

William Wordsworth

*There is a little unpretending rill*

Sonnet composed 1801 and published 1820

There is a little unpretending rill

Of limpid water, humbler fair than aught That ever among Men or Naiads sought Notice of name! – It quivers down the hill, Furrowing its shallow way with dubious will; Yet to my mind this scanty Stream is brought Oftener than Ganges or the Nile; a thought Of private recollection sweet and still!

Months perish with their moons; year treads on year; But, faithful Emma! Though with me canst say That, while ten thousand pleasures disappear, And flies their memory fast almost as they; The immortal Spirit of one happy day Lingers beside that Rill, in vision clear.

It is the Nature poetry of Wordsworth which draws me to him time and time again. Yet it is what he makes of it that is so evocative, with its depth of meaning. Our relationship with Nature over a lifetime is part of an ongoing memory as in this poem. How many times are special moments in our lives remembered in a setting, a place of significance. It matters not that the situation is grand but rather it is what is experienced in a particular place, and how over the years, memory recognizes and responds to it spiritually.

Perhaps the 'little unpretending rill' of which Wordsworth writes, was in the Lake District where there are many more significant places, which have during the lifetime of Wordsworth and ever since, acted as a magnet for tourists. My 'unpretending' place of significance is in North Devon, also an area of great beauty, which draws tourists. This 'unpretending' place was one of my favourite morning walks with Jack, our faithful mongrel Sheepdog. It was close by a river, edged with scrubland and a vague path that never dried out.

One wellington walking morning we diverted from the regularly walked path, and 'took the path less travelled'. We found a low mist hanging over the scrubland. It was eerily quiet, other than for the rustling of small animals amongst the dank debris and old leaves. We hardly ever saw anyone walking this path and that morning was no exception. Jack had been damaged as a small puppy before he came to us, so didn't move very quickly as arthritis took hold in his old age. This was a walk which he was free to roam around and explore, snuffling around in the scrub. We were never in a hurry during our morning walks, giving me lots of time just to look around me, breathe slowly and deeply.

On that particular morning I watched the low-lying mist swirl about me, whilst Jack moved into and out of the mist. The light seemed to keep changing around me, one minute dull yellow and the next grey, but always damp. One minute the nettles edging the path were clear and green, the next minute they were gone. One particular nettle seemed to catch a clear light and the brightness of its green caught my eye. On one perfect leaf was a perfect drop of water, clean, clear and whole. I watched and was caught up in that drop's wholeness for what seemed a long time, nothing else but yet everything else seemed to exist in that moment. I turned to find Jack standing by me. I don't know how long we stood there together before moving on.

I returned from that walk not the same person as when we had started out. The memory of what must seem to others an insignificant moment happening in an 'unpretending' place was what Wordsworth wrote of:

The immortal Spirit of one happy day  
Lingers beside that Rill, in vision clear