CHAPTER I

GIVEN AND TO PROVE

On 30 October in 1787, Wordsworth approached the town of Cambridge from the north to begin life as a freshman of St John's College.[1] With him in the coach were his uncle William Cookson, a Fellow of the college, and his cousin John Myers, another freshman. From a distance he and his cousin caught their first sight of the University, 'the long-backed Chapel of King's College', and soon, nearing the city, saw their first gownsman. Excitement mounted. 'The Place, as we approach'd, seem'd more and more To have an eddy's force, and suck'd us in More eagerly at every step we took.' They came down Castle Hill at the north end of town, crossed Magdalene Bridge and saw the Cam at a place where it looks like a Venetian canal making its way between the houses and college buildings. The coach pulled up at the Inn called the Hoop, and the young adventurers set their feet down carefully on the new land. 'My spirits were up, my thoughts were full of hope', Wordsworth remembers in *The Prelude*.[2]

His spirits suffered no depression from the loneliness that usually attacks a freshman, for he was soon surrounded by a circle of friends from the grammar school at Hawkshead where he had spent the last nine years. He had seen these friends last as 'poor simple Schoolboys', but found them now 'hung round With honour and importance'.[3] He saw them already thus accoutred because his uncle had brought him up to Cambridge rather stylishly late. His friends had been there since the middle of October.[4]

> In a world
> Of welcome faces up and down I rov'd;
> Questions, directions, counsel and advice
> Flow'd in upon me from all sides, fresh day
> Of pride and pleasure!

From evidence in *The Prelude* and other sources we can guess whose 'welcome faces' these were. He was certainly glad to see John Fleming, now beginning his third year at St John's, for only recently he had written, in the poem he called *The Vale of Esthwaite*, 'Friendship and Fleming are the same'. Together, early in the morning, it had been their Hawkshead custom to walk the circumference of Esthwaite Water, shouting poems in unison, until 'exultation echoed through the groves!'[5] Having seen little of each other during the last three years, these two must have had much to talk about. William Penny, also of St John's, had left Hawkshead only a year ago, and with him there would be less lost ground to recover.[6]

Wordsworth was also happy to exchange memories with Edward Birkett and Fletcher Raincock. With these boys he had hunted raven's eggs in the Yewdale Crags and hung 'by knots of grass And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock... almost... suspended by the blast which blew amain'.[7] Now they were both Junior Sophs,* Birkett at Christ's and Raincock at Pembroke. Wordsworth must also have renewed his friendship with Charles Farish, a Hawkshead boy and a fellow-poet, now preparing for his Senate House examination at Queens' College.[8]

'Questions, directions, counsel and advice' would flow in with especial zeal from the Hawkshead boys of Wordsworth's own year, who had put on their 'honour and importance' a scant two weeks before Wordsworth had arrived. Robert Greenwood, who had blown his flute so merrily when his schoolfellows marooned him on an island in Lake Windermere, was just beginning at Trinity College.[9] And John Millers was starting out at Jesus College; he had an older brother at St John's.[10] In his own college he found another familiar freshman, Thomas Gawthrop, who had come from

* Second-year men. First-year men were called *Freshmen*, second-year men *Junior Soph[ister]s*, third-year men *Senior Soph[ister]s* and fourth-year men *Questionists*.

Sedbergh for a final year at Hawkshead before going up to the University and had lived with Wordsworth at Ann Tyson's cottage.[11]

He had come up late; the men in the years above him were already at their studies. Lectures would begin in a week,[12] and he had a multitude of things to do. He must pay a visit to his tutor and be examined for a scholarship. He must find out what books he needed and buy them. His room had to be furnished. His homespun north-country clothes would not do for a college man. Gay silks, ruffles, embroidery were the fashion. He would have to dress for dinner in hall each day; that meant powdering his hair or having it curled, wearing white silk stockings and a white waistcoat, and knee-length trousers of whatever colour suited his fancy, from buff to bright green. Wordsworth enjoyed the bustle of getting ready to be a college man.

> To myself I seem'd
> A man of business and expense, and went
> From shop to shop about my own affairs,
> To Tutors or to Tailors, as befel,
> From street to street with loose and careless heart.

His enthusiasm for the new life loosened his purse strings—

> Behold me rich in monies, and attir'd
> In splendid clothes, with hose of silk . . . .
> My lordly Dressing-gown I pass it by.

He could hardly believe that it was he, so dressed, busy in such affairs. 'I was the dreamer, they the dream.' It was indeed a 'strange transformation for a mountain Youth, A northern Villager'—a transformation from homespun to silk, from an easy simple life to a mannered complex one.[13]

However sharp the transition in dress and manners, *The Prelude* testifies that Wordsworth's first months at Cambridge were months of joyful anticipation. He did in fact have every reason to believe that he was beginning an auspicious aca-

demic career, for besides having numerous friends to make him welcome, he had other important advantages as a Hawkshead boy at Cambridge.

In the first place, he was better prepared academically than most freshmen. *The Prelude* belittles his book-learning and that of his Hawkshead schoolfellows, perhaps in order to maintain one of its themes—the superiority of nature as an educative force over man-made academies:

> Easily, indeed,
> We might have fed upon a fatter soil
> Of Arts and Letters, but be that forgiven.
> [We were] A race of real children, not too wise,
> Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh.[14]

In contrast to the English public schools, Wordsworth's school could indeed be said to foster 'a race of real children'. But William Taylor's pupils at Hawkshead did not preserve their natural boyishness at the cost of solid learning. For even from a purely academic standpoint, Hawkshead was one of the best schools in England.

Following Isaac Newton's great discoveries in the seventeenth century, Cambridge gave an increasingly large place in its course of studies to mathematics and natural philosophy at the expense of classics and moral philosophy. By Wordsworth's time, only proficiency in Newtonian science could secure high honours for a B.A. degree candidate. No other field of knowledge counted. During this time, on the other hand, Oxford's curriculum continued much as if Newton (a Cambridge man) had never lived.[15]

It was the north-country schools which had first become aware that a change in emphasis had taken place in Cambridge studies and which had first revised their courses of study to take advantage of it.[16] Thus, while the schools in the southern part of the country continued to feed their pupils a steady diet of classics, the northern schools began to specialize in geometry and algebra. Hawkshead, under William

Taylor and his predecessor, James Peake, had become one of the leading northern schools for this new mathematical preparation. North-country lads frequently came to Hawkshead from other schools for a concentrated course in mathematics in the final year before going up to Cambridge, some deserting even Sedbergh for that purpose. When Peake had come to Hawkshead in 1767 there were only forty-five or fifty boys in the school. When Taylor succeeded him in 1781 the number of boys had increased to ninety, and it continued to grow under Taylor.[17] The reason for Hawkshead's growth under these men was clear. Hawkshead boys went up to Cambridge with a year's start in mathematics over boys from southern schools, and while these latter marked time, learning Euclid, algebra, simple and quadratic equations, the Hawkshead boys advanced into mechanics, hydrostatics and optics.[18] The school was especially fortunate in having William Taylor as Headmaster, because he had been second Wrangler* at Cambridge in 1778. He therefore not only knew his mathematics well, but also knew the kind of mathematical training best suited to the Cambridge course of study. In Wordsworth's time Hawkshead lads achieved several triumphs in the University examinations at the Senate House. Wordsworth's friend John Fleming was fifth Wrangler in 1789; Fletcher Raincock was second Wrangler in 1790. His friend Robert Greenwood was sixth in 1791, his own year; Thomas Jack and John Rudd were fourth and tenth in 1792; and John Harrison was first in 1793. In those four years, then, Hawkshead had a first and a second, and never fell beneath tenth. And this is even more remarkable when one considers that the school never sent more than three or four men up to Cambridge in each year.[19] Wordsworth himself admits, 'I had a full twelve-month's start of the freshmen of my year'.[20] These Hawkshead successes in the

* Second highest honours in the examination for the B.A. degree. For a complete list of these distinctions, see item 1, p. 35. Honours are recorded in *HRUC*.

Senate House reveal the academic advantages Wordsworth renounced when he rejected the regular course of study in the University.

In addition to superior academic preparation, the north-country orphan also had important connections, perhaps an even greater advantage during a time when University success often depended more on influence than on merit. Merely being a north-countryman was some help. Cambridge, perhaps as a result of the preoccupation of northern schools with mathematics, had become a veritable north-country preserve. There was hardly a limit to the opportunities it could offer a north-country lad of promise. In 1789 the two largest colleges, Trinity and St John's, came under the mastership of north-countrymen. And Isaac Milner, a Yorkshireman, had been elected President of Queens' the year before. Besides being President of Queens', Milner was chief arbitrator of disputed 'brackets'* in the Senate House, Professor of Natural Philosophy, and grand marshal of the evangelical Tories in the University. And north-countrymen had established an enviable tradition at Cambridge. Classical scholarship owed much to the work of Bentley, a Yorkshireman. North-country mathematicians could point with pride to Nicholas Saunderson of Yorkshire, a hero of the Newtonian revolution that had taken place at the beginning of the century. Edmund Law, Master of Peterhouse, who had laid the cornerstone of latitudinarian theology at Cambridge, had come from Cartmel in Lancashire, and Archdeacon Blackburne, illustrious leader of the Cambridge-dominated movement to abolish religious tests, had gone to Hawkshead school itself. William Paley, the Cambridge authority on moral

* On the last day of examinations for the B.A., examiners 'bracketed' men of roughly the same ability. If a degree candidate thought himself bracketed too low, he might challenge any man in the bracket above him to a duel of wits, the outcome deciding his proper place. Milner's part in these contests is described in Gunning, *Reminiscences*, I, p. 84.

philosophy, had come up to Cambridge from Yorkshire, and Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff and Regius Professor of Divinity, lived on the banks of Lake Windermere. During Wordsworth's residence the Professors of Chemistry and Common Law were natives of Lancashire and Cumberland respectively.

As a result of the preference its statutes gave to a number of north-country towns and schools in the granting of fellowships and scholarships, St John's itself was a haven for north-countrymen.[21] Six of the eight Senior Fellows were northerners. Even Hawkshead school had good connections with the college. The President of the College had a special place in his heart for Hawkshead and left the school a bequest when he died. William Taylor's predecessor in the mastership at Hawkshead had been a Johnian; a Fellow of the college had been Master of the school for a year, between Peake and Taylor. One of the Junior Fellows of the college was a Hawkshead boy, and another came from Wordsworth's birthplace, Cockermouth.[22]

Wordsworth's prospects for a fellowship at St John's were good. According to the College statutes, no more than two men from the same county might occupy fellowships at the same time.[23] It was often the case that after entering college, a hopeful young man discovered that his county was 'full' and that consequently all hope of an academic career was ended. But Wordsworth had insurance against such an eventuality. His county, Cumberland, was full when he came up, but his uncle William Cookson was one of the men who filled it. Cookson was expecting to marry soon, and would automatically vacate his fellowship, since he held it on condition of celibacy. In 1788 he did marry, leaving the county open for Wordsworth. It was not filled until 1794, three years after Wordsworth left college. Undoubtedly, his uncle entered Wordsworth at St John's because he knew that a fellowship would be waiting for him upon graduation.[24] All that Words-

worth had to do was qualify for it by getting a middling place on the Tripos List.*

When he went up to Cambridge, Wordsworth had hopes of eventually going into the legal profession.[25] In order to do so he would have to qualify for the bar by reading for several years at an Inn of Court. And being a man of small means, he would need the income from a fellowship to support him during this period of reading. Of course, if he obtained one of the ordinary clerical fellowships, he would be expected to take Holy Orders within six years of taking his M.A. degree. The College did allow clerical Fellows to study law, and Wordsworth could hold a clerical fellowship until 1800 without taking orders. But the College also provided two law fellowships, putting the incumbent under no obligation to take orders. Though both of these were filled when he came up, one had been held for ten years and the other for sixteen, and he might reasonably expect one to fall vacant by the time he needed it. It seems, further, to have been possible for a man to take a clerical fellowship while waiting for a law fellowship to open. But the men whom the College allowed to hold fellowships without taking orders seem to have been favourite sons; most of them had been high Wranglers.[26]

With his county open and a chance for a law fellowship, Wordsworth had much in his favour. He also had influential friends who could exert pressure in order that preferments—academic, ecclesiastical, or legal—which came his way, might not slip through his fingers. His Uncle William, besides being a Fellow of the college, had been Preceptor to three sons of King George and had become a fast friend of William Wilberforce when Wilberforce was a fellow-commoner at St John's. Wilberforce was now a real power in his own right

* The list of men graduating with honours, possibly so named because the traditional commencement poem (Tripos Verses) printed on the back of the list had originally been recited by a B.A. who sat on a three-legged stool.

and close to the seats of the mighty as William Pitt's intimate friend. Cookson was also a friend of Edward Frewen, who became Wordsworth's tutor.[27] If anything could be done to help Wordsworth in a law career, Edward Christian, once Master of Hawkshead School, who was then lecturing on law at St John's and who would soon become Professor of Common Law in the University and Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely,[28] was in a position to give that help. Christian, moreover, might well favour Wordsworth, for he represented the Wordsworths in their lawsuit against Lord Lonsdale for the recovery of their patrimony. Dorothy thought very highly of him: 'We have got a very clever man on our side but as he is young he will not have much authority, his name is Christian, he is a friend of my Uncle, knows my brother William very well and I am very well acquainted with him, and a charming man he is'.[29]

Having made this survey of Wordsworth's expectations upon his arrival at Cambridge, we may now follow the history of his first year at college with increased interest. Soon after arriving, he won his scholarship, as his Uncle William must have known he would, and his tutor helped him to two small exhibitions.[30] Lectures began. The books set for the December college examination, now little more than a month away, were the last book of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, a work of Horace (by custom either the *Ars Poetica*, or book I or II of the *Epistles*), Beausobre's *Introduction to the Reading of the Scriptures* (1779), and Philip Doddridge's *Sermons on the Evidences of the Gospel*.[31] A bit of Latin, a bit of Greek, and a bit of Scripture would keep the freshmen busy during their first term; in the spring they could settle down to the serious business of Euclid. Wordsworth set to work in earnest.

No doubt he also looked curiously about him and learned a little about the place he had come to. If we are to understand his future behaviour we must do so also. Our perspective, however, will enable us to see more than he did.

At the core of nearly everything that was thought, said, and done at Cambridge lay the discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton of Trinity College. Newton's influence was strong in England—in the whole civilized world—but he dominated Cambridge nearly to the exclusion of all other influences. Learning and applying his discoveries was the chief occupation of graduates and undergraduates alike. Moral philosophy and the classics were also given some attention, but even these were coloured by Newton's work. Newton's discoveries, in spite of his attempts in his writings to mitigate their materialistic implications, had thoroughly convinced the Cambridge mind, to state it bluntly, that reality was a manifestation of matter acting according to mechanical laws. We need not here discuss the various ways in which the Cambridge mind reconciled this idea with the idea of God. In Wordsworth's time many Cambridge men were deists, often accused of being atheists.

The effect of Newtonian science on moral speculation was pronounced, though here Locke, leaning heavily toward matter and mechanism, was also an important influence. The Cambridge followers of Locke and Newton reasoned that if mechanical laws governed the physical world, analogous laws governed the moral world. Constructing their morality on this assumption, they saw a mechanism of pleasure and pain as the guide to moral action, and utility (expediency) as the goal. On this last point the writers of antiquity gave considerable assistance. Cicero in particular had advocated expediency as the goal of moral action. He had not, however, meant the same thing by 'expediency' as many Cambridge men meant by it, notably William Paley of Christ's College, whose *Moral Philosophy* was published in 1785. Paley emphasized *self*-interest in using the term, whereas Cicero emphasized the interest of society as a whole. These writers may symbolize for us a most significant split in Cambridge thought. Conservatives tended to hold with Paley's self-centred expediency while radicals held more to