

must diffuse health and life; he must prophesy to his generation; he must teach the present age by counselling with the future; he must plead for posterity; and he must imitate Phœbus in guiding and governing all his faculties—fiery steeds though they be—with the most exact precision, lest instead of being a Phœbus he prove a Phaeton, and set the world on fire and be hurled from his car; he must rein in his fancy and temper his imagination with the control and direction of sound reason and drive on in the right track with a steady hand." *

That we may understand what was the special work to which Wordsworth was called and how he did it, it is necessary to know something of his environment and also of his time in its relation to the past. Only thus can we understand the right place in history and literature of any great writer.

The astonishing fulness of life, which received its highest expression in Shakespeare, continued throughout the Elizabethan age and became concentrated in Milton, in whom the perfection of Greek art and the moral power of English Puritanism were combined. With the Restoration a new era commenced. The French writers were taken as the models of style and rigour of life was replaced by license. Shakespeare's realism was declared to be barbarous and Milton's religion to be in bad taste. In literature form and in poetry smoothness of versification became paramount. It was an age in which Poets were "most correct and least inspired." This spirit of formalism is no less evident in the religion than in the poetry of the time. The church, though established and armed with ter-

† *Memoirs*, Vol. II., p. 7.