

Let us read this doctrine of Plato, as modified by Wordsworth, in the beautiful lines of the Ode :

" Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :  
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
 And cometh from afar :  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home :  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy !  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
 Upon the growing Boy,  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
 He sees it in his joy ;  
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
 Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
 And by the vision splendid  
 Is on his way attended ;  
 At length the Man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of common day."

But the vision is never permanently lost. Even in manhood, when the things of time and sense have taken strong hold of all the faculties, there are times when gleams come " like the flashing of a shield," re-establishing the soul for the moment in the delights of its earlier existence. Such an experience was Wordsworth's on a remarkably beautiful evening in the year 1818, to which reference has already been made. It was perfectly calm. The setting sun had touched the mountains and the clouds above them with a peculiar splendour ; the scene entered into the poet's heart, and overspread his soul with a sanctifying peace. To him the magnificent spectacle was not all of earth ;

" From worlds not quickened by the sun  
 A portion of the gift is won ;  
 An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread  
 On ground which British shepherds tread."

The mountain ridges rising one above the other, each bathed in its purple light, were to him a Jacob's ladder,

" Tempting Fancy to ascend,  
 And with immortal spirits blend."

So completely was the material world lost sight of, and the purely spiritual of his own nature alone recognized that " wings at his shoulders seemed to play." I shall quote the last stanza of the poem in which his feelings are portrayed partly for its striking beauty, but more especially because it re-