

WORDSWORTH'S

ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY.

THIS wonderful poem was composed during the period of Wordsworth's greatest mental activity and power. It may be said to stand even at the high water mark of his peculiar felicities of style and thought. The four first stanzas were written about the close of the year 1803, the remaining and more valuable portion two years later, when the poet had reached his thirty-fifth year. By this time he had fully recovered from the shock his nature and his faith had sustained through the collapse of his hopes for the French Revolutionists, and through them for oppressed humanity everywhere. In 1802 the Earl of Lonsdale, who had persistently refused to pay the poet's father during his lifetime, and, after his decease, his heirs a just debt, died, and was succeeded by a more honorable kinsman, who not only paid the original debt of £5,000, but £8,500 in interest as well. Two-fifths of this amount fell to Wordsworth and his sister who lived with him, and, added to Raisley Calvert's legacy of a few years before, produced an income which enabled them to live, if they so desired, in comparative luxury, whilst it allayed all fears as to their means of livelihood in the future. Nay more, it enabled the poet to take to himself a wife, Mary Hutchinson, his cousin, whom he had long known and loved. His poems were also slowly rising into favor, having run the gauntlet of a host of unjust and—as time has proved—incompetent critics, and the poet felt satisfied that, sooner or later, the great lesson he had to teach would find its way to the heart of humanity. To all these favoring circumstances add the fact that he was in the flush of manhood, when the physical and mental powers are usually at their best, and we need not wonder that this particular period should see the birth of his greatest works. The Prelude was finished in the same year as the Ode, and the choicest portions of the Excursion had been composed. True, there were times after this when the poet climbed to the old heights, and under the old inspiration, uttered sentiments as richly interfused as ever with

“The light that never was on sea and land ;”

but they were not frequent, and did not recur after an evening of extraordinary beauty in 1818. The concluding lines of the poem composed on that occasion may be fitly applied to his own literary career :

“The visionary splendour fades,
And Night approaches with her shades.”