

COLERIDGE.—II.

Reference has already been made to the universality of the genius of Coleridge. He united characteristics and qualities which are seldom found together in the same person. He was not only an excellent scholar; his reading was prodigious and his powerful memory enabled him to retain much of what he read. His splendid imagination is displayed in his poems, and even after his genius took different forms this quality was hardly less manifested in his philosophical speculations.

It is hardly possible to over estimate Coleridge's influence on the thought of England. Mr. John Mill declared, "No one has contributed more to shape the opinions among younger men who can be said to have any opinions at all." Mr. Mill thinks that Bentham's influence was alone superior to Coleridge's. Certainly Mr. Mill himself was more under the influence of Bentham, and Mr. Mill was, for a time almost supreme in English thought; but that influence has greatly decayed, and at the present moment it can hardly be doubted that the spiritual philosophy of Coleridge is in the ascendant. It may be useful to indicate briefly some of the departments of thought in which the influence of Coleridge has been felt.

1. We might first consider his influence as a Critic. Here we are under the disadvantage of living and breathing in the midst of that critical school of which Coleridge was almost the beginner. Take one single example of this influence—the criticism of Shakespeare. Editors and commentators are not very ready to acknowledge their obligations to those who have worked before them; but there are certain names which stand out as representing the best criticism of their own day, such as Dr. E. Dowden of the present moment, Mr. Dyce and Mr. Charles Knight of former times. These critics had considerable differences among themselves; but each one of them has done something to advance the study and purify and rectify the criticisms of our great dramatist. The influence of Coleridge is visible in them all; and Mr. Chas. Knight, one of the first in England to labour for the purity of Shakespeare's text, specially refers to Coleridge as his master. Even now, when we possess only notes and fragments of his lectures, we can discern the depth, clearness, and fineness of his criticism. If only we compared his work with previous criticisms, even that of a man so great as Johnson, we shall see that, under Coleridge, the study of Shakespeare entered upon a new era.

But the same may be said of literature in general. He and Lamb did more than any others to recall attention to the Elizabethan drama. His remarks on Wordsworth's poetry show that he was himself not merely a poet, but a critic of the highest excellence who discerned at once the strength and the weakness of Wordsworth's theories. He was, moreover, one of the first and probably the chief of those who made German literature known to the English public. On these points it is scarcely necessary to dilate and space for a full illustration.

2. With regard to his position in Philosophy, although different opinions have been held, there is now a general consent that, if he contributed nothing positive to the development of philosophical thought,

he not only did powerfully influence all students of philosophy in the second and third quarters of this century, but he also contributed largely to the discrediting of the empirical and materialistic philosophy which has had such powerful advocates in England, and promoted more spiritual views of the problems of life and thought.

He is said to have formed grand schemes of a system of philosophy which came to nothing. But it is by no means certain that any formally complete treatise would have had a greater stimulating power than the hints which he has left in the "Aids to Reflection," and "Biographia Literaria." It is said that he was unintelligible. Byron describes him as "Explaining metaphysics to the nation, I wish he would explain his explanation."

But this charge has been made against most philosophers, from the days of Heraclitus to those of Hegel and Green. Dean Mansel complained that he misunderstood Kant in regard to his use of Reason, Coleridge saying that with Kant it was the intuitional faculty, which was Jacobi's view and not Kant's. But every one must know that Kant's treatment of this subject in his *Dialectic* is highly artificial and occasionally uncertain; and even Dean Mansel does not escape criticism, for Professor Mahaffy declares of him that he follows Kant as far as he understands him!

Then, again, it is said that he plagiarized from Schelling, and a passage was actually produced which Coleridge had printed as his own, which was a manifest translation from the German philosopher. But the explanation was very simple. Coleridge had copied the passage in English into a commonplace book, neglecting to give a reference to its source, and not unnaturally took it afterwards for his own. This explanation will be quite intelligent to those who remember the admirable style of Schelling's philosophical writings, and also the peculiar excellence of Coleridge's translations which make the reader forget that they are not original works.

We notice some of these accusations not because of their intrinsic importance, but because they are the current coin of the disparagers of Coleridge. We shall see presently that he left a mark on English thought which no plagiarist, or copyist, or muddle-headed dreamer could have left. Great, however, as was Coleridge's interest in philosophy, it was chiefly as the handmaid of theology that he attached importance to its study.

3. Coleridge, like all great thinkers, regarded Theology as the *Scientia Scientiarum*, and deep as was his attachment to Philosophy, with him she was but the handmaid of the Divine Science. Doubtless his own religious history had strengthened his sense of the importance of theology. In his earlier days he had got quite unsettled in his religious opinions. His willingness, after his marriage, to undertake the pastorate of an Unitarian congregation shows us pretty plainly where he had drifted. Subsequent study of the Fathers, the great Anglican writers, and mystical divines like Tauler, Boehme, and William Law had made him profoundly dissatisfied with the shallow views of Arian and Arrianizing writers, and he came to a settled belief in the Catholic faith, as it was held alike by Romans, Anglicans, and the more Orthodox Protestant Communions.

But Coleridge, while holding firmly the

Christian religion, saw clearly enough, as we now see, that many of the ways of representing Christian doctrine were not merely offensive to men of taste, but causes of stumbling to men of intellectual consistency; and he set to work to show the reasonableness of Christian doctrine while insisting upon its experimental reality. Coleridge indeed presents us with a singular blending of the rational and the mystical. The main purpose of Coleridge in connecting philosophy and theology is set forth in a quotation from Lactantius which is prefixed to the "Aids to Reflection," and is here given in English: "It has pleased God that man should have such a nature as to be desirous of two things, Religion and Wisdom. But men are lead astray so as to seek for religion and leave out wisdom, or to strive for wisdom alone and leave out religion. This is an error, since the one without the other cannot be true." Here is Coleridge's text, and he devotes his energies to the reconciliation of philosophy and theology—an attempt which was once thought dangerous and presumptuous, but which he and others have taught us to be a duty and a matter of course.

If we ask what have been the effects of this endeavour, it is hardly possible to answer the question except in the merest outline; for the influences of Coleridge on modern theological thought have been so far-reaching that we could hardly explain them without giving a history of every theological movement of the last fifty or sixty years. Whether we turn our attention to the different departments of religious thought or to the ecclesiastical movements, in either case we must discern his influence.

For a moment consider his influence on religious thought generally, and it will be apparent that he has touched it at every point. The Evidences of Religion, the Inspiration of Scripture, the Conception of God, the Nature of Faith, the Spirituality of Morality—each of these subjects has been studied and treated in a different fashion since Coleridge wrote. It is not, of course, pretended that Coleridge was the originator of all the ideas to which he gave currency. Coleridge, like all great thinkers, was a symptom as well as an energy. He was part of a movement as well as a mover. But, for all that, he was himself a distinct and tangible power, the effects of which still remain with us. We wish it were possible for us to illustrate in detail his influence in regard to the subjects above noted. We would refer to the Layman's Sermon on Inspiration; to his profound remark that Faith is the synthesis of Reason and Will. As regards the Evidences, it is possible that, through his influence, the external evidences of miracles may have been unduly disparaged, and we think this has happened, yet his emphasizing the moral and spiritual side of evidential testimony was important and valuable. We cannot say that we owe to him alone our deliverance from the deistic conception of a Ruler of the Universe who was external to the world which He governed and our belief in a God in whom we live and move and have our being; but assuredly his teaching must be reckoned among the powers which have united these changes of view.

If we turn from the subject of religious thought in general to that of Church movements, we shall find that his influence was very powerful, and that it may easily