

Autobiography
and
Literary Essays

by JOHN STUART MILL

Edited by

JOHN M. ROBSON

Professor of English,
Victoria College, University of Toronto

AND

JACK STILLINGER

Professor of English,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL

economy were taught to me by my father. Striving, even in an exaggerated degree, to call forth the activity of my faculties, by making me find out everything for myself, he gave his explanations not before, but after, I had felt the full force of the difficulties; and not only gave me an accurate knowledge of these two great subjects, as far as they were then understood, but made me a thinker on both. I thought for myself almost from the first, and occasionally thought differently from him, though for a long time only on minor points, and making his opinion the ultimate standard. At a later period I even occasionally convinced him, and altered his opinion on some points of detail: which I state to his honour, not my own. It at once exemplifies his perfect candour, and the real worth of his method of teaching.

At this point concluded what can properly be called my lessons. When I was about fourteen I left England for more than a year; and after my return, though my studies went on under my father's general direction, he was no longer my schoolmaster. I shall therefore pause here, and turn back to matters of a more general nature connected with the part of my life and education included in the preceding reminiscences.

In the course of instruction which I have partially retraced, the point most superficially apparent is the great effort to give, during the years of childhood, an amount of knowledge in what are considered the higher branches of education, which is seldom acquired (if acquired at all) until the age of manhood. The result of the experiment shews the ease with which this may be done, and places in a strong light the wretched waste of so many precious years as are spent in acquiring the modicum of Latin and Greek commonly taught to schoolboys; a waste, which has led so many educational reformers to entertain the ill-judged proposal of discarding those languages altogether from general education. If I had been by nature extremely quick of apprehension, or had possessed a very accurate and retentive memory, or were of a remarkably active and energetic character, the trial would not be conclusive; but in all these natural gifts I am rather below than above par. What I could do, could assuredly be done by any boy or girl of average capacity and healthy physical constitution: and if I have accomplished anything, I owe it, among other fortunate circumstances, to the fact that through the early training bestowed on me by my father, I started, I may fairly say, with an advantage of a quarter of a century over my cotemporaries.

There was one cardinal point in this training, of which I have already given some indication, and which, more than anything else, was the cause of whatever good it effected. Most boys or youths who have had much knowledge drilled into them, have their mental capacities not strengthened, but overlaid by it. They are

below, for an additional passage, subsequently discarded, in R19/20.

^{o-o}[*Earlier version*:] I am satisfied also that it could be done without the very considerable drawbacks with which in my case it was accompanied and which have pursued me through life. [*paragraph*] One drawback, which if it had existed would have rendered the whole of the intellectual education worthless, did not exist in my case [*The last sentence is marked with a line in the margin by HTM*]

^{p-p}[*Revised version, subsequently discarded, in R19/20v:*] no considerable

overlaid by it. They are crammed with mere facts and with the opinions or phrases of others, and these are accepted as a substitute for the power to form opinions of their own. And thus the sons of eminent fathers, who have spared no pains in their education, grow up mere parroters of what they have learnt, incapable of any effort of original or independent thought. Mine, however, was not an education of cram. My father never permitted anything which I learnt, to degenerate into a mere exercise of memory. He strove to make the understanding not only go along with every step of the teaching but if possible precede it. His custom was, in the case of everything which could be found out by thinking, to make me strive and struggle to find it out for myself, giving me no more help than was positively indispensable. As far as I can trust my remembrance, I acquitted myself very lamely in this department; my recollection of such matters is almost wholly of failures, hardly ever of successes. It is true, the failures were often in things in which success was almost impossible. I remember at some time in my twelfth or thirteenth year, ⁴ his indignation at my using the common expression that something was true in theory but required correction in practice: and how, after making me vainly strive to define the word theory, he explained its meaning and shewed the fallacy of the form of speech which places practice and theory in opposition: leaving me fully persuaded that in being unable to give a definition of Theory, and in speaking of it as something which might be opposed to practice I had shewn unparalleled ignorance. In this he seems, and perhaps was, very unreasonable; but I think, only in 'being angry' at my failure. A pupil from whom nothing is ever demanded which he cannot do, never does all he can.

One of the evils most liable to attend on any sort of early proficiency, and which often fatally blights its promise, my father most sedulously guarded against. This was self conceit. He kept me, with extreme vigilance, out of the way of hearing myself praised, or of being led to make self complimentary comparisons between myself and others. From his own intercourse with me I could derive none but a very humble opinion of myself; and the standard of comparison he always held up to me, was not what other people did, but what could and ought to be done. He completely succeeded in preserving me from the sort of influences he so much dreaded. ⁵I was not at all^s aware that my attainments were anything unusual at my age. If as unavoidably happened I occasionally had my attention drawn to the fact that some other boy knew less than myself, I supposed, not that I knew much, but that he for some reason or other knew little: or rather that the things he knew were different ^t. My state of mind was no more arrogance than it was humility. I never

⁴[*Cancelled text*:] when I happened to use the word idea, he asked me what an idea was: and with much displeasure at my ineffective attempts to define the word, at last gave me a definition which, allowing it to be correct, had never been given by any metaphysician except Hartley. viz. that an idea is the type or remembrance of a sensation. A little before or after the same time I recollect [*deleted first by HTM*]

^{t-t}[*Earlier version*:] his vehement [*altered by HTM and then Mill to read*: the vehemence of his] demonstrations of anger

^{s-s}[*Earlier version*:] Through my whole boyhood I never was in the smallest degree

crammed with mere facts, and with the opinions or phrases of other people, and these are accepted as a substitute for the power to form opinions of their own. And thus, the sons of eminent fathers, who have spared no pains in their education, so often grow up mere parroters of what they have learnt, incapable of using their minds except in the furrows traced for them. Mine, however, was not an education of cram. My father never permitted anything which I learnt, to degenerate into a mere exercise of memory. He strove to make the understanding not only go along with every step of the teaching, but if possible, precede it. Anything which could be found out by thinking, I never was told, until I had exhausted my efforts to find it out for myself. As far as I can trust my remembrance, I acquitted myself very lamely in this department; my recollection of such matters is almost wholly of failures, hardly ever of success. It is true, the failures were often in things in which success in so early a stage of my progress, was almost impossible. I remember at some time in my thirteenth year, on my happening to use the word idea, he asked me what an idea was; and expressed some displeasure at my ineffectual efforts to define the word: I recollect also his indignation at my using the common expression that something was true in theory but required correction in practice; and how, after making me vainly strive to define the word theory, he explained its meaning, and shewed the fallacy of the vulgar form of speech which I had used; leaving me fully persuaded that in being unable to give a correct definition of Theory, and in speaking of it as something which might be at variance with practice, I had shewn unparalleled ignorance. In this he seems, and perhaps was, very unreasonable; but I think, only in being angry at my failure. A pupil from whom nothing is ever demanded which he cannot do, never does all he can.

One of the evils most liable to attend on any sort of early proficiency, and which often fatally blights its promise, my father most anxiously guarded against. This was self conceit. He kept me, with extreme vigilance, out of the way of hearing myself praised, or of being led to make self-flattering comparisons between myself and others. From his own intercourse with me I could derive none but a very humble opinion of myself; and the standard of comparison he always held up to me, was not what other people did, but what a man could and ought to do. He completely succeeded in preserving me from the sort of influences he so much dreaded. I was not at all aware that my attainments were anything unusual at my age. If I accidentally had my attention drawn to the fact that some other boy knew less than myself—which happened less often than might be imagined—I concluded, not that I knew much, but that he, for some reason or other, knew little, or that his knowledge was of a different kind from mine. My state of mind was not

[*Cancelled text:*] , for I was always conscious that I could not do many things which others could. There is nothing for which I am more indebted to my father than for thus effectually preventing the growth of self conceit; for I affirm with confidence that I had not, at this period of life, the smallest vestige of it [The first fifteen words, to the end of the sentence, are marked with a line in the margin by HTM. The next three sentences in the text are written at left, originally as an addition to this cancelled passage.]

thought of saying to myself, I am, or I can do, so and so. I neither estimated myself highly nor lowly: I did not think of estimating myself at all. "I was sometimes thought to be self conceited, probably because I was disputatious, and did not scruple to give direct contradictions to what was said. I suppose I acquired this manner from" having been encouraged in an unusual degree to talk on matters beyond my age, and with grown persons, while I never had inculcated on me the usual respect for them. My father did not correct this ill breeding and impertinence, probably from not seeing it, for I was always too much in awe of him to be otherwise than extremely subdued and quiet in his presence. " Yet with all this I had no notion of any superiority in myself. I remember the very place in Hyde Park where, in my fourteenth year, on the eve of my leaving my father's house for a year's absence, he told me, that I should find, as I got acquainted with new people, that I had been taught many things which youths of my age did not commonly know; and that many people would be disposed to talk to me of this, and to flatter me about it " . What other things he said on this topic I remember 'very imperfectly'; but he wound up by saying, that whatever I did know more than others, could not be ascribed to any merit in me, but to the very unusual advantage which had fallen to my lot, of having a father who was able to teach me, and willing to sacrifice the necessary trouble and time; that it was no matter of praise to me, to know more than those who had not had a similar advantage, but the utmost disgrace to me if I did not. I have a distinct remembrance, that the suggestion thus for the first time made to me that I knew more than other youths who were considered well educated, was to me a piece of information; to which as to all other things which my father told me, I gave implicit credence, but which did not at all impress me as a personal matter. I felt no disposition to glorify myself upon the circumstance that there were other persons who did not know what I knew, nor had I been accustomed to flatter myself that my acquirements, whatever they were, were any merit of mine: but now when my attention was called to the subject, I felt that what my father had said respecting my peculiar advantages was exactly the truth and common sense of the matter, and it fixed my opinion and feeling from that time forward. ^y

^u—"*{Written at left (over several lines in HTM's hand now erased and largely illegible) and interlined to replace Mill's original continuation of the cancelled passage given in the preceding note:}* I have, however, since found that those who knew me in my early boyhood thought me greatly and most disagreeably self-conceited, the reason of which was, that I was disputatious, and made no scruple to give direct contradictions to what was said on things which I knew nothing whatever about. How I came by this detestable [*altered to read: offensive*] habit, I do not know. Probably from being on the one hand, accustomed to lay down the law to my younger sisters, and having no other companions to withstand me, and on the other hand [*HTM deleted "on things which I knew nothing whatever about" and the beginning of the last sentence, and with several words written at left, now erased, probably supplied Mill with the new beginning of the sentence in the present text ("I suppose . . . from").*]

^v[*Cancelled text:*] My mother did tax me with it, but for her remonstrances I never had the slightest regard. [*deleted first by HTM*]

^w[*Cancelled text in R23r (see the description in App. G, p. 608 below):*]; and he then represented the folly it would be to let myself be puffed up and made vain by such flattery

humility, but neither was it arrogance. I never thought of saying to myself, I am, or I can do, so and so. I neither estimated myself highly nor lowly: I did not estimate myself at all. If I thought anything about myself, it was that I was rather backward in my studies, since I always found myself so, in comparison with what my father expected from me. I assert this with confidence, though it was not the impression of various persons who saw me in my childhood. They, as I have since found, thought me greatly and disagreeably self-conceited; probably because I was disputatious, and did not scruple to give direct contradictions to things which I heard said. I suppose I acquired this bad habit from having been encouraged in an unusual degree to talk on matters beyond my age, and with grown persons, while I never had inculcated on me the usual respect for them. My father did not correct this ill breeding and impertinence, probably from not being aware of it, for I was always too much in awe of him to be otherwise than extremely subdued and quiet in his presence. Yet with all this I had no notion of any superiority in myself; and well was it for me that I had not. I remember the very place in Hyde Park where, in my fourteenth year, on the eve of leaving my father's house for a long absence, he told me that I should find, as I got acquainted with new people, that I had been taught many things which youths of my age did not commonly know; and that many persons would be disposed to talk to me of this, and to compliment me upon it. What other things he said on this topic I remember very imperfectly; but he wound up by saying, that whatever I knew more than others, could not be ascribed to any merit in me, but to the very unusual advantage which had fallen to my lot, of having a father who was able to teach me, and willing to give the necessary trouble and time; that it was no matter of praise to me, if I knew more than those who had not had a similar advantage, but the deepest disgrace to me if I did not. I have a distinct remembrance, that the suggestion thus for the first time made to me, that I knew more than other youths who were considered well educated, was to me a piece of information, to which, as to all other things which my father told me, I gave implicit credence, but which did not at all impress me as a personal matter. I felt no disposition to glorify myself upon the circumstance that there were other persons who did not know what I knew; nor had I ever flattered myself that my acquirements, whatever they might be, were any merit of mine: but, now when my attention was called to the subject, I felt that what my father had said respecting my peculiar advantages was exactly the truth and common sense of the matter, and it fixed my opinion and feeling from that time forward.

It is evident that this, among many other of the purposes of my father's scheme of education, could not have been accomplished if he had not carefully kept me from having any great amount of intercourse with other boys. He was earnestly

^{x-x}[Earlier version, subsequently altered to final reading, in R23r.] too imperfectly to risk writing them down

^y[See App. G, pp. 608–10 below, for two additional paragraphs following the text at this point in R23v–25v.]

bent upon my escaping not only the ordinary corrupting influence which boys exercise over boys, but the contagion of vulgar modes of thought and feeling; and for this he was willing that I should pay the price of inferiority in the accomplishments which schoolboys in all countries chiefly cultivate. The deficiencies in my education were principally in the things which boys learn from being turned out to shift for themselves, and from being brought together in large numbers. From temperance and much walking, I grew up healthy and hardy, though not muscular; but I could do no feats of skill or physical strength, and knew none of the ordinary bodily exercises. It was not that play, or time for it, was refused me. Though no holidays were allowed, lest the habit of work should be broken, and a taste for idleness acquired, I had ample leisure in every day to amuse myself; but as I had no boy companions, and the animal need of physical activity was satisfied by walking, my amusements, which were mostly solitary, were in general of a quiet, if not a bookish turn, and gave little stimulus to any other kind even of mental activity than that which was already called forth by my studies. I consequently remained long, and in a less degree have always remained, inexpert in anything requiring manual dexterity; my mind, as well as my hands, did its work very lamely when it was applied, or ought to have been applied, to the practical details which, as they are the chief interest of life to the majority of men, are also the things in which whatever mental capacity they have, chiefly shews itself. I was constantly meriting reproof by inattention, inobservance, and general slackness of mind in matters of daily life. My father was the extreme opposite in these particulars: his senses and mental faculties were always on the alert; he carried decision and energy of character in his whole manner, and into every action of life: and this, as much as his talents, contributed to the strong impression which he always made upon those with whom he came into personal contact. But the children of energetic parents, frequently grow up unenergetic, because they lean on their parents, and the parents are energetic for them. The education which my father gave me, was in itself much more fitted for training me to *know* than to *do*. Not that he was unaware of my deficiencies; both as a boy and as a youth I was incessantly smarting under his severe admonitions on the subject. There was anything but insensibility or tolerance on his part towards such shortcomings: but, while he saved me from the demoralizing effects of school life, he made no effort to provide me with any sufficient substitute for its practicalizing influences. Whatever qualities he himself, probably, had acquired without difficulty or special training, he seems to have supposed that I ought to acquire as easily. He had not, I think, bestowed the same amount of thought and attention on this, as on most other branches of education; and here, as well as in some other points of my tuition, he seems to have expected effects without causes.

CHAPTER V

A Crisis in My Mental History. One Stage Onward

FOR SOME YEARS after this time I wrote very little, and nothing regularly, for publication: and great were the advantages which I derived from the intermission. It was of no common importance to me, at this period, to be able to digest and mature my thoughts for my own mind only, without any immediate call for giving them out in print. Had I gone on writing, it would have much disturbed the important transformation in my opinions and character, which took place during those years. The origin of this transformation, or at least the process by which I was prepared for it, can only be explained by turning some distance back.

From the winter of 1821, when I first read Bentham, and especially from the commencement of the *Westminster Review*, I had what might truly be called an object in life; to be a reformer of the world. My conception of my own happiness was entirely identified with this object. The personal sympathies I wished for were those of fellow labourers in this enterprise. I endeavoured to pick up as many flowers as I could by the way; but as a serious and permanent personal satisfaction to rest upon, my whole reliance was placed on this: and I was accustomed to felicitate myself on the certainty of a happy life which I enjoyed, through placing my happiness in something durable and distant, in which some progress might be always making, while it could never be exhausted by complete attainment. This did very well for several years, during which the general improvement going on in the world and the idea of myself as engaged with others in struggling to promote it, seemed enough to fill up an interesting and animated existence. But the time came when I awakened from this as from a dream. It was in the autumn of 1826. I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to: unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times, becomes insipid or indifferent; the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first "conviction of sin."

^b[*Cancelled text.*] by spreading enlightened opinions and urging practical reforms

^c[*Cancelled text.*] , probably from physical causes (connected perhaps merely with the time of year)

^{d-d'}[*Earlier version:*] indifferent or disgusting

put the question distinctly to myself, "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized, that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant; would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" and an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered "No!" At this my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be excitement in the means? I had nothing left to live for.

At first I ^e'hoped' that the cloud would pass away of itself: but it did not. A night's sleep, the sovereign remedy for the smaller vexations of life, had no effect on it. I awoke to a renewed consciousness of the woful fact. I carried it with me into all companies, into all occupations. Hardly anything had power to cause me even a few minutes oblivion of it. ^fFor some months the ^f cloud seemed to grow thicker and thicker. The lines in Coleridge's poem "Dejection" exactly describe my case:

A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear
A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief
Which finds no natural outlet or relief
In word, or sigh, or tear.

In vain I sought relief from my favourite books, those memorials of past nobleness and greatness from which I had always hitherto drawn strength and animation. I read them now without feeling, or with the accustomed feeling *minus* all its charm; and I ^gbecame persuaded^g that my love of mankind and of excellence for their own sake, had worn itself out. I sought no relief by speaking to others of what I felt. If I had loved any one sufficiently to make the confiding to them of my griefs a necessity, I should not have been in the condition I was. I was conscious too that mine was not an interesting or in any way respectable distress. There was nothing in it to attract sympathy. Advice if I had known where to seek it would have been most precious. The words of Macbeth to the physician often recurred to my thoughts. But there was no one on whom I could build the faintest hope of such assistance. My father, to whom I should most naturally have had recourse as an adviser in any practical difficulties, was the last person to whom in such a case as this I looked for help. Everything convinced me that he had no knowledge of any such mental state as I was suffering from, and that even if he could be made to understand it he was not the physician who could heal it. My education, which was wholly his work, had been conducted without any regard to the possibility of its ending in this result; and I saw no use in endeavouring to prove to him that his plans

^{e-e}{*Earlier versions:*} cherished a hope [*altered to read:*] clung to a hope

^{f-f}{*Earlier version:*} This state continued for some months without any improvement. The

^{g-g}{*Earlier version:*} said in my own mind,

In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.

At first I hoped that the cloud would pass away of itself; but it did not. A night's sleep, the sovereign remedy for the smaller vexations of life, had no effect on it. I awoke to a renewed consciousness of the woful fact. I carried it with me into all companies, into all occupations. Hardly anything had power to cause me even a few minutes oblivion of it. For some months the cloud seemed to grow thicker and thicker. The lines in Coleridge's "Dejection"—I was not then acquainted with them—exactly describe my case:

A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,
A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet or relief
In word, or sigh, or tear.^[*]

In vain I sought relief from my favourite books; those memorials of past nobleness and greatness, from which I had always hitherto drawn strength and animation. I read them now without feeling, or with the accustomed feeling *minus* all its charm; and I became persuaded, that my love of mankind, and of excellence for its own sake, had worn itself out. I sought no comfort by speaking to others of what I felt. If I had loved any one sufficiently to make confiding my griefs a necessity, I should not have been in the condition I was. I felt, too, that mine was not an interesting, or in any way respectable distress. There was nothing in it to attract sympathy. Advice, if I had known where to seek it, would have been most precious. The words of Macbeth to the physician often occurred to my thoughts.^[†] But there was no one on whom I could build the faintest hope of such assistance. My father, to whom it would have been natural to me to have recourse in any practical difficulties, was the last person to whom, in such a case as this, I looked for help. Everything convinced me that he had no knowledge of any such mental state as I was suffering from, and that even if he could be made to understand it, he was not the physician who could heal it. My education, which was wholly his work, had been conducted without any regard to the possibility of its ending in this result; and I saw no use in giving him the pain of thinking that his plans had failed, when the

[*Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Dejection, an Ode." in *Sibylline Leaves* (London. Rest Fenner, 1817), p. 238 (ll. 21–4).]

[†See Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V, iii, 40–5.]

had failed, when the failure was probably irremediable and at all events beyond the power of *his* remedies. Of other friends I had at that time none to whom I had any hope of making my condition intelligible. It was however abundantly intelligible to myself; and the more I dwelt upon it, the more hopeless it appeared.

^hMy course of study had led me to believe^h that all mental and moral feelings and qualities, whether of a good or a bad kind, were the results of association; that we love one thing and hate another, have pleasure in one sort of action or contemplation and pain in another sort, through the clinging of pleasurable and painful ideas to those things from the effect of education or of experience. As a 'consequence of this, I had always heard it maintained by my father, and was myself' convinced, that the object of education should be to form the strongest possible associations of the salutary class: associations of pleasure with all things beneficial to the great whole, and of pain with all things hurtful to it. All this appeared inexpugnable, but it now seemed to me on retrospect, that my teachers had occupied themselves but superficially with the means of forming and keeping up these salutary associations. They seemed to have trusted altogether to the old familiar instruments, praise and blame, reward and punishment. Now I did not doubt that by these means, begun early and applied vigilantly, intense associations of pain and pleasure might be raised up, especially of pain, and might produce desires and aversions capable of lasting undiminished to the end of life. But there must always be something artificial and casual in associations thus generated: the pains and pleasures thus forcibly associated with things, are not connected with them by any natural tie; and it is therefore, I thought, essential to the durability of these associations, that they should have become so intense and inveterate as to be practically indissoluble before the habitual exercise of the power of analysis had commenced. For I now saw, or thought I saw, what I had always before received with incredulity—that the habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings. This is a commonplace, but it is true, and only errs in being but a half-truth. The habit of analysis has really this tendency when no other mental habit is cultivated, and the analysing tendency remains without its natural complements and correctives. At this time I did not see what these complements and correctives are. The very excellence of analysis (I argued) is that it tends to weaken and undermine whatever is prejudice; that it enables us mentally to separate ideas which have only casually clung together, and no associations whatever could ultimately resist its dissolving force, were it not that we owe to analysis our clearest knowledge of the permanent sequences in nature; the real connexions between things, quite independent of our will and feelings; natural laws by which, in many cases, one thing is inseparable from another, and which laws, in proportion as they are clearly perceived and imaginatively realized, cause the ideas of things which always accompany one another in fact, to cohere more and more closely in

^{h-h}{*Earlier version:*} I had been taught and was thoroughly persuaded

failure was probably irremediable, and at all events, beyond the power of *his* remedies. Of other friends, I had at that time none to whom I had any hope of making my condition intelligible. It was however abundantly intelligible to myself; and the more I dwelt upon it, the more hopeless it appeared.

My course of study had led me to believe, that all mental and moral feelings and qualities, whether of a good or of a bad kind, were the results of association; that we love one thing and hate another, take pleasure in one sort of action or contemplation, and pain in another sort, through the clinging of pleasurable or painful ideas to those things, from the effect of education or of experience. As a corollary from this, I had always heard it maintained by my father, and was myself convinced, that the object of education should be to form the strongest possible associations of the salutary class; associations of pleasure with all things beneficial to the great whole, and of pain with all things hurtful to it. This doctrine appeared inexpugnable; but it now seemed to me on retrospect, that my teachers had occupied themselves but superficially with the means of forming and keeping up these salutary associations. They seemed to have trusted altogether to the old familiar instruments, praise and blame, reward and punishment. Now I did not doubt that by these means, begun early and applied unremittingly, intense associations of pain and pleasure, especially of pain, might be created, and might produce desires and aversions capable of lasting undiminished to the end of life. But there must always be something artificial and casual in associations thus produced. The pains and pleasures thus forcibly associated with things, are not connected with them by any natural tie; and it is therefore, I thought, essential to the durability of these associations, that they should have become so intense and inveterate as to be practically indissoluble, before the habitual exercise of the power of analysis had commenced. For I now saw, or thought I saw, what I had always before received with incredulity—that the habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings: as indeed it has when no other mental habit is cultivated, and the analysing spirit remains without its natural complements and correctives. The very excellence of analysis (I argued) is that it tends to weaken and undermine whatever is the result of prejudice; that it enables us mentally to separate ideas which have only casually clung together: and no associations whatever could ultimately resist this dissolving force, were it not that we owe to analysis our clearest knowledge of the permanent sequences in nature: the real connexions between Things, not dependent on our will and feelings; natural laws, by virtue of which, in many cases, one thing is inseparable from another in fact: which laws, in proportion as they are clearly perceived and imaginatively realized, cause our ideas of things which are always joined together in Nature, to cohere more and more closely in our

¹—[*Earlier version*] corollary from this I had been taught and had always been

conception. Analytic habits may thus even strengthen the associations between causes and effects but tend to weaken all those which are, to speak familiarly, a mere matter of feeling. They are, therefore (I thought), favourable to prudence and clear-sightedness, but a perpetual worm at the root both of the passions and of the virtues: and above all, fearfully undermine all desires and all pleasures which are the result of association, that is, according to the theory I held, all except the purely physical and organic: of the entire insufficiency of which, to make life desirable, no one had a stronger conviction than I had. These were the laws of human nature by which, as it seemed to me, I had been brought to my present state. ^lAll those to whom I looked up, were of opinion ^l that the pleasures of sympathy with human beings, and the feelings which made the good of others and especially of mankind on a large scale the object of existence, were the greatest and surest source of happiness. I was well convinced of this, but to know that a feeling would make me happy if I had it, did not create the feeling. My education had failed, as I thought, to give me these feelings in sufficient strength to resist the dissolving influence of analysis, while the whole course of my intellectual cultivation had made precocious and premature analysis the inveterate habit of my mind. I was thus, as I said to myself, left stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well equipped ship and a rudder but no sail; without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted to labour for: no delight in virtue or the general good, but also just as little in anything else. The ^ksources^k of vanity and ambition seemed to have dried up within me, as completely as those of benevolence. I had had (as I reflected) some gratification of vanity at too early an age; I had obtained some distinction and felt myself to be of some importance before the desire of distinction and of importance had grown into a passion; and little as it was which I had attained, yet having been attained so early, like all pleasures enjoyed too soon, it had made me *blasé* and indifferent to the pursuit. Thus neither selfish nor unselfish pleasures were pleasures to me. And there seemed no power in nature sufficient to begin the formation of my character afresh and create in a mind now irrevocably analytic, fresh associations of pleasure with any of the objects of human desire.

These were the thoughts which mingled with the dry heavy dejection of the melancholy winter of 1826–7. During this time I was not incapable of my usual occupations; I went on with them mechanically, by the mere force of habit. I had been so drilled in a certain sort of mental exercise that I could carry it on when all the spirit had gone out of it. I even composed and spoke several speeches at the debating society; how, or with what degree of worth I know not. Of four years continual speaking at that society, this is the only year of which I remember next to nothing. Two lines of Coleridge, in whom alone of all writers I have found a true description of what I felt, were often in my thoughts, not at this time, but in a later period of the same mental malady.

^l—[Earlier version:] I had been taught

thoughts. Analytic habits may thus even strengthen the associations between causes and effects, means and ends, but tend altogether to weaken those which are, to speak familiarly, a *mere* matter of feeling. They are therefore (I thought) favourable to prudence and clear-sightedness, but a perpetual worm at the root both of the passions and of the virtues; and above all, fearfully undermine all desires, and all pleasures, which are the effects of association, that is, according to the theory I held, all except the purely physical and organic; of the entire insufficiency of which to make life desirable, no one had a stronger conviction than I had. These were the laws of human nature by which, as it seemed to me, I had been brought to my present state. All those to whom I looked up, were of opinion that the pleasure of sympathy with human beings, and the feelings which made the good of others, and especially of mankind on a large scale, the object of existence, were the greatest and surest sources of happiness. Of the truth of this I was convinced, but to know that a feeling would make me happy if I had it, did not give me the feeling. My education, I thought, had failed to create these feelings in sufficient strength to resist the dissolving influence of analysis, while the whole course of my intellectual cultivation had made precocious and premature analysis the inveterate habit of my mind. I was thus, as I said to myself, left stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail; without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for: no delight in virtue or the general good, but also just as little in anything else. The fountains of vanity and ambition seemed to have dried up within me, as completely as those of benevolence. I had had (as I reflected) some gratification of vanity at too early an age: I had obtained some distinction, and felt myself of some importance, before the desire of distinction and of importance had grown into a passion: and little as it was which I had attained, yet having been attained too early, like all pleasures enjoyed too soon, it had made me *blasé* and indifferent to the pursuit. Thus neither selfish nor unselfish pleasures were pleasures to me. And there seemed no power in nature sufficient to begin the formation of my character anew, and create in a mind now irretrievably analytic, fresh associations of pleasure with any of the objects of human desire.

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^{k-k}[Earlier version:] pleasures

Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve
 And hope without an object cannot live.

I often asked myself, if I could, or was bound, to live on, when life must be passed in this manner. I generally answered to myself, that I did not think I could possibly bear it beyond a year. When however not more than half that length of time had passed, a small ray of light broke in upon my gloom. I was reading, accidentally, Marmontel's *Memoirs*, and came to the passage where he relates his father's death, the distressed position of his family, and how he, then a mere boy, by a sudden inspiration, felt and made them feel that he would be everything, would supply the place of everything to them. A vivid conception of 'this scene' came over me, and I was moved to tears. From this moment my burthen grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless. I was not a stock or a stone. I had still, it seemed, some of the material out of which all worth of character and all capacity of happiness are made. Relieved from my ever present sense of wretchedness, I gradually found that the ordinary incidents of life could again give some pleasure: that I could again find enjoyment in sunshine and sky, in books, in conversation, in public affairs, not intense, but sufficient for cheerfulness; and that there was once more, excitement though but of a moderate kind, in exerting myself for my opinions and for the public good. Thus the cloud gradually drew off, and I again enjoyed life: and though "before the gloom entirely passed away" I had several relapses, some of which lasted many months, I never again was as miserable as I had been.

The experiences of this period had two very decided effects on my opinions and character. In the first place, they led me to adopt a theory of life very unlike that on which I had before acted, and having much in common with what at that time I had never heard of, the anti-self-consciousness theory of Carlyle. I never indeed varied in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct aim. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their attention fixed on something other than their own happiness: on the happiness of others, either individually or collectively; on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or

^{l-l}[*Earlier version.*] his and their feelings

^{m-m}[*Earlier version:*] during the next few years

Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object cannot live^[*]

In all probability my case was by no means so peculiar as I fancied it, and I doubt not that many others have passed through a similar state; but the idiosyncracies of my education had given to the general phenomenon a special character, which made it seem the natural effect of causes that it was hardly possible for time to remove. I frequently asked myself, if I could, or if I was bound to go on living, when life must be passed in this manner. I generally answered to myself, that I did not think I could possibly bear it beyond a year. When, however, not more than half that duration of time had elapsed, a small ray of light broke in upon my gloom. I was reading, accidentally, Marmontel's *Memoirs*, and came to the passage which relates his father's death, the distressed position of the family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them—would supply the place of all that they had lost.^[†] A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears. From this moment my burthen grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or a stone. I had still, it seemed, some of the material out of which all worth of character, and all capacity for happiness, are made. Relieved from my ever present sense of irremediable wretchedness, I gradually found that the ordinary incidents of life could again give me some pleasure; that I could again find enjoyment, not intense, but sufficient for cheerfulness, in sunshine and sky, in books, in conversation, in public affairs; and that there was, once more, excitement, though of a moderate kind, in exerting myself for my opinions, and for the public good. Thus the cloud gradually drew off, and I again enjoyed life: and though I had several relapses, some of which lasted many months, I never again was as miserable as I had been.

The experiences of this period had two very marked effects on my opinions and character. In the first place, they led me to adopt a theory of life, very unlike that on which I had before acted, and having much in common with what at that time I certainly had never heard of, the anti-self-consciousness theory of Carlyle.^[‡] I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not

[*Coleridge, "Work without Hope," in *Poetical Works*, 3 vols. (London: Pickering, 1828), Vol. II, p. 81.]

[†Jean François Marmontel, *Mémoires d'un père*, 4 vols. (London: Peltier, 1805), Vol. I, pp. 87–8 (Livre I).]

[‡See, e.g., Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Munroe, 1837), pp. 86ff. and 189ff. (Bk. II, Chaps. 1 and 1x); cf. "Characteristics," *Edinburgh Review*, LIV (Dec., 1831), 351–83.]

favorite pursuit followed not as a means but as an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make life pleasant when they are taken en passant, without being made a principal object. Once make them so however and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. They will not bear a scrutinizing examination: ask yourself if you are happy, and you cease to be so. The only chance is to treat not happiness but some end external to it, as the object of life. Let your self-consciousness, your scrutiny, your self-interrogation exhaust themselves on that, and if otherwise fortunately circumstanced you will inhale happiness with the air you breathe, without dwelling on it or thinking about it, without either forestalling it in imagination or putting it to flight by fatal self-questioning. This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life. And I still hold to it as the best theory for those who have but a moderate degree of sensibility and of capacity for enjoyment, that is, for the great majority of mankind.

The other great change which my opinions at this time underwent, was that I now for the first time gave its proper place among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual. I ceased to attach almost exclusive importance to the ordering of outward circumstances, and to the training of the human being for knowledge and for action. I now knew by experience that the passive susceptibilities needed to be cultivated as well as the active capacities, and required to be nourished and enriched as well as guided. I never for an instant lost sight of or undervalued, that part of the truth which I saw before: I never turned recreant to intellectual culture, or ceased to value the power and habit of analysis as essential both to individual and to social improvement. But I thought that it had consequences which required to be corrected by joining other sorts of cultivation with it: and the maintenance of a due balance among the faculties, now seemed to me of primary importance. The cultivation of the feelings now became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed. And my thoughts and inclinations turned more and more towards whatever I thought capable of being instrumental to that object.

"I now" began to find meaning in the things which I had read or heard said about the importance of poetry and art as instruments of culture. But it was some time longer before I began to know this by personal experience. The only one of the imaginative arts in which I had from childhood taken great pleasure was music: the best effect of which (and in this it surpasses perhaps every other art) consists in exciting enthusiasm; in winding up to a high pitch those feelings of an elevated kind which are already *in* the character, but to which this excitement gives a glow and a fervour which though transitory in its utmost height, is precious for sustaining them at other times. This effect of music I had often experienced: but like all my better susceptibilities it was suspended during my gloomy period. I had sought relief again and again from this quarter, but found none. After the tide had turned,

"-"[*Earlier version:*] It was a natural consequence of this, that I

as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing, when they are taken *en passant*, without being made a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. They will not bear a scrutinizing examination. Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so. The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life. Let your self-consciousness, your scrutiny, your self-interrogation, exhaust themselves on that; and if otherwise fortunately circumstanced you will inhale happiness with the air you breathe, without dwelling on it or thinking about it, without either forestalling it in imagination, or putting it to flight by fatal questioning. This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life. And I still hold to it as the best theory for all those who have but a moderate degree of sensibility and of capacity for enjoyment, that is, for the great majority of mankind.

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indeed, and I was in process of recovery, I had been helped forward by music, but in a much less elevated manner. I at this time first became acquainted with Weber's *Oberon*, and the extreme pleasure which I drew from its delicious melodies did me good by shewing me a source of pleasure to which I was as susceptible as ever: this good however being much impaired by the thought that the pleasure of music (as is quite true of such pleasure as this was, that of mere tune) fades with familiarity, and requires to be fed by continual novelty. And it is very characteristic both of my then state and of my general mental character at that time, that I was seriously tormented by the thought of the exhaustibility of musical combinations. The five tones and two semitones of the octave can be put together only in a limited number of ways; of these only a small proportion are beautiful; most of these must have been already discovered and there could not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers to strike out as they had done entirely new and surpassingly rich veins of musical beauty. This source of anxiety may appear perhaps to resemble that of the philosophers of Laputa who feared lest the sun should be burnt out. It was however connected with the best point of my character, the only good point indeed to be found in my very unromantic and in no way honorable distress. For though my dejection honestly looked at, cannot be called other than egotistical, produced by the ruin as I thought of my fabric of happiness; yet the condition of mankind in general was ever in my thoughts, and could not be separated from my own: I felt that the evil in my life must be an evil in life itself; that the question was whether if the reformers of society and government could succeed in their objects and every person living were free and in physical comfort, the pleasures of life, being no longer kept up by privation and struggle would cease to be pleasures: and I felt that unless I could see my way to some better hope than this for the general happiness of mankind, my dejection must continue; but that if I could, I should then look on the world with pleasure, content with any fair share of the general lot.

This state of my thoughts and feelings made the fact of my first reading Wordsworth (in the autumn of 1828) an important event of my life. I took up the collection of his poems from curiosity, with no expectation of mental relief from it, though I had before resorted to poetry with that hope. In the worst period of my mental depression I had read through the whole of Byron (then new to me) to try whether a poet whose peculiar department was supposed to be that of the intenser feelings, could rouse any feeling in me. As might be expected, I got no good from

the tide had turned, and I was in process of recovery, I had been helped forward by music, but in a much less elevated manner. I at this time first became acquainted with Weber's *Oberon*,^[*] and the extreme pleasure which I drew from its delicious melodies did me good, by shewing me a source of pleasure to which I was as susceptible as ever. The good however was much impaired by the thought, that the pleasure of music (as is quite true of such pleasure as this was, that of mere tune) fades with familiarity, and requires either to be revived by intermittence, or fed by continual novelty. And it is very characteristic both of my then state, and of the general tone of my mind at this period of my life, that I was seriously tormented by the thought of the exhaustibility of musical combinations. The octave consists only of five tones and two semitones, which can be put together in only a limited number of ways, of which but a small proportion are beautiful: most of these, it seemed to me, must have been already discovered, and there could not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers, to strike out as these had done, entirely new and surpassingly rich veins of musical beauty. This source of anxiety may perhaps be thought to resemble that of the philosophers of Laputa, who feared lest the sun should be burnt out.^[†] It was, however, connected with the best feature in my character, and the only good point to be found in my very unromantic and in no way honorable distress. For though my dejection, honestly looked at, could not be called other than egotistical, produced by the ruin, as I thought, of my fabric of happiness, yet the destiny of mankind in general was ever in my thoughts, and could not be separated from my own. I felt that the flaw in my life, must be a flaw in life itself; that the question was, whether, if the reformers of society and government could succeed in their objects, and every person in the community were free and in a state of physical comfort, the pleasures of life, being no longer kept up by struggle and privation, would cease to be pleasures. And I felt that unless I could see my way to some better hope than this for human happiness in general, my dejection must continue; but that if I could see such an outlet, I should then look on the world with pleasure; content as far as I was myself concerned, with any fair share of the general lot.

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[*Karl Maria von Weber, *Oberon; or, The Elf-King's Oath* (first performed in London, Covent Garden, 12 Apr., 1826).]

[†See Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, in *Works*, ed. Walter Scott, 19 vols. (Edinburgh: Constable; London: White, *et al.*; Dublin: Cumming, 1814), Vol. XII, p. 211 (Voyage III, Chap. ii).]

this reading but the reverse. The poet's state of mind was too like my own. His was the lament of a man who had worn out all pleasures and who seemed to think that life to all who possessed the good things of it, must necessarily be the vapid uninteresting thing which I found it. His Harold and Manfred had the same burthen on them which I had; and I was not in a frame of mind to derive any comfort from the vehement sensual passion of his Giaours or the sulkiness of his Laras. But while Byron was exactly what did not suit my condition, Wordsworth was exactly what did. I had looked into *The Excursion* two or three years before and found little or nothing in it; and should probably have found as little had I read it now. But the miscellaneous poems, in the two-volume edition of 1815 ^o(to which little valuable was added in any of the subsequent editions) ^o, proved to be the precise thing for my mental wants at that particular time.

In the first place, these poems addressed themselves powerfully to one of the strongest of my pleasurable susceptibilities, the love of rural objects and of natural scenery; to which I had been indebted not only for much of the pleasure of my life, but quite recently for relief from one of my longest relapses into depression. ^p In this power of rural beauty over me there was a foundation laid for taking pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry; the more so, as his scenery is mostly among mountains, which owing to my early Pyrenean excursion were my ideal of natural beauty. But Wordsworth would never have had any great effect on me if he had merely placed before me beautiful pictures of natural scenery. A collection of very second rate landscapes does this more effectually than any books. What made Wordsworth's poems ^qa^q medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not outward beauty but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of. By their means I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings, which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. I seemed to learn from them what would be the perennial sources of happiness when all the greater evils of life should be removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence. At present my estimate of Wordsworth as a

^{o-o}[*Earlier version:*] , comprising nearly everything good which he ever wrote [*deleted by HTM*]

^p[*Cancelled text.*] About Midsummer of that same year 1828 I set out on a short walking tour: for months before I had been in my old state of gloomy dejection, though as I have already mentioned not so intense as at first; this continued the greater part of the first day, but the walk by the side of the Thames from Reading to Pangbourne, in one of the loveliest of summer evenings with the western sky in its most splendid colouring before me, and the calm river, rich meadows and wooded hills encompassing me, insensibly changed my state, and except a short interval two days later I had no return of depression during that excursion nor for several months afterwards [See the entry for 3 July, 1828, in Mill's *Journal of a Walking Tour of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Surrey*]

^{q-q}[*Earlier version:*] so exactly the

reading, but the reverse. The poet's state of mind was too like my own. His was the lament of a man who had worn out all pleasures, and who seemed to think that life, to all who possess the good things of it, must necessarily be the vapid uninteresting thing which I found it. His Harold and Manfred had the same burthen on them which I had; and I was not in a frame of mind to derive any comfort from the vehement sensual passion of his Giaours, or the sullenness of his Laras.^[*] But while Byron was exactly what did not suit my condition, Wordsworth was exactly what did. I had looked into *The Excursion*^[†] two or three years before, and found little in it; and should probably have found as little, had I read it at this time. But the miscellaneous poems, in the two-volume edition of 1815^[‡] (to which little of value was added in the latter part of the author's life), proved to be the precise thing for my mental wants at that particular juncture.

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[*The heroes of George Gordon Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1819); *Manfred, a Dramatic Poem* (London: Murray, 1817); *The Giaour, a Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (London: Murray, 1813); and *Lara, a Tale* (London: Murray, 1814).]

[†William Wordsworth, *The Excursion, Being a Portion of The Recluse, a Poem* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814); in *Poetical Works*, 5 vols. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827), Vol. V.]

[‡*Poems by William Wordsworth, Including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces by the Author*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815) (A third volume was published in 1820.)]

[§Cf. Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads," in *Poetical Works* (1827), Vol. IV, pp. 360–1 (para. 5).]

poet is very far indeed below that which I then formed; but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what this did. I wanted to be made to feel that there was happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this and not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in, the common feelings and common destiny of human beings. And the delight which these poems gave me, proved to me that with culture of this sort there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis. At the end of the poems came the famous "Ode," falsely called Platonic; in which, along with more than his usual sweetness of rhythm and melody, and along with the two passages of fine description but bad philosophy so often quoted, I found ³ that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. ⁷ The consequence of all these things was that I gradually but completely emerged from my habitual depression and was never again subject to it. "I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merits than to what he had done for me". My present judgment of him is, that he is the poet of unpoetical natures, when accompanied by quiet and contemplative tastes. But it must be remembered that unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This cultivation Wordsworth is more fitted to give them, than poets incomparably his superiors.

It so happened that the merits of Wordsworth were the occasion of my first public declaration of my new way of thinking, and ¹ separation from those of my habitual companions who had not undergone a similar change. The person with whom at that time I was most in the habit of comparing notes was Roebuck; and I induced him to read Wordsworth, in whom he also at first seemed to find much to admire: but I like most Wordsworthians threw myself into strong antagonism to Byron, both as a poet and in respect to his effect on the character. Roebuck, all whose instincts were those of action and struggle, had on the contrary a strong relish and admiration of Byron, whose writings he regarded as the poetry of real life while Wordsworth's according to him were that of flowers and butterflies. We agreed to have the fight out at our Debating Society, where we accordingly discussed for two evenings the comparative merits of Byron and Wordsworth, "propounding, and illustrating by long recitations," our respective theories of poetry. This was the first debate on any weighty subject on which Roebuck and I

⁷[*Cancelled text:*] unfading, or rather the increasing

¹[*Cancelled text:*] what was much more to my purpose, namely

³[*Cancelled text:*] This moral of the whole, so different from Byron's, was valuable to me, but I did not need it, as I had already drawn the same from the previous poems.

⁴⁻⁴[*Earlier version:*] All these things being considered it is not strange that I rated very high the merit and value of Wordsworth

⁷[*Cancelled text:*] apparent

⁷⁻⁷[*Earlier version:*] each bringing forward the merits of the poet he preferred, vehemently attacking the other, and propounding

have certainly been, even in our own age, greater poets than Wordsworth; but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what his did. I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this, not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in, the common feelings and common destiny of human beings. And the delight which these poems gave me, proved that with culture of this sort, there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis. At the conclusion of the Poems came the famous "Ode," falsely called Platonic, "Intimations of Immortality":^[*] in which, along with more than his usual sweetness of melody and rhythm, and along with the two passages of grand imagery but bad philosophy so often quoted, I found that he too had had similar experience to mine: that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting: but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it. I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me. Compared with the greatest poets, he may be said to be the poet of unpoetical natures, possessed of quiet and contemplative tastes. But unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he.

It so fell out that the merits of Wordsworth were the occasion of my first public declaration of my new way of thinking, and separation from those of my habitual companions who had not undergone a similar change. The person with whom at that time I was most in the habit of comparing notes on such subjects was Roebuck, and I induced him to read Wordsworth, in whom he also at first seemed to find much to admire: but I, like most Wordsworthians, threw myself into strong antagonism to Byron, both as a poet and as to his influence on the character. Roebuck, all whose instincts were those of action and struggle, had, on the contrary, a strong relish and great admiration of Byron, whose writings he regarded as the poetry of human life, while Wordsworth's, according to him, was that of flowers and butterflies. We agreed to have the fight out at our Debating Society, where we accordingly discussed for two evenings the comparative merits of Byron and Wordsworth, propounding and illustrating by long recitations our respective theories of poetry: Sterling also, in a brilliant speech, putting forward his particular theory.^[†] This was the first debate on any weighty subject in which

[*"Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *Poetical Works* (1827), Vol. IV, pp. 346–55.]

[†Mill spoke on Wordsworth in the debate on 30 Jan., 1829 (MS in the Mill-Taylor Collection); Sterling opened the debate, and Roebuck spoke on 16 Jan. Actually Roebuck and Mill had two years earlier opposed one another in debate on the immoral tendencies of Byron's poetry, with Roebuck upholding Byron.]