

and they attended to his horse and accoutrements. In four months his history and circumstances became known: he had written under his saddle, on the stable-wall, a Latin sentence, (*Eheu! quam infortunii miserrimum est fuisse felicem!*) which led to an inquiry by the captain of his troop; and Coleridge was discharged and restored to his family and friends. He returned to Cambridge; and shortly afterwards went on a visit to an old schoolfellow at Oxford, where an introduction to Southey, then an undergraduate at Balliol College, became the hinge on which a large part of his after-life was destined to turn.

CLXI.

ROBERT SOUTHEY AT HIS SCHOOLS, AND AT OXFORD.

Robert Southey, the business of whose life was the pursuit of literature, and the first and last joy of his heart, was born in the city of Bristol, in 1774, and was the son of a small tradesman. His childhood, however, was not passed at home, but from the age of two to six, at the house of Miss Tyler, his aunt, in Bath. He had no playmates; he was never permitted to do anything in which by any possibility he might contract dirt; he was kept up late at night in dramatic society, and kept in bed late in the morning at the side of his aunt; and his chief pastime—for neither at this time nor at a later period had Southey any propensity for boyish sports—was pricking holes in playbills—an amusement, of course, suggested to him by Miss Tyler, and witnessed by her with infinite delight. As soon as the child could read, his aunt's friends furnished him with books. The son of Francis Newbery, of St. Paul's Churchyard, and the well-known publisher of *Goody Two Shoes*, (1) *Giles Gingerbread*, "and other such delectable histories in sixpenny books for children, splendidly bound in the flowered and gilt Dutch paper of former days," sent the child twenty such volumes.

"This," says Southey, in his autobiography, "was a rich present, and may have been more instrumental than I am aware in giving me that love of books, and that decided determination to literature, as the one thing desirable, which manifested itself from my childhood, and which no circumstance in after-life ever slackened or abated."

Southey's first school was in the village of Corston, nine miles from Bristol: it is described in one of his earliest poems extant (the *Retrospect*), written after he had visited the house in 1793. It had been the mansion of some decayed family, and had its walled-gardens, summer-houses, gate-pillars, a large orchard, and fine old walnut-trees; the garden was the playground; and Southey recollected of the interior a black oaken staircase from the hall, and the school-room hung with faded tapestry, behind which the boys kept their hoards of crabs. The master was a remarkable man, but an unfit tutor: his whole delight was mathematics and astronomy, and he had constructed an orrery so large that it filled a room. Southey speaks of his ornamental penmanship (2)—such as flourishing an angel, a serpent, a fish, or a pen, and even historical pictures; and grand spelling-matches of puzzling words hunted from the dictionary. Here Southey read Cordery and Erasmus, and got into *Phædrus*.

Before the boy was seven years old, he had been to the theatre more frequently than he afterwards went from the age of twenty till his death. The conversations to which he listened were invariably of actors, of authors, and of the triumphs of both; the familiar books of the household were tragedies and the "acting drama." Shakspeare was in his hands as soon as he could read; and it was long before he had any other knowledge of the history of England than what he gathered from Shakspeare's plays. "Indeed," he says, "when I first read the plain matter of fact, the difference which appeared then puzzled and did not please me; and for some time I preferred Shakspeare's authority to the historians." *Titus Andronicus* was at first Southey's favourite play. He went through Beaumont and Fletcher before he was eight years old, reading them merely for the interest which the stories

afforded him, but acquiring imperceptibly familiarity with the diction, and ear for the blank verse of our great masters.

At the same tender age, the resolution was first formed to excel in the profession which the child heard extolled for its dignity from morning till night. At first the actors of plays were esteemed beyond all other men; those in their turn gave place to writers of plays, whom, almost as soon as he could hold a pen, the boy himself began to emulate. He was not quite nine when he set to work upon a tragedy, the subject being the continence of Scipio. In 1782 he went as day-boarder to a school in Bristol, learning from his master, as invariably proved the case with him, much less than he contrived to teach himself. Before he had reached his twelfth year he had read with the keenest relish Hooles's translation of *Jerusalem Liberated* and the *Orlando Furioso*, and had been entranced with the *Fæerie Queen* of Spenser.

At thirteen, Southey was not only master of Tasso, Ariosto, and Spenser, but well acquainted also, through translations, with Homer and Ovid. He was familiar with ancient history, and his acquaintance with the light literature of the day was bounded only by the supply. A more industrious infancy was never known; but it was surpassed by the ceaseless energy of youth, which, in its turn, was superseded by the unfaltering and unequalled labour of the man.

In his twelfth and thirteenth years he wrote three heroic epistles in rhyme; made some translations from Ovid, Virgil, and Horace; composed a satirical description of English manners, as delivered by a *maître*, the *Tahitian*, to his countrymen; and next began the story of the Trojan War in a dramatic form.

Southey was removed to Westminster School early in 1788, and had for his tutor Botch Hayes, so named from the manner in which he mended his pupils' verses; here Southey first appeared in print, in a weekly paper called the *Trifler*, in imitation of the *Microcosm* at Eton. He next set on foot the *Flagellant*, in which appeared a satirical attack upon corporal punishment, which so roused the wrath of Dr. Vincent, the head-master, that Southey acknowledged himself the writer and apologized, but he was compelled to leave the school. He returned to his aunt at Bristol. He next went to matriculate at Oxford; his name had been put down at Christchurch, but the Dean (Cyril Jackson) having heard of the *Flagellant*, refused to admit Southey. He, however, entered at Balliol College, where he went to reside in January, 1793; (1) one of his college friends declares that he was a perfect *heluo librorum* then as well as throughout his life; among his writings there is abundant evidence that he had drunk deeply both of the Greek and Latin poets; and his letters at this time indicate a mind imbued with heathen philosophy and Grecian republicanism. He rose at five o'clock in the morning to study; yet he used to say that he learned two things only at Oxford,—to row and to swim. He loved the place; in one of his delightful letters, he says.

When I walk over these streets, what various recollections throng upon me! what scenes fancy delineates from the hour when Alfred first marked it as the seat of learning! Bacon's study is demolished, so I shall never have the honour of being killed by its fall; before my window Latimer and Ridley were burnt, and there is not even a stone to mark the place where a monument should be erected to religious liberty.

No attempt was made to ground Southey in prosody; and, as this defect in his education was never remedied (when he went to Westminster he was too forward in other things to be placed low enough in the school for regular training in this), Southey remained to the last as liable to make a false quantity as any Scotchman.

In his nineteenth year Southey completed his *Joan of Arc*. Next year Mr. Coleridge came to Oxford, and was introduced to Southey, who describes him as "of most uncommon merit, of the strongest genius, the clearest judgment, the best heart." The two friends next planned the emigration scheme of "Pantisocracy," (2) which was soon given up. Southey left Oxford in the spring of 1795, and as a means of support, with Coleridge, gave public lectures, which were well attended. The poem of *Joan of Arc* was next printed and published by Mr. Cottle, of Bristol, which may be considered as the commencement of Southey's long and arduous career as an author; for it has been well observed that "no artisan in the workshop, no peasant in the field, no handicraftsman at his board, ever went so young to his apprenticeship, or wrought so unremittently through life for a bare livelihood, as Robert Southey."

(1) "Godwin, the author of *Caleb Williams*, who had been a child's publisher himself, had always a strong persuasion that Goldsmith wrote *Goody Two Shoes*; and if so, the effort belongs to 1763; for Mrs. Margery, radiant with gold and gingerbread, and rich in pictures as extravagantly ill-drawn as they are dear and well remembered, made her appearance at Christmas."—*Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*. By John Forster. 1848. Page 300.

(2) Southey wrote a stiff, cramp hand, but remarkably neat and regular. He states that he set the fashion for black-letter in title-pages and half-titles, from his admiration of German-text at school.

One of the earliest holiday letters which he wrote was a description of Stonehenge, from the *Salisbury Guide*, which surprised and delighted his master, and gained Southey great praise.

(1) He soon attacked the law against wearing boots at Balliol; and he refused to have his hair dressed and powdered by the college barber, which was customary with freshmen.

(2) With this wild scheme of "Pantisocracy," Miss Tyler was so offended that she would never again see him. The expenses of his education, both at school and college, were defrayed by his uncle, the Rev.