

11th July 2024

Simplicity

**“A Creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.”**

William Wordsworth, *She Was a Phantom of Delight* (1804)

Dove Cottage, the home of the poet William Wordsworth in the early part of the 19th century, is small – *surprisingly* small, it seemed to me on a recent visit. The cottage housed only Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, when it was purchased in 1799. But after Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson in 1802, and the arrival of the first three of their five children, Dove Cottage appeared to be bursting at the seams.

And yet in this over-occupied home, there was beauty, creativity, hospitality and, above all, simplicity. The simple delights of nature, beauty, friendships and family underpinned all that Wordsworth stood for. For “simple wiles” were as much in evidence in his home as in his poetry, and were clearly at the heart of coping with the “praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles” that are the daily food of human nature and family life.

In 1884, the American Shaker elder and songwriter, Joseph Brackett, wrote the beautiful lyrics of *Simple Gifts*.

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.*

*When true simplicity is gain'd
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,
To turn, turn will be our delight
'Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

William Wordsworth didn't know these lyrics. Yet the sentiment they contain more than adequately describe what I found in Dove Cottage.

And me? There have been times when I've been guilty of over-complicating things, or, indeed, trying too hard to make things perfect. Perhaps I might have “come round right” more often if I'd grasped “the gift to be simple” and practiced it, more regularly, just as Wordsworth did.

A prayer for today

*Lord, your Love is simple, yet profound.
Help me to mirror that in the simple cottage of my life. Amen*