

Choice Literature.

VITA NUOVA.

Long hath she slept, forgetful of delight;
At last, at last, the enchanted princess,
Earth,
Claimed with a kiss by Spring the adventurer,
In slumber knows the destined lips, and
thrilled
Through all the depths of her unaging
heart
With passionate necessity of joy,
Wakens, and yields her loveliness to love.

O ancient streams, O far-descended woods
Full of the fluttering of melodious souls;
O hills and valleys that adorn yourselves
In solemn jubilation; winds and clouds,
Ocean and land in stormy nuptials
clasped,

And all exuberant creatures that acclaim
The Earth's divine renewal: lo, I too
With yours would mingle somewhat of
glad song,

I too have come through wintry terrors,
—yea,

Through tempest and through cataclysm
of soul

Have come, and am delivered. Me the
Spring,

Me also, dimly with new life hath touched,
And with regenerate hope, the salt of
life;

And I would dedicate these thankful tears
To whatsoever Power beneficent,
Velled though his countenance, undivulged
his thought,

Hath led me from the haunted darkness
forth

Into the gracious air and vernal morn,
And suffers me to know my spirit a note
Of this great chorus, one with bird and
stream

And voiceful mountain,—nay, a string,
how jarred

And all but broken! of that lyre of life
Whereon himself, the master harp-player,
Resolving all its mortal dissonance
To one immortal and most perfect strain,
Harps without pause, building with song
the world.

—William Watson, in the Spectator.

COLERIDGE AS A POET.

BY REV. PROF. CLARK, LL. D.

It is generally agreed that a very high place must be given to Coleridge among English poets. But for the peculiar misfortunes and weaknesses which have been mentioned, he might have been anything. Hardly any place too high can be imagined for him. Of many of his utterances it has been said by critics of the highest eminence that none but Coleridge or Shakespeare could have produced them. When Coleridge appeared, the school of Pope had already waned, and a return to nature had been made, among others pre-eminently by Cowper and Burns, although Coleridge seems to have been more permanently influenced by Bowles, a poet now seldom quoted or remembered. It was Wordsworth, however, to whom Coleridge was most indebted for stimulus to his imagination, even as Wordsworth confesses that he owes more to Coleridge than to any other. Prior to his collaboration with Wordsworth he had done very little. It was the undertaking of his part in the Lyrical Ballads that set the tide of his poetical genius flowing.

In forming a judgment of Coleridge's poetic gifts, it may be well to give some attention to his own views on the subject of poetry. We could hardly be under better guidance. If any will deny to Coleridge a very high place among poets, they will hardly question his preeminence as a critic. We will begin with a reference to a passage in the "Biographia Literaria," (chap. xv.), in which he brings out "the specific symptoms of poetic power elucidated in a critical analysis of Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Rape of Lucrece'—works, he says, "which give at once strong promises of the strength, and yet obvious proofs of the immaturity, of his genius." We can here give only a bare outline of his remarks; the reader who wishes to possess himself of them in full will turn to the volume.

1. The first and most obvious excellence, he says, is the perfect sweetness of the versification; its adaptation to the subject; and the power displayed in varying the march of the words without passing into a loftier and more majestic rhythm than was demanded by the thoughts, or permitted by the propriety of preserving a sense of melody predominant.

2. A second promise of genius is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. In the "Venus and Adonis" this proof of poetic power exists even to excess. It is throughout as if a superior spirit, more intuitive, more intimately conscious even than the characters themselves, not only of every outward look and act, but of the flux and reflux of the mind in all its subtlest thoughts and feelings, were placing the whole before our view; himself meanwhile unparticipating in the passions, and actuated only by the pleasurable excitement which had resulted from the energetic fervour of his own spirit, in so vividly exhibiting what it had so accurately and profoundly contemplated.

3. The third characteristic is the beauty and force of the imagery employed. Images, he remarks, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proof of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit.

4. The last character which he mentions, which, he says, would prove but little except as taken conjointly with the former; yet without which the former could scarce exist in a high degree, and even if this were possible) would give promises only of transitory flashes and a meteoric power; is depth and energy of thought. No man was ever a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and fragrance of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotion, language.

We are forced to omit the illustrations given of these remarks, but the reader may refer to Coleridge's book or to Shakespeare's verses.

In his "Literary Remains" (American Edition, vol. iv. p. 19) he remarks: "Poetry is not the proper antithesis to prose, but to science. Poetry is opposed to science and prose to metre. The proper and immediate object of science is the acquirement or communication of truth; the proper and immediate object of poetry is the communication of immediate pleasure." Again he remarks: "Milton, in three incidental words, has implied all which . . . I have endeavoured to develop in a precise and strictly adequate definition. Speaking of Poetry, he says, as in a parenthesis, 'which is simple, sensuous, passionate.' . . . For the first condition, Simplicity, whilst it distinguishes poetry from the arduous processes of Science, . . . precludes, on the other hand, every affectation and morbid peculiarity. The second condition, Sensuousness, insures that framework of objectivity, that definiteness and articulation of imagery, and that modification of the images themselves, without which poetry becomes flattened into the mere didactics of practice, or evaporated into a hazy, unthoughtful, day-dreaming; and the third condition, Passion, provides that neither thought nor imagery shall be simply objective, but that the 'passio vera' of humanity shall warm and animate both."

The Poetical Life of Coleridge may be divided into three periods, the first the early period represented by the small volume published in 1796, the second edition appearing in 1797 which contained "Genievie," one of the very earliest of his published poems, the "Songs of the Pixies," written in 1793, and the "Monody on the Death of Chatterton," written in 1794 and altered up to 1798. The second period is the great period, extending from 1797 to 1806 or thereabouts, and the third period, the remainder of his life. It should be remarked that we cannot be quite sure of the dates, Coleridge's notes not being always to be depended upon, and internal evidence being sometimes uncertain.

Coleridge gives, in the "Biographia Literaria," (Chap. xiv.) an interesting account of the origin of the Lyrical Ballads, which we must not here reproduce. He notes two

cardinal points of Poetry: 1. Faithful adherence to the truth of Nature; and 2. The power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of Imagination. He mentions that he and Wordsworth planned the publication of a volume of poems of two kinds, the first dealing with incidents and agents of a supernatural character, the second with subjects chosen from ordinary life. To Coleridge the former class was assigned, and the Ancient Mariner and the Dark Ladie were the result. Christabel was begun at the same, but no part of it published in the Lyrical Ballads.

To the great period of Coleridge's poetry, and especially to the so-called Annus Mirabilis, 1797, belong the best of his poetical works. Thus "The Ancient Mariner" was written in 1797. So was "The Three Graves," and "Kubla Khan" and "France," and the first part of Christabel. The second part was written in 1800, but it was not published until 1816. The ode on "Dejection" was written in 1802, and so was the poem "Before Sunrise in the Valley of Chamouni." His principal play was also written in 1797, under the title of "Osorio." When it was produced on the stage in 1813, it appeared under the name of "Remorse."

A good many of the poems of Coleridge would have excited no particular attention; but some of them are of supreme excellence and would be sufficient to immortalize their author. Even if different critics place them differently, yet all recognize their power. For example, the "Three Graves," although incomplete, is a poem of tremendous power. "France" was pronounced by Shelley to be the greatest ode in the English language. Mr. Swinburne thinks "Kubla Khan" the first of all Coleridge's works; but with most readers the "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" will always hold the foremost place.

The Ancient Mariner is certainly a very great poem; and is the greatest ballad of its kind, or perhaps of any kind, in the English language. Whether we regard it as an effort of the imagination, or as illustrating the writer's power of representation, or think of its wonderful supernatural side, or the delicacy of treatment pervading it, or the melody of its language, we may satisfy ourselves that it fulfils all the requirements of poetry. Coleridge is always a singer, as a poet ought to be, and here his song is sweet and strong and varied.

The Ancient Mariner represents the journey of life, its dangers, difficulties and temptations. The Albatross may represent the circumstances of life generally, which he may use selfishly or unselfishly. The shooting of the Albatross was an act of wanton selfishness which brought upon the Mariner the curse of alienation, solitude, misery. His shipmates, making themselves participators in his crime, shared his punishment. The penalty was paralysis (the Ship was becalmed), unsatisfied longing (thirst), false hopes (the skeleton ship, the gamblers) from the world, isolation (his shipmates dropped dead), utter misery (the "curse in a dead man's eye"). But just as Selfishness is sin and death, so Love is the awakening of a new life. For long the Mariner's case was hopeless. He "looked to heaven and tried to pray"—in vain. But at last he looked down and saw beautiful creatures in the sea and "blessed them unawares." Now all was changed: "the self-same moment I could pray;" and then he slept and the rain fell, and he was restored to human fellowship.

A word should be said on the drama of "Remorse" which is now seldom read, but which is of first rate excellence. As regards the translation of Schiller's Wallenstein, it may be said without hesitation that it is the very best translation of any play or poem in existence; and, in the judgment of competent critics, superior to the original. Indeed it is said that some passages added by Coleridge to the English version were translated into German by Schiller and incorporated in the play.

Of "Christabel" the first part was written in 1797 and the second in 1800. During the interval between the writing and publication of the poem in 1816, it was shown

to many persons in manuscript. It is said that Shelley was so powerfully affected by it that he fainted on hearing it read aloud in Lord Byron's house. It is said that the poem was intended to be in four parts, only two of which were written. A brief analysis may be helpful to the reader. Christabel, the heroine, the daughter of Sir Leoline, lives a life of sublime purity and piety. She is betrothed to a Knight who has gone abroad. She is praying for her absent one in a wood when events occur which show that the holiest have not in this life escaped from spiritual dangers, yet which also show that the powers of the spiritual world of evil are limited.

Christabel praying comes upon a damsel bright who is really a witch in disguise, with diabolic powers which, however, are continually checked by the power of good. The damsel calls herself Geraldine, pretending to be the daughter of Lord Ronald of Tryermaine, and says she has been the victim of violence, having been carried off by five warriors who left her beneath the oak where she was found. She was invited by Christabel to go with her to her father's hall. She crosses the threshold with difficulty, good angels hindering. She cannot join in Christabel's thanksgiving. The mastiff gives an angry moan, a thing he had never done before when Christabel passed. Christabel speaks of her dead mother, and wishes she were there. Geraldine inadvertently joins in the wish, but soon bids the good spirit depart, as this was her hour. They slept together, when Christabel saw the witch's withered side, but came so under the spell that she could not tell. Yet Christabel was too holy to be dominated by the evil.

The Second Part begins by narrating how next morning Christabel awoke full of perplexity and took Geraldine to her father. Sir Leoline remembered Lord Ronald, an old friend, with whom he had quarrelled. The passage beginning "Alas, they had been friends in youth" is of surpassing beauty. Leoline was angry on hearing of the insults to Geraldine. He would avenge her and embraced her with affection. Christabel shrunk, remembering what she had seen, and drew back with a hissing sound—the serpentine influence had, in some measure, entered into her, and apparently was evoked by Geraldine's action. The Baron was troubled and angry, as Christabel could not explain. He then sent Bracy the Bard to Lord Ronald to assure him of his daughter's safety and bidding him come without delay. Bracy hesitated. A dream had told him of danger to Christabel. He saw a dove set upon by a bright green snake. The dove was Christabel, and she wanted to purge the wood with holy music. Again Christabel feeling the serpent power of Geraldine prays the Baron to send her away; but he, under the charm of the witch, is enraged against his daughter, regarding himself insulted and dishonoured. Bracy is ordered to go forth on his mission.

Here the second part ends. Gillman, in his Life of Coleridge, gives an outline of what was intended to be the continuation of the poem. According to the plan of Coleridge, the Bard hastens over the mountains to the Castle of Lord Ronald, and finds that the Castle has been swept away by an inundation. It is not quite clearly indicated in what manner he found out the falsehood of Geraldine's story, but this was done. Bracy returns, and Geraldine, having further incensed the Baron against Christabel, and finding the danger of discovery imminent, suddenly vanishes. The witch afterwards personates Christabel's lover; but Christabel feels that there is something wrong, and finds the courtship quite repulsive to her, yet is unable to understand the disgust she experiences. The Baron is shocked at her conduct, and induces her to consent to the marriage. As she reluctantly approaches the altar, the real lover returns and produces the ring she had given him. The witch vanishes, the Castle bell tolls, the mother's voice is heard, the rightful marriage takes place, and then ensues the reconciliation of father and daughter. Coleridge never completed the poem. We must, however, be thankful that we possess such great examples of his power.—The Week.

A holy act strengthens the inward holiness. It is a seed of life growing into more life.—Robertson.