

CHAPTER II

WORDSWORTH'S KNOWLEDGE OF FRANCE

WORDSWORTH travelled in France for the first time in 1790. He was a young man not quite twenty-one years of age. He travelled then, and during most of the time when he was in France, mainly on foot. He passed again rather more than a year in France, between November 1791 and December 1792.¹ He was thus in France at the very height of the French Revolution. He shared, in common with the great majority of liberal minded men throughout Europe, all the hopefulness of the revolutionary dawn. He became so intimately associated with the Girondins that, had he been still in France at the time of their fall, he probably would have died together with his friends; in his own words:

Doubtless, I should have then made common cause
With some who perished; haply perished too,
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering,—
Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
A Poet only to myself, to men
Useless. . . .²

Hence he acquired in the earliest and the most impressionable years of his manhood an intimate and a first-hand knowledge of the opinions, the feelings, the prejudices, the virtues, and the faults of the French people. He was not a rich man. Travelling often on foot, he came to know men of all classes. He was on easy

¹ Or possibly, January 1793.

² Hutchinson, p. 721.