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WORDSWORTH.*

BY THE REV. S. LYLE, HAMILTON.

WORDSWORTH'S fame is a plant of slow growth. But if his poems have been coldly and even cruelly received by some, they have been by others as enthusiastically admired, and as indiscriminately praised. Many of the thoughtful and cultured cherish a profound respect for the man and greatly admire his genius. In the honourable roll of poetic names, Matthew Arnold, no mean critic, places Wordsworth third. Shakespeare heads the list, Milton stands second, and the third place is held by Wordsworth. Francis Jeffrey, the brilliant reviewer, says, when speaking of Wordsworth's "Excursion," "this will never do." He admits some merit in the lyrical ballads—an "extreme simplicity and lowliness of tone," wavering prettily "between stillness and pathos." But the "Excursion" is a poor imitation of Cowper and of

Milton, engrafted on the natural drawl of the Lakers, and diluted by a profuse and irrepressible wordiness. To those who have studied Wordsworth carefully, and have with pleasure listened to him singing

Of truth, of grandeur, beauty, love and hope
And melancholy fear subdued by faith,
Of blessed consolation in distress,
Of moral strength and intellectual power,
Of joy in widest commonality spread,

Jeffrey's estimate appears cruelly unjust. With all Wordsworth's faults, and they are not a few, he is one of the world's great poets. Let us try to estimate the grounds on which such claims rest.

1. He is a lover of nature. And here, as in much else, "the child is father of the man." His intense sympathy with nature manifested itself in his boyish rambles over Hawkshead moor and mountain.

Even then I felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield; the earth

* A Paper read before the Hamilton Literary and Scientific Association, March 9th, 1882.