

But he is weak ; both Man and Boy,
 Hath been an idler in the land ;
 Contented if he might enjoy
 The things which others understand.¹ (1799.)

These verses may with some confidence be taken not exactly as Wordsworth's portrait of himself, but as Wordsworth's picture of an ideal poet and moralist endowed with Wordsworth's special beliefs and with his poetical imagination. These lines contain valuable self-interpretation, but like all confessions or revelations in which fact is consciously blended with imagination, while they contain much of truth they also contain some misleading suggestions. A prosaic reader, for example, who took the last verse as in fact applicable to Wordsworth, might conclude that the poet was in some sense a weakling and an idler content to pass his life in the quiet enjoyment of all that creation contains of beauty and goodness. But no conclusion drawn from a man's own words could be more false. Everything in Wordsworth's life, including his defects no less than his virtues, tells of strength not of weakness, of indomitable energy untouched by indolence. He may at times have dreamed away hours or days, yet this dreaming sprung neither from indolence nor irresolution but from the profound conviction

That we can feed this mind of ours
 In a wise passiveness.²

Put Wordsworth side by side with Coleridge and you will at once feel the difference between literary genius combined with strength, and the same high genius linked to and all but ruined by weakness. Wordsworth was no idler. The words which paint the idleness of a poet

¹ Hutchinson, p. 485.

² Hutchinson, p. 481.