

ideas ; their influence never loses its hold upon him, a fact of which he is sometimes morbidly conscious. It was, doubtless, to prevent an imputation of plagiarism that Cowper avoided reading the classical English poets, (an occasional perusal of one sufficed him during twenty years), and that Byron did not possess, according to Leigh Hunt, either a Shakespeare or a Milton ; yet Cowper imitated Churchill, Byron read widely, and adored Pope. A glance at the works of great poets, or a knowledge of their lives, shows that, in more than one instance, their greatness is in part due to arduous study.

Natural propensity, experience, and education lead poets to choose special departments of thought. We now approach the individuality of which I have already spoken. Since Wordsworth, Keats, and Scott can be brought into marked, as well as pleasing contrast, it will be profitable to examine the imaginative bent of each.

A violet by a mossy stone,  
Half hidden from the eye !  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

One of the first things worthy of note in regard to the verse is its quietness. These lines of Wordsworth refuse to lend themselves to imposing sound. They cannot be mouthed into anything great or made to tickle the ear, as do classic rhythms quite familiar to many of my hearers. The short poem on Lucy—only three verses in all—may well serve as a model of simple workmanship, a most loyal piece of English, put together with Saxon craft. And this simplicity is the result of a deep conviction held by their maker. The language of poetry he maintains to be that of common men. Two causes prevent it from becoming vulgar or mean—selection made with taste and feeling, to which is added metre. One is sometimes told, in a very confident way, that Wordsworth is at his strongest and best when he departs from his rule. In the argument general issues are seldom kept clearly in sight. Fairness demands that appeal be made to Wordsworth as a whole, in order to compare him with other writers, or to vindicate him by balancing his own work, part against part. What