VI
TO A HIGHLAND GIRL,
AT INVERSNEYDE, UPON LOCH LOMOND

[Composed 1803.—Published 1807.]

SWEET Highland Girl, a very shower
Of beauty is thy earthly dower!
Twice seven consenting years have shed
Their utmost bounty on thy head:
And these grey rocks; that household lawn;
Those trees, a veil just half withdrawn;
This fall of water that doth make
A murmur near the silent lake;
This little bay; a quiet road
That holds in shelter thy Abode—
In truth together do ye seem
Like something fashioned in a dream;
Such Forms as from their covert peep
When earthly cares are laid asleep!
But, O fair Creature! in the light
Of common day, so heavenly bright,
I bless Thee, Vision as thou art,
I bless thee with a human heart;
God shield thee to thy latest years!
Thee, neither know I, nor thy peers;
And yet my eyes are filled with tears.

With earnest feeling I shall pray
For thee when I am far away:
For never saw I mien, or face,
In which more plainly I could trace
Benignity and home-bred sense
Ripening in perfect innocence.
Here scattered, like a random seed,
Remote from men, Thou dost not need
The embarrassed look of shy distress,
And maidenly shamefacedness:

Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear
The freedom of a Mountaineer:
A face with gladness overspread!
Soft smiles, by human kindness bred!
And seemliness complete, that sways
Thy courtesies, about thee plays;
With no restraint, but such as springs
From quick and eager visitings
Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
Of thy few words of English speech:
A bondage sweetly brooked, a strife
That gives thy gestures grace and life!
So have I, not unmoved in mind,
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind—
Thus beating up against the wind.

What hand but would a garland cull;
For thee who art so beautiful?
O happy pleasure! here to dwell
Beside thee in some heathy dell;
Adopt your homely ways, and dress,
A Shepherd, thou a Shepherdess!
But I could frame a wish for thee
More like a grave reality:
Thou art to me but as a wave
Of the wild sea; and I would have
Some claim upon thee, if I could,
Though but of common neighbourhood.
What joy to hear thee, and to see!

Thy elder Brother I would be,
Thy Father—anything to thee!

Now thanks to Heaven! that of its grace
Hath led me to this lonely place.
Joy have I had; and going hence
I bear away my recompense.
In spots like these it is we prize
Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes:
Then, why should I be loth to stir?
I feel this place was made for her;
To give new pleasure like the past,
Continued long as life shall last.

Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,
Sweet Highland Girl! from thee to part;
For I, methinks, till I grow old,
As fair before me shall behold,
As I do now, the cabin small,
The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
And Thee, the Spirit of them all!
NOTES

p. 73. VI. TO A HIGHLAND GIRL: "This delightful creature and her demeanour are particularly described in my Sister's Journal, The sort of prophecy with which the verses conclude has, through God's goodness, been realized; and now, approaching on the close of my 73rd year, I have a most vivid remembrance of her and the beautiful objects with which she was surrounded. She is alluded to in the poem of 'The Three Cottage Girls' among my Continental Memorials. In illustration of this class of poems I have scarcely anything to say beyond what is anticipated in my Sister's faithful and admirable Journal."—I. F. For a description of the girl and her companion v. D. W.'s Recollections under Aug. 26; she concludes: "At this day the innocent merriment of the girls, with their kindness to us, and the beautiful figure and face of the elder come to my mind whenever I think of the ferry-house and waterfall of Loch Lomond." D. W. tells us that the poem was written "not long after our return from Scotland".

In edd. 1815, 1820 it was placed among Poems of the Imagination.

VI. 5–6 these ... that ... Those 1845: these ... this ... These MS.-1832: those ... that ... Those 1837–43

11 so 1827–32, 1845: ye do MS.-1820: In truth, unfolding thus, ye seem 1837–43

15–16 added 1845

17 so 1845: Yet dream and [or 1837–43] vision MS.-1843

20 Thee, neither know I, 1845: I neither know Thee, MS.-1843