

MARCH 24th 1893.]

poet's lifetime, "He has yet completed no adequate memorials of his genius, yet it is most unjust to assert that he has done little or nothing. To refute this assertion there are his 'Wallenstein'; his love poems of intensest interest; his 'Ancient Mariner' with its touches of profoundest tenderness amidst the wildest and most bewildering terrors; his holy and sweet tale of 'Christabel,' with its rich enchantments and richer humanities; the depths, the sublimities and the pensive sweetness of his Tragedy, the heart-dilating sentiments scattered through his 'Friend.'"

It may be convenient to divide our remarks into three parts. 1. Treating of some incidents in his life; 2. Of his genius and influence generally; 3. Of his poetic genius.

1. We begin with his history.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born at Ottery St. Mary, in South Devon, October 24th, 1772. His father, the Rev. John Coleridge, was Master of the Free School there, and afterwards Vicar of the parish. Sir John Taylor Coleridge was a grandson, and the present Lord Coleridge is a great grandson of Coleridge's father. The poet was two years younger than Wordsworth, one year younger than Scott, two years older than Southey, and two and a half older than Lamb.

His father was a remarkable and somewhat eccentric man. He wrote a Latin Grammar, in which he changed the names of the cases, putting for the Ablative, the "Quale, quare, quidditive case." We can quite understand whence Coleridge drew his taste for hard and unusual terms. His mother was a sensible and somewhat common-place kind of a lady who had an impatient, perhaps a contemptuous feeling for "harpsichord young ladies." Could she but have seen the kitchens at the close of the nineteenth century.

Coleridge's father died when he was about nine; in 1782 the future poet entered Christ's Hospital (the Blue Coat School) where he remained until 1791. He seems to have had a miserable life there. Boyer the head-master, was an excellent scholar, and he imparted his scholarship to Coleridge; but there does not seem to have been much to cheer or comfort the sensitive boy and he was so far from being contented with his position that he wanted to apprentice himself to a shoemaker whose acquaintance he had made.

Before the age of fifteen Coleridge was deeply interested in theology and metaphysics, as he tells us in his Biographia Literaria, and as Charles Lamb chronicles in his Essay on "Christ's Hospital five and thirty years ago," published in 1830. Lamb was about two years and a half younger than Coleridge, and the friendship which began between these two men at Christ's Hospital, ended only with the death of Coleridge, followed in the same year by the death of Lamb. Here is Lamb's remembrance of his friend: "Come back into memory like as thou was in the dayspring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Logician, Metaphysician, Bard! How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still entranced with admiration. . . . to hear thee unfold in thy deep and sweet intonations the mysteries of Jamblichus or Plotinus (for even in these

years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar—while the walls of the old Gray Friars re-echo to the accents of the inspired charity boy."

While at Christ's Hospital Coleridge swam the New River and allowed his clothes to dry on his body, an event to which many have attributed the chronic rheumatism to which he was subject in after years. During his time at school his faith had got greatly unsettled. Boyer suggested that he should go to Cambridge and prepare for Holy Orders, when the pupil astonished his head-master by explaining that he was an infidel, a confession which was followed by a flogging. Coleridge afterwards declared that the flogging was well deserved, we may take leave to doubt whether it was quite wise. A story goes that once after flogging him, Boyer added, "There is one more, because you are so ugly." Coleridge never was quite beautiful. He had flabby cheeks, and a large mouth; but his forehead was "divine" and his eyes were beautiful.

In 1791 he went to Cambridge and was an undergraduate at Peterhouse until 1794, when he left without taking a degree. In 1792 he gained the gold medal for a Greek ode on the Slave Trade. In 1793 he ran away from Cambridge—apparently on account of some not considerable debts which he had incurred in no dishonourable manner, and enlisted in a Regiment of Dragoons under the name of Silas Titus Cumberbatch, thus preserving his initials—S. T. C. In 1794 he was bought off and returned to Cambridge for the Michaelmas term; but this was his last.

About Christmas he was lodging at the "Salutation and Cat," a tavern near Temple Bar. There he met Charles Lamb and other choice spirits; and his conversation is said to have been so entertaining that the landlord offered him free board and lodgings, if he would only remain and entertain his other guests. In the long vacation of 1794 he had gone to Oxford and there had met Robert Southey who was then an undergraduate at Balliol College, and next year he went to visit Southey at Bristol. Mr. Joseph Cottle, subsequently the generous publisher of these men's works, speaks of the impression made upon him by Southey and Coleridge. We may note, in passing, that Joseph Cottle is the brother of Byron's "Amos Cottle" in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." "Never," he says, "will the effect be effaced produced on me by Southey. Tall, dignified, possessing great suavity of manner, an eye piercing, with a countenance full of genius, kindness, and intelligence." Of Coleridge he says, "I instantly desecrated his intellectual character, exhibiting as he did, an eye, a brow, and a forehead indicative of commanding genius."

During this visit Coleridge made the acquaintance of Sara Fricker to whose younger sister Southey was engaged. Coleridge became engaged to Sara but with characteristic indecision seems to have paid very little attention to her, seldom writing, until Southey went and told him that he had gone too far to draw back. In 1795 he married, and so did Southey. It is to this that Byron refers when he says in "Don Juan":
"When he and Southey following one path,
Espoused two partners (milliners of Bath)"

The milliners appear to have been of Bristol, not of Bath, and his Lordship did not show himself quite the gentleman by this reference to them.

Coleridge and his wife resided for some time at Overstowey and at Clevedon, in Somersetshire. Here they seem to have been very happy; and here some of Coleridge's best poetical work was done. In 1800 they removed to Greta Hall in Westmoreland. In 1806 Coleridge almost ceased to write poetry. A gradual estrangement seems to have taken place between him and his wife. It would serve no purpose to enter into the details which would make it intelligible. It would be easy to hold a brief on either side or on neither or on both. When Coleridge could go travelling in Italy and leave his family for six months without any notice of his existence, there must have been something wrong on his side. We must here remember his opium habit and other things. At any rate, in 1810 he left his family in Westmoreland, and never went back to them. At the same time he gave up entirely to them an annuity of £150 which had been settled upon him by the Westwoods about the time of his wedding, in order to enable him to continue his literary work.

Coleridge's efforts to make a living were quite sincere but never very effectual—partly through his own want of business habits, partly through his unfortunately not meeting with just and generous treatment. In the first instance, he and Southey thought of emigrating to America, and setting up a socialistic community—a Pantisocracy, as they proposed to call it. But this came to nothing. Then Coleridge thought of becoming a Unitarian minister, and amusing stories are told of his appearing in the pulpits of that denomination, clad in a blue coat and white waistcoat. Sometimes his sermons were rather ridiculous—on corn laws, hair tax and such subjects—and sometimes, Hazlitt assures us, they were full of power.

From the pulpit he turned to the press; and tried to set up a newspaper called the Watchman. He got a good many subscribers. But he offended a large portion of them by denouncing the exaggerations of Liberty, and another portion by speaking in condemnation of fasting, so that the list of subscribers which began with 1,500 soon dwindled to nothing. From this he went to the Morning Post on which he worked until 1800; and there can be little doubt that his writings were the making of this paper. As a simple fact, Stuart, the proprietor, bought the copyright of the paper for £600 and sold it for £25,000. Moreover, he offered Coleridge half shares in the profits if he would bind himself to the paper and give all his writing to it. But Coleridge wouldn't be bound. He little thought how he would have, in a few years, to work on a paper under far less favourable conditions.

In 1809-10 he put forth, somewhat irregularly, a periodical called The Friend. If we were to judge from the selections from this paper which the author republished in 1818, we should wonder at the dullness of a public which could not appreciate such literature. If, however, we consider the business arrangements of the author, we may cease to wonder.

At various times during Coleridge's life he sought to make something by lectures.