

THE FIRST ROBIN.

A LEADEN sky, gold-fretted in the west,
Where sinks the red sun with his banners torn :
A robin resting from long flight and worn
Is perched beside a winter-draggled nest.
A thousand miles of ever anxious quest,
From Southern bayou, lit by sunny morn,
Where cypress branches, tasseled like ripe corn,
Flung their gray moss against his tawny breast,
Have not bereft him of the thoughts of love ;
The morrow's eye will bring his tardy mate,
And they will build another home, above
The last year's wreck—at early morn and late,
His song will pierce the lilac-leaved alcove,
Where she sits queenlike, in her purple state.

Barrie-field, April, 1888.

K. L. JONES.

PROFESSOR BRANDL ON COLERIDGE.

PROFESSOR ALOIS BRANDL, the author of an elaborate study of the life and works of the poet Coleridge, which has been translated into English by Lady Eastlake, and favourably reviewed in some English journals of high standing, pronounces at least one critical judgment which cannot be allowed to pass unquestioned. "It is wrong," he says, "to cite always the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* as Coleridge's best works. In the *Reflections on Leaving a Place of Retirement* there is more domestic warmth, more original thought, more artistic finish." Now, to Coleridge's English admirers this brief poem so highly praised by Professor Brandl is nothing more than a transcript of one of those fluctuating moods and phases of emotion which the poet has so often embodied in facile blank verse. Its domestic warmth is simply that effusive glow of feeling which he could always summon at will ; its aspirations for himself and his brother men the echoes of his visionary scheme of founding a Pantisocracy—a poetized and sublimated anarchy—on the banks of the river Susquehanna. To place this piece of sentimental verse above the wonderful poems with which Professor Brandl compares it seems to prove him quite incapable of appreciating, or even comprehending, Coleridge's true genius as a poet.

Not on any of the poems which may be called personal revelations, beautiful as some of this class are—*Dejection*, for instance, *Youth and Age*, and two or three others—can Coleridge's title to immortal fame be founded. It does not depend on his *Religious Musings*, his *Sibylline Leaves*, his political-philosophical odes, or his dramas. It rests on the slender but immovable basis of three poems, each unique in its way, *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel*, and *The Ancient Mariner*.

Whether *Kubla Khan* was really the birth of a dream, as Coleridge said, or only the creation of the poet's dream-like imagination, who can say? For so strangely was his mind confused between his literary work imagined and that actually done that his utterances on such subjects are not to be depended on. It is a purely poetical fantasy, with no more plot or plan, motive of moral, than a flower or gem, but in its power of raising with splendid imagery and melodious verse, as with a magic wand, a realm of enchantment, it is unequalled, and must forever remain one of the greatest marvels of poetry.

Christabel has a plot, a tale to tell, though, alas ! it is a tale that is left half told. In it the opposing powers of good and ill are shadowed forth in weird and mystic guise, and the dead mother, as her guardian spirit and minister of grace, contends with the beautiful enchantress, who is the minister of evil, for the soul of sweet Christabel. From the very first, the ghostly aspect of nature, the troubled unrest of the creatures that are nearer to nature than man, thrill us with the sense that something eerie and harmful is abroad. We know at once that the damsel, "beautiful exceedingly," who lies moaning under the old oak tree, is a witch or a Lamia, come to work woe on the innocent maiden

Beloved by all in the upper sky ;

and we shudder with dread as Christabel in tender pity stretches forth her hand, and puts herself under the spell of the wicked Geraldine. But through all this haunting terror the dread is "tempered with delight" ; the dominant note is one of ineffable sweetness ; and the noble and pathetic lines which tell of Sir Leoline's quarrel with his friend and the pain and loss of their parted lives are as sweet as they are sad.

Coleridge says in *The Day Dream*—

My eyes make pictures when they're shut :

and we can easily fancy that the pictures in *Christabel* were made by this simple process, and instantly woven into the melodious numbers through which we see them. The lovely maid, so pure and sweet, praying in the moonlit wood ; the lady so beautiful to see, with glittering gems wildly tangled in her hair, and naked blue-veined feet, appealing to the wondering maiden's pity ; Christabel opening the little door in the middle of the gate with the key that fitted well, to admit her treacherous guest ; the dying firebrands in the hall shooting out tongues of flame as the witch steals by, and Christabel guides her up the stairs "as still as death, with stifled breath" ; the maiden's chamber, carved with figures strange and sweet, and Christabel trimming the lamp fastened with twofold silver chain to an angel's feet ; the bodiless spirit of the guardian mother hovering near, while the wicked Geraldine shrinks and cowers at the

heavenly watcher's presence ; Christabel leaning from her bed in a dream or trance, and, as the lady loosens her cincture and lets her silken robe drop to the floor, beholding the foul heart of the witch revealed in all its horror—these, and many other pictures, all so ethereal in their beauty and yet so weird, illuminate the pages of this lovely poem as if the silver-pointed pencil that "Rafael used to draw Madonnas" were added to the vision and the voice of divine poesy. Add to these rare faculties the power of subtly blending soul and sense, nature and man, and the world beyond mortal ken, and of wrapping them in an atmosphere of mystic glamour of which only Coleridge ever had the secret, and we have the elements from which *Christabel* sprang to being in the poet's imagination, waiting to receive outward life and form from his hand. Owing to the defects that marred Coleridge's splendid genius this was only partly accomplished. In his mind, he tells us, the poem had "the wholeness as well as the loveliness of a vision" ; unhappily, the inspiration under which it was conceived and the first part written passed away, and it was thrown aside unfinished. Three years later he tried to recall the lost vision and fix its fleeting images, but again "the spells that drowsed his soul" overcame him ; the wondrous tale was left half told, the other half lost for ever.

One man, disregarding the warning in *Kubla Khan*, had the hardihood to rush within the woven circle, and attempt to revive the mystic symphony and song. It is needless to speak of the result, but it may be found somewhere among the works of Mr. Martin Tupper.

But incomparably Coleridge's greatest work is the *Ancient Mariner*. The simplicity of its ballad form and its weird supernaturalism hide its spiritual meaning from many who delightedly yield themselves to its witching spell, and think it the most wonderful fairy tale that ever was written. To Coleridge it was something far more than a fairy tale. It was inspired and pervaded by that religious mysticism, and that profound belief in the unity of man and all God's creatures, "great and small," with the spirit that informs the universe, which from first to last coloured all his theories of life, and all his philosophical theology. In it he made the confession of a faith rooted in his being, constantly trying to escape from the limits of thought into some region of absolute certainty and constantly thrown back into doubt and despondency, he found his only relief in dreams, or in the creations of his vivid imagination.

In the *Ancient Mariner* we have a symbol of man's soul, alienated from God, and leading a blind and selfish existence, destitute of sympathy and love. The misery that follows such an isolated soul is symbolically pictured, partly through scenes of human suffering, partly through visionary phantoms from the spirit-world. The great elemental forces of nature—tempests of wind and snow, giant icebergs, and all the dread phenomena of the southern polar seas ; the burning heats and deadly calms of the torrid zone ; sun, moon, and stars, and the strange aspects of unknown skies ; the strong-winged denizens of the air, and the playful water snakes of the great deep—all have their parts in this "wild Odyssey of the soul" ; while the dreams and illusions of guilt and remorse become living personifications of weird power. When the lost soul, as symbolized in the *Ancient Mariner*, is sunk in the depths of despair, when the burden of his guilt becomes a conscious weight too heavy to be borne, redemption comes. In the simplest, humblest way love enters his heart unawares. That moment he is at one with God, and in sympathy with all God's creatures. In a strain of sweet and thrilling melody, in which all the sweetest songs of earth and heaven seem to blend and harmonize, he is brought back to his own country ; and henceforth, whenever he finds a man fitted to receive his message, he is constrained to tell his marvellous tale, and teach the lesson that had been taught to him—the lesson that love is the fulfilling of the law and the link that binds heaven and earth together.

Farewell, farewell ! but this I tell
To thee, thou wedding guest,
He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

A simple creed, but one that, through dreams of Neo-Platonism, Christian mysticism, and ecclesiastical dogmas, Coleridge held all his life. Long before he wrote the *Ancient Mariner* he made himself a target for the arrows of Philistine mockery by his *Lines to a Young Ass*, in which the same creed was set forth. And doubtless it was the child-like love and faith inherent in his nature, far more than his real genius or wonderful powers of persuasion, that preserved for him to the last the devoted friendship and affection of so many whom his faults and eccentricities had tried to the utmost, but could never wholly estrange.

From Professor Brandl's estimate of the comparative merit of Coleridge's works his critical review of the *Ancient Mariner* could hardly be satisfactory to those who appreciate its almost supernatural power and matchless charm. He treats it in his elaborate analysis as if it were merely an ingenious composition, a skilful combination of borrowed ideas, instead of an original work of creative genius ; and recounts Coleridge's supposed aid from Wordsworth, from another friend's dream, and from certain voyages and travels, in a manner that reminds one of the London charwoman who thought "it must have taken three or four men to put together *Dombey*." The mystic and spiritual element, which is the essence of the poem, he assumes to have had its origin in German ghost stories and ballads, and in proof cites the resemblance between the *Ancient Mariner* and Monk Lewis's ghostly ballad *Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogen*, which is an obvious imitation of Bürger's *Lenore*. In this way, Professor Brandl says, Bürger directly and indirectly influenced the *Ancient Mariner*.