

From Book Tenth
France continued¹

[THE REVOLUTION: PARIS AND ENGLAND]

Cheered with this hope,² to Paris I returned;
And ranged, with ardor heretofore unfelt,
50 The spacious City, and in progress passed
The Prison³ where the unhappy Monarch lay,
Associate with his Children and his Wife,
In Bondage; and the Palace⁴ lately stormed,
With roar of Cannon, by a furious Host.
55 I crossed the Square (an empty Area then!)
Of the Carousel, where so late had lain
The Dead, upon the Dying heaped: and gazed
On this and other Spots, as doth a Man
Upon a Volume whose contents he knows
60 Are memorable, but from him locked up,
Being written in a tongue he cannot read;
So that he questions the mute leaves with pain,
And half-upbraids their silence. But, that night,
I felt most deeply in what world I was,
65 What ground I trod on, and what air I breathed.
High was my Room and lonely, near the roof
Of a large Mansion or Hotel,⁵ a Lodge
That would have pleased me in more quiet times,
Nor was it wholly without pleasure, then.
70 With unextinguished taper I kept watch,
Reading at intervals; the fear gone by
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.
I thought of those September massacres,
Divided from me by one little month,
75 Saw them and touched;⁶ the rest was conjured up
From tragic fictions, or true history,
Remembrances and dim admonishments.
The Horse is taught his manage,⁶ and no Star
Of wildest course but treads back his own steps;
80 For the spent hurricane the air provides
As fierce a Successor; the tide retreats
But to return out of its hiding place
In the great Deep; all things have second birth;
The earthquake is not satisfied at once;
85 And in this way I wrought upon myself
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried

town house

1. At this period, October 1792–August 1794, Wordsworth's revolutionary enthusiasm was at its height.

2. I.e., that the moderates were now taking over and would eliminate further violence.

3. I.e., the "Temple" (it had once housed the religious Order of Templars), where Louis XVI was held prisoner.

4. The Tuileries. In front of this is the great square of "the Carousel" (line 56), where a number of the mob storming the palace had been killed.

5. I.e., his imagination of the September massacres was so vivid as to be palpable.

6. The French *manège*, the prescribed action and paces of a trained horse.

To the whole City, "Sleep no more." The Trance
Fled with the Voice to which it had given birth.
But vainly comments of a calmer mind
90 Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.
The place, all hushed and silent as it was,
Appeared unfit for the repose of Night,
Defenceless as a wood where Tygers roam.

" * * * In this frame of mind,

Dragged by a chain of harsh necessity,
So seemed it,—now I thankfully acknowledge,
Forced by the gracious providence of Heaven—
225 To England I returned,⁸ else (though assured
That I both was, and must be, of small weight,
No better than a Landsman on the deck
Of a ship struggling with a hideous storm)
Doubtless I should have then made common cause
230 With some who perished, haply perished too,⁹
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering,
Should to the breast of Nature have gone back
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
A Poet only to myself, to Men
235 Useless, and even, beloved Friend, a Soul
To thee unknown!¹

* * *

What then were my emotions, when in Arms
Britain put forth her free-born strength in league,
265 O pity and shame! with those confederate Powers?²
Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous Youth,
Change and subversion from that hour. No shock
Given to my moral nature had I known
270 Down to that very moment; neither lapse
Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
A revolution, save at this one time;
All else was progress on the self-same path
On which, with a diversity of pace,
275 I had been travelling: this a stride at once
Into another region.—As a light
And pliant hare-bell swinging in the breeze
On some gray rock, its birth-place, so had I
Wantedon, fast rooted on the ancient tower

7. *Macbeth* 2.2.33–34: "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep.'"

8. Forced by the "harsh necessity" of a lack of money, Wordsworth returned to England late in 1792.

9. Wordsworth had allied his sympathies with the party of the Girondins, almost all of whom were guillotined or committed suicide.

1. Wordsworth did not meet Coleridge, the "beloved Friend," until 1795.

2. England joined the war against France in February 1793. The great moral crisis that ultimately wrecked Wordsworth's life began with this sudden split between his profound attachments to the English land (the development of which he described in the early books of *The Prelude*) and his later but heartfelt identification with the cause of the French Revolution. What had seemed a single and coherent world suddenly began to split into conflicting

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

**Composed Upon Westminster Bridge,
September 3, 1802***

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
This river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

1802

1807

* The date of this experience was not September 3, but July, 1802. Its occasion was a trip to France (see Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals*, July 1802, p. 395). The conflict of feelings attending Wordsworth's brief return to France, where he had once been a revolutionist and the lover of Annette Vallon, evoked a number of personal and political sonnets. (Editor's footnote in *The Norton Anthology*, vol. 2. p. 296)