

with its forced antithesis and monotonous rhythm, which had enthralled English verse from the days of Pope. Of the poets that burst into song at the beginning of the century, only two of them—Wordsworth and Coleridge—were possessed of the critical and poetic powers combined. Shelley and Keats, though they were masters of a fine classical style, never indicated their preference for any poetic methods of construction. Scott and Byron were both reckless of style, and may be said often to fall below anything like art in the form, rhythm, and diction of the verse in which they chiefly wrote. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge, on the contrary, were critics of style, and both entered their protest against that vapid poetic diction which had been in vogue since Dryden's time, and which they wished to replace, and notably succeeded in replacing, by the more natural and genuine language of true thought and feeling. Principal Shairp, speaking of Wordsworth's blank verse, says "there is much, no doubt, which may freely be made over to the scourge of the critic;" but he adds that "even in the least effective of his verse, the critic will find in every page some line or phrase or thought, weighty with individual genius." Of Coleridge's best verse Swinburne remarks that, "the world has nothing like them, nor can have; they are of the highest kind, and of their own. He brackets as of supreme value "Christabel," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Kubla Khan," giving his preference, however, for the latter, which he terms the most wonderful of all poems. "In reading it," he says, "we are rapt into that paradise where 'music and colour and perfume are one;' where you see the hues and hear the harmonies of heaven. For absolute melody and splendour, it were hardly rash to call it the first poem of the language." Principal Shairp's own preference is for "Christ-

abel," whose magical beauty, he remarks, "has been so long canonized in the world's estimate, that to praise it now would be unseemly. It brought into English poetry an atmosphere of wonder and mystery, of beauty and pity combined, which was quite new at the time it appeared, and has never since been approached. The movement of its subtle cadences has a union of grace with power which only the finest lines of Shakespeare can parallel." "Coleridge," he continues, "from his temperament, was not often at the full pitch of his powers; but when he was, he possessed a style which, for inner delicacy and grace combined with inspired strength and free-sweeping movement, made him one of the few masters of poetic diction, one who, we may be quite sure, will in our language remain unsurpassed. Too early he forsook the muse, or the muse forsook him; and the most subtle imagination of his time was plunged in the Sterbonian bog of German metaphysics."

The estimate passed on the *Ancient Mariner* by Mr. Traill, the latest biographer of Coleridge, is, as may be expected, a high one. What strikes him most, is the simple realistic force of its narrative, which, obviously, it was Coleridge's main purpose to achieve. "But," as Mr. Traill remarks, "it is easier to undertake this than to perform it, and much easier to perform it in prose than in verse." "Coleridge," he goes on to say, "triumphs over his difficulties by sheer vividness of imagery and terse vigour of descriptive phrase—two qualities for which his previous poems did not prove him to possess by any means so complete a mastery. . . . In the *Ancient Mariner* his eye seems never to wander from his object, and again and again the scene starts out upon the canvas in two or three strokes of the brush. The skeleton ship, with the dicing demons on its