Portrait Edition

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY

JOHN MORLEY

X.

COLERIDGE. By H. D. Traill

WORDSWORTH. By F. W. H. Myers

BURNS. By J. C. Shairp

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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS.

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY.

Portrait Edition.

I.	IV.	VII.	X.
MILTON.	BENTLEY.	SCOTT.	COLERIDGE.
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POPE	JOHNSON.	LAMB.	ADDISON.
SIDNEY.	BACON.	DE QUINCEY.	SHERIDAN.

XIII.

KEATS. HAWTHORNE. CARLYLE.

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COLERIDGE

BY

H. D. TRAILL

PREFATORY NOTE.

In a tolerably well-known passage in one of his essays De Quincey enumerates the multiform attainments and powers of Coleridge, and the corresponding varieties of demand made by them on any one who should aspire to become this many-sided man's biographer. The description is slightly touched with the humorous hyperbole characteristic of its author; but it is in substance just, and I cannot but wish that it were possible, within the limits of a preface, to set out the whole of it in excuse for the many inevitable shortcomings of this volume. Having thus made an "exhibit" of it, there would only remain to add that the difficulties with which De Quincey confronts an intending biographer of Coleridge must necessarily be multiplied many-fold by the conditions under which this work is here attempted. No complete biography of Coleridge, at least on any important scale of dimensions, is in existence; no critical appreciation of his work *as a whole*, and as correlated with the circumstances and affected by the changes of his life, has, so far as I am aware, been attempted. To perform either of these two tasks adequately, or even with any approach to adequacy, a writer should at least have the elbow-room of a portly volume. To attempt the two together, therefore, and to attempt them within the limits prescribed to the manuals of this series, is an enterprise which I think should claim, from all at least who are not offended by its audacity, an almost unbounded indulgence.

The supply of material for a *Life* of Coleridge is fairly plentiful, though it is not very easily come by. For the most part it needs to be hunted up or fished up—those accustomed to the work will appreciate the difference between the two processes—from a considerable variety of contemporary documents. Completed biography of the poet-philosopher there is none, as has been said, in existence; and the one volume of the unfinished *Life* left us by Mr. Gillman—a name never to be mentioned with disrespect, however difficult it may sometimes be to avoid doing so, by any one who honours the name and genius of Coleridge—covers, and that in but a loose and rambling fashion, no more than a few years. Mr. Cottle's *Recollections of Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge* contains some valuable information on certain points of importance, as also does the *Letters, Conversations, etc., of S. T. C.* by Mr. Allsop. Miss Meteyard's *Group of Eminent Englishmen* throws much light on the relations between Coleridge and his early patrons, the Wedgwoods. Everything, whether critical or biographical, that De Quincey wrote on Coleridgian matters requires, with whatever discount, to be carefully studied. *The Life of Wordsworth*, by the Bishop of St. Andrews; *The Correspondence of Southey;* the Rev. Derwent Coleridge's brief account of his father's life and writings; and the prefatory memoir prefixed to the 1880 edition of Coleridge's *Poetical and Dramatic Works*, have all had to be consulted. But, after all, there remain several tantalising gaps in Coleridge's life which refuse to be bridged over; and one cannot but think that there must be enough unpublished matter in the possession of his relatives, and the representatives of his friends and correspondents, to enable some at least, though doubtless not all, of these missing links to be supplied. Perhaps upon a fitting occasion, and for an adequate purpose, these materials would be forthcoming.

CONTENTS.

POETICAL PERIOD.

CHAPTER I.

1772–1794.

BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EARLY YEARS.—CHRIST'S HOSPITAL.—JESUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE. . . . . *Page* 1

CHAPTER II.

1794–1797.

THE BRISTOL LECTURES.—MARRIAGE.—LIFE AT CLEVEDON.—THE "WATCHMAN."—RETIREMENT TO STOWEY.—INTRODUCTION TO WORDSWORTH 17

CHAPTER III.

1797–1799.

COLERIDGE AND WORDSWORTH.—PUBLICATION OF THE "LYRICAL BALLADS."—THE "ANCIENT MARINER."—THE FIRST PART OF "CHRISTABEL."—DECLINE OF COLERIDGE'S POETIC IMPULSE.—FINAL REVIEW OF HIS POETRY 37

CRITICAL PERIOD.

CHAPTER IV.

1799–1800.

VISIT TO GERMANY.—LIFE AT GÖTTINGEN.—RETURN.—EXPLORES THE LAKE COUNTRY.—LONDON.—THE "MORNING POST."—COLERIDGE AS A JOURNALIST.—RETIREMENT TO KESWICK . . . . . *Page* 67

CHAPTER V.

1800–1804.

LIFE AT KESWICK.—SECOND PART OF "CHRISTABEL."—FAILING HEALTH.—RESORT TO OPIUM.—THE "ODE TO DEJECTION."—INCREASING RESTLESSNESS.—VISIT TO MALTA . 84

CHAPTER VI.

1806–1809.

STAY AT MALTA.—ITS INJURIOUS EFFECTS.—RETURN TO ENGLAND.—MEETING WITH DE QUINCEY.—RESIDENCE IN LONDON.—FIRST SERIES OF LECTURES 101

CHAPTER VII.

1809–1810.

RETURN TO THE LAKES.—FROM KESWICK TO GRASMERE.—WITH WORDSWORTH AT ALLAN BANK.—THE "FRIEND."—QUITS THE LAKE COUNTRY FOREVER 117

CHAPTER VIII.

1810–1816.

LONDON AGAIN. — SECOND RECOURSE TO JOURNALISM. — THE "COURIER" ARTICLES. — THE SHAKESPEARE LECTURES. — PRODUCTION OF "REMORSE." — AT BRISTOL AGAIN AS LECTURER. — RESIDENCE AT CALNE. — INCREASING ILL HEALTH AND EMBARRASSMENTS. — RETIREMENT TO MR. GILLMAN'S . . . . . *Page* 126

METAPHYSICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERIOD.

CHAPTER IX.

1816–1818.

LIFE AT HIGHGATE. — RENEWED ACTIVITY. — PUBLICATIONS AND REPUBLICATIONS. — THE "BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA." — THE LECTURES OF 1818. — COLERIDGE AS A SHAKESPEARIAN CRITIC 145

CHAPTER X.

1818–1834.

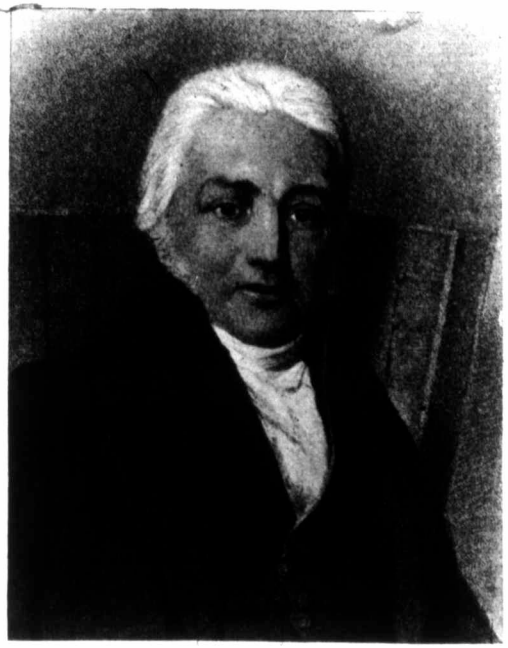
CLOSING YEARS. — TEMPORARY RENEWAL OF MONEY TROUBLES. — THE "AIDS TO REFLECTION." — GROWING WEAKNESS. — VISIT TO GERMANY WITH THE WORDSWORTHS. — LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH 160

CHAPTER XI.

COLERIDGE'S METAPHYSICS AND THEOLOGY. — THE "SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY" OF MR. GREEN 173

CHAPTER XII.

COLERIDGE'S POSITION IN HIS LATER YEARS.—HIS DISCOURSE.—HIS INFLUENCE ON CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT.—FINAL REVIEW OF HIS INTELLECTUAL WORK . . . . . *Page* 185



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COLERIDGE.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EARLY YEARS.—CHRIST'S HOSPITAL.—JESUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

[1772–1794.]

On the 21st of October, 1772, there was added to that roll of famous Englishmen of whom Devonshire boasts the parentage a new and not its least illustrious name. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the son of the Rev. John Coleridge, vicar of Ottery St. Mary in that county, and headmaster of Henry VIII.'s Free Grammar School in the same town. He was the youngest child of a large family. To the vicar, who had been twice married, his first wife had borne three children, and his second ten. Of these latter, however, one son died in infancy; four others, together with the only daughter of the family, passed away before Samuel had attained his majority; and thus only three of his brothers, James, Edward, and George Coleridge, outlived the eighteenth century. The first of these three survivors became the father of Henry Nelson Coleridge—who married his cousin Sara, the poet's accomplished daughter, and edited his uncle's posthumous works—and of the late

Mr. Justice Coleridge, himself the father of the present Lord Chief-Justice of England. Edward, the second of the three, went, like his eldest brother William, to Pembroke College, Oxford, and like him took orders; and George, also educated at the same college and for the same profession, succeeded eventually to his father's benefice and school. The vicar himself appears from all accounts to have been a man of more mark than most rural incumbents, and probably than a good many schoolmasters of his day. He was a Hebrew scholar of some eminence, and the compiler of a Latin grammar, in which, among other innovations designed to simplify the study of the language for "boys just initiated," he proposed to substitute for the name of "ablative" that of "quale-quare-quidditive case." The mixture of amiable simplicity and not unamiable pedantry to which this stroke of nomenclature testifies was further illustrated in his practice of diversifying his sermons to his village flock with Hebrew quotations, which he always commended to their attention as "the immediate language of the Holy Ghost"—a practice which exposed his successor, himself a learned man, to the complaint of his rustic parishioners, that for all his erudition no "immediate language of the Holy Ghost" was ever to be heard from *him*. On the whole the Rev. John Coleridge appears to have been a gentle and kindly eccentric, whose combination of qualities may have well entitled him to be compared, as his famous son was wont in after-life to compare him, to Parson Adams.

Of the poet's mother we know little; but it is to be gathered from such information as has come to us through Mr. Gillman from Coleridge himself, that, though reputed to have been a "woman of strong mind," she exercised less influence on the formation of her son's mind and char-

acter than has frequently been the case with the not remarkable mothers of remarkable men. "She was," says Mr. Gillman, "an uneducated woman, industriously attentive to her household duties, and devoted to the care of her husband and family. Possessing none even of the most common accomplishments of her day, she had neither love nor sympathy for the display of them in others. She disliked, as she would say, your 'harpsichord ladies,' and strongly tried to impress upon her sons their little value" (that is, of the accomplishments) "in their choice of wives." And the final judgment upon her is that she was "a very good woman, though, like Martha, over careful in many things; very ambitious for the advancement of her sons in life, but wanting, perhaps, that flow of heart which her husband possessed so largely." Of Coleridge's boyhood and school-days we are fortunate in being able to construct an unusually clear and complete idea. Both from his own autobiographic notes, from the traditionary testimony of his family, and from the no less valuable evidence of his most distinguished schoolfellow, we know that his youthful character and habits assign him very conspicuously to that perhaps somewhat small class of eminent men whose boyhood has given distinct indications of great things to come. Coleridge is as pronounced a specimen of this class as Scott is of its opposite. Scott has shown the world how commonplace a boyhood may precede a maturity of extraordinary powers. In Coleridge's case a boy of truly extraordinary qualities was father to one of the most remarkable of men. As the youngest of ten children (or of thirteen, reckoning the vicar's family of three by his first wife), Coleridge attributes the early bent of his disposition to causes the potency of which one may be permitted to think that he has somewhat exaggerated.

It is not quite easy to believe that it was only through "certain jealousies of old Molly," his brother Frank's "dotingly fond nurse," and the infusions of these jealousies into his brother's mind, that he was drawn "from life in motion to life in thought and sensation." The physical impulses of boyhood, where they exist in vigour, are not so easily discouraged, and it is probable that they were naturally weaker and the meditative tendency stronger than Coleridge in after-life imagined. But to continue: "I never played," he proceeds, "except by myself, and then only acting over what I had been reading or fancying, or half one, half the other" (a practice common enough, it may be remarked, among boys of by no means morbidly imaginative habit), "cutting down weeds and nettles with a stick, as one of the seven champions of Christendom. Alas! I had all the simplicity, all the docility of the little child, but none of the child's habits. I never thought as a child — never had the language of a child." So it fared with him during the period of his home instruction, the first eight years of his life; and his father having, as scholar and schoolmaster, no doubt noted the strange precocity of his youngest son, appears to have devoted especial attention to his training. "In my ninth year," he continues, "my most dear, most revered father died suddenly. O that I might so pass away, if, like him, I were an Israelite without guile. The image of my father, my revered, kind, learned, simple-hearted father, is a religion to me."

Before he had attained his tenth year a presentation to Christ's Hospital was obtained for him by that eminent judge Mr. Justice Buller, a former pupil of his father's; and he was entered at the school on the 18th July, 1782. His early bent towards poetry, though it displayed itself

in youthful verse of unusual merit, is a less uncommon and arresting characteristic than his precocious speculative activity. Many a raw boy "lisps in numbers, for the numbers come;" but few discourse Alexandrian metaphysics at the same age, for the very good reason that the metaphysics as a rule do not "come." And even among those youths whom curiosity, or more often vanity, induces to dabble in such studies, one would find few indeed over whom they have cast such an irresistible spell as to estrange them for a while from poetry altogether. That this was the experience of Coleridge we have his own words to show. His son and biographer, the Rev. Derwent Coleridge, has a little antedated the poet's stages of development in stating that when his father was sent to Christ's Hospital in his eleventh year he was "already a poet, and yet more characteristically a metaphysician." A poet, yes, and a precocious scholar perhaps to boot, but a metaphysician, no; for "the delightful sketch of him by his friend and schoolfellow Charles Lamb" was pretty evidently taken not at "this period" of his life but some years later. Coleridge's own account of the matter in the *Biographia Literaria*[1] is clear. "At a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year," he says, "I had bewildered myself in metaphysics and in theological controversy. Nothing else pleased me. History and particular facts lost all interest in my mind. Poetry (though for a schoolboy of that age I was above par in English versification, and had already produced two or three com-

[1] He tells us in the *Biographia Literaria* that he had translated the eight hymns of Synesius from the Greek into English anacreontics "before his fifteenth year." It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that he had more scholarship in 1782 than most boys of ten years.

positions which I may venture to say were somewhat above mediocrity, and which had gained me more credit than the sound good sense of my old master was at all pleased with), —poetry, itself, yea, novels and romance, became insipid to me." He goes on to describe how highly delighted he was if, during his friendless wanderings on leave-days, "any passenger, especially if he were dressed in black," would enter with him into a conversation, which he soon found the means of directing to his favourite subject of "providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate; fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute." Undoubtedly, it is to this period that one should refer Lamb's well-known description of "Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Logician, Metaphysician, Bard."

> "How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold in thy deep and sweet intonations the mysteries of Iamblichus or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in the Greek, or Pindar, while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed with the accents of the *inspired charity-boy*."

It is interesting to note such a point as that of the "deep and sweet intonations" of the youthful voice—its most notable and impressive characteristic in after-life. Another schoolfellow describes the young philosopher as "tall and striking in person, with long black hair," and as commanding "much deference" among his schoolfellows. Such was Coleridge between his fifteenth and seventeenth year, and such continued to be the state of his mind and the direction of his studies until he was won back again from what he calls "a preposterous pursuit, injurious to his natural powers and to the progress of his education," by—it is difficult, even after the most pains-

taking study of its explanations, to record the phenomenon without astonishment — a perusal of the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles. Deferring, however, for the present any research into the occult operation of this converting agency, it will be enough to note Coleridge's own assurance of its perfect efficacy. He was completely cured for the time of his metaphysical malady, and "well were it for me perhaps," he exclaims, "had I never relapsed into the same mental disease; if I had continued to pluck the flowers and reap the harvest from the cultivated surface instead of delving in the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths." And he goes on to add, in a passage full of the peculiar melancholy beauty of his prose, and full too of instruction for the biographer, "But if, in after-time, I have sought a refuge from bodily pain and mismanaged sensibility in abstruse researches, which exercised the strength and subtlety of the understanding without awakening the feelings of the heart, there was a long and blessed interval, during which my natural faculties were allowed to expand and my original tendencies to develop themselves—my fancy, and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds." This "long and blessed interval" endured, as we shall see, for some eleven or twelve years.

His own account of his seduction from the paths of poetry by the wiles of philosophy is that physiology acted as the go-between. His brother Luke had come up to London to walk the hospitals, and young Samuel's insatiable intellectual curiosity immediately inspired him with a desire to share his brother's pursuit. "Every Saturday I could make or obtain leave, to the London Hospital trudged I. O! the bliss if I was permitted to hold the plasters or attend the dressings. . . . I became wild to be appren-

ticed to a surgeon; English, Latin, yea, Greek books of medicine read I incessantly. Blanchard's *Latin Medical Dictionary* I had nearly by heart. Briefly, it was a wild dream, which, gradually blending with, gradually gave way to, a rage for metaphysics occasioned by the essays on Liberty and Necessity in Cato's *Letters*, and more by theology."[1] At the appointed hour, however, Bowles the emancipator came, as has been said, to his relief, and having opportunely fallen in love with the eldest daughter of a widow lady of whose son he had been the patron and protector at school, we may easily imagine that his liberation from the spell of metaphysics was complete. "From this time," he says, "to my nineteenth year, when I quitted school for Jesus, Cambridge, was the era of poetry and love."

Of Coleridge's university days we know less; but the account of his schoolfellow, Charles Le Grice, accords, so far as it goes, with what would have been anticipated from the poet's school life. Although "very studious," and not unambitious of academical honours—within a few months of his entering at Jesus he won the Browne Gold Medal for a Greek Ode on the Slave-trade[2]—his reading, his friend admits, was "desultory and capricious. He took

[1] Gillman, pp. 22, 23.

[2] Of this Coleridge afterwards remarked with justice that its "ideas were better than the language or metre in which they were conveyed." Porson, with little magnanimity, as De Quincey complains, was severe upon its Greek, but its main conception—an appeal to Death to come, a welcome deliverer to the slaves, and to bear them to shores where "they may tell their beloved ones what horrors they, being men, had endured from men"—is moving and effective. De Quincey, however, was undoubtedly right in his opinion that Coleridge's Greek scholarship was not of the exact order. No exact scholar could, for instance, have died in the faith (as Coleridge did) that ἔστησε (S. T. C.) means "he stood," and not "he placed."

little exercise merely for the sake of exercise, but he was ready at any time to unbend his mind in conversation, and for the sake of this his room was a constant rendezvous of conversation-loving friends. I will not call them loungers, for they did not call to kill time but to enjoy it." From the same record we gather that Coleridge's interest in current politics was already keen, and that he was an eager reader, not only of Burke's famous contributions thereto, but even a devourer of all the pamphlets which swarmed during that agitated period from the press. The desultory student, however, did not altogether intermit his academical studies. In 1793 he competed for another Greek verse prize, this time unsuccessfully. He afterwards described his ode *On Astronomy* as "the finest Greek poem I ever wrote;"[1] but, whatever may have been its merits from the point of view of scholarship, the English translation of it, made eight years after by Southey (in which form alone it now exists), seems hardly to establish its title to the peculiar merit claimed by its author for his earlier effort. The long vacation of this year, spent by him in Devonshire, is also interesting as having given birth to one of the most characteristic of the *Juvenile Poems*, the *Songs of the Pixies*, and the closing months of 1793 were marked by the most singular episode in the poet's earlier career.

It is now perhaps impossible to ascertain whether the

[1] Adding, "that which gained the prize was contemptible"—an expression of opinion hardly in accordance with Le Grice's statement ("Recollections" in *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1836) that "no one was more convinced of the propriety of the decision than Coleridge himself." Mr. Le Grice, however, bears valuable testimony to Coleridge's disappointment, though I think he exaggerates its influence in determining his career.

cause of this strange adventure of Coleridge's was "chagrin at his disappointment in a love affair" or "a fit of dejection and despondency caused by some debts not amounting to a hundred pounds;" but, actuated by some impulse or other of restless disquietude, Coleridge suddenly quitted Cambridge and came up, very slenderly provided with money, to London, where, after a few days' sojourn, he was compelled by pressure of actual need to enlist, under the name of Silas Titus Comberback[1] (S. T. C.), as a private in the 15th Light Dragoons. It may seem strange to say so, but it strikes one as quite conceivable that the world might have been a gainer if fate had kept Coleridge a little longer in the ranks than the four months of his actual service. As it was, however, his military experiences, unlike those of Gibbon, were of no subsequent advantage to him. He was, as he tells us, an execrable rider, a negligent groom of his horse, and, generally, a slack and slovenly trooper; but before drill and discipline had had time to make a smart soldier of him, he chanced to attract the attention of his captain by having written a Latin quotation on the white wall of the stables at Reading. This officer, who it seems was either able to translate the ejaculation, "Eheu! quam infortunii miserrimum est fuisse felicem,"[2] or, at any rate, to recognise the language it was

[1] It is characteristic of the punctilious inaccuracy of Mr. Cottle (*Recollections*, ii. 54) that he should insist that the assumed name was "Cumberbatch, not Comberback," though Coleridge has himself fixed the real name by the jest, "My habits were so little equestrian that my horse, I doubt not, was of that opinion." This circumstance, though trifling, does not predispose us to accept unquestioningly Mr. Cottle's highly particularised account of Coleridge's experience with his regiment.

[2] "In omni adversitate fortunæ, infelicissimum genus est infortunii fuisse felicem."—*Boethius.*

written in, interested himself forthwith on behalf of his scholarly recruit.[1] Coleridge's discharge was obtained at Hounslow on April 10, 1794, and he returned to Cambridge.

The year was destined to be eventful for him in more ways than one. In June he went to Oxford to pay a visit to an old schoolfellow, where an accidental introduction to Robert Southey, then an undergraduate of Balliol, laid the foundation of a friendship destined largely to influence their future lives. In the course of the following August he came to Bristol, where he was met by Southey, and by him introduced to Robert Lovell, through whom and Southey he made the acquaintance of two persons of considerable, if not exactly equal, importance to any young author — his first publisher and his future wife. Robert Lovell already knew Mr. Joseph Cottle, brother of Amos Cottle (Byron's "O! Amos Cottle! Phœbus! what a name"), and himself a poet of some pretensions; and he had married Mary Fricker, one of whose sisters, Edith, was already engaged to Southey; while another, Sara, was afterwards to become Mrs. Coleridge.

As the marriage turned out on the whole an unhappy one, the present may be a convenient moment for considering how far its future character was determined by previously existing and unalterable conditions, and how far it may be regarded as the result of subsequent events. De Quincey, whose acute and in many respects most valuable monograph on the poet touches its point of least trustworthiness in matters of this kind, declares roundly, and on the alleged authority of Coleridge himself, that

[1] Miss Mitford, in her *Recollections of a Literary Life*, interestingly records the active share taken by her father in procuring the learned trooper's discharge.

the very primary and essential prerequisite of happiness was wanting to the union. Coleridge, he says, assured him that his marriage was "not his own deliberate act, but was in a manner forced upon his sense of honour by the scrupulous Southey, who insisted that he had gone too far in his attentions to Miss Fricker for any honourable retreat." On the other hand, he adds, "a neutral spectator of the parties protested to me that if ever in his life he had seen a man under deep fascination, and what he would have called desperately in love, Coleridge, in relation to Miss F., was that man." One need not, I think, feel much hesitation in preferring this "neutral spectator's" statement to that of the discontented husband, made several years after the mutual estrangement of the couple, and with no great propriety perhaps, to a new acquaintance. There is abundant evidence in his own poems alone that at the time of, and for at least two or three years subsequently to, his marriage Coleridge's feeling towards his wife was one of profound and indeed of ardent attachment. It is of course quite possible that the passion of so variable, impulsive, and irresolute a temperament as his may have had its hot and cold fits, and that during one of the latter phases Southey may have imagined that his friend needed some such remonstrance as that referred to. But this is not nearly enough to support the assertion that Coleridge's marriage was "in a manner forced upon his sense of honour," and was not his own deliberate act. It was as deliberate as any of his other acts during the years 1794 and 1795,—that is to say, it was as wholly inspired by the enthusiasm of the moment, and as utterly ungoverned by anything in the nature of calculation on the possibilities of the future. He fell in love with Sara Fricker as he fell in love with the French Revolution and with the scheme of

"Pantisocracy," and it is indeed extremely probable that the emotions of the lover and the socialist may have subtly acted and reacted upon each other. The Pantisocratic scheme was essentially based at its outset upon a union of kindred souls, for it was clearly necessary of course that each male member of the little community to be founded on the banks of the Susquehanna should take with him a wife. Southey and Lovell had theirs in the persons of two sisters; they were his friends and fellow-workers in the scheme; and they had a sympathetic sister-in-law disengaged. Fate therefore seemed to designate her for Coleridge, and with the personal attraction which she no doubt exerted over him there may well have mingled a dash of that mysterious passion for symmetry which prompts a man to "complete the set." After all, too, it must be remembered that, though Mrs. Coleridge did not permanently retain her hold upon her husband's affections, she got considerably the better of those who shared them with her. Coleridge found out the objections to Pantisocracy in a very short space of time, and a decided coolness had sprung up between him and Madame la Revolution before another two years had passed.

The whole history indeed of this latter *liaison* is most remarkable, and no one, it seems to me, can hope to form an adequate conception of Coleridge's essential instability of character without bestowing somewhat closer attention upon this passage in his intellectual development than it usually receives. It is not uncommon to see the cases of Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge lumped together indiscriminately, as interequivalent illustrations of the way in which the young and generous minds of that era were first fascinated and then repelled by the French Revolution. As a matter of fact, however, the last of the three

cases differed in certain very important respects from the two former. Coleridge not only took the "frenzy-fever" in a more violent form than either Wordsworth or Southey, and uttered wilder things in his delirium than they, but the paroxysm was much shorter, the *immediate* reaction more violent in its effects, and brought about by slighter causes in his case than in theirs. This will appear more clearly when we come to contrast the poems of 1794 and 1795 with those of 1797. For the present it must suffice to say that while the history of Coleridge's relations to the French Revolution is intellectually more interesting than that of Wordsworth's and Southey's, it plainly indicates, even in that early period of the three lives, a mind far more at the mercy of essentially transitory sentiment than belonged to either of the others, and far less disposed than theirs to review the aspirations of the moment by the steady light of the practical judgment.

This, however, is anticipating matters. We are still in the summer of 1794, and we left Coleridge at Bristol with Southey, Lovell, and the Miss Frickers. To this year belongs that remarkable experiment in playwriting at high pressure, *The Fall of Robespierre*. It originated, we learn from Southey, in "a sportive conversation at poor Lovell's," when each of the three friends agreed to produce one act of a tragedy, on the subject indicated in the above title, by the following evening. Coleridge was to write the first, Southey the second, and Lovell the third. Southey and Lovell appeared the next day with their acts complete, Coleridge, characteristically, with only a part of his. Lovell's, however, was found not to be in keeping with the other two, so Southey supplied the third as well as the second, by which time Coleridge had completed the first. The tragedy was afterwards published entire, and is usual-

ly included in complete editions of Coleridge's poetical works. It is an extremely immature production, abounding in such coquettings (if nothing more serious) with bathos as

> "Now,
> Aloof thou standest from the tottering pillar,
> And like a frighted child behind its mother,
> Hidest thy pale face in the skirts of Mercy;"

and

> "Liberty, condensed awhile, is bursting
> To scatter the arch-chemist in the explosion."

Coleridge also contributed to Southey's *Joan of Arc* certain lines of which, many years afterwards, he wrote in this humorously exaggerated but by no means wholly unjust tone of censure:—"I was really astonished (1) at the schoolboy, wretched, allegoric machinery; (2) at the transmogrification of the fanatic Virago into a modern novel-pawing proselyte of the Age of Reason—a Tom Paine in petticoats; (3) at the utter want of all rhythm in the verse, the monotony and dead plumb-down of the pauses, and at the absence of all bone, muscle, and sinew in the single lines."

In September Coleridge returned to Cambridge, to keep what turned out to be his last term at Jesus. We may fairly suppose that he had already made up his mind to bid adieu to the Alma Mater whose bosom he was about to quit for that of a more venerable and, as he then believed, a gentler mother on the banks of the Susquehanna; but it is not impossible that in any case his departure might have been expedited by the remonstrances of college authority. Dr. Pearce, Master of Jesus, and afterwards Dean of Ely, did all he could, records a friend of a somewhat later date, "to keep him within bounds; but his repeated efforts to

reclaim him were to no purpose, and upon one occasion, after a long discussion on the visionary and ruinous tendency of his later schemes, Coleridge cut short the argument by bluntly assuring him, his friend and master, that he mistook the matter altogether. He was neither Jacobin,[1] he said, nor Democrat, but a Pantisocrat." And, leaving the good doctor to digest this new and strange epithet, Coleridge bade farewell to his college and his university, and went forth into that world with which he was to wage so painful and variable a struggle.

[1] Carrlyon's *Early Years and late Reflections*, vol. i. p. 27.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRISTOL LECTURES.—MARRIAGE.—LIFE AT CLEVEDON.—THE "WATCHMAN."—RETIREMENT TO STOWEY.—INTRODUCTION TO WORDSWORTH.

[1794–1797.]

THE reflections of the worthy Master of Jesus upon the strange reply of the wayward young undergraduate would have been involved in even greater perplexity if he could have looked forward a few months into the future. For after a winter spent in London, and enlivened by those *noctes cœnæque Deûm* at the "Cat and Salutation," which Lamb has so charmingly recorded, Coleridge returned with Southey to Bristol at the beginning of 1795, and there proceeded to deliver a series of lectures which, whatever their other merits, would certainly not have assisted Dr. Pearce to grasp the distinction between a Pantisocrat and a Jacobin. As a scholar and a man of literary taste he might possibly have admired the rhetorical force of the following outburst, but, considering that the "HE" here gibbeted in capitals was no less a personage than the "heaven-born minister" himself, a plain man might well have wondered what additional force the vocabulary of Jacobinism could have infused into the language of Pantisocracy. After summing up the crimes of the Reign of Terror the lecturer asks: "Who, my brethren, was the cause of this guilt if not HE who supplied the occasion and

the motive? Heaven hath bestowed on *that man* a portion of its ubiquity, and given him an actual presence in the sacraments of hell, wherever administered, in all the bread of bitterness, in all the cups of blood." And in general, indeed, the *Conciones ad Populum*, as Coleridge named these lectures on their subsequent publication, were rather calculated to bewilder any of the youthful lecturer's well-wishers who might be anxious for some means of discriminating his attitude from that of the Hardys, the Horne Tookes, and the Thelwalls of the day. A little warmth of language might no doubt be allowed to a young friend of liberty in discussing legislation which, in the retrospect, has staggered even so staunch a Tory as Sir Archibald Alison; but Coleridge's denunciation of the Pitt and Grenville Acts, in a lecture entitled *The Plot Discovered*, is occasionally startling, even for that day of fierce passions, in the fierceness of its language. It is interesting, however, to note the ever-active play of thought and reasoning amid the very storm and stress of political passion. Coleridge is never for long together a mere declaimer on popular rights and ministerial tyranny, and even this indignant address contains a passage of extremely just and thoughtful analysis of the constituent elements of despotism. Throughout the spring and summer of 1795 Coleridge continued his lectures at Bristol, his head still simmering—though less violently, it may be suspected, every month—with Pantisocracy, and certainly with all his kindred political and religious enthusiasms unabated. A study of these crude but vigorous addresses reveals to us, as does the earlier of the early poems, a mind struggling with its half-formed and ever-changing conceptions of the world, and, as is usual at such peculiar phases of an intellectual development, affirming its temporary beliefs with a fervour

and vehemence directly proportioned to the recency of their birth. Commenting on the *Conciones ad Populum* many years afterwards, and invoking them as witnesses to his political consistency as an author, Coleridge remarked that with the exception of "two or three pages involving the doctrine of philosophical necessity and Unitarianism," he saw little or nothing in these outbursts of his youthful zeal to retract, and, with the exception of "some flame-coloured epithets" applied to persons, as to Mr. Pitt and others, "or rather to personifications"—for such, he says, they really were to him—as little to regret.

We now, however, arrive at an event important in the life of every man, and which influenced that of Coleridge to an extent not the less certainly extraordinary because difficult, if not impossible, to define with exactitude. On the 4th of October, 1795, Coleridge was married at St. Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol, to Sarah (or as he preferred to spell it Sara) Fricker, and withdrew for a time from the eager intellectual life of a political lecturer to the contemplative quiet appropriate to the honeymoon of a poet, spent in a sequestered cottage amid beautiful scenery, and within sound of the sea. No wonder that among such surroundings, and with such belongings, the honeymoon should have extended from one month to three, and indeed that Coleridge should have waited till his youthful yearnings for a life of action, and perhaps (though that would have lent itself less gracefully to his poem of farewell to his Clevedon cottage) his increasing sense of the necessity of supplementing the ambrosia of love with the bread and cheese of mortals, compelled him to re-enter the world. No wonder he should have delayed to do so, for it is as easy to perceive in his poems that these were days of unclouded happiness as it is melancholy to reflect by how

few others like them his life was destined to be brightened. The *Æolian Harp* has no more than the moderate merits, with its full share of the characteristic faults, of his earlier productions; but one cannot help "reading into it" the poet's after-life of disappointment and disillusion—estrangement from the "beloved woman" in whose affection he was then reposing; decay and disappearance of those "flitting phantasies" with which he was then so joyously trifling, and the bitterly ironical scholia which fate was preparing for such lines as

"And tranquil muse upon tranquillity."

One cannot in fact refrain from mentally comparing the *Æolian Harp* of 1795 with the *Dejection* of 1803, and no one who has thoroughly felt the spirit of both poems can make that comparison without emotion. The former piece is not, as has been said, in a literary sense remarkable. With the exception of the one point of metrical style, to be touched on presently, it has almost no note of poetic distinction save such as belongs of right to any simple record of a mood which itself forms the highest poetry of the average man's life; and one well knows whence came the criticism of that MS. note inscribed by S. T. C. in a copy of the second edition of his early poems, "This I think the most perfect poem I ever wrote. Bad may be the best, perhaps." One feels that the annotator might just as well have written, "How perfect was the happiness which this poem recalls!" for this is really all that Coleridge's eulogium, with its touching bias from the hand of memory, amounts to.

It has become time, however, to speak more generally of Coleridge's early poems. The peaceful winter months of 1795–96 were in all likelihood spent in arranging and

revising the products of those poetic impulses which had more or less actively stirred within him from his seventeenth year upwards; and in April, 1797, there appeared at Bristol a volume of some fifty pieces entitled *Poems on Various Subjects, by S. T. Coleridge, late of Jesus College, Cambridge.* It was published by his friend Cottle, who, in a mixture of the generous with the speculative instinct, had given him thirty guineas for the copyright. Its contents are of a miscellaneous kind, consisting partly of rhymed irregular odes, partly of a collection of *Sonnets on Eminent Characters*, and partly (and principally) of a blank-verse poem of several hundred lines, then, and indeed for years afterwards, regarded by many of the poet's admirers as his masterpiece—the *Religious Musings.*[1]

To the second edition of these poems, which was published in the following year, Coleridge, at all times a candid critic (to the limited extent to which it is possible even for the finest judges to be so) of his own works, prefixed a preface, wherein he remarks that his poems have been "rightly charged with a profusion of double epithets and a general turgidness," and adds that he has "pruned the double epithets with no sparing hand," and used his best efforts to tame the swell and glitter both of thought and diction. "The latter fault, however, had," he continues, "so insinuated itself into my *Religious Musings* with such intricacy of union that sometimes I have omitted to disentangle the weed from fear of snapping the flower." This is plain-spoken criticism, but I do not think that any reader who is competent to pronounce judgment on the point will be inclined to deprecate its severity. Nay, in order to get done with fault-finding as soon as possible, it

[1] The volume contained also three sonnets by Charles Lamb, one of which was destined to have a somewhat curious history.

must perhaps be added that the admitted turgidness of the poems is often something more than a mere defect of style, and that the verse is turgid because the feeling which it expresses is exaggerated. The "youthful bard unknown to fame" who, in the *Songs of the Pixies*, is made to "heave the gentle misery of a sigh," is only doing a natural thing described in ludicrously and unnaturally stilted terms; but the young admirer of the *Robbers*, who informs Schiller that if he were to meet him in the evening wandering in his loftier mood "beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood," he would "gaze upon him a while in mute awe" and then "weep aloud in a wild ecstasy," endangers the reader's gravity not so much by extravagance of diction as by over-effusiveness of sentiment. The former of these two offences differs from the latter by the difference between "fustian" and "gush." And there is, in fact, more frequent exception to be taken to the character of the thought in these poems than to that of the style. The remarkable gift of eloquence, which seems to have belonged to Coleridge from boyhood, tended naturally to aggravate that very common fault of young poets whose faculty of expression has outstripped the growth of their intellectual and emotional experiences—the fault of wordiness. Page after page of the poems of 1796 is filled with what one cannot, on the most favourable terms, rank higher than rhetorical commonplace; stanza after stanza falls pleasantly upon the ear without suggesting any image sufficiently striking to arrest the eye of the imagination, or awakening any thought sufficiently novel to lay hold upon the mind. The *Æolian Harp* has been already referred to as a pleasing poem, and reading it, as we must, in constant recollection of the circumstances in which it was written, it unquestionably is so. But in none of the

descriptions either of external objects or of internal feeling which are to be found in this and its companion-piece, the *Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement*, is there anything which can fairly be said to elevate them above the level of graceful verse. It is only in the region of the fantastic and supernatural that Coleridge's imagination, as he was destined to show by a far more splendid example two years afterwards, seems to acquire true poetic distinction. It is in the *Songs of the Pixies* that the young man "heaves the gentle misery of a sigh," and the sympathetic interest of the reader of to-day is chilled by the too frequent intrusion of certain abstract ladies, each preceded by her capital letter and attended by her "adjective-in-waiting;" but, after all deductions for the conventionalisms of "white-robed Purity," "meek-eyed Pity," "graceful Ease," etc., one cannot but feel that the *Songs of the Pixies* was the offspring not of a mere abundant and picturesque vocabulary but of a true poetic fancy. It is worth far more as an earnest of future achievement than the very unequal *Monody on the Death of Chatterton* (for which indeed we ought to make special allowance, as having been commenced in the author's eighteenth year), and certainly than anything which could be quoted from the *Effusions*, as Coleridge, unwilling to challenge comparison with the divine Bowles, had chosen to describe his sonnets. It must be honestly said, indeed, that these are, a very few excepted, among the least satisfactory productions of any period of his poetic career. The Coleridgian sonnet is not only imperfect in form and in marked contrast in the frequent bathos of its close to the steady swell and climax of Wordsworth, but, in by far the majority of instances in this volume, it is wanting in internal weight. The "single pebble" of thought which a sonnet should enclose is not

only not neatly wrapped up in its envelope of words, but it is very often not heavy enough to carry itself and its covering to the mark. When it is so, its weight, as in the sonnet to Pitt, is too frequently only another word for an ephemeral violence of political feeling which, whether displayed on one side or the other, cannot be expected to reproduce its effect in the minds of comparatively passionless posterity. Extravagances, too, abound, as when in *Kosciusko* Freedom is made to look as if, in a fit of "wilfulness and sick despair," she had drained a mystic urn containing all the tears that had ever found "fit channel on a Patriot's furrowed cheek." The main difficulty of the metre, too—that of avoiding forced rhymes—is rarely surmounted. Even in the three fine lines in the *Burke*—

> "Thee stormy Pity, and the cherished lure
> Of Pomp and proud precipitance of soul,
> 'Wildered with meteor fires"—

we cannot help feeling that "lure" is extremely harsh, while the weakness of the two concluding lines of the sonnet supplies a typical example of the disappointment which these "effusions" so often prepare for their readers.

Enough, however, has been said of the faults of these early poems; it remains to consider their merits, foremost among which, as might be expected, is the wealth and splendour of their diction in these passages, in which such display is all that is needed for the literary ends of the moment. Over all that wide region of literature, in which force and fervour of utterance, depth and sincerity of feeling avail, without the nameless magic of poetry in the higher sense of the word, to achieve the objects of the writer and to satisfy the mind of the reader, Coleridge ranges with a free and sure footstep. It is no disparage-

ment to his *Religious Musings* to say that it is to this class of literature that it belongs. Having said this, however, it must be added that poetry of the second order has seldom risen to higher heights of power. The faults already admitted disfigure it here and there. We have "moon-blasted Madness when he yells at midnight;" we read of "eye-starting wretches and rapture-trembling seraphim," and the really striking image of Ruin, the "old hag, unconquerable, huge, Creation's eyeless drudge," is marred by making her "nurse" an "impatient earthquake." But there is that in Coleridge's aspirations and apostrophes to the Deity which impresses one even more profoundly than the mere magnificence, remarkable as it is, of their rhetorical clothing. They are touched with so penetrating a sincerity; they are so obviously the outpourings of an awe-struck heart. Indeed, there is nothing more remarkable at this stage of Coleridge's poetic development than the instant elevation which his verse assumes whenever he passes to Divine things. At once it seems to take on a Miltonic majesty of diction and a Miltonic stateliness of rhythm. The tender but low-lying domestic sentiment of the *Æolian Harp* is in a moment informed by it with the dignity which marks that poem's close. Apart too from its literary merits, the biographical interest of *Religious Musings* is very considerable. "Written," as its title declares, but in reality as its length would suggest, and as Mr. Cottle in fact tells us, only *completed*, "on the Christmas eve of 1794," it gives expression to the tumultuous emotions by which Coleridge's mind was agitated at this its period of highest political excitement. His revolutionary enthusiasm was now at its hottest, his belief in the infant French Republic at its fullest, his wrath against the "coalesced kings" at its fiercest, his contempt for their

religious pretence at its bitterest. "Thee to defend," he cries,

> "Thee to defend, dear Saviour of mankind!
> Thee, Lamb of God! Thee, blameless Prince of Peace!
> From all sides rush the thirsty brood of war—
> Austria, and that foul Woman of the North,
> The lustful murderess of her wedded lord,
> And he, connatural mind! whom (in their songs,
> So bards of elder time had haply feigned)
> Some Fury fondled in her hate to man,
> Bidding her serpent hair in tortuous fold
> Lick his young face, and at his mouth imbreathe
> Horrible Sympathy!"

This is vigorous poetic invective; and the effect of such outbursts is heightened by the rapid subsidence of the passion that inspires them and the quick advent of a calmer mood. We have hardly turned the page ere denunciations of Catherine and Frederick William give place to prayerful invocations of the Supreme Being, which are in their turn the prelude of a long and beautiful contemplative passage: "In the primæval age, a dateless while," etc., on the pastoral origin of human society. It is as though some sweet and solemn strain of organ music had succeeded to the blast of war-bugles and the roll of drums. In the *Ode to the Departing Year*, written in the last days of 1796, with its "prophecy of curses though I pray fervently for blessings" upon the poet's native country, the mood is more uniform in its gloom; and it lacks something, therefore, of those peculiar qualities which make the *Religious Musings* one perhaps of the most pleasing of all Coleridge's earlier productions. But it shares with the poems shortly to be noticed what may be called the autobiographic charm. The fresh, natural emotion of a young and brilliant mind is eternally interesting, and Cole-

ridge's youthful Muse, with a frankness of self-disclosure which is not the less winning because at times it provokes a smile, confides to us even the history of her most temporary moods. It is, for instance, at once amusing and captivating to read in the latest edition of the poems, as a foot-note to the lines—

> "Not yet enslaved, not wholly vile,
> O Albion! O my mother isle!"

the words—

> "O doomed to fall, enslaved and vile—1796."

Yes; in 1796 and till the end of 1797 the poet's native country *was* in his opinion all these dreadful things; but directly the mood changes, the verse alters, and to the advantage, one cannot but think, of the beautiful and often-quoted close of the passage—

> "And Ocean 'mid his uproar wild
> Speaks safety to his island child.
> Hence for many a fearless age
> Has social Quiet loved thy shore,
> Nor ever proud invader's rage,
> Or sacked thy towers or stained thy fields with gore."

And whether we view him in his earlier or his later mood there is a certain strange dignity of utterance, a singular confidence in his own poetic mission, which forbids us to smile at this prophet of four-and-twenty who could thus conclude his menacing vaticinations:

> "Away, my soul, away!
> I, unpartaking of the evil thing,
> With daily prayer and daily toil
> Soliciting for food my scanty soil,
> Have wailed my country with a loud lament.
> Now I recentre my immortal mind
> In the deep Sabbath of meek self-content,

> Cleansed from the vaporous passions which bedim
> God's image, sister of the Seraphim."

If ever the consciousness of great powers and the assurance of a great future inspired a youth with perfect and on the whole well-warranted fearlessness of ridicule it has surely done so here.

Poetry alone, however, formed no sufficient outlet for Coleridge's still fresh political enthusiasm—an enthusiasm which now became too importunate to let him rest in his quiet Clevedon cottage. Was it right, he cries in his lines of leave-taking to his home, that he should dream away the entrusted hours "while his unnumbered brethren toiled and bled?" The propaganda of Liberty was to be pushed forward; the principles of Unitarianism, to which Coleridge had become a convert at Cambridge, were to be preached. Is it too prosaic to add that what poor Henri Murger calls the "chasse aux pieces de cent sous" was in all probability demanding peremptorily to be resumed?

Anyhow it so fell out that in the spring of the year 1796 Coleridge took his first singular plunge into the unquiet waters of journalism, instigated thereto by "sundry philanthropists and anti-polemists," whose names he does not record, but among whom we may conjecturally place Mr. Thomas Poole of Stowey, with whom he had formed what was destined to be one of the longest and closest friendships of his life. Which of the two parties—the advisers or the advised—was responsible for the general plan of this periodical and for the arrangements for its publication is unknown; but one of these last-mentioned details is enough to indicate that there could have been no "business head" among them. Considering that the motto of the *Watchman* declared the object of its issue to be that "all might know the truth, and that the truth might make

them free," it is to be presumed that the promoters of the scheme were not unwilling to secure as many subscribers as possible for their sheet of "thirty-two pages, large octavo, closely printed, price only fourpence." In order, however, to exempt it from the stamp-tax, and with the much less practical object of making it "contribute as little as possible to the supposed guilt of a war against freedom," it was to be published on every eighth day, so that the week-day of its appearance would of course vary with each successive week—an arrangement as ingeniously calculated to irritate and alienate its public as any perhaps that the wit of man could have devised. So, however, it was to be, and accordingly, with "a flaming prospectus, 'Knowledge is Power,' to cry the state of the political atmosphere," Coleridge set off on a tour to the north, from Bristol to Sheffield, for the purpose of procuring customers, preaching Unitarian sermons by the way in most of the great towns, "as an hireless volunteer in a blue coat and white waistcoat, that not a rag of the woman of Babylon might be seen on me." How he sped upon his mission is related by him with infinite humour in the *Biographia Literaria*. He opened the campaign at Birmingham upon a Calvinist tallow-chandler, who, after listening to half an hour's harangue, extending from "the captivity of the nations" to "the near approach of the millennium," and winding up with a quotation describing the latter "glorious state" out of the *Religious Musings*, inquired what might be the cost of the new publication. Deeply sensible of "the anti-climax, the abysmal bathos" of the answer, Coleridge replied, "Only fourpence, each number to be published every eighth day," upon which the tallow-chandler observed doubtfully that that came to "a deal of money at the end of the year." What determined him, however, to withhold

his patronage was not the price of the article but its quantity, and not the deficiency of that quantity but its excess. Thirty-two pages, he pointed out, was more than he ever read all the year round, and though "as great a one as any man in Brummagem for liberty and truth, and them sort of things, he begged to be excused." Had it been possible to arrange for supplying him with sixteen pages of the paper for twopence, a bargain might no doubt have been struck; but he evidently had a business-like repugnance to anything in the nature of "over-trading." Equally unsuccessful was a second application made at Manchester to a "stately and opulent wholesale dealer in cottons," who thrust the prospectus into his pocket and turned his back upon the projector, muttering that he was "overrun with these articles." This, however, was Coleridge's last attempt at canvassing. His friends at Birmingham persuaded him to leave that work to others, their advice being no doubt prompted, in part at least, by the ludicrous experience of his qualifications as a canvasser which the following incident furnished them. The same tradesman who had introduced him to the patriotic tallow-chandler entertained him at dinner, and, after the meal, invited his guest to smoke a pipe with him and "two or three other *illuminati* of the same rank." The invitation was at first declined, on the plea of an engagement to spend the evening with a minister and his friends, and also because, writes Coleridge, "I had never smoked except once or twice in my lifetime, and then it was herb-tobacco mixed with Oronooko." His host, however, assured him that the tobacco was equally mild, and "seeing, too, that it was of a yellow colour," he took half a pipe of it, "filling the lower half of the bowl," for some unexplained reason, "with salt." He was soon, however, compelled to resign it "in consequence of a

giddiness, and distressful feeling" in his eyes, which, as he had drunk but a single glass of ale, he knew must have been the effect of the tobacco. Deeming himself recovered after a short interval, he sallied forth to fulfil the evening's engagement; but the symptoms returned with the walk and the fresh air, and he had scarcely entered the minister's drawing-room and opened a packet of letters awaiting him there than he "sank back on the sofa in a sort of swoon rather than sleep." Fortunately he had had time to inform his new host of the confused state of his feelings and of its occasion; for "here and thus I lay," he continues, "my face like a wall that is whitewashing, deathly pale, and with the cold drops of perspiration running down it from my forehead; while one after another there dropped in the different gentlemen who had been invited to meet and spend the evening with me, to the number of from fifteen to twenty. As the poison of tobacco acts but for a short time, I at length awoke from insensibility and looked round on the party, my eyes dazzled by the candles, which had been lighted in the interim. By way of relieving my embarrassment one of the gentlemen began the conversation with, 'Have you seen a paper today, Mr. Coleridge?' 'Sir,' I replied, rubbing my eyes, 'I am far from convinced that a Christian is permitted to read either newspapers or any other works of merely political and temporary interest.'" The incongruity of this remark, with the purpose for which the speaker was known to have visited Birmingham, and to assist him in which the company had assembled, produced, as was natural, "an involuntary and general burst of laughter," and the party spent, we are told, a most delightful evening. Both then and afterwards, however, they all joined in dissuading the young projector from proceeding with his scheme, as-

suring him "in the most friendly and yet most flattering expressions" that the employment was neither fit for him nor he for the employment. They insisted that at any rate "he should make no more applications in person, but carry on the canvass by proxy," a stipulation which we may well believe to have been prompted as much by policy as by good nature. The same hospitable reception, the same dissuasion, and, that failing, the same kind exertions on his behalf, he met with at Manchester, Derby, Nottingham, and every other place he visited; and the result of his tour was that he returned with nearly a thousand names on the subscription list of the *Watchman*, together with "something more than a half conviction that prudence dictated the abandonment of the scheme." Nothing but this, however, was needed to induce him to persevere with it. To know that a given course of conduct was the dictate of prudence was a sort of presumptive proof to him at this period of life that the contrary was the dictate of duty. In due time, or rather out of due time—for the publication of the first number was delayed beyond the day announced for it—the *Watchman* appeared. Its career was brief—briefer, indeed, than it need have been. A naturally short life was suicidally shortened. In the second number, records Coleridge, with delightful *naïveté*, "an essay against fast-days, with a most censurable application[1] of a text from Isaiah for its motto, lost me near five hundred subscribers at one blow." In the two following numbers he made enemies of all his Jacobin and democratic patrons by playing Balaam to the legislation of the Government, and pronouncing something almost like a blessing on the "gagging bills"—measures he declared

[1] "Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp."—Is. xvi. 11.

which, "whatever the motive of their introduction, would produce an effect to be desired by all true friends of freedom, as far as they should contribute to deter men from openly declaiming on subjects the principles of which they had never bottomed, and from pleading to the poor and ignorant instead of pleading for them." At the same time the editor of the *Watchman* avowed his conviction that national education and a concurring spread of the Gospel were the indispensable conditions of any true political amelioration. We can hardly wonder on the whole that by the time the seventh number was published its predecessors were being "exposed in sundry old iron shops at a penny a piece."

And yet, like everything which came from Coleridge's hand, this immature and unpractical production has an interest of its own. Amid the curious mixture of actuality and abstract disquisition of which each number of the *Watchman* is made up, we are arrested again and again by some striking metaphor or some weighty sentence which tells us that the writer is no mere wordy wielder of a facile pen. The paper on the slave trade in the seventh number is a vigorous and, in places, a heart-stirring appeal to the humane emotions. There are passages in it which foreshadow Coleridge's more mature literary manner — the manner of the great pulpit orators of the seventeenth century—in a very interesting way.[1] But what was the use

[1] Take for instance this sentence: "Our own sorrows, like the Princes of Hell in Milton's Pandemonium, sit enthroned 'bulky and vast;' while the miseries of our fellow-creatures dwindle into pigmy forms, and are crowded in an innumerable multitude into some dark corner of the heart." Both in character of imagery and in form of structure we have here the germ of such passages as this, which one might confidently defy the most accomplished literary "taster" to

of No. IV. containing an effective article like this when No. III. had opened with an "Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the Ancient Germans, introductory to a sketch of the Manners, Religion, and Politics of present Germany?" This to a public who wanted to read about Napoleon and Mr. Pitt! No. III. in all probability "choked off" a good proportion of the commonplace readers who might have been well content to have put up with the humanitarian rhetoric of No. IV., if only for its connection with so unquestionably an actuality as West Indian sugar. It was, anyhow, owing to successive alienations of this kind that on 13th May, 1796, the editor of the *Watchman* was compelled to bid farewell to his few remaining readers in the tenth number of his periodical, for the "short and satisfactory" reason that "the work does not pay its expenses." "Part of my readers," continues Coleridge, "relinquished it because it did not contain sufficient original composition, and a still larger part because it contained too much;" and he then proceeds with that half-humorous simplicity of his to explain what excellent reasons there were why the first of these classes should transfer their patronage to Flower's *Cambridge Intelligencer*, and the second theirs to the *New Monthly Magazine*.

It is not, however, for the biographer or the world to regret the short career of the *Watchman*, since its decease left Coleridge's mind in undivided allegiance to the poetic impulse at what was destined to be the period of its great-

distinguish from Jeremy Taylor: "Or like two rapid streams that at their first meeting within narrow and rocky banks mutually strive to repel each other, and intermix reluctantly and in tumult, but soon finding a wider channel and more yielding shores, blend and dilate and flow on in one current and with one voice."—*Biog. Lit.* p. 155.

est power. In the meantime one result of the episode had been to make a not unimportant addition to his friendships. Mention has already been made of his somewhat earlier acquaintance with Mr. Thomas Poole, of Nether Stowey, a man of high intelligence and mark in his time; and it was in the course of his northern peregrinations in search of subscribers that he met with Charles Lloyd. This young man, the son of an eminent Birmingham banker, was so struck with Coleridge's genius and eloquence as to conceive an "ardent desire to domesticate himself permanently with a man whose conversation was to him as a revelation from heaven;" and shortly after the decease of the *Watchman* he obtained his parents' consent to the arrangement.

Early, therefore, in the year 1797 Coleridge, accompanied by Charles Lloyd, removed to Nether Stowey in Somersetshire, where he occupied a cottage placed at his disposal by Mr. Poole. His first employment in his new abode appears to have been the preparation of the second edition of his poems. In the new issue nineteen pieces of the former publication were discarded and twelve new ones added, the most important of which was the *Ode to the Departing Year*, which had first appeared in the *Cambridge Intelligencer*, and had been immediately afterwards republished in a separate form as a thin quarto pamphlet, together with some lines of no special merit "addressed to a young man of fortune" (probably Charles Lloyd), "who abandoned himself to an indolent and causeless melancholy." To the new edition were added the preface already quoted from, and a prose introduction to the sonnets. The volume also contained some poems by Charles Lloyd and an enlarged collection of sonnets and other pieces by Charles Lamb, the latter of whom about the

time of its publication paid his first visit to the friend with whom, ever since leaving Christ's Hospital, he had kept up a constant and, to the student of literature, a most interesting correspondence.[1] In June, 1797, Charles and Mary Lamb arrived at the Stowey cottage to find their host disabled by an accident which prevented him from walking during their whole stay. It was during their absence on a walking expedition that he composed the pleasing lines,

"The lime-tree bower my prison,"

in which he thrice applies to his friend that epithet which gave such humorous annoyance to the gentle-hearted Charles."[2]

But a greater than Lamb, if one may so speak without offence to the votaries of that rare humorist and exquisite critic, had already made his appearance on the scene. Some time before this visit of Lamb's to Stowey Coleridge had made the acquaintance of the remarkable man who was destined to influence his literary career in many ways importantly, and in one way decisively. It was in the month of June, 1797, and at the village of Racedown in Dorsetshire, that he first met William Wordsworth.

[1] Perhaps a "correspondence" of which only one side exists may be hardly thought to deserve that name. Lamb's letters to Coleridge are full of valuable criticism on their respective poetical efforts. Unfortunately in, it is somewhat strangely said, "a fit of dejection," he destroyed all Coleridge's letters to him.

[2] Lamb's Correspondence with Coleridge, Letter XXXVII.

CHAPTER III.

COLERIDGE AND WORDSWORTH.—PUBLICATION OF THE "LYRICAL BALLADS."—THE "ANCIENT MARINER."—THE FIRST PART OF "CHRISTABEL."—DECLINE OF COLERIDGE'S POETIC IMPULSE.—FINAL REVIEW OF HIS POETRY.

[1797–1799.]

THE years 1797 and 1798 are generally and justly regarded as the blossoming-time of Coleridge's poetic genius. It would be scarcely an exaggeration to say that they were even more than this, and that within the brief period covered by them is included not only the development of the poet's powers to their full maturity but the untimely beginnings of their decline. For to pass from the poems written by Coleridge within these two years to those of later origin is like passing from among the green wealth of summer foliage into the well-nigh naked woods of later autumn. During 1797 and 1798 the *Ancient Mariner*, the first part of *Christabel*, the fine ode to France, the *Fears in Solitude*, the beautiful lines entitled *Frost at Midnight*, the *Nightingale*, the *Circassian Love-Chant*, the piece known as *Love*, from the poem of the *Dark Ladie*, and that strange fragment *Kubla Khan*, were all of them written and nearly all of them published; while between the last composed of these and that swan-song of his dying Muse, the *Dejection*, of 1802, there is but one piece to be added to the list of his greater works. This, therefore, the

second part of *Christabel* (1800), may almost be described by the picturesque image in the first part of the same poem as

> "The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> Hanging so light and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky."

The first to fail him of his sources of inspiration was his revolutionary enthusiasm; and the ode to France—the *Recantation*, as it was styled on its first appearance in the *Morning Post*—is the record of a reaction which, as has been said, was as much speedier in Coleridge's case than in that of the other ardent young minds which had come under the spell of the Revolution as his enthusiasm had been more passionate than theirs. In the winter of 1797–98 the Directory had plunged France into an unnatural conflict with her sister Republic of Switzerland, and Coleridge, who could pardon and had pardoned her fierce animosity against a country which he considered not so much his own as Pitt's, was unable to forgive her this. In the *Recantation* he casts her off forever; he perceives at last that true liberty is not to be obtained through political, but only through spiritual emancipation; that—

> "The sensual and the dark rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
> They burst their manacles, and wear the name
> Of Freedom graven on a heavier chain;"

and arrives in a noble peroration at the somewhat unsatisfactory conclusion that the spirit of liberty, "the guide of homeless winds and playmate of the waves," is to be found only among the elements, and not in the institutions of man. And in the same quaintly ingenuous spirit

which half touches and half amuses us in his earlier poems he lets us perceive, a few weeks later, in his *Fears in Solitude*, that sympathy with a foreign nation threatened by the invader may gradually develop into an almost filial regard for one's own similarly situated land. He has been deemed, he says, an enemy of his country.

> "But, O dear Britain! O my mother Isle,"

once, it may be remembered, "doomed to fall enslaved and vile," but now—

> "Needs must thou prove a name most dear and holy,
> To me a son, a brother, and a friend,
> A husband and a father! who revere
> All bonds of natural love, and find them all
> Within the limits of thy rocky shores."

After all, it has occurred to him, England is not only the England of Pitt and Grenville, and in that capacity the fitting prey of the insulted French Republic: she is also the England of Sara Coleridge, and little Hartley, and of Mr. Thomas Poole, of Nether Stowey. And so, to be sure, she was in 1796 when her downfall was predicted, and in the spirit rather of the Old Testament than of the New. But there is something very engaging in the candour with which the young poet hastens to apprise us of this his first awakening to the fact.

France may be regarded as the last ode, and *Fears in Solitude* as the last blank-verse poem of any importance, that owe their origin to Coleridge's early political sentiments. Henceforth, and for the too brief period of his poetic activity, he was to derive his inspiration from other sources. The most fruitful and important of these was unquestionably his intercourse with Wordsworth, from

whom, although there was doubtless a reciprocation of influence between them, his much more receptive nature took a far deeper impression than it made.[1] At the time of their meeting he had already for some three years been acquainted with Wordsworth's works as a poet, and it speaks highly for his discrimination that he was able to discern the great powers of his future friend, even in work so immature in many respects as the *Descriptive Sketches*. It was during the last year of his residence at Cambridge that he first met with these poems, of which he says in the *Biographia Literaria* that "seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced;" and the effect produced by this volume was steadily enhanced by further acquaintance both with the poet and his works. Nothing, indeed, is so honourably noticeable and even touching in Coleridge's relation to his friend as the tone of reverence with which, even in the days of his highest self-confidence and even almost haughty belief in the greatness of his own poetic mission, he was accustomed to speak of Words-

[1] Perhaps the deepest impress of the Wordsworthian influence is to be found in the little poem *Frost at Midnight*, with its affecting apostrophe to the sleeping infant at his side—infant destined to develop as wayward a genius and to lead as restless and irresolute a life as his father. Its closing lines—

> "Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee
> Whether the summer clothe the general earth
> With greenness . . .
> . . . whether the eave-drops fall,
> Heard only in the trances of the blast,
> Or if the secret ministry of frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles
> Quietly shining to the quiet moon"—

might have flowed straight from the pen of Wordsworth himself.

worth. A witness, to be more fully cited hereafter, and whose testimony is especially valuable as that of one who was by no means blind to Coleridge's early foible of self-complacency, has testified to this unbounded admiration of his brother-poet. "When," records this gentleman, "we have sometimes spoken complimentarily to Coleridge of himself he has said that he was nothing in comparison with Wordsworth." And two years before this, at a time when they had not yet tested each other's power in literary collaboration, he had written to Cottle to inform him of his introduction to the author of "near twelve hundred lines of blank-verse, superior, I dare aver, to anything in our language which in any way resembles it," and had declared with evident sincerity that he felt "a little man" by Wordsworth's side.

His own impression upon his new friend was more distinctively personal in its origin. It was by Coleridge's total individuality, by the sum of his vast and varied intellectual powers, rather than by the specific poetic element contained in them, that Wordsworth, like the rest of the world, indeed, was in the main attracted; but it is clear enough that this attraction was from the first most powerful. On that point we have not only the weighty testimony of Dorothy Wordsworth, as conveyed in her often-quoted description[1] of her brother's new acquaint-

[1] "You had a great loss in not seeing Coleridge. He is a wonderful man. His conversation teems with soul, mind, and spirit. Then he is so benevolent, so good tempered and cheerful, and, like William, interests himself so much about every little trifle. At first I thought him very plain—that is, for about three minutes; he is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish loose-growing half-curling rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them. His eye is large and full, and not very dark but gray, such an eye as

ance, but the still more conclusive evidence of her brother's own acts. He gave the best possible proof of the fascination which had been exercised over him by quitting Racedown with his sister for Alfoxden near Nether Stowey within a few weeks of his first introduction to Coleridge, a change of abode for which, as Miss Wordsworth has expressly recorded, "our principal inducement was Coleridge's society."

By a curious coincidence the two poets were at this time simultaneously sickening for what may perhaps be appropriately called the "poetic measles." They were each engaged in the composition of a five-act tragedy, and read scenes to each other, and to each other's admiration, from their respective dramas. Neither play was fortunate in its immediate destiny. Wordsworth's tragedy, the *Borderers*, was greatly commended by London critics and decisively rejected by the management of Covent Garden. As for Coleridge, the negligent Sheridan did not even condescend to acknowledge the receipt of his manuscript; his play was passed from hand to hand among the Drury Lane Committee; but not till many years afterwards did *Osorio* find its way under another name to the footlights.

For the next twelvemonth the intercourse between the two poets was close and constant, and most fruitful in results of high moment to English literature. It was in their daily rambles among the Quantock Hills that they excogitated that twofold theory of the essence and functions of poetry which was to receive such notable illustration in their joint volume of verse, the *Lyrical Ballads;* it was

would receive from a heavy soul the dullest expression; but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind: it has more of the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark eyebrows and an overhanging forehead."

during a walk over the Quantock Hills that by far the most famous poem of that series, the *Ancient Mariner*, was conceived and in part composed. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in the spring of the year 1798 was, indeed, an event of double significance for English poetry. It marked an epoch in the creative life of Coleridge, and a no less important one in the critical life of Wordsworth. In the *Biographia Literaria* the origination of the plan of the work is thus described:

"During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours our conversation turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination. The sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the interest aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. . . . For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves. In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself, as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awakening the

mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes which see not, ears that hear not, and hearts which neither feel nor understand."

We may measure the extent to which the poetic teaching and practice of Wordsworth have influenced subsequent taste and criticism by noting how completely the latter of these two functions of poetry has overshadowed the former. To lend the charm of imagination to the real will appear to many people to be not one function of poetry merely but its very essence. To them it *is* poetry, and the only thing worthy of the name; while the correlative function of lending the force of reality to the imaginary will appear at best but a superior kind of metrical romancing, or clever telling of fairy tales. Nor of course can there, from the point of view of the highest conception of the poet's office, be any comparison between the two. In so far as we regard poetry as contributing not merely to the pleasure of the mind but to its health and strength—in so far as we regard it in its capacity not only to delight but to sustain, console, and tranquillise the human spirit—there is, of course, as much difference between the idealistic and the realistic forms of poetry as there is between a narcotic potion and a healing drug. The one, at best, can only enable a man to forget his burdens; the other fortifies him to endure them. It is perhaps no more than was naturally to be expected of our brooding and melancholy age, that poetry (when it is not a mere voluptuous record of the subjective impressions of sense) should have become almost limited in its very meaning to the exposition of the imaginative or spiritual aspect of the world of realities; but so it is now, and so in Coleridge's time it clearly was *not*.

Coleridge, in the passage above quoted, shows no signs of regarding one of the two functions which he attributes to poetry as any more accidental or occasional than the other; and the fact that the realistic portion of the *Lyrical Ballads* so far exceeded in amount its supernatural element, he attributes not to any inherent supremacy in the claims of the former to attention but simply to the greater industry which Wordsworth had displayed in his special department of the volume. For his own part, he says, "I wrote the *Ancient Mariner*, and was preparing, among other poems, the *Dark Ladie* and the *Christabel*, in which I should have more nearly realised my ideal than I had done in my first attempt. But Mr. Wordsworth's industry had proved so much more successful, and the number of the poems so much greater, that my compositions, instead of forming a balance, appeared rather an interpolation of heterogeneous matter." There was certainly a considerable disparity between the amount of their respective contributions to the volume, which, in fact, contained nineteen pieces by Wordsworth and only four by Coleridge. Practically, indeed, we may reduce this four to one; for, of the three others, the two scenes from *Osorio* are without special distinction, and the *Nightingale*, though a graceful poem, and containing an admirably-studied description of the bird's note, is too slight and short to claim any importance in the series. But the one long poem which Coleridge contributed to the collection is alone sufficient to associate it forever with his name. *Unum sed leonem.* To any one who should have taunted him with the comparative infertility of his Muse he might well have returned the haughty answer of the lioness in the fable, when he could point in justification of it to the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*

There is, I may assume, no need at the present day to discuss the true place in English literature of this unique product of the human imagination. One is bound, however, to attempt to correlate and adjust it to the rest of the poet's work, and this, it must be admitted, is a most difficult piece of business. Never was there a poem so irritating to a critic of the "pigeon-holing" variety. It simply defies him; and yet the instinct which he obeys is so excusable, because in fact so universal, that one feels guilty of something like disloyalty to the very principles of order in smiling at his disappointment. Complete and symmetrical classification is so fascinating an amusement; it would simplify so many subjects of study if men and things would only consent to rank themselves under different categories and remain there; it would, in particular, be so inexpressibly convenient to be able to lay your hand upon your poet whenever you wanted him by merely turning to a shelf labelled "Realistic" or "Imaginative" (nay, perhaps, to the still greater saving of labour — Objective or Subjective), that we cannot be surprised at the strength of the aforesaid instinct in many a critical mind. Nor should it be hard to realise its revolt against those single exceptions which bring its generalisations to nought. When the pigeon-hole will admit every "document" but one, the case is hard indeed; and it is not too much to say that the *Ancient Mariner* is the one document which the pigeon-hole in this instance declines to admit. If Coleridge had only refrained from writing this remarkable poem, or if, having done so, he had written more poems like it, the critic might have ticketed him with a quiet mind, and gone on his way complacent. As it is, however, the poet has contrived, in virtue of this performance, not only to defeat classification but to defy it. For the weird ballad

abounds in those very qualities in which Coleridge's poetry with all its merits is most conspicuously deficient, while on the other hand it is wholly free from the faults with which he is most frequently and justly chargeable. One would not have said in the first place that the author of *Religious Musings*, still less of the *Monody on the Death of Chatterton*, was by any means the man to have compassed triumphantly at the very first attempt the terseness, vigour, and *naïveté* of the true ballad-manner. To attain this, Coleridge, the student of his early verse must feel, would have rather more to retrench and much more to restrain than might be the case with many other youthful poets. The exuberance of immaturity, the want of measure, the "not knowing where to stop," are certainly even more conspicuous in the poems of 1796 than they are in most productions of the same stage of poetic development; and these qualities, it is needless to say, require very stern chastening from him who would succeed in the style which Coleridge attempted for the first time in the *Ancient Mariner*.

The circumstances of this immortal ballad's birth have been related with such fulness of detail by Wordsworth, and Coleridge's own references to them are so completely reconcilable with that account, that it must have required all De Quincey's consummate ingenuity as a mischief-maker to detect any discrepancy between the two.

In the autumn of 1797, records Wordsworth in the MS. notes which he left behind him, "Mr. Coleridge, my sister, and myself started from Alfoxden pretty late in the afternoon with a view to visit Linton and the Valley of Stones near to it; and as our united funds were very small, we agreed to defray the expense of the tour by writing a poem to be sent to the *New Monthly Magazine*. Accordingly we set off, and proceeded along the Quantock Hills

towards Watchet; and in the course of this walk was planned the poem of the *Ancient Mariner*, founded on a dream, as Mr. Coleridge said, of his friend Mr. Cruikshank. Much the greatest part of the story was Mr. Coleridge's invention, but certain parts I suggested; for example, some crime was to be committed which should bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke's *Voyages*, a day or two before, that while doubling Cape Horn they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. 'Suppose,' said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.' The incident was thought fit for the purpose, and adopted accordingly. I also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem. The gloss with which it was subsequently accompanied was not thought of by either of us at the time, at least not a hint of it was given to me, and I have no doubt it was a gratuitous afterthought. We began the composition together on that to me memorable evening. I furnished two or three lines at the beginning of the poem, in particular—

> 'And listened like a three years' child:
> The Mariner had his will.'

These trifling contributions, all but one, which Mr. C. has with unnecessary scrupulosity recorded,[1] slipped out of his

[1] The lines—

> "And it is long, and lank, and brown,
> As is the ribbed sea-sand."

mind, as well they might. As we endeavoured to proceed conjointly (I speak of the same evening) our respective manners proved so widely different that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog. . . . The *Ancient Mariner* grew and grew till it became too important for our first object, which was limited to our expectation of five pounds; and we began to think of a volume which was to consist, as Mr. Coleridge has told the world, of poems chiefly on supernatural subjects." Except that the volume ultimately determined on was to consist only "partly" and not "chiefly" of poems on supernatural subjects (in the result, as has been seen, it consisted "chiefly" of poems upon natural subjects), there is nothing in this account which cannot be easily reconciled with the probable facts upon which De Quincey bases his hinted charge against Coleridge in his *Lake Poets*. It was not Coleridge who had been reading Shelvocke's *Voyages*, but Wordsworth, and it is quite conceivable, therefore, that the source from which his friend had derived the idea of the killing of the albatross may (if indeed he was informed of it at the time) have escaped his memory twelve years afterwards, when the conversation with De Quincey took place. Hence, in "disowning his obligations to Shelvocke," he may not by any means have intended to suggest that the albatross incident was his own thought. Moreover, De Quincey himself supplies another explanation of the matter, which we know, from the above-quoted notes of Wordsworth's, to be founded upon fact. "It is possible," he adds, "from something which Coleridge said on another occasion, that before meeting a fable in which to embody his ideas he had meditated a poem on delirium, confounding its own dream-scenery with external things,

and connected with the imagery of high latitudes." Nothing, in fact, would be more natural than that Coleridge, whose idea of the haunted seafarer was primarily suggested by his friend's dream, and had no doubt been greatly elaborated in his own imagination before being communicated to Wordsworth at all, should have been unable, after a considerable lapse of time, to distinguish between incidents of his own imagining and those suggested to him by others. And, in any case, the "unnecessary scrupulosity," rightly attributed to him by Wordsworth with respect to this very poem, is quite incompatible with any intentional denial of obligations.

Such, then, was the singular and even prosaic origin of the *Ancient Mariner* — a poem written to defray the expenses of a tour; surely the most sublime of "pot-boilers" to be found in all literature. It is difficult, from amid the astonishing combination of the elements of power, to select that which is the most admirable; but, considering both the character of the story and of its particular vehicle, perhaps the greatest achievement of the poem is the simple realistic force of its narrative. To achieve this was of course Coleridge's main object: he had undertaken to "transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imaginations that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith." But it is easier to undertake this than to perform it, and much easier to perform it in prose than in verse—with the assistance of the everyday and the commonplace than without it. Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin* is no doubt a great feat of the realistic-supernatural; but no one can help feeling how much the author is aided by his "broker's clerk" style of description, and by the familiar Parisian scenes among

which he makes his hero move. It is easier to compass verisimilitude in the Palais-Royal than on the South Pacific, to say nothing of the thousand assisting touches, out of place in rhyme and metre, which can be thrown into a prose narrative. The *Ancient Mariner*, however, in spite of all these drawbacks, is as real to the reader as is the hero of the *Peau de Chagrin;* we are as convinced of the curse upon one of the doomed wretches as upon the other; and the strange phantasmagoric haze which is thrown around the ship and the lonely voyager leaves their outlines as clear as if we saw them through the sunshine of the streets of Paris. Coleridge 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. For among all the beauties of his earlier landscapes we can hardly reckon that of intense and convincing truth. He seems seldom before to have written, as Wordsworth nearly always seemed to write, "with his eye on the object;" and certainly he never before displayed any remarkable power of completing his word-picture with a few touches. 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 deck; the setting sun peering "through its ribs, as if through a dungeon-grate;" the water-snakes under the moonbeams, with the "elfish light" falling off them "in hoary flakes" when they reared; the dead crew, who work the ship and "raise their limbs like lifeless tools"—everything seems to have been actually *seen*, and we believe it all as the story of a truthful eye-witness. The details of the voyage, too, are all chronicled with such order and

regularity, there is such a diary-like air about the whole thing, that we accept it almost as if it were a series of extracts from the ship's "log." Then again the execution —a great thing to be said of so long a poem—is marvellously equal throughout; the story never drags or flags for a moment, its felicities of diction are perpetual, and it is scarcely marred by a single weak line. What could have been better said of the instantaneous descent of the tropical night than—

> "The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
> At one stride comes the dark;"

what more weirdly imagined of the "cracks and growls" of the rending iceberg than that they sounded "like noises in a swound?" And how beautifully steals in the passage that follows upon the cessation of the spirit's song—

> "It ceased; yet still the sails made on
> A pleasant noise till noon,
> A noise like to a hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune."

Then, as the ballad draws to its close, after the ship has drifted over the harbour-bar—

> "And I with sobs did pray—
> O let me be awake, my God;
> Or let me sleep alway,"

with what consummate art are we left to imagine the physical traces which the mariner's long agony had left behind it by a method far more terrible than any direct description—the effect, namely, which the sight of him produces upon others—

"I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked
And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

"I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see
The Devil knows how to row.'"

Perfect consistency of plan, in short, and complete equality of execution, brevity, self-restraint, and an unerring sense of artistic propriety—these are the chief notes of the *Ancient Mariner*, as they are *not*, in my humble judgment, the chief notes of any poem of Coleridge's before or since. And hence it is that this masterpiece of ballad minstrelsy is, as has been said, so confounding to the "pigeon-holing" mind.

The next most famous poem of this or indeed of any period of Coleridge's life is the fragment of *Christabel*, which, however, in spite of the poet's own opinion on that point, it is difficult to regard as "a more effective realization" of the "natural-supernatural" idea. Beautiful as it is, it possesses none of that human interest with which, according to this idea, the narrator of the poetic story must undertake to invest it. Nor can the unfinished condition in which it was left be fairly held to account for this, for the characters themselves—the lady Christabel, the witch Geraldine, and even the baron Sir Leoline himself—are somewhat shadowy creations, with too little hold upon life and reality, and too much resemblance to the flitting figures of a dream. Powerful in their way as are the lines descriptive of the spell thrown over Christabel by

her uncanny guest—lines at the recitation of which Shelley is said to have fainted—we cannot say that they strike a reader with such a sense of horror as should be excited by the contemplation of a real flesh-and-blood maiden subdued by "the shrunken serpent eyes" of a sorceress, and constrained "passively to imitate" their "look of dull and treacherous hate." Judging it, however, by any other standard than that of the poet's own erecting, one must certainly admit the claim of *Christabel* to rank very high as a work of pure creative art. It is so thoroughly suffused and permeated with the glow of mystical romance, the whole atmosphere of the poem is so exquisitely appropriate to the subject, and so marvellously preserved throughout, that our lack of belief in the reality of the scenes presented to us detracts but little from the pleasure afforded by the artistic excellence of its presentment. It abounds, too, in isolated pictures of surpassing vividness and grace—word-pictures which live in the "memory of the eye" with all the wholeness and tenacity of an actual painting. Geraldine appearing to Christabel beneath the oak, and the two women stepping lightly across the hall "that echoes still, pass as lightly as you will," are pictures of this kind; and nowhere out of Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* is there any "interior" to match that of Christabel's chamber, done as it is in little more than half a dozen lines. These beauties, it is true, are fragmentary, like the poem itself, but there is no reason to believe that the poem itself would have gained anything in its entirety—that is to say, as a poetic narrative—by completion. Its main idea—that the purity of a pure maiden is a charm more powerful for the protection of those dear to her than the spells of the evil one for their destruction—had been already sufficiently indicated, and the mode in which Cole-

ridge, it seems, intended to have worked would hardly have added anything to its effect.[1] And although he clung till very late in life to the belief that he *could* have finished it in after-days with no change of poetic manner —"If easy in my mind," he says in a letter to be quoted hereafter, "I have no doubt either of the reawakening power or of the kindling inclination" — there are few students of his later poems who will share his confidence.

[1] Mr. Gillman (in his *Life*, p. 301) gives the following somewhat bald outline of what were to form the two concluding cantos, no doubt on the authority of Coleridge himself. The second canto ends, it may be remembered, with the despatch of Bracy the bard to the castle of Sir Roland: "Over the mountains the Bard, as directed by Sir Leoline, hastes with his disciple; but, in consequence of one of those inundations supposed to be common to the country, the spot only where the castle once stood is discovered, the edifice itself being washed away. He determines to return. Geraldine, being acquainted with all that is passing, like the weird sisters in *Macbeth*, vanishes. Reappearing, however, she awaits the return of the Bard, exciting in the meantime by her wily arts all the anger she could rouse in the Baron's breast, as well as that jealousy of which he is described to have been susceptible. The old bard and the youth at length arrive, and therefore she can no longer personate the character of Geraldine, the daughter of Lord Roland de Vaux, but changes her appearance to that of the accepted though absent lover of Christabel. Next ensues a courtship most distressing to Christabel, who feels — she knows not why — great disgust for her once favoured knight. This coldness is very painful to the Baron, who has no more conception than herself of the supernatural transformation. She at last yields to her father's entreaties, and consents to approach the altar with the hated suitor. The real lover returning, enters at this moment, and produces the ring which she had once given him in sign of her betrothment. Thus defeated, the supernatural being Geraldine disappears. As predicted, the castle-bell tolls, the mother's voice is heard, and, to the exceeding great joy of the parties, the rightful marriage takes place, after which follows a reconciliation and explanation between father and daughter."

Charles Lamb strongly recommended him to leave it unfinished, and Hartley Coleridge, in every respect as competent a judge on that point as could well be found, always declared his conviction that his father could not, at least *qualis ab incepto*, have finished the poem.

The much-admired little piece first published in the *Lyrical Ballads* under the title of *Love*, and probably best known by its (original) first and most pregnant stanza,[1] possesses a twofold interest for the student of Coleridge's life and works, as illustrating at once one of the most marked characteristics of his peculiar temperament, and one of the most distinctive features of his poetic manner. The lines are remarkable for a certain strange fascination of melody—a quality for which Coleridge, who was not unreasonably proud of his musical gift, is said to have especially prized them; and they are noteworthy also as perhaps the fullest expression of the almost womanly softness of Coleridge's nature. To describe their tone as effeminate would be unfair and untrue, for effeminacy in the work of a male hand would necessarily imply something of falsity of sentiment, and from this they are entirely free. But it must certainly be admitted that for a man's description of his wooing the warmth of feeling which pervades them is as nearly sexless in character as it is possible to conceive; and, beautiful as the verses are, one cannot but feel that they only escape the "namby-pamby" by the breadth of a hair.

As to the wild dream-poem *Kubla Khan*, it is hardly more than a psychological curiosity, and only that per-

[1] "All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame."

haps in respect of the completeness of its metrical form. For amid its picturesque but vague imagery there is nothing which might not have presented itself, and the like of which has not perhaps actually presented itself, to many a half-awakened brain of far lower imaginative energy during its hours of full daylight consciousness than that of Coleridge. Nor possibly is it quite an unknown experience to many of us to have even a fully-written record, so to speak, of such impressions imprinted instantaneously on the mind, the conscious composition of whole pages of narrative, descriptive, or cogitative matter being compressed as it were into a moment of time. Unfortunately, however, the impression made upon the ordinary brain is effaced as instantaneously as it is produced; the abnormal exaltation of the creative and apprehensive power is quite momentary, being probably, indeed, confined to the single moment between sleep and waking; and the mental tablet which a second before was covered so thickly with the transcripts of ideas and images, all far more vivid, or imagined to be so, than those of waking life, and all apprehended with a miraculous simultaneity by the mind, is converted into a *tabula rasa* in the twinkling of a half-opened eye. The wonder in Coleridge's case was that his brain retained the word-impressions sufficiently long to enable him to commit them, to the extent at least of some fifty odd lines, to paper, and that, according to his own belief, this is but a mere fraction of what but for an unlucky interruption in the work of transcribing he would have been able to preserve. His own account of this curious incident is as follows:

"In the summer of 1797 the author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of

a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchas's *Pilgrimage:* 'Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed by a wall.' The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines—if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the corresponding expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effect. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and, taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter."

This poem, though written in 1797, remained, like *Christabel*, in MS. till 1816. These were then published in a thin quarto volume, together with another piece called the *Pains of Sleep*, a composition of many years' later date than the other two, and of which there will be occasion to say a word or two hereafter.

At no time, however, not even in this the high-tide of its activity, was the purely poetic impulse dominant for long together in Coleridge's mind. He was born with the instincts of the orator, and still more with those of the teacher, and I doubt whether he ever really regarded himself as fulfilling the true mission of his life except at those moments when he was seeking by spoken word to exer-

cise direct influence over his fellow-men. At the same time, however, such was the restlessness of his intellect, and such his instability of purpose, that he could no more remain constant to what he deemed his true vocation than he could to any other. This was now to be signally illustrated. Soon after the *Ancient Mariner* was written, and some time before the volume which was to contain it appeared, Coleridge quitted Stowey for Shrewsbury to undertake the duties of a Unitarian preacher in that town. This was in the month of January, 1798,[1] and it seems pretty certain, though exact dates are not to be ascertained, that he was back again at Stowey early in the month of February. In the pages of the *Liberal* (1822) William Hazlitt has given a most graphic and picturesque description of Coleridge's appearance and performance in his Shrewsbury pulpit; and, judging from this, one can well believe, what indeed was to have been antecedently expected, that had he chosen to remain faithful to his new employment he might have rivalled the reputation of the greatest preacher of the time. But his friends the Wedgwoods, the two sons of the great potter, whose acquaintance he had made a few years earlier, were apparently much dismayed at the prospect of his deserting the library for the chapel, and they offered him an annuity of £150 a year on condition of his retiring from the ministry and devoting himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy. Coleridge was staying at the house of Hazlitt's

[1] It may be suggested that this sudden resolution was forced upon Coleridge by the *res angusta domi*. But I do not think that was the case. In the winter of 1797 he had obtained an introduction to and entered into a literary engagement with Mr. Stuart, of the *Morning Post*, and could thus have met, as in fact he afterwards did meet, the necessities of the hour.

father when the letter containing this liberal offer reached him, "and he seemed," says the younger Hazlitt, "to make up his mind to close with the proposal in the act of tying on one of his shoes." Another inducement to so speedy an acceptance of it is no doubt to be found in the fact of its presenting to Coleridge an opportunity for the fulfilment of a cherished desire—that, namely, of "completing his education," as he regarded it, by studying the German language, and acquiring an acquaintance with the theology and philosophy of Germany in that country itself. This prospect he was enabled, through the generosity of the Wedgwoods, to put into execution towards the end of 1798.

But before passing on from this culminating and, to all intents and purposes, this closing year of Coleridge's career as a poet it will be proper to attempt something like a final review of his poetic work. Admirable as much of that work is, and unique in quality as it is throughout, I must confess that it leaves on my own mind a stronger impression of the unequal and imperfect than does that of any poet at all approaching Coleridge in imaginative vigour and intellectual grasp. It is not a mere inequality and imperfection of style like that which so seriously detracts from the pleasure of reading Byron. Nor is it that the thought is often *impar sibi*—that, like Wordsworth's, it is too apt to descend from the mountain-tops of poetry to the flats of commonplace, if not into the bogs of bathos. In both these respects Coleridge may and does occasionally offend, but his workmanship is, on the whole, as much more artistic than Byron's as the material of his poetry is of more uniformly equal value than Wordsworth's. Yet, with almost the sole exception of the *Ancient Mariner*, his work is in

a certain sense more disappointing than that of either. In spite of his theory as to the twofold function of poetry we must finally judge that of Coleridge, as of any other poet, by its relation to the actual. Ancient Mariners and Christabels—the people, the scenery, and the incidents of an imaginary world—may be handled by poetry once and again to the wonder and delight of man; but feats of this kind cannot—or cannot in the Western world, at any rate—be repeated indefinitely, and the ultimate test of poetry, at least for the modern European reader, is its treatment of actualities—its relations to the world of human action, passion, sensation, thought. And when we try Coleridge's poetry in any one of these four regions of life, we seem forced to admit that, despite all its power and beauty, it at no moment succeeds in convincing us, as at their best moments Wordsworth's and even Byron's continually does, that the poet has found his true poetic vocation—that he is interpreting that aspect of life which he can interpret better than he can any other, and which no other poet, save the one who has vanquished all poets in their own special fields of achievement, can interpret as well as he. In no poem of actuality does Coleridge so victoriously show himself to be the right man at the right work as does Wordsworth in certain moods of seership and Byron in certain moments of passion. Of them at such moods and moments we feel assured that they have discovered where their real strength lies, and have put it forth to the utmost. But we never feel satisfied that Coleridge has discovered where *his* real strength lies, and he strikes us as feeling no more certainty on the point himself. Strong as is his pinion, his flight seems to resemble rather that of the eaglet than of the full-grown eagle even to the last. He continues "mewing his mighty youth" a little too

long. There is a tentativeness of manner which seems to come from a conscious aptitude for many poetic styles and an incapacity to determine which should be definitely adopted and cultivated to perfection. Hence one too often returns from any prolonged ramble through Coleridge's poetry with an unsatisfied feeling which does not trouble us on our return from the best literary country of Byron or Wordsworth. Byron has taken us by rough roads, and Wordsworth led us through some desperately flat and dreary lowlands to his favourite "bits;" but we feel that we have seen mountain and valley, wood and river, glen and waterfall at their best. But Coleridge's poetry leaves too much of the feeling of a walk through a fine country on a misty day. We may have had many a peep of beautiful scenery and occasional glimpses of the sublime; but the medium of vision has been of variable quality, and somehow we come home with an uneasy suspicion that we have not seen as much as we might.

It is obvious, however, even upon a cursory consideration of the matter, that this disappointing element in Coleridge's poetry is a necessary result of the circumstances of its production; for the period of his productive activity (at least after attaining manhood) was too short to enable a mind with so many intellectual distractions to ascertain its true poetic bent, and to concentrate its energies thereupon. If he seems always to be feeling his way towards the work which he could do best, it is for the very good reason that this is what, from 1796 to 1800, he was continually doing as a matter of fact. The various styles which he attempted —and for a season, in each case, with such brilliant results —are forms of poetic expression corresponding, on the face of them, to poetic impulses of an essentially fleeting nature. The political or politico-religious odes were the

offspring of youthful democratic enthusiasm; the supernatural poems, so to call them for want of a better name, had their origin in an almost equally youthful and more than equally transitory passion for the wild and wondrous. Political disillusion is fatal to the one impulse, and mere advance in years extinguishes the other. Visions of Ancient Mariners and Christabels do not revisit the mature man, and the Toryism of middle life will hardly inspire odes to anything.

With the extinction of these two forms of creative impulse Coleridge's poetic activity, from causes to be considered hereafter, came almost entirely to an end, and into what later forms it might subsequently have developed remains therefore a matter more or less of conjecture. Yet I think there is almost a sufficiency of *à priori* evidence as to what that form would have been. Had the poet in him survived until years had "brought the philosophic mind," he would doubtless have done for the human spirit, in its purely isolated self-communings, what Wordsworth did for it in its communion with external nature. All that the poetry of Wordsworth is for the mind which loves to hold converse with the world of things; this, and more perhaps than this—if more be possible—would the poetry of Coleridge have been for the mind which abides by preference in the world of self-originating emotion and introspective thought. Wordsworth's primary function is to interpret nature to man: the interpretation of man to himself is with him a secondary process only—the response, in almost every instance, to impressions from without. This poet can nobly brace the human heart to fortitude; but he must first have seen the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor. The "presence and the spirit interfused" throughout creation

is revealed to us in moving and majestic words; yet the poet requires to have felt it "in the light of setting suns and the round ocean and the living air" before he feels it "in the mind of man." But what Wordsworth grants only to the reader who wanders with him in imagination by lake and mountain, the Muse of Coleridge, had she lived, would have bestowed upon the man who has entered into his inner chamber and shut to the door. This, it seems to me, is the work for which genius, temperament, and intellectual habit would alike have fitted him. For while his feeling for internal nature was undoubtedly less profound, less mystically penetrating than Wordsworth's, his sensibilities in general were incomparably quicker and more subtle than those of the friend in whom he so generously recognised a master; and the reach of his sympathies extends to forms of human emotion, to subjects of human interest which lay altogether outside the somewhat narrow range of Wordsworth.

And, with so magnificent a furniture of those mental and moral qualities which should belong to "a singer of man to men," it must not be forgotten that his technical equipment for the work was of the most splendidly effective kind. If a critic like Mr. Swinburne seems to speak in exaggerated praise of Coleridge's lyrics, we can well understand their enchantment for a master of music like himself. Probably it was the same feeling which made Shelley describe *France* as "the finest ode in the English language." With all, in fact, who hold—as it is surely plausible to hold—that the first duty of a singer is to sing, the poetry of Coleridge will always be more likely to be classed above than below its merits, great as they are. For, if we except some occasional lapses in his sonnets—a metrical

form in which, at his best, he is quite "out of the running" with Wordsworth—his melody never fails him. He is a singer always, as Wordsworth is not always, and Byron almost never. The Æolian harp to which he so loved to listen does not more surely respond in music to the breeze of heaven than does Coleridge's poetic utterance to the wind of his inspiration. Of the dreamy fascination which *Love* exercises over a listening ear I have already spoken; and there is hardly less charm in the measure and assonances of the *Circassian Love Chant*. *Christabel* again, considered solely from the metrical point of view, is a veritable *tour de force*—the very model of a metre for romantic legend: as which, indeed, it was imitated with sufficient grace and spirit, but seldom with anything approaching to Coleridge's melody, by Sir Walter Scott.

Endowed therefore with so glorious a gift of song, and only not fully master of his poetic means because of the very versatility of his artistic power and the very variety and catholicity of his youthful sympathies, it is unhappily but too certain that the world has lost much by that perversity of conspiring accidents which so untimely silenced Coleridge's muse. And the loss is the more trying to posterity because he seems, to a not, I think, too curiously considering criticism, to have once actually struck that very chord which would have sounded the most movingly beneath his touch—and to have struck it at the very moment when the failing hand was about to quit the keys forever.

> "Ostendunt terris hunc tantum fata neque ultra
> Esse sinunt."

I cannot regard it as merely fantastic to believe that the *Dejection*, that dirge of infinite pathos over the grave of

creative imagination, might, but for the fatal decree which had by that time gone forth against Coleridge's health and happiness, have been but the cradle-cry of a new-born poetic power, in which imagination, not annihilated but transmigrant, would have splendidly proved its vitality through other forms of song.

CHAPTER IV.

VISIT TO GERMANY.—LIFE AT GÖTTINGEN.—RETURN.—EXPLORES THE LAKE COUNTRY.—LONDON.—THE "MORNING POST."—COLERIDGE AS A JOURNALIST.—RETIREMENT TO KESWICK.

[1799–1800.]

THE departure of the two poets for the Continent was delayed only till they had seen their joint volume through the press. The *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in the autumn of 1798, and on 16th September of that year Coleridge left Yarmouth for Hamburg with Wordsworth and his sister.[1] The purpose of his two companions' tour is not known to have been other than the pleasure, or mixed pleasure and instruction, usually derivable from foreign travel; that of Coleridge was strictly, even sternly, educational. Immediately on his arrival in Germany he parted from the Wordsworths, who went on to Goslar,[2] and took up his abode at

[1] De Quincey's error, in supposing that Coleridge's visit to Germany to "complete his education" was made at an earlier date than this journey with the Wordsworths, is a somewhat singular mistake for one so well acquainted with the facts of Coleridge's life. Had we not his own statement that this of 1798 was the first occasion of his quitting his native country, it so happens that we can account in England for nearly every month of his time from his leaving Cambridge until this date.

[2] It has only within a comparatively recent period been ascertained that the visit of the Wordsworths to Germany was itself another result of Thomas Wedgwood's generous appreciation of literary merit. It appears, on the incontrovertible testimony of the Wedgwoods' ac-

the house of the pastor at Ratzeburg, with whom he spent five months in assiduous study of the language. In January he removed to Göttingen. Of his life here during the next few months we possess an interesting record in the *Early Years and Late Reflections* of Dr. Carrlyon, a book published many years after the events which it relates, but which is quite obviously a true reflection of impressions yet fresh in the mind of its writer when its materials were first collected. Its principal value, in fact, is that it gives us Coleridge from the standpoint of the average young educated Englishman of the day, sufficiently intelligent, indeed, to be sensible of his fellow-student's transcendent abilities, but as little awed by them out of youth's healthy irreverence of criticism as the ordinary English undergraduate ever has been by the intellectual supremacy of any "greatest man of his day" who might chance to have been his contemporary at Oxford or Cambridge. In Dr. Carrlyon's reminiscences and in the quoted letters of a certain young Parry, another of the English student colony at Göttingen, we get a piquant picture of the poet-philosopher of seven-and-twenty, with his yet buoyant belief in his future, his still unquenched interest in the world of things, and his never-to-be-quenched interest in the world of thought, his even then inexhaustible flow of disquisition, his generous admiration for the gifts of others, and his *naïve* complacency—including, it would seem, a touch of the vanity of personal appearance—in his own. "He frequently," writes Dr. Carrlyon, "recited his own poetry, and not unfrequently led us further into

counts with their agents at Hamburg, that the expenses of all three travellers were defrayed by their friend at home. The credits opened for them amounted, during the course of their stay abroad, to some £260.—Miss Meteyard's *A Group of Englishmen*, p. 99.

the labyrinth of his metaphysical elucidations, either of particular passages or of the original conception of any of his productions, than we were able to follow him. At the conclusion, for instance, of the first stanza of *Christabel*, he would perhaps comment at full length upon such a line as 'Tu-whit!—Tu-whoo!' that we might not fall into the mistake of supposing originality to be its sole merit." The example is not very happily chosen, for Coleridge could hardly have claimed "originality" for an onomatopœia which occurs in one of Shakspeare's best known lyrics; but it serves well enough to illustrate the fact that he "very seldom went right to the end of any piece of poetry; to pause and analyse was his delight." His disappointment with regard to his tragedy of *Osorio* was, we also learn, still fresh. He seldom, we are told, "recited any of the beautiful passages with which it abounds without a visible interruption of the perfect composure of his mind." He mentioned with great emotion Sheridan's inexcusable treatment of him with respect to it. At the same time, adds his friend, "he is a severe critic of his own productions, and declares" (this no doubt with reference to his then, and indeed his constant estimate of *Christabel* as his masterpiece) "that his best poems have perhaps not appeared in print."

Young Parry's account of his fellow-student is also fresh and pleasing. "It is very delightful," he tells a correspondent, "to hear him sometimes discourse on religious topics for an hour together. His fervour is particularly agreeable when compared with the chilling speculations of German philosophers," whom Coleridge, he adds, "successively forced to abandon all their strongholds." He is "much liked, notwithstanding many peculiarities. He is very liberal towards all doctrines and

opinions, and cannot be put out of temper. These circumstances give him the advantage of his opponents, who are always bigoted and often irascible. Coleridge is an enthusiast on many subjects, and must therefore appear to many to possess faults, and no doubt he has faults, but he has a good heart and a large mass of information with," as his fellow-student condescendingly admits, "superior talents. The great fault which his friends may lament is the variety of subjects which he adopts, and the abstruse nature of his ordinary speculations, *extra homines positas.* They can easily," concludes the writer, rising here to the full stateliness of youth's epistolary style—"they can easily excuse his devoted attachment to his country, and his reasoning as to the means of producing the greatest human happiness, but they do not universally approve the mysticism of his metaphysics and the remoteness of his topics from human comprehension."

In the month of May, 1799, Coleridge set out with a party of his fellow-students on a walking tour through the Harz Mountains, an excursion productive of much oral philosophising on his part, and of the composition of the *Lines on ascending the Brocken*, not one of the happiest efforts of his muse. As to the philosophising, "he never," says one of his companions on this trip, "appeared to tire of mental exercise; talk seemed to him a perennial pastime, and his endeavours to inform and amuse us ended only with the cravings of hunger or the fatigue of a long march, from which neither his conversational powers nor his stoicism could protect himself or us." It speaks highly for the matter of Coleridge's allocutions that such incessant outpourings during a mountaineering tramp appear to have left no lasting impression of boredom behind them. The holiday seems to have been thoroughly

enjoyed by the whole party, and Coleridge, at any rate, had certainly earned it. For once, and it is almost to be feared for the last time in his life, he had resisted his besetting tendency to dispersiveness, and constrained his intelligence to apply itself to one thing at a time. He had come to Germany to acquire the language, and to learn what of German theology and metaphysics he might find worth the study, and his five months' steady pursuit of the former object had been followed by another four months of resolute prosecution of the latter. He attended the lectures of Professor Blumenbach, and obtained through a fellow-student notes from those of Eichhorn. He suffered no interruption in his studies, unless we are to except a short visit from Wordsworth and his sister, who had spent most of their stay abroad in residence at Goslar; and he appears, in short, to have made in every way the best use of his time. On 24th June, 1799, he gave his leave-taking supper at Göttingen, replying to the toast of his health in fluent German but with an execrable accent; and the next day, presumably, he started on his homeward journey.

His movements for the next few months are incorrectly stated in most of the brief memoirs prefixed to the various editions of the poet's works — their writers having, it is to be imagined, accepted without examination a misplaced date of Mr. Gillman's. It is not the fact that Coleridge "returned to England after an absence of fourteen months, and arrived in London the 27th of November." His absence could not have lasted longer than a year, for we know from the evidence of Miss Wordsworth's diary that he was exploring the Lake country (very likely for the first time) in company with her brother and herself in the month of September, 1799. The

probability is that he arrived in England early in July, and immediately thereupon did the most natural and proper thing to be done under the circumstances — namely, returned to his wife and children at Nether Stowey, and remained there for the next two months, after which he set off with the Wordsworths, then still at Alfoxden, to visit the district to which the latter had either already resolved upon, or were then contemplating, the transfer of their abode.

The 27th of November is no doubt the correct date of his arrival in London, though not "from abroad." And his first six weeks in the metropolis were spent in a very characteristic fashion — in the preparation, namely, of a work which he pronounced with perfect accuracy to be destined to fall dead from the press. He shut himself up in a lodging in Buckingham Street, Strand, and by the end of the above-mentioned period he had completed his admirable translation of *Wallenstein*, in itself a perfect, and indeed his most perfect dramatic poem. The manuscript of this English version of Schiller's drama was purchased by Messrs. Longman under the condition that the translation and the original should appear at the same time. Very few copies were sold, and the publishers, indifferent to Coleridge's advice to retain the unsold copies until the book should become fashionable, disposed of them as waste paper. Sixteen years afterwards, on the publication of *Christabel*, they were eagerly sought for, and the few remaining copies doubled their price. It was while engaged upon this work that he formed that connection with political journalism which lasted, though with intermissions, throughout most of the remainder of his life. His early poetical pieces had, as we have seen, made their first appearance in the *Morning Post*, but hitherto that newspaper had received no prose contribution from his

pen. His engagement with its proprietor, Mr. Daniel Stuart, to whom he had been introduced during a visit to London in 1797, was to contribute an occasional copy of verses for a stipulated annual sum; and some dozen or so of his poems (notably among them the ode to *France* and the two strange pieces, *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter* and *The Devil's Thoughts*) had entered the world in this way during the years 1798 and 1799.

Misled by the error above corrected, the writers of some of the brief memoirs of Coleridge's life represent him as having sent verse contributions to the *Morning Post* from Germany in 1799; but as the earliest of these only appeared in August of that year, there is no reason to suppose that any of them were written before his return to England. The longest of the serious pieces is the well-known *Ode to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, which cannot be regarded as one of the happiest of Coleridge's productions. Its motive is certainly a little slight, and its sentiment more than a little overstrained. The noble enthusiasm of the noble lady who, "though nursed in pomp and pleasure," could yet condescend to "hail the platform wild where once the Austrian fell beneath the shaft of Tell," hardly strikes a reader of the present day as remarkable enough to be worth "gushing" over; and when the poet goes on to suggest as the explanation of Georgiana's having "learned that heroic measure" that the Whig great lady had suckled her own children, we certainly seem to have taken the fatal step beyond the sublime! It is to be presumed that Tory great ladies invariably employed the services of a wet-nurse, and hence failed to win the same tribute from the angel of the earth, who, usually, while he guides

> "His chariot-planet round the goal of day,
> All trembling gazes on the eye of God,"

but who on this occasion "a moment turned his awful face away" to gaze approvingly on the high-born mother who had so conscientiously performed her maternal duties.

Very different is the tone of this poem from that of the two best known of Coleridge's lighter contributions to the *Morning Post*. The most successful of these, however, from the journalistic point of view, is in a literary sense the less remarkable. One is indeed a little astonished to find that a public, accustomed to such admirable political satire as the *Anti-Jacobin*, should have been so much taken as it seems to have been by the rough versification and somewhat clumsy sarcasm of the *Devil's Thoughts*. The poem created something like a *furore*, and sold a large reissue of the number of the *Morning Post* in which it appeared. Nevertheless it is from the metrical point of view doggerel, as indeed the author admits, three of its most smoothly-flowing stanzas being from the hand of Southey, while there is nothing in its boisterous political drollery to put its composition beyond the reach of any man of strong partisan feelings and a turn for street-humour. *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, on the other hand, is literary in every sense of the word, requiring indeed, and very urgently, to insist on its character as literature, in order to justify itself against the charge of inhuman malignity. Despite the fact that "letters four do form his name," it is of course an idealised statesman, and not the real flesh and blood Mr. Pitt, whom the sister furies, Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, extol as their patron in these terrible lines. The poem must be treated as what lawyers call an "A. B. case." Coleridge must be supposed to be lashing certain alphabetical symbols arranged in a certain order. This idealising process is perfectly easy and familiar to everybody with the literary sense. The de-

duction for "poetic license" is just as readily, though it does not, of course, require to be as frequently, made with respect to the hyperbole of denunciation as with respect to that of praise. Nor need we doubt that this deduction had in fact been made by all intelligent readers long before that agitating dinner at Mr. Sotheby's, which Coleridge describes with such anxious gravity in his apologetic preface to the republication of the lines. On the whole one may pretty safely accept De Quincey's view of the true character of this incident as related by him in his own inimitable fashion, namely, that it was in the nature of an elaborate hoax, played off at the poet's expense.[1] The malice of the piece is, as De Quincey puts it, quite obviously a "malice of the understanding and fancy," and

[1] After quoting the two concluding lines of the poem, "Fire's" rebuke of her inconstant sisters, in the words

"I alone am faithful, I
Cling to him everlastingly,"

De Quincey proceeds: "The sentiment is diabolical; and the question argued at the London dinner-table (Mr. Sotheby's) was 'Could the writer have been other than a devil?' . . . Several of the great guns among the literary body were present—in particular Sir Walter Scott, and he, we believe, with his usual good nature, took the apologetic side of the dispute; in fact, he was in the secret. Nobody else, barring the author, knew at first whose good name was at stake. The scene must have been high. The company kicked about the poor diabolic writer's head as though it had been a tennis-ball. Coleridge, the yet unknown criminal, absolutely perspired and fumed in pleading for the defendant; the company demurred; the orator grew urgent; wits began to *smoke* the case as an active verb, the advocate to smoke as a neuter verb; the 'fun grew fast and furious,' until at length the delinquent arose, burning tears in his eyes, and confessed to an audience now bursting with stifled laughter (but whom he supposed to be bursting with fiery indignation), 'Lo, I am he that wrote it.'"

not of the heart. There is significance in the mere fact that the poem was deliberately published by Coleridge two years after its composition, when the vehemence of his political animosities had much abated. Written in 1796, it did not appear in the *Morning Post* till January, 1798.

He was now, however, about to draw closer his connection with the newspaper press. Soon after his return from Germany he was solicited to "undertake the literary and political department in the *Morning Post*," and acceded to the proposal "on condition that the paper should thenceforward be conducted on certain fixed and announced principles, and that he should be neither obliged nor requested to deviate from them in favour of any party or any event." Accordingly, from December, 1799, until about midsummer of 1800, Coleridge became a regular contributor of political articles to this journal, sometimes to the number of two or three in one week. At the end of the period of six months he quitted London, and his contributions became necessarily less frequent, but they were continued (though with two apparent breaks of many months in duration)[1] until the close of the year 1802. It would seem, however, that nothing but Coleridge's own disinclination prevented this connection from taking a form in which it would have profoundly modified his whole future career. In a letter to Mr. Poole, dated March, 1800, he informs his friend that if he "had the least love of money" he could "make sure of £2000 a year, for that Stuart had offered him half shares

[1] *Sic* in *Essays on his own Times*, by S. T. C., the collection of her father's articles made by Mrs. Nelson (Sara) Coleridge; but without attributing strange error to Coleridge's own estimate (in the *Biographia Literaria*) of the amount of his journalistic work, it is impossible to believe that this collection, forming as it does but two small volumes, and a portion of a third, is anything like complete.

in his two papers, the *Morning Post* and the *Courier*, if he would devote himself to them in conjunction with their proprietor. But I told him," he continues, "that I would not give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times two thousand pounds—in short, that beyond £350 a year I considered money a real evil." Startlingly liberal as this offer will appear to the journalist, it seems really to have been made. For, writing long afterwards to Mr. Nelson Coleridge, Mr. Stuart says: "Could Coleridge and I place ourselves thirty years back, and he be so far a man of business as to write three or four hours a day, there is nothing I would not pay for his assistance. I would take him into partnership, and I would enable him to make a large fortune." Nor is there any reason to think that the bargain would have been a bad one for the proprietor from the strictly commercial point of view. Coleridge in later years may no doubt have overrated the effect of his own contributions on the circulation of the *Morning Post*, but it must have been beyond question considerable, and would in all likelihood have become far greater if he could have been induced to devote himself more closely to the work of journalism. For the fact is—and it is a fact for which the current conception of Coleridge's intellectual character does not altogether prepare one—that he was a workman of the very first order of excellence in this curious craft. The faculties which go to the attainment of such excellence are not perhaps among the highest distinctions of the human mind, but, such as they are, they are specific and well marked; they are by no means the necessary accompaniments even of the most conspicuous literary power, and they are likely rather to suffer than to profit by association with great subtlety of intellect or wide philosophic grasp. It is not to the advantage of the journal-

ist, as such, that he should see too many things at a time, or too far into any one thing, and even the gifts of an active imagination and an abundant vocabulary are each of them likely to prove a snare. To be wholly successful, the journalist—at least the English journalist—must not be too eloquent, or too witty, or too humorous, or too ingenious, or too profound. Yet the English reader likes, or thinks he likes, eloquence; he has a keen sense of humour, and a fair appreciation of wit; and he would be much hurt if he were told that ingenuity and profundity were in themselves distasteful to him. How, then, to give him enough of these qualities to please and not enough to offend him—as much eloquence as will stir his emotions, but not enough to arouse his distrust; as much wit as will carry home the argument, but not enough to make him doubt its sincerity; as much humour as will escape the charge of levity; as much ingenuity as can be displayed without incurring suspicion, and as much profundity as may impress without bewildering? This is a problem which is fortunately simplified for most journalists by the fact of their possessing these qualities in no more than, if in so much as, the minimum required. But Coleridge, it must be remembered, possessed most of them in embarrassing superfluity. Not all of them indeed, for, though he could be witty and at times humorous, his temptations to excess in these respects were doubtless not considerable. But as for his eloquence, he was from his youth upwards *Isæo torrentior*, his dialectical ingenuity was unequalled, and in disquisition of the speculative order no man was so apt as he to penetrate more deeply into his subject than most of his readers would care to follow him. *À priori*, therefore, one would have expected that Coleridge's instincts would have led him to rhetorise too much in his diction,

to refine too much in his arguments, and to philosophise too much in his reflections, to have hit the popular taste as a journalist, and that at the age of eight-and-twenty he would have been unable to subject these tendencies either to the artistic repression of the maturer writer or to the tactical restraints of the trained advocate. This eminently natural assumption, however, is entirely rebutted by the facts. Nothing is more remarkable in Coleridge's contributions to the *Morning Post* than their thoroughly workmanlike character from the journalistic point of view, their avoidance of "viewiness," their strict adherence to the one or two simple points which he is endeavouring at any particular juncture in politics to enforce upon his readers, and the steadiness with which he keeps his own and his readers' attention fixed on the special political necessities of the hour. His articles, in short, belong to that valuable class to which, while it gives pleasure to the cultivated reader, the most commonplace and Philistine man of business cannot refuse the, to him, supreme praise of being eminently "practical." They hit the nail on the head in nearly every case, and they take the plainest and most direct route to their point, dealing in rhetoric and metaphor only so far as the strictly "business" ends of the argument appear to require. Nothing, for instance, could have been better done, better reasoned and written, more skilfully adapted throughout to the English taste, than Coleridge's criticism (31st Dec., 1799) on the new constitution established by Bonaparte and Sieyès on the foundation of the Consulate, with its eighty senators, the "creatures of a renegade priest, himself the creature of a foreign mercenary, its hundred tribunes who are to talk and do nothing, and its three hundred legislators whom the constitution orders to be silent." What a ludicrous Purgatory,

adds he, "for three hundred Frenchmen!" Very vigorous, moreover, is he on the ministerial rejection of the French proposals of peace in 1800, arguing against the continuance of the war on the very sound anti-Jacobin ground that if it were unsuccessful it would inflame French ambition anew, and, if successful, repeat the experience of the results of rendering France desperate, and simply reanimate Jacobinism.

Effective enough too, for the controversial needs of the moment, was the argument that if France were known, as Ministers pretended, to be insincere in soliciting peace, "Ministers would certainly treat with her, since they would again secure the support of the British people in the war, and expose the ambition of the enemy;" and that, therefore, the probability was that the British Government knew France to be sincere, and shrank from negotiation lest it should expose their own desire to prosecute the war.[1] Most happy, again, is his criticism of Lord Grenville's note, with its references to the unprovoked aggression of France (in the matter of the opening of the Scheldt, etc.) as the sole cause and origin of the war. "If this were indeed true, in what ignorance must not Mr. Pitt and Mr. Windham have kept the poor Duke of Portland, who declared in the House of Lords that the cause of the war was the maintenance of the Christian religion?"

To add literary excellence of the higher order to the peculiar qualities which give force to the newspaper arti-

[1] Alas, that the facts should be so merciless to the most excellent arguments! Coleridge could not foresee that Napoleon would, years afterwards, admit in his own Memoirs the insincerity of his overtures. "I had need of war; a treaty of peace . . . would have withered every imagination." And when Mr. Pitt's answer arrived, "it filled me with a secret satisfaction."

cle is for a journalist, of course, a "counsel of perfection;" but it remains to be remarked that Coleridge did make this addition in a most conspicuous manner. Mrs. H. N. Coleridge's three volumes of her father's *Essays on his own Times* deserve to live as literature apart altogether from their merits as journalism. Indeed, among the articles in the *Morning Post* between 1799 and 1802 may be found some of the finest specimens of Coleridge's maturer prose style. The character of Pitt, which appeared on 19th March, 1800, is as remarkable for its literary merits as it is for the almost humorous political perversity which would not allow the Minister any single merit except that which he owed to the sedulous rhetorical training received by him from his father, viz., "a premature and unnatural dexterity in the combination of words."[1] The letters to Fox, again, though a little artificialised perhaps by reminiscences of Junius, are full of weight and dignity. But by far the most piquant illustration of Coleridge's peculiar power is to be found in the comparison between his own version of Pitt's speech of 17th February, 1800, on the continuance of the war, with the report of it which appeared in the *Times* of that date. With the exception of

[1] The following passage, too, is curious as showing how polemics, like history, repeat themselves. "As his reasonings were, so is his eloquence. One character pervades his whole being. Words on words, finely arranged, and so dexterously consequent that the whole bears the semblance of argument and still keeps awake a sense of surprise; but, when all is done, nothing rememberable has been said; no one philosophical remark, no one image, not even a pointed aphorism. Not a sentence of Mr. Pitt's has ever been quoted, or formed the favourite phrase of the day—a thing unexampled in any man of equal reputation." With the alteration of one word — the proper name—this passage might have been taken straight from some political diatribe of to-day.

a few unwarranted elaborations of the arguments here and there, the two speeches are in substance identical; but the effect of the contrast between the Minister's cold state-paper periods and the life and glow of the poet-journalist's style is almost comic. Mr. Gillman records that Canning, calling on business at the editor's, inquired, as others had done, who was the reporter of the speech for the *Morning Post*, and, on being told, remarked drily that the report "did more credit to his head than to his memory."

On the whole one can well understand Mr. Stuart's anxiety to secure Coleridge's permanent collaboration with him in the business of journalism; and it would be possible to maintain, with less of paradox than may at first sight appear, that it would have been better not only for Coleridge himself but for the world at large if the editor's efforts had been successful. It would indeed have been bowing the neck to the yoke; but there are some natures upon which constraint of that sort exercises not a depressing but a steadying influence. What, after all, would the loss in hours devoted to a comparatively inferior class of literary labour have amounted to when compared with the gain in much-needed habits of method and regularity, and—more valuable than all to an intellect like Coleridge's—in the constant reminder that human life is finite and the materials of human speculation infinite, and that even a world-embracing mind must apportion its labour to its day? There is, however, the great question of health to be considered—*the* question, as every one knows, of Coleridge's whole career and life. If health was destined to give way, in any event—if its collapse, in fact, was simply the cause of all the lamentable external results which followed it, while itself due only to predetermined internal conditions over which the sufferer had no control—then to be sure

cadit quæstio. At London or at the Lakes, among newspaper files or old folios, Coleridge's life would in that case have run the same sad course; and his rejection of Mr. Stuart's offer becomes a matter of no particular interest to disappointed posterity. But be that as it may, the "old folios" won the day. In the summer of 1800 Coleridge quitted London, and having wound up his affairs at his then place of residence, removed with his wife and children to a new and beautiful home in that English Lake country with which his name was destined, like those of Southey and Wordsworth, to be enduringly associated.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT KESWICK.—SECOND PART OF "CHRISTABEL."—FAILING HEALTH.—RESORT TO OPIUM.—THE "ODE TO DEJECTION."—INCREASING RESTLESSNESS.—VISIT TO MALTA.

[1800–1804.]

We are now approaching the turning-point, moral and physical, of Coleridge's career. The next few years determined not only his destiny as a writer but his life as a man. Between his arrival at Keswick in the summer of 1800 and his departure for Malta in the spring of 1804 that fatal change of constitution, temperament, and habits which governed the whole of his subsequent history had fully established itself. Between these two dates he was transformed from the Coleridge of whom his young fellow-students in Germany have left us so pleasing a picture into the Coleridge whom distressed kinsmen, alienated friends, and a disappointed public were to have before them for the remainder of his days. Here, then, at Keswick, and in these first two or three years of the century—here or nowhere is the key to the melancholy mystery to be found.

It is probable that only those who have gone with some minuteness into the facts of this singular life are aware how great was the change effected during this very short period of time. When Coleridge left London for the Lake country, he had not completed his eight-and-twentieth

year. Before he was thirty he wrote that *Ode to Dejection* in which his spiritual and moral losses are so pathetically bewailed. His health and spirits, his will and habits, may not have taken any unalterable bent for the worse until 1804, the year of his departure for Malta—the date which I have thought it safest to assign as the definitive close of the earlier and happier period of his life; but undoubtedly the change had fully manifested itself more than two years before. And a very great and painful one it assuredly was. We know from the recorded evidence of Dr. Carrlyon and others that Coleridge was full of hope and gaiety, full of confidence in himself and of interest in life during his few months' residence in Germany. The *annus mirabilis* of his poetic life was but two years behind him, and his achievements of 1797–98 seemed to him but a mere earnest of what he was destined to accomplish. His powers of mental concentration were undiminished, as his student days at Göttingen sufficiently proved; his conjugal and family affections, as Dr. Carrlyon notes for us, were still unimpaired; his own verse gives signs of a home-sickness and a yearning for his own fireside which were in melancholy contrast with the restlessness of his later years. Nay, even after his return to England, and during the six months of his regular work on the *Morning Post*, the vigour of his political articles entirely negatives the idea that any relaxation of intellectual energy had as yet set in. Yet within six months of his leaving London for Keswick there begins a progressive decline in Coleridge's literary activity in every form. The second part of *Christabel*, beautiful but inferior to the first, was composed in the autumn of 1800, and for the next two years, so far as the higher forms of literature are concerned, "the rest is silence." The author of the pref-

atory memoir in the edition of Coleridge's *Poetical and Dramatic Works* (1880) enumerates some half-dozen slight pieces contributed to the *Morning Post* in 1801, but declares that Coleridge's poetical contributions to this paper during 1802 were "very rich and varied, and included the magnificent ode entitled *Dejection*." Only the latter clause of this statement is entitled, I think, to command our assent. Varied though the list may be, it is hardly to be described as "rich." It covers only about seven weeks in the autumn of 1802, and, with the exception of the *Lovers' Resolution* and the "magnificent ode" referred to, the pieces are of the shortest and slightest kind. Nor is it accurate to say that the "political articles of the same period were also numerous and important." On the contrary, it would appear from an examination of Mrs. H. N. Coleridge's collection that her father's contributions to the *Post* between his departure from London and the autumn of 1802 were few and intermittent, and in August, 1803, the proprietorship of that journal passed out of Mr. Stuart's hands. It is, in short, I think, impossible to doubt that very shortly after his migration to the Lake country he practically ceased not only to write poetry but to produce any mentionable quantity of *complete* work in the prose form. His mind, no doubt, was incessantly active throughout the whole of the deplorable period upon which we are now entering; but it seems pretty certain that its activity was not poetic nor even critical, but purely philosophical, and that the products of that activity went exclusively to *marginalia* and the pages of note-books.

Yet unfortunately we have almost no evidence, personal or other, from which we can with any certainty construct the psychological—if one should not rather say the physiological, or better still, perhaps, the pathological—history of

this cardinal epoch in Coleridge's life. Miss Wordsworth's diary is nearly silent about him for the next few years; he was living indeed some dozen miles from her brother at Grasmere, and they could not therefore have been in daily intercourse. Southey did not come to the Lakes till 1803, and the records of his correspondence only begin therefore from that date. Mr. Cottle's *Reminiscences* are here a blank; Charles Lamb's correspondence yields little; and though De Quincey has plenty to say about this period in his characteristic fashion, it must have been based upon pure gossip, as he cites no authorities, and did not himself make Coleridge's acquaintance till six years afterwards. This, however, is at least certain, that his gloomy accounts of his own health begin from a period at which his satisfaction with his new abode was still as fresh as ever. The house which he had taken, now historic as the residence of two famous Englishmen, enjoyed a truly beautiful situation and the command of a most noble view. It stood in the vale of Derwentwater, on the bank of the river Greta, and about a mile from the lake. When Coleridge first entered it, it was uncompleted, and an arrangement was made by which, after completion, it was to be divided between the tenant and the landlord, a Mr. Jackson. As it turned out, however, the then completed portion was shared by them in common, the other portion, and eventually the whole, being afterwards occupied by Southey.

In April, 1801, some eight or nine months after his taking possession of Greta Hall, Coleridge thus describes it to its future occupant:

"Our house stands on a low hill, the whole front of which is one field and an enormous garden, nine-tenths of which is a nursery garden. Behind the house is an orchard and a small wood on a steep slope, at the foot of which is the river Greta, which winds round and

catches the evening's light in the front of the house. In front we have a giant camp—an encamped army of tent-like mountains which, by an inverted arch, gives a view of another vale. On our right the lovely vale and the wedge-shaped lake of Bassenthwaite; and on our left Derwentwater and Lodore full in view, and the fantastic mountains of Borrowdale. Behind is the massy Skiddaw, smooth, green, high, with two chasms and a tent-like ridge in the larger. A fairer scene you have not seen in all your wanderings."

There is here no note of discontent with the writer's surroundings; and yet, adds Mr. Cuthbert Southey in his *Life and Correspondence* of his father, the remainder of this letter was filled by Coleridge with "a most gloomy account of his health." Southey writes him in reply that he is convinced that his friend's "complaint is gouty, that good living is necessary, and a good climate." In July of the same year he received a visit from Southey at Greta Hall, and one from Charles and Mary Lamb in the following summer, and it is probable that during such intervals of pleasurable excitement his health and spirits might temporarily rally. But henceforward and until his departure for Malta we gather nothing from any source as to Coleridge's *normal* condition of body and mind which is not unfavourable, and it is quite certain that he had long before 1804 enslaved himself to that fatal drug which was to remain his tyrant for the rest of his days.

When, then, and how did this slavery begin? What was the precise date of Coleridge's first experiences of opium, and what the original cause of his taking it? Within what time did its use become habitual? To what extent was the decline of his health the effect of the evil habit, and to what, if any, extent its cause? And how far, if at all, can the deterioration of his character and powers be attributed to a decay of physical constitution, brought about by influences beyond the sufferer's own control?

Could every one of these questions be completely answered, we should be in a position to solve the very obscure and painful problem before us; but though some of them can be answered with more or less approach to completeness, there is only one of them which can be finally disposed of. It is certain, and it is no doubt matter for melancholy satisfaction to have ascertained it, that Coleridge first had recourse to opium as an anodyne. It was Nature's revolt from pain, and not her appetite for pleasure, which drove him to the drug; and though De Quincey, with his almost comical malice, remarks that, though Coleridge began in the desire to obtain relief, "there is no proof that he did not end in voluptuousness," there is on the other hand no proof whatever that he did so end—*until the habit was formed.* It is quite consistent with probability, and only accords with Coleridge's own express affirmations, to believe that it was the medicinal efficacy of opium, and this quality of it alone, which induced him to resort to it again and again until his senses contracted that well-known and insatiable craving for the peculiar excitement, "voluptuous" only to the initiated, which opium-intoxication creates. But let Coleridge speak on this point for himself. Writing in April, 1826, he says:

"I wrote a few stanzas three-and-twenty years ago, soon after my eyes had been opened to the true nature of the habit into which I had been ignorantly deluded by the seeming magic effects of opium, in the sudden removal of a supposed rheumatic affection, attended with swellings in my knees and palpitation of the heart and pains all over me, by which I had been bedridden for nearly six months. Unhappily among my neighbours' and landlord's books were a large number of medical reviews and magazines. I had always a fondness (a common case, but most mischievous turn with reading men who are at all dyspeptic) for dabbling in medical writings; and in one of these reviews I met a case which I fancied very like my own, in which

a cure had been effected by the Kendal Black Drop. In an evil hour I procured it: it worked miracles — the swellings disappeared, the pains vanished. I was all alive, and all around me being as ignorant as myself, nothing could exceed my triumph. I talked of nothing else, prescribed the newly-discovered panacea for all complaints, and carried a little about with me not to lose any opportunity of administering 'instant relief and speedy cure' to all complainers, stranger or friend, gentle or simple. Alas! it is with a bitter smile, a laugh of gall and bitterness, that I recall this period of unsuspecting delusion, and how I first became aware of the Maelstrom, the fatal whirlpool to which I was drawing, just when the current was beyond my strength to stem. The state of my mind is truly portrayed in the following effusion, for God knows that from that time I was the victim of pain and terror, nor had I at any time taken the flattering poison as a stimulus or for any craving after pleasurable sensation."

The "effusion" in question has parted company with the autobiographical note, and the author of the prefatory memoir above quoted conjectures it to have been a little poem entitled the *Visionary Hope;* but I am myself of opinion, after a careful study of both pieces, that it is more probably the *Pains of Sleep*, which moreover is known to have been written in 1803. But whichever it be, its date is fixed in that year by the statement in the autobiographical note of 1826 that the stanzas referred to in it were written "twenty-three years ago." Thus, then, we have the two facts established, that the opium-taking habit had its origin in a bodily ailment, and that at some time in 1803 that habit had become confirmed. The disastrous experiment in amateur therapeutics, which was the means of implanting it, could not have taken place, according to the autobiographical note, until at least six months after Coleridge's arrival at Keswick, and perhaps not for some months later yet. At any rate, it seems tolerably certain that it was not till the spring of 1801, when the climate of the

Lake country first began to tell unfavourably on his health, that the "Kendal Black Drop" was taken. Possibly it may have been about the time (April, 1801) when he wrote the letter to Southey which has been quoted above, and which, it will be remembered, contained "so gloomy an account of his health." How painfully ailing he was at this time we know from a variety of sources, from some of which we also gather that he must have been a sufferer in more or less serious forms from his boyhood upwards. Mr. Gillman, for instance, who speaks on this point with the twofold authority of confidant and medical expert, records a statement of Coleridge's to the effect that, as a result of such schoolboy imprudences as "swimming over the New River in my clothes and remaining in them, full half the time from seventeen to eighteen was passed by me in the sick ward of Christ's Hospital, afflicted with jaundice and rheumatic fever." From these indiscretions and their consequences "may be dated," Mr. Gillman thinks, "all his bodily sufferings in future life." That he was a martyr to periodical attacks of rheumatism for some years before his migration to Keswick is a conclusion resting upon something more than conjecture. The *Ode to the Departing Year* (1796) was written, as he has himself told us, under a severe attack of rheumatism in the head. In 1797 he describes himself in ill health, and as forced to retire on that account to the "lonely farmhouse between Porlock and London on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire," where *Kubla Khan* was written.[1]

[1] Were it not for Coleridge's express statement that he first took opium at Keswick, one would be inclined to attribute the gorgeous but formless imagery of that poem to the effects of the stimulant. It is certainly very like a metrical version of one of the pleasant variety of opium-dreams described in De Quincey's poetic prose.

Thus much is, moreover, certain, that whatever were Coleridge's health and habits during the first two years of his residence at Keswick, his career as a poet—that is to say, as a poet of the first order—was closed some months before that period had expired. The ode entitled *Dejection*, to which reference has so often been made, was written on the 4th of April, 1802, and the evidential importance which attaches, in connection with the point under inquiry, to this singularly pathetic utterance has been almost universally recognised. Coleridge has himself cited its most significant passage in the *Biographia Literaria* as supplying the best description of his mental state at the time when it was written. De Quincey quotes it with appropriate comments in his *Coleridge and Opium-eating*. Its testimony is reverently invoked by the poet's son in the introductory essay prefixed by him to his edition of his father's works. The earlier stanzas are, however, so necessary to the comprehension of Coleridge's mood at this time that a somewhat long extract must be made. In the opening stanza he expresses a longing that the storm which certain atmospheric signs of a delusively calm evening appear to promise might break forth, so that

> "Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
> And sent my soul abroad,
> Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
> Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live."

And thus, with ever-deepening sadness, the poem proceeds:

> "A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
> A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
> Which finds no natural outlet, no relief
> In word, or sigh, or tear—

O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel how beautiful they are!

"My genial spirits fail,
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze forever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

"O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

"O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!

What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which, wedding Nature to us, gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light."

And then follows the much quoted, profoundly touching, deeply significant stanza to which we have referred:

"There was a time when, though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth,
But O! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural Man—
This my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul."

Sadder lines than these were never perhaps written by any poet in description of his own feelings. And what

gives them their peculiar sadness—as also, of course, their special biographical value—is that they are not, like Shelley's similarly entitled stanzas, the mere expression of a passing mood. They are the record of a life change, a veritable threnody over a spiritual death. For there can be no doubt—his whole subsequent history goes to show it—that Coleridge's "shaping spirit of Imagination" was in fact dead when these lines were written. To a man of stronger moral fibre a renascence of the poetical instinct in other forms might, as I have suggested above, been possible; but the poet of *Christabel* and the *Ancient Mariner* was dead. The metaphysician had taken his place, and was striving, in abstruse research, to live in forgetfulness of the loss. Little more, that is to say, than a twelvemonth after the composition of the second part of *Christabel* the impulse which gave birth to it had passed away forever. Opium-taking had doubtless begun by this time—may conceivably indeed have begun nearly a year before—and the mere *mood* of the poem, the temporary phase of feeling which directed his mind inwards into deeper reflections on its permanent state, is no doubt strongly suggestive, in its excessive depression, of the terrible reaction which is known to follow upon opium-excitement. But, I confess, it seems to me improbable that even the habitual use of the stimulant for so comparatively short a time as twelve months could have produced so profound a change in Coleridge's intellectual nature. I cannot but think that De Quincey overstates the case in declaring that "opium killed Coleridge as a poet," though it may well be that, after the collapse of health, which appears to me to have been the real *causa causans* in the matter, had killed the poet as we know him, opium prevented his resurrection in another and it may be but little

inferior form. On the whole, in fact, the most probable account of this all-important era in Coleridge's life appears to me to be this: that in the course of 1801, as he was approaching his thirtieth year, a distinct change for the worse — precipitated possibly, as Mr. Gillman thinks, by the climate of his new place of abode—took place in his constitution; that his rheumatic habit of body, and the dyspeptic trouble by which it was accompanied, became confirmed; and that the severe attacks of the acute form of the malady which he underwent produced such a permanent lowering of his vitality and animal spirits as, *first*, to extinguish the creative impulse, and *then* to drive him to the physical anodyne of opium and to the mental stimulant of metaphysics.

From the summer of 1801, at any rate, his *malaise*, both of mind and body, appears to have grown apace. Repeated letters from Southey allow us to see how deeply concerned he was at this time about his friend's condition. Plans of foreign travel are discussed between them, and Southey endeavours in vain to spur his suffering and depressed correspondent to "the assertion of his supremacy" in some new literary work. But, with the exception of his occasional contributions to the press, whatever he committed to paper during these years exists only, if at all, in a fragmentary form. And his restlessness, continually on the increase, appears by the end of 1802 to have become ungovernable. In November of that year he eagerly accepted an offer from Thomas Wedgwood to become his companion on a tour, and he spent this and the greater part of the following month in South Wales with some temporary advantage, it would seem, to his health and spirits. "Coleridge," writes Mr. Wedgwood to a friend, "is all kindness to me, and in prodigious favour here.

He is quite easy, cheerful, and takes great pains to make himself pleasant. He is willing, indeed desirous, to accompany me to any part of the globe." "Coll and I," he writes on another occasion, the abbreviation of name having been suggested to him by Coleridge himself, "harmonise amazingly," and adds that his companion "takes long rambles, and writes a great deal." But the fact that such changes of air and scene produced no permanent effect upon the invalid after his return to his own home appears to show that now, at any rate, his fatal habit had obtained a firm hold upon him. And his "writing a great deal resulted" only in the filling of many notebooks, and perhaps the sketching out of many of those vast schemes of literary labour of which he was destined to leave so remarkable a collection at his death. One such we find him forwarding to Southey in the August of 1803—the plan of a Bibliotheca Britannica, or "History of British Literature, bibliographical, biographical, and critical," in eight volumes. The first volume was to contain a "complete history of all Welsh, Saxon, and Erse books that are not translations, but the native growth of Britain;" to accomplish which, writes Coleridge, "I will with great pleasure join you in learning Welsh and Erse." The second volume was to contain the history of English poetry and poets, including "all prose truly poetical." The third volume "English prose, considered as to style, as to eloquence, as to general impressiveness; a history of styles and manners, their causes, their birthplace and parentage, their analysis." The fourth volume would take up "the history of metaphysics, theology, medicine, alchemy; common, canon, and Roman law from Alfred to Henry VII." The fifth would "carry on metaphysics and ethics to the present day in the first half, and comprise in the second

half the theology of all the reformers." In the sixth and seventh volumes were to be included "all the articles you (Southey) can get on all the separate arts and sciences that have been treated of in books since the Reformation; and by this time," concludes the enthusiastic projector, "the book, if it answered at all, would have gained so high a reputation that you need not fear having whom you liked to write the different articles—medicine, surgery, chemistry, etc.; navigation, travellers' voyages, etc., etc." There is certainly a melancholy humour in the formulation of so portentous a scheme by a man who was at this moment wandering aimlessly among the lakes and mountains, unable to settle down to any definite piece of literary work, or even to throw off a fatal habit, which could not fail, if persevered in, to destroy all power of steady application in the future. That neither the comic nor the pathetic element in the situation was lost upon Southey is evident from his half-sad, half-satirical, wholly winning reply. "Your plan," he writes, "is too good, too gigantic, quite beyond my powers. If you had my tolerable state of health and that love of steady and productive employment which is now grown into a necessary habit with me, if you were to execute and would execute it, it would be beyond all doubt the most valuable work of any age or any country; but I cannot fill up such an outline. No man can better feel where he fails than I do, and to rely upon you for whole quartos! Dear Coleridge, the smile that comes with that thought is a very melancholy one; and if Edith saw me now she would think my eyes were weak again, when in truth the humour that covers them springs from another cause." A few weeks after this interchange of correspondence Coleridge was once again to prove how far he was from possessing Southey's "tolerable state of

health." Throughout the whole of this year he had been more restless than ever. In January, 1803, we find him staying with Southey at Bristol, "suffering terribly from the climate, and talking of going abroad." A week later he is at Stowey, planning schemes, not destined to be realised, of foreign travel with Wedgwood. Returning again to Keswick, he started, after a few months' quiescence, on 15th August, in company with Wordsworth and his sister, for a tour in Scotland, but after a fortnight he found himself too ill to proceed. The autumn rains set in, and "poor Coleridge," writes Miss Wordsworth, "being very unwell, determined to send his clothes to Edinburgh, and make the best of his way thither, being afraid to face much wet weather in an open carriage." It is possible, however, that his return to Keswick may have been hastened by the circumstance that Southey, who had paid a brief visit to the Lake country two years before, was expected in a few days at the house which was destined to be his abode for the longest portion of his life. He arrived at Greta Hall on 7th September, 1803, and from time to time during the next six months his correspondence gives us occasional glimpses of Coleridge's melancholy state. At the end of December, his health growing steadily worse, he conceived the project of a voyage to Madeira, and quitted Keswick with the intention, after paying a short visit to the Wordsworths, of betaking himself to London to make preparations. His stay at Grasmere, however, was longer than he had counted on. "He was detained for a month by a severe attack of illness, induced, if his description is to be relied on, by the use of narcotics.[1] Unsuspicious of the

[1] See Miss Meteyard (*A Group of Englishmen*, p. 223). Her evidence, however, on any point otherwise doubtful in Coleridge's history should be received with caution, as her estimate of the poet certainly errs somewhat on the side of excessive harshness.

cause, Mrs. and Miss Wordsworth nursed him with the tenderest affection, while the poet himself, usually a parsimonious man, forced upon him, to use Coleridge's own words, a hundred pounds in the event of his going to Madeira, and his friend Stuart offered to befriend him." From Grasmere he went to Liverpool, where he spent a pleasant week with his old Unitarian friend, Dr. Crompton, and arrived in London at the close of 1803. Here, however, his plans were changed. Malta was substituted for Madeira, in response to an invitation from his friend Mr., afterwards Sir John, Stoddart, then resident as judge in the Mediterranean island. By 12th March, as we gather from the Southey correspondence, the change of arrangements had been made. Two days afterwards he receives a letter of valediction from his "old friend and brother" at Greta Hall, and on 2d April, 1804, he sailed from England in the *Speedwell*, dropping anchor sixteen days later in Valetta harbour.

CHAPTER VI.

STAY AT MALTA.—ITS INJURIOUS EFFECTS.—RETURN TO ENGLAND.—MEETING WITH DE QUINCEY.—RESIDENCE IN LONDON.—FIRST SERIES OF LECTURES.

[1806–1809.]

NEVER was human being destined so sadly and signally to illustrate the *cœlum non animum* aphorism as the unhappy passenger on the *Speedwell*. Southey shall describe his condition when he left England; and his own pathetic lines to William Wordsworth will picture him to us on his return. "You are in great measure right about Coleridge," writes the former to his friend Rickman, "he is worse in body than you seem to believe; but the main cause lies in his own management of himself, or rather want of management. His mind is in a perpetual St. Vitus's dance—eternal activity without action. At times he feels mortified that he should have done so little, but this feeling never produces any exertion. 'I will begin to-morrow,' he says, and thus he has been all his life long letting to-day slip. He has had no heavy calamities in life, and so contrives to be miserable about trifles. Poor fellow, there is no one thing which gives me so much pain as the witnessing such a waste of unequalled powers." Then, after recalling the case of a highly promising schoolfellow, who had made shipwreck of his life, and whom "a few indi-

viduals only remember with a sort of horror and affection, which just serves to make them melancholy whenever they think of him or mention his name," he adds: "This will not be the case with Coleridge; the *disjecta membra* will be found if he does not die early: but having so much to do, so many errors to weed out of the world which he is capable of eradicating, if he does die without doing his work, it would half break my heart, for no human being has had more talents allotted." Such being his closest friend's account of him, and knowing, as we now do (what Southey perhaps had no suspicion of at the time), the chief if not the sole or original cause of his morally nerveless condition, it is impossible not to feel that he did the worst possible thing for himself in taking this journey to Malta. In quitting England he cut himself off from those last possibilities of self-conquest which the society and counsels of his friends might otherwise have afforded him, and the consequences were, it is to be feared, disastrous. After De Quincey's incredibly cool assertion that it was "notorious that Coleridge began the use of opium, not as a relief from any bodily pain or nervous irritations, since his constitution was strong and excellent (!), but as a source of luxurious sensations," we must receive anything which he has to say on this particular point with the utmost caution; but there is only too much plausibility in his statement that, Coleridge being necessarily thrown, while at Malta, "a good deal upon his own resources in the narrow society of a garrison, he there confirmed and cherished . . . his habit of taking opium in large quantities." Contrary to his expectations, moreover, the Maltese climate failed to benefit him. At first, indeed, he did experience some feeling of relief, but afterwards, according to Mr. Gillman, he spoke of his rheumatic limbs as "lifeless tools,"

and of the "violent pains in his bowels, which neither opium, ether, nor peppermint combined could relieve."

Occupation, however, was not wanting to him, if occupation could have availed in the then advanced stage of his case. He early made the acquaintance of the governor of the island, Sir Alexander Ball, who, having just lost his secretary by death, requested Coleridge to undertake that official's duties until his successor should be appointed. By this arrangement the governor and the public service in all likelihood profited more than the provisional secretary; for Coleridge's literary abilities proved very serviceable in the department of diplomatic correspondence. The dignities of the office, Mr. Gillman tells us, no doubt on Coleridge's own authority, "he never attempted to support; he was greatly annoyed at what he thought its unnecessary parade, and he petitioned Sir Alexander Ball to be relieved from it." The purely mechanical duties of the post, too, appear to have troubled him. He complains, in one of the journals which he kept during this period, of having been "for months past incessantly employed in official tasks, subscribing, examining, administering oaths, auditing, etc." On the whole it would seem that the burden of his secretarial employment, though doubtless it would have been found light enough by any one accustomed to public business, was rather a weariness to the flesh than a distraction to the mind; while in the meantime a new symptom of disorder —a difficulty of breathing, to which he was always afterwards subject—began to manifest itself in his case. Probably he was glad enough—relieved, in more than one sense of the word—when, in the autumn of 1805, the new secretary arrived at Malta to take his place.

On 27th September Coleridge quitted the island on his

homeward journey *via* Italy, stopping for a short time at Syracuse on his way. At Naples, which he reached on the 15th of December, he made a longer stay, and in Rome his sojourn lasted some months. Unfortunately, for a reason which will presently appear, there remains no written record of his impressions of the Eternal City; and though Mr. Gillman assures us that the gap is "partly filled by his own verbal account, repeated at various times to the writer of this memoir," the public of to-day is only indebted to "the writer of this memoir" for the not very startling information that Coleridge, "while in Rome, was actively employed in visiting the great works of art, statues, pictures, buildings, palaces, etc. etc., observations on which he minuted down for publication." It is somewhat more interesting to learn that he made the acquaintance of many literary and artistic notabilities at that time congregated there, including Tieck, the German poet and novelist, and the American painter Alston, to whose skill we owe what is reputed to be the best of his many not easily reconcilable portraits. The loss of his Roman memoranda was indirectly brought about by a singular incident, his account of which has met with some undeserved ridicule at the hands of Tory criticism. When about to quit Rome for England *via* Switzerland and Germany he took the precaution of inquiring of Baron von Humboldt, brother of the traveller, and then Prussian Minister at the Court of Rome, whether the proposed route was safe, and was by him informed that he would do well to keep out of the reach of Bonaparte, who was meditating the seizure of his person. According to Coleridge, indeed, an order for his arrest had actually been transmitted to Rome, and he was only saved from its execution by the connivance of the "good old Pope," Pius VII., who sent him a passport and counselled

his immediate flight. Hastening to Leghorn, he discovered an American vessel ready to sail for England, on board of which he embarked. On the voyage she was chased by a French vessel, which so alarmed the captain that he compelled Coleridge to throw his papers, including these precious MSS., overboard. The wrath of the First Consul against him was supposed to have been excited by his contributions to the *Morning Post*, an hypothesis which De Quincey reasonably finds by no means so ridiculous as it appeared to a certain writer in *Blackwood*, who treated it as the "very consummation of moon-struck vanity," and compared it to "John Dennis's frenzy in retreating from the sea-coast under the belief that Louis XIV. had commissioned commissaries to land on the English shore and make a dash at his person." It must be remembered, however, that Mr. Fox, to whose statement on such a point Napoleon would be likely to attach especial weight, had declared in the House of Commons that the rupture of the Peace of Amiens had been brought about by certain essays in the *Morning Post*, and there is certainly no reason to believe that a tyrant whose animosity against literary or quasi-literary assailants ranged from Madame de Staël down to the bookseller Palm would have regarded a man of Coleridge's reputation in letters as beneath the stoop of his vengeance.

After an absence of two years and a half Coleridge arrived in England in August, 1806. That his then condition of mind and body was a profoundly miserable one, and that he himself was acutely conscious of it, will be seen later on in certain extracts from his correspondence; but his own *Lines to William Wordsworth*—lines "composed on the night after his recitation of a poem on the growth of an individual mind"—contain an even more

tragic expression of his state. It was Wordworth's pensive retrospect of their earlier years together which awoke the bitterest pangs of self-reproach in his soul, and wrung from it the cry which follows:

> "Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn
> The pulses of my being beat anew:
> And even as life returns upon the drowned,
> Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains—
> Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
> Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
> And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of hope;
> And hope that scarce would know itself from fear;
> Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
> And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;
> And all which I had culled in wood-walks wild,
> And all which patient toil had reared, and all
> Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers
> Strewn on my corse, and borne upon my bier,
> In the same coffin, for the self-same grave!"

A dismal and despairing strain, indeed, but the situation unhappily was not less desperate. We are, in fact, entering upon that period of Coleridge's life—a period, roughly speaking, of about ten years — which no admirer of his genius, no lover of English letters, no one, it might even be said, who wishes to think well of human nature, can ever contemplate without pain. His history from the day of his landing in England in August, 1806, till the day when he entered Mr. Gillman's house in 1816, is one long and miserable story of self-indulgence and self-reproach, of lost opportunities, of neglected duties, of unfinished undertakings. His movements and his occupation for the first year after his return are not now traceable with exactitude, but his time was apparently spent partly in London and partly at Grasmere and Keswick. When in London, Mr. Stuart,

who had now become proprietor of the *Courier*, allowed him to occupy rooms at the office of that newspaper to save him expense; and Coleridge, though his regular connection with the *Courier* did not begin till some years afterwards, may possibly have repaid the accommodation by occasional contributions or by assistance to its editor in some other form. It seems certain, at any rate, that if he was earning no income in this way he was earning none at all. His friend and patron, Mr. Thomas Wedgwood, had died while he was in Malta; but the full pension of £150 per annum bestowed upon him by the two brothers jointly continued to be paid to him by Josiah, the senior. Coleridge, however, had landed in England in ignorance of his patron's death. He had wholly neglected to keep up any correspondence with the Wedgwoods during his stay in Malta, and though "dreadfully affected" by it, as Mr. Poole records, he seems to have allowed nearly a year to elapse before communicating with the surviving brother. The letter which he then wrote deserves quotation, not only as testimony to his physical and pecuniary condition on his arrival in England, but as affording a distressing picture of the morbid state of his emotions and the enfeebled condition of his will. "As to the reasons for my silence, they are," he incoherently begins, "impossible, and the numbers of the *causes* of it, with the almost weekly expectation for the last eight months of receiving my books, manuscripts, etc., from Malta, has been itself a cause of increasing the procrastination which constant ill health, despondency, domestic distractions, and embarrassment from accidents, equally unconnected with my will or conduct" [every cause mentioned, it will be seen, but the true one], "had already seated deep in my very muscles, as it were. I do not mean to accuse myself of idleness—I have

enough of self-crimination without adding imaginary articles—but in all things that affect my moral feelings I have sunk under such a strange cowardice of pain that I have not unfrequently kept letters from persons dear to me for weeks together unopened. After a most miserable passage from Leghorn of fifty-five days, during which my life was twice given over, I found myself again in my native country, ill, penniless, and worse than homeless. I had been near a month in the country before I ventured or could summon courage enough to ask a question concerning you and yours, and yet God Almighty knows that every hour the thought had been gnawing at my heart. I then for the first time heard of that event which sounded like my own knell, without its natural hope or sense of rest. Such shall I be (is the thought that haunts me), but O! not such; O! with what a different retrospect! But I owe it to justice to say, Such good I truly can do myself, etc., etc." The rest of this painfully inarticulate letter is filled with further complaints of ill health, with further protestations of irresponsibility for the neglect of duties, and with promises, never to be fulfilled, of composing or assisting others to compose a memoir of Thomas Wedgwood, who, in addition to his general repute as a man of culture, had made a special mark by his speculations in psychology.

The singular expression, "worse than homeless," and the reference to domestic distractions, appear to indicate that some estrangement had already set in between Coleridge and his wife. De Quincey's testimony to its existence at the time (a month or so later) when he made Coleridge's acquaintance may, subject to the usual deductions, be accepted as trustworthy; and, of course, for aught we know, it may then have been already of some years' standing.

That the provocation to it on the husband's part may be so far antedated is at least a reasonable conjecture. There may be nothing—in all likelihood there is nothing—worth attention in De Quincey's gossip about the young lady, "intellectually very much superior to Mrs. Coleridge, who became a neighbour and daily companion of Coleridge's walks" at Keswick. But if there be no foundation for his remarks on "the mischiefs of a situation which exposed Mrs. Coleridge to an invidious comparison with a more intellectual person," there is undoubtedly plenty of point in the immediately following observation that "it was most unfortunate for Coleridge himself to be continually compared with one so ideally correct and regular in his habits as Mr. Southey." The passion of female jealousy assuredly did not need to be called into play to account for the alienation of Mrs. Coleridge from her husband. Mrs. Carlyle has left on record her pathetic lament over the fate of a woman who marries a man of genius; but a man of genius of the coldly selfish and exacting type of the Chelsea philosopher would probably be a less severe burden to a woman of housewifely instincts than the weak, unmethodical, irresolute, shiftless being that Coleridge had by this time become. After the arrival of the Southeys, Mrs. Coleridge would indeed have been more than human if she had not looked with an envious eye upon the contrast between her sister Edith's lot and her own. For this would give her the added pang of perceiving that she was specially unlucky in the matter, and that men of genius could ("if they chose," as she would probably, though not perhaps quite justly have put it) make very good husbands indeed. If one poet could finish his poems, and pay his tradesmen's bills, and work steadily for the publishers in his own house without the necessity of periodical flittings

to various parts of the United Kingdom or the Continent, why, so could another. With such reflections as these Mrs. Coleridge's mind was no doubt sadly busy during the early years of her residence at the Lakes, and, since their causes did not diminish but rather increased in intensity as time went on, the estrangement between them—or rather, to do Coleridge justice, her estrangement from her husband — had, by 1806, no doubt become complete. The fatal habit which even up to this time seems to have been unknown to most of his friends could hardly have been a secret to his wife, and his four or five years of slavery to it may well have worn out her patience.

This single cause indeed, namely, Coleridge's addiction to opium, is quite sufficient, through the humiliations, discomfort, and privations, pecuniary and otherwise, for which the vice was no doubt mediately or immediately responsible, to account for the unhappy issue of a union which undoubtedly was one of love to begin with, and which seems to have retained that character for at least six years of its course. We have noted the language of warm affection in which the "beloved Sara" is spoken of in the early poems, and up to the time of Coleridge's stay in Germany his feelings towards his wife remained evidently unchanged. To his children, of whom three out of the four born to him had survived, he was deeply attached; and the remarkable promise displayed by the eldest son, Hartley, and his youngest child and only daughter, Sara, made them objects of no less interest to his intellect than to his heart. "Hartley," he writes to Mr. Poole in 1803, "is a strange, strange boy, exquisitely wild, an utter visionary; like the moon among thin clouds, he moves in a circle of light of his own making. He alone is a light of his own." And of his daughter in the same poetic strain: "My meek lit-

tle Sara is a remarkably interesting baby, with the finest possible skin, and large blue eyes, and she smiles as if she were basking in a sunshine as mild as moonlight of her own quiet happiness." Derwent, a less remarkable but no less attractive child than his brother and sister (whom he was destined long to survive), held an equal place in his father's affections. Yet all these interwoven influences—a deep love of his children and a sincere attachment to his wife, of whom, indeed, he never ceased to speak with respect and regard—were as powerless as in so many thousands of other cases they have been, to brace an enfeebled will to the task of self-reform. In 1807 "respect and regard" had manifestly taken the place of any warmer feeling in his mind. Later on in the letter above quoted he says, "In less than a week I go down to Ottery, with my children and their mother, from a sense of duty" (*i.e.* to his brother, the Rev. George Coleridge, who had succeeded his father as head-master of the Ottery St. Mary Grammar School) "as far as it affects myself, and from a promise made to Mrs. Coleridge, as far as it affects her, and indeed of a debt of respect to her for her many praiseworthy qualities." When husbands and wives take to liquidating debts of this kind, and in this spirit, it is pretty conclusive evidence that all other accounts between them are closed.

The letter from which these extracts have been taken was written from Aisholt, near Bridgewater, where Coleridge was then staying, with his wife and children, as the guest of a Mr. Price; and his friend Poole's description to Josiah Wedgwood of his state at that time is significant as showing that some at least of his intimate acquaintances had no suspicion of the real cause of his bodily and mental disorders. "I admire him," Poole writes,

"and pity him more than ever. His information is much extended, the *great* qualities of his mind heightened and better disciplined, but alas! his health is much weaker, and his great failing, procrastination, or the incapability of acting agreeably to his wish and will, much increased."

Whether the promised visit to Ottery St. Mary was ever paid there is no record to show, but at the end of July, 1807, we again hear of the Coleridges at the house of a Mr. Chubb, a descendant of the Deist, at Bridgewater; and here it was that De Quincey, after having endeavoured in vain to run the poet to earth at Stowey, where he had been staying with Mr. Poole, and whence he had gone to pay a short visit to Lord Egmont, succeeded in obtaining an introduction to him. The characteristic passage in which the younger man describes their first meeting is too long for quotation, and it is to be hoped too well known to need it; his vivid and acute criticism of Coleridge's conversation may be more appropriately cited hereafter. His evidence as to the conjugal relations of Coleridge and his wife has been already discussed; and the last remaining point of interest about this memorable introduction is the testimony which it incidentally affords to De Quincey's genuine and generous instinct of hero-worship, and to the depth of Coleridge's pecuniary embarrassments. The loan of £300, which the poet's enthusiastic admirer insisted on Cottle's conveying to him as from an unknown "young man of fortune who admired his talents," should cover a multitude of De Quincey's subsequent sins. It was indeed only upon Cottle's urgent representation that he had consented to reduce the sum from £500 to £300. Nor does there seem any doubt of his having honestly attempted to conceal his own identity

with the nameless benefactor, though, according to his own later account, he failed.[1]

This occurred in November, 1807, and in the previous month De Quincey had been able to render Coleridge a minor service, while at the same moment gratifying a long cherished wish of his own. Mrs. Coleridge was about to return with her children to Keswick, but her husband, not yet master of this £300 windfall, and undoubtedly at his wits' end for money, was arranging for a course of lectures to be delivered at the Royal Institution early in the ensuing year, and could not accompany them. De Quincey offered accordingly to be their escort, and duly conducted them to Wordsworth's house, thus making the acquaintance of the second of his two great poetical idols within a few months of paying his first homage to the other. In February, 1808, Coleridge again took up his abode in London at his old free quarters in the *Courier* office, and began the delivery of a promised series of sixteen lectures on Poetry and the Fine Arts. "I wish you could see him," again writes Poole to Wedgwood, "you would pity and admire. He is much improved, but has still less voluntary power than ever. Yet he is so committed that I think he must deliver these lectures." Considering that the authorities of the Royal Institution had agreed to pay him one hundred guineas for delivering the lectures, he undoubtedly was more or less "committed;" and his voluntary power, however small, might be safely supposed to

[1] "In a letter written by him (Coleridge) about fifteen years after that time, I found that he had become aware of all the circumstances, perhaps through some indiscretion of Mr. Cottle's." Perhaps, however, no very great indiscretion on Mr. Cottle's part was needed to enable Coleridge to trace the loan to so ardent a young admirer and disciple.

be equal to the task of fulfilling a contract. But to get the lecturer into the lecture-room does not amount to much more than bringing the horse to the water. You can no more make the one drink than you can prevent the other from sending his audience away thirsty. Coleridge's lectures on Poetry and the Fine Arts were confused, ill arranged, and generally disappointing to the last degree. Sometimes it was not even possible to bring the horse to the water. Charles Lamb writes to Manning on the 20th of February, 1808 (early days indeed), that Coleridge had only delivered two lectures, and that though "two more were intended, he did not come." De Quincey writes of "dismissals of audience after audience, with pleas of illness; and on many of his lecture-days I have seen all Albermarle Street closed by a lock of carriages filled with women of distinction, until the servants of the Institution or their own footmen advanced to the carriage-doors with the intelligence that Mr. Coleridge had been suddenly taken ill." Naturally there came a time when the "women of distinction" began to tire of this treatment. "The plea, which at first had been received with expressions of concern, repeated too often began to rouse disgust. Many in anger, and some in real uncertainty whether it would not be trouble thrown away, ceased to attend." And what De Quincey has to say of the lectures themselves, when they did by chance get delivered, is no less melancholy. "The lecturer's appearance," he says, "was generally that of a man struggling with pain and overmastering illness."

"His lips were baked with feverish heat, and often black in colour; and in spite of the water which he continued drinking through the whole course of the lecture, he often seemed to labour under an almost paralytic inability to raise the upper jaw from the lower"

[*i.e.*, I suppose to move the lower jaw]. "In such a state it is clear that nothing could save the lecture itself from reflecting his own feebleness and exhaustion except the advantage of having been precomposed in some happier mood. But that never happened: most unfortunately, he relied on his extempore ability to carry him through. Now, had he been in spirits, or had he gathered animation and kindled by his own emotion, no written lecture could have been more effectual than one of his unpremeditated colloquial harangues. But either he was depressed originally below the point from which reascent was possible, or else this reaction was intercepted by continual disgust from looking back upon his own ill success; for assuredly he never once recovered that free and eloquent movement of thought which he could command at any time in a private company. The passages he read, moreover, in illustrating his doctrines, were generally unhappily chosen, because chosen at haphazard, from the difficulty of finding at a moment's summons these passages which his purpose required. Nor do I remember any that produced much effect except two or three which I myself put ready marked into his hands among the *Metrical Romances*, edited by Ritson. Generally speaking, the selections were as injudicious and as inappropriate as they were ill delivered, for among Coleridge's accomplishments good reading was not one. He had neither voice (so at least *I* thought) nor management of voice. This defect is unfortunate in a public lecturer, for it is inconceivable how much weight and effectual pathos can be communicated by sonorous depth and melodious cadence of the human voice to sentiments the most trivial;[1] nor, on the other hand, how the grandest are emasculated by a style of reading which fails in distributing the lights and shadows of a musical intonation. However, this defect chiefly concerned the immediate impression; the most afflicting to a friend of Coleridge's was the entire absence of his own peculiar and majestic intellect; no heart, no soul, was in anything he said; no strength of feeling in recalling universal truths,

[1] The justice of this criticism will be acknowledged by those many persons whom Mr. Bright's great elocutionary skill has occasionally deluded into imagining that the very commonplace verse which the famous orator has been often known to quote with admiration is poetry of a high order.

no power of originality or compass of moral relations in his novelties; all was a poor, faint reflection from pearls once scattered on the highway by himself in the prodigality of his early opulence—a mendicant dependence on the alms dropped from his own overflowing treasury of happier times."

Severe as is this censure of the lectures, there is unhappily no good ground for disputing its substantial justice, and the inferences which it suggests are only too painfully plain. One can well understand Coleridge's being an ineffective lecturer, and no failure in this respect, however conspicuous, would necessarily force us to the hypothesis of physical disability. But a Coleridge who could no more *compose* a lecture than he could deliver one—a Coleridge who could neither write nor extemporise anything specially remarkable on a subject so congenial to him as that of English poetry—must assuredly have spent most of his time, whether in the lecture-room or out of it, in a state of incapacity for sustained intellectual effort. De Quincey's humorous account of the lecturer's shiftless, untidy life at the *Courier* office, and even the Rabelaisian quip which Charles Lamb throws at it in the above-quoted letter to Manning, are sufficient indications of his state at this time. "Oh, Charles," he wrote to Lamb, early in February, just before the course of lectures was to begin, "I am very, very ill. *Vixi.*" The sad truth is that, as seems to have been always the case with him when living alone, he was during these months of his residence in London more constantly and hopelessly under the dominion of opium than ever.

CHAPTER VII.

RETURN TO THE LAKES.—FROM KESWICK TO GRASMERE.—WITH WORDSWORTH AT ALLAN BANK.—THE "FRIEND."—QUITS THE LAKE COUNTRY FOREVER.

[1809–1810.]

From the close of this series of lectures in the month of May, 1808, until the end of the year it is impossible to trace Coleridge's movements or even to determine the nature of his occupation with any approach to exactitude. The probability is, however, that he remained in London at his lodgings in the *Courier* office, and that he supported himself by rendering assistance in various ways to Mr. Daniel Stuart. We know nothing of him, however, with certainty until we find him once more at the Lakes in the early part of the year 1809, but not in his own home. Wordsworth had removed from his former abode at Grasmere to Allan Bank, a larger house some three-quarters of a mile distant, and there Coleridge took up his residence, more, it would seem, as a permanent inmate of his friend's house than as a guest. The specific cause of this migration from Greta Hall to Allan Bank does not appear, but all the accessible evidence, contemporary and subsequent, seems to point to the probability that it was the result of a definite break-up of Coleridge's own home. He continued, at any rate, to reside in Wordsworth's house

during the whole seven months of his editorship of the *Friend*, a new venture in periodical literature which he undertook at this period; and we shall see that upon its failure he did not resume his residence at Greta Hall, but quitted the Lake country at once and forever.

We need not take too literally Coleridge's declaration in the *Biographia Literaria* that one "main object of his in starting the *Friend* was to establish the philosophical distinction between the Reason and the Understanding." Had this been so, or at least had the periodical been actually conducted in conformity with any such purpose, even the chagrined projector himself could scarcely have had the face to complain, as Coleridge did very bitterly, of the reception accorded to it by the public. The most unpractical of thinkers can hardly have imagined that the "general reader" would "take in" a weekly metaphysical journal published at a town in Cumberland. The *Friend* was not quite so essentially hopeless an enterprise as that would have been; but the accidents of mismanagement and imprudence soon made it, for all practical purposes, sufficiently desperate. Even the forlorn *Watchman*, which had been set on foot when Coleridge had fourteen years' less experience of the world, was hardly more certainly foredoomed. The first care of the founder of the *Friend* was to select, as the place of publication, a town exactly twenty-eight miles from his own abode—a distance virtually trebled, as De Quincey observes, "by the interposition of Kirkstone, a mountain only to be scaled by a carriage ascent of three miles, and so steep in parts that without four horses no solitary traveller can persuade the neighbouring innkeepers to convey him." Here, however, at Penrith, "by way of purchasing intolerable difficulties at the highest price," Cole-

ridge was advised and actually persuaded to set up a printer, to buy and lay in a stock of paper, types, etc., instead of resorting to some printer already established at a nearer place—as, for instance, Kendal, which was ten miles nearer, and connected with Coleridge's then place of residence by a daily post, whereas at Penrith there was no post at all. Having thus studiously and severely handicapped himself, the projector of the new periodical set to work, upon the strength of what seems to have been in great measure a fancy list of subscribers, to print and, so far as his extraordinary arrangements permitted, to circulate his journal. With *naïve* sententiousness he warns the readers of the *Biographia Literaria* against trusting, in their own case, to such a guarantee as he supposed himself to possess. "You cannot," he observes, "be certain that the names of a subscription list have been put down by sufficient authority; or, should that be ascertained, it still remains to be known whether they were not extorted by some over-zealous friend's importunity; whether the subscriber had not yielded his name merely from want of courage to say no! and with the intention of dropping the work as soon as possible." Thus, out of a hundred patrons who had been obtained for the *Friend* by an energetic canvasser, "ninety threw up the publication before the fourth number without any notice, though it was well known to them that in consequence of the distance and the slowness and irregularity of the conveyance" [it is amusing to observe the way in which Coleridge notes these drawbacks of his own creation as though they were "the act of God"] "I was compelled to lay in a stock of stamped paper for at least eight weeks beforehand, each sheet of which stood me in fivepence previous to its arrival at my printer's; though the subscription money was not to be received till the twenty

first week after the commencement of the work; and, lastly, though it was in nine cases out of ten impracticable for me to receive the money for two or three numbers without paying an equal sum for the postage."

Enough appears in this undesignedly droll account of the venture to show pretty clearly that, even had the *Friend* obtained a reasonable measure of popularity at starting, the flagrant defects in the methods of distributing and financing it must have insured its early decease. But, as a matter of fact, it had no chance of popularity from the outset. Its first number appeared on 1st August, 1809, and Coleridge, writing to Southey on 20th October of the same year, speaks of his "original apprehension" that the plan and execution of the *Friend* is so utterly unsuitable to the public taste as to preclude all rational hopes of its success. "Much," he continues, "might have been done to have made the former numbers less so, by the interposition of others written more expressly for general interest;" and he promises to do his best in future to "interpose tales and whole numbers of amusement, which will make the periods lighter and shorter." Meanwhile he begs Southey to write a letter to the *Friend* in a lively style, rallying its editor on "his Quixotism in expecting that the public will ever pretend to understand his lucubrations or feel any interest in subjects of such sad and unkempt antiquity." Southey, ever good-natured, complied, even amid the unceasing press of his work, with the request; and to the letter of lightly-touched satire which he contributed to the journal he added a few private lines of friendly counsel, strongly urging Coleridge to give two or three amusing numbers, and he would hear of admiration on every side. "Insert too," he suggested, "a few more poems — any that you have, except *Christabel*, for that is of too much value. And write *now*

that character of Bonaparte, announced in former times for 'to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow.'" It was too late, however, for good advice to be of any avail: the *Friend* was past praying for. It lingered on till its twenty-eighth number, and expired, unlike the *Watchman*, without any farewell to its friends, in the third week of March, 1810.

The republication of this periodical, or rather selections from it, which appeared in 1818, is hardly perhaps described with justice in De Quincey's words as "altogether and absolutely a new work." A reader can, at any rate, form a pretty fair estimate from it of the style and probable public attractions of the original issue; and a perusal of it, considered in its character as a bid for the patronage of the general reader, is certainly calculated to excite an astonishment too deep for words. We have, of course, to bear in mind that the standard of the readable in our grandfathers' days was a more liberal and tolerant one than it is in our own. In those days of leisurely communications and slowly moving events there was relatively at least a far larger public for a weekly issue of moral and philosophical essays, under the name of a periodical, than it would be found easy to secure at present, when even a monthly discourse upon things in general requires Mr. Ruskin's brilliancy of eloquence, vivacity of humour, and perpetual charm of unexpectedness to carry it off. Still the *Spectator* continued to be read in Coleridge's day, and people therefore must have had before them a perpetual example of what it was possible to do in the way of combining entertainment with instruction. How, then, it could have entered into the mind of the most sanguine projector to suppose that the *longueurs* and the difficulty of the *Friend* would be patiently borne with for the sake of the solid nutriment which it contained it is quite impossible to understand. Even sup-

posing that a weekly, whose avowed object was "to aid in the formation of fixed principles in politics, morals, and religion," could possibly be floated, even "with literary amusements interspersed," it is evident that very much would depend upon the character of these "amusements" themselves. In the republication of 1817 they appear under the heading of "landing-places." One of them consists of a parallel between Voltaire and Erasmus, and between Rousseau and Luther, founded, of course, on the respective attitudes of the two pairs of personages to the Revolution and the Reformation. Another at the end of the series consists of a criticism of, and panegyric on, Sir Alexander Ball, the governor of Malta. Such are the landing-places. But how should any reader, wearied with "forever climbing up the climbing wave" of Coleridge's eloquence, have found rest or refreshment on one of these uncomfortable little sandbanks? It was true that the original issue of the *Friend* contained poetical contributions which do not appear in the republication; but poetry in itself, or, at any rate, good poetry, is not a relief to the overstrained faculties, and, even if it were, the relief would have been provided at too infrequent intervals to affect the general result. The fact is, however, that Coleridge's own theory of his duty as a public instructor was in itself fatal to any hope of his venture proving a commercial success. Even when entreated by Southey to lighten the character of the periodical, he accompanies his admission of the worldly wisdom of the advice with something like a protest against such a departure from the severity of his original plan. His object, as he puts it with much cogency from his own unpractical point of view—his object being to teach men how to think on politics, religion, and morals, and

thinking being a very arduous and distasteful business to the mass of mankind, it followed that the essays of the *Friend* (and particularly the earlier essays, in which the reader required to be "grounded" in his subject) could hardly be agreeable reading. With perfect frankness indeed does he admit in his prospectus that he must "submit to be thought dull by those who seek amusement only." He hoped, however, as he says in one of his earlier essays, to become livelier as he went on. "The proper merit of a foundation is its massiveness and solidity. The conveniences and ornaments, the gilding and stucco-work, the sunshine and sunny prospects, will come with the superstructure." But the building, alas! was never destined to be completed, and the architect had his own misgivings about the attractions even of the completed edifice. "I dare not flatter myself that any endeavours of mine, compatible with the duty I owe to the truth and the hope of permanent utility, will render the *Friend* agreeable to the majority of what is called the reading public. I never expected it. How indeed could I when, etc." Yet, in spite of these professions, it is clear from the prospectus that Coleridge believed in the possibility of obtaining a public for the *Friend*. He says that "a motive for honourable ambition was supplied by the fact that every periodical paper of the kind now attempted, which had been conducted with zeal and ability, was not only well received at the time, but has become popular;" and he seems to regard it as a comparatively unimportant circumstance that the *Friend* would be distinguished from "its celebrated predecessors, the *Spectator* and the like," by the "greater length of the separate essays, by their closer connection with each other, and by the predominance of one object, and the common bearing of all to

one end." It was, of course, exactly this *plus* of prolixity and *minus* of variety which lowered the sum of the *Friend's* attractions so far below that of the *Spectator* as to deprive the success of Addison of all its value as a precedent.

Nor is it easy to agree with the editor of the reprint of 1837 that the work, "with all its imperfections, is perhaps the most vigorous" of its author's compositions. That there are passages in it which impress us by their force of expression, as well as by subtlety or beauty of thought, must of course be admitted. It was impossible to a man of Coleridge's literary power that it should be otherwise. But "vigorous" is certainly not the adjective which seems to me to suggest itself to an impartial critic of these too copious disquisitions. Making every allowance for their necessary elasticity of scope as being designed to "prepare and discipline the student's moral and intellectual being, not to propound dogmas and theories for his adoption," it must, I think, be allowed that they are wanting in that continuity of movement and co-ordination of parts which, as it seems to me, enters into any intelligible definition of "vigour," as attributed to a work of moral and political exposition considered as a whole. The writer's discursiveness is too often and too vexatiously felt by the reader to permit of the survival of any sense of theorematic unity in his mind; he soon gives up all attempts at periodical measurement of his own and his author's progress towards the prescribed goal of their journey; and he resigns himself in this, as in so many other of Coleridge's prose works, to a study of isolated and detached passages. So treated, however, one may freely admit that the *Friend* is fully worthy of the admiration with which Mr. H. N. Coleridge regarded it. If

not the most vigorous, it is beyond all comparison the most characteristic of all his uncle's performances in this field of his multiform activity. In no way could the peculiar pregnancy of Coleridge's thoughts, the more than scholastic subtlety of his dialectic, and the passionate fervour of his spirituality be more impressively exhibited than by a well-made selection of *loci* from the pages of the *Friend*.

CHAPTER VIII.

LONDON AGAIN.— SECOND RECOURSE TO JOURNALISM.— THE "COURIER" ARTICLES.— THE SHAKESPEARE LECTURES.— PRODUCTION OF "REMORSE."—AT BRISTOL AGAIN AS LECTURER.— RESIDENCE AT CALNE.— INCREASING ILL HEALTH AND EMBARRASSMENTS.—RETIREMENT TO MR. GILLMAN'S.

[1810–1816.]

THE life led by Coleridge during the six years next ensuing is difficult to trace, even in the barest outline; to give a detailed and circumstantial account of it from any ordinarily accessible source of information is impossible. Nor is it, I imagine, very probable that even the most exhaustive search among whatever unprinted records may exist in the possession of his friends would at all completely supply the present lack of biographical material. For not only had it become Coleridge's habit to disappear from the sight of his kinsmen and acquaintances for long periods together; he had fallen almost wholly silent also. They not only ceased to see him, but they ceased to hear of him. Letters addressed to him, even on subjects of the greatest importance, would remain for months unnoticed, and in many instances would receive no answer at all. His correspondence during the next half-dozen years must have been of the scantiest amount and the most intermittent character, and a biographer could hope, there-

fore, for but little aid in bridging over the large gaps in his knowledge of this period, even if every extant letter written by Coleridge during its continuance were to be given to the world.

Such light, too, as is retrospectively thrown upon it by Coleridge's correspondence of a later date is of the most fitful description — scarcely more than serves, in fact, for the rendering of darkness visible. Even the sudden and final departure from the Lakes it leaves involved in as much obscurity as ever. Writing to Mr. Thomas Allsop[1] from Ramsgate twelve years afterwards (8th October, 1822) he says that he "counts four grasping and griping sorrows in his past life." The first of these "was when" [no date given] "the vision of a happy home sank forever, and it became impossible for me longer even to hope for domestic happiness under the name of husband." That is plain enough on the whole, though it still leaves us in some uncertainty as to whether the "sinking of the vision" was as gradual as the estrangement between husband and wife, or whether he refers to some violent rupture of relations with Mrs. Coleridge, possibly precipitating his departure from the Lakes. If so, the second "griping

[1] Coleridge made the acquaintance of this gentleman, who became his enthusiastic disciple, in 1818. His chief interest for us is the fact that for the next seven years he was Coleridge's correspondent. Personally, he was a man of little judgment or critical discrimination, and his sense of the ridiculous may be measured by the following passage. Speaking of the sweetness of Charles Lamb's smile, he says that "there is still one man living, a stock-broker, who has that smile," and adds: "To those who wish to see the only thing left on earth, *if it is still left*, of Lamb, his best and most beautiful remain—his smile—I will indicate its possessor, Mr. ——, of Throgmorton Street." How the original "possessor" of this apparently assignable security would have longed to "feel Mr. Allsop's head!"

and grasping sorrow" followed very quickly on the first, for he says that it overtook him "on the night of his arrival from Grasmere with Mr. and Mrs. Montagu;" while in the same breath and paragraph, and as though undoubtedly referring to the same thing, he speaks of the "destruction of a friendship of fifteen years when, just at the moment of Fenner and Curtis's (the publishers) bankruptcy" (by which Coleridge was a heavy loser, but which did not occur till seven years afterwards), somebody indicated by seven asterisks and possessing an income of £1200 a year, was "totally transformed into baseness." There is certainly not much light here, any more than in the equally enigmatical description of the third sorrow as being "in some sort included in the second," so that "what the former was to friendship the latter was to a still more inward bond." The truth is, that all Coleridge's references to himself in his later years are shrouded in a double obscurity. One veil is thrown over them by his deliberate preference for abstract and mystical forms of expression, and another perhaps by that kind of shameful secretiveness which grows upon all men who become the slaves of concealed indulgences, and which often displays itself on occasions when it has no real object to gain of any kind whatever.

Thus much only we know, that on reaching London in the summer of 1810 Coleridge became the guest of the Montagus, and that, after some months' residence with them, he left, as the immediate result of some difference with his host which was never afterwards composed. Whether it arose from the somewhat trivial cause to which De Quincey has, admittedly upon the evidence of "the learned in literary scandal," referred it, it is now impossible to say. But at some time or other, towards the

close probably of 1810, or in the early months of 1811, Coleridge quitted Mr. Montagu's house for that of Mr. John Morgan, a companion of his early Bristol days, and a common friend of his and Southey's; and here, at No. 7 Portland Place, Hammersmith, he was residing when, for the second time, he resolved to present himself to the London public in the capacity of lecturer. His services were on this occasion engaged by the London Philosophical Society, at Crane Court, Fleet Street, and their prospectus announced that on Monday, 18th November, Mr. Coleridge would commence "a course of lectures on Shakspeare and Milton, in illustration of the principles of poetry and their application, on grounds of criticism, to the most popular works of later English poets, those of the living included. After an introductory lecture on false criticism (especially in poetry) and on its causes, two-thirds of the remaining course," continues the prospectus, "will be assigned, 1st, to a philosophical analysis and explanation of all the principal characters of our great dramatists, as Othello, Falstaff, Richard the Third, Iago, Hamlet, etc., and to a critical comparison of Shakspeare in respect of diction, imagery, management of the passions, judgment in the construction of his dramas—in short, of all that belongs to him as a poet, and as a dramatic poet, with his contemporaries or immediate successors, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Massinger, and in the endeavour to determine which of Shakspeare's merits and defects are common to him, with other writers of the same age, and what remain peculiar to his genius."

A couple of months before the commencement of this course, viz., in September, 1811, Coleridge seems to have entered into a definite journalistic engagement with his old editor, Mr. Daniel Stuart, then the proprietor of the *Cou-*

rier. It was not, however, his first connection with that journal. He had already published at least one piece of verse in its columns, and two years before, while the *Friend* was still in existence, he had contributed to it a series of letters on the struggle of the Spaniards against their French invaders. In these, as though to show that under the ashes of his old democratic enthusiasm still lived its wonted fires, and that the inspiration of a popular cause was only needed to reanimate them, we find, with less of the youthful lightness of touch and agility of movement, a very near approach to the vigour of his early journalistic days. Whatever may be thought of the historic value of the parallel which he institutes between the struggle of the Low Countries against their tyrant, and that of the Peninsula against its usurping conqueror, it is worked out with remarkable ingenuity of completeness. Whole pages of the letters are radiant with that steady flame of hatred which, ever since the hour of his disillusionment, had glowed in his breast at the name and thought of Bonaparte; and whenever he speaks of the Spaniards, of Spanish patriotism, of the Spanish Cortes, we see that the names of "the people," of "freedom," of "popular assembly," have some of their old magic for him still. The following passage is almost pathetic in its reminder of the days of 1792, before that modern Leonidas, the young French Republic, had degenerated into the Xerxes of the Empire:

"The power which raised up, established, and enriched the Dutch republic—the same mighty power is no less at work in the present struggle of the Spanish nation—a power which mocks the calculations of ordinary statecraft too subtle to be weighed against it, and mere outward brute force too different from it to admit of comparison. A power as mighty in the rational creation as the element of electricity

in the material world; and, like that element, infinite in its affinities, infinite in its mode of action, combining the most discordant natures, fixing the most volatile, and arming the sluggish vapour of the marsh with arrows of fire; working alike in silence and in tempest, in growth and in destruction; now contracted to an individual soul, and now, as in a moment, dilating itself over a whole nation! Am I asked what this mighty power may be, and wherein it exists? If we are worthy of the fame which we possess as the countrymen of Hampden, Russell, and Algernon Sidney, we shall find the answer in our own hearts. It is the power of the insulted free-will, steadied by the approving conscience and struggling against brute force and iniquitous compulsion for the common rights of human nature, brought home to our inmost souls by being, at the same time, the rights of our betrayed, insulted, and bleeding country."

And as this passage recalls the most striking characteristics of his earlier style, so may its conclusion serve as a fair specimen of the calmer eloquence of his later manner:

"It is a painful truth, sir, that these men who appeal most to facts, and pretend to take them for their exclusive guide, are the very persons who most disregard the light of experience when it refers them to the mightiness of their own inner nature, in opposition to those forces which they can see with their eyes, and reduce to figures upon a slate. And yet, sir, what is history for the greater and more useful part but a voice from the sepulchres of our forefathers, assuring us, from *their* united experience, that our spirits are as much stronger than our bodies as they are nobler and more permanent? The historic muse appears in her loftiest character as the nurse of Hope. It is her appropriate praise that her records enable the magnanimous to silence the selfish and cowardly by appealing to actual *events* for the information of these truths which they themselves first learned from the surer oracle of their own reason."

But this reanimation of energy was but a transient phenomenon. It did not survive the first freshness of its exciting cause. The Spanish insurrection grew into the Peninsular war, and though the glorious series of Welling-

ton's victories might well, one would think, have sustained the rhetorical temperature at its proper pitch, it failed to do so. Or was it, as the facts appear now and then to suggest, that Coleridge at Grasmere or Keswick—Coleridge in the inspiring (and restraining) companionship of close friends and literary compeers—was an altogether different man from Coleridge in London, alone with his thoughts and his opium? The question cannot be answered with confidence, and the fine quality of the lectures on Shakespeare is sufficient to show that, for some time, at any rate, after his final migration to London, his critical faculty retained its full vigour. But it is beyond dispute that his regular contributions to the *Courier* in 1811–12 are not only vastly inferior to his articles of a dozen years before in the *Morning Post* but fall sensibly short of the level of the letters of 1809, from which extract has just been made. Their tone is spiritless, and they even lack distinction of style. Their very subjects, and the mode of treating them, appear to show a change in Coleridge's attitude towards public affairs if not in the very conditions of his journalistic employment. They have much more of the character of newspaper hack-work than his earlier contributions. He seems to have been, in many instances, set to write a mere report, and often a rather dry and mechanical report, of this or the other Peninsular victory. He seldom or never discusses the political situation, as his wont has been, *au large;* and in place of broad statesmanlike reflection on the scenes and actors in the great world-drama then in progress, we meet with too much of that sort of criticism on the consistency and capacity of "our contemporary, the *Morning Chronicle*," which had less attraction, it may be suspected, even for the public of its own day than for the journalistic profession, while for posterity, of course, it

possesses no interest at all. The series of contributions extends from September of 1811 until April of the following year, and appears to have nearly come to a premature and abrupt close in the intermediate July, when an article written by Coleridge in strong opposition to the proposed reinstatement of the Duke of York in the command-in-chief was, by ministerial influence, suppressed before publication. This made Coleridge, as his daughter informs us on the authority of Mr. Crabb Robinson, "very uncomfortable," and he was desirous of being engaged on another paper. He wished to be connected with the *Times*, and "I spoke," says Mr. Robinson, "with Walter on the subject, but the negotiation failed."

With the conclusion of the lectures on Shakespeare, and the loss of the stimulus, slight as it then was to him, of regular duties and recurring engagements, Coleridge seems to have relapsed once more into thoroughly desultory habits of work. The series of aphorisms and reflections which he contributed in 1812 to Southey's *Omniana*, witty, suggestive, profound as many of them are, must not of course be referred to the years in which they were given to the world. They belong unquestionably to the order of *marginalia*, the scattered notes of which De Quincey speaks with not extravagant admiration, and which, under the busy pencil of a commentator always indefatigable in the *strenua inertia* of reading, had no doubt accumulated in considerable quantities over a long course of years.

The disposal, however, of this species of literary material could scarcely have been a source of much profit to him, and Coleridge's difficulties of living must by this time have been growing acute. His pension from the Wedgwoods had been assigned, his surviving son has stated, to

the use of his family, and even this had been in the previous year reduced by half. "In Coleridge's neglect," observes Miss Meteyard, "of his duties to his wife, his children, and his friends, must be sought the motives which led Mr. Wedgwood in 1811 to withdraw his share of the annuity.' An excellent, even over-anxious father, he was likely to be shocked at a neglect which imposed on the generosity of Southey, himself heavily burdened, those duties which every man of feeling and honour proudly and even jealously guards as his own. . . . The pension of £150 per annum had been originally granted with the view to secure Coleridge independence and leisure while he effected some few of his manifold projects of literary work. But ten years had passed, and these projects were still *in nubibus*—even the life of Lessing, even the briefer memoir of Thomas Wedgwood; and gifts so well intentioned, had as it were, ministered to evil rather than to good." We can hardly wonder at the step, however we may regret it; and if one of the reasons adduced in defence of it savours somewhat of the fallacy known as *à non causâ pro causâ*, we may perhaps attribute that rather to the maladroitness of Miss Meteyard's advocacy than to the weakness of Mr. Wedgwood's logic. The fact, however, that this "excellent, even over-anxious father" was shocked at a neglect which imposed a burden on the generosity of Southey, is hardly a just ground for cutting off one of the supplies by which that burden was partially relieved. As to the assignment of the pension to the family, it is impossible to question what has been positively affirmed by an actual member of that family, the Rev. Derwent Coleridge himself; though, when he adds that not only was the school education of both the sons provided from this source, but that through his (Coleridge's) influence they were both sent to college,

his statement is at variance, as will be presently seen, with an authority equal to his own.

In 1812, at any rate, we may well believe that Coleridge's necessities had become pressing, and the timely service then rendered to him by Lord Byron may have been suggested almost as much by a knowledge of his needs as by admiration for the dramatic merits of his long-since rejected tragedy. *Osorio's* time had at any rate come. The would-be fratricide changed his name to Ordonio, and ceased to stand sponsor to the play, which was rechristened *Remorse*, and accepted at last, upon Byron's recommendation, by the committee of Drury Lane Theatre, the playhouse at whose doors it had knocked vainly fifteen years before it was performed there for the first time on the 23d of January, 1813. The prologue and epilogue, without which in those times no gentleman's drama was accounted complete, was written, the former by Charles Lamb, the latter by the author himself. It obtained a brilliant success on its first representation, and was honoured with what was in those days regarded as the very respectable run of twenty nights.

The success, however, which came so opportunely for his material necessities was too late to produce any good effect upon Coleridge's mental state. But a month after the production of his tragedy we find him writing in the most dismal strain of hypochondria to Thomas Poole. The only pleasurable sensation which the success of *Remorse* had given him was, he declares, the receipt of his friend's "heart-engendered lines" of congratulation. "No grocer's apprentice, after his first month's permitted riot, was ever sicker of figs and raisins than I of hearing about the *Remorse*. The endless rat-a-tat-tat at our black-and-blue bruised doors, and my three master-fiends, proof-sheets,

letters, and—worse than these—invitations to large dinners, which I cannot refuse without offence and imputation of pride, etc., oppress me so much that my spirits quite sink under it. I have never seen the play since the first night. It has been a good thing for the theatre. They will get eight or ten thousand pounds by it, and I shall get more than by all my literary labours put together—nay, thrice as much." So large a sum of money as this must have amounted to should surely have lasted him for years; but the particular species of intemperance to which he was now hopelessly enslaved is probably the most costly of all forms of such indulgence, and it seems pretty evident that the proceeds of his theatrical *coup* were consumed in little more than a year.

Early in 1814, at any rate, Coleridge once more returned to his old occupation of lecturer, and this time not in London, but in the scene of his first appearance in that capacity. The lectures which he proposed to deliver at Bristol were, in fact, a repetition of the course of 1811–12; but the ways of the lecturer, to judge from an amusing story recorded by Cottle, more nearly resembled his proceedings in 1808. A "brother of Mr. George Cumberland," who happened to be his fellow-traveller to Bristol on this occasion, relates that before the coach started Coleridge's attention was attracted by a little Jew boy selling pencils, with whom he entered into conversation, and with whose superior qualities he was so impressed as to declare that "if he had not an important engagement at Bristol he would stay behind to provide some better condition for the lad." The coach having started, "the gentleman" (for his name was unknown to the narrator of the incident) "talked incessantly and in a most entertaining way for thirty miles out of London, and, after-

wards, with little intermission till they reached Marlborough," when he discovered that a lady in the coach with him was a particular friend of his; and on arriving at Bath he quitted the coach declaring that he was determined not to leave her till he had seen her safe to her brother's door in North Wales. This was the day fixed for the delivery of Coleridge's first lecture. Two or three days afterwards, having completed his *détour* by North Wales, he arrived at Bristol; another day was fixed for the commencement of the course, and Coleridge then presented himself an hour after the audience had taken their seats. The "important engagement" might be broken, it seems, for a mere whim, though not for a charitable impulse—a distinction testifying to a mixture of insincerity and unpunctuality not pleasant to note as an evidence of the then state of Coleridge's emotions and will.

Thus inauspiciously commenced, there was no reason why the Bristol lectures of 1814 should be more successful than the London Institution lectures of 1808; nor were they, it appears, in fact. They are said to have been "sparsely attended"—no doubt owing to the natural unwillingness of people to pay for an hour's contemplation of an empty platform; and their pecuniary returns in consequence were probably insignificant. Coleridge remained in Bristol till the month of August, when he returned to London.

The painful task of tracing his downward course is now almost completed. In the middle of this year he touched the lowest point of his descent. Cottle, who had a good deal of intercourse with him by speech and letter in 1814, and who had not seen him since 1807, was shocked by his extreme prostration, and then for the first time ascertained the cause. "In 1814," he says in his *Recollections*,

"S. T. C. had been long, very long, in the habit of taking from two quarts of laudanum a week to a pint a day, and on one occasion he had been known to take in the twenty-four hours a whole quart of laudanum. The serious expenditure of money resulting from this habit was the least evil, though very great, and must have absorbed all the produce of his writings and lectures and the liberalities of his friends." Cottle addressed to him a letter of not very delicate remonstrance on the subject, to which Coleridge replied in his wontedly humble strain.

There is a certain Pharisaism about the Bristol poet-publisher which renders it necessary to exercise some little caution in the acceptance of his account of Coleridge's condition; but the facts, from whatever source one seeks them, appear to acquit him of any exaggeration in his summing up of the melancholy matter. "A general impression," he says, "prevailed on the minds of Coleridge's friends that it was a desperate case, that paralysed all their efforts; that to assist Coleridge with money which, under favourable circumstances would have been most promptly advanced, would now only enlarge his capacity to obtain the opium which was consuming him. We merely knew that Coleridge had retired with his friend, Mr. John Morgan, to a small house at Calne, in Wiltshire."

It must have been at Calne, then, that Coleridge composed the series of "Letters to Mr. Justice Fletcher concerning his charge to the Grand Jury of the county of Wexford, at the summer Assizes in 1814," which appeared at intervals in the *Courier* between 20th September and 10th December of this year. Their subject, a somewhat injudiciously animated address to the aforesaid Grand Jury on the subject of the relations between Catholicism and Protestantism in Ireland, was well calculated to stimu-

late the literary activity of a man who always took something of the keen interest of the modern Radical in the eternal Irish question; and the letters are not wanting either in argumentative force or in grave impressiveness of style. But their lack of spring and energy, as compared with Coleridge's earlier work in journalism, is painfully visible throughout.

Calne, it is to be supposed, was still Coleridge's place of abode when Southey (17th October) wrote Cottle that letter which appears in his *Correspondence*, and which illustrates with such sad completeness the contrast between the careers of the two generous, romantic, brilliant youths who had wooed their wives together—and between the fates, one must add, of the two sisters who had listened to their wooing—eighteen years before: a letter as honourable to the writer as it is the reverse to its subject. "Can you," asks Southey, "tell me anything of Coleridge? A few lines of introduction for a son of Mr. ——, of St. James's, in your city, are all that we have received from him since I saw him last September twelvemonth (1813) in town. The children being thus left entirely to chance, I have applied to his brothers at Ottey (Ottery?) concerning them, and am in hopes through their means and the assistance of other friends of sending Hartley to college. Lady Beaumont has promised £30 a year for the purpose, and Poole £10. I wrote to Coleridge three or four months ago, telling him that unless he took some steps in providing for this object I must make the application, and required his answer within a given term of three weeks. He received the letter, and in his note by Mr. —— promised to answer it, but he has never taken any further notice of it. I have acted with the advice of Wordsworth. The brothers, as I expected, promise their con-

currence, and I daily expect a letter stating to what extent they will contribute." With this letter before him an impartial biographer can hardly be expected to adopt the theory which has commended itself to the filial piety of the Rev. Derwent Coleridge—namely, that it was through the father's "influence" that the sons were sent to college. On a plain matter of fact such as this, one may be permitted, without indelicacy, to uphold the conclusions compelled by the evidence. Such expressions of opinion, on the other hand, as that Coleridge's "separation from his family, brought about and continued through the force of circumstances over which he had far less control than has been commonly supposed, was in fact nothing else but an ever-prolonged absence;" and that "from first to last he took an affectionate, it may be said a passionate, interest in the welfare of his children"—such expressions of mere opinion as these it may be proper enough to pass by in respectful silence.

The following year brought with it no improvement in the embarrassed circumstances, no reform of the disordered life. Still domiciled with Mr. Morgan at Calne, the self-made sufferer writes to Cottle: "You will wish to know something of myself. In health I am not worse than when at Bristol I was best; yet fluctuating, yet unhappy, in circumstances poor indeed! I have collected my scattered and my manuscript poems sufficient to make one volume. Enough I have to make another. But, till the latter is finished, I cannot, without great loss of character, publish the former, on account of the arrangement, besides the necessity of correction. For instance, I earnestly wish to begin the volumes with what has never been seen by any, however few, such as a series of odes on the different sentences of the Lord's Prayer, and, more than

all this, to finish my greater work on 'Christianity considered as philosophy, and as the only philosophy.'" Then follows a request for a loan of forty pounds on the security of the MSS., an advance which Cottle declined to make, though he sent Coleridge "some smaller temporary relief." The letter concludes with a reference to a project for taking a house and receiving pupils to board and instruct, which Cottle appeared to consider the crowning "degradation and ignominy of all."

A few days later we find Lord Byron again coming to Coleridge's assistance with a loan of a hundred pounds and words of counsel and encouragement. Why should not the author of *Remorse* repeat his success? "In Kean," writes Byron, "there is an actor worthy of expressing the thoughts of the character which you have every power of embodying, and I cannot but regret that the part of Ordonio was disposed of before his appearance at Drury Lane. We have had nothing to be mentioned in the same breath with *Remorse* for very many years, and I should think that the reception of that play was sufficient to encourage the highest hopes of author and audience." The advice was followed, and the drama of *Zapolya* was the result. It is a work of even less dramatic strength than its predecessor, and could scarcely, one thinks, have been as successful with an audience. It was not, however, destined to see the footlights. Before it had passed the tribunal of the Drury Lane Committee it had lost the benefit of Byron's patronage through the poet's departure from England, and the play was rejected by Mr. Douglas Kinnaird, the then reader for the theatre, who assigned, according to Mr. Gillman, "some ludicrous objections to the metaphysics." Before leaving England, however, Byron rendered a last, and, as the result proved, a not unimpor-

tant service to his brother-poet. He introduced him to Mr. Murray, who, in the following year, undertook the publication of *Christabel*—the most successful, in the sense of the most popular, of all its author's productions in verse.

With the coming of spring in the following year that dreary story of slow self-destruction, into which the narrative of Coleridge's life from the age of thirty to that of forty-five resolves itself, was brought to a close. Coleridge had at last perceived that his only hope of redemption lay in a voluntary submission of his enfeebled will to the control of others, and he had apparently just enough strength of volition to form and execute the necessary resolve. He appears, in the first instance, to have consulted a physician of the name of Adams, who, on the 9th of April, 1816, put himself in communication with Mr. Gillman, of Highgate. "A very learned, but in one respect an unfortunate gentleman, has," he wrote, "applied to me on a singular occasion. He has for several years been in the habit of taking large quantities of opium. For some time past he has been in vain endeavouring to break himself of it. It is apprehended his friends are not firm enough, from a dread lest he should suffer by suddenly leaving it off, though he is conscious of the contrary, and has proposed to me to submit himself to any regimen, however severe. With this view he wishes to fix himself in the house of some medical gentleman who will have the courage to refuse him any laudanum, and under whose assistance, should he be the worse for it, he may be relieved." Would such a proposal, inquires the writer, be absolutely inconsistent with Mr. Gillman's family arrangements? He would not, he adds, have proposed it "but on account of the great importance of the character as a literary man. His communicative temper will make his society very in-

teresting as well as useful." Mr. Gillman's acquaintance with Dr. Adams was but slight, and he had had no previous intention of receiving an inmate into his house. But the case very naturally interested him; he sought an interview with Dr. Adams, and it was agreed that the latter should drive Coleridge to Highgate the following evening. At the appointed hour, however, Coleridge presented himhimself alone, and, after spending the evening at Mr. Gillman's, left him, as even in his then condition he left most people who met him for the first time, completely captivated by the amiability of his manners and the charm of his conversation. The next day Mr. Gillman received from him a letter finally settling the arrangement to place himself under the doctor's care, and concluding with the following pathetic passage:

"And now of myself. My ever wakeful reason and the keenness of my moral feelings will secure you from all unpleasant circumstances connected with me save only one, viz., the evasion of a specific madness. You will never *hear* anything but truth from me; prior habits render it out of my power to tell an untruth, but, unless carefully observed, I dare not promise that I should not, with regard to this detested poison, be capable of acting one. Not sixty hours have yet passed without my having taken laudanum, though, for the last week, comparatively trifling doses. I have full belief that your anxiety need not be extended beyond the first week, and for the first week I shall not, must not, be permitted to leave your house, unless with you; delicately or indelicately, this must be done, and both the servants, and the assistant, must receive absolute commands from you. The stimulus of conversation suspends the terror that haunts my mind; but, when I am alone, the horrors I have suffered from laudanum, the degradation, the blighted utility, almost overwhelm me. If (as I feel for the *first time* a soothing confidence that it will prove) I should leave you restored to my moral and bodily health, it is not myself only that will love and honour you; every friend I have (and, thank God! in spite of this wretched vice I have many and

warm ones, who were friends of my youth, and have never deserted me) will thank you with reverence. I have taken no notice of your kind apologies. If I could not be comfortable in your house and with your family, I should deserve to be miserable."

This letter was written on a Saturday, and on the following Monday Coleridge presented himself at Mr. Gillman's, bringing in his hand the proof-sheets of *Christabel*, now printed for the first time. He had looked, as the letter just quoted shows, with a "soothing confidence" to leaving his retreat at some future period in a restored condition of moral and bodily health; and as regards the restoration, his confidence was in a great measure justified. But the friendly doors which opened to receive him on this 15th of April, 1816, were destined to close only upon his departing bier. Under the watchful and almost reverential care of this well-chosen guardian, sixteen years of comparatively quiet and well-ordered life, of moderate but effective literary activity, and of gradual though never complete emancipation from his fatal habit, were reserved to him. He had still, as we shall see, to undergo certain recurrences of restlessness and renewals of pecuniary difficulty; his shattered health was but imperfectly and temporarily repaired; his "shaping spirit of imagination" could not and did not return; his transcendental broodings became more and more the "habit of his soul." But henceforth he recovers for us a certain measure of his long-lost dignity, and a figure which should always have been "meet for the reverence of the hearth" in the great household of English literature, but which had far too long and too deeply sunk below it, becomes once more a worthy and even a venerable presence. At evening-time it was light.

CHAPTER IX.

LIFE AT HIGHGATE.—RENEWED ACTIVITY.—PUBLICATIONS AND REPUBLICATIONS. — THE "BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA." — THE LECTURES OF 1818.—COLERIDGE AS A SHAKESPEARIAN CRITIC.

[1816–1818.]

THE results of the step which Coleridge had just taken became speedily visible in more ways than one, and the public were among the first to derive benefit from it. For not only was he stimulated to greater activity of production, but his now more methodical way of life gave him time and inclination for that work of arrangement and preparation for the press which, distasteful to most writers, was no doubt especially irksome to him, and thus insured the publication of many pieces which otherwise might never have seen the light. The appearance of *Christabel* was, as we have said, received with signal marks of popular favour, three editions being called for and exhausted in the same year. In 1816 there appeared also *The Statesman's Manual; or the Bible the best guide to Political Skill and Foresight: a Lay Sermon addressed to the higher classes of Society, with an Appendix containing Comments and Essays connected with the Study of the Inspired Writings;* in 1817 another *Lay Sermon, addressed to the higher and middle classes on the existing distresses and discontents;* and in the same year followed

the most important publication of this period, the *Biographia Literaria.*

In 1817, too, it was that Coleridge at last made his long-meditated collection and classification of his already published poems, and that for the first time something approaching to a complete edition of the poet's works was given to the world. The *Sibylline Leaves*, as this reissue was called, had been intended to be preceded by another volume of verse, and "accordingly on the printer's signatures of every sheet we find Vol. II. appearing." Too characteristically, however, the scheme was abandoned, and Volume II. emerged from the press without any Volume I. to accompany it. The drama of *Zapolya* followed in the same year, and proved more successful with the public than with the critic of Drury Lane. The "general reader" assigned no "ludicrous objections to its metaphysics;" on the contrary, he took them on trust, as his generous manner is, and *Zapolya*, published thus as a Christmas tale, became so immediately popular that two thousand copies were sold in six weeks. In the year 1818 followed the three-volume selection of essays from the *Friend*, a reissue to which reference has already been made. With the exception of *Christabel*, however, all the publications of these three years unfortunately proceeded from the house of Gale and Fenner, a firm which shortly afterwards became bankrupt; and Coleridge thus lost all or nearly all of the profits of their sale.

The most important of the new works of this period was, as has been said, the *Biographia Literaria*, or, to give it its other title, *Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions.* Its interest, however, is wholly critical and illustrative; as a narrative it would be found extremely disappointing and probably irritating by the aver-

age reader. With the exception of one or two incidental disclosures, but little biographical information is to be derived from it which is not equally accessible from sources independent of the author; and the almost complete want of sequence and arrangement renders it a very inconvenient work of reference even for these few biographical details. Its main value is to be found in the contents of seven chapters, from the fourteenth to the twentieth; but it is not going too far to say that, in respect of these, it is literally priceless. No such analysis of the principles of poetry—no such exact discrimination of what was sound in the modern "return-to-nature" movement from what was false—has ever been accomplished by any other critic, or with such admirable completeness by this consummate critic at any other time. Undoubtedly it is not of the light order of reading; none, or very little, of Coleridge's prose is. The whole of Chapter XV., for instance, in which the specific elements of "poetic power" are "distinguished from general talent determined to poetic composition by accidental motives," requires a close and sustained effort of the attention, but those who bestow it will find it amply repaid. I know of no dissertation conceived and carried out in terms of the abstract which in the result so triumphantly justifies itself upon application to concrete cases. As regards the question of poetic *expression*, and the laws by which its true form is determined, Coleridge's analysis is, it seems to me, final. I cannot, at least, after the most careful reflection upon it, conceive it as being other than the absolutely last word on the subject. Reasoning and illustration are alike so convincing that the reader, like the contentious student who listened unwillingly to his professor's demonstration of the first proposition of Euclid, is compelled to confess that

"he has nothing to reply." To the judicious admirer of Wordsworth, to every one who, while recognising Wordsworth's inestimable services to English literature as the leader of the naturalist reaction in poetry, has yet been vaguely conscious of the defect in his poetic theory, and very keenly conscious of the vices of his poetic practice—to all such persons it must be a profound relief and satisfaction to be guided as unerringly as Coleridge guides them to the "parting of the ways" of truth and falsity in Wordsworth's doctrines, and to be enabled to perceive that nothing which has offended him in that poet's thought and diction has any real connection with whatever in the poet's principles has commanded his assent. There is no one who has ever felt uneasy under the blasphemies of the enemy but must entertain deep gratitude for so complete a discharge as Coleridge has procured him from the task of defending such lines as—

> "And I have travelled far as Hull to see
> What clothes he might have left or other property."

Defend them indeed the ordinary reader probably would not, preferring even the abandonment of his theory to a task so humiliating. But the theory has so much of truth and value in it that the critic who has redeemed it from the discredit of Wordsworth's misapplications of it is entitled to the thanks of every friend of simplicity, who is at the same time an enemy of bathos. There is no longer any reason to treat the deadly commonplaces, amid which we toil through so many pages of the *Excursion*, as having any true theoretic affinity with its but too occasional majestic interludes. The smooth, square-cut blocks of prose which insult the natural beauty of poetic rock and boulder even in such a scene of naked moorland grandeur

as that of *Resolution and Independence* are seen and shown to be the mere intruders which we have all felt them to be. To the Wordsworthian, anxious for a full justification of the faith that is in him, the whole body of Coleridge's criticism on his friend's poetry in the *Biographia Literaria* may be confidently recommended. The refutation of what is untenable in Wordsworth's theory, the censure pronounced upon certain characteristics of his practice, are made all the more impressive by the tone of cordial admiration which distinguishes every personal reference to the poet himself, and by the unfailing discrimination with which the critic singles out the peculiar beauties of his poetry. No finer selection of finely characteristic Wordsworthian passages could perhaps have been made than those which Coleridge has quoted in illustration of his criticisms in the eighteenth and two following chapters of the *Biographia Literaria.* For the rest, however, unless indeed one excepts the four chapters on the Hartleian system and its relation to the German school of philosophy, the book is rather one to be dipped into for the peculiar pleasure which an hour in Coleridge's company must always give to any active intelligence, than to be systematically studied with a view to perfecting one's conception of Coleridge's philosophical and critical genius considered in its totality.

As to the two lay sermons, the less ambitious of them is decidedly the more successful. The advice to "the higher and middle classes" on the existing distresses and discontents contains at least an ingredient of the practical; its distinctively religious appeals are varied by sound political and economical arguments; and the enumeration and exposure of the various artifices by which most orators are accustomed to delude their hearers is as masterly

as only Coleridge could have made it. Who but he, for instance, could have thrown a piece of subtle observation into a form in which reason and fancy unite so happily to impress it on the mind as in the following passage: "The mere appeal to the auditors, whether the arguments are not such that none but an idiot or an hireling could resist, is an effective substitute for any argument at all. For mobs have no memories. They are in nearly the same state as that of an individual when he makes what is termed a bull. *The passions, like a fused metal, fill up the wide interstices of thought and supply the defective links; and thus incompatible assertions are harmonised by the sensation without the sense of connection.*" The other lay sermon, however, the *Statesman's Manual*, is less appropriately conceived. Its originating proposition, that the Bible is "the best guide to political skill and foresight," is undoubtedly open to dispute, but might nevertheless be capable of plausible defence upon *à priori* grounds. Coleridge, however, is not content with this method of procedure; as, indeed, with so avowedly practical an object in view he scarcely could be, for a "manual" is essentially a work intended for the constant consultation of the artificer in the actual performance of his work, and ought at least to contain illustrations of the application of its general principles to particular cases. It is in undertaking to supply these that the essential mysticism of Coleridge's counsels comes to light. For instance: "I am deceived if you will not be compelled to admit that the prophet Isaiah revealed the true philosophy of the French Revolution more than two thousand years before it became a sad irrevocable truth of history. 'And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever, so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart neither didst remember the latter end of it. . . . There-

fore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth, etc.'" And to this last-quoted sentence Coleridge actually appends the following note: "The reader will scarcely fail to find in this verse a remembrancer of the sudden setting in of the frost before the usual time (in a country, too, where the commencement of its two seasons is in general scarcely less regular than that of the wet and dry seasons between the tropics) which caused, and the desolation which accompanied, the flight from Moscow." One can make no other comment upon this than that if it really be wisdom which statesmen would do well to lay to heart, the late Dr. Cumming must have been the most profound instructor in statesmanship that the world has ever seen. A prime minister of real life, however, could scarcely be seriously recommended to shape his policy upon a due consideration of the possible allegoric meaning of a passage in Isaiah, to say nothing of the obvious objection that this kind of appeal to *Sortes Biblicæ* is dangerously liable to be turned against those who recommend it. On the whole, one must say of this lay sermon that it justifies the apprehension expressed by the author in its concluding pages. It does rather "resemble the overflow of an earnest mind than an orderly and premeditated," in the sense, at any rate, of a well-considered "composition."

In the month of January, 1818, Coleridge once more commenced the delivery of a course of lectures in London. The scope of this series—fourteen in number—was, as will be seen from the subjoined syllabus, an immensely comprehensive one. The subject of the first was "the manners, morals, literature, philosophy, religion, and state of society in general in European Christendom, from the eighth to the fifteenth century;" and of the second "the

tales and metrical romances common for the most part to England, Germany, and the north of France; and English songs and ballads continued to the reign of Charles I." In the third the lecturer proposed to deal with the poetry of Chaucer and Spenser, of Petrarch, and of Ariosto, Pulci, and Boiardo. The fourth, fifth, and sixth were to be devoted to the dramatic works of Shakespeare, and to comprise the substance of Coleridge's former courses on the same subject, "enlarged and varied by subsequent study and reflection." In the seventh he was to treat of the other principal dramatists of the Elizabethan period, Ben Jonson, Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher; in the eighth of the life and all the works of Cervantes; in the ninth of Rabelais, Swift, and Sterne, with a dissertation "on the nature and constituents of genuine humour, and on the distinctions of humorous from the witty, the fanciful, the droll, the odd, etc." Donne, Dante, and Milton formed the subject of the tenth; the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, and the *romantic* use of the supernatural in poetry, that of the eleventh. The twelfth was to be on "tales of witches and apparitions, etc.," as distinguished from magic and magicians of Asiatic origin; and the thirteenth, "on colour, sound, and form in nature, as connected with Poesy—the word 'Poesy' being used as the *generic* or class term including poetry, music, painting, statuary, and ideal architecture as its species, the reciprocal relations of poetry and philosophy to each other, and of both to religion and the moral sense." In the fourteenth and final lecture Coleridge proposed to discuss "the corruptions of the English language since the reign of Queen Anne, in our style of writing prose," and to formulate "a few easy rules for the attainment of a manly, unaffected, and pure language in our genuine mother

tongue, whether for the purposes of writing, oratory, or conversation."

These lectures, says Mr. Gillman, were from Coleridge's own account more profitable than any he had before given, though delivered in an unfavourable situation; a lecture-room in Flower de Luce Court, which, however, being near the Temple, secured to him the benefit—if benefit it were—of a considerable number of law students among his auditors. It was the first time that his devoted guardian had ever heard him in public, and he reports the significant fact that though Coleridge lectured from notes, which he had carefully made, "it was obvious that his audience were more delighted when, putting his notes aside, he spoke extempore. . . ." He was brilliant, fluent, and rapid; his words seemed to flow as from a person repeating with grace and energy some delightful poem. If he sometimes paused, it was not for the want of words, but that he was seeking their most appropriate or most logical arrangement.

An incident, related with extreme, though in a great measure unconscious, drollery by Mr. Gillman in connection with a lecture delivered at this period is to my mind of more assistance than many of the accounts of his "lay sermons" in private circles, in enabling us to comprehend one element of Coleridge's marvellous powers of discourse. Early one morning at Mr. Gillman's he received two letters—one to inform him that he was *expected* that same evening to deliver a lecture, at the rooms of the London Philosophical Society, to an audience of some four or five hundred persons; the other containing a list of the previous lecturers and the lectures delivered by them during the course of the season. At seven o'clock in the evening Coleridge and Mr. Gillman went up to town to make some inquiries respecting this unexpected application; but, on

arriving at the house of the gentleman who had written the letter, they were informed that he was not at home, but would return at eight o'clock—the hour fixed for the commencement of the lecture. They then proceeded to the Society's rooms, where in due time the audience assembled; and the committee having at last entered and taken their places on the seats reserved for them, "Mr. President arose from the centre of the group, and, putting on a 'president's hat,' which so disfigured him that we could scarcely refrain from laughter, addressed the company in these words: 'This evening Mr. Coleridge will deliver a lecture on "the Growth of the Individual Mind."'" Coleridge at first "seemed startled," as well he might, and turning round to Mr. Gillman whispered: "A pretty stiff subject they have chosen for me." However, he instantly mounted his standing-place and began without hesitation, previously requesting his friend to observe the effect of his lecture on the audience. It was agreed that, should he appear to fail, Gillman was to "clasp his ancle; but that he was to continue for an hour if the countenances of his auditors indicated satisfaction." Coleridge then began his address in these words: "The lecture I am about to give this evening is purely extempore. Should you find a nominative case looking out for a verb, or a fatherless verb for a nominative case, you must excuse it. It is purely extempore, though I have read and thought much on the subject." At this the company smiled, which seemed to inspire the lecturer with confidence. He plunged at once into his lecture—and most brilliant, eloquent, and logically consecutive it was. The time moved on so swiftly that Mr. Gillman found, on looking at his watch, that an hour and a half had passed away, and, therefore, he continues "waiting only a desirable moment—to use his own

playful words—I prepared myself to punctuate his oration. As previously agreed, I pressed his ancle, and thus gave him the hint he had requested; when, bowing graciously, and with a benevolent and smiling countenance, he presently descended. The lecture was quite new to me, and I believe quite new to himself so far as the arrangement of his words was concerned. The floating thoughts were beautifully arranged, and delivered on the spur of the moment. What accident gave rise to the singular request that he should deliver this lecture impromptu, I never learnt; nor did it signify, as it afforded a happy opportunity to many of witnessing in part the extent of his reading and the extraordinary strength of his powers."

It is tantalising to think that no record of this remarkable performance remains; but, indeed, the same may to some extent be said, and in various degrees, of nearly all the lectures which Coleridge ever delivered. With the exception of seven out of the fifteen of 1811, which were published in 1856 by Mr. Payne Collier from short-hand notes taken at the time, Coleridge's lectures scarcely exist for us otherwise than in the form of rough preparatory notes. A few longer pieces, such as the admirable observations in the second volume of the *Literary Remains*, on poetry, on the Greek drama, and on the progress of the dramatic art in England, are, with the exception above noticed, almost the only general disquisitions on these subjects which appear to have reached us in a complete state. Of the remaining contents of the volume, including the detailed criticisms — now textual, now analytic — of the various plays of Shakespeare, a considerable portion is frankly fragmentary, pretending, indeed, to no other character than that of mere *marginalia*. This, however, does not destroy—I had almost said it does not even impair—

their value. It does but render them all the more typical productions of a writer whose greatest services to mankind in almost every department of human thought and knowledge with which he concerned himself were much the most often performed in the least methodical way. In reading through these incomparable notes on Shakespeare we soon cease to lament, or even to remember, their unconnected form and often somewhat desultory appearance; if, indeed, we do not see reason to congratulate ourselves that the annotator, unfettered by the restraints which the composition of a systematic treatise would have imposed upon him, is free to range with us at will over many a flower-strewn field, for which otherwise he could not perhaps have afforded to quit the main road of his subject. And this liberty is the more welcome, because Coleridge, *primus inter pares* as a critic of any order of literature, is in the domain of Shakespearian commentary absolute king. The principles of analysis which he was charged with having borrowed without acknowledgment from Schlegel, with whose Shakespearian theories he was at the time entirely unacquainted, were in fact of his own excogitation. He owed nothing in this matter to any individual German, nor had he anything in common with German Shakespearianism except its profoundly philosophising spirit, which, moreover, was in his case directed and restrained by other qualities, too often wanting in critics of that industrious race; for he possessed a sense of the ridiculous, a feeling for the poetic, a tact, a taste, and a judgment, which would have saved many a worthy but heavy-handed Teutonic professor, who should have been lucky enough to own these gifts, from exposing himself and his science to the satire of the light-minded. Very rarely, indeed, do we find Coleridge indulging *plus*

æquo his passion for psychological analysis. Deeply as his criticism penetrates, it is yet loyally recognitive of the opacity of mile-stones. Far as he sees into his subject, we never find him fancying that he sees beyond the point at which the faculty of human vision is exhausted. His conception of the more complex of Shakespeare's personages, his theory of their characters, his reading of their motives, is often subtle, but always sane; his interpretation of the master's own dealings with them, and of the language which he puts into their mouths, is often highly imaginative, but it is rarely fanciful. Take, as an illustration of the first-mentioned merit, the following acute but eminently sensible estimate of the character of Polonius:

"He is the personified memory of wisdom no longer actually possessed. This admirable character is always misrepresented on the stage. Shakspeare never intended to exhibit him as a buffoon; for although it was natural that Hamlet—a young man of fire and genius, detesting formality and disliking Polonius on political grounds, as imagining that he had assisted his uncle in his usurpation—should express himself satirically, yet this must not be taken exactly as the poet's conception of him. In Polonius a certain induration of character had arisen from long habits of business; but take his advice to Laertes, and Ophelia's reverence for his memory, and we shall see that he was meant to be represented as a statesman somewhat past his faculties—his recollections of life all full of wisdom, and showing a knowledge of human nature, while what immediately takes place before him and escapes from him is indicative of weakness."

Or this comment on the somewhat faint individualisation of the figure of Lear:

"In Lear old age is itself a character—natural imperfections being increased by life-long habits of receiving a prompt obedience. Any addition of individualisation would have been unnecessary and

painful; for the relation of others to him, of wondrous fidelity and of frightful ingratitude, alone sufficiently distinguish him. Thus Lear becomes the open and ample playroom of nature's passions."

Or lastly, in illustration of my second point, let us take this note on the remark of the knight that "since my young lady's going into France the fool hath much pined away:"

"The fool is no comic buffoon to make the groundlings laugh—no forced condescension of Shakspeare's genius to the taste of his audience. Accordingly the poet prepares us for the introduction, which he never does with any of his common clowns and fools, by bringing him into living connection with the pathos of the play. He is as wonderful a creation as Caliban—his wild babblings and inspired idiocy articulate and gauge the horrors of the scene."

The subject is a tempting one to linger over, did not imperative exigencies of space compel me to pass on from it. There is much—very much—more critical matter in the *Literary Remains* of which it is hard to forbear quotation; and I may mention in particular the profoundly suggestive remarks on the nature of the humorous, with their accompanying analysis of the genius and artistic method of Sterne. But it is, as has been said, in Shakespearian criticism that Coleridge's unique mastery of all the tools of the critic is most conspicuous, and it is in the brilliant, if unmethodised, pages which I have been discussing that we may most readily find consolation for the too early silencing of his muse. For these consummate criticisms are essentially and above all the criticisms of a poet. They are such as could not have been achieved by any man not originally endowed with that divine gift which was fated in this instance to expend itself within so few years. Nothing, indeed, could more strikingly

illustrate the commanding advantage possessed by a poet interpreting a poet than is to be found in Coleridge's occasional sarcastic comments on the *banalités* of our national poet's most prosaic commentator, Warburton—the "thought-swarming but idealess Warburton," as he once felicitously styles him. The one man seems to read his author's text under the clear, diffused, unwavering radiance emitted from his own poetic imagination; while the criticism of the other resembles a perpetual scratching of damp matches, which flash a momentary light into one corner of the dark passage, and then go out.

CHAPTER X.

CLOSING YEARS.—TEMPORARY RENEWAL OF MONEY TROUBLES.—THE "AIDS TO REFLECTION."—GROWING WEAKNESS.—VISIT TO GERMANY WITH THE WORDSWORTHS.—LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH.

[1818–1834.]

For the years which now remained to Coleridge, some sixteen in number, dating from his last appearance as a public lecturer, his life would seem to have been attended with something, at least, of that sort of happiness which is enjoyed by the nation of uneventful annals. There is little to be told of him in the way of literary performance; little record remains, unfortunately, of the discursively didactic talk in which, during these years, his intellectual activity found its busiest exercise; of incident, in the ordinary sense of the word, there is almost none. An account of these closing days of his life must resolve itself almost wholly into a "history of opinion"—an attempt to reanimate for ourselves that life of perpetual meditation which Coleridge lived, and to trace, so far as the scanty evidence of his utterances enables us to do so, the general tenor of his daily thoughts. From one point of view, of course, this task would be extremely difficult, if not impossible; from another comparatively easy. It is easy, that is to say, to investigate Coleridge's speculations, so far as their subject is concerned, whatever difficulties their obscurity and

subtlety may present to the inquirer; for, as a matter of fact, their subject is remarkably uniform. Attempts to divide the literary life of a writer into eras are more often arbitrary and fanciful than not; but the peculiar circumstances of Coleridge's career did in fact effect the division for themselves. His life until the age of twenty-six may fairly be described as in its "poetic period." It was during these years, and indeed during the last two or three of them, that he produced all the poetry by which he will be remembered, while he produced little else of mark or memorability. The twenty years which follow from 1798 to 1818 may with equal accuracy be styled the "critical period." It was during these years that he did his best work as a journalist, and all his work as a public lecturer on æsthetics. It was during them that he said his say, and even his final say, so far as any public modes of expression were concerned, on politics and on art. From 1818 to his death his life was devoted entirely to metaphysics and theology, and with such close and constant reference to the latter subject, to which indeed his metaphysics had throughout his life been ancillary, that it deserves to give the name of the "theological period" to these closing years.

Their lack of incident, however, is not entirely as favourable a circumstance as that uneventfulness of national annals to which I have compared it; for, though "no news may be good news" in the case of a nation's history, it is by no means as certainly so in the case of a man's biography, and, least of all, when the subject is a man whose inward life of thought and feeling so completely overshadowed his outward life of action throughout his whole career. There is indeed evidence, slight in amount, but conclusive in character—plain and painful evidence enough to show that at least the first four or five years of the period

we have mentioned were not altogether years of resignation and calm; that they were embittered by recurring agonies of self-reproach, by

> "Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
> And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;"

and by the desolating thought that all which had been "culled in wood-walks wild," and "all which patient toil had reared," were to be

> —"but flowers
> Strewn on the corse, and borne upon the bier,
> In the same coffin, for the self-same grave!"

Here and there in the correspondence with Thomas Allsop we obtain a glimpse into that vast half-darkened arena in which this captive spirit self-condemned to the lions was struggling its last. To one strange and hitherto unexplained letter I have already referred. It was written from Ramsgate in the autumn of 1822, evidently under circumstances of deep depression. But there is a letter nearly two years earlier in date addressed to the same correspondent which contains by far the fullest account of Coleridge's then condition of mind, the state of his literary engagements and his literary projects, his completed and uncompleted work. As usual with him it is stress of money matters that prompts him to write, and he prefaces his request for assistance with the following portentous catalogue of realised or contemplated schemes. "Contemplated," indeed, is too modest a word, according to his own account, to be applied to any one item in the formidable list. Of all of them, he has, he tells Allsop, "already the *written* materials and contents, requiring only to be put together from the loose papers and commonplace in memorandum books, and needing no other change, whether of

omission, addition, or correction, than the mere act of arranging, and the opportunity of seeing the whole collectively, bring with them of course." Heads I. and II. of the list comprise those criticisms on Shakespeare and the other principal Elizabethan dramatists; on Dante, Spenser, Milton, Cervantes, Calderon; on Chaucer, Ariosto, Donne, Rabelais, etc., which formed the staple of the course of lectures delivered in 1818, and which were published after his death in the first two of the four volumes of *Literary Remains* brought out under the editorship of Mr. H. N. Coleridge. Reserving No. III. for a moment we find No. IV. to consist of "Letters on the Old and New Testament, and on the Doctrines and Principles held in common by the Fathers and Founders of the Reformation, addressed to a Candidate for Holy Orders, including advice on the plan and subjects of preaching proper to a minister of the Established Church." The letters never apparently saw the light of publicity, at any rate, in the epistolary form, either during the author's lifetime or after his death; and with regard to II. and III., which did obtain posthumous publication, the following caution should be borne in mind by the reader. "To the completion," says Coleridge, "of these four works I have literally nothing more to do than to transcribe; but, as I before hinted, from so many scraps and Sibylline leaves, including margins of blank pages, that unfortunately I must be my own scribe, and, not done by myself, they will be all but lost." As matters turned out he was not his own scribe, and the difficulty which Mr. Nelson Coleridge experienced in piecing together the fragmentary materials at his disposal is feelingly described by him in his preface to the first edition. He added that the contents of these volumes were drawn from a portion only of the MSS. entrusted to

him, and that the remainder of the collection, which, under favourable circumstances, he hoped might hereafter see the light, "was at least of equal value" with what he was then presenting to the reader. This hope was never realised; and it must be remembered, therefore, that the published record of Coleridge's achievements as a critic is, as has already been pointed out, extremely imperfect.[1] That it is not even more disappointingly so than it is, may well entitle his nephew and editor to the gratitude of posterity; but where much has been done, there yet remains much to do ere Coleridge's consummate analyses of poetic and dramatic works can be presented to the reader in other than their present shape of a series of detached brilliancies. The pearls are there, but the string is wanting. Whether it will be ever supplied, or whether it is possible now to supply it, one cannot say.

The third of Coleridge's virtually completed works—there is much virtue in a "virtually"—was a "History of Philosophy considered as a Tendency of the Human Mind to exhibit the Powers of the Human Reason, to discover by its own strength the Origin and Laws of Man and the World, from Pythagoras to Locke and Condillac." This production, however, considerable as it is, was probably merely ancillary to what he calls "My GREAT WORK, to the preparation of which more than twenty years of my life have been devoted, and on which my hopes of extensive and permanent utility, of fame in the noblest sense of the word, mainly rest." To this work he goes on to say:

[1] How imperfect, a comparison between estimated and actual bulk will show. No. I. was, according to Coleridge's reckoning, to form three volumes of 500 pages each. In the *Literary Remains* it fills less than half of four volumes of little more than 400 pages each.

"All my other writings, unless I except my Poems (and these I can exclude in part only), are introductory and preparative, while its result, if the premises be as I with the most tranquil assurance am convinced they are—incontrovertible, the deductions legitimate, and the conclusions commensurate, and only commensurate with both [must be], to effect a revolution in all that has been called Philosophy and Metaphysics in England and France since the era of commencing predominance of the mechanical system at the Restoration of our Second Charles, and with [in] the present fashionable views not only of religion, morals, and politics, but even of the modern physics and physiology."

This, it must be allowed, is a sufficiently "large order," being apparently indeed nothing less than an undertaking to demolish the system of Locke and his successors, and to erect German Transcendentalism on the ruins. With anything less than this, however—with any less noble object or less faith in their attainments—Coleridge could not, he declares, have stood acquitted of folly and abuse of time, talent, and learning, on a labour of three-fourths of his intellectual life. Somewhat more than a volume of this *magnum opus* had been dictated by him to his "friend and enlightened pupil, Mr. Green, so as to exist fit for the press;" and more than as much again had been done, but he had been compelled to break off the weekly meetings with his pupil from the necessity of writing on subjects of the passing day. Then comes a reference, the last we meet with, to the real "great work," as the unphilosophic world has always considered and will always consider it. On this subject he says:

"Of my poetic works I would fain finish the *Christabel*. Alas! for the proud time when I planned, when I had present to my mind the materials as well as the scheme of the Hymns entitled Spirit, Sun, Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Man; and the Epic Poem on what appears to me the only fit subject remaining for an Epic Poem—Jerusalem besieged and destroyed by Titus."

And then there follows this most pathetic passage, necessary, in spite of its length, to be transcribed entire, both on account of the value of its biographic details—its information on the subject of the useless worldly affairs, etc.—and because of the singularly penetrating light which it throws upon the mental and moral nature of the man:

"I have only by fits and starts ever prayed—I have not prevailed upon myself to pray to God in sincerity and entireness for the fortitude that might enable me to resign myself to the abandonment of all my life's best hopes, to say boldly to myself, 'Gifted with powers confessedly above mediocrity, aided by an education of which no less from almost unexampled hardships and sufferings than from manifold and peculiar advantages I have never yet found a parallel, I have devoted myself to a life of unintermitted reading, thinking, meditating, and observing; I have not only sacrificed all worldly prospects of wealth and advancement, but have in my inmost soul stood aloof from temporary reputation. In consequence of these toils and this self-dedication I possess a calm and clear consciousness that in many and most important departments of truth and beauty I have outstrode my contemporaries, those at least of highest name, that the number of my printed works bear witness that I have not been idle, and the seldom acknowledged but strictly *proveable* effects of my labours appropriated to the welfare of my age in the *Morning Post* before the peace of Amiens, in the *Courier* afterwards, and in the serious and various subjects of my lectures . . (add to which the unlimited freedom of my communications to colloquial life) may surely be allowed as evidence that I have not been useless to my generation. But, from circumstances, the main portion of my harvest is still on the ground, ripe indeed and only waiting, a few for the sickle, but a large part only for the *sheaving* and carting and housing —but from all this I must turn away and let them rot as they lie, and be as though they never had been; for I must go and gather blackberries and earth-nuts, or pick mushrooms and gild oak-apples for the palate and fancies of chance customers. I must abrogate the name of philosopher and poet, and scribble as fast as I can and with as little thought as I can for *Blackwood's Magazine*, or as I have been employed for the last days in writing MS. sermons for lazy clergy.

men who stipulate that the composition must be more than respectable.' . . . This" [*i.e.*, to say this to myself] "I have not yet had courage to do. My soul sickens and my heart sinks, and thus oscillating between both" [forms of activity—the production of permanent and of ephemeral work] "I do neither—neither as it ought to be done to any profitable end."

And his proposal for extricating himself from this distressing position is that "those who think respectfully and hope highly of my power and attainments should guarantee me a yearly sum for three or four years, adequate to my actual support, with such comforts and decencies of appearance as my health and habit have made necessaries, so that my mind may be unanxious as far as the present time is concerned." Thus provided for he would undertake to devote two-thirds of his time to some one work of those above mentioned—that is to say, of the first four —and confine it exclusively to it till finished, while the remaining third of his time he would go on maturing and completing his "great work," and "(for, if but easy in my mind, I have no doubt either of the reawakening power or of the kindling inclination) my *Christabel*, and what else the happier hour may inspire." Mr. Green, he goes on to say, had promised to contribute £30 to £40 yearly, another pupil, "the son of one of my dearest old friends, £50," and £10 or £20 could, he thought, he relied on from another. The whole amount of the required annuity would be about £200, to be repaid, of course, should disposal or sale of his works produce, or as far as they should produce, the means. But "am I entitled," he asks uneasily, "have I a *right* to do this? Can I do it without moral degradation? And lastly, can it be done without loss of character in the eyes of my acquaintances and of my friends' acquaintances?"

I cannot take upon myself to answer these painful questions. The reply to be given to them must depend upon the judgment which each individual student of this remarkable but unhappy career may pass upon it as a whole; and, while it would be too much to expect that that judgment should be entirely favourable, one may at least believe that a fair allowance for those inveterate weaknesses of physical constitution which so largely aggravated, if they did not wholly generate, the fatal infirmities of Coleridge's moral nature, must materially mitigate the harshness of its terms.

The story of Coleridge's closing years is soon told. It is mainly a record of days spent in meditation and discourse, in which character it will be treated of more fully in a subsequent chapter. His literary productions during the last fourteen years of his life were few in number, and but one of them of any great importance. In 1821 he had offered himself as an occasional contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*, but a series of papers promised by him to that periodical were uncompleted, and his only two contributions, in October, 1821, and January, 1822, are of no particular note. In May, 1825, he read a paper on the *Prometheus* of Æschylus before the Royal Society of Literature; but "the series of disquisitions respecting the Egyptian in connection with the sacerdotal theology and in contrast with the mysteries of ancient Greece," to which this essay had been announced as preparatory, never made their appearance. In the same year, however, he published one of the best known of his prose works, his *Aids to Reflection*.

Of the success of this latest of Coleridge's more important contributions to literature there can be no doubt. New editions of it seem to have been demanded at regular intervals for some twenty years after its first production,

and it appears to have had during the same period a relatively equal reissue in the United States. The Rev. Dr. James Marsh, an American divine of some ability and reputation, composed a preliminary essay (now prefixed to the fifth English edition), in which he elaborately set forth the peculiar merits of the work, and undertook to initiate the reader in the fittest and most profitable method of making use of it. In these remarks the reverend essayist insists more strongly on the spiritually edifying quality of the *Aids* than on their literary merits, and, for my own part, I must certainly consider him right in doing so. As a religious manual it is easy to understand how this volume of Coleridge's should have obtained many and earnest readers. What religious manual, which shows traces of spiritual insight, or even merely of pious yearnings after higher and holier than earthly things, has ever failed to win such readers among the weary and heavy-laden of the world? And that Coleridge, a writer of the most penetrating glance into divine mysteries, and writing always from a soul all tremulous, as it were, with religious sensibility, should have obtained such readers in abundance is not surprising. But to a critic and literary biographer I cannot think that his success in this respect has much to say. For my own part, at any rate, I find considerable difficulty in tracing it to any distinctively literary origin. There seems to me to be less charm of thought, less beauty of style, less even of Coleridge's seldom-failing force of effective statement, in the *Aids to Reflection* than in almost any of his writings. Even the volume of some dozen short chapters on the Constitution of the Church and State, published in 1830, as an "aid towards a right judgment in the late Catholic Relief Bill," appears to me to yield a more characteristic flavour of the author's style,

and to exhibit far more of his distinction of literary workmanship, than the earlier and more celebrated work.

Among the acquaintances made by Coleridge after his retirement to Mr. Gillman's was one destined to be of some importance to the history of his philosophical work. It was that of a gentleman whose name has already been mentioned in this chapter, Mr. Joseph Henry Green, afterwards a distinguished surgeon and Fellow of the Royal Society, who in his early years had developed a strong taste for metaphysical speculation, going even so far as to devote one of his hard-earned periods of professional holiday to a visit to Germany for the sake of studying philosophy in that home of abstract thought. To him Coleridge was introduced by his old Roman acquaintance, Ludwig Tieck, on one of the latter's visits to England, and he became, as the extract above quoted from Coleridge's correspondence shows, his enthusiastic disciple and indefatigable fellow-worker. In the pursuit of their common studies, and in those weekly reunions of admiring friends which Coleridge, while his health permitted it, was in the habit of holding, we may believe that a considerable portion of these closing years of his life was passed under happier conditions than he had been long accustomed to. It is pleasant to read of him among his birds and flowers, and surrounded by the ever-watchful tendance of the affectionate Gillmans, tranquil in mind at any rate, if not at ease from his bodily ailments, and enjoying, as far as enjoyment was possible to him, the peaceful close of a stormy and unsettled day. For the years 1825–30, moreover, his pecuniary circumstances were improved to the extent of £105 per annum, obtained for him at the instance of the Royal Society of Literature, and held by him till the death of George IV.

Two incidents of his later years are, however, worthy of more special mention — a tour up the Rhine, which he took in 1828, in company with Wordsworth and his daughter, and, some years earlier, a meeting with John Keats. "A loose, slack, not well dressed youth," it is recorded in the *Table Talk*, published after his death by his nephew, "met Mr. ——" [it was Mr. Green, of whom more hereafter] "and myself in a lane near Highgate. Green knew him and spoke. It was Keats. He was introduced to me, and stayed a minute or so. After he had left us a little way, he came back and said, 'Let me carry away the memory, Coleridge, of having pressed your hand.' 'There is death in that hand,' I said to Green, when Keats was gone; yet this was, I believe, before the consumption showed itself distinctly."

His own health, however, had been steadily declining in these latter years, and the German tour with the Wordsworths must, I should imagine, have been the last expedition involving any considerable exercise of the physical powers which he was able to take. Within a year or so afterwards his condition seems to have grown sensibly worse. In November, 1831, he writes that for eighteen months past his life had been "one chain of severe sicknesses, brief and imperfect convalescences, and capricious relapses." Henceforth he was almost entirely confined to the sick-room. His faculties, however, still remained clear and unclouded. The entries in the *Table Talk* do not materially diminish in frequency. Their tone of colloquy undergoes no perceptible variation; they continue to be as stimulating and delightful reading as ever. Not till 11th July, 1834, do we find any change; but here at last we meet the shadow, deemed longer than it was in reality, of the approaching end. "I am dying," said Coleridge, "but

without expectation of a speedy release. Is it not strange that, very recently, by-gone images and scenes of early life have stolen into my mind like breezes blown from the spice-islands of Youth and Hope—those twin realities of the phantom world! I do not add Love, for what is Love but Youth and Hope embracing, and, so seen, as *one*. . . . Hooker wished to live to finish his *Ecclesiastical Polity*—so I own I wish life and strength had been spared to me to complete my *Philosophy*. For, as God hears me, the originating, continuing, and sustaining wish and design in my heart were to exalt the glory of His name; and, which is the same thing in other words, to promote the improvement of mankind. But *visum aliter Deo*, and His will be done."

The end was nearer than he thought. It was on the 11th of July, as has been said, that he uttered these last words of gentle and pious resignation. On that day fortnight he died. Midway, however, in this intervening period, he knew that the "speedy release" which he had not ventured to expect was close at hand. The death, when it came, was in some sort emblematic of the life. Sufferings severe and constant, till within thirty-six hours of the end: at the last peace. On the 25th of July, 1834, this sorely-tried, long-labouring, fate-marred and self-marred life passed tranquilly away. The pitiful words of Kent over his dead master rise irrepressibly to the lips—

> "O let him pass; he hates him
> Who would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer."

There might have been something to be said, though not by Kent, of the weaknesses of Lear himself; but at such a moment compassion both for the king and for the poet may well impose silence upon censure.

CHAPTER XI.

COLERIDGE'S METAPHYSICS AND THEOLOGY.—THE "SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY" OF MR. GREEN.

In spite of all the struggles, the resolutions, and the entreaties which displayed themselves so distressingly in the letter to Mr. Allsop, quoted in the last chapter, it is doubtful whether Coleridge's "great work" made much additional progress during the last dozen years of his life. The weekly meeting with Mr. Green seems, according to the latter's biographer, to have been resumed. Mr. Simon tells us that he continued year after year to sit at the feet of his Gamaliel, getting more and more insight into his opinions, until, in 1834, two events occurred which determined the remaining course of Mr. Green's life. One of these events, it is needless to say, was Coleridge's death; the other was the death of his disciple's father, with the result of leaving Mr. Green possessed of such ample means as to render him independent of his profession. The language of Coleridge's will, together, no doubt, with verbal communications which had passed, imposed on Mr. Green what he accepted as an obligation to devote so far as necessary the whole remaining strength and earnestness of his life to the one task of systematising, developing, and establishing the doctrines of the Coleridgian philosophy. Accordingly, in 1836, two years after his master's death,

he retired from medical practice, and thenceforward, until his own death, nearly thirty years afterwards, he applied himself unceasingly to what was in a twofold sense a labour of love.

We are not, it seems from his biographer's account, to suppose that Mr. Green's task was in any material degree lightened for him by his previous collaboration with Coleridge. The latter had, as we have seen, declared in his letter to Allsop that "more than a volume" of the great work had been dictated by him to Mr. Green, so as to exist in a condition fit for the press; but this, according to Mr. Simon, was not the case, and the probability is, therefore, that "more than a volume" meant written material equal in amount to more than a volume — of course, an entirely different thing. Mr. Simon, at any rate, assures us that no available written material existed for setting comprehensively before the public, in Coleridge's own language, and in an argued form, the philosophical system with which he wished his name to be identified. Instead of it there were fragments — for the most part mutually inadaptable fragments, and beginnings, and studies of special subjects, and numberless notes on the margins and fly-leaves of books.

With this equipment, such as it was, Mr. Green set to work to methodise the Coleridgian doctrines, and to construct from them nothing less than such a system of philosophy as should "virtually include the law and explanation of all being, conscious and unconscious, and of all correlativity and duty, and be applicable directly or by deduction to whatsoever the human mind can contemplate —sensuous or supersensuous—of experience, purpose, or imagination." Born under post-diluvian conditions, Mr. Green was of course unable to accomplish his self-proposed

enterprise, but he must be allowed to have attacked his task with remarkable energy. "Theology, ethics, politics and political history, ethnology, language, æsthetics, psychology, physics, and the allied sciences, biology, logic, mathematics, pathology, all these subjects," declares his biographer, "were thoughtfully studied by him, in at least their basial principles and metaphysics, and most were elaborately written of, as though for the divisions of some vast cyclopædic work." At an early period of his labours he thought it convenient to increase his knowledge of Greek; he began to study Hebrew when more than sixty years old, and still later in life he took up Sanscrit. It was not until he was approaching his seventieth year and found his health beginning to fail him that Mr. Green seems to have felt that his design, in its more ambitious scope, must be abandoned, and that, in the impossibility of applying the Coleridgian system of philosophy to all human knowledge, it was his imperative duty under his literary trust to work out that particular application of it which its author had most at heart. Already, in an unpublished work which he had made it the first care of his trusteeship to compose, he had, though but roughly and imperfectly, as he considered, exhibited the relation of his master's doctrines to revealed religion, and it had now become time to supersede this unpublished compendium, the *Religio Laici*, as he had styled it, by a fuller elaboration of the great Coleridgian position that "Christianity, rightly understood, is identical with the highest philosophy, and that, apart from all question of historical evidence, the essential doctrines of Christianity are necessary and eternal truths of reason—truths which man, by the vouchsafed light of Nature and without aid from documents or tradition, may always and anywhere discover for himself." To this work accordingly Mr. Green

devoted the few remaining years of his life, and, dying in 1863 at the age of seventy-two, left behind him in MS. the work entitled *Spiritual Philosophy: founded on the teaching of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, which was published two years later, together with the memoir of the author, from which I have quoted, by Mr. John Simon. It consists of two volumes, the first of which is devoted to the exposition of the general principles of Coleridge's philosophy, while the second is entirely theological, and aims at indicating, on principles for which the first volume has contended, the essential doctrines of Christianity.

The earlier chapters of this volume Mr. Green devotes to an exposition (if indeed the word can be applied to what is really a catalogue of the results of a transcendental intuition) of the essential difference between the reason and the understanding—a distinction which Coleridge has himself elsewhere described as pre-eminently the *gradus ad philosophiam*, and might well have called its *pons asinorum*. In the second part of his first volume Mr. Green applies himself to the establishment of a position which, fundamental as it must be accounted in all philosophical speculations of this school, is absolutely vital to the theology which Coleridge sought to erect upon a metaphysical basis. This position is that the human will is to be regarded as the one ultimate fact of self-consciousness. So long as man confines himself to the contemplation of his percipient and reflective self alone—so long as he attends only to those modes of consciousness which are produced in him by the impressions of the senses and the operations of thought, he can never hope to escape from the famous *reductio ad inscibile* of Hume. He can never affirm anything more than the existence of those modes of consciousness, or assert, at least as a direct deliverance of intuition, that

his conscious self *is* anything apart from the perceptions and concepts to which he is attending. But when he turns from his perceiving and thinking to his willing self he becomes for the first time aware of something deeper than the mere objective presentations of consciousness; he obtains a direct intuition of an originant, causative, and independent self-existence. He will have attained in short to the knowledge of a noumenon, and of the only knowable noumenon. The barrier, elsewhere insuperable between the subject and object, is broken down; that which *knows* becomes identified with that which *is;* and in the consciousness of will the consciousness also of a self, as something independent of and superior to its own modifications, is not so much affirmed as acquired. The essence, in short, of the Coleridgian ontology consists in the alteration of a single though a very important word in the well-known Cartesian formula. *Cogito ergo sum* had been shown by Hume to involve an illicit process of reasoning. Descartes, according to the Scottish sceptic, had no right to have said more than *Cogito ergo cogitationes sunt.* But substitute willing for thinking, convert the formula into *Volo ergo sum*, and it becomes irrefragable.

So far as I can perceive, it would have been sufficient for Mr. Green's subsequent argument to have thus established the position of the will as the ultimate fact of consciousness, but he goes on to assert that he has thus secured the immovable ground of a philosophy of Realism. For since man, "in affirming his Personality by the verb substantive I am, asserts, nay, acquires, the knowledge of his own Substance as a Spiritual being, and thereby knows what substance truly and properly is, so he contemplates the outward, persons or things, as subjects partaking of reality by virtue of the same substance of which he is con-

scious in his own person." So far, however, from this being a philosophy of Realism, it is in effect, if not indeed in actual terms, a philosophy of Idealism. I, at least, am unable to see how any Idealist, from Berkeley downwards, could ask for a better definition of his theory of the external world than that it "partakes of reality by virtue of the same substance of which he is conscious in his own person."

But it is, of course, with the second volume of Mr. Green's work that one is chiefly concerned. Had Coleridge been a mere Transcendentalist for Transcendentalism's sake, had there been no connection between his philosophy of Being and his religious creed, it might be a question whether even the highly condensed and necessarily imperfect sketch which has here been given of it would not have been superfluous and out of place. But Coleridge was a Theosophist first, and a philosopher afterwards; it was mainly as an organon of religion that he valued his philosophy, and it was to the development and perfection of it, *as such organon*, that he may be said to have devoted, so far as it could be redeemed from its enthralment to lower necessities, the whole of the latter half of his career. No account of his life, therefore, could be complete without at least some brief glance at the details of this notable attempt to lead the world to true religion by the road of the Transcendental philosophy. It is difficult, of course, for those who have been trained in a wholly different school of thought to do justice to processes of reasoning carried on, as they cannot but hold, in terms of the inconceivable; it is still more difficult to be *sure* that you have done justice to it after all has been said; and I think that no candid student of the Coleridgian philosophico-theology (not being a professed disciple of

it, and therefore bound, at any rate, to feign familiarity with incomprehensibilities) will deny that he is often compelled to formulate its positions and recite its processes in somewhat of the same modest and confiding spirit as animates those youthful geometricians who learn their Euclid by heart. With this proviso I will, as briefly as may be, trace the course of the dialectic by which Mr. Green seeks to make the Coleridgian metaphysics demonstrative of the truth of Christianity.

Having shown that the Will is the true and the only tenable base of Philosophic Realism, the writer next proceeds to explain the growth of the Soul, from its rudimental strivings in its fallen condition to the development of its spiritual capabilities, and to trace its ascent to the conception of the Idea of God. The argument—if we may apply so definite a name to a process which is continually forced to appeal to something that may perhaps be higher, but is certainly *other* than the ratiocinative faculty—is founded partly on moral and partly on intellectual considerations. By an analysis of the moral phenomena associated with the action of the human will, and, in particular, of the conflict which arises between "the tendency of all Will to make itself absolute," and the consciousness that, under the conditions of man's fallen state, nothing but misery could result both to the individual and the race from the fulfilment of this tendency—Mr. Green shows how the Soul, or the Reason, or the Speculative Intellect (for he seems to use all three expressions indiscriminately) is morally prepared for the reception of the truth which his Understanding alone could never have compassed—the Idea of God. This is in effect neither more nor less than a restatement of that time-honoured argument for the existence of some Being of perfect holiness which has

always weighed so much with men of high spirituality as to blind them to the fact of its actually enhancing the intellectual difficulties of the situation. Man possesses a Will which longs to fulfil itself; but it is coupled with a nature which constantly impels him to those gratifications of will which tend not to self-preservation and progress, but to their contraries. Surely, then, on the strength of the mere law of life, which prevails everywhere, there must be some higher archetypal Will, to which human wills, or rather certain selected examples of them, may more and more conform themselves, and in which the union of unlimited efficiency in operation with unqualified purity of aim has been once for all effected. Or to put it yet another way: The life of the virtuous man is a life auxiliary to the preservation and progress of the race; but his will is under restraint. The will of the vicious man energises freely enough, but his life is hostile to the preservation and progress of the race. Now the natural and essential *nisus* of all Will is towards absolute freedom. But nothing in life has a natural and essential *nisus* towards that which tends to its deterioration and extinction. Therefore, there must be some ultimate means of reconciling absolute freedom of the Will with perfectly salutary conditions of its exercise. And since Mr. Green, like his master and all other Platonists, is incapable of stopping here, and contenting himself with assuming the existence of a "stream of tendency" which will gradually bring the human will into the required conditions, he here makes the inevitable Platonic jump, and proceeds to conclude that there must be a self-existent ideal Will in which absolute freedom and power concur with perfect purity and holiness.

So much for the moral part of Mr. Green's proof, which

so far fails, it will be observed, to carry us much beyond the Pantheistic position. It has, that is to say, to be proved that the "power not ourselves," which has been called Will, originates in some source to which we should be rationally justified in giving the name of "God;" and, singular as such a thing may seem, it is impossible at any rate for the logic of the understanding to regard Mr. Green's argument on this point as otherwise than hopelessly circular. The half-dozen pages or so which he devotes to the refutation of the Pantheistic view reduce themselves to the following simple *petitio principii:* the power is first assumed to be a Will; it is next affirmed with perfect truth that the very notion of Will would escape us except under the condition of Personality; and from this the existence of a personal God as the source of the power in question deduced. And the same vice underlies the further argument by which Mr. Green meets the familiar objection to the personality of the Absolute as involving contradictory conceptions. An infinite Person, he argues, is no contradiction in terms, unless "finition or limitation" be regarded as identical with "negation" (which, when applied to a hypothetical Infinite, one would surely think it is); and an Absolute Will is not the less absolute from being self-determined *ab intrâ*. For how, he asks, can any Will which is causative of reality be conceived as a Will except by conceiving it as *se finiens*, predetermining itself to the specific processes required by the act of causation? How, indeed? But the answer of a Pantheist would of course be that the very impossibility of conceiving of Will except as *se finiens* is his very ground for rejecting the notion of a volitional (in the sense of a personal) origin of the cosmos.

However, it is beyond my purposes to enter into any

detailed criticism of Mr. Green's position, more especially as I have not yet reached the central and capital point of his spiritual philosophy — the construction of the Christian theology on the basis of the Coleridgian metaphysics. Having deduced the Idea of God from man's consciousness of an individual Will perpetually affirming itself, Mr. Green proceeds to evolve the Idea of the Trinity, by (as he considers it) an equally necessary process from two of the invariable accompaniments of the above-mentioned introspective act. "For as in our consciousness," he truly says, "we are under the necessity of distinguishing the relation of 'myself,' now as the *subject* thinking and now as the *object* contemplated in the manifold of thought, so we might express the relations in the Divine instance as *Deus Subjectivus* and *Deus Objectivus*—that is, the Absolute Subjectivity or Supreme Will, uttering itself as and contemplating itself in the Absolute Objectivity or plenitude of Being eternally and causatively realised in his Personality." Whence it follows (so runs or seems to run the argument) that the Idea of God the Father as necessarily involves the Idea of God the Son as the "I" who, as the thinking subject, contemplate myself, implies the contemplated "Me" as the object thought of. Again, the man who reflects on the fact of his consciousness, "which discloses to him the unavoidable opposition of subject and object in the self of which he is conscious, cannot fail to see that the conscious mind requires not only the distinction in order to the act of reflection in itself, but the continual sense of the relative nature of the distinction and of the essential oneness of the mind itself." Whence it follows (so runs or seems to run the argument) that the Idea of the first two Persons of the Trinity as necessarily involves the Idea of the Third Person, as the

contemplation of the "Me" by the "I" implies the perpetual consciousness that the contemplator and the contemplated — the "I" and the "Me" — are one. In this manner is the Idea of the Trinity shown to be involved in the Idea of God, and to arise out of it by an implication as necessary as that which connects together the three phases of consciousness attendant upon every self-contemplative act of the individual mind.[1]

It may readily be imagined that after the Speculative Reason has been made to perform such feats as these the remainder of the work proposed to it could present no serious difficulty. And in the half-dozen chapters which follow it is made to evolve in succession the doctrine of the Incarnation, the Advent, and the Atonement of Christ, and to explain the mysteries of the fall of man and of original sin. Considered in the aspect in which Coleridge himself would have preferred to regard his pupil's work, namely as a systematic attempt to lead the minds of men to Christianity by an intellectual route, no more hopeless enterprise perhaps could have been conceived than that embodied in these volumes. It is like offering a traveller a guide-book written in hieroglyphics. Upon the most liberal computation it is probable that not one-fourth part

[1] Were it not hazardous to treat processes of the Speculative Reason as we deal with the vulgar dialectic of the Understanding, one would be disposed to reply that if the above argument proves the existence of three persons in the Godhead, it must equally prove the existence of three persons in every man who reflects upon his conscious self. That the Divine Mind, when engaged in the act of self-contemplation, must be conceived under three *relations* is doubtless as true as that the human mind, when so engaged, must be so conceived; but that these three *relations* are so many objective *realities* is what Mr. Green asserts indeed a few pages farther on, but what he nowhere attempts to prove.

of educated mankind are capable of so much as comprehending the philosophic doctrine upon which Coleridge seeks to base Christianity, and it is doubtful whether any but a still smaller fraction of these would admit that the foundation was capable of supporting the superstructure. That the writings of the pupil, like the teachings of the master whom he interprets, may serve the cause of religion in another than an intellectual way is possible enough. Not a few of the functions assigned to the Speculative Reason will strike many of us as moral and spiritual rather than intellectual in their character, and the appeal to them is in fact an appeal to man to chasten the lower passions of his nature, and to discipline his unruly will. Exhortations of that kind are religious all the world of philosophy over, and will succeed in proportion to the moral fervour and oratorical power which distinguish them. But if the benefits of Coleridge's theological teachings are to be reduced to this, it would of course have been much better to have dissociated them altogether from the exceedingly abstruse metaphysic to which they have been wedded.

CHAPTER XII.

COLERIDGE'S POSITION IN HIS LATER YEARS.—HIS DISCOURSE.—HIS INFLUENCE ON CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT.—FINAL REVIEW OF HIS INTELLECTUAL WORK.

THE critic who would endeavour to appreciate the position which Coleridge fills in the history of literature and thought for the first half of the nineteenth century must, if he possesses ordinary candour and courage, begin, I think, with a confession. He must confess an inability to comprehend the precise manner in which that position was attained, and the precise grounds on which it was recognized. For vast as were Coleridge's powers of thought and expression, and splendid, if incomplete, as is the record which they have left behind them in his works, they were never directed to purposes of instruction or persuasion in anything like that systematic and concentrated manner which is necessary to him who would found a school. Coleridge's writings on philosophical and theological subjects were essentially discursive, fragmentary, incomplete. Even when he professes an intention of exhausting his subject and affects a logical arrangement, it is not long before he forgets the design and departs from the order. His disquisitions are in no sense connected treatises on the subjects to which they relate. Brilliant *aperçus*, gnomic sayings, flights of fervid eloquence, infinitely suggestive reflections—of these

there is enough and to spare; but these, though an ample equipment for the critic, are not sufficient for the constructive philosopher. Nothing, it must be frankly said, in Coleridge's philosophical and theological writings — nothing, that is to say, which appeals in them to the mere intelligence—suffices to explain, at least to the appreciation of posterity, the fact that he was surrounded during these closing years of his life by an eager crowd of real or supposed disciples, including two, at any rate, of the most remarkable personalities of the time. And if nothing in Coleridge's writings serves to account for it, so neither does anything traceable or tangible in the mere matter of his conversations. This last point, however, is one which must be for the present reserved. I wish for the moment to confine myself to the fact of Coleridge's position during his later life at Highgate. To this we have, as we all know, an extremely eminent witness, and one from whose evidence most people, one may suppose, are by this time able to make their own deductions in all matters relating to the persons with whom he was brought into contact. Carlyle on Charles Lamb, few as the sour sentences are, must always warn us to be careful how we follow Carlyle "on" anybody whomsoever. But there is no evidence of any ill feeling on Carlyle's part towards Coleridge—nothing but a humorous, kindly-contemptuous compassion for his weaknesses and eccentricities; and the famous description in the *Life of Sterling* may be taken therefore as a fairly accurate account of the man and the circumstances to which it refers:

"Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill in those years looking down on London and its smoke tumult like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle, attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there. His express contribu-

tions to poetry, philosophy, or any specific province of human literature or enlightenment had been small and sadly intermittent; but he had, especially among young inquiring men, a higher than literary, a kind of prophetic or magician character. He was thought to hold—he alone in England—the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing by the 'reason' what the 'understanding' had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian, and say and point to the Church of England, with its singular old rubrics and surplices at Allhallowtide, *Esto perpetua*. A sublime man; who alone in those dark days had saved his crown of spiritual manhood, escaping from the black materialisms and revolutionary deluges with 'God, Freedom, Immortality,' still his; a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer; but to the rising spirits of the young generation he had this dusky sublime character, and sat there as a kind of Magus, girt in mystery and enigma; his Dodona oak-grove (Mr. Gillman's house at Highgate) whispering strange things, uncertain whether oracles or jargon."

The above quotation would suffice for my immediate purpose, but it is impossible to deny oneself or one's readers the pleasure of a refreshed recollection of the noble landscape-scene and the masterly portrait that follow:

"The Gillmans did not encourage much company or excitation of any sort round their sage; nevertheless, access to him, if a youth did reverently wish it, was not difficult. He would stroll about the pleasant garden with you, sit in the pleasant rooms of the place—perhaps take you to his own peculiar room, high up, with a rearward view, which was the chief view of all. A really charming outlook in fine weather. Close at hand wide sweeps of flowing leafy gardens, their few houses mostly hidden, the very chimney-pots veiled under blossoming umbrage, flowed gloriously down hill; gloriously issuing in wide-tufted undulating plain country, rich in all charms of field and town. Waving blooming country of the brightest green, dotted all over with handsome villas, handsome groves crossed by roads and human traffic, here inaudible, or heard only as a musical hum;

and behind all swam, under olive-tinted haze, the illimitable limitary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul's and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all. Nowhere of its kind could you see a grander prospect on a bright summer day, with the set of the air going southward—southward, and so draping with the city smoke not *you* but the city."

Then comes the invariable final touch, the one dash of black—or green, shall we call it—without which the master left no picture that had a human figure in the foreground:

"Here for hours would Coleridge talk concerning all conceivable or inconceivable things; and liked nothing better than to have an intelligent, or, failing that, even a silent and patient human listener. He distinguished himself to all that ever heard him as at least the most surprising talker extant in this world—and to some small minority, by no means to all, as the most excellent."

Then follows the well-known, wonderfully vivid, cynically pathetic sketch of the man:

"The good man—he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps, and gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings; a life heavy-laden, half-vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment. Brow and head were round and of massive weight, but the face was flabby and irresolute. The deep eyes, of a light hazel, were as full of sorrow as of inspiration; confused pain looked mildly from them, as in a kind of mild astonishment. The whole figure and air, good and amiable otherwise, might be called flabby and irresolute; expressive of weakness under possibility of strength. He hung loosely on his limbs, with knees bent, and stooping attitude; in walking he rather shuffled than decisively stept; and a lady once remarked he never could fix which side of the garden-walk would suit him best, but continually shifted, corkscrew fashion, and kept trying both; a heavy-laden, high-aspiring, and surely much-suffering man. His voice, naturally soft and good, had contracted itself into a plaintive snuffle and sing-song; he spoke as if preaching—you could have said preaching earnestly and almost hopelessly the weightiest things. I still recollect his 'object'

and 'subject,' terms of continual recurrence in the Kantean province; and how he sang and snuffled them into 'om-m-ject' and 'sum-m-mject,' with a kind of solemn shake or quaver as he rolled along.[1] No talk in his century or in any other could be more surprising."

Such, as he appeared to this half-contemptuous, half-compassionate, but ever acute observer, was Coleridge at this the zenith of his influence over the nascent thought of his day. Such to Carlyle seemed the *manner* of the deliverance of the oracles; in his view of their matter, as we all know from an equally well-remembered passage, his tolerance disappears, and his account here, with all its racy humour, is almost wholly impatient. Talk, "suffering no interruption, however reverent, hastily putting aside all foreign additions, annotation, or most ingenuous desires for elucidation, as well-meant superfluities which would never do;" talk "not flowing anywhither, like a river, but spreading everywhither in inextricable currents and regurgitations like a lake or sea;" a "confused unintelligible flood of utterance, threatening to submerge all known landmarks of thought and drown the world with you"—this, it must be admitted, is not an easily recognisable description of the Word of Life. Nor, certainly, does Carlyle's own personal experience of its preaching and effects — he having heard the preacher talk "with

[1] No one who recollects the equally singular manner in which another most distinguished metaphysician—the late Dean Mansel—was wont to quaver forth his admirably turned and often highly eloquent phrases of philosophical exposition, can fail to be reminded of him by the above description. No two temperaments or histories, however, could be more dissimilar. The two philosophers resembled each other in nothing save the "om-mject" and "sum-mject" of their studies.

eager musical energy two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers"—certain of whom, the narrator for one, "still kept eagerly listening in hope, while the most had long before given up and formed (if the room was large enough) humming groups of their own." "He began anywhere," continues this irresistibly comic sketch; "you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation; instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards an answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers, and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear for setting out; perhaps did at last get under way—but was swiftly solicited, turned aside by the flame of some radiant new game on this hand or on that into new courses, and ever into new; and before long into all the universe, where it was uncertain what game you would catch, or whether any." He had, indeed, according to the dissatisfied listener, "not the least talent for explaining this or anything to them; and you swam and fluttered on the mistiest, wide, unintelligible deluge of things for most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner." And the few vivid phrases of eulogy which follow seem only to deepen by contrast the prevailing hue of the picture. The "glorious islets" which were sometimes seen to "rise out of the haze," the "balmy sunny islets of the blest and the intelligible, at whose emergence the secondary humming group would all cease humming and hang breathless upon the eloquent words, till once your islet got wrapped in the mist again, and they would recommence humming"—these, it seems to be suggested, but rarely revealed themselves; but "eloquent, artistically expressive words you always had; piercing radiances of

a most subtle insight came at intervals; tones of noble pious sympathy, recognisable as pious though strangely coloured, were never wanting long; but, in general, you could not call this aimless cloud-capt, cloud-bound, lawlessly meandering discourse, by the name of excellent talk, but only of surprising. . . . The moaning sing-song of that theosophico-metaphysical monotony left in you at last a very dreary feeling."

It is tolerably clear, I think, that some considerable discount must be allowed upon the sum of disparagement in this famous criticism. We have learnt, indeed, to be more on the look-out for the disturbing influences of temperament in the judgments of this atrabilious observer than was the case when the *Life of Sterling* was written, and it is difficult to doubt that the unfavourable strokes in the above-quoted description have been unduly multiplied and deepened, partly in the mere waywardness of a sarcastic humour, and partly perhaps from a less excusable cause. It is always dangerous to accept one remarkable talker's view of the characteristics of another; and if this is true of men who merely compete with each other in the ordinary give-and-take of the dinner-table epigrammatist and *raconteur*, the caution is doubly necessary in the case of two rival prophets—two competing oracles. There are those among us who hold that the conversation of the Chelsea sage, in his later years, resembled his own description of the Highgate philosopher's, in this, at any rate, that it was mightily intolerant of interruption; and one is apt to suspect that at no time of his life did Carlyle "understand duologue" much better than Coleridge. It is probable enough, therefore, that the young lay-preacher did not quite relish being silenced by the elder, and that his account of the sermons was coloured by the rec-

ollection that his own remained undelivered. There is an abundance of evidence that the "glorious islets" emerged far more often from the transcendental haze than Carlyle would have us suppose. Hazlitt, a bitter assailant of Coleridge's, and whose caustic remark that "his talk was excellent if you let him start from no premisses and come to no conclusion," is cited with approval by Carlyle, has elsewhere spoken of Coleridge as the only person from whom he ever learned anything, has said of him that though he talked on forever you wished him to talk on forever, that "his thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort, but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from his feet." And besides this testimony to the eloquence which Carlyle only but inadequately recognises, one should set for what it is worth De Quincey's evidence to that consequence of thought which Carlyle denies altogether. To De Quincey the complaint that Coleridge wandered in his talk appeared unjust. According to him the great discourser only "seemed to wander," and he seemed to wander the most "when in fact his resistance to the wandering instinct was greatest, viz., when the compass and huge circuit by which his illustrations moved travelled farthest into remote regions before they began to revolve. Long before this coming round commenced, most people had lost him, and, naturally enough, supposed that he had lost himself. They continued to admire the separate beauty of the thoughts, but did not see their relations to the dominant theme." De Quincey, however, declares positively in the faith of his "long and intimate knowledge of Coleridge's mind, that logic the most severe was as inalienable from his modes of thinking as grammar from his language."

Nor should we omit the testimony of another, a more partial, perhaps, but even better informed judge. The *Table Talk*, edited by Mr. Nelson Coleridge, shows how pregnant, how pithy, how full of subtle observation, and often also of playful humour, could be the talk of the great discourser in its lighter and more colloquial forms. The book indeed is, to the thinking of one, at any rate, of its frequent readers, among the most delightful in the world. But thus speaks its editor of his uncle's conversation in his more serious moods:

"To pass an entire day with Coleridge was a marvellous change indeed [from the talk of daily life]. It was a Sabbath past expression, deep and tranquil and serene. You came to a man who had travelled in many countries and in critical times; who had seen and felt the world in most of its ranks and in many of its vicissitudes and weaknesses; one to whom all literature and art were absolutely subject; and to whom, with a reasonable allowance as to technical details, all science was, in a most extraordinary degree, familiar. Throughout a long-drawn summer's day would this man talk to you in low, equable, but clear and musical tones concerning things human and divine; marshalling all history, harmonising all experiment, probing the depths of your consciousness, and revealing visions of glory and terror to the imagination; but pouring withal such floods of light upon the mind that you might for a season, like Paul, become blind in the very act of conversion. And this he would do without so much as one allusion to himself, without a word of reflection upon others, save when any given art fell naturally in the way of his discourse; without one anecdote that was not proof and illustration of a previous position; gratifying no passion, indulging no caprice, but, with a calm mastery over your soul, leading you onward and onward forever through a thousand windings, yet with no pause, to some magnificent point in which, as in a focus, all the parti-coloured rays of his discourse should converge in light. In all these he was, in truth, your teacher and guide; but in a little while you might forget that he was other than a fellow-student and the companion of your way—so playful was his manner, so simple his language, so affectionate the glance of his eye!"

Impressive, however, as these displays may have been, it is impossible to suppose that their direct didactic value as discourses was at all considerable. Such as it was, moreover, it was confined in all probability to an extremely select circle of followers. A few mystics of the type of Maurice, a few eager seekers after truth like Sterling, may have gathered, or fancied they gathered, distinct dogmatic instruction from the Highgate oracles; and no doubt, to the extent of his influence over the former of these disciples, we may justly credit Coleridge's discourses with having exercised a real if only a transitory directive effect upon nineteenth-century thought. But the terms in which his influence is sometimes spoken of appear, as far as one can judge of the matter at this distance of time, to be greatly exaggerated. To speak of it in the same way as we are—or were—accustomed to speak of the influence of Carlyle, is to subject it to an altogether inappropriate comparison. It is not merely that Coleridge founded no recognisable school, for neither did Carlyle. It is that the former can show absolutely nothing at all resembling that sort of power which enabled the latter to lay hold upon all the youthful minds of his time—minds of the most disparate orders and associated with the utmost diversities of temperament, and detain them in a captivity which, brief as it may have been in some cases, has in no case failed to leave its marks behind it. Over a few spirits already prepared to receive them Coleridge's teachings no doubt exerted power, but he led no soul captive against its will. There are few middle-aged men of active intelligence at the present day who can avoid a confession of having "taken" Carlylism in their youth; but no mental constitutions not predisposed to it could ever have caught Coleridgism at all. There is indeed no moral theory of life, there are no

maxims of conduct, such as youth above all things craves for, in Coleridge's teaching. Apart from the intrinsic difficulties of the task to which he invites his disciples, it labours under a primary and essential disadvantage of postponing moral to intellectual liberation. Contrive somehow or other to attain to just ideas as to the capacities and limitations of human consciousness, considered especially in relation to its two important and eternally distinct functions, the Reason and the Understanding, and peace of mind shall in due time be added unto you. That is in effect Coleridge's answer to the inquirer who consults him; and if the distinction between the Reason and the Understanding were as obvious as it is obscure to the average unmetaphysical mind, and of a value as assured for the purpose to which Coleridge applies it as it is uncertain, the answer would nevertheless send many a would-be disciple sorrowful away. His natural impulse is to urge the oracle to tell him whether there be not some one moral attitude which he can wisely and worthily adopt towards the universe, whatever theory he may form of his mental relations to it, or without forming any such theory at all. And it was because Carlyle supplied, or was believed to supply an answer, such as it was, to this universal question, that his train of followers, voluntary and involuntary, permanent and temporary, has been so large.

It appears to me, therefore, on as careful an examination of the point as the data admit of, that Coleridge's position in these latter days of his life has been somewhat mythically exalted by the generation which succeeded him. There are, I think, distinct traces of a Coleridgian legend which has only slowly died out. The actual truth I believe to be that Coleridge's position from 1818 or 1820 till his death, though one of the greatest eminence, was in no sense

one of the highest, or even of any considerable influence. Fame and honour, in the fullest measure, were no doubt his: in that matter, indeed, he was only receiving payment of long-delayed arrears. The poetic school with which he was, though not with entire accuracy, associated, had outlived its period of contempt and obloquy. In spite of the two quarterlies, the Tory review hostile, its Whig rival coldly silent, the public had recognised the high imaginative merit of *Christabel;* and who knows but that if the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* had appeared at this date instead of twenty years before, it would have obtained a certain number of readers even among landsmen?[1] But over and above the published works of the poet there were those extraordinary personal characteristics to which the fame of his works of course attracted a far larger share than formerly of popular attention. A remarkable man has more attractive power over the mass of mankind than the most remarkable of books, and it was because the report of Coleridge among those who knew him was more stimulating to public curiosity than even the greatest of his poems, that his celebrity in these latter years attained such proportions. Wordsworth said that though "he had seen many men do wonderful things, Coleridge was the only wonderful *man* he had ever met," and it was not the doer of wonderful things but the wonderful man that English society in those days went out to see. Seeing would have been enough, but for a certain number there was hearing too, with the report of it for all; and it is not surprising that fame of the marvellous discourser should, in mere virtue of

[1] The Longmans told Coleridge that the greater part of the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* had been sold to seafaring men, who, having heard of the *Ancient Mariner*, took the volume for a naval song-book.

his extraordinary power of improvised speech, his limitless and untiring mastery of articulate words, have risen to a height to which writers whose only voice is in their pens can never hope to attain.

A reputation of that kind, however, must necessarily perish with its possessor; and Coleridge's posthumous renown has grown, his place in English literature has become more assured, if it has not been even fixed higher, since his death than during his lifetime. This is, in part no doubt, one among the consequences of those very defects of character which so unfortunately limited his actual achievements. He has been credited by faith, as it were, with those famous "unwritten books" of which he assured Charles Lamb that the titles alone would fill a volume, and such "popular reputation," in the strict sense of the word, as he has left behind him, is measured rather by what he was thought capable of doing than by what he did. By serious students, however, the real worth of Coleridge will be differently estimated. For them his peculiar value to English literature is not only undiminished by the incompleteness of his work; it has been, in a certain sense, enhanced thereby. Or, perhaps, it would be more strictly accurate to say that the value could not have existed without the incompleteness. A Coleridge with the faculty of concentration, and the habit of method superadded — a Coleridge capable of becoming possessed by any one form of intellectual energy to the exclusion of all others—might, indeed, have left behind him a more enduring reputation as a philosopher, and possibly (although this, for reasons already stated, is, in my own opinion, extremely doubtful) bequeathed to his countrymen more poetry destined to live; but, unquestionably, he would never have been able to render that precise service to modern thought and literature

which, in fact, they owe to him. To have exercised his vivifying and fertilising influence over the minds of others his intellect was bound to be of the dispersive order; it was essential that he should "take all knowledge to be his province," and that that eager, subtle, and penetrative mind should range as freely as it did over subject after subject of human interest — illuminating each of them in turn with those rays of true critical insight which, amid many bewildering cross-lights and some few downright *ignes fatui*, flash forth upon us from all Coleridge's work.

Of the personal weaknesses which prevented the just development of the powers, enough, perhaps, has been incidentally said in the course of this volume. But, in summing up his history, I shall not, I trust, be thought to judge the man too harshly in saying that, though the natural disadvantages of wretched health, almost from boyhood upward, must, in common fairness, be admitted in partial excuse for his failure, they do not excuse it altogether. It is difficult not to feel that Coleridge's character, apart altogether from defects of physical constitution, was wanting in manliness of fibre. His willingness to accept assistance at the hands of others is too manifestly displayed even at the earlier and more robust period of his life. It would be a mistake, of course, in dealing with a literary man of Coleridge's era, to apply the same standards as obtain in our own days. Wordsworth, as we have seen, made no scruple to accept the benevolences of the Wedgwoods. Southey, the type of independence and self-help, was, for some years, in receipt of a pension from a private source. But Coleridge, as Miss Meteyard's disclosures have shown, was at all times far more willing to depend upon others, and was far less scrupulous about soliciting their bounty, than was either of his two friends. Had he shared more of the spirit

which made Johnson refuse to owe to the benevolence of others what Providence had enabled him to do for himself, it might have been better, no doubt, for the world and for the work which he did therein.

But when we consider what that work was, how varied and how wonderful, it seems idle—nay, it seems ungrateful and ungracious—to speculate too curiously on what further or other benefits this great intellect might have conferred upon mankind, had its possessor been endowed with those qualities of resolution and independence which he lacked. That Coleridge so often only *shows* the way, and so seldom guides our steps along it to the end, is no just ground of complaint. It would be as unreasonable to complain of a beacon-light that it is not a steam-tug, and forget in the incompleteness of its separate services the glory of their number. It is a more reasonable objection that the light itself is too often liable to obscuration—that it stands erected upon a rock too often enshrouded by the mists of its encircling sea. But even this objection should not too greatly weigh with us. It would be wiser and better for us to dwell rather upon its splendour and helpfulness in the hours of its efficacy, to think how vast is then the expanse of waters which it illuminates, and its radiance how steady and serene.

THE END.

WORDSWORTH

BY

F. W. H. MYERS

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

BIRTH AND EDUCATION.—CAMBRIDGE 1

CHAPTER II.

RESIDENCE IN LONDON AND IN FRANCE 15

CHAPTER III.

MISS WORDSWORTH.—LYRICAL BALLADS.—SETTLEMENT AT GRASMERE 25

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENGLISH LAKES 38

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE.—SOCIETY.—HIGHLAND TOUR 55

CHAPTER VI.

SIR GEORGE BEAUMONT.—DEATH OF JOHN WORDSWORTH 65

CHAPTER VII.

"HAPPY WARRIOR," AND PATRIOTIC POEMS 74

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE
CHILDREN.—LIFE AT RYDAL MOUNT.—"THE EXCURSION" 84

CHAPTER IX.

POETIC DICTION.—"LAODAMIA."—"EVENING ODE" . . 103

CHAPTER X.

NATURAL RELIGION 123

CHAPTER XI.

ITALIAN TOUR.—ECCLESIASTICAL SONNETS.—POLITICAL VIEWS.—LAUREATESHIP 153

CHAPTER XII.

LETTERS ON THE KENDAL AND WINDERMERE RAILWAY. —CONCLUSION 167

PAGE
ON" 84

. . 103

. . 123

ICAL
. . 153

VAY.
. . 167

I CAN
than
his o
should
a priv
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WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND EDUCATION.—CAMBRIDGE.

I CANNOT, perhaps, more fitly begin this short biography than with some words in which its subject has expressed his own feelings as to the spirit in which such a task should be approached. "Silence," says Wordsworth, "is a privilege of the grave, a right of the departed: let him, therefore, who infringes that right by speaking publicly of, for, or against those who cannot speak for themselves, take heed that he opens not his mouth without a sufficient sanction. Only to philosophy enlightened by the affections does it belong justly to estimate the claims of the deceased, on the one hand, and of the present age and future generations, on the other, and to strike a balance between them. Such philosophy runs a risk of becoming extinct among us, if the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life, to which we have lately been more and more accustomed, are to be regarded as indications of a vigorous state of public feeling. The wise and good respect, as one of the noblest characteristics of Englishmen, that jealousy of familiar ap-

proach which, while it contributes to the maintenance of private dignity, is one of the most efficacious guardians of rational public freedom."

In accordance with these views the poet entrusted to his nephew, the present Bishop of Lincoln, the task of composing memoirs of his life, in the just confidence that nothing would by such hands be given to the world which was inconsistent with the dignity either of the living or of the dead. From those memoirs the facts contained in the present work have been for the most part drawn. It has, however, been my fortune, through hereditary friendships, to have access to many manuscript letters and much oral tradition bearing upon the poet's private life;[1] and some details and some passages of letters hitherto unpublished will appear in these pages. It would seem, however, that there is but little of public interest in Wordsworth's life which has not already been given to the world, and I have shrunk from narrating such minor personal incidents as he would himself have thought it needless to dwell upon. I have endeavoured, in short, to write as though the Subject of this biography were himself its Auditor, listening, indeed, from some region where all of truth is discerned and nothing but truth desired, but checking by his venerable presence any such revelation as public advantage does not call for, and private delicacy would condemn.

As regards the critical remarks which these pages contain, I have only to say that I have carefully consulted such notices of the poet as his personal friends have left

[1] I take this opportunity of thanking Mr. William Wordsworth, the son, and Mr. William Wordsworth, the grandson, of the poet, for help most valuable in enabling me to give a true impression of the poet's personality.

as, and also, I believe, nearly every criticism of importance which has appeared on his works. I find with pleasure that a considerable agreement of opinion exists—though less among professed poets or critics than among men of eminence in other departments of thought or action whose attention has been directed to Wordsworth's poems. And although I have felt it right to express in each case my own views with exactness, I have been able to feel that I am not obtruding on the reader any merely fanciful estimate in which better accredited judges would refuse to concur.

Without further preface I now begin my story of Wordsworth's life, in words which he himself dictated to his intended biographer. "I was born," he said, "at Cockermouth, in Cumberland, on April 7th, 1770, the second son of John Wordsworth, attorney-at-law—as lawyers of this class were then called—and law-agent to Sir James Lowther, afterwards Earl of Lonsdale. My mother was Anne, only daughter of William Cookson, mercer, of Penrith, and of Dorothy, born Crackanthorp, of the ancient family of that name, who from the times of Edward the Third had lived in Newbiggen Hall, Westmoreland. My grandfather was the first of the name of Wordsworth who came into Westmoreland, where he purchased the small estate of Sockbridge. He was descended from a family who had been settled at Peniston, in Yorkshire, near the sources of the Don, probably before the Norman Conquest. Their names appear on different occasions in all the transactions, personal and public, connected with that parish; and I possess, through the kindness of Colonel Beaumont, an almery, made in 1525, at the expense of a William Wordsworth, as is expressed in a Latin inscription carved upon it, which carries the pedigree of the family back four

generations from himself. The time of my infancy and early boyhood was passed partly at Cockermouth, and partly with my mother's parents at Penrith, where my mother, in the year 1778, died of a decline, brought on by a cold, in consequence of being put, at a friend's house in London, in what used to be called 'a best bedroom.' My father never recovered his usual cheerfulness of mind after this loss, and died when I was in my fourteenth year, a school-boy, just returned from Hawkshead, whither I had been sent with my elder brother Richard, in my ninth year.

"I remember my mother only in some few situations, one of which was her pinning a nosegay to my breast, when I was going to say the catechism in the church, as was customary before Easter. An intimate friend of hers told me that she once said to her that the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious was William; and he, she said, would be remarkable, either for good or for evil. The cause of this was that I was of a stiff, moody, and violent temper; so much so that I remember going once into the attics of my grandfather's house at Penrith, upon some indignity having been put upon me, with an intention of destroying myself with one of the foils which I knew was kept there. I took the foil in hand, but my heart failed. Upon another occasion, while I was at my grandfather's house at Penrith, along with my eldest brother, Richard, we were whipping tops together in the large drawing-room, on which the carpet was only laid down upon particular occasions. The walls were hung round with family pictures, and I said to my brother, 'Dare you strike your whip through that old lady's petticoat?' He replied, 'No, I won't.' 'Then,' said I, 'here goes!' and I struck my lash through her hooped petticoat; for which, no doubt, though I have forgotten

it, I was properly punished. But, possibly from some want of judgment in punishments inflicted, I had become perverse and obstinate in defying chastisement, and rather proud of it than otherwise.

"Of my earliest days at school I have little to say, but that they were very happy ones, chiefly because I was left at liberty then, and in the vacations, to read whatever books I liked. For example, I read all Fielding's works, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and any part of Swift that I liked —*Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Tale of a Tub*, being both much to my taste. It may be, perhaps, as well to mention that the first verses which I wrote were a task imposed by my master—the subject, *The Summer Vacation;* and of my own accord I added others upon *Return to School.* There was nothing remarkable in either poem; but I was called upon, among other scholars, to write verses upon the completion of the second centenary from the foundation of the school in 1585 by Archbishop Sandys. These verses were much admired—far more than they deserved, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope's versification, and a little in his style."

But it was not from exercises of this kind that Wordsworth's school-days drew their inspiration. No years of his life, perhaps, were richer in strong impressions; but they were impressions derived neither from books nor from companions, but from the majesty and loveliness of the scenes around him;—from Nature, his life-long mistress, loved with the first heats of youth. To her influence we shall again recur; it will be most convenient first to trace Wordsworth's progress through the curriculum of ordinary education.

It was due to the liberality of Wordsworth's two uncles, Richard Wordsworth and Christopher Crackanthorp (un-

der whose care he and his brothers were placed at their father's death, in 1783), that his education was prolonged beyond his school-days. For Sir James Lowther, afterwards Lord Lonsdale—whose agent Wordsworth's father, Mr. John Wordsworth, was—becoming aware that his agent had about 5000*l.* at the bank, and wishing, partly on political grounds, to make his power over him absolute, had forcibly borrowed this sum of him, and then refused to repay it. After Mr. John Wordsworth's death much of the remaining fortune which he left behind him was wasted in efforts to compel Lord Lonsdale to refund this sum; but it was never recovered till his death in 1801, when his successor repaid 8500*l.* to the Wordsworths, being a full acquittal, with interest, of the original debt. The fortunes of the Wordsworth family were, therefore, at a low ebb in 1787, and much credit is due to the uncles who discerned the talents of William and Christopher, and bestowed a Cambridge education on the future Poet Laureate, and the future Master of Trinity.

In October, 1787, then, Wordsworth went up as an undergraduate to St. John's College, Cambridge. The first court of this College, in the south-western corner of which were Wordsworth's rooms, is divided only by a narrow lane from the Chapel of Trinity College, and his first memories are of the Trinity clock, telling the hours "twice over, with a male and female voice," of the pealing organ, and of the prospect when

> "From my pillow looking forth, by light
> Of moon or favouring stars I could behold
> The antechapel, where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone."

For the most part, the recollections which Wordsworth brought away from Cambridge are such as had already found expression more than once in English literature; for it has been the fortune of that ancient University to receive in her bosom most of that long line of poets who form the peculiar glory of our English speech. Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Marlowe; Dryden, Cowley, and Waller; Milton, George Herbert, and Gray—to mention only the most familiar names—had owed allegiance to that mother who received Wordsworth now, and Coleridge and Byron immediately after him. "Not obvious, not obtrusive, she;" but yet her sober dignity has often seemed no unworthy setting for minds, like Wordsworth's, meditative without languor, and energies advancing without shock or storm. Never, perhaps, has the spirit of Cambridge been more truly caught than in Milton's *Penseroso;* for this poem obviously reflects the seat of learning which the poet had lately left, just as the *Allegro* depicts the cheerful rusticity of the Buckinghamshire village which was his new home. And thus the *Penseroso* was understood by Gray, who, in his *Installation Ode*, introduces Milton among the bards and sages who lean from heaven,

> "To bless the place where, on their opening soul,
> First the genuine ardour stole."

"'Twas Milton struck the deep-toned shell," and invoked with the old affection the scenes which witnessed his best and early years:

> "Ye brown o'er-arching groves,
> That contemplation loves,
> Where willowy Camus lingers with delight!
> Oft at the blush of dawn
> I trod your level lawn,
> Oft wooed the gleam of Cynthia silver-bright

> In cloisters dim, far from the haunts of Folly,
> With Freedom by my side, and soft-eyed Melancholy."

And Wordsworth also "on the dry smooth-shaven green" paced on solitary evenings "to the far-off curfew's sound," beneath those groves of forest-trees among which "Philomel still deigns a song" and the spirit of contemplation lingers still; whether the silent avenues stand in the summer twilight filled with fragrance of the lime, or the long rows of chestnut engirdle the autumn river-lawns with walls of golden glow, or the tall elms cluster in garden or *Wilderness* into towering citadels of green. Beneath one exquisite ash-tree, wreathed with ivy, and hung in autumn with yellow tassels from every spray, Wordsworth used to linger long. "Scarcely Spenser's self," he tells us,

> "Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
> Or could more bright appearances create
> Of human forms with superhuman powers,
> Than I beheld loitering on calm, clear nights
> Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth."

And there was another element in Wordsworth's life at Cambridge more peculiarly his own—that exultation which a boy born among the mountains may feel when he perceives that the delight in the external world which the mountains have taught him has not perished by uprooting, nor waned for want of nourishment in field or fen; that even here, where nature is unadorned, and scenery, as it were, reduced to its elements—where the prospect is but the plain surface of the earth, stretched wide beneath an open heaven—even here he can still feel the early glow, can take delight in that broad and tranquil greenness, and in the august procession of the day.

"As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,
I looked for universal things; perused
The common countenance of earth and sky—
Earth, nowhere unembellished by some trace
Of that first Paradise whence man was driven;
And sky, whose beauty and bounty are expressed
By the proud name she bears—the name of Heaven."

Nor is it only in these open air scenes that Wordsworth has added to the long tradition a memory of his own. The "storied windows richly dight," which have passed into a proverb in Milton's song, cast in King's College Chapel the same "soft chequerings" upon their framework of stone while Wordsworth watched through the pauses of the anthem the winter afternoon's departing glow:

"Martyr, or King, or sainted Eremite,
Whoe'er ye be that thus, yourselves unseen,
Imbue your prison-bars with solemn sheen,
Shine on until ye fade with coming Night."

From those shadowy seats whence Milton had heard "the pealing organ blow to the full-voiced choir below," Wordsworth too gazed upon—

"That branching roof
Self-poised, and scooped into ten thousand cells
Where light and shade repose, where music dwells
Lingering, and wandering on as loth to die—
Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality."

Thus much, and more, there was of ennobling and unchangeable in the very aspect and structure of that ancient University, by which Wordsworth's mind was bent towards a kindred greatness. But of active moral and intellectual life there was at that time little to be found within her

walls. The floodtide of her new life had not yet set in; she was still slumbering, as she had slumbered long, content to add to her majesty by the mere lapse of generations, and increment of her ancestral calm. Even had the intellectual life of the place been more stirring, it is doubtful how far Wordsworth would have been welcomed, or deserved to be welcomed, by authorities or students. He began residence at seventeen, and his northern nature was late to flower. There seems, in fact, to have been even less of visible promise about him than we should have expected; but rather something untamed and insubordinate, something heady and self-confident; an independence that seemed only rusticity, and an indolent ignorance which assumed too readily the tones of scorn. He was as yet a creature of the lakes and mountains, and love for Nature was only slowly leading him to love and reverence for man. Nay, such attraction as he had hitherto felt for the human race had been interwoven with her influence in a way so strange that to many minds it will seem a childish fancy not worth recounting. The objects of his boyish idealization had been Cumbrian shepherds—a race whose personality seems to melt into Nature's—who are united as intimately with moor and mountain as the petrel with the sea.

> "A rambling school-boy, thus
> I felt his presence in his own domain
> As of a lord and master—or a power,
> Or genius, under Nature, under God,
> Presiding; and severest solitude
> Had more commanding looks when he was there.
> When up the lonely brooks on rainy days
> Angling I went, or trod the trackless hills
> By mists bewildered, suddenly mine eyes
> Have glanced upon him distant a few steps,
> In size a giant, stalking through thick fog,

His sheep like Greenland bears; or, as he stepped
Beyond the boundary line of some hill-shadow,
His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun;
Or him have I descried in distant sky,
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height! like an aerial cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
Of the Chartreuse, for worship. Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight;
And thus my heart was early introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature; hence the human form
To me became an index of delight,
Of grace and honour, power and worthiness."

"This sanctity of Nature given to man"—this interfusion of human interest with the sublimity of moor and hill—formed a typical introduction to the manner in which Wordsworth regarded mankind to the end—depicting him as set, as it were, amid impersonal influences, which make his passion and struggle but a little thing; as when painters give but a strip of their canvas to the fields and cities of men, and overhang the narrowed landscape with the space and serenity of heaven.

To this distant perception of man—of man "purified, removed, and to a distance that was fit"—was added, in his first summer vacation, a somewhat closer interest in the small joys and sorrows of the villagers of Hawkshead—a new sympathy for the old Dame in whose house the poet still lodged, for "the quiet woodman in the woods," and even for the "frank-hearted maids of rocky Cumberland," with whom he now delighted to spend an occasional evening in dancing and country mirth. And since the events in this poet's life are for the most part inward and unseen,

and depend upon some shock and coincidence between the operations of his spirit and the cosmorama of the external world, he has recorded with especial emphasis a certain sunrise which met him as he walked homewards from one of these scenes of rustic gaiety—a sunrise which may be said to have begun that poetic career which a sunset was to close:

> "Ah! need I say, dear Friend, that to the brim
> My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated Spirit."

His second long vacation brought him a further gain in human affections. His sister, of whom he had seen little for some years, was with him once more at Penrith, and with her another maiden,

> "By her exulting outside look of youth
> And placid under-countenance, first endeared;"

whose presence now laid the foundation of a love which was to be renewed and perfected when his need for it was full, and was to be his support and solace to his life's end. His third long vacation he spent in a walking tour in Switzerland. Of this, now the commonest relaxation of studious youth, he speaks as of an "unprecedented course," indicating "a hardy slight of college studies and their set rewards." And it seems, indeed, probable that Wordsworth and his friend Jones were actually the first undergraduates who ever spent their summer in this way. The pages of the *Prelude* which narrate this excursion, and especially the description of the crossing of the Simplon—

"The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed"—

form one of the most impressive parts of that singular autobiographical poem, which, at first sight so tedious and insipid, seems to gather force and meaning with each fresh perusal. These pages, which carry up to the verge of manhood the story of Wordsworth's career, contain, perhaps, as strong and simple a picture as we shall anywhere find of hardy English youth—its proud self-sufficingness and careless independence of all human things. Excitement, and thought, and joy, seem to come at once at its bidding; and the chequered and struggling existence of adult men seems something which it need never enter, and hardly deigns to comprehend.

Wordsworth and his friend encountered on this tour many a stirring symbol of the expectancy that was running through the nations of Europe. They landed at Calais "on the very eve of that great federal day" when the Trees of Liberty were planted all over France. They met on their return

"The Brabant armies on the fret
For battle in the cause of liberty."

But the exulting pulse that ran through the poet's veins could hardly yet pause to sympathize deeply even with what in the world's life appealed most directly to ardent youth.

"A stripling, scarcely of the household then
Of social life, I looked upon these things
As from a distance; heard, and saw, and felt—
Was touched, but with no intimate concern.
I seemed to move along them as a bird
Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues
Its sport or feeds in its proper element.

I wanted not that joy, I did not need
Such help. The ever-living universe,
Turn where I might, was opening out its glories;
And the independent spirit of pure youth
Called forth at every season new delights,
Spread round my steps like sunshine o'er green fields."

lds."

CHAPTER II.

RESIDENCE IN LONDON AND IN FRANCE.

WORDSWORTH took his B.A. degree in January, 1791, and quitted Cambridge with no fixed intentions as to his future career. "He did not feel himself," he said long afterwards, "good enough for the Church; he felt that his mind was not properly disciplined for that holy office, and that the struggle between his conscience and his impulses would have made life a torture. He also shrank from the law. He had studied military history with great interest, and the strategy of war; and he always fancied that he had talents for command; and he at one time thought of a military life; but then he was without connexions, and he felt if he were ordered to the West Indies his talents would not save him from the yellow fever, and he gave that up." He therefore repaired to London, and lived there for a time on a small allowance, and with no definite aim. His relations with the great city were of a very slight and external kind. He had few acquaintances, and spent his time mainly in rambling about the streets. His descriptions of this phase of his life have little interest. There is some flatness in an enumeration of the nationalities observable in a London crowd, concluding thus—

> "Malays, Lascars, the Tartar, the Chinese,
> And Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns."

But Wordsworth's limitations were inseparably connected with his strength. And just as the flat scenery of Cambridgeshire had only served to intensify his love for such elements of beauty and grandeur as still were present in sky and fen, even so the bewilderment of London taught him to recognize with an intenser joy such fragments of things rustic, such aspects of things eternal, as were to be found amidst that rush and roar. To the frailer spirit of Hartley Coleridge the weight of London might seem a load impossible to shake off. "And what hath Nature," he plaintively asked—

> "And what hath Nature but the blank void sky
> And the thronged river toiling to the main?"

But Wordsworth saw more than this. He became, as one may say, the poet not of London considered as London, but of London considered as a part of the country. Like his own *Farmer of Tilsbury Vale*—

> "In the throng of the Town like a Stranger is he,
> Like one whose own Country's far over the sea;
> And Nature, while through the great city he hies,
> Full ten times a day takes his heart by surprise."

Among the poems describing these sudden shocks of vision and memory none is more exquisite than the *Reverie of Poor Susan:*

> "At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
> Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:
> Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
> In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.
>
> "'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
> A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
> Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
> And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside."

The picture is one of those which come home to many a country heart with one of those sudden "revulsions into the natural" which philosophers assert to be the essence of human joy. But noblest and best known of all these poems is the *Sonnet on Westminster Bridge*, "Earth hath not anything to show more fair;" in which Nature has re-asserted her dominion over the works of all the multitude of men; and in the early clearness the poet beholds the great City — as Sterling imagined it on his dying bed— "not as full of noise and dust and confusion, but as something silent, grand, and everlasting." And even in later life, when Wordsworth was often in London, and was welcome in any society, he never lost this external manner of regarding it. He was always of the same mind as the group of listeners in his *Power of Music:*

> "Now, Coaches and Chariots! roar on like a stream!
> Here are twenty Souls happy as souls in a dream:
> They are deaf to your murmurs, they care not for you,
> Nor what ye are flying, nor what ye pursue!"

He never made the attempt—vulgarized by so many a "fashionable novelist," and in which no poet has succeeded yet—to disentangle from that turmoil its elements of romance and of greatness; to enter that realm of emotion where Nature's aspects become the scarcely noted accessory of vicissitudes that transcend her own; to trace the passion or the anguish which whirl along some lurid vista towards a sun that sets in storm, or gaze across silent squares by summer moonlight amid a smell of dust and flowers.

But although Wordsworth passed thus through London unmodified and indifferent, the current of things was sweeping him on to mingle in a fiercer tumult—to be caught in

the tides of a more violent and feverish life. In November, 1791, he landed in France, meaning to pass the winter at Orleans and learn French. Up to this date the French Revolution had impressed him in a rather unusual manner —namely, as being a matter of course. The explanation of this view is a somewhat singular one. Wordsworth's was an old family, and his connexions were some of them wealthy and well placed in the world; but the chances of his education had been such that he could scarcely realize to himself any other than a democratic type of society. Scarcely once, he tells us, in his school days had he seen boy or man who claimed respect on the score of wealth and blood; and the manly atmosphere of Cambridge preserved even in her lowest days a society

> "Where all stood thus far
> Upon equal ground; that we were brothers all
> In honour, as in one community,
> Scholars and gentlemen;"

while the teachings of nature and the dignity of Cumbrian peasant life had confirmed his high opinion of the essential worth of man. The upheaval of the French people, therefore, and the downfall of privilege, seemed to him no portent for good or evil, but rather the tardy return of a society to its stable equilibrium. He passed through revolutionized Paris with satisfaction and sympathy, but with little active emotion, and proceeded first to Orleans, and then to Blois, between which places he spent nearly a year. At Orleans he became intimately acquainted with the nobly-born but republican General Beaupuis, an inspiring example of all in the Revolution that was self-devoted and chivalrous, and had compassion on the wretched poor. In conversation with him Wordsworth learnt with what new force

the well-worn adages of the moralist fall from the lips of one who is called upon to put them at once in action, and to stake life itself on the verity of his maxims of honour. The poet's heart burned within him as he listened. He could not, indeed, help mourning sometimes at the sight of a dismantled chapel, or peopling in imagination the forest-glades in which they sat with the chivalry of a by-gone day. But he became increasingly absorbed in his friend's ardour, and the Revolution — *mulier formosa superne* — seemed to him big with all the hopes of man.

He returned to Paris in October, 1792—a month after the massacres of September; and he has described his agitation and dismay at the sight of such world-wide destinies swayed by the hands of such men. In a passage which curiously illustrates that reasoned self-confidence and deliberate boldness which for the most part he showed only in the peaceful incidents of a literary career, he has told us how he was on the point of putting himself forward as a leader of the Girondist party, in the conviction that his single-heartedness of aim would make him, in spite of foreign birth and imperfect speech, a point round which the confused instincts of the multitude might not impossibly rally.

Such a course of action—which, whatever its other results, would undoubtedly have conducted him to the guillotine with his political friends in May, 1793 — was rendered impossible by a somewhat undignified hindrance. Wordsworth, while in his own eyes "a patriot of the world," was in the eyes of others a young man of twenty-two, travelling on a small allowance, and running his head into unnecessary dangers. His funds were stopped, and he reluctantly returned to England at the close of 1792.

And now to Wordsworth, as to many other English patriots, there came, on a great scale, that form of sorrow

which in private life is one of the most agonizing of all —when two beloved beings, each of them erring greatly, become involved in bitter hate. The new-born Republic flung down to Europe as her battle-gage the head of a king. England, in an hour of horror that was almost panic, accepted the defiance, and war was declared between the two countries early in 1793. "No shock," says Wordsworth,

> "Given to my moral nature had I known
> Down to that very moment; neither lapse
> Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
> A revolution, save at this one time;"

and the sound of the evening gun-fire at Portsmouth seemed at once the embodiment and the premonition of England's guilt and woe.

Yet his distracted spirit could find no comfort in the thought of France. For in France the worst came to the worst; and everything vanished of liberty except the crimes committed in her name.

> "Most melancholy at that time, O Friend!
> Were my day-thoughts, my nights were miserable.
> Through months, through years, long after the last beat
> Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep
> To me came rarely charged with natural gifts—
> Such ghastly visions had I of despair,
> And tyranny, and implements of death; . . .
> And levity in dungeons, where the dust
> Was laid with tears. Then suddenly the scene
> Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled me
> In long orations, which I strove to plead
> Before unjust tribunals—with a voice
> Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
> Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
> In the last place of refuge—my own soul."

These years of perplexity and disappointment, following on a season of overstrained and violent hopes, were the sharpest trial through which Wordsworth ever passed. The course of affairs in France, indeed, was such as seemed by an irony of fate to drive the noblest and firmest hearts into the worst aberrations. For first of all in that Revolution, Reason had appeared, as it were, in visible shape, and hand in hand with Pity and Virtue; then, as the welfare of the oppressed peasantry began to be lost sight of amid the brawls of the factions of Paris, all that was attractive and enthusiastic in the great movement seemed to disappear, but yet Reason might still be thought to find a closer realization here than among scenes more serene and fair; and, lastly, Reason set in blood and tyranny, and there was no more hope from France. But those who, like Wordsworth, had been taught by that great convulsion to disdain the fetters of sentiment and tradition, and to look on Reason as supreme, were not willing to relinquish their belief because violence had conquered her in one more battle. Rather they clung with the greater tenacity—"adhered," in Wordsworth's words,

> "More firmly to old tenets, and to prove
> Their temper, strained them more;"

cast off more decisively than ever the influences of tradition, and in their Utopian visions even wished to see the perfected race severed in its perfection from the memories of humanity, and from kinship with the struggling past.

Through a mood of this kind Wordsworth had to travel now. And his nature, formed for pervading attachments and steady memories, suffered grievously from the privation of much which even the coldest and calmest temper cannot forego without detriment and pain. For it is not

with impunity that men commit themselves to the sole guidance of either of the two great elements of their being. The penalties of trusting to the emotions alone are notorious; and every day affords some instance of a character that has degenerated into a bundle of impulses, of a will that has become caprice. But the consequences of making Reason our tyrant instead of our king are almost equally disastrous. There is so little which Reason, divested of all emotional or instinctive supports, is able to prove to our satisfaction that a sceptical aridity is likely to take possession of the soul. It was thus with Wordsworth; he was driven to a perpetual questioning of all beliefs and analysis of all motives—

> "Till, demanding formal proof,
> And seeking it in everything, I lost
> All feeling of conviction; and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair."

In this mood all those great generalized conceptions which are the food of our love, our reverence, our religion, dissolve away; and Wordsworth tells us that at this time

> "Even the visible universe
> Fell under the dominion of a taste
> Less spiritual, with microscopic view
> Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world."

He looked on the operations of nature "in disconnection dull and spiritless;" he could no longer apprehend her unity nor feel her charm. He retained, indeed, his craving for natural beauty, but in an uneasy and fastidious mood—

> "Giving way
> To a comparison of scene with scene,
> Bent overmuch on superficial things,

> Pampering myself with meagre novelties
> Of colour and proportion; to the moods
> Of time and season, to the moral power,
> The affections, and the spirit of the place,
> Insensible."

Such cold fits are common to all religions; they haunt the artist, the philanthropist, the philosopher, the saint. Often they are due to some strain of egoism or ambition which has intermixed itself with the impersonal desire; sometimes, as in Wordsworth's case, to the persistent tension of a mind which has been bent too ardently towards an ideal scarce possible to man. And in this case, when the objects of a man's habitual admiration are true and noble, they will ever be found to suggest some antidote to the fatigues of their pursuit. We shall see as we proceed how a deepening insight into the lives of the peasantry around him — the happiness and virtue of simple Cumbrian homes—restored to the poet a serener confidence in human nature, amid all the shame and downfall of such hopes in France. And that still profounder loss of delight in Nature herself—that viewing of all things "in disconnection dull and spiritless," which, as it has been well said, is the truest definition of Atheism, inasmuch as a unity in the universe is the first element in our conception of God—this dark pathway also was not without its outlet into the day. For the God in Nature is not only a God of Beauty, but a God of Law; his unity can be apprehended in power as well as in glory; and Wordsworth's mind, "sinking inward upon itself from thought to thought," found rest for the time in that austere religion—Hebrew at once and scientific, common to a Newton and a Job—which is fostered by the prolonged contemplation of the mere Order of the sum of things.

> "Not in vain
> I had been taught to reverence a Power
> That is the visible quality and shape
> And image of right reason."

Not, indeed, in vain! For he felt now that there is no side of truth, however remote from human interests, no aspect of the universe, however awful and impersonal, which may not have power at some season to guide and support the spirit of man. When Goodness is obscured, when Beauty wearies, there are some souls which still can cling and grapple to the conception of eternal Law.

Of such stern consolations the poet speaks as having restored him in his hour of need. But he gratefully acknowledges also another solace of a gentler kind. It was about this time (1795) that Wordsworth was blessed with the permanent companionship of his sister, to whom he was tenderly attached, but whom, since childhood, he had seen only at long intervals. Miss Wordsworth, after her father's death, had lived mainly with her maternal grandfather, Mr. Cookson, at Penrith; occasionally at Halifax with other relations; or at Forncett with her uncle, Dr. Cookson, Canon of Windsor. She was now able to join her favourite brother; and in this gifted woman Wordsworth found a gentler and sunnier likeness of himself; he found a love which never wearied, and a sympathy fervid without blindness, whose suggestions lay so directly in his mind's natural course that they seemed to spring from the same individuality, and to form at once a portion of his inmost being. The opening of this new era of domestic happiness demands a separate chapter.

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CHAPTER III.

MISS WORDSWORTH.—LYRICAL BALLADS.—SETTLEMENT AT GRASMERE.

From among many letters of Miss Wordsworth's to a beloved friend (Miss Jane Pollard, afterwards Mrs. Marshall, of Hallsteads), which have been kindly placed at my disposal, I may without impropriety quote a few passages which illustrate the character and the affection of brother and sister alike. And first, in a letter (Forncett, February, 1792), comparing her brothers Christopher and William, she says: "Christopher is steady and sincere in his attachments. William has both these virtues in an eminent degree, and a sort of violence of affection, if I may so term it, which demonstrates itself every moment of the day, when the objects of his affection are present with him, in a thousand almost imperceptible attentions to their wishes, in a sort of restless watchfulness which I know not how to describe, a tenderness that never sleeps, and at the same time such a delicacy of manner as I have observed in few men." And again (Forncett, June, 1793), she writes to the same friend: "I have strolled into a neighbouring meadow, where I am enjoying the melody of birds, and the busy sounds of a fine summer's evening. But oh! how imperfect is my pleasure whilst I am alone! Why are you not seated with me? and my dear William,

why is he not here also? I could almost fancy that I see you both near me. I hear *you* point out a spot, where, if we could erect a little cottage and call it our own, we should be the happiest of human beings. I see my brother fired with the idea of leading his sister to such a retreat. Our parlour is in a moment furnished, our garden is adorned by magic; the roses and honeysuckles spring at our command; the wood behind the house lifts its head, and furnishes us with a winter's shelter and a summer's noonday shade. My dear friend, I trust that erelong you will be, without the aid of imagination, the companion of my walks, and my dear William may be of our party. . . . He is now going upon a tour in the west of England, with a gentleman who was formerly a school-fellow—a man of fortune, who is to bear all the expenses of the journey, and only requests the favour of William's company. He is perfectly at liberty to quit this companion as soon as anything more advantageous offers. But it is enough to say that I am likely to have the happiness of introducing you to my beloved brother. You must forgive me for talking so much of him; my affection hurries me on, and makes me forget that you cannot be so much interested in the subject as I am. You do not know him; you do not know how amiable he is. Perhaps you reply, 'But I know how blinded you are.' Well, my dearest, I plead guilty at once; I *must* be blind; he cannot be so pleasing as my fondness makes him. I am willing to allow that half the virtues with which I fancy him endowed are the creation of my love; but surely I may be excused! He was never tired of comforting his sister; he never left her in anger; he always met her with joy; he preferred her society to every other pleasure—or rather, when we were so happy as to be within each other's reach,

he had no pleasure when we were compelled to be divided. Do not, then, expect too much from this brother of whom I have delighted so to talk to you. In the first place, you must be with him more than once before he will be perfectly easy in conversation. In the second place, his person is not in his favour—at least I should think not; but I soon ceased to discover this—nay, I almost thought that the opinion which I had formed was erroneous. He is, however, certainly rather plain, though otherwise has an extremely thoughtful countenance; but when he speaks it is often lighted up by a smile which I think very pleasing. But enough, he is my brother; why should I describe him? I shall be launching again into panegyric."

The brother's language to his sister is equally affectionate. "How much do I wish," he writes in 1793, "that each emotion of pleasure or pain that visits your heart should excite a similar pleasure or a similar pain within me, by that sympathy which will almost identify us when we have stolen to our little cottage. . . . I will write to my uncle, and tell him that I cannot think of going anywhere before I have been with you. Whatever answer he gives me, I certainly will make a point of once more mingling my transports with yours. Alas! my dear sister, how soon must this happiness expire; yet there are moments worth ages."

And again, in the same year, he writes, "Oh, my dear, dear sister! with what transport shall I again meet you! with what rapture shall I again wear out the day in your sight! . . . I see you in a moment running, or rather flying, to my arms."

Wordsworth was in all things fortunate, but in nothing more fortunate than in this, that so unique a companion should have been ready to devote herself to him with an

affection wholly free from egoism or jealousy—an affection that yearned only to satisfy his subtlest needs, and to transfuse all that was best in herself into his larger being. And, indeed, that fortunate admixture or influence, whencesoever derived, which raised the race of Wordsworth to poetic fame, was almost more dominant and conspicuous in Dorothy Wordsworth than in the poet himself. "The shooting lights of her wild eyes" reflected to the full the strain of imaginative emotion which was mingled in the poet's nature with that spirit of steadfast and conservative virtue which has already given to the family a Master of Trinity, two Bishops, and other divines and scholars of weight and consideration. In the poet himself the conservative and ecclesiastical tendencies of his character became more and more apparent as advancing years stiffened the movements of the mind. In his sister the ardent element was less restrained; it showed itself in a most innocent direction, but it brought with it a heavy punishment. Her passion for nature and her affection for her brother led her into mountain rambles which were beyond her strength, and her last years were spent in a condition of physical and mental decay.

But at the time of which we are now speaking there was, perhaps, no one in the world who could have been to the poet such a companion as his sister became. She had not, of course, his grasp of mind or his poetic power; but her sensitiveness to nature was quite as keen as his, and her disposition resembled his "with sunshine added to daylight."

> "Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,
> Could they have known her, would have loved; methought
> Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,
> That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,

> And everything she looked on, should have had
> An intimation how she bore herself
> Towards them, and to all creatures."

Her journal of a tour in Scotland, and her description of a week on Ullswater, affixed to Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*—diaries not written for publication, but merely to communicate her own delight to intimate friends at a distance—are surely indescribably attractive in their naïve and tender feeling, combined with a delicacy of insight into natural beauty which was almost a new thing in the history of the world. If we compare, for instance, any of her descriptions of the Lakes with Southey's, we see the difference between mere literary skill, which can now be rivalled in many quarters, and that sympathetic intuition which comes of love alone. Even if we compare her with Gray, whose short notice of Cumberland bears on every page the stamp of a true poet, we are struck by the way in which Miss Wordsworth's tenderness for all living things gives character and pathos to her landscapes, and evokes from the wildest solitude some note that thrills the heart.

> "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart the fountain of sweet tears;
> And love, and thought, and joy."

The cottage life in her brother's company, which we have seen Miss Wordsworth picturing to herself with girlish ardour, was destined to be realized no long time afterwards, thanks to the unlooked-for outcome of another friendship. If the poet's sister was his first admirer, Raisley Calvert may fairly claim the second place. Calvert was the son of the steward of the Duke of Norfolk, who possessed large estates in Cumberland. He attached him-

self to Wordsworth, and in 1793 and 1794 the friends were much together. Calvert was then attacked by consumption, and Wordsworth nursed him with patient care. It was found at his death that he had left his friend a legacy of 900*l.* "The act," says Wordsworth, "was done entirely from a confidence on his part that I had powers and attainments which might be of use to mankind. Upon the interest of the 900*l.*—400*l.* being laid out in annuity —with 200*l.* deducted from the principal, and 100*l.* a legacy to my sister, and 100*l.* more which the *Lyrical Ballads* have brought me, my sister and I contrived to live seven years, nearly eight."

Trusting in this small capital, and with nothing to look to in the future except the uncertain prospect of the payment of Lord Lonsdale's debt to the family, Wordsworth settled with his sister at Racedown, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire, in the autumn of 1795, the choice of this locality being apparently determined by the offer of a cottage on easy terms. Here, in the first home which he had possessed, Wordsworth's steady devotion to poetry began. He had already, in 1792,[1] published two little poems, the *Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, which Miss Wordsworth (to whom the *Evening Walk* was addressed) criticises with candour in a letter to the same friend (Forncett, February, 1792):

"The scenes which he describes have been viewed with a poet's eye, and are portrayed with a poet's pencil; and the poems contain many passages exquisitely beautiful; but they also contain many faults, the chief of which are obscurity and a too frequent use of some particular expressions and uncommon words; for instance, *moveless*,

[1] The *Memoirs* say in 1793, but the following MS. letter of 1792 speaks of them as already published.

which he applies in a sense, if not new, at least different from its ordinary one. By 'moveless,' when applied to the swan, he means that sort of motion which is smooth without agitation; it is a very beautiful epithet, but ought to have been cautiously used. The word *viewless* also is introduced far too often. I regret exceedingly that he did not submit the works to the inspection of some friend before their publication, and he also joins with me in this regret."

These poems show a careful and minute observation of nature, but their versification — still reminding us of the imitators of Pope—has little originality or charm. They attracted the admiration of Coleridge, but had no further success.

At Racedown Wordsworth finished *Guilt and Sorrow*, a poem gloomy in tone and written mainly in his period of depression and unrest; and wrote a tragedy called *The Borderers*, of which only a few lines show any promise of future excellence. He then wrote *The Ruined Cottage*, now incorporated in the First Book of the *Excursion*. This poem, on a subject thoroughly suited to his powers, was his first work of merit; and Coleridge, who visited the quiet household in June, 1797, pronounces this poem "superior, I hesitate not to aver, to anything in our language which in any way resembles it." In July, 1797, the Wordsworths removed to Alfoxden, a large house in Somersetshire, near Netherstowey, where Coleridge was at that time living. Here Wordsworth added to his income by taking as pupil a young boy, the hero of the trifling poem *Anecdote for Fathers*, a son of Mr. Basil Montagu; and here he composed many of his smaller pieces. He has described the origin of the *Ancient Mariner* and the *Lyrical Ballads* in a well-known passage, part of which I must here repeat:

"In the autumn of 1797, Mr. Coleridge, my sister, and myself started from Alfoxden pretty late in the afternoon, with a view to visit Linton, and the Valley of Stones near to it; and as our united funds were very small, we agreed to defray the expense of the tour by writing a poem, to be sent to the *New Monthly Magazine*. In the course of this walk was planned the poem of the *Ancient Mariner*, founded on a dream, as Mr. Coleridge said, of his friend Mr. Cruikshank. Much the greatest part of the story was Mr. Coleridge's invention; but certain parts I suggested: for example, some crime was to be committed which was to bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke's *Voyages*, a day or two before, that while doubling Cape Horn they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. 'Suppose,' said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime. The incident was thought fit for the purpose, and adopted accordingly. I also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead man, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem. We began the composition together, on that to me memorable evening. I furnished two or three lines at the beginning of the poem, in particular—

"'And listened like a three years' child;
The Mariner had his will.'

As we endeavoured to proceed conjointly our respective manners proved so widely different, that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog. The *Ancient Mariner* grew and grew, till it became too important for our first object, which was limited to our expectation of five pounds; and we began to think of a volume, which was to consist, as Mr. Coleridge has told the world, of poems chiefly on supernatural subjects, taken from common life, but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium."

The volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, whose first beginnings have here been traced, was published in the autumn of

1798, by Mr. Cottle, at Bristol. This volume contained several poems which have been justly blamed for triviality —as *The Thorn*, *Goody Blake*, *The Idiot Boy;* several in which, as in *Simon Lee*, triviality is mingled with much real pathos; and some, as *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*, which are of the very essence of Wordsworth's nature. It is hardly too much to say that, if these two last-named poems—to the careless eye so slight and trifling — were all that had remained from Wordsworth's hand, they would have "spoken to the comprehending" of a new individuality, as distinct and unmistakable in its way as that which Sappho has left engraven on the world forever in words even fewer than these. And the volume ended with a poem which Wordsworth composed in 1798, in one day, during a tour with his sister to Tintern and Chepstow. The *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* have become, as it were, the *locus classicus*, or consecrated formulary of the Wordsworthian faith. They say in brief what it is the work of the poet's biographer to say in detail.

As soon as this volume was published Wordsworth and his sister sailed for Hamburg, in the hope that their imperfect acquaintance with the German language might be improved by the heroic remedy of a winter at Goslar. But at Goslar they do not seem to have made any acquaintances, and their self-improvement consisted mainly in reading German books to themselves. The four months spent at Goslar, however, were the very bloom of Wordsworth's poetic career. Through none of his poems has the peculiar loveliness of English scenery and English girlhood shone more delicately than through those which came to him as he paced the frozen gardens of that desolate city. Here it was that he wrote *Lucy Gray*, and *Ruth*, and *Nutting*,

and the *Poet's Epitaph*, and other poems known now to most men as possessing in its full fragrance his especial charm. And here it was that the memory of some emotion prompted the lines on *Lucy*. Of the history of that emotion he has told us nothing; I forbear, therefore, to inquire concerning it, or even to speculate. That it was to the poet's honour, I do not doubt; but who ever learned such secrets rightly? or who should wish to learn? It is best to leave the sanctuary of all hearts inviolate, and to respect the reserve not only of the living but of the dead. Of these poems, almost alone, Wordsworth in his autobiographical notes has said nothing whatever. One of them he suppressed for years, and printed only in a later volume. One can, indeed, well imagine that there may be poems which a man may be willing to give to the world only in the hope that their pathos will be, as it were, protected by its own intensity, and that those who are worthiest to comprehend will be least disposed to discuss them.

The autobiographical notes on his own works above alluded to were dictated by the poet to his friend Miss Isabella Fenwick, at her urgent request, in 1843, and preserve many interesting particulars as to the circumstances under which each poem was composed. They are to be found printed entire among Wordsworth's prose works, and I shall therefore cite them only occasionally. Of *Lucy Gray*, for instance, he says—

"It was founded on a circumstance told me by my sister, of a little girl who, not far from Halifax, in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snow-storm. Her footsteps were tracked by her parents to the middle of the lock of a canal, and no other vestige of her, backward or forward, could be traced. The body, however, was found in the canal. The way in which the incident was treated, and the spiritualizing of the character, might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative

influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life, with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of handling subjects of the same kind."

And of the *Lines written in Germany*, 1798–99—

"A bitter winter it was when these verses were composed by the side of my sister, in our lodgings, at a draper's house, in the romantic imperial town of Goslar, on the edge of the Hartz forest. So severe was the cold of this winter that, when we passed out of the parlour warmed by the stove, our cheeks were struck by the air as by cold iron. I slept in a room over a passage that was not ceiled. The people of the house used to say, rather unfeelingly, that they expected I should be frozen to death some night; but with the protection of a pelisse lined with fur, and a dog's-skin bonnet, such as was worn by the peasants, I walked daily on the ramparts or on a sort of public ground or garden, in which was a pond. Here I had no companion but a kingfisher, a beautiful creature that used to glance by me. I consequently became much attached to it. During these walks I composed *The Poet's Epitaph*."

Seldom has there been a more impressive instance of the contrast, familiar to biographers, between the apparent insignificance and the real importance of their hero in undistinguished youth. To any one considering Wordsworth as he then was—a rough and somewhat stubborn young man, who, in nearly thirty years of life, had seemed alternately to idle without grace and to study without advantage—it might well have seemed incredible that he could have anything new or valuable to communicate to mankind. Where had been his experience? or where was the indication of that wealth of sensuous emotion which in such a nature as Keats's seems almost to dispense with experience, and to give novelty by giving vividness to such passions as are known to all? If Wordsworth were to impress mankind it must be, one might have thought, by travelling out of himself altogether—by revealing some

such energy of imagination as can create a world of romance and adventure in the shyest heart. But this was not so to be. Already Wordsworth's minor poems had dealt almost entirely with his own feelings, and with the objects actually before his eyes; and it was at Goslar that he planned, and on the day of his quitting Goslar that he began, a much longer poem, whose subject was to be still more intimately personal, being the development of his own mind. This poem, dedicated to Coleridge, and written in the form of a confidence bestowed on an intimate friend, was finished in 1805, but was not published till after the poet's death. Mrs. Wordsworth then named it *The Prelude*, indicating thus the relation which it bears to the *Excursion*—or, rather, to the projected poem of the *Recluse*, of which the *Excursion* was to form only the Second out of three Divisions. One Book of the First Division of the *Recluse* was written, but is yet unpublished; the Third Division was never even begun, and "the materials," we are told, "of which it would have been formed have been incorporated, for the most part, in the author's other publications." Nor need this change of plan be regretted: didactic poems admit easily of mutilation; and all that can be called plot in this series of works is contained in the *Prelude*, in which we see Wordsworth arriving at those convictions which in the *Excursion* he pauses to expound.

It would be too much to say that Wordsworth has been wholly successful in the attempt—for such the *Prelude* virtually is—to write an epic poem on his own education. Such a poem must almost necessarily appear tedious and egoistic, and Wordsworth's manner has not tact enough to prevent these defects from being felt to the full. On the contrary, in his constant desire frugally to extract, as it were, its full teaching from the minutest event which

has befallen him, he supplements the self-complacency of the autobiographer with the conscientious exactness of the moralist, and is apt to insist on trifles such as lodge in the corners of every man's memory, as if they were unique lessons vouchsafed to himself alone.

Yet it follows from this very temper of mind that there is scarcely any autobiography which we can read with such implicit confidence as the *Prelude*. In the case of this, as of so many of Wordsworth's productions, our first dissatisfaction at the form which the poem assumes yields to a recognition of its fitness to express precisely what the poet intends. Nor are there many men who, in recounting the story of their own lives, could combine a candour so absolute with so much of dignity; who could treat their personal history so impartially as a means of conveying lessons of general truth; or who, while chronicling such small things, could remain so great. The *Prelude* is a book of good augury for human nature. We feel in reading it as if the stock of mankind were sound. The soul seems going on from strength to strength by the mere development of her inborn power. And the scene with which the poem at once opens and concludes—the return to the Lake country as to a permanent and satisfying home—places the poet at last amid his true surroundings, and leaves us to contemplate him as completed by a harmony without him, which he of all men most needed to evoke the harmony within.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENGLISH LAKES.

THE lakes and mountains of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire are singularly fitted to supply such elements of moral sustenance as nature's aspects can afford to man. There are, indeed, many mountain regions of greater awfulness; but prospects of ice and terror should be a rare stimulant rather than an habitual food; and the physical difficulties inseparable from immense elevations depress the inhabitant and preoccupy the traveller. There are many lakes under a more lustrous sky; but the healthy activities of life demand a scene brilliant without languor, and a beauty which can refresh and satisfy rather than lull or overpower. Without advancing any untenable claim to British pre-eminence in the matter of scenery, we may, perhaps, follow on both these points the judgment which Wordsworth has expressed in his *Guide to the Lakes*, a work which condenses the results of many years of intimate observation.

"Our tracts of wood and water," he says, "are almost diminutive in comparison (with Switzerland); therefore, as far as sublimity is dependent upon absolute bulk and height, and atmospherical influences in connexion with these, it is obvious that there can be no rivalship. But a short residence among the British mountains will fur-

nish abundant proof that, after a certain point of elevation, viz., that which allows of compact and fleecy clouds settling upon, or sweeping over, the summits, the sense of sublimity depends more upon form and relation of objects to each other than upon their actual magnitude; and that an elevation of 3000 feet is sufficient to call forth in a most impressive degree the creative, and magnifying, and softening powers of the atmosphere."

And again, as to climate: "The rain," he says, "here comes down heartily, and is frequently succeeded by clear bright weather, when every brook is vocal, and every torrent sonorous; brooks and torrents which are never muddy even in the heaviest floods. Days of unsettled weather, with partial showers, are very frequent; but the showers, darkening or brightening as they fly from hill to hill, are not less grateful to the eye than finely interwoven passages of gay and sad music are touching to the ear. Vapours exhaling from the lakes and meadows after sunrise in a hot season, or in moist weather brooding upon the heights, or descending towards the valleys with inaudible motion, give a visionary character to everything around them; and are in themselves so beautiful as to dispose us to enter into the feelings of those simple nations (such as the Laplanders of this day) by whom they are taken for guardian deities of the mountains; or to sympathize with others who have fancied these delicate apparitions to be the spirits of their departed ancestors. Akin to these are fleecy clouds resting upon the hill-tops; they are not easily managed in picture, with their accompaniments of blue sky, but how glorious are they in nature! how pregnant with imagination for the poet! And the height of the Cumbrian mountains is sufficient to exhibit daily and hourly instances of those mysterious attachments.

Such clouds, cleaving to their stations, or lifting up suddenly their glittering heads from behind rocky barriers, or hurrying out of sight with speed of the sharpest edge, will often tempt an inhabitant to congratulate himself on belonging to a country of mists and clouds and storms, and make him think of the blank sky of Egypt, and of the cerulean vacancy of Italy, as an unanimated and even a sad spectacle."

The consciousness of a preceding turmoil brings home to us best the sense of perfect peace; and a climate accustomed to storm-cloud and tempest can melt sometimes into "a day as still as heaven," with a benignant tranquillity which calmer regions can scarcely know. Such a day Wordsworth has described in language of such delicate truth and beauty as only a long and intimate love can inspire:

"It has been said that in human life there are moments worth ages. In a more subdued tone of sympathy may we affirm, that in the climate of England there are, for the lover of nature, days which are worth whole months, I might say, even years. One of these favoured days sometimes occurs in spring-time, when that soft air is breathing over the blossoms and new-born verdure which inspired Buchanan with his beautiful Ode to the First of May; the air which, in the luxuriance of his fancy, he likens to that of the golden age—to that which gives motion to the funereal cypresses on the banks of Lethe; to the air which is to salute beatified spirits when expiatory fires shall have consumed the earth with all her habitations. But it is in autumn that days of such affecting influence most frequently intervene. The atmosphere seems refined, and the sky rendered more crystalline, as the vivifying heat of the year abates; the lights and shadows are more delicate; the colouring is richer and more finely harmonized; and, in this season of stillness, the ear being unoccupied, or only gently excited, the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments. A resident in a country like this which we are treating of will agree with me that the presence of a

lake is indispensable to exhibit in perfection the beauty of one of these days; and he must have experienced, while looking on the unruffled waters, that the imagination by their aid is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable. The reason of this is, that the heavens are not only brought down into the bosom of the earth, but that the earth is mainly looked at, and thought of, through the medium of a purer element. The happiest time is when the equinoctial gales are departed; but their fury may probably be called to mind by the sight of a few shattered boughs, whose leaves do not differ in colour from the faded foliage of the stately oaks from which these relics of the storm depend: all else speaks of tranquillity; not a breath of air, no restlessness of insects, and not a moving object perceptible—except the clouds gliding in the depths of the lake, or the traveller passing along, an inverted image, whose motion seems governed by the quiet of a time to which its archetype, the living person, is perhaps insensible; or it may happen that the figure of one of the larger birds, a raven or a heron, is crossing silently among the reflected clouds, while the voice of the real bird, from the element aloft, gently awakens in the spectator the recollection of appetites and instincts, pursuits and occupations, that deform and agitate the world, yet have no power to prevent nature from putting on an aspect capable of satisfying the most intense cravings for the tranquil, the lovely, and the perfect, to which man, the noblest of her creatures, is subject."

The scene described here is one as exquisite in detail as majestic in general effect. And it is characteristic of the region to which Wordsworth's love was given that there is no corner of it without a meaning and a charm; that the open record of its immemorial past tells us at every turn that all agencies have conspired for loveliness and ruin itself has been benign. A passage of Wordsworth's describing the character of the lake-shores illustrates this fact with loving minuteness:

"Sublimity is the result of nature's first great dealings with the superficies of the Earth; but the general tendency of her subsequent operations is towards the production of beauty, by a multiplicity of

symmetrical parts uniting in a consistent whole. This is everywhere exemplified along the margins of these lakes. Masses of rock, that have been precipitated from the heights into the area of waters, lie in some places like stranded ships, or have acquired the compact structure of jutting piers, or project in little peninsulas crested with native wood. The smallest rivulet, one whose silent influx is scarcely noticeable in a season of dry weather, so faint is the dimple made by it on the surface of the smooth lake, will be found to have been not useless in shaping, by its deposits of gravel and soil in time of flood, a curve that would not otherwise have existed. But the more powerful brooks, encroaching upon the level of the lake, have, in course of time, given birth to ample promontories of sweeping outline, that contrast boldly with the longitudinal base of the steeps on the opposite shore; while their flat or gently-sloping surfaces never fail to introduce, into the midst of desolation and barrenness, the elements of fertility, even where the habitations of men may not have been raised."

With this we may contrast, as a companion picture, the poet's description of the tarns, or lonely bodies of water, which lie here and there among the hills:

"They are difficult of access and naked; yet some of them are, in their permanent forms, very grand, and there are accidents of things which would make the meanest of them interesting. At all events, one of these pools is an acceptable sight to the mountain wanderer, not merely as an incident that diversifies the prospect, but as forming in his mind a centre or conspicuous point to which objects, otherwise disconnected or insubordinated, may be referred. Some few have a varied outline, with bold heath-clad promontories; and as they mostly lie at the foot of a steep precipice, the water, where the sun is not shining upon it, appears black and sullen, and round the margin huge stones and masses of rock are scattered, some defying conjecture as to the means by which they came thither, and others obviously fallen from on high, the contribution of ages. A not unpleasing sadness is induced by this perplexity and these images of decay; while the prospect of a body of pure water, unattended with groves and other cheerful rural images by which fresh water is usually accompanied, and unable to give furtherance to the meagre veg-

etation around it, excites a sense of some repulsive power strongly put forth, and thus deepens the melancholy natural to such scenes."

To those who love to deduce the character of a population from the character of their race and surroundings the peasantry of Cumberland and Westmoreland form an attractive theme. Drawn in great part from the strong Scandinavian stock, they dwell in a land solemn and beautiful as Norway itself, but without Norway's rigour and penury, and with still lakes and happy rivers instead of Norway's inarming melancholy sea. They are a mountain folk; but their mountains are no precipices of insuperable snow, such as keep the dwellers in some Swiss hamlet shut in ignorance and stagnating into idiocy. These barriers divide only to concentrate, and environ only to endear; their guardianship is but enough to give an added unity to each group of kindred homes. And thus it is that the Cumbrian dalesmen have afforded perhaps as near a realization as human fates have yet allowed of the rural society which statesmen desire for their country's greatness. They have given an example of substantial comfort strenuously won; of home affections intensified by independent strength; of isolation without ignorance, and of a shrewd simplicity; of an hereditary virtue which needs no support from fanaticism, and to which honour is more than law.

The school of political economists, moreover, who urge the advantage of a peasant proprietary, of small independent holdings—as at once drawing from the land the fullest produce and rearing upon it the most vigorous and provident population—this school, as is well known, finds in the *statesmen* of Cumberland one of its favourite examples. In the days of border-wars, when the first ob-

ject was to secure the existence of as many armed men as possible, in readiness to repel the Scot, the abbeys and great proprietors in the north readily granted small estates on military tenure, which tenure, when personal service in the field was no longer needed, became in most cases an absolute ownership. The attachment of these *statesmen* to their hereditary estates, the heroic efforts which they would make to avoid parting with them, formed an impressive phenomenon in the little world—a world at once of equality and of conservatism—which was the scene of Wordsworth's childish years, and which remained his manhood's ideal.

The growth of large fortunes in England, and the increased competition for land, has swallowed up many of these small independent holdings in the extensive properties of wealthy men. And at the same time the spread of education, and the improved poor-laws and other legislation, by raising the condition of other parts of England, have tended to obliterate the contrast which was so marked in Wordsworth's day. How marked that contrast was, a comparison of Crabbe's poems with Wordsworth's will sufficiently indicate. Both are true painters; but while in the one we see poverty as something gross and degrading, and the *Tales of the Village* stand out from a background of pauperism and crime; in the other picture poverty means nothing worse than privation, and the poet in the presence of the most tragic outcast of fortune could still

> "Have laughed himself to scorn to find
> In that decrepit man so firm a mind."

Nay, even when a state far below the *Leech-Gatherer's* has been reached, and mind and body alike are in their last

decay, the life of the *Old Cumberland Beggar*, at one remove from nothingness, has yet a dignity and a usefulness of its own. His fading days are passed in no sad asylum of vicious or gloomy age, but amid neighbourly kindnesses, and in the sanity of the open air; and a life that is reduced to its barest elements has yet a hold on the liberality of nature and the affections of human hearts.

So long as the inhabitants of a region so solitary and beautiful have neither many arts nor many wishes, save such as the nature which they know has suggested, and their own handiwork can satisfy, so long are their presence and habitations likely to be in harmony with the scenes around them. Nay, man's presence is almost always needed to draw out the full meaning of Nature, to illustrate her bounty by his glad well-being, and to hint by his contrivances of precaution at her might and terror. Wordsworth's description of the cottages of Cumberland depicts this unconscious adaptation of man's abode to his surroundings, with an eye which may be called at pleasure that of painter or of poet.

"The dwelling-houses and contiguous out-houses are in many instances of the colour of the native rock out of which they have been built; but frequently the dwelling—or Fire-house, as it is ordinarily called—has been distinguished from the barn or byre by roughcast and whitewash, which, as the inhabitants are not hasty in renewing it, in a few years acquires by the influence of weather a tint at once sober and variegated. As these houses have been, from father to son, inhabited by persons engaged in the same occupations, yet necessarily with changes in their circumstances, they have received without incongruity additions and accommodations adapted to the needs of each successive occupant, who, being for the most part proprietor, was at liberty to follow his own fancy, so that these humble dwellings remind the contemplative spectator of a production of nature, and may (using a strong expression) rather be said to have grown than to have been erected—to have risen, by an instinct of

their own, out of the native rock—so little is there in them of formality, such is their wildness and beauty.

"These dwellings, mostly built, as has been said, of rough unhewn stone, are roofed with slates, which were rudely taken from the quarry before the present art of splitting them was understood, and are therefore rough and uneven in their surface, so that both the coverings and sides of the houses have furnished places of rest for the seeds of lichens, mosses, ferns, and flowers. Hence buildings, which in their very form call to mind the processes of nature, do thus, clothed in part with a vegetable garb, appear to be received into the bosom of the living principle of things, as it acts and exists among the woods and fields, and by their colour and their shape affectingly direct the thoughts to that tranquil course of nature and simplicity along which the humble-minded inhabitants have through so many generations been led. Add the little garden with its shed for bee-hives, its small bed of potherbs, and its borders and patches of flowers for Sunday posies, with sometimes a choice few too much prized to be plucked; an orchard of proportioned size; a cheese-press, often supported by some tree near the door; a cluster of embowering sycamores for summer shade, with a tall fir through which the winds sing when other trees are leafless; the little rill or household spout murmuring in all seasons: combine these incidents and images together, and you have the representative idea of a mountain cottage in this country—so beautifully formed in itself, and so richly adorned by the hand of Nature."

These brief descriptions may suffice to indicate the general character of a district which in Wordsworth's early days had a distinctive unity which he was the first fully to appreciate, which was at its best during his long lifetime, and which has already begun to disappear. The mountains had waited long for a full adoration, an intelligent worship. At last "they were enough beloved." And if now the changes wrought around them recall too often the poet's warning, how

> "All that now delights thee, from the day
> On which it should be touched, shall melt, and melt away—"

yet they have gained something which cannot be taken from them. Not mines, nor railways, nor monster excursions, nor reservoirs, nor Manchester herself, "toute entière à sa proie attachée," can deprive lake and hill of Wordsworth's memory, and the love which once they knew.

Wordsworth's life was from the very first so ordered as to give him the most complete and intimate knowledge both of district and people. There was scarcely a mile of ground in the Lake country over which he had not wandered; scarcely a prospect which was not linked with his life by some tie of memory. Born at Cockermouth, on the outskirts of the district, his mind was gradually led on to its beauty; and his first recollections were of Derwent's grassy holms and rocky falls, with Skiddaw, "bronzed with deepest radiance," towering in the eastern sky. Sent to school at Hawkshead at eight years old, Wordsworth's scene was transferred to the other extremity of the Lake district. It was in this quaint old town, on the banks of Esthwaite Water, that the "fair seed-time of his soul" was passed; it was here that his boyish delight in exercise and adventure grew, and melted in its turn into a more impersonal yearning, a deeper absorption into the beauty and the wonder of the world. And even the records of his boyish amusements come to us each on a background of nature's majesty and calm. Setting springs for woodcock on the grassy moors at night, at nine years old, he feels himself "a trouble to the peace" that dwells among the moon and stars overhead; and when he has appropriated a woodcock caught by somebody else, "sounds of undistinguishable motion" embody the viewless pursuit of Nemesis among the solitary hills. In the perilous search for the raven's nest, as he hangs on the face of the

naked crags of Yewdale, he feels for the first time that sense of detachment from external things which a position of strange unreality will often force on the mind.

> "Oh, at that time
> When on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!"

The innocent rapine of *nutting* taught him to feel that there is a spirit in the woods—a presence which too rude a touch of ours will desecrate and destroy.

The neighbouring lakes of Coniston, Esthwaite, Windermere, have left similar traces of the gradual upbuilding of his spirit. It was on a promontory on Coniston that the sun's last rays, gilding the eastern hills above which he had first appeared, suggested the boy's first impulse of spontaneous poetry, in the resolve that, wherever life should lead him, his last thoughts should fall on the scenes where his childhood was passing now. It was on Esthwaite that the "huge peak" of Wetherlam, following him (as it seemed) as he rowed across the starlit water, suggested the dim conception of "unknown modes of being," and a life that is not ours. It was round Esthwaite that the boy used to wander with a friend at early dawn, rejoicing in the charm of words in tuneful order, and repeating together their favourite verses, till "sounds of exultation echoed through the groves." It was on Esthwaite that the band of skaters "hissed along the polished ice in games confederate," from which Wordsworth would sometimes withdraw himself and pause suddenly in full career, to feel in that dizzy silence the mystery of a rolling world.

A passage, less frequently quoted, in describing a boat-

ing excursion on Windermere illustrates the effect of some small point of human interest in concentrating and realising the diffused emotion which radiates from a scene of beauty:

> "But, ere nightfall,
> When in our pinnace we returned at leisure
> Over the shadowy lake, and to the beach
> Of some small island steered our course with one,
> The minstrel of the troop, and left him there,
> And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute
> Alone upon the rock—oh, then the calm
> And dead still water lay upon my mind
> Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
> Never before so beautiful, sank down
> Into my heart, and held me like a dream!"

The passage which describes the school-boy's call to the owls—the lines of which Coleridge said that he should have exclaimed "Wordsworth!" if he had met them running wild in the deserts of Arabia—paints a somewhat similar rush of feeling with a still deeper charm. The "gentle shock of mild surprise" which in the pauses of the birds' jocund din *carries far into his heart the sound of mountain torrents*—the very mingling of the grotesque and the majestic—brings home the contrast between our transitory energies and the mystery around us which returns ever the same to the moments when we pause and are at peace.

It is round the two small lakes of Grasmere and Rydal that the memories of Wordsworth are most thickly clustered. On one or other of these lakes he lived for fifty years—the first half of the present century; and there is not in all that region a hill-side walk or winding valley which has not heard him murmuring out his verses as they slowly rose from his heart. The cottage at Town-

end, Grasmere, where he first settled, is now surrounded by the out-buildings of a busy hotel, and the noisy stream of traffic, and the sight of the many villas which spot the valley, give a new pathos to the sonnet in which Wordsworth deplores the alteration which even his own residence might make in the simplicity of the lonely scene:

"Well may'st thou halt, and gaze with brightening eye!
The lovely cottage in the guardian nook
Hath stirred thee deeply; with its own dear brook,
Its own small pasture, almost its own sky!
But covet not the abode: forbear to sigh,
As many do, repining while they look;
Intruders—who would tear from Nature's book
This precious leaf with harsh impiety.
Think what the home must be if it were thine,
Even thine, though few thy wants! Roof, window, door,
The very flowers are sacred to the poor,
The roses to the porch which they entwine:
Yea, all that now enchants thee, from the day
On which it should be touched, would melt, and melt away."

The *Poems on the Naming of Places* belong for the most part to this neighbourhood. *Emma's Dell* on Easdale Beck, *Point Rash-Judgment* on the eastern shore of Grasmere, *Mary's Pool* in Rydal Park, *William's Peak* on Stone Arthur, *Joanna's Rock* on the banks of Rotha, and *John's Grove* near White Moss Common, have been identified by the loving search of those to whom every memorial of that simple-hearted family group has still a charm.

It is on Greenhead Ghyll—"upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale"—that the poet has laid the scene of *Michael*, the poem which paints with such detailed fidelity both the inner and the outward life of a typical Westmoreland "statesman." And the upper road from Grasmere to Rydal, superseded now by the road along the lake-

side, and left as a winding foot-path among rock and fern, was one of his most habitual haunts. Of another such haunt his friend Lady Richardson says, "The *Prelude* was chiefly composed in a green mountain terrace, on the Easdale side of Helm Crag, known by the name of Under Lancrigg, a place which he used to say he knew by heart. The ladies sat at their work on the hill-side, while he walked to and fro on the smooth green mountain turf, humming out his verses to himself, and then repeating them to his sympathising and ready scribes, to be noted down on the spot, and transcribed at home."

The neighbourhood of the poet's later home at Rydal Mount is equally full of associations. Two of the *Evening Voluntaries* were composed by the side of Rydal Mere. The *Wild Duck's Nest* was on one of the Rydal islands. It was on the fells of Loughrigg that the poet's fancy loved to plant an imperial castle. And *Wansfell's* green slope still answers with many a change of glow and shadow to the radiance of the sinking sun.

Hawkshead and Rydal, then, may be considered as the poet's principal centres, and the scenery in their neighbourhood has received his most frequent attention. The Duddon, a seldom-visited stream on the south-west border of the Lake district, has been traced by him from source to outfall in a series of sonnets. Langdale, and Little Langdale, with Blea Tarn lying in it, form the principal scene of the discourses in the *Excursion*. The more distant lakes and mountains were often visited, and are often alluded to. The scene of *The Brothers*, for example, is laid in Ennerdale; and the index of the minor poems will supply other instances. But it is chiefly round two lines of road leading from Grasmere that Wordsworth's associations cluster—the route over Dunmailraise, which led him

to Keswick, to Coleridge and Southey at Greta Hall, and to other friends in that neighbourhood; and the route over Kirkstone, which led him to Ullswater, and the friendly houses of Patterdale, Hallsteads, and Lowther Castle. The first of these two routes was that over which the *Waggoner* plied; it skirts the lovely shore of Thirlmere —a lonely sheet of water, of exquisite irregularity of outline, and fringed with delicate verdure, which the Corporation of Manchester has lately bought to embank it into a reservoir. *Dedecorum pretiosus emptor!* This lake was a favourite haunt of Wordsworth's; and upon a rock on its margin, where he and Coleridge, coming from Keswick and Grasmere, would often meet, the two poets, with the other members of Wordsworth's loving household group, inscribed the initial letters of their names. To the "monumental power" of this Rock of Names Wordsworth appeals, in lines written when the happy company who engraved them had already been severed by distance and death:

> "O thought of pain,
> That would impair it or profane!
> And fail not Thou, loved Rock, to keep
> Thy charge when we are laid asleep."

The rock may still be seen, but is to be submerged in the new reservoir. In the vale of Keswick itself, Applethwaite, Skiddaw, St. Herbert's Island, Lodore, are commemorated in sonnets or inscriptions. And the Borrowdale yew-trees have inspired some of the poet's noblest lines—lines breathing all the strange forlornness of Glaramara's solitude, and the withering vault of shade.

The route from Rydal to Ullswater is still more thickly studded with poetic allusions. The *Pass of Kirkstone* is the theme of a characteristic ode; Grisdale Tarn and

Helvellyn recur again and again; and Aira Force was one of the spots which the poet best loved to describe, as well as to visit. It was on the shores of Further Gowbarrow that the *Daffodils* danced beneath the trees. These references might be much further multiplied; and the loving diligence of disciples has set before us "the Lake district as interpreted by Wordsworth" through a multitude of details. But enough has been said to show how completely the poet had absorbed the influences of his dwelling-place; how unique a representative he had become of the lovely district of his birth; how he had made it subject to him by comprehending it, and his own by love.

He visited other countries and described other scenes. Scotland, Wales, Switzerland, France, Germany, Italy, have all a place in his works. His familiarity with other scenery helped him, doubtless, to a better appreciation of the Lake country than he could have gained had he never left it. And, on the other hand, like Cæsar in Gaul, or Wellington in the Peninsular, it was because he had so complete a grasp of this chosen base of operations that he was able to come, to see, and to make his own, so swiftly and unfailingly elsewhere. Happy are those whose deep-rooted memories cling like his about some stable home! whose notion of the world around them has expanded from some prospect of happy tranquillity, instead of being drawn at random from the confusing city's roar! Happier still if that early picture be of one of those rare scenes which have inspired poets and prophets with the retrospective day-dream of a patriarchal, or a golden age; of some plot of ground like the Ithaca of Odysseus, τρηχεῖ', ἀλλ' ἀγαθὴ κουροτρόφος, "rough, but a nurse of *men*;" of some life like that which a poet of kindred spirit to Wordsworth's

saw half in vision, half in reality, among the husbandmen of the Italian hills:

"Peace, peace is theirs, and life no fraud that knows,
Wealth as they will, and when they will, repose:
On many a hill the happy homesteads stand,
The living lakes through many a vale expand;
Cool glens are there, and shadowy caves divine,
Deep sleep, and far-off voices of the kine—
From moor to moor the exulting wild deer stray;—
The strenuous youth are strong and sound as they;
One reverence still the untainted race inspires,
God their first thought, and after God their sires;—
These last discerned Astræa's flying hem,
And Virtue's latest footsteps walked with them."

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE.—SOCIETY.—HIGHLAND TOUR.

With Wordsworth's settlement at Townend, Grasmere, in the closing days of the last century, the external events of his life may be said to come to an end. Even his marriage to Miss Mary Hutchinson, of Penrith, on October 4, 1802, was not so much an importation into his existence of new emotion, as a development and intensification of feelings which had long been there. This marriage was the crowning stroke of Wordsworth's felicity—the poetic recompense for his steady advocacy of all simple and noble things. When he wished to illustrate the true dignity and delicacy of rustic lives he was always accustomed to refer to the Cumbrian folk. And now it seemed that Cumberland requited him for his praises with her choicest boon; found for him in the country town of Penrith, and from the small and obscure circle of his connexions and acquaintance—nay, from the same dame's school in which he was taught to read—a wife such as neither rank nor young beauty nor glowing genius enabled his brother bards to win.

Mrs. Wordsworth's poetic appreciativeness, manifest to all who knew her, is attested by the poet's assertion that two of the best lines in the poem of *The Daffodils*—

"They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude"—

were of her composition. And in all other matters, from the highest to the lowest, she was to him a true helpmate, a companion "dearer far than life and light are dear," and able "in his steep march to uphold him to the end." Devoted to her husband, she nevertheless welcomed not only without jealousy but with delight the household companionship through life of the sister who formed so large an element in his being. Admiring the poet's genius to the full, and following the workings of his mind with a sympathy that never tired, she nevertheless was able to discern, and with unobtrusive care to hide or avert, those errors of manner into which retirement and self-absorption will betray even the gentlest spirit. It speaks, perhaps, equally well for Wordsworth's character that this tendency to a lengthy insistence, in general conversation, on his own feelings and ideas is the worst charge that can be brought against him; and for Mrs. Wordsworth's, that her simple and rustic upbringing had gifted her with a manner so gracious and a tact so ready that in her presence all things could not but go well.

The life which the young couple led was one of primitive simplicity. In some respects it was even less luxurious than that of the peasants around them. They drank water, and ate the simplest fare. Miss Wordsworth had long rendered existence possible for her brother on the narrowest of means by her unselfish energy and skill in household management; and "plain living and high thinking" were equally congenial to the new inmate of the frugal home. Wordsworth gardened; and all together, or oftenest the poet and his sister, wandered almost daily over the neighbouring hills. Narrow means did not prevent them

from offering a generous welcome to their few friends, especially Coleridge and his family, who repeatedly stayed for months under Wordsworth's roof. Miss Wordsworth's unpublished letters breathe the very spirit of hospitality in their näive details of the little sacrifices gladly made for the sake of the presence of these honoured guests. But for the most part their life was solitary and uneventful. Books they had few; neighbours almost none; and Miss Wordsworth's diary of these early years describes a life seldom paralleled in its intimate dependence on external nature. I take, almost at random, her account of a single day. "November 24, 1801. Read Chaucer. We walked by Gell's cottage. As we were going along we were stopped at once, at the distance, perhaps, of fifty yards from our favourite birch-tree; it was yielding to the gust of wind, with all its tender twigs; the sun shone upon it, and it glanced in the wind like a flying sunshiny shower. It was a tree in shape, with stem and branches; but it was like a spirit of water. After our return William read Spenser to us, and then walked to John's Grove. Went to meet W." And from an unpublished letter of Miss Wordsworth's, of about the same period (September 10, 1800), I extract her description of the new home. "We are daily more delighted with Grasmere and its neighbourhood. Our walks are perpetually varied, and we are more fond of the mountains as our acquaintance with them increases. We have a boat upon the lake, and a small orchard and smaller garden, which, as it is the work of our own hands, we regard with pride and partiality. Our cottage is quite large enough for us, though very small; and we have made it neat and comfortable within doors; and it looks very nice on the outside; for though the roses and honeysuckles which we have planted against it are

only of this year's growth, yet it is covered all over with green leaves and scarlet flowers; for we have trained scarlet beans upon threads, which are not only exceedingly beautiful but very useful, as their produce is immense. We have made a lodging-room of the parlour below stairs, which has a stone floor, therefore we have covered it all over with matting. We sit in a room above stairs, and we have one lodging-room with two single beds, a sort of lumber-room, and a small, low, unceiled room, which I have papered with newspapers, and in which we have put a small bed. Our servant is an old woman of sixty years of age, whom we took partly out of charity. She was very ignorant, very foolish, and very difficult to teach. But the goodness of her disposition, and the great convenience we should find if my perseverance was successful, induced me to go on."

The sonnets entitled *Personal Talk* give a vivid picture of the blessings of such seclusion. There are many minds which will echo the exclamation with which the poet dismisses his visitors and their gossip:

> "Better than such discourse doth silence long,
> Long barren silence, square with my desire;
> To sit without emotion, hope, or aim,
> In the loved presence of my cottage fire,
> And listen to the flapping of the flame,
> Or kettle whispering its faint undersong."

Many will look with envy on a life which has thus decisively cut itself loose from the world; which is secure from the influx of those preoccupations, at once distracting and nugatory, which deaden the mind to all other stimulus, and split the river of life into channels so minute that it loses itself in the sand.

> "Hence have I genial seasons; hence have I
> Smooth passions, smooth discourse, and joyous thought."

Left to herself, the mind can expatiate in those kingdoms of the spirit bequeathed to us by past generations and distant men, which to the idle are but a garden of idleness, but to those who choose it become a true possession and an ever-widening home. Among those "nobler loves and nobler cares" there is excitement without reaction, there is an unwearied and impersonal joy—a joy which can only be held cheap because it is so abundant, and can only disappoint us through our own incapacity to contain it. These delights of study and of solitude Wordsworth enjoyed to the full. In no other poet, perhaps, have the poet's heightened sensibilities been productive of a pleasure so unmixed with pain. The wind of his emotions blew right abaft; he "swam smoothly in the stream of his nature, and lived but one man."

The blessing of meditative and lonely hours must of course be purchased by corresponding limitations. Wordsworth's conception of human character retained to the end an extreme simplicity. Many of life's most impressive phenomena were hid from his eyes. He never encountered any of those rare figures whose aspect seems to justify all traditions of pomp and pre-eminence when they appear amid stately scenes as with a natural sovereignty. He neither achieved nor underwent any of those experiences which can make all high romance seem a part of memory, and bestow, as it were, a password and introduction into the very innermost of human fates. On the other hand, he almost wholly escaped those sufferings which exceptional natures must needs derive from too close a contact with this commonplace world. It was not his lot—as it has been the lot of so many poets—to move amongst mankind at once as an intimate and a stranger; to travel from disillusionment to disillusionment, and from regret to regret;

to construct around him a world of ideal beings, who crumble into dust at his touch; to hope from them what they can neither understand nor accomplish, to lavish on them what they can never repay. Such pain, indeed, may become a discipline; and the close contact with many lives may teach to the poetic nature lessons of courage, of self-suppression, of resolute good-will, and may transform into an added dignity the tumult of emotions which might else have run riot in his heart. Yet it is less often from moods of self-control than from moods of self-abandonment that the fount of poetry springs; and herein it was that Wordsworth's especial felicity lay—that there was no one feeling in him which the world had either repressed or tainted; that he had no joy which might not be the harmless joy of all; and that, therefore, it was when he was most unreservedly himself that he was most profoundly human. All that was needful for him was to strike down into the deep of his heart. Or, using his own words, we may compare his tranquil existence to

> "A crystal river,
> Diaphanous because it travels slowly;"

and in which poetic thoughts rose unimpeded to the surface, like bubbles through the pellucid stream.

The first hint of many of his briefer poems is to be found in his sister's diary:

> "*April* 15, 1802.—When we were in the woods below Gowbarrow Park we saw a few *daffodils* close to the water side. As we went along there were more, and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw there was a long belt of them along the shore. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about them; some rested their heads on the stones as on a pillow; the rest tossed, and reeled, and danced, and seemed as if they verily danced with the wind, they looked so gay and glancing."

"*July* 30, 1802.—Left London between five and six o'clock of the morning, outside the Dover coach. A beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river, a multitude of little boats, made a beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge; the houses not overhung by their clouds of smoke, were spread out endlessly; yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a pure light, that there was something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles. Arrived at Calais at four in the morning of July 31st. Delightful walks in the evenings, seeing far off in the west the coast of England like a cloud, crested with Dover Castle, the evening star, and the glory of the sky. The reflections in the water were more beautiful than the sky itself; purple waves brighter than precious stones for ever melting away upon the sands."

How simple are the elements of these delights! There is nothing here, except fraternal affection, a sunrise, a sunset, a flock of bright wild flowers; and yet the sonnets on *Westminster Bridge* and *Calais Sands*, and the stanzas on the *Daffodils*, have taken their place among the permanent records of the profoundest human joy.

Another tour—this time through Scotland—undertaken in August, 1803, inspired Wordsworth with several of his best pieces. Miss Wordsworth's diary of this tour has been lately published, and should be familiar to all lovers of nature. The sister's journal is, indeed, the best introduction to the brother's poems. It has not—it cannot have—their dignity and beauty; but it exemplifies the same method of regarding Nature, the same self-identification with her subtler aspects and entrance into her profounder charm. It is interesting to notice how the same impression strikes both minds at once. From the sister's it is quickly reflected in words of exquisite delicacy and simplicity; in the brother's it germinates, and reappears, it may be months or years afterwards, as the nucleus of a mass of thought and feeling which has grown round it in

his musing soul. The travellers' encounter with two Highland girls on the shore of Loch Lomond is a good instance of this. "One of the girls," writes Miss Wordsworth, "was exceedingly beautiful; and the figures of both of them, in grey plaids falling to their feet, their faces only being uncovered, excited our attention before we spoke to them; but they answered us so sweetly that we were quite delighted, at the same time that they stared at us with an innocent look of wonder. I think I never heard the English language sound more sweetly than from the mouth of the elder of these girls, while she stood at the gate answering our inquiries, her face flushed with the rain; her pronunciation was clear and distinct, without difficulty, yet slow, as if like a foreign speech."

"A face with gladness overspread!
Soft smiles, by human kindness bred!
And seemliness complete, that sways
Thy courtesies, about thee plays;
With no restraint, but such as springs
From quick and eager visitings
Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
Of thy few words of English speech:
A bondage sweetly brooked, a strife
That gives thy gestures grace and life!
So have I, not unmoved in mind,
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind
Thus beating up against the wind."

The travellers saw more of this girl, and Miss Wordsworth's opinion was confirmed. But to Wordsworth his glimpse of her became a veritable romance. He commemorated it in his poem of *The Highland Girl*, soon after his return from Scotland; he narrated it once more in his poem of *The Three Cottage Girls*, written nearly twenty

years afterwards; and "the sort of prophecy," he says in 1843, "with which the verses conclude has, through God's goodness, been realized; and now, approaching the close of my seventy-third year, I have a most vivid remembrance of her and the beautiful objects with which she was surrounded." Nay, more; he has elsewhere informed us, with some näiveté, that the first few lines of his exquisite poem to his wife, *She was a phantom of delight*, were originally composed as a description of this Highland maid, who would seem almost to have formed for him ever afterwards a kind of type and image of loveliness.

That such a meeting as this should have formed so long-remembered an incident in the poet's life will appear, perhaps, equally ridiculous to the philosopher and to the man of the world. The one would have given less, the other would have demanded more. And yet the quest of beauty, like the quest of truth, reaps its surest reward when it is disinterested as well as keen; and the true lover of humankind will often draw his most exquisite moments from what to most men seems but the shadow of a joy. Especially, as in this case, his heart will be prodigal of the impulses of that protecting tenderness which it is the blessing of early girlhood to draw forth unwittingly, and to enjoy unknown—affections which lead to no declaration, and desire no return; which are the spontaneous effluence of the very Spirit of Love in man; and which play and hover around winning innocence like the coruscations round the head of the unconscious Iulus, a soft and unconsuming flame.

It was well, perhaps, that Wordsworth's romance should come to him in this remote and fleeting fashion. For to the Priest of Nature it was fitting that all things else should be harmonious, indeed, but accessory; that joy

should not be so keen, nor sorrow so desolating, nor love itself so wildly strong, as to prevent him from going out upon the mountains with a heart at peace, and receiving "in a wise passiveness" the voices of earth and heaven.

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CHAPTER VI.

SIR GEORGE BEAUMONT.—DEATH OF JOHN WORDSWORTH.

THE year 1803 saw the beginning of a friendship which formed a valuable element in Wordsworth's life. Sir George Beaumont, of Coleorton Hall, Essex, a descendant of the dramatist, and representative of a family long distinguished for talent and culture, was staying with Coleridge at Greta Hall, Keswick, when, hearing of Coleridge's affection for Wordsworth, he was struck with the wish to bring Wordsworth also to Keswick, and bought and presented to him a beautiful piece of land at Applethwaite, under Skiddaw, in the hope that he might be induced to settle there. Coleridge was soon afterwards obliged to leave England in search of health, and the plan fell through. A characteristic letter of Wordsworth's records his feelings on the occasion. "Dear Sir George," he writes, "if any person were to be informed of the particulars of your kindness to me—if it were described to him in all its delicacy and nobleness—and he should afterwards be told that I suffered eight weeks to elapse without writing to you one word of thanks or acknowledgment, he would deem it a thing absolutely *impossible*. It is nevertheless true.

"Owing to a set of painful and uneasy sensations which I have, more or less, at all times about my chest, I deferred writing to you, being at first made still more uncomforta-

ble by travelling, and loathing to do violence to myself in what ought to be an act of pure pleasure and enjoyment, viz., the expression of my deep sense of your goodness. This feeling was indeed so strong in me as to make me look upon the act of writing to you as a thing not to be done but in my best, my purest, and my happiest moments. Many of these I had, but then I had not my pen, ink, and, paper before me, my conveniences, 'my appliances and means to boot;' all which, the moment that I thought of them, seemed to disturb and impair the sanctity of my pleasure. I contented myself with thinking over my complacent feelings, and breathing forth solitary gratulations and thanksgivings, which I did in many a sweet and many a wild place, during my late tour."

The friendship of which this act of delicate generosity was the beginning was maintained till Sir George Beaumont's death in 1827, and formed for many years Wordsworth's closest link with the world of art and culture. Sir George was himself a painter as well as a connoisseur, and his landscapes are not without indications of the strong feeling for nature which he undoubtedly possessed. Wordsworth, who had seen very few pictures, but was a penetrating critic of those which he knew, discerned this vein of true feeling in his friend's work, and has idealized a small landscape which Sir George had given him, in a sonnet which reproduces the sense of happy pause and voluntary fixation with which the mind throws itself into some scene where art has given

> "To one brief moment caught from fleeting time
> The appropriate calm of blest eternity."

There was another pursuit in which Sir George Beaumont was much interested, and in which painter and poet

were well fitted to unite. The landscape-gardener, as Wordsworth says, should "work in the spirit of Nature, with an invisible hand of art." And he shows how any real success can only be achieved when the designer is willing to incorporate himself with the scenery around him; to postpone to its indications the promptings of his own pride or caprice; to interpret Nature to herself by completing touches; to correct her with deference, and, as it were, to caress her without importunity. And rising to that aspect of the question which connects it with human society, he is strenuous in condemnation of that taste, not so much for solitude as for isolation, which can tolerate no neighbourhood, and finds its only enjoyment in the sense of monopoly.

"Laying out grounds, as it is called, may be considered as a liberal art, in some sort like poetry and painting; its object ought to be to move the affections under the control of good-sense; and surely the affections of those who have the deepest perception of the beauty of Nature—who have the most valuable feelings, that is, the most permanent, the most independent, the most ennobling, connected with Nature and human life. No liberal art aims merely at the gratification of an individual or a class; the painter or poet is degraded in proportion as he does so. The true servants of the arts pay homage to the human-kind as impersonated in unwarped and enlightened minds. If this be so when we are merely putting together words or colours, how much more ought the feeling to prevail when we are in the midst of the realities of things; of the beauty and harmony, of the joy and happiness, of loving creatures; of men and children, of birds and beasts, of hills and streams, and trees and flowers; with the changes of night and day, evening and morning, summer and winter; and all their unwearied actions and energies, as benign in the spirit that animates them as they are beautiful and grand in that form of clothing which is given to them for the delight of our senses! What, then, shall we say of many great mansions, with their unqualified expulsion of human creatures from their neigh-

bourhood, happy or not; houses which do what is fabled of the upas-tree—breathe out death and desolation! For my part, strip my neighbourhood of human beings, and I should think it one of the greatest privations I could undergo. You have all the poverty of solitude, nothing of its elevation."

This passage is from a letter of Wordsworth's to Sir George Beaumont, who was engaged at the time in rebuilding and laying out Coleorton. The poet himself planned and superintended some of these improvements, and wrote, for various points of interest in the grounds, inscriptions which form dignified examples of that kind of composition.

Nor was Sir George Beaumont the only friend whom the poet's taste assisted in the choice of a site or the disposition of pleasure-grounds. More than one seat in the Lake country—among them one home of pre-eminent beauty—have owed to Wordsworth no small part of their ordered charm. In this way, too, the poet is with us still: his presence has a strange reality as we look on some majestic prospect of interwinding lake and mountain which his design has made more beautifully visible to the children's children of those he loved; as we stand, perhaps, in some shadowed garden-ground where his will has had its way—has framed Helvellyn's far-off summit in an arch of tossing green, and embayed in towering forest-trees the long lawns of a silent valley—fit haunt for lofty aspiration and for brooding calm.

But of all woodland ways which Wordsworth's skill designed or his feet frequented, not one was dearer to him (if I may pass thus by a gentle transition to another of the strong affections of his life) than a narrow path through a firwood near his cottage, which "was known to the poet's household by the name of John's Grove."

For in the year 1800 his brother, John Wordsworth, a few years younger than himself, and captain of an East Indiaman, had spent eight months in the poet's cottage at Grasmere. The two brothers had seen little of each other since childhood, and the poet had now the delight of discovering in the sailor a character congenial to his own, and an appreciation of poetry — and of the *Lyrical Ballads* especially — which was intense and delicate in an unusual degree. In both brothers, too, there was the same love of nature; and after John's departure, the poet pleased himself with imagining the visions of Grasmere which beguiled the watches of many a night at sea, or with tracing the pathway which the sailor's instinct had planned and trodden amid trees so thickly planted as to baffle a less practised skill. John Wordsworth, on the other hand, looked forward to Grasmere as the final goal of his wanderings, and intended to use his own savings to set the poet free from worldly cares.

Two more voyages the sailor made with such hopes as these, and amid a frequent interchange of books and letters with his brother at home. Then, in February, 1805, he set sail from Portsmouth, in command of the "Abergavenny" East Indiaman, bound for India and China. Through the incompetence of the pilot who was taking her out of the Channel, the ship struck on the Shambles off the Bill of Portland, on February 5, 1805. "She struck," says Wordsworth, "at 5 p.m. Guns were fired immediately, and were continued to be fired. She was gotten off the rock at half-past seven, but had taken in so much water, in spite of constant pumping, as to be water-logged. They had, however, hope that she might still be run upon Weymouth sands, and with this view continued pumping and baling till eleven, when she went

down. . . . A few minutes before the ship went down my brother was seen talking to the first mate with apparent cheerfulness; and he was standing on the hen-coop, which is the point from which he could overlook the whole ship, the moment she went down—dying, as he had lived, in the very place and point where his duty stationed him."

"For myself," he continues elsewhere, "I feel that there is something cut out of my life which cannot be restored. I never thought of him but with hope and delight. We looked forward to the time, not distant, as we thought, when he would settle near us—when the task of his life would be over, and he would have nothing to do but reap his reward. By that time I hoped also that the chief part of my labours would be executed, and that I should be able to show him that he had not placed a false confidence in me. I never wrote a line without a thought of giving him pleasure; my writings, printed and manuscript, were his delight, and one of the chief solaces of his long voyages. But let me stop. I will not be cast down; were it only for his sake, I will not be dejected. I have much yet to do, and pray God to give me strength and power; his part of the agreement between us is brought to an end, mine continues; and I hope, when I shall be able to think of him with a calmer mind, that the remembrance of him dead will even animate me more than the joy which I had in him living."

In these and the following reflections there is nothing of novelty; yet there is an interest in the spectacle of this strong and simple mind confronted with the universal problems, and taking refuge in the thoughts which have satisfied, or scarcely satisfied, so many generations of mourning men.

"A thousand times have I asked myself, as your tender

sympathy led me to do, 'Why was he taken away?' and I have answered the question as you have done. In fact, there is no other answer which can satisfy, and lay the mind at rest. Why have we a choice, and a will, and a notion of justice and injustice, enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the Supreme Governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence, differ so widely from what appears to be his notion and rule, *if everything were to end here?* Would it not be blasphemy to say that, upon the supposition of the thinking principle being *destroyed by death*, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and Ruler of things, we have *more of love* in our nature than he has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it, except upon the supposition of *another* and a *better world*, I do not see."

From this calamity, as from all the lessons of life, Wordsworth drew all the benefit which it was empowered to bring. "A deep distress hath humanized my soul"—what lover of poetry does not know the pathetic lines in which he bears witness to the teaching of sorrow? Other griefs, too, he had—the loss of two children in 1812; his sister's chronic illness, beginning in 1832: his daughter's death in 1847 All these he felt to the full; and yet, until his daughter's death, which was more than his failing energies could bear, these bereavements were but the thinly-scattered clouds "in a great sea of blue"—seasons of mourning here and there among years which never lost their hold on peace; which knew no shame and no remorse, no desolation and no fear; whose days were never long with weariness, nor their nights broken at the touch of woe. Even

when we speak of his tribulations, it is his happiness which rises in our minds.

And inasmuch as this felicity is the great fact of Wordsworth's life—since his history is for the most part but the history of a halcyon calm—we find ourselves forced upon the question whether such a life is to be held desirable or no. Happiness with honor was the ideal of Solon; is it also ours? To the modern spirit—to the Christian, in whose ears counsels of perfection have left "a presence that is not to be put by," this question, at which a Greek would have smiled, is of no such easy solution.

To us, perhaps, in computing the fortune of any one whom we hold dear, it may seem more needful to inquire not whether he has had enough of joy, but whether he has had enough of sorrow; whether the blows of circumstance have wholly shaped his character from the rock; whether his soul has taken lustre and purity in the refiner's fire. Nor is it only (as some might say) for violent and faulty natures that sorrow is the best. It is true that by sorrow only can the headstrong and presumptuous spirit be shamed into gentleness and solemnized into humility. But sorrow is used also by the Power above us in cases where we men would have shrunk in horror from so rough a touch. Natures that were already of a heroic unselfishness, of a childlike purity, have been raised ere now by anguish upon anguish, woe after woe, to a height of holiness which we may believe that they could have reached by no other road. Why should it not be so? since there is no limit to the soul's possible elevation, why should her purifying trials have any assignable end? She is of a metal which can grow for ever brighter in the fiercening flame. And if, then, we would still pronounce the true Beatitudes not on the rejoicing, the satisfied, the highly-honoured, but after

an ancient and sterner pattern, what account are we to give of Wordsworth's long years of blissful calm?

In the first place, we may say that his happiness was as wholly free from vulgar or transitory elements as a man's can be. It lay in a life which most men would have found austere and blank indeed; a life from which not Crœsus only but Solon would have turned in scorn; a life of poverty and retirement, of long apparent failure, and honour that came tardily at the close; it was a happiness nourished on no sacrifice of other men, on no eager appropriation of the goods of earth, but springing from a single eye and a loving spirit, and wrought from those primary emotions which are the innocent birthright of all. And if it be answered that, however truly philosophic, however sacredly pure, his happiness may have been, yet its wisdom and its holiness were without an effort, and that it is effort which makes the philosopher and the saint: then we must use in answer his own Platonic scheme of things, to express a thought which we can but dimly apprehend; and we must say that, though progress be inevitably linked in our minds with struggle, yet neither do we conceive of struggle as without a pause; there must be prospect-places in the long ascent of souls; and the whole of this earthly life —this one existence, standing we know not where among the myriad that have been for us or shall be—may not be too much to occupy with one of those outlooks of vision and of prophecy, when

> "In a season of calm weather,
> Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither;
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

CHAPTER VII.

"HAPPY WARRIOR," AND PATRIOTIC POEMS.

THE year 1805, which bereft Wordsworth of a beloved brother, brought with it also another death, which was felt by the whole English nation like a private calamity. The emotion which Wordsworth felt at the news of Trafalgar —the way in which he managed to intertwine the memories of Nelson and of his own brother in his heart—may remind us fitly at this point of our story of the distress and perplexity of nations which for so many years surrounded the quiet Grasmere home, and of the strong responsive emotion with which the poet met each shock of European fates.

When England first took up arms against the French revolution, Wordsworth's feeling, as we have seen, had been one of unmixed sorrow and shame. Bloody and terrible as the revolution had become, it was still in some sort representative of human freedom; at any rate, it might still seem to contain possibilities of progress such as the retrograde despotisms with which England allied herself could never know. But the conditions of the contest changed before long. France had not the wisdom, the courage, the constancy to play to the end the part for which she had seemed chosen among the nations. It was her conduct towards Switzerland which decisively altered

Wordsworth's view. He saw her valiant spirit of self-defence corrupted into lust of glory; her eagerness for the abolition of unjust privilege turned into a contentment with equality of degradation under a despot's heel. "One man, of men the meanest too"—for such the First Consul must needs appear to the moralist's eye—was

> "Raised up to sway the world—to do, undo;
> With mighty nations for his underlings."

And history herself seemed vulgarized by the repetition of her ancient tales of war and overthrow on a scale of such apparent magnitude, but with no glamour of distance to hide the baseness of the agencies by which the destinies of Europe were shaped anew. This was an occasion that tried the hearts of men; it was not easy to remain through all those years at once undazzled and untempted, and never in the blackest hour to despair of human virtue.

In his tract on *The Convention of Cintra*, 1808, Wordsworth has given the fullest expression to this undaunted temper:

> "Oppression, its own blind and predestined enemy, has poured this of blessedness upon Spain—that the enormity of the outrages of which she has been the victim has created an object of love and of hatred, of apprehensions and of wishes, adequate (if that be possible) to the utmost demands of the human spirit. The heart that serves in this cause, if it languish, must languish from its own constitutional weakness, and not through want of nourishment from without. But it is a belief propagated in books, and which passes currently among talking men as part of their familiar wisdom, that the hearts of the many *are* constitutionally weak, that they *do* languish, and are slow to answer to the requisitions of things. I entreat those who are in this delusion to look behind them and about them for the evidence of experience. Now this, rightly understood, not only gives no support to any such belief, but proves that the truth is in direct opposi-

tion to it. The history of all ages—tumults after tumults, wars foreign or civil, with short or with no breathing-places from generation to generation; the senseless weaving and interweaving of factions, vanishing, and reviving, and piercing each other like the Northern Lights; public commotions, and those in the breast of the individual; the long calenture to which the Lover is subject; the blast, like the blast of the desert, which sweeps perennially through a frightful solitude of its own making in the mind of the Gamester; the slowly quickening, but ever quickening, descent of appetite down which the Miser is propelled; the agony and cleaving oppression of grief; the ghost-like hauntings of shame; the incubus of revenge; the life-distemper of ambition . . . these demonstrate incontestably that the passions of men (I mean the soul of sensibility in the heart of man), in all quarrels, in all contests, in all quests, in all delights, in all employments which are either sought by men or thrust upon them, do immeasurably transcend their objects. The true sorrow of humanity consists in this—not that the mind of man fails, but that the cause and demands of action and of life so rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires; and hence, that which is slow to languish is too easily turned aside and abused. But, with the remembrance of what has been done, and in the face of the interminable evils which are threatened, a Spaniard can never have cause to complain of this while a follower of the tyrant remains in arms upon the Peninsula."

It was passages such as this, perhaps, which led Canning to declare that Wordsworth's pamphlet was the finest piece of political eloquence which had appeared since Burke. And yet if we compare it with Burke, or with the great Greek exemplar of all those who would give speech the cogency of act—we see at once the causes of its practical failure. In Demosthenes the thoughts and principles are often as lofty as any patriot can express; but their loftiness, in his speech, as in the very truth of things, seemed but to add to their immediate reality. They were beaten and inwoven into the facts of the hour; action seemed to turn on them as on its only possible

pivot; it was as though Virtue and Freedom hung armed in heaven above the assembly, and in the visible likeness of immortal ancestors beckoned upon an urgent way. Wordsworth's mood of mind, on the other hand, as he has depicted it in two sonnets written at the same time as his tract, explains why it was that that appeal was rather a solemn protest than an effective exhortation. In the first sonnet he describes the surroundings of his task—the dark wood and rocky cave, "the hollow vale which foaming torrents fill with omnipresent murmur:"

> "Here mighty Nature! in this school sublime
> I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain;
> For her consult the auguries of time,
> And through the human heart explore my way,
> And look and listen, gathering whence I may
> Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain."

And then he proceeds to conjecture what effect his tract will produce:

> "I dropped my pen, and listened to the wind,
> That sang of trees uptorn and vessels tost;
> A midnight harmony, and wholly lost
> To the general sense of men, by chains confined
> Of business, care, or pleasure,—or resigned
> To timely sleep. Thought I, the impassioned strain
> Which without aid of numbers I sustain
> Like acceptation from the world will find."

This deliberate and lonely emotion was fitter to inspire grave poetry than a pamphlet appealing to an immediate crisis. And the sonnets dedicated *To Liberty* (1802–16) are the outcome of many moods like these.

It is little to say of these sonnets that they are the most permanent record in our literature of the Napoleonic war.

For that distinction they have few competitors. Two magnificent songs of Campbell's, an ode of Coleridge's, a few spirited stanzas of Byron's—strangely enough there is little besides these that lives in the national memory, till we come to the ode which summed up the long contest a generation later, when its great captain passed away. But these *Sonnets to Liberty* are worthy of comparison with the noblest passages of patriotic verse or prose which all our history has inspired—the passages where Shakspeare brings his rays to focus on "this earth, this realm, this England"—or where the dread of national dishonour has kindled Chatham to an iron glow—or where Milton rises from the polemic into the prophet, and Burke from the partisan into the philosopher. The armoury of Wordsworth, indeed, was not forged with the same fire as that of these "invincible knights of old." He had not swayed senates, nor directed policies, nor gathered into one ardent bosom all the spirit of a heroic age. But he had deeply felt what it is that makes the greatness of nations; in that extremity no man was more staunch than he; no man more unwaveringly disdained unrighteous empire, or kept the might of moral forces more steadfastly in view. Not Stein could place a manlier reliance on "a few strong instincts and a few plain rules;" not Fichte could invoke more convincingly the "great allies" which work with "Man's unconquerable mind."

Here and there, indeed, throughout these sonnets are scattered strokes of high poetic admiration or scorn which could hardly be overmatched in Æschylus. Such is the indignant correction—

> "Call not the royal Swede unfortunate,
> Who never did to Fortune bend the knee!"

or the stern touch which closes a description of Flaminius's proclamation at the Isthmian games, according liberty to Greece—

> "A gift of that which is not to be given
> By all the blended powers of Earth and Heaven!"

Space forbids me to dwell in detail on these noble poems—on the well-known sonnets to Venice, to Milton, &c.; on the generous tributes to the heroes of the contest—Schill, Hoffer, Toussaint, Palafox; or on the series which contrast the instinctive greatness of the Spanish people at bay with Napoleon's lying promises and inhuman pride. But if Napoleon's career afforded to Wordsworth a poetic example, impressive as that of Xerxes to the Greeks, of lawless and intoxicated power, there was need of some contrasted figure more notable than Hoffer or Palafox from which to draw the lessons which great contests can teach of unselfish valour. Was there then any man, by land or sea, who might serve as the poet's type of the ideal hero? To an Englishman, at least, this question carries its own reply. For by a singular destiny England, with a thousand years of noble history behind her, has chosen for her best-beloved, for her national hero, not an Arminius from the age of legend, not a Henri Quatre from the age of chivalry, but a man whom men still living have seen and known. For, indeed, England and all the world as to this man were of one accord; and when in victory, on his ship *Victory*, Nelson passed away, the thrill which shook mankind was of a nature such as perhaps was never felt at any other death—so unanimous was the feeling of friends and foes that earth had lost her crowning example of impassioned self-devotedness and of heroic honour.

And yet it might have seemed that between Nelson's nature and Wordsworth's there was little in common. The obvious limitations of the great Admiral's culture and character were likely to be strongly felt by the philosophic poet. And a serious crime, of which Nelson was commonly, though, as now appears, erroneously,[1] supposed to be guilty, was sure to be judged by Wordsworth with great severity.

Wordsworth was, in fact, hampered by some such feelings of disapproval. He even tells us, with that näive affectionateness which often makes us smile, that he has had recourse to the character of his own brother John for the qualities in which the great Admiral appeared to him to have been deficient. But on these hesitations it would be unjust to dwell. I mention them only to bring out the fact that between these two men, so different in outward fates—between "the adored, the incomparable Nelson" and the homely poet, "retired as noontide dew"—there was a moral likeness so profound that the ideal of the recluse was realized in the public life of the hero, and, on the other hand, the hero himself is only seen as completely heroic when his impetuous life stands out for us from the solemn background of the poet's calm. And surely these two natures taken together make the perfect Englishman. Nor is there any portrait fitter than that of *The Happy Warrior* to go forth to all lands as representing the English character at its height—a figure not ill-matching with "Plutarch's men."

For indeed this short poem is in itself a manual of greatness; there is a Roman majesty in its simple and

[1] The researches of Sir Nicholas Nicolas (*Letters and Despatches of Lord Nelson*, vol. vii., Appendix) have placed Lord Nelson's connexion with Lady Hamilton in an unexpected light.

weighty speech. And what eulogy was ever nobler than that passage where, without definite allusion or quoted name, the poet depicts, as it were, the very summit of glory in the well-remembered aspect of the Admiral in his last and greatest hour?

> "Whose powers shed round him, in the common strife,
> Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
> A constant influence, a peculiar grace;
> But who, if he be called upon to face
> Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
> Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
> *Is happy as a Lover, and attired*
> *With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired.*"

Or again, where the hidden thought of Nelson's womanly tenderness, of his constant craving for the green earth and home affections in the midst of storm and war, melts the stern verses into a sudden change of tone:

> "He who, though thus endued as with a sense
> And faculty for storm and turbulence,
> *Is yet a Soul whose master-bias leans*
> *To home-felt pleasures and to gentle scenes;*
> Sweet images! which, wheresoe'er he be,
> Are at his heart; and such fidelity
> It is his darling passion to approve;—
> More brave for this, that he hath much to love."

Compare with this the end of the *Song at Brougham Castle*, where, at the words "alas! the fervent harper did not know—" the strain changes from the very spirit of chivalry to the gentleness of nature's calm. Nothing can be more characteristic of Wordsworth than contrasts like this. They teach us to remember that his accustomed mildness is the fruit of no indolent or sentimental peace; and that, on the other hand, when his counsels are sternest,

and "his voice is still for war," this is no voice of hardness or of vainglory, but the reluctant resolution of a heart which fain would yield itself to other energies, and have no message but of love.

There is one more point in which the character of Nelson has fallen in with one of the lessons which Wordsworth is never tired of enforcing, the lesson that virtue grows by the strenuousness of its exercise, that it gains strength as it wrestles with pain and difficulty, and converts the shocks of circumstance into an energy of its proper glow. The Happy Warrior is one,

> "Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
> And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
> Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
> In face of these doth exercise a power
> Which is our human nature's highest dower;
> Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
> Of their bad influence, and their good receives;
> By objects which might force the soul to abate
> Her feeling, rendered more compassionate;"

and so further, in words which recall the womanly tenderness, the almost exaggerated feeling for others' pain, which showed itself memorably in face of the blazing *Orient*, and in the harbour at Teneriffe, and in the cockpit at Trafalgar.

In such lessons as these—such lessons as *The Happy Warrior* or the Patriotic Sonnets teach—there is, of course, little that is absolutely novel. We were already aware that the ideal hero should be as gentle as he is brave, that he should act always from the highest motives, nor greatly care for any reward save the consciousness of having done his duty. We were aware that the true strength of a nation is moral, and not material; that dominion which rests

on mere military force is destined quickly to decay; that the tyrant, however admired and prosperous, is in reality despicable, and miserable, and alone; that the true man should face death itself rather than parley with dishonour. These truths are *admitted* in all ages; yet it is scarcely stretching language to say that they are *known* to but few men. Or at least, though in a great nation there be many who will act on them instinctively, and approve them by a self-surrendering faith, there are few who can so put them forth in speech as to bring them home with a fresh conviction and an added glow; who can sum up, like Æschylus, the contrast between Hellenic freedom and barbarian despotism in "one trump's peal that set all Greeks aflame;" can thrill, like Virgil, a world-wide empire with the recital of the august simplicities of early Rome.

To those who would know these things with a vital knowledge—a conviction which would remain unshaken were the whole world in arms for wrong—it is before all things necessary to strengthen the inner monitions by the companionship of these noble souls. And if a poet, by strong concentration of thought, by striving in all things along the upward way, can leave us in a few pages, as it were, a summary of patriotism, a manual of national honour, he surely has his place among his country's benefactors not only by that kind of courtesy which the nation extends to men of letters of whom her masses take little heed, but with a title as assured as any warrior or statesman, and with no less direct a claim.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHILDREN.—LIFE AT RYDAL MOUNT.—"THE EXCURSION."

It may be well at this point to return to the quiet chronicle of the poet's life at Grasmere; where his cottage was becoming too small for an increasing family. His eldest son, John, was born in 1803; his eldest daughter, Dorothy or Dora, in 1804. Then came Thomas, born 1806; and Catherine, born 1808; and the list is ended by William, born 1810, and now (1880) the only survivor. In the spring of 1808 Wordsworth left Townend for Allan Bank—a more roomy but an uncomfortable house, at the north end of Grasmere. From thence he removed for a time, in 1811, to the Parsonage at Grasmere.

Wordsworth was the most affectionate of fathers, and allusions to his children occur frequently in his poetry. Dora—who was the delight of his later years—has been described at length in *The Triad*. Shorter and simpler, but more completely successful, is the picture of Catherine in the little poem which begins "Loving she is, and tractable, though wild," with its homely simile for childhood—its own existence sufficient to fill it with gladness:

> "As a faggot sparkles on the hearth
> Not less if unattended and alone
> Than when both young and old sit gathered round
> And take delight in its activity."

The next notice of this beloved child is in the sonnet, "Surprised by joy, impatient as the wind," written when she had already been removed from his side. She died in 1812, and was closely followed by her brother Thomas. Wordsworth's grief for these children was profound, violent, and lasting, to an extent which those who imagine him as not only calm but passionless might have some difficulty in believing. "Referring once," says his friend Mr. Aubrey de Vere, "to two young children of his who had died about *forty years* previously, he described the details of their illnesses with an exactness and an impetuosity of troubled excitement such as might have been expected if the bereavement had taken place but a few weeks before. The lapse of time seemed to have left the sorrow submerged indeed, but still in all its first freshness. Yet I afterwards heard that at the time of the illness, at least in the case of one of the two children, it was impossible to rouse his attention to the danger. He chanced to be then under the immediate spell of one of those fits of poetic inspiration which descended on him like a cloud. Till the cloud had drifted, he could see nothing beyond."

This anecdote illustrates the fact, which to those who knew Wordsworth well was sufficiently obvious, that the characteristic calm of his writings was the result of no coldness of temperament, but of a deliberate philosophy. The pregnant force of his language in dealing with those dearest to him—his wife, his sister, his brother—is proof enough of this. The frequent allusions in his correspondence to the physical exhaustion brought on by the act of poetical composition indicate a frame which, though made robust by exercise and temperance, was by nature excitable rather than strong. And even in the direction in which we should least have expected it, there is reason

to believe that there were capacities of feeling in him which never broke from his control. "Had I been a writer of love-poetry," he is reported to have said, "it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader."

Wordsworth's paternal feelings, at any rate, were, as has been said, exceptionally strong; and the impossibility of remaining in a house filled with sorrowful memories rendered him doubly anxious to obtain a permanent home. "The house which I have for some time occupied," he writes to Lord Lonsdale, in January, 1813, "is the Parsonage of Grasmere. It stands close by the churchyard, and I have found it absolutely necessary that we should quit a place which, by recalling to our minds at every moment the losses we have sustained in the course of the last year, would grievously retard our progress towards that tranquillity which it is our duty to aim at." It happened that Rydal Mount became vacant at this moment, and in the spring of 1813 the Wordsworths migrated to this their favourite and last abode.

Rydal Mount has probably been oftener described than any other English poet's home since Shakspeare; and few homes, certainly, have been moulded into such close accordance with their inmates' nature. The house, which has been altered since Wordsworth's day, stands, looking southward, on the rocky side of Nab Scar, above Rydal Lake. The garden was described by Bishop Wordsworth immediately after his uncle's death, while every terrace-walk and flowering alley spoke of the poet's loving care. He tells of the "tall ash-tree, in which a thrush has sung, for hours together, during many years;" of the "labur-

num in which the osier cage of the doves was hung;" of the stone steps "in the interstices of which grow the yellow flowering poppy, and the wild geranium or Poor Robin"—

"Gay
With his red stalks upon a sunny day."

And then of the terraces—one levelled for Miss Fenwick's use, and welcome to himself in aged years; and one ascending, and leading to the "far terrace" on the mountain's side, where the poet was wont to murmur his verses as they came. Within the house were disposed his simple treasures: the ancestral almery, on which the names of unknown Wordsworths may be deciphered still; Sir George Beaumont's pictures of "The White Doe of Rylstone" and "The Thorn," and the cuckoo clock which brought vernal thoughts to cheer the sleepless bed of age, and which sounded its noonday summons when his spirit fled.

Wordsworth's worldly fortunes, as if by some benignant guardianship of Providence, were at all times proportioned to his successive needs. About the date of his removal to Rydal (in March, 1813) he was appointed, through Lord Lonsdale's interest, to the distributorship of stamps for the county of Westmoreland, to which office the same post for Cumberland was afterwards added. He held this post till August, 1842, when he resigned it without a retiring pension, and it was conferred on his second son. He was allowed to reside at Rydal, which was counted as a suburb of Ambleside; and as the duties of the place were light, and mainly performed by a most competent and devoted clerk, there was no drawback to the advantage of an increase of income which released him from anxiety as to the future. A more lucrative office—the collectorship of Whitehaven — was subsequently offered to him; but he

declined it, "nor would exchange his Sabine valley for riches and a load of care."

Though Wordsworth's life at Rydal was a retired one, it was not that of a recluse. As years went on he became more and more recognized as a centre of spiritual strength and illumination, and was sought not only by those who were already his neighbours, but by some who became so mainly for his sake. Southey at Keswick was a valued friend, though Wordsworth did not greatly esteem him as a poet. De Quincey, originally attracted to the district by admiration for Wordsworth, remained there for many years, and poured forth a criticism strangely compounded of the utterances of the hero-worshipper and the *valet-de-chambre*. Professor Wilson, of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, never showed, perhaps, to so much advantage as when he walked by the side of the master whose greatness he was one of the first to detect. Dr. Arnold of Rugby made the neighbouring home at Fox How a focus of warm affections and of intellectual life. And Hartley Coleridge, whose fairy childhood had inspired one of Wordsworth's happiest pieces, continued to lead among the dales of Westmoreland a life which showed how much of genius and goodness a single weakness can nullify.

Other friends there were, too, less known to fame, but of exceptional powers of appreciation and sympathy. The names of Mrs. Fletcher and her daughters, Lady Richardson and Mrs. Davy, should not be omitted in any record of the poet's life at Rydal. And many humbler neighbours may be recognized in the characters of the *Excursion* and other poems. The *Wanderer*, indeed, is a picture of Wordsworth himself—"an idea," as he says, "of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances." But the *Solitary* was suggested by a broken

man who took refuge in Grasmere from the world in which he had found no peace; and the characters described as lying in the churchyard among the mountains are almost all of them portraits. The clergyman and his family described in Book VII. were among the poet's principal associates in the vale of Grasmere. "There was much talent in the family," says Wordsworth, in the memoranda dictated to Miss Fenwick; "and the eldest son was distinguished for poetical talent, of which a specimen is given in my Notes to the *Sonnets on the Duddon*. Once when, in our cottage at Townend, I was talking with him about poetry, in the course of our conversation I presumed to find fault with the versification of Pope, of whom he was an enthusiastic admirer. He defended him with a warmth that indicated much irritation; nevertheless, I could not abandon my point, and said, 'In compass and variety of sound your own versification surpasses his.' Never shall I forget the change in his countenance and tone of voice. The storm was laid in a moment; he no longer disputed my judgment; and I passed immediately in his mind, no doubt, for as great a critic as ever lived."

It was with personages simple and unromantic as these that Wordsworth filled the canvas of his longest poem. Judged by ordinary standards the *Excursion* appears an epic without action, and with two heroes, the Pastor and the Wanderer, whose characters are identical. Its form is cumbrous in the extreme, and large tracts of it have little claim to the name of poetry. Wordsworth compares the *Excursion* to a temple of which his smaller poems form subsidiary shrines; but the reader will more often liken the small poems to gems, and the *Excursion* to the rock from which they were extracted. The long poem contains, indeed, magnificent passages, but as a whole it is a

diffused description of scenery which the poet has elsewhere caught in brighter glimpses; a diffused statement of hopes and beliefs which have crystallized more exquisitely elsewhere round moments of inspiring emotion. The *Excursion*, in short, has the drawbacks of a didactic poem as compared with lyrical poems; but, judged as a didactic poem, it has the advantage of containing teaching of true and permanent value.

I shall not attempt to deduce a settled scheme of philosophy from these discourses among the mountains. I would urge only that, as a guide to conduct, Wordsworth's precepts are not in themselves either unintelligible or visionary. For whereas some moralists would have us amend Nature, and others bid us follow her, there is apt to be something impracticable in the first maxim, and something vague in the second. Asceticism, quietism, enthusiasm, ecstasy—all systems which imply an unnatural repression or an unnatural excitation of our faculties—are ill-suited for the mass of mankind. And on the other hand, if we are told to follow nature, to develope our original character, we are too often in doubt as to which of our conflicting instincts to follow, what part of our complex nature to accept as our regulating self. But Wordsworth, while impressing on us conformity to nature as the rule of life, suggests a test of such conformity which can be practically applied. "The child is father of the man"—in the words which stand as introduction to his poetical works, and Wordsworth holds that the instincts and pleasures of a healthy childhood sufficiently indicate the lines on which our maturer character should be formed. The joy which began in the mere sense of existence should be maintained by hopeful faith; the simplicity which began in inexperience should be recovered by meditation; the love which

originated in the family circle should expand itself over the race of men. And the calming and elevating influence of Nature—which to Wordsworth's memory seemed the inseparable concomitant of childish years—should be constantly invoked throughout life to keep the heart fresh and the eyes open to the mysteries discernible through her radiant veil. In a word, the family affections, if duly fostered, the influences of Nature, if duly sought, with some knowledge of the best books, are material enough to "build up our moral being" and to outweigh the less deep-seated impulses which prompt to wrong-doing.

If, then, surrounding influences make so decisive a difference in man's moral lot, what are we to say of those who never have the chance of receiving those influences aright; who are reared, with little parental supervision, in smoky cities, and spend their lives in confined and monotonous labour? One of the most impressive passages in the *Excursion* is an indignant complaint of the injustice thus done to the factory child. Wordsworth was no fanatical opponent of manufacturing industry. He had intimate friends among manufacturers; and in one of his letters he speaks of promising himself much pleasure from witnessing the increased regard for the welfare of factory hands of which one of these friends had set the example. But he never lost sight of the fact that the life of the mill-hand is an anomaly—is a life not in the order of nature, and which requires to be justified by manifest necessity and by continuous care. The question to what extent we may acquiesce in the continuance of a low order of human beings, existing for our enjoyment rather than for their own, may be answered with plausibility in very different tones; from the Communist who cannot acquiesce in the inferiority of any one man's position to any other's,

to the philosopher who holds that mankind has made the most eminent progress when a few chosen individuals have been supported in easy brilliancy by a population of serfs or slaves. Wordsworth's answer to this question is at once conservative and philanthropic. He holds to the distinction of classes, and thus admits a difference in the fulness and value of human lots. But he will not consent to any social arrangement which implies a necessary *moral* inferiority in any section of the body politic; and he esteems it the statesman's first duty to provide that all citizens shall be placed under conditions of life which, however humble, shall not be unfavourable to virtue.

His views on national education, which at first sight appear so inconsistent, depend on the same conception of national welfare. Wordsworth was one of the earliest and most emphatic proclaimers of the duty of the State in this respect. The lines in which he insists that every child ought to be taught to read are, indeed, often quoted as an example of the moralizing baldness of much of his blank verse. But, on the other hand, when a great impulse was given to education (1820–30) by Bell and Lancaster, by the introduction of what was called the "Madras system" of tuition by pupil-teachers, and the spread of infant schools, Wordsworth was found unexpectedly in the opposite camp. Considering as he did all mental requirements as entirely subsidiary to moral progress, and in themselves of very little value, he objected to a system which, instead of confining itself to reading—that indispensable channel of moral nutriment—aimed at communicating knowledge as varied and advanced as time and funds would allow. He objected to the dissociation of school and home life—to that relegation of domestic interests and duties to the background, which large and highly-organized

schools, and teachers much above the home level, must necessarily involve. And yet more strongly, and as it may still seem to many minds, with convincing reason, he objected to an eleemosynary system, which "precludes the poor mother from the strongest motive human nature can be actuated by for industry, for forethought, and self-denial." "The Spartan," he said, "and other ancient communities, might disregard domestic ties, because they had the substitution of country, which we cannot have. Our course is to supplant domestic attachments, without the possibility of substituting others more capacious. What can grow out of it but selfishness?" The half-century which has elapsed since Wordsworth wrote these words has evidently altered the state of the question. It has impressed on us the paramount necessity of national education, for reasons political and social too well known to repeat. But it may be feared that it has also shifted the incidence of Wordsworth's arguments in a more sinister manner, by vastly increasing the number of those homes where domestic influence of the kind which the poet saw around him at Rydal is altogether wanting, and school is the best avenue even to moral well-being. "Heaven and hell," he writes in 1808, "are scarcely more different from each other than Sheffield and Manchester, &c., differ from the plains and valleys of Surrey, Essex, Cumberland, or Westmoreland." It is to be feared, indeed, that even "the plains and valleys of Surrey and Essex" contain many cottages whose spiritual and sanitary conditions fall far short of the poet's ideal. But it is of course in the great and growing centres of population that the dangers which he dreads have come upon us in their most aggravated form. And so long as there are in England so many homes to which parental care and the influences of

nature are alike unknown, no protest in favour of the paramount importance of these primary agencies in the formation of character can be regarded as altogether out of date.

With such severe and almost prosaic themes is the greater part of the *Excursion* occupied. Yet the poem is far from being composed throughout in a prosaic spirit. "Of its bones is coral made;" its arguments and theories have lain long in Wordsworth's mind, and have accreted to themselves a rich investiture of observation and feeling. Some of its passages rank among the poet's highest flights. Such is the passage in Book I. describing the boy's rapture at sunrise; and the picture of a sunset at the close of the same book. Such is the opening of Book IV.; and the passage describing the wild joy of roaming through a mountain storm; and the metaphor in the same book which compares the mind's power of transfiguring the obstacles which beset her, with the glory into which the moon incorporates the umbrage that would intercept her beams.

It would scarcely be possible at the present day that a work containing such striking passages, and so much of substance and elevation—however out of keeping it might be with the ruling taste of the day—should appear without receiving careful study from many quarters and warm appreciation in some recognized organs of opinion. Criticism in Wordsworth's day was both less competent and less conscientious, and the famous "this will never do" of Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* was by no means an extreme specimen of the general tone in which the work was received. The judgment of the reviewers influenced popular taste; and the book was as decided a pecuniary failure as Wordsworth's previous ventures had been.

And here, perhaps, is a fit occasion to speak of that strangely violent detraction and abuse which formed so large an ingredient in Wordsworth's life — or, rather, of that which is the only element of permanent interest in such a matter—his manner of receiving and replying to it. No writer, probably, who has afterwards achieved a reputation at all like Wordsworth's, has been so long represented by reviewers as purely ridiculous. And in Wordsworth's manner of acceptance of this fact we may discern all the strength, and something of the stiffness, of his nature; we may recognize an almost, but not quite, ideal attitude under the shafts of unmerited obloquy. For he who thus is arrogantly censured should remember both the dignity and the frailty of man; he should wholly forgive, and almost wholly forget; but, nevertheless, should retain such serviceable hints as almost any criticism, however harsh or reckless, can afford, and go on his way with no bitter broodings, but yet (to use Wordsworth's expression in another context) "with a melancholy in the soul, a sinking inward into ourselves from thought to thought, a steady remonstrance, and a high resolve."

How far his own self-assertion may becomingly be carried in reply, is another and a delicate question. There is almost necessarily something distasteful to us not only in self-praise but even in a thorough self-appreciation. We desire of the ideal character that his faculties of admiration should be, as it were, absorbed in an eager perception of the merits of others—that a kind of shrinking delicacy should prevent him from appraising his own achievements with a similar care. Often, indeed, there is something most winning in a touch of humorous blindness: "Well, Miss Sophia, and how do *you* like the *Lady of the Lake?*" "Oh, I've not read it; papa says

there's nothing so bad for young people as reading bad poetry."

But there are circumstances under which this graceful absence of self-consciousness can no longer be maintained. When a man believes that he has a message to deliver that vitally concerns mankind, and when that message is received with contempt and apathy, he is necessarily driven back upon himself; he is forced to consider whether what he has to say is after all so important, and whether his mode of saying it be right and adequate. A necessity of this kind was forced upon both Shelley and Wordsworth. Shelley—the very type of self-forgetful enthusiasm—was driven at last by the world's treatment of him into a series of moods sometimes bitter and sometimes self-distrustful—into a sense of aloofness and detachment from the mass of men, which the poet who would fain improve and exalt them should do his utmost not to feel. On Wordsworth's more stubborn nature the effect produced by many years of detraction was of a different kind. Naturally introspective, he was driven by abuse and ridicule into taking stock of himself more frequently and more laboriously than ever. He formed an estimate of himself and his writings which was, on the whole (as will now be generally admitted), a just one; and this view he expressed when occasion offered—in sober language, indeed, but with calm conviction, and with precisely the same air of speaking from undoubted knowledge as when he described the beauty of Cumbrian mountains or the virtue of Cumbrian homes.

"It is impossible," he wrote to Lady Beaumont in 1807, "that any expectations can be lower than mine concerning the immediate effect of this little work upon what is called the public. I do not here take into consideration

the envy and malevolence, and all the bad passions which always stand in the way of a work of any merit from a living poet; but merely think of the pure, absolute, honest ignorance in which all worldlings, of every rank and situation, must be enveloped, with respect to the thoughts, feelings, and images on which the life of my poems depends. The things which I have taken, whether from within or without, what have they to do with routs, dinners, morning calls, hurry from door to door, from street to street, on foot or in carriage; with Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox, Mr. Paul or Sir Francis Burdett, the Westminster election or the borough of Honiton? In a word —for I cannot stop to make my way through the hurry of images that present themselves to me—what have they to do with endless talking about things that nobody cares anything for, except as far as their own vanity is concerned, and this with persons they care nothing for, but as their vanity or *selfishness* is concerned? What have they to do (to say all at once) with a life without love? In such a life there can be no thought; for we have no thought (save thoughts of pain), but as far as we have love and admiration.

"It is an awful truth, that there neither is nor can be any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world—among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one; because to be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God.

"Upon this I shall insist elsewhere; at present let me confine myself to my object, which is to make you, my

dear friend, as easy-hearted as myself with respect to these poems. Trouble not yourself upon their present reception. Of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny?—to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves."

Such words as these come with dignity from the mouth of a man like Wordsworth when he has been, as it were, driven to bay—when he is consoling an intimate friend, distressed at the torrent of ridicule which, as she fears, must sweep his self-confidence and his purposes away. He may be permitted to assure her that "my ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz, and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings," and to accompany his assurance with a reasoned statement of the grounds of his unshaken hopes.

We feel, however, that such an expression of self-reliance on the part of a great man should be accompanied with some proof that no conceit or impatience is mixed with his steadfast calm. If he believes the public to be really unable to appreciate himself, he must show no surprise when they admire his inferiors; he must remember that the case would be far worse if they admired no one at all. Nor must he descend from his own unpopular merits on the plea that after catching the public attention by what is bad he will retain it for what is good. If he is so sure that he is in the right he can afford to wait and let the world come round to him. Wordsworth's conduct satisfies both these tests. It is, indeed, curious to observe

how much abuse this inoffensive recluse received, and how absolutely he avoided returning it. Byron, for instance, must have seemed in his eyes guilty of something far more injurious to mankind than "a drowsy, frowsy poem, called the *Excursion*," could possibly appear. But, except in one or two private letters, Wordsworth has never alluded to Byron at all. Shelley's lampoon—a singular instance of the random blows of a noble spirit, striking at what, if better understood, it would eagerly have revered — Wordsworth seems never to have read. Nor did the violent attacks of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Reviews* provoke him to any rejoinder. To "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" — leagued against him as their common prey—he opposed a dignified silence; and the only moral injury which he derived from their assaults lay in that sense of the absence of trustworthy external criticism which led him to treat everything which he had once written down as if it were a special revelation, and to insist with equal earnestness on his most trifling as on his most important pieces—on *Goody Blake* and *The Idiot Boy* as on *The Cuckoo* or *The Daffodils*. The sense of humour is apt to be the first grace which is lost under persecution; and much of Wordsworth's heaviness and stiff exposition of commonplaces is to be traced to a feeling which he could scarcely avoid, that "all day long he had lifted up his voice to a perverse and gainsaying generation."

To the pecuniary loss inflicted on him by these adverse criticisms he was justly sensible. He was far from expecting, or even desiring, to be widely popular or to make a rapid fortune; but he felt that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and that the devotion of years to literature should have been met with some moderate degree of the

usual form of recognition which the world accords to those who work for it. In 1820 he speaks of "the whole of my returns from the writing trade not amounting to seven-score pounds;" and as late as 1843, when at the height of his fame, he was not ashamed of confessing the importance which he had always attached to this particular.

"So sensible am I," he says, "of the deficiencies in all that I write, and so far does everything that I attempt fall short of what I wish it to be, that even private publication, if such a term may be allowed, requires more resolution than I can command. I have written to give vent to my own mind, and not without hope that, some time or other, kindred minds might benefit by my labours; but I am inclined to believe I should never have ventured to send forth any verses of mine to the world, if it had not been done on the pressure of personal occasions. Had I been a rich man, my productions, like this *Epistle*, the *Tragedy of the Borderers*, &c., would most likely have been confined to manuscript."

An interesting passage from an unpublished letter of Miss Wordsworth's, on the *White Doe of Rylstone*, confirms this statement:

"My brother was very much pleased with your frankness in telling us that you did not perfectly like his poem. He wishes to know what your feelings were—whether the tale itself did not interest you—or whether you could not enter into the conception of Emily's character, or take delight in that visionary communion which is supposed to have existed between her and the Doe. Do not fear to give him pain. He is far too much accustomed to be abused to receive pain from it (at least as far as he himself is concerned). My reason for asking you these questions is, that some of our friends, who are equal admirers of the *White Doe* and of my brother's published poems, think that *this* poem will sell on account of the story;

that is, that the story will bear up those points which are above the level of the public taste; whereas, the two last volumes—except by a few solitary individuals, who are passionately devoted to my brother's works—are abused by wholesale.

"Now, as his sole object in publishing this poem at present would be for the sake of the money, he would not publish it if he did not think, from the several judgments of his friends, that it would be likely to have a sale. He has no pleasure in publishing—he even detests it; and if it were not that he is *not* over-wealthy, he would leave all his works to be published after his death. William himself is sure that the *White Doe* will not sell or be admired, except by a very few, at first; and only yields to Mary's entreaties and mine. We are determined, however, if we are deceived this time, to let him have his own way in future."

These passages must be taken, no doubt, as representing one aspect only of the poet's impulses in the matter. With his deep conviction of the world's real, though unrecognized, need of a pure vein of poetry, we can hardly imagine him as permanently satisfied to defer his own contribution till after his death. Yet we may certainly believe that the need of money helped him to overcome much diffidence as to publication; and we may discern something dignified in his frank avowal of this when it is taken in connexion with his scrupulous abstinence from any attempt to win the suffrages of the multitude by means unworthy of his high vocation. He could never, indeed, have written poems which could have vied in immediate popularity with those of Byron or Scott. But the criticisms on the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* must have shown him that a slight alteration of method—nay, even the excision of a few pages in each volume, pages certain to be loudly objected to—would have made a marked difference in the sale and its proceeds. From this point of view, even poems which we may now feel to

have been needlessly puerile and grotesque acquire a certain impressiveness, when we recognize that the theory which demanded their composition was one which their author was willing to uphold at the cost of some years of real physical privation, and of the postponement for a generation of his legitimate fame.

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CHAPTER IX.

POETIC DICTION.—"LAODAMIA."—"EVENING ODE."

THE *Excursion* appeared in 1814, and in the course of the next year Wordsworth republished his minor poems, so arranged as to indicate the faculty of the mind which he considered to have been predominant in the composition of each. To most readers this disposition has always seemed somewhat arbitrary; and it was once suggested to Wordsworth that a chronological arrangement would be better. The manner in which Wordsworth met this proposal indicated the limit of his absorption in himself—his real desire only to dwell on his own feelings in such a way as might make them useful to others. For he rejected the plan as too egoistical—as emphasizing the succession of moods in the poet's mind, rather than the lessons which those moods could teach. His objection points, at any rate, to a real danger which any man's simplicity of character incurs by dwelling too attentively on the changing phases of his own thought. But after the writer's death the historical spirit will demand that poems, like other artistic products, should be disposed for the most part in the order of time.

In a preface to this edition of 1815, and a supplementary essay, he developed the theory on poetry already set forth in a well-known preface to the second edition of the

Lyrical Ballads. Much of the matter of these essays, received at the time with contemptuous aversion, is now accepted as truth; and few compositions of equal length contain so much of vigorous criticism and sound reflection. It is only when they generalize too confidently that they are in danger of misleading us; for all expositions of the art and practice of poetry must necessarily be incomplete. Poetry, like all the arts, is essentially a "mystery." Its charm depends upon qualities which we can neither define accurately, nor reduce to rule, nor create again at pleasure. Mankind, however, are unwilling to admit this; and they endeavour from time to time to persuade themselves that they have discovered the rules which will enable them to produce the desired effect. And so much of the effect *can* thus be reproduced, that it is often possible to believe for a time that the problem has been solved. Pope, to take the instance which was prominent in Wordsworth's mind, was by general admission a poet. But his success seemed to depend on imitable peculiarities; and Pope's imitators were so like Pope that it was hard to draw a line and say where they ceased to be poets. At last, however, this imitative school began to prove too much. If all the insipid verses which they wrote were poetry, what was the use of writing poetry at all? A reaction succeeded, which asserted that poetry depends on emotion, and not on polish; that it consists precisely in those things which frigid imitators lack. Cowper, Burns, and Crabbe (especially in his *Sir Eustace Grey*) had preceded Wordsworth as leaders of this reaction. But they had acted half unconsciously, or had even at times themselves attempted to copy the very style which they were superseding.

Wordsworth, too, began with a tendency to imitate Pope, but only in the school exercises which he wrote as

a boy. Poetry soon became to him the expression of his own deep and simple feelings; and then he rebelled against rhetoric and unreality, and found for himself a directer and truer voice. "I have proposed to myself to imitate and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men. . . . I have taken as much pains to avoid what is usually called poetic diction as others ordinarily take to produce it." And he erected this practice into a general principle in the following passage:

"I do not doubt that it may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between poetry and painting, and accordingly we call them sisters; but where shall we find bonds of connexion sufficiently strict to typify the affinity between metrical and prose composition? If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what I have been saying on the strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such poetry as I am recommending is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we have? whence is it to come? and where is it to exist?"

There is a definiteness and simplicity about this description of poetry which may well make us wonder why this precious thing (producible, apparently, as easily as Pope's imitators supposed, although by means different from theirs) is not offered to us by more persons, and of better quality. And it will not be hard to show that a good

poetical style must possess certain characteristics which, although something like them must exist in a good prose style, are carried in poetry to a pitch so much higher as virtually to need a specific faculty for their successful production.

To illustrate the inadequacy of Wordsworth's theory to explain the merits of his own poetry, I select a stanza from one of his simplest and most characteristic poems, *The Affliction of Margaret:*

> "Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
> Maimed, mangled by inhuman men,
> Or thou upon a Desert thrown
> Inheritest the lion's Den;
> Or hast been summoned to the Deep,
> Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
> An incommunicable sleep."

These lines, supposed to be uttered by "a poor widow at Penrith," afford a fair illustration of what Wordsworth calls "the language really spoken by men," with "metre superadded." "What other distinction from prose," he asks, "would we have?" We may answer that we would have what he has actually given us, viz., an appropriate and attractive music, lying both in the rhythm and in the actual sound of the words used—a music whose complexity may be indicated here by drawing out some of its elements in detail, at the risk of appearing pedantic and technical. We observe, then (*a*), that the general movement of the lines is unusually slow. They contain a very large proportion of strong accents and long vowels, to suit the tone of deep and despairing sorrow. In six places only out of twenty-eight is the accent weak where it might be expected to be strong (in the second syllable, namely, of the iambic foot), and in each of these cases the omis-

sion of a possible accent throws greater weight on the next succeeding accent — on the accents, that is to say, contained in the words inhuman, desert, lion, summoned, deep, and sleep. (*b*) The first four lines contain subtle alliterations of the letters d, h, m, and th. In this connexion it should be remembered that when consonants are thus repeated at the beginning of syllables, those syllables need not be at the beginning of words; and further, that repetitions scarcely more numerous than chance alone would have occasioned may be so placed by the poet as to produce a strongly-felt effect. If any one doubts the effectiveness of the unobvious alliterations here insisted on, let him read (1) "jungle" for "desert," (2) "maybe" for "perhaps," (3) "tortured" for "mangled," (4) "blown" for "thrown," and he will become sensible of the lack of the metrical support which the existing consonants give one another. The three last lines contain one or two similar alliterations on which I need not dwell. (*c*) The words *inheritest* and *summoned* are by no means such as "a poor widow," even at Penrith, would employ; they are used to intensify the imagined relation which connects the missing man with (1) the wild beasts who surround him, and (2) the invisible Power which leads; so that something mysterious and awful is added to his fate. (*d*) This impression is heightened by the use of the word *incommunicable* in an unusual sense, "incapable of being communicated *with*," instead of "incapable of being communicated;" while (*e*) the expression "to keep an incommunicable sleep" for "to lie dead," gives dignity to the occasion by carrying the mind back along a train of literary associations of which the well-known *ἀτέρμονα νήγρετον ὕπνον* of Moschus may be taken as the type.

We must not, of course, suppose that Wordsworth consciously sought these alliterations, arranged these accents, resolved to introduce an unusual word in the last line, or hunted for a classical allusion. But what the poet's brain does not do consciously it does unconsciously; a selective action is going on in its recesses simultaneously with the overt train of thought, and on the degree of this unconscious suggestiveness the richness and melody of the poetry will depend.

No rules can secure the attainment of these effects; and the very same artifices which are delightful when used by one man seem mechanical and offensive when used by another. Nor is it by any means always the case that the man who can most delicately appreciate the melody of the poetry of others will be able to produce similar melody himself. Nay, even if he can produce it one year, it by no means follows that he will be able to produce it the next. Of all qualifications for writing poetry this inventive music is the most arbitrarily distributed, and the most evanescent. But it is the more important to dwell on its necessity, inasmuch as both good and bad poets are tempted to ignore it. The good poet prefers to ascribe his success to higher qualities; to his imagination, elevation of thought, descriptive faculty. The bad poet can more easily urge that his thoughts are too advanced for mankind to appreciate than that his melody is too sweet for their ears to catch. And when the gift vanishes no poet is willing to confess that it is gone; so humiliating is it to lose power over mankind by the loss of something which seems quite independent of intellect or character. And yet so it is. For some twenty years at most (1798–1818) Wordsworth possessed this gift of melody. During those years he wrote works which profoundly influenced

mankind. The gift then left him; he continued as wise and as earnest as ever, but his poems had no longer any potency, nor his existence much public importance.

Humiliating as such reflections may seem, they are in accordance with actual experience in all branches of art. The fact is that the pleasures which art gives us are complex in the extreme. We are always disposed to dwell on such of their elements as are explicable, and can in some way be traced to moral or intellectual sources. But they contain also other elements which are inexplicable, non-moral, and non-intellectual, and which render most of our attempted explanations of artistic merit so incomplete as to be practically misleading. Among such incomplete explanations Wordsworth's essays must certainly be ranked. It would not be safe for any man to believe that he had produced true poetry because he had fulfilled the conditions which Wordsworth lays down. But the essays effected what is perhaps as much as the writer on art can fairly hope to accomplish. They placed in a striking light that side of the subject which had been too long ignored; they aided in recalling an art which had become conventional and fantastic into the normal current of English thought and speech.

It may be added that, both in doctrine and practice, Wordsworth exhibits a progressive reaction from the extreme views with which he starts towards that common vein of good sense and sound judgment which may be traced back to Horace, Longinus, and Aristotle. His first preface is violently polemic. He attacks with reason that conception of the sublime and beautiful which is represented by Dryden's picture of "Cortes alone in his night-gown," remarking that "the mountains seem to nod their drowsy heads." But the only example of true poetry

which he sees fit to adduce in contrast consists in a stanza from the *Babes in the Wood*. In his preface of 1815 he is not less severe on false sentiment and false observation. But his views of the complexity and dignity of poetry have been much developed, and he is willing now to draw his favourable instances from Shakspeare, Milton, Virgil, and himself.

His own practice underwent a corresponding change. It is only to a few poems of his earlier years that the famous parody of the *Rejected Addresses* fairly applies—

> "My father's walls are made of brick,
> But not so tall and not so thick
> As these; and goodness me!
> My father's beams are made of wood,
> But never, never half so good
> As those that now I see!"

Lines something like these might have occurred in *The Thorn* or *The Idiot Boy*. Nothing could be more different from the style of the sonnets, or of the *Ode to Duty*, or of *Laodamia*. And yet both the simplicity of the earlier and the pomp of the later poems were almost always noble; nor is the transition from the one style to the other a perplexing or abnormal thing. For all sincere styles are congruous to one another, whether they be adorned or no, as all high natures are congruous to one another, whether in the garb of peasant or of prince. What is incongruous to both is affectation, vulgarity, egoism; and while the noble style can be interchangeably childlike or magnificent, as its theme requires, the ignoble can neither simplify itself into purity nor deck itself into grandeur.

It need not, therefore, surprise us to find the classical models becoming more and more dominant in Words-

worth's mind, till the poet of *Poor Susan* and *The Cuckoo* spends months over the attempt to translate the *Æneid*—to win the secret of that style which he placed at the head of all poetic styles, and of those verses which "wind," as he says, "with the majesty of the Conscript Fathers entering the Senate-house in solemn procession," and envelope in their imperial melancholy all the sorrows and the fates of man.

And, indeed, so tranquil and uniform was the life which we are now retracing, and at the same time so receptive of any noble influence which opportunity might bring, that a real epoch is marked in Wordsworth's poetical career by the mere rereading of some Latin authors in 1814–16 with a view to preparing his eldest son for the University. Among the poets whom he thus studied was one in whom he might seem to discern his own spirit endowed with grander proportions, and meditating on sadder fates. Among the poets of the battlefield, of the study, of the boudoir, he encountered the first Priest of Nature, the first poet in Europe who had deliberately shunned the life of courts and cities for the mere joy in Nature's presence, for "sweet Parthenope and the fields beside Vesevus' hill."

There are, indeed, passages in the *Georgics* so Wordsworthian, as we now call it, in tone, that it is hard to realize what centuries separated them from the *Sonnet to Lady Beaumont* or from *Ruth*. Such, for instance, is the picture of the Corycian old man, who had made himself independent of the seasons by his gardening skill, so that "when gloomy winter was still rending the stones with frost, still curbing with ice the rivers' onward flow, he even then was plucking the soft hyacinth's bloom, and chid the tardy summer and delaying airs of spring." Such, again,

is the passage where the poet breaks from the glories of successful industry into the delight of watching the great processes which nature accomplishes untutored and alone, "the joy of gazing on Cytorus waving with boxwood, and on forests of Narycian pine, on tracts that never felt the harrow, nor knew the care of man."

Such thoughts as these the Roman and the English poet had in common—the heritage of untarnished souls.

> "I asked; 'twas whispered: The device
> To each and all might well belong:
> It is the Spirit of Paradise
> That prompts such work, a Spirit strong,
> That gives to all the self-same bent
> Where life is wise and innocent."

It is not only in tenderness but in dignity that the "wise and innocent" are wont to be at one. Strong in tranquillity, they can intervene amid great emotions with a master's voice, and project on the storm of passion the clear light of their unchanging calm. And thus it was that the study of Virgil, and especially of Virgil's solemn picture of the Underworld, prompted in Wordsworth's mind the most majestic of his poems, his one great utterance on heroic love.

He had as yet written little on any such topic as this. At Goslar he had composed the poems on *Lucy* to which allusion has already been made. And after his happy marriage he had painted in one of the best known of his poems the sweet transitions of wedded love, as it moves on from the first shock and agitation of the encounter of predestined souls through all tendernesses of intimate affection into a pervading permanency and calm. Scattered, moreover, throughout his poems are several passages in which

the passion is treated with similar force and truth. The poem which begins "'Tis said that some have died for love" depicts the enduring poignancy of bereavement with an "iron pathos" that is almost too strong for art. And something of the same power of clinging attachment is shown in the sonnet where the poet is stung with the thought that "even for the least division of an hour" he has taken pleasure in the life around him, without the accustomed tacit reference to one who has passed away. There is a brighter touch of constancy in that other sonnet where, after letting his fancy play over a glad imaginary past, he turns to his wife, ashamed that even in so vague a vision he could have shaped for himself a solitary joy:

> "Let *her* be comprehended in the frame
> Of these illusions, or they please no more."

In later years the two sonnets on his wife's picture set on that love the consecration of faithful age; and there are those who can recall his look as he gazed on the picture and tried to recognize in that aged face the Beloved who to him was ever young and fair—a look as of one dwelling in life-long affections with the unquestioning single-heartedness of a child.

And here it might have been thought that as his experience ended, his power of description would have ended too. But it was not so. Under the powerful stimulus of the sixth *Æneid*—allusions to which pervade *Laodamia*[1] throughout—with unusual labour, and by a strenuous effort of the imagination, Wordsworth was enabled to depict

[1] *Laodamia* should be read (as it is given in Mr. Matthew Arnold's admirable volume of selections) with the *earlier* conclusion: the *second* form is less satisfactory; and the *third*, with its sermonizing tone, "thus all in vain exhorted and reproved," is worst of all.

his own love *in excelsis*, to imagine what aspect it might have worn, if it had been its destiny to deny itself at some heroic call, and to confront with nobleness an extreme emergency, and to be victor (as Plato has it) in an Olympian contest of the soul. For, indeed, the "fervent, not ungovernable, love," which is the ideal that Protesilaus is sent to teach, is on a great scale the same affection which we have been considering in domesticity and peace; it is love considered not as a revolution but as a consummation; as a self-abandonment not to a laxer but to a sterner law; no longer as an invasive passion, but as the deliberate habit of the soul. It is that conception of love which springs into being in the last canto of Dante's *Purgatory*—which finds in English chivalry a noble voice—

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more."

For, indeed (even as Plato says that Beauty is the splendour of Truth), so such a Love as this is the splendour of Virtue; it is the unexpected spark that flashes from self-forgetful soul to soul, it is man's standing evidence that he "must lose himself to find himself," and that only when the veil of his personality has lifted from around him can he recognize that he is already in heaven.

In a second poem inspired by this revived study of classical antiquity Wordsworth has traced the career of Dion—the worthy pupil of Plato, the philosophic ruler of Syracuse, who allowed himself to shed blood unjustly, though for the public good, and was haunted by a spectre symbolical of this fatal error. At last Dion was assassinated, and the words in which the poet tells his fate seem to me to breathe the very triumph of philosophy, to paint with a touch the greatness of a spirit which makes of

Death himself a deliverer, and has its strength in the unseen—

> "So were the hopeless troubles, that involved
> The soul of Dion, instantly dissolved."

I can only compare these lines to that famous passage of Sophocles where the lamentations of the dying Œdipus are interrupted by the impatient summons of an unseen accompanying god. In both places the effect is the same—to present to us with striking brevity the contrast between the visible and the invisible presences that may stand about a man's last hour; for he may feel with the desolate Œdipus that "all I am has perished"—he may sink like Dion through inextricable sadness to a disastrous death, and then in a moment the transitory shall disappear and the essential shall be made plain, and from Dion's upright spirit the perplexities shall vanish away, and Œdipus, in the welcome of that unknown companionship, shall find his expiations over and his reward begun.

It is true, no doubt, that when Wordsworth wrote these poems he had lost something of the young inimitable charm which fills such pieces as the *Fountain* or the *Solitary Reaper*. His language is majestic, but it is no longer magical. And yet we cannot but feel that he has put into these poems something which he could not have put into the poems which preceded them; that they bear the impress of a soul which has added moral effort to poetic inspiration, and is mistress now of the acquired as well as of the innate virtue. For it is words like these that are the strength and stay of men; nor can their accent of lofty earnestness be simulated by the writer's art. Literary skill may deceive the reader who seeks a literary pleasure alone; and he to whom these strong consolations are a mere imaginative luxury may be uncertain or indif-

ferent out of what heart they come. But those who need them know; spirits that hunger after righteousness discern their proper food; there is no fear lest they confound the sentimental and superficial with those weighty utterances of moral truth which are the most precious legacy that a man can leave to mankind.

Thus far, then, I must hold that, although much of grace had already vanished, there was on the whole a progress and elevation in the mind of him of whom we treat. But the culminating point is here. After this—whatever ripening process may have been at work unseen—what is chiefly visible is the slow stiffening of the imaginative power, the slow withdrawal of the insight into the soul of things, and a descent—ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος—"soft as soft can be," to the euthanasy of a death that was like sleep.

The impression produced by Wordsworth's reperusal of Virgil in 1814–16 was a deep and lasting one. In 1829–30 he devoted much time and labour to a translation of the first three books of the *Æneid*, and it is interesting to note the gradual modification of his views as to the true method of rendering poetry.

"I have long been persuaded," he writes to Lord Lonsdale in 1829, "that Milton formed his blank verse upon the model of the *Georgics* and the *Æneid*, and I am so much struck with this resemblance, that I should have attempted Virgil in blank verse, had I not been persuaded that no ancient author can with advantage be so rendered. Their religion, their warfare, their course of action and feeling are too remote from modern interest to allow it. We require every possible help and attraction of sound in our language to smooth the way for the admission of things so remote from our present concerns. My own

notion of translation is, that it cannot be too literal, provided these faults be avoided: *baldness*, in which I include all that takes from dignity; and strangeness, or uncouthness, including harshness; and lastly, attempts to convey meanings which, as they cannot be given but by languid circumlocutions, cannot in fact be said to be given at all. . . . I feel it, however, to be too probable that my translation is deficient in ornament, because I must unavoidably have lost many of Virgil's, and have never without reluctance attempted a compensation of my own."

The truth of this last self-criticism is very apparent from the fragments of the translation which were published in the *Philological Museum;* and Coleridge, to whom the whole manuscript was submitted, justly complains of finding "page after page without a single brilliant note;" and adds, "Finally, my conviction is that you undertake an impossibility, and that there is no medium between a pure version and one on the avowed principle of *compensation* in the widest sense, *i.e.*, manner, genius, total effect; I confine myself to *Virgil* when I say this." And it appears that Wordsworth himself came round to this view, for, in reluctantly sending a specimen of his work to the *Philological Museum* in 1832, he says:

> "Having been displeased in modern translations with the additions of incongruous matter, I began to translate with a resolve to keep clear of that fault by adding nothing; but I became convinced that a spirited translation can scarcely be accomplished in the English language without admitting a principle of compensation."

There is a curious analogy between the experiences of Cowper and Wordsworth in the way of translation. Wordsworth's translation of Virgil was prompted by the same kind of reaction against the reckless laxity of Dryden as that which inspired Cowper against the distorting

artificiality of Pope. In each case the new translator cared more for his author, and took a much higher view of a translator's duty, than his predecessor had done. But in each case the plain and accurate translation was a failure, while the loose and ornate one continued to be admired. We need not conclude from this that the wilful inaccuracy of Pope or Dryden would be any longer excusable in such a work. But, on the other hand, we may certainly feel that nothing is gained by rendering an ancient poet into verse at all unless that verse be of a quality to give a pleasure independent of the faithfulness of the translation which it conveys.

The translations and *Laodamia* are not the only indications of the influence which Virgil exercised over Wordsworth. Whether from mere similarity of feeling, or from more or less conscious recollection, there are frequent passages in the English which recall the Roman poet. Who can hear Wordsworth describe how a poet on the island in Grasmere

> "At noon
> Spreads out his limbs, while, yet unshorn, the sheep,
> Panting beneath the burthen of their wool,
> Lie round him, even as if they were a part
> Of his own household"—

and not think of the stately tenderness of Virgil's

> "Stant et oves circum; nostri nec pœnitet illas,"

and the flocks of Arcady that gather round in sympathy with the lovelorn Gallus' woe?

So, again, the well-known lines—

> "Not seldom, clad in radiant vest,
> Deceitfully goes forth the Morn;
> Not seldom Evening in the west
> Sinks smilingly forsworn"—

are almost a translation of Palinurus' remonstrance with "the treachery of tranquil heaven." And when the poet wishes for any link which could bind him closer to the Highland maiden who has flitted across his path as a being of a different world from his own—

> "Thine elder Brother would I be,
> Thy Father, anything to thee!"—

we hear the echo of the sadder plaint—

> "Atque utinam e vobis unus"—

when the Roman statesman longs to be made one with the simple life of shepherd or husbandman, and to know their undistracted joy.

Still more impressive is the shock of surprise with which we read in Wordsworth's poem on Ossian the following lines:

> "Musæus, stationed with his lyre
> Supreme among the Elysian quire,
> Is, for the dwellers upon earth,
> Mute as a lark ere morning's birth,"

and perceive that he who wrote them has entered—where no commentator could conduct him—into the solemn pathos of Virgil's *Musæum ante omnis;* where the singer whose very existence upon earth has become a legend and a mythic name is seen keeping in the underworld his old pre-eminence, and towering above the blessed dead.

This is a stage in Wordsworth's career on which his biographer is tempted unduly to linger. For we have reached the Indian summer of his genius; it can still shine at moments bright as ever, and with even a new majesty and calm; but we feel, nevertheless, that the melody is dying from his song; that he is hardening into self-repetition, into rhetoric, into sermonizing common-place,

and is rigid where he was once profound. The *Thanksgiving Ode* (1816) strikes death to the heart. The accustomed patriotic sentiments—the accustomed virtuous aspirations—these are still there; but the accent is like that of a ghost who calls to us in hollow mimicry of a voice that once we loved.

And yet Wordsworth's poetic life was not to close without a great symbolical spectacle, a solemn farewell. Sunset among the Cumbrian hills, often of remarkable beauty, once or twice, perhaps, in a score of years, reaches a pitch of illusion and magnificence which indeed seems nothing less than the commingling of earth and heaven. Such a sight—seen from Rydal Mount in 1818—afforded once more the needed stimulus, and evoked that "*Evening Ode, composed on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty*," which is the last considerable production of Wordsworth's genius. In this ode we recognize the peculiar gift of reproducing with magical simplicity, as it were, the inmost virtue of natural phenomena.

"No sound is uttered, but a deep
And solemn harmony pervades
The hollow vale from steep to steep,
And penetrates the glades.
Far distant images draw nigh,
Called forth by wondrous potency
Of beamy radiance, that imbues
Whate'er it strikes, with gem-like hues!
In vision exquisitely clear
Herds range along the mountain side;
And glistening antlers are descried,
And gilded flocks appear."

Once more the poet brings home to us that sense of belonging at once to two worlds, which gives to human life so much of mysterious solemnity.

"Wings at my shoulder seem to play;
But, rooted here, I stand and gaze
On those bright steps that heavenward raise
Their practicable way."

And the poem ends — with a deep personal pathos — in an allusion, repeated from the *Ode on Immortality*, to the light which "lay about him in his infancy"—the light

"Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored;
Which at this moment, on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored!
My soul, though yet confined to earth,
Rejoices in a second birth;
—'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades;
And night approaches with her shades."

For those to whom the mission of Wordsworth appears before all things as a religious one there is something solemn in the spectacle of the seer standing at the close of his own apocalypse, with the consciousness that the stiffening brain would never permit him to drink again that overflowing sense of glory and revelation—never, till he should drink it new in the kingdom of God. He lived, in fact, through another generation of men, but the vision came to him no more;

"Or if some vestige of those gleams
Survived, 'twas only in his dreams."

We look on a man's life for the most part as forming in itself a completed drama. We love to see the interest maintained to the close, the pathos deepened at the departing hour. To die on the same day is the prayer of lovers; to vanish at Trafalgar is the ideal of heroic souls. And yet — so wide and various are the issues of life — there is a solemnity as profound in a quite different lot:

for if we are moving among eternal emotions we should have time to bear witness that they are eternal. Even Love left desolate may feel with a proud triumph that it could never have rooted itself so immutably amid the joys of a visible return as it can do through the constancies of bereavement, and the life-long memory which is a life-long hope. And Vision, Revelation, Ecstasy — it is not only while these are kindling our way that we should speak of them to men, but rather when they have passed from us and left us only their record in our souls, whose permanence confirms the fiery finger which wrote it long ago. For as the Greeks would end the first drama of a trilogy with a hush of concentration, and with declining notes of calm, so to us the narrowing receptivity and persistent steadfastness of age suggest not only decay but expectancy, and not death so much as sleep; or seem, as it were, the beginning of operations which are not measured by our hurrying time, nor tested by any achievement to be accomplished here.

CHAPTER X.

NATURAL RELIGION.

It will have been obvious from the preceding pages, as well as from the tone of other criticisms on Wordsworth, that his exponents are not content to treat his poems on nature simply as graceful descriptive pieces, but speak of him in terms usually reserved for the originators of some great religious movement. "The very image of Wordsworth," says De Quincey, for instance, "as I prefigured it to my own planet-struck eye, crushed my faculties as before Elijah or St. Paul." How was it that poems so simple in outward form that the reviewers of the day classed them with the *Song of Sixpence*, or at best with the *Babes in the Wood*, could affect a critic like De Quincey—I do not say with admiration, but with this exceptional sense of revelation and awe?

The explanation of this anomaly lies, as is well known, in something new and individual in the way in which Wordsworth regarded nature; something more or less discernible in most of his works, and redeeming even some of the slightest of them from insignificance, while conferring on the more serious and sustained pieces an importance of a different order from that which attaches to even the most brilliant productions of his contemporaries. To define with exactness, however, what was this

new element imported by our poet into man's view of nature is far from easy, and requires some brief consideration of the attitude in this respect of his predecessors.

There is so much in the external world which is terrible or unfriendly to man, that the first impression made on him by Nature as a whole, even in temperate climates, is usually that of awfulness; his admiration being reserved for the fragments of her which he has utilized for his own purposes, or adorned with his own handiwork. When Homer tells us of a place

> "Where even a god might gaze, and stand apart,
> And feel a wondering rapture at the heart,"

it is of no prospect of sea or mountain that he is speaking, but of a garden where everything is planted in rows, and there is a never-ending succession of pears and figs. These gentler aspects of nature will have their minor deities to represent them; but the men, of whatever race they be, whose minds are most absorbed in the problems of man's position and destiny will tend for the most part to some sterner and more overwhelming conception of the sum of things. "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" is the cry of Hebrew piety as well as of modern science; and the "majestas cognita rerum"—the recognized majesty of the universe—teaches Lucretius only the indifference of gods and the misery of men.

But in a well-known passage, in which Lucretius is honoured as he deserves, we find, nevertheless, a different view hinted, with an impressiveness which it had hardly acquired till then. We find Virgil implying that scientific knowledge of Nature may not be the only way of arriving at the truth about her; that her loveliness is also a revelation, and that the soul which is in unison with her

is justified by its own peace. This is the very substance of *The Poet's Epitaph* also; of the poem in which Wordsworth at the beginning of his career describes himself as he continued till its close—the poet who "murmurs near the running brooks a music sweeter than their own"—who scorns the man of science "who would peep and botanize upon his mother's grave."

"The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

"In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart—
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

"But he is weak, both man and boy,
Hath been an idler in the land;
Contented if he might enjoy
The things which others understand."

Like much else in the literature of imperial Rome, the passage in the second *Georgic*, to which I have referred, is in its essence more modern than the Middle Ages. Mediæval Christianity involved a divorce from the nature around us, as well as from the nature within. With the rise of the modern spirit delight in the external world returns; and from Chaucer downwards through the whole course of English poetry are scattered indications of a mood which draws from visible things an intuition of things not seen. When Withers, in words which Wordsworth has fondly quoted, says of his muse:

"By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustelling;

By a daisy whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree—
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man"—

he felt already, as Wordsworth after him, that Nature is no mere collection of phenomena, but infuses into her least approaches some sense of her mysterious whole.

Passages like this, however, must not be too closely pressed. The mystic element in English literature has run for the most part into other channels; and when, after Pope's reign of artificiality and convention, attention was redirected to the phenomena of Nature by Collins, Beattie, Thomson, Crabbe, Cowper, Burns, and Scott, it was in a spirit of admiring observation rather than of an intimate worship. Sometimes, as for the most part in Thomson, we have mere picturesqueness—a reproduction of Nature for the mere pleasure of reproducing her—a kind of stock-taking of her habitual effects. Or sometimes, as in Burns, we have a glowing spirit which looks on Nature with a side glance, and uses her as an accessory to the expression of human love and woe. Cowper sometimes contemplated her as a whole, but only as affording a proof of the wisdom and goodness of a personal Creator.

To express what is characteristic in Wordsworth we must recur to a more generalized conception of the relations between the natural and the spiritual worlds. We must say with Plato—the lawgiver of all subsequent idealists—that the unknown realities around us, which the philosopher apprehends by the contemplation of abstract truth, become in various ways obscurely perceptible to men under the influence of "divine madness"—of an

enthusiasm which is in fact inspiration. And further, giving, as he so often does, a half-fanciful expression to a substance of deep meaning, Plato distinguishes four kinds of this enthusiasm. There is the prophet's glow of revelation; and the prevailing prayer which averts the wrath of heaven; and that philosophy which enters, so to say, unawares into the poet through his art, and into the lover through his love. Each of these stimuli may so exalt the inward faculties as to make a man ἔνθεος καὶ ἔκφρων—"bereft of reason, but filled with divinity"—percipient of an intelligence other and larger than his own. To this list Wordsworth has made an important addition. He has shown by his example and writings that the contemplation of Nature may become a stimulus as inspiring as these; may enable us "to see into the life of things"—as far, perhaps, as beatific vision or prophetic rapture can attain. Assertions so impalpable as these must justify themselves by subjective evidence. He who claims to give a message must satisfy us that he has himself received it; and, inasmuch as transcendent things are in themselves inexpressible, he must convey to us in hints and figures the conviction which we need. Prayer may bring the spiritual world near to us; but when the eyes of the kneeling Dominic seem to say "*Io son venuto a questo*," their look must persuade us that the life of worship has indeed attained the reward of vision. Art, too, may be inspired; but the artist, in whatever field he works, must have "such a mastery of his mystery" that the fabric of his imagination stands visible in its own light before our eyes—

> "Seeing it is built
> Of music; therefore never built at all,
> And therefore built for ever."

Love may open heaven; but when the lover would invite us "thither, where are the eyes of Beatrice," he must make us feel that his individual passion is indeed part and parcel of that love "which moves the sun and the other stars."

And so also with Wordsworth. Unless the words which describe the intense and sympathetic gaze with which he contemplates Nature convince us of the reality of "the light which never was on sea or land"—of the "Presence which disturbs him with the joy of elevated thoughts"—of the authentic vision of those hours

> "When the light of sense
> Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world;"

unless his tone awakes a responsive conviction in ourselves, there is no argument by which he can prove to us that he is offering a new insight to mankind. Yet, on the other hand, it need not be unreasonable to see in his message something more than a mere individual fancy. It seems, at least, to be closely correlated with those other messages of which we have spoken—those other cases where some original element of our nature is capable of being regarded as an inlet of mystic truth. For in each of these complex aspects of religion we see, perhaps, the modification of a primeval instinct. There is a point of view from which Revelation seems to be but transfigured Sorcery, and Love transfigured Appetite, and Philosophy man's ordered Wonder, and Prayer his softening Fear. And similarly, in the natural religion of Wordsworth we may discern the modified outcome of other human impulses hardly less universal—of those instincts which led our forefathers to people earth and air with deities, or to vivify the whole universe with a single soul. In this view

the achievement of Wordsworth was of a kind which most of the moral leaders of the race have in some way or other performed. It was that he turned a theology back again into a religion; that he revived in a higher and purer form those primitive elements of reverence for Nature's powers which had diffused themselves into speculation, or crystallized into mythology; that for a system of beliefs about Nature, which paganism had allowed to become grotesque —of rites which had become unmeaning—he substituted an admiration for Nature so constant, an understanding of her so subtle, a sympathy so profound, that they became a veritable worship. Such worship, I repeat, is not what we commonly imply either by paganism or by pantheism. For in pagan countries, though the gods may have originally represented natural forces, yet the conception of them soon becomes anthropomorphic, and they are reverenced as transcendent *men;* and, on the other hand, pantheism is generally characterized by an indifference to things in the concrete, to Nature in detail; so that the Whole, or Universe, with which the Stoics (for instance) sought to be in harmony, was approached not by contemplating external objects, but rather by ignoring them.

Yet here I would be understood to speak only in the most general manner. So congruous in all ages are the aspirations and the hopes of men that it would be rash indeed to attempt to assign the moment when any spiritual truth rises for the first time on human consciousness. But thus much, I think, may be fairly said, that the maxims of Wordsworth's form of natural religion were uttered before Wordsworth only in the sense in which the maxims of Christianity were uttered before Christ. To compare small things with great—or, rather, to compare great things with things vastly greater—the essential spirit of the *Lines*

near Tintern Abbey was for practical purposes as new to mankind as the essential spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Not the isolated expression of moral ideas, but their fusion into a whole in one memorable personality, is that which connects them forever with a single name. Therefore it is that Wordsworth is venerated; because to so many men—indifferent, it may be, to literary or poetical effects, as such—he has shown by the subtle intensity of his own emotion how the contemplation of Nature can be made a revealing agency, like Love or Prayer—an opening, if indeed there be any opening, into the transcendent world.

The prophet with such a message as this will, of course, appeal for the most part to the experience of exceptional moments—those moments when "we see into the life of things;" when the face of Nature sends to us "gleams like the flashing of a shield"—hours such as those of the Solitary, who, gazing on the lovely distant scene,

> "Would gaze till it became
> Far lovelier, and his heart could not sustain
> The beauty, still more beauteous."

But the idealist, of whatever school, is seldom content to base his appeal to us upon these scattered intuitions alone. There is a whole epoch of our existence whose memories, differing, indeed, immensely in vividness and importance in the minds of different men, are yet sufficiently common to all men to form a favourite basis for philosophical argument. "The child is father of the man;" and through the recollection and observation of early childhood we may hope to trace our ancestry—in heaven above or on the earth beneath—in its most significant manifestation.

It is to the workings of the mind of the child that the philosopher appeals who wishes to prove that knowledge is recollection, and that our recognition of geometrical truths—so prompt as to appear instinctive—depends on our having been actually familiar with them in an earlier world. The Christian mystic invokes with equal confidence his own memories of a state which seemed as yet to know no sin:

> "Happy those early days, when I
> Shined in my angel infancy!
> Before I understood this place
> Appointed for my second race,
> Or taught my soul to fancy aught
> But a white, celestial thought;
> When yet I had not walked above
> A mile or two from my first Love,
> And, looking back at that short space,
> Could see a glimpse of His bright face;
> When on some gilded cloud or flower
> My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
> And in those weaker glories spy
> Some shadows of eternity;
> Before I taught my tongue to wound
> My conscience with a sinful sound,
> Or had the black art to dispense
> A several sin to every sense,
> But felt through all this fleshly dress
> Bright shoots of everlastingness."

And Wordsworth, whose recollections were exceptionally vivid, and whose introspection was exceptionally penetrating, has drawn from his own childish memories philosophical lessons which are hard to disentangle in a logical statement, but which will roughly admit of being classed under two heads. For, firstly, he has shown an unusual delicacy of analysis in eliciting the "firstborn affinities that

fit our new existence to existing things"—in tracing the first impact of impressions which are destined to give the mind its earliest ply, or even, in unreflecting natures, to determine the permanent modes of thought. And, secondly, from the halo of pure and vivid emotions with which our childish years are surrounded, and the close connexion of this emotion with external nature, which it glorifies and transforms, he infers that the soul has enjoyed elsewhere an existence superior to that of earth, but an existence of which external nature retains for a time the power of reminding her.

The first of these lines of thought may be illustrated by a passage in the *Prelude*, in which the boy's mind is represented as passing through precisely the train of emotion which we may imagine to be at the root of the theology of many barbarous peoples. He is rowing at night alone on Esthwaite Lake, his eyes fixed upon a ridge of crags, above which nothing is visible:

"I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And as I rose upon the stroke my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again;
And, growing still in stature, the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own,
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow-tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood. But after I had seen

That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness—call it solitude,
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea, or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly thro' the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams."

In the controversy as to the origin of the worship of inanimate objects, or of the powers of Nature, this passage might fairly be cited as an example of the manner in which those objects, or those powers, can impress the mind with that awe which is the foundation of savage creeds, while yet they are not identified with any human intelligence, such as the spirits of ancestors or the like, nor even supposed to operate according to any human analogy.

Up to this point Wordsworth's reminiscences may seem simply to illustrate the conclusions which science reaches by other roads. But he is not content with merely recording and analyzing his childish impressions; he implies, or even asserts, that these "fancies from afar are brought"—that the child's view of the world reveals to him truths which the man with difficulty retains or recovers. This is not the usual teaching of science, yet it would be hard to assert that it is absolutely impossible. The child's instincts may well be supposed to partake in larger measure of the general instincts of the race, in smaller measure of the special instincts of his own country and century, than is the case with the man. Now the feelings and beliefs of each successive century will probably be, on the whole, superior to those of any previous century. But this is not universally true; the teaching of each generation does

not thus sum up the results of the whole past. And thus the child, to whom in a certain sense the past of humanity is present — who is living through the whole life of the race in little, before he lives the life of his century in large —may possibly dimly apprehend something more of truth in certain directions than is visible to the adults around him.

But, thus qualified, the intuitions of infancy might seem scarcely worth insisting on. And Wordsworth, as is well known, has followed Plato in advancing for the child a much bolder claim. The child's soul, in this view, has existed before it entered the body—has existed in a world superior to ours, but connected, by the immanence of the same pervading Spirit, with the material universe before our eyes. The child begins by feeling this material world strange to him. But he sees in it, as it were, what he has been accustomed to see; he discerns in it its kinship with the spiritual world which he dimly remembers; it is to him "an unsubstantial fairy place"—a scene at once brighter and more unreal than it will appear in his eyes when he has become acclimatized to earth. And even when this freshness of insight has passed away, it occasionally happens that sights or sounds of unusual beauty or carrying deep associations—a rainbow, a cuckoo's cay, a sunset of extraordinary splendour—will renew for a while this sense of vision and nearness to the spiritual world — a sense which never loses its reality, though with advancing years its presence grows briefer and more rare.

Such then, in prosaic statement, is the most characteristic message of Wordsworth. And it is to be noted that though Wordsworth at times presents it as a coherent theory, yet it is not necessarily of the nature of a theory, nor need be accepted or rejected as a whole; but is rather an inlet of

illumining emotion in which different minds can share in the measure of their capacities or their need. There are some to whom childhood brought no strange vision of brightness, but who can feel their communion with the Divinity in Nature growing with the growth of their souls. There are others who might be unwilling to acknowledge any spiritual or transcendent source for the elevating joy which the contemplation of Nature can give, but who feel, nevertheless, that to that joy Wordsworth has been their most effective guide. A striking illustration of this fact may be drawn from the passage in which John Stuart Mill, a philosopher of a very different school, has recorded the influence exercised over him by Wordsworth's poems, read in a season of dejection, when there seemed to be no real and substantive joy in life, nothing but the excitement of the struggle with the hardships and injustices of human fates.

> "What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind," he says, in his Autobiography, "was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings, which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence."

Words like these, proceeding from a mind so different from the poet's own, form perhaps as satisfactory a testimony to the value of his work as any writer can obtain:

for they imply that Wordsworth has succeeded in giving his own impress to emotions which may become common to all; that he has produced a body of thought which is felt to be both distinctive and coherent, while yet it enlarges the reader's capacities instead of making demands upon his credence. Whether there be theories, they shall pass; whether there be systems, they shall fail; the true epoch-maker in the history of the human soul is the man who educes from this bewildering universe a new and elevating joy.

I have alluded above to some of the passages, most of them familiar enough, in which Wordsworth's sense of the mystic relation between the world without us and the world within—the correspondence between the seen and the unseen—is expressed in its most general terms. But it is evident that such a conviction as this, if it contain any truth, cannot be barren of consequences on any level of thought. The communion with Nature which is capable of being at times sublimed to an incommunicable ecstasy must be capable also of explaining Nature to us so far as she can be explained; there must be *axiomata media* of natural religion; there must be something in the nature of poetic truths, standing midway between mystic intuition and delicate observation.

How rich Wordsworth is in these poetic truths—how illumining is the gaze which he turns on the commonest phenomena—how subtly and variously he shows us the soul's innate perceptions or inherited memories, as it were, co-operating with Nature and "half creating" the voice with which she speaks—all this can be learnt by attentive study alone. Only a few scattered samples can be given here; and I will begin with one on whose significance the poet has himself dwelt. This is the poem called *The*

Leech-Gatherer, afterwards more formally named *Resolution and Independence.*

"I will explain to you," says Wordsworth, "in prose, my feelings in writing that poem. I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature; and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thoughts of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz., poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it, that I consider the manner in which I am rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence. A person reading the poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controlled, expecting something spiritual or supernatural. What is brought forward? A lonely place, 'a pond, by which an old man *was*, far from all house or home:' not *stood*, nor *sat*, but *was*—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. The feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in this passage. How came he here? thought I, or what can he be doing? I then describe him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence; but this I *can* confidently affirm, that though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like this, the survivor of a wife and ten children, travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has laid upon him. You speak of his speech as tedious. Everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the author. *The Thorn* is

tedious to hundreds; and so is *The Idiot Boy* to hundreds. It is in the character of the old man to tell his story, which an impatient reader must feel tedious. But, good heavens! such a figure, in such a place; a pious, self-respecting, miserably infirm and pleased old man, telling such a tale!"

The naïve earnestness of this passage suggests to us how constantly recurrent in Wordsworth's mind were the two trains of ideas which form the substance of the poem; the interaction, namely (if so it may be termed), of the moods of Nature with the moods of the human mind; and the dignity and interest of man as man, depicted with no complex background of social or political life, but set amid the primary affections and sorrows, and the wild aspects of the external world.

Among the pictures which Wordsworth has left us of the influence of Nature on human character, *Peter Bell* may be taken as marking one end, and the poems on *Lucy* the other end of the scale. Peter Bell lives in the face of Nature untouched alike by her terror and her charm: Lucy's whole being is moulded by Nature's self; she is responsive to sun and shadow, to silence and to sound, and melts almost into an impersonation of a Cumbrian valley's peace. Between these two extremes how many are the possible shades of feeling! In *Ruth*, for instance, the point impressed upon us is that Nature's influence is only salutary so long as she is herself, so to say, in keeping with man; that when her operations reach that degree of habitual energy and splendour at which our love for her passes into fascination and our admiration into bewilderment, then the fierce and irregular stimulus consorts no longer with the growth of a temperate virtue:

> "The wind, the tempest roaring high,
> The tumult of a tropic sky.

Might well be dangerous food
For him, a youth to whom was given
So much of earth, so much of heaven,
And such impetuous blood."

And a contrasting touch recalls the healing power of those gentle and familiar presences which came to Ruth in her stormy madness with visitations of momentary calm:

"Yet sometimes milder hours she knew,
Nor wanted sun, nor rain, nor dew,
Nor pastimes of the May;
They all were with her in her cell;
And a wild brook with cheerful knell
Did o'er the pebbles play."

I will give one other instance of this subtle method of dealing with the contrasts in nature. It is from the poem entitled "*Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the Shore, commanding a beautiful Prospect.*" This seat was once the haunt of a lonely, a disappointed, an embittered man.

"Stranger! these gloomy boughs
Had charms for him; and here he loved to sit,
His only visitants a straggling sheep,
The stone-chat, or the glancing sand-piper;
And on these barren rocks, with fern and heath
And juniper and thistle sprinkled o'er,
Fixing his downcast eye, he many an hour
A morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here
An emblem of his own unfruitful life;
And, lifting up his head, he then would gaze
On the more distant scene—how lovely 'tis
Thou seest—and he would gaze till it became
Far lovelier, and his heart could not contain
The beauty, still more beauteous! Nor, that time,

> When Nature had subdued him to herself,
> Would he forget those beings, to whose minds,
> Warm from the labours of benevolence,
> The world, and human life, appeared a scene
> Of kindred loveliness; then he would sigh
> With mournful joy, to think that others felt
> What he must never feel: and so, lost Man!
> On visionary views would fancy feed
> Till his eyes streamed with tears."

This is one of the passages which the lover of Wordsworth quotes, perhaps, with some apprehension; not knowing how far it carries into the hearts of others its affecting power; how vividly it calls up before them that mood of desolate loneliness when the whole vision of human love and joy hangs like a mirage in the air, and only when it seems irrecoverably distant seems also intolerably dear. But, however this particular passage may impress the reader, it is not hard to illustrate by abundant references the potent originality of Wordsworth's outlook on the external world.

There was indeed no aspect of nature, however often depicted, in which his seeing eye could not discern some unnoted quality; there was no mood to which nature gave birth in the mind of man from which his meditation could not disengage some element which threw light on our inner being. How often has the approach of evening been described! and how mysterious is its solemnizing power! Yet it was reserved for Wordsworth, in his sonnet "Hail, Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour," to draw out a characteristic of that grey waning light which half explains to us its sombre and pervading charm. "Day's mutable distinctions" pass away; all in the landscape that suggests our own age or our own handiwork is gone; we look on the sight seen by our remote ancestors,

and the visible present is generalized into an immeasurable past.

The sonnet on the Duddon beginning "What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled First of his tribe to this dark dell?" carries back the mind along the same track, with the added thought of Nature's permanent gentleness amid the "hideous usages" of primeval man—through all which the stream's voice was innocent, and its flow benign. "A weight of awe not easy to be borne" fell on the poet, also, as he looked on the earliest memorials which these remote ancestors have left us. The *Sonnet on a Stone-Circle* which opens with these words is conceived in a strain of emotion never more needed than now — when Abury itself owes its preservation to the munificence of a private individual — when stone-circle or round-tower, camp or dolmen, are destroyed to save a few shillings, and occupation-roads are mended with the immemorial altars of an unknown God. "Speak, Giant-mother! tell it to the Morn!"—how strongly does the heart re-echo the solemn invocation which calls on those abiding witnesses to speak once of what they knew long ago!

The mention of these ancient worships may lead us to ask in what manner Wordsworth was affected by the Nature-deities of Greece and Rome — impersonations which have preserved through so many ages so strange a charm. And space must be found here for the characteristic sonnet in which the baseness and materialism of modern life drives him back on whatsoever of illumination and reality lay in that young ideal.

> "The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The Winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea:
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

Wordsworth's own imagination idealized Nature in a different way. The sonnet "Brook! whose society the poet seeks" places him among the men whose Nature-deities have not yet become anthropomorphic—men to whom "unknown modes of being" may seem more lovely as well as more awful than the life we know. He would not give to his idealized brook "human cheeks, channels for tears—no Naiad shouldst thou be"—

"It seems the Eternal Soul is clothed in thee
With purer robes than those of flesh and blood,
And hath bestowed on thee a better good;
Unwearied joy, and life without its cares."

And in the *Sonnet on Calais Beach* the sea is regarded in the same way, with a sympathy (if I may so say) which needs no help from an imaginary impersonation, but strikes back to a sense of kinship which seems antecedent to the origin of man.

"It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly."

A comparison, made by Wordsworth himself, of his own method of observing Nature with Scott's expresses in less mystical language something of what I am endeavouring to say.

"He expatiated much to me one day," says Mr. Aubrey de Vere, "as we walked among the hills above Grasmere, on the mode in which Nature had been described by one of the most justly popular of England's modern poets—one for whom he preserved a high and affectionate respect. 'He took pains,' Wordsworth said; 'he went out with his pencil and note-book, and jotted down whatever struck him most—a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory, and a mountain-ash waving its red berries. He went home and wove the whole together into a poetical description.' After a pause, Wordsworth resumed, with a flashing eye and impassioned voice: 'But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and note-book at home, fixed his eye as he walked with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that, while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated; that which remained—the picture surviving in his mind—would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so in a large part by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental; a true eye for Nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them.'"

How many a phrase of Wordsworth's rises in the mind in illustration of this power! phrases which embody in a single picture, or a single image—it may be the vivid wildness of the flowery coppice, of

> "Flaunting summer, when he throws
> His soul into the briar-rose"—

or the melancholy stillness of the declining year—

"Where floats
O'er twilight fields the autumnal gossamer;"

or, as in the words which to the sensitive Charles Lamb seemed too terrible for art, the irresponsive blankness of the universe—

"The broad open eye of the solitary sky"—

beneath which mortal hearts must make what merriment they may.

Or take those typical stanzas in *Peter Bell*, which so long were accounted among Wordsworth's leading absurdities.

"In vain through every changeful year
Did Nature lead him as before;
A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

"In vain, through water, earth, and air,
The soul of happy sound was spread,
When Peter, on some April morn,
Beneath the broom or budding thorn,
Made the warm earth his lazy bed.

"At noon, when by the forest's edge
He lay beneath the branches high,
The soft blue sky did never melt
Into his heart—he never felt
The witchery of the soft blue sky!

"On a fair prospect some have looked
And felt, as I have heard them say,
As if the moving time had been
A thing as steadfast as the scene
On which they gazed themselves away."

In all these passages, it will be observed, the emotion is educed from Nature rather than added to her; she is

treated as a mystic text to be deciphered, rather than as a stimulus to roving imagination. This latter mood, indeed, Wordsworth feels occasionally, as in the sonnet where the woodland sights become to him "like a dream of the whole world;" but it is checked by the recurring sense that "it is our business to idealize the real, and not to realize the ideal." Absorbed in admiration of fantastic clouds of sunset, he feels for a moment ashamed to think that they are unrememberable—

> "They are of the sky,
> And from our earthly memory fade away."

But soon he disclaims this regret, and reasserts the paramount interest of the things that we can grasp and love:

> "Grove, isle, with every shape of sky-built dome,
> Though clad in colours beautiful and pure,
> Find in the heart of man no natural home:
> The immortal Mind craves objects that endure:
> These cleave to it; from these it cannot roam,
> Nor they from it: their fellowship is secure."

From this temper of Wordsworth's mind, it follows that there will be many moods in which we shall not retain him as our companion. Moods which are rebellious, which beat at the bars of fate; moods of passion reckless in its vehemence, and assuming the primacy of all other emotions through the intensity of its delight or pain; moods of mere imaginative phantasy, when we would fain shape from the well-worn materials of our thought some fabric at once beautiful and new; from all such phases of our inward being Wordsworth stands aloof. His poem on the nightingale and the stock-dove illustrates with half-conscious allegory the contrast between himself and certain other poets.

"O Nightingale! thou surely art
A creature of a fiery heart;
These notes of thine—they pierce and pierce;
Tumultuous harmony and fierce!
Thou sing'st as if the God of wine
Had helped thee to a Valentine;
A song in mockery and despite
Of shades, and dews, and silent Night;
And steady bliss, and all the loves
Now sleeping in their peaceful groves.

"I heard a Stock-dove sing or say
His homely tale, this very day;
His voice was buried among trees,
Yet to be come at by the breeze:
He did not cease; but cooed—and cooed,
And somewhat pensively he wooed.
He sang of love with quiet blending,
Slow to begin, and never ending;
Of serious faith and inward glee;
That was the Song—the Song for me!"

"*His voice was buried among trees*," says Wordsworth; "a metaphor expressing the love of *seclusion* by which this bird is marked; and characterizing its note as not partaking of the shrill and the piercing, and therefore more easily deadened by the intervening shade; yet a note so peculiar, and withal so pleasing, that the breeze, gifted with that love of the sound which the poet feels, penetrates the shade in which it is entombed, and conveys it to the ear of the listener."

Wordsworth's poetry on the emotional side (as distinguished from its mystical or its patriotic aspects) could hardly be more exactly described than in the above sentence. For while there are few poems of his which could be read to a mixed audience with the certainty of pro-

ducing an immediate impression; yet, on the other hand, all the best ones gain in an unusual degree by repeated study; and this is especially the case with those in which some touch of tenderness is enshrined in a scene of beauty, which it seems to interpret, while it is itself exalted by it. Such a poem is *Stepping Westward*, where the sense of sudden fellowship, and the quaint greeting beneath the glowing sky, seem to link man's momentary wanderings with the cosmic spectacles of heaven. Such are the lines where all the wild romance of Highland scenery, the forlornness of the solitary vales, pours itself through the lips of the maiden singing at her work, "as if her song could have no ending"—

> "Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
> And sings a melancholy strain;
> O listen! for the Vale profound
> Is overflowing with the sound."

Such—and with how subtle a difference!—is the *Fragment* in which a "Spirit of noonday" wears on his face the silent joy of Nature in her own recesses, undisturbed by beast, or bird, or man—

> "Nor ever was a cloudless sky
> So steady or so fair."

And such are the poems—*We are Seven*, *The Pet Lamb*,[1]

[1] The *Pet Lamb* is probably the only poem of Wordsworth's which can be charged with having done moral injury, and that to a single individual alone. "Barbara Lewthwaite," says Wordsworth, in 1843, "was not, in fact, the child whom I had seen and overheard as engaged in the poem. I chose the name for reasons implied in the above" (*i. e.*, an account of her remarkable beauty), "and will here add a caution against the use of names of living persons. Within a few months after the publication of this poem I was much surprised, and more hurt, to find it in a child's school-book, which,

Louisa, The Two April Mornings—in which the beauty of rustic children melts, as it were, into Nature herself, and the

> "Blooming girl whose hair was wet
> With points of morning dew"

becomes the impersonation of the season's early joy. We may apply, indeed, to all these girls Wordsworth's description of leverets playing on a lawn, and call them—

> "Separate creatures in their several gifts
> Abounding, but so fashioned that in all
> That Nature prompts them to display, their looks,
> Their starts of motion and their fits of rest,
> An undistinguishable style appears
> And character of gladness, as if Spring
> Lodged in their innocent bosoms, and the spirit
> Of the rejoicing Morning were their own."

My limits forbid me to dwell longer on these points. The passages which I have been citing have been for the most part selected as illustrating the novelty and subtlety of Wordsworth's view of nature. But it will now be sufficiently clear how continually a strain of human interest is interwoven with the delight derived from impersonal things.

> "Long have I loved what I behold,
> The night that calms, the day that cheers:
> The common growth of mother earth
> Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears."

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having been compiled by Lindley Murray, had come into use at Grasmere School, where Barbara was a pupil. And, alas, I had the mortification of hearing that she was very vain of being thus distinguished; and in after-life she used to say that she remembered the incident, and what I said to her upon the occasion."

The poet of the *Waggoner* — who, himself a habitual water-drinker, has so glowingly described the glorification which the prospect of nature receives in a half-intoxicated brain—may justly claim that he can enter into all genuine pleasures, even of an order which he declines for himself. With anything that is false or artificial he cannot sympathize, nor with such faults as baseness, cruelty, rancour, which seem contrary to human nature itself; but in dealing with faults of mere *weakness* he is far less strait-laced than many less virtuous men.

He had, in fact, a reverence for human beings as such, which enabled him to face even their frailties without alienation; and there was something in his own happy exemption from such falls which touched him into regarding men less fortunate rather with pity than disdain:

> "Because the unstained, the clear, the crystalline,
> Have ever in them something of benign."

His comment on Burns's *Tam o' Shanter* will perhaps surprise some readers who are accustomed to think of him only in his didactic attitude.

"It is the privilege of poetic genius," he says, "to catch, under certain restrictions of which, perhaps, at the time of its being exerted it is but dimly conscious, a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found, in the walks of nature, and in the business of men. The poet, trusting to primary instincts, luxuriates among the felicities of love and wine, and is enraptured while he describes the fairer aspects of war, nor does he shrink from the company of the passion of love, though immoderate—from convivial pleasures, though intemperate—nor from the presence of war, though savage, and recognized as the handmaid of desolation. Frequently and admirably has Burns given way to these impulses of nature, both with reference to himself and in describing the condition of others. Who, but some impenetrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight

the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exultation of the rustic adventurer, Tam o' Shanter? The poet fears not to tell the reader in the outset that his hero was a desperate and sottish drunkard, whose excesses were as frequent as his opportunities. This reprobate sits down to his cups while the storm is roaring, and heaven and earth are in confusion; the night is driven on by song and tumultuous noise, laughter and jest thicken as the beverage improves upon the palate—conjugal fidelity archly bends to the service of general benevolence—selfishness is not absent, but wearing the mask of social cordiality; and while these various elements of humanity are blended into one proud and happy composition of elated spirits, the anger of the tempest without doors only heightens and sets off the enjoyment within. I pity him who cannot perceive that in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.

> "'Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
> O'er a' the *ills* of life victorious.'

What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in the scene, and of those who resemble him! Men who to the rigidly virtuous are objects almost of loathing, and whom therefore they cannot serve! The poet, penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things, has unveiled with exquisite skill the finer ties of imagination and feeling, that often bind these beings to practices productive of so much unhappiness to themselves, and to those whom it is their duty to cherish; and, as far as he puts the reader into possession of this intelligent sympathy, he qualifies him for exercising a salutary influence over the minds of those who are thus deplorably enslaved."

The reverence for man as man, the sympathy for him in his primary relations and his essential being, of which these comments on *Tam o' Shanter* form so remarkable an example, is a habit of thought too ingrained in all Wordsworth's works to call for specific illustration. The figures of *Michael*, of *Matthew*, of the *Brothers*, of the hero of the *Excursion*, and even of the *Idiot Boy*, suggest themselves at once in this connexion. But it should be

noted in each case how free is the poet's view from any idealization of the poorer classes as such, from the ascription of imaginary merits to an unknown populace which forms the staple of so much revolutionary eloquence. These poems, while they form the most convincing rebuke to the exclusive pride of the rich and great, are also a stern and strenuous incentive to the obscure and lowly. They are pictures of the poor man's life as it is—pictures as free as Crabbe's from the illusion of sentiment—but in which the delight of mere observation (which in Crabbe predominates) is subordinated to an intense sympathy with all such capacities of nobleness and tenderness as are called out by the stress and pressure of penury or woe. They form for the folk of northern England (as the works of Burns and Scott for the Scottish folk) a gallery of figures that are modelled, as it were, both from without and from within; by one with experience so personal as to keep every sentence vividly accurate, and yet with an insight which could draw from that simple life lessons to itself unknown. We may almost venture to generalize our statement further, and to assert that no writer since Shakspeare has left us so true a picture of the British nation. In Milton, indeed, we have the characteristic English spirit at a whiter glow; but it is the spirit of the scholar only, or of the ruler, not of the peasant, the woman, or the child. Wordsworth gives us that spirit as it is diffused among shepherds and husbandmen—as it exists in obscurity and at peace. And they who know what makes the strength of nations need wish nothing better than that the temper which he saw and honoured among the Cumbrian dales should be the temper of all England, now and for ever.

Our discussion of Wordsworth's form of Natural Religion

has led us back by no forced transition to the simple life which he described and shared. I return to the story of his later years—if that be called a story which derives no interest from incident or passion, and dwells only on the slow broodings of a meditative soul.

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CHAPTER XI.

ITALIAN TOUR.—ECCLESIASTICAL SONNETS.—POLITICAL VIEWS.—LAUREATESHIP.

WORDSWORTH was fond of travelling, and indulged this taste whenever he could afford it. Comparing himself and Southey, he says in 1843: "My lamented friend Southey used to say that, had he been a Papist, the course of life which in all probability would have been his was that of a Benedictine monk, in a convent furnished with an inexhaustible library. *Books* were, in fact, his passion; and *wandering*, I can with truth affirm, was mine; but this propensity in me was happily counteracted by inability from want of fortune to fulfil my wishes." We find him, however, frequently able to contrive a change of scene. His Swiss tour in 1790, his residence in France in 1791–2, his residence in Germany, 1798–9, have been already touched on. Then came a short visit to France in August, 1802, which produced the sonnets on Westminster Bridge and Calais Beach. The tour in Scotland which was so fertile in poetry took place in 1803. A second tour in Scotland, in 1814, produced the *Brownie's Cell* and a few other pieces. And in July, 1820, he set out with his wife and sister and two or three other friends for a tour through Switzerland and Italy.

This tour produced a good deal of poetry; and here and

there are touches which recall the old inspiration. Such is the comparison of the clouds about the Engelberg to hovering angels; and such the description of the eclipse falling upon the population of statues which throng the pinnacles of Milan Cathedral. But for the most part the poems relating to this tour have an artificial look; the sentiments in the vale of Chamouni seem to have been laboriously summoned for the occasion; and the poet's admiration for the Italian maid and the Helvetian girl is a mere shadow of the old feeling for the Highland girl, to whom, in fact, he seems obliged to recur in order to give reality to his new emotion.

To conclude the subject of Wordsworth's travels, I will mention here that in 1823 he made a tour in Holland, and in 1824 in North Wales, where his sonnet to the torrent at the Devil's Bridge recalls the Swiss scenery seen in his youth with vigour and dignity. In 1828 he made another excursion in Belgium with Coleridge, and in 1829 he visited Ireland with his friend Mr. Marshall. Neither of these tours was productive. In 1831 he paid a visit with his daughter to Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford, before his departure to seek health in Italy. Scott received them cordially, and had strength to take them to the Yarrow. "Of that excursion," says Wordsworth, "the verses *Yarrow Revisited* are a memorial. On our return in the afternoon we had to cross the Tweed, directly opposite Abbotsford. A rich but sad light, of rather a purple than a golden hue, was spread over the Eildon hills at that moment; and, thinking it probable that it might be the last time Sir Walter would cross the stream (the Tweed), I was not a little moved, and expressed some of my feelings in the sonnet beginning, *A trouble not of clouds nor weeping rain.* At noon on Thursday we left Abbotsford, and on the morn-

ing of that day Sir Walter and I had a serious conversation, *tête-à-tête*, when he spoke with gratitude of the happy life which, upon the whole, he had led. He had written in my daughter's album, before he came into the breakfast-room that morning, a few stanzas addressed to her; and, while putting the book into her hand, in his own study, standing by his desk, he said to her, in my presence, 'I should not have done anything of this kind but for your father's sake; they are probably the last verses I shall ever write.' They show how much his mind was impaired; not by the strain of thought, but by the execution, some of the lines being imperfect, and one stanza wanting corresponding rhymes. One letter, the initial S, had been omitted in the spelling of his own name."

There was another tour in Scotland in 1833, which produced *Memorials* of little poetic value. And in 1837 he made a long tour in Italy with Mr. Crabbe Robinson. But the poems which record this tour indicate a mind scarcely any longer susceptible to any vivid stimulus except from accustomed objects and ideas. The ***Musings near Aquapendente*** are musings on Scott and Helvellyn; the *Pine Tree of Monte Mario* is interesting because Sir George Beaumont has saved it from destruction; the *Cuckoo at Laverna* brings all childhood back into his heart. "I remember perfectly well," says Crabbe Robinson, "that I heard the cuckoo at Laverna twice before he heard it; and that it absolutely fretted him that my ear was first favoured; and that he exclaimed with delight, 'I hear it! I hear it!'" This was his last foreign tour; nor, indeed, are these tours very noticeable except as showing that he was not blindly wedded to his own lake scenery; that his admiration could face comparisons, and keep the same vividness when he was fresh from other orders of beauty.

The productions of these later years took for the most part a didactic rather than a descriptive form. In the volume entitled *Poems chiefly of Early and Later Years*, published in 1842, were many hortatory or ecclesiastical pieces of inferior merit, and among them various additions to the *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, a series of sonnets begun in 1821, but which he continued to enlarge, spending on them much of the energies of his later years. And although it is only in a few instances—as in the description of King's College, Cambridge—that these sonnets possess force or charm enough to rank them high as poetry, yet they assume a certain value when we consider not so much their own adequacy as the greater inadequacy of all rival attempts in the same direction.

The Episcopalian Churchman, in this country or in the United States, will certainly nowhere find presented to him in poetical form so dignified and comprehensive a record of the struggles and the glories, of the vicissitudes and the edification, of the great body to which he belongs. Next to the Anglican liturgy, though next at an immense interval, these sonnets may take rank as the authentic exposition of her historic being—an exposition delivered with something of her own unadorned dignity, and in her moderate and tranquil tone.

I would not, however, seem to claim too much. The religion which these later poems of Wordsworth's embody is rather the stately tradition of a great Church than the pangs and aspirations of a holy soul. There is little in them, whether for good or evil, of the stuff of which a Paul, a Francis, a Dominic are made. That fervent emotion—akin to the passion of love rather than to intellectual or moral conviction—finds voice through singers of a very different tone. It is fed by an inward anguish and

felicity which, to those who have not felt them, seem as causeless as a lover's moods; by wrestlings not with flesh and blood; by nights of despairing self-abasement; by ecstasies of an incommunicable peace. How great the gulf between Wordsworth and George Herbert!—Herbert "offering at heaven, growing and groaning thither"—and Wordsworth, for whom the gentle regret of the lines—

> "Me this unchartered freedom tires,
> I feel the weight of chance desires"—

forms his most characteristic expression of the self-judgment of the solitary soul.

Wordsworth accomplished one reconciliation of great importance to mankind. He showed, as plainly in his way as Socrates had shown it long ago, with what readiness a profoundly original conception of the scheme of things will shape itself into the mould of an established and venerable faith. He united the religion of the philosopher with the religion of the churchman; one rarer thing he could not do: he could not unite the religion of the philosopher with the religion of the saint. It is, indeed, evident that the most inspiring feeling which breathes through Wordsworth's ecclesiastical pieces is not of a doctrinal, not even of a spiritual kind. The ecclesiastical as well as the political sentiments of his later years are prompted mainly by the admiring love with which he regarded the structure of English society—seen as that society was by him in its simplest and most poetic aspect. This concrete attachment to the scenes about him had always formed an important element in his character. Ideal politics, whether in Church or State, had never occupied his mind, which sought rather to find its informing principles embodied in the England of his own day. The sonnet *On a Parsonage*

in Oxfordshire well illustrates the loving minuteness with which he draws out the beauty and fitness of the established scheme of things — the power of English country life to satisfy so many moods of feeling.

The country-seat of the English squire or nobleman has become—may we not say?—one of the world's chosen types of a happy and a stately home. And Wordsworth, especially in his poems which deal with Colcorton, has shown how deeply he felt the sway of such a home's hereditary majesty, its secure and tranquillizing charm. Yet there are moods when the heart which deeply feels the inequality of human lots turns towards a humbler idea. There are moments when the broad park, the halls and towers, seem no longer the fitting frame of human greatness, but rather an isolating solitude, an unfeeling triumph over the poor.

In such a mood of mind it will not always satisfy us to dwell, as Wordsworth has so often done, on the virtue and happiness that gather round a cottage hearth—which we must, after all, judge by a somewhat less exacting standard. We turn rather to the "refined rusticity" of an English Parsonage home—

> "Where holy ground begins, unhallowed ends,
> Is marked by no distinguishable line;
> The turf unites, the pathways intertwine"—

and the clergyman's abode has but so much of dignity as befits the minister of the Church which is the hamlet's centre; enough to suggest the old Athenian boast of beauty without extravagance, and study without effeminacy; enough to show that dwellings where not this life but another is the prevailing thought and care, yet need not lack the graces of culture nor the loves of home.

The sonnet on *Seathwaite Chapel*, and the life of Robert

Walker, the incumbent of Seathwaite, which is given at length in the notes to the sonnets on the Duddon, afford a still more characteristic instance of the clerical ideal towards which Wordsworth naturally turned. In Robert Walker he had a Cumbrian statesman turned into a practical saint; and he describes him with a gusto in which his laboured sonnets on *Laud* or on *Dissensions* are wholly deficient.

It was in social and political matters that the consequences of this idealizing view of the facts around him in Cumberland were most apparent. Take education, for example. Wordsworth, as has been already stated, was one of the earliest and most impressive assertors of the national duty of teaching every English child to read. He insists on this with a prosaic earnestness which places several pages of the *Excursion* among what may be called the standing bugbears which his poems offer to the inexperienced reader. And yet as soon as, through the exertions of Bell and Lancaster, there seems to be some chance of really educating the poor, Dr. Bell, whom Coleridge fondly imagines as surrounded in heaven by multitudes of grateful angels, is to Wordsworth a name of horror. The mistresses trained on his system are called "Dr. Bell's sour-looking teachers in petticoats." And the instruction received in these new-fangled schools is compared to "the training that fits a boxer for victory in the ring." The reason of this apparent inconsistency is not far to seek. Wordsworth's eyes were fixed on the village life around him. Observation of that life impressed on him the imperative necessity of instruction in reading. But it was from a moral rather than an intellectual point of view that he regarded it as needful, and, this opening into the world of ideas once secured, he held that the cultivation of the

home affections and home duties was all that was needed beyond. And thus the Westmoreland dame, "in her summer seat in the garden, and in winter by the fireside," was elevated into the unexpected position of the ideal instructress of youth.

Conservatism of this kind could provoke nothing but a sympathetic smile. The case was different when the same conservative—even retrograde—tendency showed itself on subjects on which party-feeling ran high. A great part of the meditative energy of Wordsworth's later years was absorbed by questions towards whose solution he contributed no new element, and which filled him with disproportionate fears. And some injustice has been done to his memory by those who have not fully realized the predisposing causes which were at work—the timidity of age, and the deep-rooted attachment to the England which he knew.

I speak of age, perhaps, somewhat prematurely, as the poet's gradually growing conservatism culminated in his opposition to the Catholic Relief Bill before he was sixty years old. But there is nothing to wonder at in the fact that the mind of a man of brooding and solitary habits should show traces of advancing age earlier than is the case with statesmen or men of the world, who are obliged to keep themselves constantly alive to the ideas of the generation that is rising around them. A deadness to new impressions, an unwillingness to make intellectual efforts in fresh directions, a tendency to travel the same mental pathways over and over again, and to wear the ruts of prejudice deeper at every step; such traces of age as these undoubtedly manifested themselves in the way in which the poet confronted the great series of changes — Catholic Emancipation, Reform Bill, New Poor Law—on which

England entered about the year 1829. "My sixty-second year," Wordsworth writes, in 1832, "will soon be completed; and though I have been favoured thus far in health and strength beyond most men of my age, yet I feel its effects upon my spirits; they sink under a pressure of apprehension to which, at an earlier period of my life, they would probably have been superior." To this it must be added that the increasing weakness of the poet's eyes seriously limited his means of information. He had never read much contemporary literature, and he read less than ever now. He had no fresh or comprehensive knowledge of the general condition of the country, and he really believed in the prognostication which was uttered by many also who did *not* believe in it, that with the Reform Bill the England which he knew and loved would practically disappear. But there was nothing in him of the angry polemic, nothing of the calumnious partisan. One of the houses where Mr. Wordsworth was most intimate and most welcome was that of a reforming member of Parliament, who was also a manufacturer, thus belonging to the two classes for which the poet had the greatest abhorrence. But the intimacy was never for a moment shaken, and, indeed, in that house Mr. Wordsworth expounded the ruinous tendency of Reform and manufactures with even unusual copiousness, on account of the admiring affection with which he felt himself surrounded. The tone in which he spoke was never such as could give pain or excite antagonism; and—if I may be pardoned for descending to a detail which well illustrates my position—the only rejoinder which these diatribes provoked was that the poet on his arrival was sometimes decoyed into uttering them to the younger members of the family, whose time was of less value, so as to set his mind free to return

to those topics of more permanent interest where his conversation kept to the last all that tenderness, nobility, wisdom, which in that family, as in many others familiar with the celebrated persons of that day, won for him a regard and a reverence such as was accorded to no other man.

To those, indeed, who realized how deeply he felt these changes—how profoundly his notion of national happiness was bound up with a lovely and vanishing ideal—the prominent reflection was that the hopes and principles which maintained through all an underlying hope and trust in the future must have been potent indeed. It was no easy optimism which prompted the lines written in 1837—one of his latest utterances—in which he speaks to himself with strong self-judgment and resolute hope. On reading them one shrinks from dwelling longer upon an old man's weakness and a brave man's fears.

"If this great world of joy and pain
Revolve in one sure track;
If Freedom, set, revive again,
And Virtue, flown, come back—

"Woe to the purblind crew who fill
The heart with each day's care,
Nor learn, from past and future, skill
To bear and to forbear."

The poet had also during these years more of private sorrow than his tranquil life had for a long time experienced. In 1832 his sister had a most serious illness, which kept her for many months in a state of great prostration, and left her, when the physical symptoms abated, with her intellect painfully impaired, and her bright nature permanently overclouded. Coleridge, too, was nearing his end. "He and my beloved sister," writes Wordsworth, in 1832, "are the two beings to whom my intellect is most

indebted, and they are now proceeding, as it were, *pari passu*, along the path of sickness, I will not say towards the grave, but I trust towards a blessed immortality."

In July, 1834, "every mortal power of Coleridge was frozen at its marvellous source." And although the early intimacy had scarcely been maintained — though the "comfortless and hidden well" had, for a time at least, replaced the "living murmuring fount of love" which used to spring beside Wordsworth's door — yet the loss was one which the surviving poet deeply felt. Coleridge was the only contemporary man of letters with whom Wordsworth's connexion had been really close; and when Wordsworth is spoken of as one of a group of poets exemplifying in various ways the influence of the Revolution, it is not always remembered how very little he had to do with the other famous men of his time. Scott and Southey were valued friends, but he thought little of Scott's poetry, and less of Southey's. Byron and Shelley he seems scarcely to have read; and there is nothing to show that he had ever heard of Keats. But to Coleridge his mind constantly reverted; he called him "the most wonderful man he had ever known," and he kept him as the ideal auditor of his own poems, long after Coleridge had listened to the *Prelude*—

> "A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
> To their own music chanted."

In 1836, moreover, died one for whom Coleridge, as well as Wordsworth, had felt a very high respect and regard — Sarah Hutchinson, Mrs. Wordsworth's sister, and long the inmate of Wordsworth's household. This most valued friend had been another instance of the singular good fortune which attended Wordsworth in his domestic

connexions; and when she was laid in Grasmere churchyard, the stone above her tomb expressed the wish of the poet and his wife that, even as her remains were laid beside their dead children's, so their own bodies also might be laid by hers.

And now, while the inner circle of friends and relations began to pass away, the outer circle of admirers was rapidly spreading. Between the years 1830 and 1840 Wordsworth passed from the apostle of a clique into the most illustrious man of letters in England. The rapidity of this change was not due to any remarkable accident, nor to the appearance of any new work of genius. It was merely an extreme instance of what must always occur where an author, running counter to the fashion of his age, has to create his own public in defiance of the established critical powers. The disciples whom he draws round him are for the most part young; the established authorities are for the most part old; so that by the time that the original poet is about sixty years old, most of his admirers will be about forty, and most of his critics will be dead. His admirers now become his accredited critics; his works are widely introduced to the public; and if they are really good his reputation is secure. In Wordsworth's case the detractors had been unusually persistent, and the reaction, when it came, was therefore unusually violent; it was even somewhat factitious in its extent; and the poems were forced by enthusiasts upon a public which was only half ripe for them. After the poet's death a temporary counter-reaction succeeded, and his fame is only now finding its permanent level.

Among the indications of growing popularity was the publication of an American edition of Wordsworth's poems in 1837, by Professor Reed, of Philadelphia, with

whom the poet interchanged many letters of interest. "The acknowledgments," he says, in one of these, "which I receive from the vast continent of America are among the most grateful that reach me. What a vast field is there open to the English mind, acting through our noble language! Let us hope that our authors of true genius will not be unconscious of that thought, or inattentive to the duty which it imposes upon them, of doing their utmost to instruct, to purify, and to elevate their readers."

But of all the manifestations of the growing honour in which Wordsworth was held, none was more marked or welcome than the honorary degree of D.C.L. conferred on him by the University of Oxford in the summer of 1839. Keble, as Professor of Poetry, introduced him in words of admiring reverence, and the enthusiasm of the audience was such as had never been evoked in that place before, "except upon the occasions of the visits of the Duke of Wellington." The collocation was an interesting one. The special claim advanced for Wordsworth by Keble in his Latin oration was "that he had shed a celestial light upon the affections, the occupations, the piety of the poor." And to many men besides the author of the *Christian Year* it seemed that this striking scene was, as it were, another visible triumph of the temper of mind which is of the essence of Christianity; a recognition that one spirit more had become as a little child, and had entered into the kingdom of heaven.

In October, 1842, another token of public respect was bestowed on him in the shape of an annuity of 300*l.* a year from the Civil List for distinguished literary merit. "I need scarcely add," says Sir Robert Peel, in making the offer, "that the acceptance by you of this mark of favour from the Crown, considering the grounds on which

it is proposed, will impose no restraint upon your perfect independence, and involve no obligation of a personal nature." In March, 1843, came the death of Southey, and in a few days Wordsworth received a letter from Earl De la Warr, the Lord Chamberlain, offering him, in the most courteous terms, the office of Poet Laureate, which, however, he respectfully declined as imposing duties "which, far advanced in life as I am, I cannot venture to undertake."

This letter brought a reply from the Lord Chamberlain, pressing the office on him again, and a letter from Sir Robert Peel which gave dignified expression to the national feeling in the matter. "The offer," he says, "was made to you by the Lord Chamberlain, with my entire concurrence, not for the purpose of imposing on you any onerous or disagreeable duties, but in order to pay you that tribute of respect which is justly due to the first of living poets. The Queen entirely approved of the nomination, and there is one unanimous feeling on the part of all who have heard of the proposal (and it is pretty generally known) that there could not be a question about the selection. Do not be deterred by the fear of any obligations which the appointment may be supposed to imply. I will undertake that you shall have nothing *required* from you. But as the Queen can select for this honourable appointment no one whose claims for respect and honour, on account of eminence as a poet, can be placed in competition with yours, I trust you will not longer hesitate to accept it."

This letter overcame the aged poet's scruples; and he filled with silent dignity the post of Laureate till, after seven years' space, a worthy successor received

> "This laurel greener from the brows
> Of him that uttered nothing base."

CHAPTER XII.

LETTERS ON THE KENDAL AND WINDERMERE RAILWAY.—CONCLUSION.

WORDSWORTH'S appointment to the Laureateship was significant in more ways than one. He was so much besides a poet, that his appointment implied something of a national recognition, not only of his past poetical achievements, but of the substantial truth of that body of principles which through many years of neglect and ridicule he had consistently supported. There was, therefore, nothing incongruous in the fact that the only composition of any importance which Wordsworth produced after he became Laureate was in prose — his two letters on the projected Kendal and Windermere railway, 1844. No topic, in fact, could have arisen on which the veteran poet could more fitly speak with whatever authority his official spokesmanship of the nation's higher life could give, for it was a topic with every aspect of which he was familiar; and so far as the extension of railways through the Lake country was defended on grounds of popular benefit (and not merely of commercial advantage) no one, certainly, had shown himself more capable of estimating at their full value such benefits as were here proposed.

The results which follow on a large incursion of visitors

into the Lake country may be considered under two heads, as affecting the residents, or as affecting the visitors themselves. And first as to the residents. Of the wealthier class of these I say nothing, as it will perhaps be thought that their inconvenience is outweighed by the possible profits which the railway may bring to speculators or contractors. But the effect produced on the poorer residents — on the peasantry — is a serious matter, and the danger which was distantly foreseen by Wordsworth has since his day assumed grave proportions. And lest the poet's estimate of the simple virtue which is thus jeopardized should be suspected of partiality, it may be allowable to corroborate it by the testimony of an eminent man not a native of the district, though a settler therein in later life, and whose writings, perhaps, have done more than any man's since Wordsworth to increase the sum of human enjoyment derived both from Art and from Nature.

"The Border peasantry of Scotland and England," says Mr. Ruskin,[1] "painted with absolute fidelity by Scott and Wordsworth (for leading types out of this exhaustless portraiture, I may name Dandie Dinmont, and Michael), are hitherto a scarcely injured race; whose strength and virtue yet survive to represent the body and soul of England, before her days of mechanical decrepitude and commercial dishonour. There are men working in my own fields who might have fought with Henry the Fifth at Agincourt, without being discerned from among his knights; I can take my tradesmen's word for a thousand pounds; my garden gate opens on the latch to the public road, by day and night, without fear of any foot entering but my own; and my girl-guests may wander by road or

[1] *A Protest against the Extension of Railways in the Lake District.* —Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1876.

moorland, or through every bosky dell of this wild wood, free as the heather-bees or squirrels. What effect on the character of such a population will be produced by the influx of that of the suburbs of our manufacturing towns there is evidence enough, if the reader cares to ascertain the facts, in every newspaper on his morning table."

There remains the question of how the greatest benefit is to be secured to visitors to the country, quite apart from the welfare of its more permanent inhabitants. At first sight this question seems to present a problem of a well-known order—to find the point of maximum pleasure to mankind in a case where the intensity of the pleasure varies inversely as its extension—where each fresh person who shares it diminishes *pro tanto* the pleasure of the rest. But, as Wordsworth has pointed out, this is not in reality the question here. To the great mass of cheap excursionists the characteristic scenery of the Lakes is in itself hardly a pleasure at all. The pleasure, indeed, which they derive from contact with Nature is great and important, but it is one which could be offered to them, not only as well but much better, near their own homes.

"It is benignly ordained that green fields, clear blue skies, running streams of pure water, rich groves and woods, orchards, and all the ordinary varieties of rural nature should find an easy way to the affections of all men. But a taste beyond this, however desirable it may be that every one should possess it, is not to be implanted at once; it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals. Rocks and mountains, torrents and wide-spread waters, and all those features of nature which go to the composition of such scenes as this part of England is distinguished for, cannot, in their finer relations to the human mind, be comprehended, or even very imperfectly conceived, without processes of culture or opportunities of observation in some degree habitual. In the eye of thousands and tens of thousands, a rich meadow, with fat cattle grazing upon it, or the sight of what they

would call a heavy crop of corn, is worth all that the Alps and Pyrenees in their utmost grandeur and beauty could show to them; and it is noticeable what trifling conventional prepossessions will, in common minds, not only preclude pleasure from the sight of natural beauty, but will even turn it into an object of disgust. In the midst of a small pleasure-ground immediately below my house rises a detached rock, equally remarkable for the beauty of its form, the ancient oaks that grow out of it, and the flowers and shrubs which adorn it. 'What a nice place would this be,' said a Manchester tradesman, pointing to the rock, 'if that ugly lump were but out of the way.' Men as little advanced in the pleasure which such objects give to others are so far from being rare that they may be said fairly to represent a large majority of mankind. This is the fact, and none but the deceiver and the willingly deceived can be offended by its being stated."

And, since this is so, the true means of raising the taste of the masses consists, as Wordsworth proceeds to point out, in giving them—not a few hurried glimpses of what is above their comprehension, but permanent opportunities of learning at leisure the first great lessons which Nature has to teach. Since he wrote thus our towns have spread their blackness wider still, and the provision of parks for the recreation of our urban population has become a pressing national need. And here, again, the very word *recreation* suggests another unfitness in the Lake country for these purposes. Solitude is as characteristic of that region as beauty, and what the mass of mankind need for their refreshment—most naturally and justly—is not solitude but society.

> "The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills,"

is to them merely a drawback, to be overcome by moving about in large masses, and by congregating in chosen re-

sorts with vehement hilarity. It would be most unreasonable to wish to curtail the social expansion of men whose lives are for the most part passed in a monotonous round of toil. But is it kinder and wiser—from any point of view but the railway shareholder's—to allure them into excursion trains by the prestige of a scenery which is to them (as it was to all classes a century or two ago) at best indifferent, or to provide them near at hand with their needed space for rest and play, not separated from their homes by hours of clamour and crowding, nor broken up by barren precipices, nor drenched with sweeping storm?

Unquestionably it is the masses whom we have first to consider. Sooner than that the great mass of the dwellers in towns should be debarred from the influences of Nature —sooner than that they should continue for another century to be debarred as now they are—it might be better that Cumbrian statesmen and shepherds should be turned into innkeepers and touts, and that every poet, artist, dreamer in England should be driven to seek his solitude at the North Pole. But it is the mere futility of sentiment to pretend that there need be any real collision of interests here. There is space enough in England yet for all to enjoy in their several manners, if those who have the power would leave some unpolluted rivers, and some unblighted fields, for the health and happiness of the factory-hand, whose toil is for their fortunes, and whose degradation is their shame.

Wordsworth, while indicating, with some such reasoning as this, the true method of promoting the education of the mass of men in natural joys, was assuredly not likely to forget that in every class, even the poorest, are found exceptional spirits which some inbred power has attuned already to the stillness and glory of the hills. In what

way the interests of such men may best be consulted, he has discussed in the following passage:

> "'O Nature, a' thy shows an' forms
> To feeling pensive hearts hae charms!'

So exclaimed the Ayrshire ploughman, speaking of ordinary rural nature under the varying influences of the seasons; and the sentiment has found an echo in the bosoms of thousands in as humble a condition as he himself was when he gave vent to it. But then they *were* feeling, pensive hearts—men who would be among the first to lament the facility with which they had approached this region, by a sacrifice of so much of its quiet and beauty as, from the intrusion of a railway, would be inseparable. What can, in truth, be more absurd than that either rich or poor should be spared the trouble of travelling by the high roads over so short a space, according to their respective means, if the unavoidable consequence must be a great disturbance of the retirement, and, in many places, a destruction of the beauty, of the country which the parties are come in search of? Would not this be pretty much like the child's cutting up his drum to learn where the sound came from?"

The truth of these words has become more conspicuous since Wordsworth's day. The Lake country is now both engirdled and intersected with railways. The point to which even the poorest of genuine lovers of the mountains could desire that his facilities of cheap locomotion should be carried has been not only reached but far overpassed. If he is not content to dismount from his railway carriage at Coniston, or Seascale, or Bowness—at Penrith, or Troutbeck, or Keswick—and to move at eight miles an hour in a coach, or at four miles an hour on foot, while he

studies that small intervening tract of country, of which every mile is a separate gem—when, we may ask, *is* he to dismount? what *is* he to study? Or is nothing to be expected from nature but a series of dissolving views?

It is impossible to feel sanguine as to the future of this irreplaceable national possession. A real delight in scenery—apart from the excitements of sport or mountaineering, for which Scotland and Switzerland are better suited than Cumberland—is still too rare a thing among the wealthier as among the poorer classes to be able to compete with such a power as the Railway Interest. And it is little likely now that the Government of England should act with regard to this district as the Government of the United States has acted with regard to the Yosemite and Yellowstone valleys, and guard as a national possession the beauty which will become rarer and more precious with every generation of men. But it is in any case desirable that Wordsworth's unanswered train of reasoning on the subject should be kept in view — that it should be clearly understood that the one argument for making more railways through the Lakes is that they may possibly pay; while it is certain that each railway extension is injurious to the peasantry of the district, and to all visitors who really care for its scenery, while conferring no benefit on the crowds who are dragged many miles to what they do not enjoy, instead of having what they really want secured to them, as it ought to be, at their own doors.

It is probable that all this will continue to be said in vain. Railways, and mines, and waterworks will have their way, till injury has become destruction. The natural sanctuary of England, the nurse of simple and noble natures, "the last region which Astræa touches with fly-

ing feet," will be sacrificed — it is scarcely possible to doubt it—to the greed of gain. We must seek our consolation in the thought that no outrage on nature is mortal; that the ever-springing affections of men create for themselves continually some fresh abode, and inspire some new landscape with a consecrating history, and, as it were, with a silent soul. Yet it will be long ere round some other lakes, upon some other hill, shall cluster memories as pure and high as those which hover still around Rydal and Grasmere, and on Helvellyn's windy summit, "and by Glenridding Screes and low Glencoign."

With this last word of protest and warning—uttered, as it may seem to the reader, with unexpected force and conviction from out of the tranquillity of a serene old age—Wordsworth's mission is concluded. The prophecy of his boyhood is fulfilled, and the "dear native regions" whence his dawning genius rose have been gilded by the last ray of its declining fire. There remains but the domestic chronicle of a few more years of mingled sadness and peace. And I will first cite a characteristic passage from a letter to his American correspondent, Mr. Reed, describing his presentation as Laureate to the Queen:

"The reception given me by the Queen at her ball was most gracious. Mrs. Everett, the wife of your Minister, among many others, was a witness to it, without knowing who I was. It moved her to the shedding of tears. This effect was in part produced, I suppose, by American habits of feeling, as pertaining to a republican government. To see a gray-haired man of seventy-five years of age kneeling down in a large assembly to kiss the hand of a young woman is a sight for which institutions essentially democratic do not prepare a spectator of either sex, and must naturally place the opinions upon which a republic is

founded, and the sentiments which support it, in strong contrast with a government based and upheld as ours is."

In the same letter the poet introduces an ominous allusion to the state of his daughter's health. Dora, his only daughter who survived childhood, was the darling of Wordsworth's age. In her wayward gaiety and bright intelligence there was much to remind him of his sister's youth; and his clinging nature wound itself round this new Dora as tenderly as it had ever done round her who was now only the object of loving compassion and care. In 1841 Dora Wordsworth married Mr. Quillinan, an ex-officer of the Guards, and a man of great literary taste and some original power. In 1821 he had settled for a time in the vale of Rydal, mainly for the sake of Wordsworth's society; and ever since then he had been an intimate and valued friend. He had been married before, but his wife died in 1822, leaving him two daughters, one of whom was named from the murmuring Rotha, and was god-child of the poet. Shortly after marriage, Dora Quillinan's health began to fail. In 1845 the Quillinans went to Oporto in search of health, and returned in 1846, in the trust that it was regained. But in July, 1847, Dora Quillinan died at Rydal, and left her father to mourn for his few remaining years his "immeasurable loss."

The depth and duration of Wordsworth's grief, in such bereavements as fell to his lot, was such as to make his friends thankful that his life had, on the whole, been guided through ways of so profound a peace.

Greatly, indeed, have they erred who have imagined him as cold, or even as by nature tranquil. "What strange workings," writes one from Rydal Mount, when the poet was in his sixty-ninth year — "what strange workings are there in his great mind! How fearfully

strong are all his feelings and affections! If his intellect had been less powerful they must have destroyed him long ago." Such, in fact, was the impression which he gave to those who knew him best throughout life. The look of premature age, which De Quincey insists on; the furrowed and rugged countenance, the brooding intensity of the eye, the bursts of anger at the report of evil doings, the lonely and violent roamings over the mountains —all told of a strong absorption and a smothered fire. His own description of himself, in his *Imitation of the Castle of Indolence*, unexpected as it is by the ordinary reader, carries for those who knew him the stamp of truth:

"Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
His voice came to us from the neighbouring height:
Oft did we see him driving full in view
At mid-day when the sun was shining bright;
What ill was on him, what he had to do,
A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.

Ah! piteous sight it was to see this Man
When he came back to us, a withered flower—
Or like a sinful creature, pale and wan.
Down would he sit; and without strength or power
Look at the common grass from hour to hour:
And oftentimes, how long I fear to say,
Where apple-trees in blossom made a bower,
Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay;
And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away.

Great wonder to our gentle tribe it was
Whenever from our valley he withdrew;
For happier soul no living creature has
Than he had, being here the long day through.
Some thought he was a lover, and did woo:
Some thought far worse of him, and judged him wrong:
But Verse was what he had been wedded to;

> And his own mind did like a tempest strong
> Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight along."

An excitement which vents itself in bodily exercise carries its own sedative with it. And in comparing Wordsworth's nature with that of other poets whose career has been less placid, we may say that he was perhaps not less excitable than they, but that it was his constant endeavour to avoid all excitement save of the purely poetic kind; and that the outward circumstances of his life—his mediocrity of fortune, happy and early marriage, and absence of striking personal charm—made it easy for him to adhere to a method of life which was, in the truest sense of the term, *stoic*—stoic alike in its practical abstinences and in its calm and grave ideal. Purely poetic excitement, however, is hard to maintain at a high point; and the description quoted above of the voice which came through the stormy night should be followed by another—by the same candid and self-picturing hand—which represents the same habits in a quieter light.

"Nine-tenths of my verses," says the poet, in 1843, "have been murmured out in the open air. One day a stranger, having walked round the garden and grounds of Rydal Mount, asked of one of the female servants, who happened to be at the door, permission to see her master's study. 'This,' said she, leading him forward, 'is my master's library, where he keeps his books, but his study is out-of-doors.' After a long absence from home, it has more than once happened that some one of my cottage neighbours (not of the double-coach-house cottages) has said, 'Well, there he is! we are glad to hear him *booing* about again.'"

Wordsworth's health, steady and robust for the most part, indicated the same restrained excitability. While

he was well able to resist fatigue, exposure to weather, &c., there were, in fact, three things which his peculiar constitution made it difficult for him to do, and unfortunately those three things were reading, writing, and the composition of poetry. A frequently recurring inflammation of the eyes, caught originally from exposure to a cold wind when overheated by exercise, but always much aggravated by mental excitement, sometimes prevented his reading for months together. His symptoms when he attempted to hold the pen are thus described in a published letter to Sir George Beaumont (1803):

"I do not know from what cause it is, but during the last three years I have never had a pen in my hand for five minutes before my whole frame becomes a bundle of uneasiness; a perspiration starts out all over me, and my chest is oppressed in a manner which I cannot describe." While as to the labour of composition his sister says (September, 1800): "He writes with so much feeling and agitation that it brings on a sense of pain and internal weakness about his left side and stomach, which now often makes it impossible for him to write when he is, in mind and feelings, in such a state that he could do it without difficulty."

But turning to the brighter side of things—to the joys rather than the pains of the sensitive body and spirit—we find in Wordsworth's later years much of happiness on which to dwell. The memories which his name recalls are for the most part of thoughtful kindnesses, of simple-hearted joy in feeling himself at last appreciated, of tender sympathy with the young. Sometimes it is a recollection of some London drawing-room, where youth and beauty surrounded the rugged old man with an eager admiration which fell on no unwilling heart. Sometimes it is a story

of some assemblage of young and old, rich and poor, from all the neighbouring houses and cottages, at Rydal Mount, to keep the aged poet's birthday with a simple feast and rustic play. Sometimes it is a report of some fireside gathering at Lancrigg or Foxhow, where the old man grew eloquent as he talked of Burns and Coleridge, of Homer and Virgil, of the true aim of poetry and the true happiness of man. Or we are told of some last excursion to well-loved scenes; of holly-trees planted by the poet's hands to stimulate nature's decoration on the craggy hill.

Such are the memories of those who best remember him. To those who were young children while his last years went by he seemed a kind of mystical embodiment of the lakes and mountains round him—a presence without which they would not be what they were. And now he is gone, and their untouched and early charm is going too.

"Heu, tua nobis
Pæne simul tecum solatia rapta, Menalca!"

Rydal Mount, of which he had at one time feared to be deprived, was his to the end. He still paced the terrace-walks—but now the flat terrace oftener than the sloping one—whence the eye travels to lake and mountain across a tossing gulf of green. The doves that so long had been wont to answer with murmurs of their own to his "half-formed melodies" still hung in the trees above his pathway; and many who saw him there must have thought of the lines in which his favourite poet congratulates himself that he has not been exiled from his home.

"Calm as thy sacred streams thy years shall flow;
Groves which thy youth has known thine age shall know;

Here, as of old, Hyblæan bees shall twine
Their mazy murmur into dreams of thine—
Still from the hedge's willow-bloom shall come
Through summer silences a slumberous hum—
Still from the crag shall lingering winds prolong
The half-heard cadence of the woodman's song—
While evermore the doves, thy love and care,
Fill the tall elms with sighing in the air."

Yet words like these fail to give the solemnity of his last years — the sense of grave retrospection, of humble self-judgment, of hopeful looking to the end. "It is indeed a deep satisfaction," he writes, near the close of life, "to hope and believe that my poetry will be, while it lasts, a help to the cause of virtue and truth, especially among the young. As for myself, it seems now of little moment how long I may be remembered. When a man pushes off in his little boat into the great seas of Infinity and Eternity, it surely signifies little how long he is kept in sight by watchers from the shore."

And again, to an intimate friend, "Worldly-minded I am not; on the contrary, my wish to benefit those within my humble sphere strengthens seemingly in exact proportion to my inability to realize those wishes. What I lament most is that the spirituality of my nature does not expand and rise the nearer I approach the grave, as yours does, and as it fares with my beloved partner."

The aged poet might feel the loss of some vividness of emotion, but his thoughts dwelt more and more constantly on the unseen world. One of the images which recurs oftenest to his friends is that of the old man as he would stand against the window of the dining-room at Rydal Mount and read the Psalms and Lessons for the day; of the tall bowed figure and the silvery hair; of the deep

voice which always faltered when among the prayers he came to the words which give thanks for those "who have departed this life in Thy faith and fear."

There is no need to prolong the narration. As healthy infancy is the same for all, so the old age of all good men brings philosopher and peasant once more together, to meet with the same thoughts the inevitable hour. Whatever the well-fought fight may have been, rest is the same for all.

> "Retirement then might hourly look
> Upon a soothing scene;
> Age steal to his allotted nook
> Contented and serene;
> With heart as calm as lakes that sleep,
> In frosty moonlight glistening,
> Or mountain torrents, where they creep
> Along a channel smooth and deep,
> To their own far-off murmurs listening."

What touch has given to these lines their impress of an unfathomable peace? For there speaks from them a tranquillity which seems to overcome our souls; which makes us feel in the midst of toil and passion that we are disquieting ourselves in vain; that we are travelling to a region where these things shall not be; that "so shall immoderate fear leave us, and inordinate love shall die."

Wordsworth's last days were absolutely tranquil. A cold caught on a Sunday afternoon walk brought on a pleurisy. He lay for some weeks in a state of passive weakness; and at last Mrs. Wordsworth said to him, "William, you are going to Dora." "He made no reply at the time, and the words seem to have passed unheeded; indeed, it was not certain that they had been even heard. More than twenty-four hours afterwards one of his nieces

came into his room, and was drawing aside the curtain of his chamber, and then, as if awakening from a quiet sleep, he said, 'Is that Dora?'"

On Tuesday, April 23, 1850, as his favourite cuckoo-clock struck the hour of noon, his spirit passed away. His body was buried, as he had wished, in Grasmere churchyard. Around him the dalesmen of Grasmere lie beneath the shade of sycamore and yew; and Rotha's murmur mourns the pausing of that "music sweeter than her own." And surely of him, if of any one, we may think as of a man who was so in accord with nature, so at one with the very soul of things, that there can be no Mansion of the Universe which shall not be to him a home, no Governor who will not accept him among his servants, and satisfy him with love and peace.

THE END.

BURNS

BY

J. C. SHAIRP

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. PAGE

YOUTH IN AYRSHIRE 1

CHAPTER II.

FIRST WINTER IN EDINBURGH 42

CHAPTER III.

BORDER AND HIGHLAND TOURS 60

CHAPTER IV.

SECOND WINTER IN EDINBURGH 79

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT ELLISLAND 94

CHAPTER VI.

MIGRATION TO DUMFRIES. 134

CHAPTER VII.

LAST YEARS. 153

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARACTER, POEMS, SONGS 186

GREA
grow
grow
of th
be gr
passed
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creasi
two bi
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six bio
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ROBERT BURNS.

CHAPTER I.

YOUTH IN AYRSHIRE.

GREAT men, great events, great epochs, it has been said, grow as we recede from them; and the rate at which they grow in the estimation of men is in some sort a measure of their greatness. Tried by this standard, Burns must be great indeed; for, during the eighty years that have passed since his death, men's interest in the man himself and their estimate of his genius have been steadily increasing. Each decade since he died has produced at least two biographies of him. When Mr. Carlyle wrote his well-known essay on Burns in 1828, he could already number six biographies of the Poet, which had been given to the world during the previous thirty years; and the interval between 1828 and the present day has added, in at least the same proportion, to their number. What it was in the man and in his circumstances that has attracted so much of the world's interest to Burns, I must make one more attempt to describe.

If success were that which most secures men's sympathy, Burns would have won but little regard; for in all but his

poetry his was a defeated life—sad and heart-depressing to contemplate beyond the lives even of most poets.

Perhaps it may be the very fact that in him so much failure and shipwreck were combined with such splendid gifts, that has attracted to him so deep and compassionate interest. Let us review once more the facts of that life, and tell again its oft-told story.

It was on the 25th of January, 1759, about two miles from the town of Ayr, in a clay-built cottage, reared by his father's own hands, that Robert Burns was born. The "auld clay bigging" which saw his birth still stands by the side of the road that leads from Ayr to the river and the bridge of Doon. Between the banks of that romantic stream and the cottage is seen the roofless ruin of "Alloway's auld haunted kirk," which Tam o' Shanter has made famous. His first welcome to the world was a rough one. As he himself says—

> "A blast o' Janwar' win'
> Blew hansel in on Robin."

A few days after his birth, a storm blew down the gable of the cottage, and the poet and his mother were carried in the dark morning to the shelter of a neighbour's roof, under which they remained till their own home was repaired. In after-years he would often say, "No wonder that one ushered into the world amid such a tempest should be the victim of stormy passions." "It is hard to be born in Scotland," says the brilliant Parisian. Burns had many hardships to endure, but he never reckoned this to be one of them.

His father, William Burness or Burnes, for so he spelt his name, was a native not of Ayrshire, but of Kincardineshire, where he had been reared on a farm belonging to the

forfeited estate of the noble but attainted house of Keith-Marischal. Forced to migrate thence at the age of nineteen, he had travelled to Edinburgh, and finally settled in Ayrshire, and at the time when Robert, his eldest child, was born, he rented seven acres of land, near the Brig o' Doon, which he cultivated as a nursery-garden. He was a man of strict, even stubborn integrity, and of strong temper—a combination which, as his son remarks, does not usually lead to worldly success. But his chief characteristic was his deep-seated and thoughtful piety. A peasant-saint of the old Scottish stamp, he yet tempered the stern Calvinism of the West with the milder Arminianism more common in his northern birthplace. Robert, who, amid all his after-errors, never ceased to revere his father's memory, has left an immortal portrait of him in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, when he describes how

> "The saint, the father, and the husband prays."

William Burness was advanced in years before he married, and his wife, Agnes Brown, was much younger than himself. She is described as an Ayrshire lass, of humble birth, very sagacious, with bright eyes and intelligent looks, but not beautiful, of good manners and easy address. Like her husband, she was sincerely religious, but of a more equable temper, quick to perceive character, and with a memory stored with old traditions, songs, and ballads, which she told or sang to amuse her children. In his outer man the poet resembled his mother, but his great mental gifts, if inherited at all, must be traced to his father.

Three places in Ayrshire, besides his birthplace, will always be remembered as the successive homes of Burns. These were Mount Oliphant, Lochlea (pronounced Lochly), and Mossgiel.

MOUNT OLIPHANT. — This was a small upland farm, about two miles from the Brig o' Doon, of a poor and hungry soil, belonging to Mr. Ferguson, of Doon-holm, who was also the landlord of William Burness' previous holding. Robert was in his seventh year when his father entered on this farm at Whitsuntide, 1766, and he had reached his eighteenth when the lease came to a close in 1777. All the years between these two dates were to the family of Burness one long sore battle with untoward circumstances, ending in defeat. If the hardest toil and severe self-denial could have procured success, they would not have failed. It was this period of his life which Robert afterwards described, as combining "the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing moil of galley-slave." The family did their best, but a niggard soil and bad seasons were too much for them. At length, on the death of his landlord, who had always dealt generously by him, William Burness fell into the grip of a factor, whose tender mercies were hard. This man wrote letters which set the whole family in tears. The poet has not given his name, but he has preserved his portrait in colours which are indelible:

> "I've noticed, on our Laird's court-day,
> An' mony a time my heart's been wae,
> Poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,
> How they maun thole a factor's snash;
> He'll stamp an' threaten, curse and swear,
> He'll apprehend them, poind their gear,
> While they maun stan', wi aspect humble,
> And hear it a', an' fear an' tremble."

In his autobiographical sketch the poet tells us that, "The farm proved a ruinous bargain. I was the eldest of seven children, and my father, worn out by early hard-

ship, was unfit for labour. His spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in the lease in two years more; and to weather these two years we retrenched expenses, and toiled on." Robert and Gilbert, the two eldest, though still boys, had to do each a grown man's full work. Yet, for all their hardships, these Mount Oliphant days were not without alleviations. If poverty was at the door, there was warm family affection by the fireside. If the two sons had, long before manhood, to bear toil beyond their years, still they were living under their parents' roof, and those parents two of the wisest and best of Scotland's peasantry. Work was no doubt incessant, but education was not neglected — rather it was held one of the most sacred duties. When Robert was five years old, he had been sent to a school at Alloway Mill; and when the family removed to Mount Oliphant, his father combined with four of his neighbours to hire a young teacher, who boarded among them, and taught their children for a small salary. This young teacher, whose name was Murdoch, has left an interesting description of his two young pupils, their parents, and the household life while he sojourned at Mount Oliphant. At that time Murdoch thought that Gilbert possessed a livelier imagination, and was more of a wit than Robert. "All the mirth and liveliness," he says, "were with Gilbert. Robert's countenance at that time wore generally a grave and thoughtful look." Had their teacher been then told that one of his two pupils would become a great poet, he would have fixed on Gilbert. When he tried to teach them church music along with other rustic lads, they two lagged far behind the rest. Robert's voice especially was untuneable, and his ear so dull that it was with difficulty he could distinguish one tune from another. Yet this was he

who was to become the greatest song-writer that Scotland —perhaps the world—has known. In other respects the mental training of the lads was of the most thorough kind. Murdoch taught them not only to read, but to parse, and to give the exact meaning of the words, to turn verse into the prose order, to supply ellipses, and to substitute plain for poetic words and phrases. How many of our modern village schools even attempt as much! When Murdoch gave up, the father himself undertook the education of his children, and carried it on at night after work-hours were over. Of that father Murdoch speaks as by far the best man he ever knew. Tender and affectionate towards his children he describes him, seeking not to drive, but to lead them to the right, by appealing to their conscience and their better feelings, rather than to their fears. To his wife he was gentle and considerate in an unusual degree, always thinking of her ease and comfort; and she repaid it with the utmost reverence. She was a careful and thrifty housewife; but, whenever her domestic tasks allowed, she would return to hang with devout attention on the discourse that fell from her wise husband. Under that father's guidance knowledge was sought for as hid treasure, and this search was based on the old and reverential faith that increase of knowledge is increase of wisdom and goodness. The readings of the household were wide, varied, and unceasing. Some one entering the house at meal-time found the whole family seated, each with a spoon in one hand and a book in the other. The books which Burns mentions as forming part of their reading at Mount Oliphant surprise us even now. Not only the ordinary school-books and geographies, not only the traditional life of Wallace, and other popular books of that sort, but The Spectator, odd plays of Shakespeare, Pope (his

Homer included), Locke on the Human Understanding, Boyle's Lectures, Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, Allan Ramsay's works, formed the staple of their reading. Above all there was a collection of songs, of which Burns says, "This was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is!" And he could not have learnt it in a better way.

There are few countries in the world which could at that time have produced in humble life such a teacher as Murdoch and such a father as William Burness. It seems fitting, then, that a country which could rear such men among its peasantry should give birth to such a poet as Robert Burns to represent them. The books which fed his young intellect were devoured only during intervals snatched from hard toil. That toil was no doubt excessive. And this early overstrain showed itself soon in the stoop of his shoulders, in nervous disorder about the heart, and in frequent fits of despondency. Yet perhaps too much has sometimes been made of these bodily hardships, as though Burns's boyhood had been one long misery. But the youth which grew up in so kindly an atmosphere of wisdom and home affection, under the eye of such a father and mother, cannot be called unblest.

Under the pressure of toil and the entire want of society, Burns might have grown up the rude and clownish and unpopular lad that he has been pictured in his early teens. But in his fifteenth summer there came to him a new influence, which at one touch unlocked the springs of new emotions. This incident must be given in his own words: "You know," he says, "our country custom of

coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of the harvest. In my fifteenth summer my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom. She was a bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass. In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell. . . . Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heartstrings thrill like an Æolian harp; and especially why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand, to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who read Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could shear sheep and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself. Thus with me began love and poetry."

The song he then composed is entitled "Handsome Nell," and is the first he ever wrote. He himself speaks of it as very puerile and silly—a verdict which Chambers endorses, but in which I cannot agree. Simple and artless

it no doubt is, but with a touch of that grace which bespeaks the true poet. Here is one verse which, for directness of feeling and felicity of language, he hardly ever surpassed:

"She dresses aye sae clean and neat,
Baith decent and genteel,
And then there's something in her gait
Gars ony dress look weel."

"I composed it," says Burns, "in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies at the remembrance."

Lochlea.—Escaped from the fangs of the factor, with some remnant of means, William Burness removed from Mount Oliphant to Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton (1777); an upland, undulating farm, on the north bank of the River Ayr, with a wide outlook, southward over the hills of Carrick, westward toward the Isle of Arran, Ailsa Craig, and down the Firth of Clyde, toward the Western Sea. This was the home of Burns and his family from his eighteenth till his twenty-fifth year. For a time the family life here was more comfortable than before, probably because several of the children were now able to assist their parents in farm labour. "These seven years," says Gilbert Burns, "brought small literary improvement to Robert"—but I can hardly believe this, when we remember that Lochlea saw the composition of *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie*, and of *My Nannie, O*, and one or two more of his most popular songs. It was during those days that Robert, then growing into manhood, first ventured to step beyond the range of his father's control, and to trust the promptings of his own social instincts and headlong passions. The first step in this direction was to go to a dancing-school, in a neighbouring village, that he

might there meet companions of either sex, and give his rustic manners "a brush," as he phrases it. The next step was taken when Burns resolved to spend his nineteenth summer in Kirkoswald, to learn mensuration and surveying from the schoolmaster there, who was famous as a teacher of these things. Kirkoswald, on the Carrick coast, was a village full of smugglers and adventurers, in whose society Burns was introduced to scenes of what he calls "swaggering riot and roaring dissipation." It may readily be believed that, with his strong love of sociality and excitement, he was an apt pupil in that school. Still the mensuration went on, till one day, when in the kail-yard behind the teacher's house, Burns met a young lass, who set his heart on fire, and put an end to mensuration. This incident is celebrated in the song beginning—

> "Now westlin winds and slaughtering guns
> Bring autumn's pleasant weather"—

"the ebullition," he calls it, "of that passion which ended the school business at Kirkoswald."

From this time on for several years, love-making was his chief amusement, or rather his most serious business. His brother tells us that he was in the secret of half the love affairs of the parish of Tarbolton, and was never without at least one of his own. There was not a comely girl in Tarbolton on whom he did not compose a song, and then he made one which included them all. When he was thus inly moved, "the agitations of his mind and body," says Gilbert, "exceeded anything of the kind I ever knew in real life. He had always a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself, or had more consequence. His love, therefore, rarely settled on persons of this description." The jealousy here noted, as extend-

ing even to his loves, was one of the weakest points of the poet's character. Of the ditties of that time, most of which have been preserved, the best specimen is *My Nannie, O.* This song, and the one entitled *Mary Morison*, render the whole scenery and sentiment of those rural meetings in a manner at once graphic and free from coarseness. Yet, truth to speak, it must be said that those gloamin' trysts, however they may touch the imagination and lend themselves to song, do in reality lie at the root of much that degrades the life and habits of the Scottish peasantry.

But those first three or four years at Lochlea, if not free from peril, were still with the poet times of innocence. His brother Gilbert, in the words of Chambers, "used to speak of his brother as at this period, to himself, a more admirable being than at any other. He recalled with delight the days when they had to go with one or two companions to cut peats for the winter fuel; because Robert was sure to enliven their toil with a rattling fire of witty remarks on men and things, mingled with the expressions of a genial, glowing heart, and the whole perfectly free from the taint which he afterwards acquired from his contact with the world. Not even in those volumes which afterwards charmed his country from end to end, did Gilbert see his brother in so interesting a light as in these conversations in the bog, with only two or three noteless peasants for an audience."

While Gilbert acknowledges that his brother's love-makings were at this time unceasing, he asserts that they were "governed by the strictest rules of virtue and modesty, from which he never deviated till he reached his twenty-third year." It was towards the close of his twenty-second that there occurs the record of his first serious

desire to marry and settle in life. He had set his affections on a young woman named Ellison Begbie, daughter of a small farmer, and at that time servant in a family on Cessnock Water, about two miles from Lochlea. She is said to have been not a beauty, but of unusual liveliness and grace of mind. Long afterwards, when he had seen much of the world, Burns spoke of this young woman as, of all those on whom he ever fixed his fickle affections, the one most likely to have made a pleasant partner for life. Four letters which he wrote to her are preserved, in which he expresses the most pure and honourable feelings in language which, if a little formal, is, for manliness and simplicity, a striking contrast to the bombast of some of his later epistles. Songs, too, he addressed to her—*The Lass of Cessnock Banks*, *Bonnie Peggy Alison*, and *Mary Morison*. The two former are inconsiderable; the latter is one of those pure and beautiful love-lyrics, in the manner of the old ballads, which, as Hazlitt says, "take the deepest and most lasting hold on the mind."

"Yestreen, when to the trembling string,
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw:
Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sigh'd, and said amang them a',
'Ye are na Mary Morison.'"

"Oh, Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,
Wha for thy sake wad gladly die;
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
Whase only faut is loving thee?
If love for love thou wilt na gie,
At least be pity to me shown;

A thought ungentle canna be
The thought o' Mary Morison."

In these lines the lyric genius of Burns was for the first time undeniably revealed.

But neither letters nor love-songs prevailed. The young woman, for some reason untold, was deaf to his entreaties; and the rejection of this his best affection fell on him with a malign influence, just as he was setting his face to learn a trade which he hoped would enable him to maintain a wife.

Irvine was at that time a centre of the flax-dressing art, and as Robert and his brother raised flax on their farm, they hoped that if they could dress as well as grow flax, they might thereby double their profits. As he met with this heavy disappointment in love just as he was setting out for Irvine, he went thither down-hearted and depressed, at Midsummer, 1781. All who met him at that time were struck with his look of melancholy, and his moody silence, from which he roused himself only when in pleasant female society, or when he met with men of intelligence. But the persons of this sort whom he met in Irvine were probably few. More numerous were the smugglers and rough-living adventurers with which that seaport town, as Kirkoswald, swarmed. Among these he contracted, says Gilbert, "some acquaintance of a freer manner of thinking and living than he had been used to, whose society prepared him for overleaping the bonds of rigid virtue which had hitherto restrained him." One companion, a sailor-lad of wild life and loose and irregular habits, had a wonderful fascination for Burns, who admired him for what he thought his independence and magnanimity. "He was," says Burns, "the only man I ever knew who was a greater fool than myself, where

woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of lawless love with levity, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. *Here his friendship did me a mischief.*"

Another companion, older than himself, thinking that the religious views of Burns were too rigid and uncompromising, induced him to adopt "more liberal opinions," which in this case, as in so many others, meant more lax opinions. With his principles of belief, and his rules of conduct at once assailed and undermined, what chart or compass remained any more for a passionate being like Burns over the passion-swept sea of life that lay before him? The migration to Irvine was to him the descent to Avernus, from which he never afterwards, in the actual conduct of life, however often in his hours of inspiration, escaped to breathe again the pure upper air. This brief but disastrous Irvine sojourn was brought to a sudden close. Burns was robbed by his partner in trade, his flax-dressing shop was burnt to the ground by fire during the carousal of a New-Year's morning, and himself, impaired in purse, in spirits, and in character, returned to Lochlea to find misfortunes thickening round his family, and his father on his death-bed. For the old man, his long struggle with scanty means, barren soil, and bad seasons, was now near its close. Consumption had set in. Early in 1784, when his last hour drew on, the father said that there was one of his children of whose future he could not think without fear. Robert, who was in the room, came up to his bedside and asked, "O father, is it me you mean?" The old man said it was. Robert turned to the window, with tears streaming down his cheeks, and his bosom swelling, from the restraint he put on himself, almost to bursting. The father had early perceived the genius that was in his boy, and even in Mount Oliphant days

had said to his wife, "Whoever lives to see it, something extraordinary will come from that boy." He had lived to see and admire his son's earliest poetic efforts. But he had also noted the strong passions, with the weak will, which might drive him on the shoals of life.

Mossgiel.—Towards the close of 1783, Robert and his brother, seeing clearly the crash of family affairs which was impending, had taken on their own account a lease of the small farm of Mossgiel, about two or three miles distant from Lochlea, in the parish of Mauchline. When their father died in February, 1784, it was only by claiming the arrears of wages due to them, and ranking among their father's creditors, that they saved enough from the domestic wreck to stock their new farm. Thither they conveyed their widowed mother, and their younger brothers and sisters, in March, 1784. Their new home was a bare, upland farm, 118 acres of cold clay soil, lying within a mile of Mauchline village. Burns entered on it with a firm resolution to be prudent, industrious, and thrifty. In his own words, "I read farming books, I calculated crops, I attended markets, and, in short, in spite of the devil, the world, and the flesh, I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed—the second, from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Burns was in the beginning of his twenty-sixth year when he took up his abode at Mossgiel, where he remained for four years. Three things those years and that bare moorland farm witnessed—the wreck of his hopes as a farmer, the revelation of his genius as a poet, and the frailty of his character as a man. The result of the immoral habits and "liberal opinions" which he had

learnt at Irvine were soon apparent in that event of which he speaks in his *Epistle to John Rankine* with such unbecoming levity. In the Chronological Edition of his works it is painful to read on one page the pathetic lines which he engraved on his father's headstone, and a few pages on, written almost at the same time, the epistle above alluded to, and other poems in the same strain, in which the defiant poet glories in his shame. It was well for the old man that he was laid in Alloway Kirkyard before these things befell. But the widowed mother had to bear the burden, and to receive in her home and bring up the child that should not have been born. When silence and shame would have most become him, Burns poured forth his feelings in ribald verses, and bitterly satirized the parish minister, who required him to undergo that public penance which the discipline of the Church at that time exacted. Whether this was a wise discipline or not, no blame attached to the minister, who merely carried out the rules which his Church enjoined. It was no proof of magnanimity in Burns to use his talent in reviling the minister, who had done nothing more than his duty. One can hardly doubt but that in his inmost heart he must have been visited with other and more penitential feelings than those unseemly verses express. But, as Lockhart has well observed, "his false pride recoiled from letting his jovial associates know how little he was able to drown the whispers of the still small voice; and the fermenting bitterness of a mind ill at ease within himself escaped—as may be often traced in the history of satirists—in angry sarcasms against those who, whatever their private errors might be, had at least done him no wrong." Mr. Carlyle's comment on this crisis of his life is too weighty to be omitted here. "With principles assailed by evil example from without,

by 'passions raging like demons' from within, he had little need of sceptical misgivings to whisper treason in the heat of the battle, or to cut off his retreat if he were already defeated. He loses his feeling of innocence; his mind is at variance with itself; the old divinity no longer presides there; but wild Desires and wild Repentance alternately oppress him. Ere long, too, he has committed himself before the world; his character for sobriety, dear to a Scottish peasant as few corrupted worldlings can even conceive, is destroyed in the eyes of men; and his only refuge consists in trying to disbelieve his guiltiness, and is but a refuge of lies. The blackest desperation gathers over him, broken only by the red lightnings of remorse." Amid this trouble it was but a poor vanity and miserable love of notoriety which could console itself with the thought—

> "The mair they talk, I'm kent the better,
> E'en let them clash."

Or was this not vanity at all, but the bitter irony of self-reproach?

This collision with the minister and Kirk Session of his parish, and the bitter feelings it engendered in his rebellious bosom, at once launched Burns into the troubled sea of religious controversy that was at that time raging all around him. The clergy of the West were divided into two parties, known as the Auld Lights and the New Lights. Ayrshire and the west of Scotland had long been the stronghold of Presbyterianism and of the Covenanting spirit; and in Burns's day—a century and a half after the Covenant—a large number of the ministers still adhered to its principles, and preached the Puritan theology undiluted. These men were democratic in their ecclesiastical views, and stout protesters against Patronage, which has always

been the bugbear of the sects in Scotland. As Burns expresses it, they did their best to stir up their flocks to

> "Join their counsel and their skills
> To cowe the lairds,
> An' get the brutes the power themsels
> To chuse their herds."

All Burns's instincts would naturally have been on the side of those who wished to resist patronage and "to cowe the lairds," had not this his natural tendency been counteracted by a stronger bias drawing him in an opposite direction. The Auld Lights, though democrats in Church politics, were the upholders of that strict Church discipline under which he was smarting, and to this party belonged his own minister, who had brought that discipline to bear upon him. Burns, therefore, naturally threw himself into the arms of the opposite, or New Light party, who were more easy in their life and in their doctrine. This large and growing section of ministers were deeply imbued with rationalism, or, as they then called it, "common-sense," in the light of which they pared away from religion all that was mysterious and supernatural. Some of them were said to be Socinians or even pure Deists, most of them shone less in the pulpit than at the festive board. With such men a person in Burns's then state of mind would readily sympathize, and they received him with open arms. Nothing could have been more unfortunate than that in this crisis of his career he should have fallen into intimacy with those hard-headed but coarse-minded men. They were the first persons of any pretensions to scholarly education with whom he had mingled freely. He amused them with the sallies of his wit and sarcasm, and astonished them by his keen insight and vigorous powers of rea-

soning. They abetted those very tendencies in his nature which required to be checked. Their countenance, as clergymen, would allay the scruples and misgivings he might otherwise have felt, and stimulate to still wilder recklessness whatever profanity he might be tempted to indulge in. When he had let loose his first shafts of satire against their stricter brethren, those New Light ministers heartily applauded him; and hounded him on to still more daring assaults. He had not only his own quarrel with his parish minister and the stricter clergy to revenge, but the quarrel also of his friend and landlord, Gavin Hamilton, a county lawyer, who had fallen under Church censure for neglect of Church ordinances, and had been debarred from the Communion. Burns espoused Gavin's cause with characteristic zeal, and let fly new arrows one after another from his satirical quiver.

The first of these satires against the orthodox ministers was *The Twa Herds, or the Holy Tulzie*, written on a quarrel between two brother clergymen. Then followed in quick succession *Holy Willie's Prayer*, *The Ordination*, and *The Holy Fair*. His good mother and his brother were pained by these performances, and remonstrated against them. But Burns, though he generally gave ear to their counsel, in this instance turned a deaf ear to it, and listened to other advisers. The love of exercising his strong powers of satire and the applause of his boon-companions, lay and clerical, prevailed over the whispers of his own better nature and the advice of his truest friends. Whatever may be urged in defence of employing satire to lash hypocrisy, I cannot but think that those who have loved most what is best in Burns's poetry must have regretted that these poems were ever written. Some have commended them on the ground that they have exposed

religious pretence and Pharisaism. The good they may have done in this way is perhaps doubtful. But the harm they have done in Scotland is not doubtful, in that they have connected in the minds of the people so many coarse and even profane thoughts with objects which they had regarded till then with reverence. Even *The Holy Fair*, the poem in this kind which is least offensive, turns on the abuses that then attended the celebration of the Holy Communion in rural parishes, and with great power portrays those gatherings in their most mundane aspects. Yet, as Lockhart has well remarked, those things were part of the same religious system which produced the scenes which Burns has so beautifully described in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*. Strange that the same mind, almost at the same moment, should have conceived two poems so different in spirit as *The Cotter's Saturday Night* and *The Holy Fair!*

I have dwelt thus long on these unpleasant satires that I may not have again to return to them. It is a more welcome task to turn to the other poems of the same period. Though Burns had entered on Mossgiel resolved to do his best as a farmer, he soon discovered that it was not in that way he was to attain success. The crops of 1784 and 1785 both failed, and their failure seems to have done something to drive him in on his own internal resources. He then for the first time seems to have awakened to the conviction that his destiny was to be a poet; and he forthwith set himself, with more resolution than he ever showed before or after, to fulfil that mission. Hitherto he had complained that his life had been without an aim; now he determined that it should be so no longer. The dawning hope began to gladden him that he might take his place among the bards of Scotland.

who, themselves mostly unknown, have created that atmosphere of minstrelsy which envelopes and glorifies their native country. This hope and aim is recorded in an entry of his commonplace book, of the probable date of August, 1784:

"However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more excellent Fergusson, yet I am hurt to see other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, and haughs, immortalized in such celebrated performances, while my dear native country — the ancient bailieries of Carrick, Kyle, and Cunningham, famous both in ancient and modern times for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants — a country where civil, and particularly religious liberty, have ever found their first support, and their last asylum — a country, the birthplace of many famous philosophers, soldiers, and statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in Scottish history, particularly a great many of the actions of the glorious Wallace, the saviour of his country — yet we have never had one Scotch poet of any eminence to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes of Ayr, and the heathy mountainous source and winding sweep of Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed. This is a complaint I would gladly remedy; but, alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and in education. Obscure I am, obscure I must be, though no young poet nor young soldier's heart ever beat more fondly for fame than mine."

Though the sentiment here expressed may seem commonplace and the language hardly grammatical, yet this extract clearly reveals the darling ambition that was now haunting the heart of Burns. It was the same wish

which he expressed better in rhyme at a later day in his *Epistle to the Gude Wife of Wauchope House.*

"E'en then, a wish, I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I for poor Auld Scotland's sake
Some usefu' plan or beuk could make,
Or sing a sang at least.
The rough burr-thistle, spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear,
I turn'd the weeder-clips aside,
An' spar'd the symbol dear."

It was about his twenty-fifth year when he first conceived the hope that he might become a national poet. The failure of his first two harvests, 1784 and '85, in Mossgiel, may well have strengthened this desire, and changed it into a fixed purpose. If he was not to succeed as a farmer, might he not find success in another employment that was much more to his mind?

And this longing, so deeply cherished, he had, within less than two years from the time that the above entry in his diary was written, amply fulfilled. From the autumn of 1784 till May, 1786, the fountains of poetry were unsealed within, and flowed forth in a continuous stream. That period, so prolific of poetry that none like it ever afterwards visited him, saw the production not only of the satirical poems already noticed, and of another more genial satire, *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, but also of those characteristic epistles in which he reveals so much of his own character, and of those other descriptive poems in which he so wonderfully delineates the habits of the Scottish peasantry.

Within from sixteen to eighteen months were com-

posed, not only seven or eight long epistles to rhyme-composing brothers in the neighbourhood, David Sillar, John Lapraik, and others, but also, *Halloween*, *To a Mouse*, *The Jolly Beggars*, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *Address to the Deil*, *The Auld Farmer's Address to his Auld Mare*, *The Vision*, *The Twa Dogs*, *The Mountain Daisy*. The descriptive poems above named followed each other in rapid succession during that spring-time of his genius, having been all composed, as the latest edition of his works shows, in a period of about six months, between November, 1785, and April, 1786. Perhaps there are none of Burns's compositions which give the real man more naturally and unreservedly than his epistles. Written in the dialect he had learnt by his father's fireside, to friends in his own station, who shared his own tastes and feelings, they flow on in an easy stream of genial, happy spirits, in which kindly humour, wit, love of the outward world, knowledge of men, are all beautifully intertwined into one strand of poetry, unlike anything else that has been seen before or since. The outward form of the verse and the style of diction are no doubt after the manner of his two forerunners whom he so much admired, Ramsay and Fergusson; but the play of soul and power of expression, the natural grace with which they rise and fall, the vividness of every image, and transparent truthfulness of every sentiment, are all his own. If there is any exception to be made to this estimate, it is in the grudge which here and there peeps out against those whom he thought greater favourites of fortune than himself and his correspondents. But taken as a whole, I know not any poetic epistles to be compared with them. They are just the letters in which one friend might unbosom himself to another without the least artifice or disguise. And the

broad Doric is so pithy, so powerful, so aptly fitted to the thought, that not even Horace himself has surpassed it in "curious felicity." Often when harvests were failing and the world going against him, he found his solace in pouring forth in rhyme his feelings to some trusted friend. As he says in one of these same epistles—

> "Leeze me on rhyme! it's aye a treasure,
> My chief, amaist my only pleasure,
> At hame, a-fiel', at wark, at leisure,
> The Muse, poor hizzie!
> Tho' rough an' raploch be her measure,
> She's seldom lazy."

Of the poems founded on the customs of the peasantry, I shall speak in the sequel. The garret in which all the poems of this period were written is thus described by Chambers: "The farmhouse of Mossgiel, which still exists almost unchanged since the days of the poet, is very small, consisting of only two rooms, a but and a ben, as they are called in Scotland. Over these, reached by a trap stair, is a small garret, in which Robert and his brother used to sleep. Thither, when he had returned from his day's work, the poet used to retire, and seat himself at a small deal table, lighted by a narrow skylight in the roof, to transcribe the verses which he had composed in the fields. His favourite time for composition was at the plough. Long years afterwards his sister, Mrs. Begg, used to tell how, when her brother had gone forth again to field-work, she would steal up to the garret and search the drawer of the deal table for the verses which Robert had newly transcribed."

In which of the poems of this period his genius is most conspicuous it might not be easy to determine. But there can be little question about the justice of Lockhart's re-

mark, that "*The Cotter's Saturday Night* is of all Burns's pieces the one whose exclusion from the collection would be most injurious, if not to the genius of the poet, at least to the character of the man. In spite of many feeble lines, and some heavy stanzas, it appears to me that even his genius would suffer more in estimation by being contemplated in the absence of this poem, than of any other single poem he has left us." Certainly it is the one which has most endeared his name to the more thoughtful and earnest of his countrymen. Strange it is, not to say painful, to think that this poem, in which the simple and manly piety of his country is so finely touched, and the image of his own religious father so beautifully portrayed, should have come from the same hand which wrote nearly at the same time *The Jolly Beggars*, *The Ordination*, and *The Holy Fair*.

During those two years at Mossgiel, from 1784 to 1786, when the times were hard, and the farm unproductive, Burns must indeed have found poetry to be, as he himself says, its own reward. A nature like his required some vent for itself, some excitement to relieve the pressure of dull farm drudgery, and this was at once his purest and noblest excitement. In two other more hazardous forms of excitement he was by temperament disposed to seek refuge. These were conviviality and love-making. In the former of these, Gilbert says that he indulged little, if at all, during his Mossgiel period. And this seems proved by his brother's assertion that during all that time Robert's private expenditure never exceeded seven pounds a year. When he had dressed himself on this, and procured his other necessaries, the margin that remained for drinking must have been small indeed. But love-making—that had been with him, ever since he reached manhood, an un-

ceasing employment. Even in his later teens he had, as his earliest songs show, given himself enthusiastically to those nocturnal meetings, which were then and are still customary among the peasantry of Scotland, and which at the best are full of perilous temptation. But ever since the time when, during his Irvine sojourn, he forsook the paths of innocence, there is nothing in any of his love-affairs which those who prize what was best in Burns would not willingly forget. If here we allude to two such incidents, it is because they are too intimately bound up with his life to be passed over in any account of it. Gilbert says that while "one generally reigned paramount in Robert's affections, he was frequently encountering other attractions, which formed so many underplots in the drama of his love." This is only too evident in those two loves which most closely touched his destiny at this time.

From the time of his settlement at Mossgiel frequent allusions occur in his letters and poems to flirtations with the belles of the neighbouring village of Mauchline. Among all these Jean Armour, the daughter of a respectable master-mason in that village, had the chief place in his affections. All through 1785 their courtship had continued, but early in 1786 a secret and irregular marriage, with a written acknowledgment of it, had to be effected. Then followed the father's indignation that his daughter should be married to so wild and worthless a man as Burns; compulsion of his daughter to give up Burns, and to destroy the document which vouched their marriage; Burns's despair driving him to the verge of insanity; the letting loose by the Armours of the terrors of the law against him; his skulking for a time in concealment; his resolve to emigrate to the West Indies, and become a slave-driver. All these things were passing in the spring

months of 1786, and in September of the same year Jean Armour became the mother of twin children.

It would be well if we might believe that the story of his betrothal to Highland Mary was, as Lockhart seems to have thought, previous to and independent of the incidents just mentioned. But the more recent investigations of Mr. Scott Douglas and Dr. Chambers have made it too painfully clear that it was almost at the very time when he was half distracted by Jean Armour's desertion of him, and while he was writing his broken-hearted *Lament* over her conduct, that there occurred, as an interlude, the episode of Mary Campbell. This simple and sincere-hearted girl from Argyllshire was, Lockhart says, the object of by far the deepest passion Burns ever knew. And Lockhart gives at length the oft-told tale how, on the second Sunday of May, 1786, they met in a sequestered spot by the banks of the River Ayr, to spend one day of parting love; how they stood, one on either side of a small brook, laved their hands in the stream, and, holding a Bible between them, vowed eternal fidelity to each other. They then parted, never again to meet. In October of the same year Mary came from Argyllshire, as far as Greenock, in the hope of meeting Burns, but she was there seized with a malignant fever which soon laid her in an early grave.

The Bible, in two volumes, which Burns gave her on that parting day, has been recently recovered. On the first volume is inscribed, in Burns's hand, "And ye shall not swear by My Name falsely, I am the Lord. Levit. 19th chap. 12th verse;" and on the second volume, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oath. Matth. 5th chap. 33rd verse." But the names of Mary Campbell and Robert Burns, which were originally inscribed on the volumes, have been almost obliterated.

It has been suggested by Mr. Scott Douglas, the most recent editor who has investigated anew the whole incident, that, "in the whirl of excitement which soon followed that Sunday, Burns forgot his vow to poor Mary, and that she, heart-sore at his neglect, deleted the names from this touching memorial of their secret betrothal."

Certain it is that in the very next month, June, 1786, we find Burns, in writing to one of his friends about "poor, ill-advised, ungrateful Armour," declaring that, "to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all, though I won't tell her so if I were to see her." And Chambers even suggests that there was still a third love interwoven, at this very time, in the complicated web of Burns's fickle affections. Burns, though he wrote several poems about Highland Mary, which afterwards appeared, never mentioned her name to any of his family. Even if there was no more in the story than what has been here given, no wonder that a heart like Burns, which, for all its unsteadfastness, never lost its sensibility, nor even a sense of conscience, should have been visited by the remorse which forms the burden of the lyric to Mary in heaven, written three years after.

> "Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
> Hear'st thou the pangs that rend his breast?"

The misery of his condition, about the time when Highland Mary died, and the conflicting feelings which agitated him, are depicted in the following extract from a letter which he wrote probably about October, 1786, to his friend Robert Aiken:

"There are many things that plead strongly against it [seeking a place in the Excise]: the uncertainty of getting soon into business; the consequences of my follies, which

perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and, besides, I have been for some time pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know —the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of the Muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad, and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances everything that can be laid in the scale against it. You may perhaps think it an extravagant fancy, but it is a sentiment which strikes home to my very soul; though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet I think I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stinted bourne of our present existence: if so, then how should I, in the presence of that tremendous Being, the Author of existence, how should I meet the reproaches of those who stand to me in the dear relation of children, whom I deserted in the smiling innocency of helpless infancy? Oh, Thou great unknown Power! Thou Almighty God! who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of Thy works, yet Thou hast never left me nor forsaken me. . . ."

* * * * * *

"You see, sir, that if to know one's errors were a probability of mending them, I stand a fair chance; but, according to the reverend Westminster divines, though conviction must precede conversion, it is very far from always implying it."

This letter exhibits the tumult of soul in which he had been tossed during the last six months before it was written. He had by his own conduct wound round himself complications from which he could not extricate himself, yet which he could not but poignantly feel. One cannot read of the "wandering stabs of remorse" of which he speaks, without thinking of Highland Mary.

Some months before the above letter was written, in the April of the same year, at the time when he first fell into trouble with Jean Armour and her father, Burns had resolved to leave his country and sail for the West Indies. He agreed with a Mr. Douglas to go to Jamaica and become a book-keeper on his estate there. But how were funds to be got to pay his passage-money? His friend Gavin Hamilton suggested that the needed sum might be raised, if he were to publish by subscription the poems he had lying in his table-drawer.

Accordingly, in April, the publication of his poems was resolved on. His friends, Gavin Hamilton of Mauchline, Aiken and Ballantyne of Ayr, Muir and Parker of Kilmarnock, and others—all did their best to get the subscription lists quickly filled. The last-named person put down his own name for thirty-five copies. The printing of them was committed to John Wilson, a printer in Kilmarnock, and during May, June, and July of 1786, the work of the press was going forward. In the interval between the resolution to publish and the appearance of the poems, during his distraction about Jean Armour's conduct, followed by the episode of Highland Mary, Burns gave vent to his own dark feelings in some of the saddest strains that ever fell from him—the lines on *The Mountain Daisy*, *The Lament*, the Odes to *Despondency* and to *Ruin*. And yet so various were his moods, so versatile his powers, that it was

during that same interval that he composed, in a very different vein, *The Twa Dogs*, and probably also his satire of *The Holy Fair*. The following is the account the poet gives of these transactions in the autobiographical sketch of himself which he communicated to Dr. Moore:

"I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw light was a burlesque lamentation of a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists; both of them were *dramatis personæ* in my *Holy Fair*. I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as the laity, it met with a roar of applause.

"*Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the Kirk Session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wandering led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate incident which gave rise to my printed poem, *The Lament*. This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart and mistaken the reckoning of Rationality.

"I gave up my part of the farm to my brother, and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But, before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power; I thought they had merit;

and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver, or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. . . .

"I threw off about six hundred copies, of which I got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides, I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money, to procure a passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde, for

'Hungry ruin had me in the wind.'

"I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail, as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my friends; my chest was on the way to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia, '*The gloomy night is gathering fast*,' when a letter from Dr. Blackwood to a friend of mine overthrew all my schemes, by opening up new prospects to my poetic ambition."

It was at the close of July, while Burns was, according to his own account, "wandering from one friend's house to another," to avoid the jail with which he was threatened by Jean Armour's father, that the volume appeared, containing the immortal poems (1786). That Burns himself had some true estimate of their real worth is shown by

the way in which he expresses himself in his preface to his volume.

Ushered in with what Lockhart calls a "modest and manly preface," the Kilmarnock volume went forth to the world. The fame of it spread at once like wild-fire throughout Ayrshire and the parts adjacent. This is the account of its reception given by Robert Heron, a young literary man, who was at that time living in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright:—"Old and young, high and low, grave and gay, learned or ignorant, were alike delighted, agitated, transported. I was at that time resident in Galloway, contiguous to Ayrshire, and I can well remember how even ploughboys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages they earned most hardly, and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might procure the works of Burns." The edition consisted of six hundred copies—three hundred and fifty had been subscribed for before publication, and the remainder seems to have been sold off in about two months from their first appearance. When all expenses were paid, Burns received twenty pounds as his share of the profits. Small as this sum was, it would have more than sufficed to convey him to the West Indies; and, accordingly, with nine pounds of it he took a steerage passage in a vessel which was expected to sail from Greenock at the beginning of September. But from one cause or another the day of sailing was postponed, his friends began to talk of trying to get him a place in the Excise, his fame was rapidly widening in his own country, and his powers were finding a response in minds superior to any which he had hitherto known. Up to this time he had not associated with any persons of a higher grade than the convivial lawyers of Mauchline and Ayr, and the mundane ministers of the New Light school. But

now persons of every rank were anxious to become acquainted with the wonderful Ayrshire Ploughman, for it was by that name he now began to be known, just as in the next generation another poet of as humble birth was spoken of as The Ettrick Shepherd. The first persons of a higher order who sought the acquaintanceship of Burns were Dugald Stewart and Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop. The former of these two was the celebrated Scotch metaphysician, one of the chief ornaments of Edinburgh and its University at the close of last and the beginning of this century. He happened to be passing the summer at Catrine, on the Ayr, a few miles from Burns's farm, and having been made acquainted with the poet's works and character by Mr. Mackenzie, the surgeon of Mauchline, he invited the poet and the medical man to dine with him at Catrine. The day of this meeting was the 23rd of October, only three days after that on which Highland Mary died. Burns met on that day not only the professor and his accomplished wife, but for the first time in his life dined with a live lord—a young nobleman, said to have been of high promise, Lord Daer, eldest son of the then Earl of Selkirk. He had been a former pupil of Dugald Stewart, and happened to be at that time his guest. Burns has left the following humorous record of his own feelings at that meeting:

"This wot ye all whom it concerns,
I, Rhymer Robin, alias Burns,
October twenty-third,
A ne'er to be forgotten day,
Sae far I sprachled up the brae [clambered],
I dinner'd wi' a Lord.
* * * * *
"But wi' a Lord! stand out my shin,
A Lord—a Peer, an Earl's Son!

Up higher yet my bonnet!
And sic a Lord! lang Scotch ells twa,
Our Peerage he o'erlooks them a',
As I look o'er a sonnet.

"But oh for Hogarth's magic power!
To show Sir Bardie's willyart glower [bewildered],
And how he stared and stammered,
When goavan, as if led in branks [moving stupidly],
And stumpin' on his ploughman shanks,
He in the parlour hammered.

"I sidling sheltered in a nook,
An' at his Lordship steal't a look
Like some portentous omen;
Except good sense and social glee,
An' (what surprised me) modesty,
I markèd nought uncommon.

"I watched the symptoms o' the great,
The gentle pride, the lordly state,
The arrogant assuming;
The fient a pride, nae pride had he,
Nor sauce, nor state, that I could see,
Mair than an honest ploughman."

From this record of that evening given by Burns, it is interesting to turn to the impression made on Professor Stewart by this their first interview. He says:

"His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple, manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth, but without anything that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened with apparent attention and deference on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness and accommodation in his temper, he would,

I think, have been still more interesting; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of his ordinary acquaintance, and his dread of anything approaching to meanness or servility rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard. Nothing, perhaps, was more remarkable among his various attainments than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language, when he spoke in company; more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of expression, and avoided, more successfully than most Scotchmen, the peculiarities of Scottish phraseology."

Burns parted with Dugald Stewart, after this evening spent with him in Ayrshire, to meet him again in the Edinburgh coteries, amid which the professor shone as a chief light.

Not less important in the history of Burns was his first introduction to Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, a lady who continued the constant friend of himself and of his family while she lived. She was said to be a lineal descendant of the brother of the great hero of Scotland, William Wallace. Gilbert Burns gives the following account of the way in which his brother's acquaintance with this lady began:

"Of all the friendships, which Robert acquired in Ayrshire or elsewhere, none seemed more agreeable to him than that of Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, nor any which has been more uniformly and constantly exerted in behalf of him and his family, of which, were it proper, I could give many instances. Robert was on the point of setting out for Edinburgh before Mrs. Dunlop heard of him. About the time of my brother's publishing in Kilmarnock, she had been afflicted with a long and severe illness, which had reduced her mind to the most distressing state of depression. In this situation, a copy of the printed poems was

laid on her table by a friend; and happening to open on *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, she read it over with the greatest pleasure and surprise; the poet's description of the simple cottagers operating on her mind like the charm of a powerful exorcist, expelling the demon *ennui*, and restoring her to her wonted inward harmony and satisfaction. Mrs. Dunlop sent off a person express to Mossgiel, distant fifteen or sixteen miles, with a very obliging letter to my brother, desiring him to send her half a dozen copies of his poems, if he had them to spare, and begging he would do her the pleasure of calling at Dunlop House as soon as convenient. This was the beginning of a correspondence which ended only with the poet's life. Nearly the last use he made with his pen was writing a short letter to this lady a few days before his death."

The success of the first edition of his poems naturally made Burns anxious to see a second edition begun. He applied to his Kilmarnock printer, who refused the venture, unless Burns could supply ready money to pay for the printing. This he could not do. But the poems by this time had been read and admired by the most cultivated men in Edinburgh, and more than one word of encouragement had reached him from that city. The earliest of these was contained in a letter from the blind poet, Dr. Blacklock, to whom Mr. Laurie, the kindly and accomplished minister of Loudoun, had sent the volume. This Mr. Laurie belonged to the more cultivated section of the Moderate party in the Church, as it was called, and was the friend of Dr. Hugh Blair, Principal Robertson, and Dr. Blacklock, and had been the channel through which Macpherson's fragments of Ossian had first been brought under the notice of that literary circle, which afterwards introduced them to the world. The same worthy minister

had, on the first appearance of the poems, made Burns's acquaintance, and had received him with warm-hearted hospitality. This kindness the poet acknowledged, on one of his visits to the Manse of Loudoun, by leaving in the room in which he slept a short poem of six very feeling stanzas, which contained a prayer for the family. This is the last stanza—

> "When soon or late they reach that coast,
> O'er life's rough ocean driven,
> May they rejoice, no wanderer lost,
> A family in heaven!"

As soon as Mr. Laurie received the letter from Dr. Blacklock, written on the 4th September, in which warm admiration of the Kilmarnock volume was expressed, he forwarded it to Burns at Mossgiel. The result of it fell like sunshine on the young poet's heart; for, as he says, "The doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to hope." The next word of approval from Edinburgh was a highly appreciative criticism of the poems, which appeared in a number of *The Edinburgh Magazine* at the beginning of November. Up till this time Burns had not abandoned his resolution to emigrate to the West Indies. But the refusal of the Kilmarnock printer to undertake a new edition, and the voices of encouragement reaching him from Edinburgh, combining with his natural desire to remain, and be known as a poet, in his native country, at length made him abandon the thought of exile. On the 18th November we find him writing to a friend, that he had determined on Monday or Tuesday, the 27th or 28th November, to set his face toward the Scottish capital and try his fortune there.

At this stage of the poet's career, Chambers pauses to speculate on the feelings with which the humble family at

Mossgiel would hear of the sudden blaze of their brother's fame, and of the change it had made in his prospects. They rejoiced, no doubt, that he was thus rescued from compulsory banishment, and were no way surprised that the powers they had long known him to possess had at length won the world's admiration. If he had fallen into evil courses, none knew it so well as they, and none had suffered more by these aberrations. Still, with all his faults, he had always been to them a kind son and brother, not loved the less for the anxieties he had caused them. But the pride and satisfaction they felt in his newly-won fame would be deep, not demonstrative. For the Burns family were a shy, reserved race, and like so many of the Scottish peasantry, the more they felt, the less they would express. In this they were very unlike the poet, with whom to have a feeling and to express it were almost synonymous. His mother, though not lacking in admiration of her son, is said to have been chiefly concerned lest the praises of his genius should make him forget the Giver of it. Such may have been the feelings of the poet's family.

What may we imagine his own feeling to have been in this crisis of his fate? The thought of Edinburgh society would naturally stir that ambition which was strong within him, and awaken a desire to meet the men who were praising him in the capital, and to try his powers in that wider arena. It might be that in that new scene something might occur which would reverse the current of his fortunes, and set him free from the crushing poverty that had hitherto kept him down. Anyhow, he was conscious of strong powers, which fitted him to shine, not in poetry only, but in conversation and discussion; and, ploughman though he was, he did not shrink from encountering any man or any set of men. Proud, too, we know he was, and

his pride often showed itself in jealousy and suspicion of the classes who were socially above him, until such feelings were melted by kindly intercourse with some individual man belonging to the suspected orders. He felt himself to surpass in natural powers those who were his superiors in rank and fortune, and he could not, for the life of him, see why they should be full of this world's goods, while he had none of them. He had not yet learned—he never did learn — that lesson, that the genius he had received was his allotted and sufficient portion, and that his wisdom lay in making the most of this rare inward gift, even on a meagre allowance of the world's external goods. But perhaps, whether he knew it or not, the greatest attraction of the capital was the secret hope that in that new excitement he might escape from the demons of remorse and despair which had for many months been dogging him. He may have fancied this, but the pangs which Burns had created for himself were too deep to be in this way permanently put by.

The secret of his settled unhappiness lay in the affections that he had abused in himself and in others who had trusted him. The course he had run since his Irvine sojourn was not of a kind to give peace to him or to any man. A coarse man of the world might have stifled the tender voices that were reproaching him, and have gone on his way uncaring that his conduct—

> "Hardened a' within,
> And petrified the feeling."

But Burns could not do this. The heart that had responded so feelingly to the sufferings of lower creatures, the unhoused mouse, the shivering cattle, the wounded hare, could not without shame remember the wrongs he had

done to those human beings whose chief fault was that they had trusted him not wisely but too well. And these suggestions of a sensitive heart, conscience was at hand to enforce—a conscience wonderfully clear to discern the right, even when the will was least able to fulfil it. The excitements of a great city, and the loud praises of his fellow-men, might enable him momentarily to forget, but could not permanently stifle inward voices like these. So it was with a heart but ill at ease, bearing dark secrets he could tell to no one, that Burns passed from his Ayrshire cottage into the applause of the Scottish capital.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST WINTER IN EDINBURGH.

The journey of Burns from Mossgiel to Edinburgh was a sort of triumphal progress. He rode on a pony, lent him by a friend, and as the journey took two days, his resting-place the first night was at the farm-house of Covington Mains, in Lanarkshire, hard by the Clyde. The tenant of this farm, Mr. Prentice, was an enthusiastic admirer of Burns's poems, and had subscribed for twenty copies of the second edition. His son, years afterwards, in a letter to Christopher North, thus describes the evening on which Burns appeared at his father's farm:—"All the farmers in the parish had read the poet's then published works, and were anxious to see him. They were all asked to meet him at a late dinner, and the signal of his arrival was to be a white sheet attached to a pitchfork, and put on the top of a corn-stack in the barn-yard. The parish is a beautiful amphitheatre, with the Clyde winding through it—Wellbrae Hill to the west, Tinto Hill and the Culter Fells to the south, and the pretty, green, conical hill, Quothquan Law, to the east. My father's stack-yard, lying in the centre, was seen from every house in the parish. At length Burns arrived, mounted on a borrowed *pownie*. Instantly was the white flag hoisted, and as instantly were seen the farmers issuing from their houses, and converging to the point of meeting. A glorious even-

ing, or rather night, which borrowed something from the morning, followed, and the conversation of the poet confirmed and increased the admiration created by his writings. On the following morning he breakfasted with a large party at the next farm-house, tenanted by James Stodart; . . . took lunch with a large party at the bank in Carnwath, and rode into Edinburgh that evening on the *pownie*, which he returned to the owner in a few days afterwards by John Samson, the brother of the immortal *Tam*."

This is but a sample of the kind of receptions which were henceforth to await Burns wherever his coming was known. If such welcomes were pleasing to his ambition, they must have been trying both to his bodily and his mental health.

Burns reached Edinburgh on the 28th of November, 1786. The one man of note there with whom he had any acquaintance was Professor Dugald Stewart, whom, as already mentioned, he had met in Ayrshire. But it was not to him or to any one of his reputation that he first turned; but he sought refuge with John Richmond, an old Mauchline acquaintance, who was humbly lodged in Baxter's Close, Lawnmarket. During the whole of his first winter in Edinburgh, Burns lived in the lodging of this poor lad, and shared with him his single room and bed, for which they paid three shillings a week. It was from this retreat that Burns was afterwards to go forth into the best society of the Scottish capital, and thither, after these brief hospitalities were over, he had to return. For some days after his arrival in town, he called on no one—letters of introduction he had none to deliver. But he is said to have wandered about alone, "looking down from Arthur's Seat, surveying the palace, gazing at the Castle, or looking

into the windows of the booksellers' shops, where he saw all books of the day, save the poems of the Ayrshire Ploughman." He found his way to the lowly grave of Fergusson, and, kneeling down, kissed the sod; he sought out the house of Allan Ramsay, and, on entering it, took off his hat. While Burns is thus employed, we may cast a glance at the capital to which he had come, and the society he was about to enter.

Edinburgh at that time was still adorned by a large number of the stars of literature, which, although none of those then living may have reached the first magnitude, had together made a galaxy in the northern heavens, from the middle till the close of last century. At that time literature was well represented in the University. The Head of it was Dr. Robertson, well known as the historian of Charles V., and as the author of other historic works. The chair of Belles-Lettres was filled by the accomplished Dr. Hugh Blair, whose lectures remain one of the best samples of the correct and elegant, but narrow and frigid style, both of sentiment and criticism, which then flourished throughout Europe, and nowhere more than in Edinburgh. Another still greater ornament of the University was Dugald Stewart, the Professor of Moral Philosophy, whose works, if they have often been surpassed in depth and originality of speculation, have seldom been equalled for solid sense and polished ease of diction. The professors at that time were most of them either taken from the ranks of the clergy, or closely connected with them.

Among the literary men unconnected with the University, by far the greatest name, that of David Hume, had disappeared about ten years before Burns arrived in the capital. But his friend, Dr. Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations*, still lingered. Mr. Henry Mackenzie,

"The Man of Feeling," as he was called from his best known work, was at that time one of the most polished as well as popular writers in Scotland. He was then conducting a periodical called the *Lounger*, which was acknowledged as the highest tribunal of criticism in Scotland, and was not unknown beyond it.

But even more influential than the literary lights of the University were the magnates of the Bench and Bar. During the eighteenth century and the earlier part of the nineteenth, the Scottish Bar was recruited almost entirely from the younger sons of ancient Scottish families. To the patrician feelings which they brought with them from their homes these men added that exclusiveness which clings to a profession claiming for itself the highest place in the city where they resided. Modern democracy has made rude inroads on what was formerly something of a select patrician caste. But the profession of the Bar has never wanted either then or in more recent times some genial and original spirits who broke through the crust of exclusiveness. Such, at the time of Burns's advent, was Lord Monboddo, the speculative and humorous judge, who in his own way anticipated the theory of man's descent from the monkey. Such, too, was the genial and graceful Henry Erskine, the brother of the Lord Chancellor of that name, the pride and the favourite of his profession—the sparkling and ready wit who, thirteen years before the day of Burns, had met the rude manners of Dr. Johnson with a well-known repartee. When the Doctor visited the Parliament House, Erskine was presented to him by Boswell, and was somewhat gruffly received. After having made his bow, Erskine slipped a shilling into Boswell's hand, whispering that it was for the sight of his *bear!*

Besides these two classes, the occupants of the Professorial chair and of the Bar, there still gathered every winter in Edinburgh a fair sprinkling of rank and beauty, which had not yet abandoned the Scottish for the English capital. The leader at that time in gay society was the well-known Duchess of Gordon — a character so remarkable in her day that some rumour of her still lives in Scottish memory. The impression made upon her by Burns and his conversation shall afterwards be noticed.

Though Burns for the first day or two after his arrival wandered about companionless, he was not left long unfriended. Mr. Dalrymple, of Orangefield, an Ayrshire country gentleman, a warm-hearted man, and a zealous Freemason, who had become acquainted with Burns during the previous summer, now introduced the Ayrshire bard to his relative, the Earl of Glencairn. This nobleman, who had heard of Burns from his Ayrshire factor, welcomed him in a very friendly spirit, introduced him to his connexion, Henry Erskine, and also recommended him to the good offices of Creech, at that time the first publisher in Edinburgh. Of Lord Glencairn, Chambers says that "his personal beauty formed the index to one of the fairest characters." As long as he lived he did his utmost to befriend Burns, and on his death, a few years after this time, the poet, who seldom praised the great unless he respected and loved them, composed one of his most pathetic elegies.

It was not, however, to his few Ayrshire connexions only, Mr. Dalrymple, Dugald Stewart, and others, that Burns was indebted for his introduction to Edinburgh society. His own fame was now enough to secure it. A criticism of his poems, which appeared within a fortnight after his arrival in Edinburgh, in the *Lounger*, on the

9th of December, did much to increase his reputation. The author of that criticism was The Man of Feeling, and to him belongs the credit of having been the first to claim that Burns should be recognized as a great original poet, not relatively only, in consideration of the difficulties he had to struggle with, but absolutely on the ground of the intrinsic excellence of his work. He pointed to his power of delineating manners, of painting the passions, and of describing scenery, as all bearing the stamp of true genius; he called on his countrymen to recognize that a great national poet had arisen amongst them, and to appreciate the gift that in him had been bestowed upon their generation. Alluding to his narrow escape from exile, he exhorted them to retain and to cherish this inestimable gift of a native poet, and to repair, as far as possible, the wrongs which suffering or neglect had inflicted on him. The *Lounger* had at that time a wide circulation in Scotland, and penetrated even to England. It was known and read by the poet Cowper, who, whether from this or some other source, became acquainted with the poems of Burns within the first year of their publication. In July, 1787, we find the poet of *The Task* telling a correspondent that he had read Burns's poems twice; "and though they be written in a language that is new to me . . . I think them, on the whole, a very extraordinary production. He is, I believe, the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare (I should rather say since Prior), who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured." Cowper thus endorses the verdict of Mackenzie in almost the same language.

It did not, however, require such testimonials, from here

and there a literary man, however eminent, to open every hospitable door in Edinburgh to Burns. Within a month after his arrival in town he had been welcomed at the tables of all the celebrities—Lord Monboddo, Robertson, the historian, Dr. Hugh Blair, Dugald Stewart, Dr. Adam Ferguson, The Man of Feeling, Mr. Fraser Tytler, and many others. We are surprised to find that he had been nearly two months in town before he called on the amiable Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet, who in his well-known letter to Dr. Laurie had been the first Edinburgh authority to hail in Burns the rising of a new star.

How he bore himself throughout that winter when he was the chief lion of Edinburgh society many records remain to show, both in his own letters and in the reports of those who met him. On the whole, his native good sense carried him well through the ordeal. If he showed for the most part due respect to others, he was still more bent on maintaining his respect for himself; indeed, this latter feeling was pushed even to an exaggerated independence. As Mr. Lockhart has expressed it, he showed, "in the whole strain of his bearing, his belief that in the society of the most eminent men of his nation he was where he was entitled to be, hardly deigning to flatter them by exhibiting a symptom of being flattered." All who heard him were astonished by his wonderful powers of conversation. These impressed them, they said, with a greater sense of his genius than even his finest poems.

With the ablest men that he met he held his own in argument, astonishing all listeners by the strength of his judgment, and the keenness of his insight both into men and things. And when he warmed on subjects which interested him, the boldest stood amazed at the flashes of his wit, and the vehement flow of his impassioned elo-

quence. With the "high-born ladies" he succeeded even better than with the "stately patricians"—as one of those dames herself expressed it, fairly carrying them off their feet by the deference of his manner, and the mingled humour and pathos of his talk.

It is interesting to know in what dress Burns generally appeared in Edinburgh. Soon after coming thither he is said to have laid aside his country clothes for "a suit of blue and buff, the livery of Mr. Fox, with buckskins and top-boots." How he wore his hair will be seen immediately. There are several well-known descriptions of Burns's manner and appearance during his Edinburgh sojourn, which, often as they have been quoted, cannot be passed by in any account of his life.

Mr. Walker, who met him for the first time at breakfast in the house of Dr. Blacklock, says, "I was not much struck by his first appearance. His person, though strong and well-knit, and much superior to what might be expected in a ploughman, appeared to be only of the middle size, but was rather above it. His motions were firm and decided, and, though without grace, were at the same time so free from clownish constraint as to show that he had not always been confined to the society of his profession. His countenance was not of that elegant cast which is most frequent among the upper ranks, but it was manly and intelligent, and marked by a thoughtful gravity which shaded at times into sternness. In his large dark eye the most striking index of his genius resided. It was full of mind. . . . He was plainly but properly dressed, in a style midway between the holiday costume of a farmer and that of the company with which he now associated. His black hair without powder, at a time when it was generally worn, was tied behind, and spread upon his fore-

head. Had I met him near a seaport, I should have conjectured him to be the master of a merchant vessel. . . . In no part of his manner was there the slightest affectation; nor could a stranger have suspected, from anything in his behaviour or conversation, that he had been for some months the favourite of all the fashionable circles of the metropolis. In conversation he was powerful. His conceptions and expressions were of corresponding vigour, and on all subjects were as remote as possible from commonplaces. Though somewhat authoritative, it was in a way which gave little offence; and was readily imputed to his inexperience in those modes of smoothing dissent and softening assertion, which are important characteristics of polished manners.

"The day after my first introduction to Burns, I supped with him at Dr. Blair's. The other guests were few, and as they had come to meet Burns, the Doctor endeavoured to draw him out, and to make him the central figure of the group. Though he therefore furnished the greatest proportion of the conversation, he did no more than what he saw evidently was expected. From the blunders often committed by men of genius Burns was unusually free; yet on the present occasion he made a more awkward slip than any that are reported of the poets or mathematicians most noted for absence of mind. Being asked from which of the public places he had received the greatest gratification, he named the High Church, but gave the preference as a preacher to the colleague of our worthy entertainer, whose celebrity rested on his pulpit eloquence, in a tone so pointed and decisive as to throw the whole company into the most foolish embarrassment!" Dr. Blair, we are told, relieved their confusion by seconding Burns's praise. The poet saw his mistake, but had the good sense not to try to

repair it. Years afterwards he told Professor Walker that he had never spoken of this unfortunate blunder, so painful to him had the remembrance of it been.

There seems little doubt, from all the accounts that have been preserved, that Burns in conversation gave forth his opinions with more decision than politeness. He had not a little of that mistaken pride not uncommon among his countrymen, which fancies that gentle manners and consideration for others' feelings are marks of servility. He was for ever harping on independence, and this betrayed him into some acts of rudeness in society which have been recorded with perhaps too great minuteness.

Against these remarks, we must set the testimony of Dugald Stewart, who says: "The attentions he received from all ranks and descriptions of persons would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I perceived any unfavourable effect which they left on his mind. He retained the same simplicity which had struck me so forcibly when first I saw him in the country, nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance. He walked with me in spring, early in the morning, to the Braid Hills, when he charmed me still more by his private conversation than he had ever done in company. He was passionately fond of the beauties of nature; and he once told me, when I was admiring a distant prospect in one of our morning walks, that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and worth which they contained. . . . The idea which his conversation conveyed of the powers of his mind exceeded, if possible, that which is suggested by his writings. All his faculties were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous,

and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. I should have pronounced him fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen. . . . The remarks he made on the characters of men were shrewd and pointed, though frequently inclining too much to sarcasm. His praise of those he loved was sometimes indiscriminate and extravagant. . . . His wit was ready, and always impressed with the marks of a vigorous understanding; but, to my taste, not often pleasing or happy."

While the learned of his own day were measuring him thus coolly, and forming their critical estimates of him, youths of the younger generation were regarding him with far other eyes. Of Jeffrey, when a lad in his teens, it is recorded that one day in the winter of 1786–87, as he stood on the High Street of Edinburgh, staring at a man whose appearance struck him, a person at a shop door tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Aye, laddie, ye may weel look at that man. That's Robbie Burns." This was the young critic's first and last look at the poet of his country.

But the most interesting of all the reminiscences of Burns, during his Edinburgh visit, or, indeed, during any other time, was the day when young Walter Scott met him, and received from him that one look of approbation.

This is the account of that meeting which Scott himself gave to Lockhart: "As for Burns, I may truly say, '*Virgilium vidi tantum.*' I was a lad of fifteen when he came to Edinburgh. I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Adam Fergusson's. Of course we youngsters sat silent, looked and listened. The only thing I remembered which was remarkable in Burns's manner,

was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side — on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath:

> 'Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
> Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain—
> Bent o'er the babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
> The big drops mingling with the milk he drew,
> Gave the sad presage of his future years,
> The child of misery baptized in tears.'

"Burns seemed much affected by the print: he actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of The Justice of Peace. I whispered my information to a friend present, who mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which though of mere civility, I then received with very great pleasure. His person was strong and robust; his manner rustic, not clownish; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity. His countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I would have taken the poet, had I not known who he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school—the *douce gudeman* who held his own plough. There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally glowed) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time."

While men of the upper ranks, old and young, were thus receiving their impressions, and forming their various estimates of Burns, he, we may be sure, was not behindhand in his reflections on them, and on himself. He had by nature his full share of that gnawing self-consciousness which haunts the irritable tribe, from which no modern poet but Walter Scott has been able wholly to escape. While he was bearing himself thus manfully to outward appearance, inwardly he was scrutinizing himself and others with a morbid sensitiveness. In the heyday of his Edinburgh popularity, he writes to Mrs. Dunlop, one of his most trusted friends, what he repeats to other correspondents, that he had long been at pains to take a true measure of himself and to form a just estimate of his powers; that this self-estimate was not raised by his present success, nor would it be depressed by future neglect; that though the tide of popularity was now at full flood, he foresaw that the ebb would soon set in, and that he was prepared for it. In the same letters he speaks of his having too much pride for servility, as though there was no third and more excellent way; of "the stubborn pride of his own bosom," on which he seems mainly to have relied. Indeed, throughout his life there is much talk of what Mr. Carlyle well calls the altogether barren and unfruitful principle of pride; much prating about "a certain fancied rock of independence"—a rock which he found but a poor shelter when the worst ills of life overtook him. This feeling reached its height when, soon after leaving Edinburgh, we find him writing to a comrade in the bitterness of his heart that the stateliness of Edinburgh patricians and the meanness of Mauchline plebeians had so disgusted him with his kind, that he had bought a pocket copy of Milton to study the character of Satan,

as the great exemplar of "intrepid, unyielding independence."

If during his stay in Edinburgh, his "irascible humour" never went so far as this, "the contumely of condescension" must have entered pretty deeply into the soul of the proud peasant when he made the following memorable entry in his diary, on the 9th April, 1787. After some remarks on the difficulty of true friendship, and the hazard of losing men's respect by being too confidential with friends, he goes on: "For these reasons, I am determined to make these pages my confidant. I will sketch every character that any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insert anecdotes and take down remarks, in the old law phrase, without feud or favour. . . . I think a lock and key a security at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever. My own private story likewise, my love adventures, my rambles; the frowns and smiles of fortune on my bardship; my poems and fragments, that must never see the light, shall be occasionally inserted. In short, never did four shillings purchase so much friendship, since confidence went first to the market, or honesty was set up for sale. . . .

"There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me more uneasiness and chagrin, than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth, is received everywhere, with the reception which a mere ordinary character, decorated with the trappings and futile distinctions of fortune, meets: I imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving honour to whom honour is due; he meets at a great man's table a Squire Something or a Sir Somebody; he knows the noble landlord at heart gives the bard, or whatever he is, a share of his good wishes, be-

yond, perhaps, any one at the table; yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow whose abilities would scarcely have made an eightpenny tailor, and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice that are withheld from the son of genius and poverty!

"The noble Glencairn has wounded me to the soul here, because I dearly esteem, respect, and love him. He showed so much attention, engrossing attention, one day, to the only blockhead at table (the whole company consisted of his lordship, dunder-pate, and myself), that I was within half a point of throwing down my gage of contemptuous defiance, but he shook my hand and looked so benevolently good at parting, God bless him! though I should never see him more, I shall love him to my dying day! I am pleased to think I am so capable of gratitude, as I am miserably deficient in some other virtues."

Lockhart, after quoting largely from this Common-place Book, adds, "This curious document has not yet been printed entire. Another generation will, no doubt, see the whole of the confession." All that remains of it has recently been given to the world. The original design was not carried out, and what is left is but a fragment, written chiefly in Edinburgh, with a few additions made at Ellisland. The only characters which are sketched are those of Blair, Stewart, Creech, and Greenfield. The remarks on Blair, if not very appreciative, are mild and not unkindly. There seems to be irony in the praise of Dugald Stewart for the very qualities in which Burns probably thought him to be deficient. Creech's strangely composite character is well touched off. Dr. Greenfield, the colleague of Dr. Blair, whose eloquence Burns on an unfortunate occasion preferred to that of his host, alone comes in for an unaffected eulogy. The plain and manly

directness of these prose sketches is in striking contrast to the ambitious flights which the poet attempts in many of his letters.

Dugald Stewart in his cautious way hints that Burns did not always keep himself to the learned circles which had welcomed him, but sometimes indulged in "not very select society." How much this cautious phrase covers may be seen by turning to Heron's account of some of the scenes in which Burns mingled. Tavern life was then in Edinburgh, as elsewhere, more or less habitual in all classes. In those clubs and brotherhoods of the middle class, which met in taverns down the closes and wynds of High Street, Burns found a welcome, warmer, freer, more congenial than any vouchsafed to him in more polished coteries. Thither convened when their day's work was done, lawyers, writers, schoolmasters, printers, shopkeepers, tradesmen—ranting, roaring boon-companions—who gave themselves up, for the time, to coarse songs, rough raillery, and deep drinking. At these meetings all restraint was cast to the winds, and the mirth drove fast and furious. With open arms the clubs welcomed the poet to their festivities; each man proud to think that he was carousing with Robbie Burns. The poet the while gave full vein to all his impulses, mimicking, it is said, and satirizing his superiors in position, who, he fancied, had looked on him coldly, paying them off by making them the butt of his raillery, letting loose all his varied powers, wit, humour, satire, drollery, and throwing off from time to time snatches of licentious song, to be picked up by eager listeners — song wildly defiant of all the proprieties. The scenes which Burns there took part in far exceeded any revelries he had seen in the clubs of

Tarbolton and Mauchline, and did him no good. If we may trust the testimony of Heron, at the meetings of a certain Crochallan club, and at other such uproarious gatherings, he made acquaintances who, before that winter was over, led him on from tavern dissipations to still worse haunts and habits.

By the 21st of April (1787), the ostensible object for which Burns had come to Edinburgh was attained, and the second edition of his poems appeared in a handsome octavo volume. The publisher was Creech, then chief of his trade in Scotland. The volume was published by subscription "for the sole benefit of the author," and the subscribers were so numerous that the list of them covered thirty-eight pages. In that list appeared the names of many of the chief men of Scotland, some of whom subscribed for twenty — Lord Eglinton for as many as forty-two copies. Chambers thinks that full justice has never been done to the liberality of the Scottish public in the way they subscribed for this volume. Nothing equal to the patronage that Burns at this time met with had been seen since the days of Pope's Iliad. This second edition, besides the poems which had appeared in the Kilmarnock one, contained several additional pieces, the most important of which had been composed before the Edinburgh visit. Such were *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, *The Brigs of Ayr*, *The Ordination*, *The Address to the Unco Guid*. The proceeds from this volume ultimately made Burns the possessor of about 500*l*., quite a little fortune for one who, as he himself confesses, had never before had 10*l*. he could call his own. It would, however, have been doubly welcome and useful to him, had it been paid down without needless delay. But unfortunately

this was not Creech's way of transacting business, so that Burns was kept for many months waiting for a settlement — months during which he could not, for want of money, turn to any fixed employment, and which were therefore spent by him unprofitably enough.

CHAPTER III.

BORDER AND HIGHLAND TOURS.

SOME small instalments of the profits of his new volume enabled our Poet, during the summer and autumn of 1787, to make several tours to various districts of Scotland, famous either for scenery or song. The day of regular touring had not yet set in, and few Scots at that time would have thought of visiting what Burns called the classic scenes of their country. A generation before this, poets in England had led the way in this—as when Gray visited the lakes of Cumberland, and Dr. Johnson the Highlands and the Western Isles. In his ardour to look upon places famous for their natural beauty or their historic associations, or even for their having been mentioned in some old Scottish song, Burns surpassed both Gray and Johnson, and anticipated the sentiment of the present century. Early in May he set out with one of his Crochallan club acquaintances, named Ainslie, on a journey to the Border. Ainslie was a native of the Merse, his father and family living in Dunse. Starting thence with Ainslie, Burns traversed the greater part of the vale of Tweed from Coldstream to Peebles, recalling, as he went along, snatches of song connected with the places he passed. He turned aside to see the valley of the Jed, and got as far as Selkirk in the hope of looking upon Yarrow. But from doing this he was hindered by a day of unceasing rain, and he who

was so soon to become the chief singer of Scottish song was never allowed to look on that vale which has long been its most ideal home. Before finishing his tour, he went as far as Nithsdale, and surveyed the farm of Ellisland, with some thought already that he might yet become the tenant of it.

It is noteworthy, but not wonderful, that the scenes visited in this tour called forth no poetry from Burns, save here and there an allusion that occurred in some of his later songs. When we remember with what an uneasy heart Burns left Ayrshire for Edinburgh, that the town life he had there led for the last six months had done nothing to lighten—it had probably done something to increase the load of his mental disquietude—that in an illness which he had during his tour he confesses that "embittering remorse was scaring his fancy at the gloomy forebodings of death," and that when his tour was over, soon after his return to Edinburgh, he found the law let loose against him, and what was called a "fugæ" warrant issued for his apprehension, owing to some occurrence like to that which a year ago had terrified him with legal penalties, and all but driven him to Jamaica—when all these things are remembered, is it to be wondered that Burns should have wandered by the banks of Tweed, in no mood to chaunt beside it "a music sweeter than its own?"

At the close of his Border tour Burns had, as we have seen, visited Nithsdale and looked at the farm of Ellisland. From Nithsdale he made his way back to native Ayrshire and his family at Mossgiel. I have heard a tradition that his mother met him at the door of the small farm-house, with this only salutation, "O Robbie!" Neither Lockhart nor Chambers mentions this, but the latter says, his sister, Mrs. Begg, remembered the arrival of her brother. He

came in unheralded, and was in the midst of them before they knew. It was a quiet meeting, for the Mossgiel family had the true Scottish reticence or reserve; but though their words were not "mony feck," their feelings were strong. It was, indeed, as strange a reverse as ever was made by fortune's fickle wheel. "He had left them," to quote the words of Lockhart, "comparatively unknown, his tenderest feelings torn and wounded by the behaviour of the Armours, and so miserably poor that he had been for some weeks obliged to skulk from the sheriff's officers to avoid the payment of a paltry debt. He returned, his poetical fame established, the whole country ringing with his praise, from a capital in which he was known to have formed the wonder and delight of the polite and the learned; if not rich, yet with more money already than any of his kindred had ever hoped to see him possess, and with prospects of future patronage and permanent elevation in the scale of society, which might have dazzled steadier eyes than those of maternal and fraternal affection. The prophet had at last honour in his own country, but the haughty spirit that had preserved its balance in Edinburgh was not likely to lose it at Mauchline." The haughty spirit of which Lockhart speaks was reserved for others than his own family. To them we hear of nothing but simple affection. His youngest sister, Mrs. Begg, told Chambers, "that her brother went to Glasgow, and thence sent home a present to his mother and three sisters, namely, a quantity of *mode* silk, enough to make a bonnet and a cloak to each, and a gown besides to his mother and youngest sister." This was the way he took to mark their right to share in his prosperity. Mrs. Begg remembers going for rather more than a week to Ayr to assist in making up the dresses, and when she came back on a Saturday, her

brother had returned and requested her "to put on her dress that he might see how smart she looked in it." The thing that stirred his pride and scorn was the servility with which he was now received by his "plebeian brethren" in the neighbourhood, and chief among these by the Armours, who had formerly eyed him with looks askance. If anything "had been wanting to disgust me completely with Armour's family, their mean, servile compliance would have done it." So he writes, and it was this disgust that prompted him to furnish himself, as we have seen he did, with a pocket copy of Milton, to study the character of Satan. This fierce indignation was towards the family; towards "bonny Jean" herself his feeling was far other. Having accidentally met her, his old affection revived, and they were soon as intimate as of old.

After a short time spent at Mossgiel wandering about, and once, it would seem, penetrating the West Highlands as far as Inverary, a journey during which his temper seems to have been far from serene, he returned in August to Edinburgh. There he encountered, and in time got rid of, the law troubles already alluded to; and on the 25th of August he set out, on a longer tour than any he had yet attempted, to the Northern Highlands.

The travelling companion whom he chose for this tour was a certain Mr. Nicol, whose acquaintance he seems to have first formed at the Crochallan club, or some other haunt of boisterous joviality. After many ups and downs in life Nicol had at last, by dint of some scholastic ability, settled as a master of the Edinburgh High School. What could have tempted Burns to select such a man for a fellow-traveller? He was cast in one of nature's roughest moulds; a man of careless habits, coarse manners, enormous vanity, of most irascible and violent temper, which

vented itself in cruelties on the poor boys who were the victims of his care. Burns compared himself with such a companion to "a man travelling with a loaded blunderbuss at full cock." Two things only are mentioned in his favour, that he had a warm heart, and an unbounded admiration of the poet. But the choice of such a man was an unfortunate one, and in the upshot did not a little to spoil both the pleasure and the benefit which might have been gathered from the tour.

Their journey lay by Stirling and Crieff to Taymouth and Breadalbane, thence to Athole, on through Badenoch and Strathspey to Inverness. The return by the east coast was through the counties of Moray and Banff to Aberdeen. After visiting the county whence his father had come, and his kindred who were still in Kincardineshire, Burns and his companion passed by Perth back to Edinburgh, which they reached on the 16th of September. The journey occupied only two and twenty days, far too short a time to see so much country, besides making several visits, with any advantage. During his Border tour Burns had ridden his Rosinante mare, which he had named Jenny Geddes. As his friend, the schoolmaster, was no equestrian, Burns was obliged to make his northern journey in a post-chaise, not the best way of taking in the varied and ever-changing sights and sounds of Highland scenery.

Such a tour as this, if Burns could have entered on it under happier auspices, that is, with a heart at ease, a fitting companion, and leisure enough to view quietly the scenes through which he passed, and to enjoy the society of the people whom he met, could not have failed, from its own interestingness, and its novelty to him, to have enriched his imagination, and to have called forth some lasting memorials. As it was, it cannot be said to have done

either. There are, however, a few incidents which are worth noting. The first of these took place at Stirling. Burns and his companion had ascended the Castle Rock, to look on the blue mountain rampart that flanks the Highlands from Ben Lomond to Benvoirlich. As they were both strongly attached to the Stuart cause, they had seen with indignation, on the slope of the Castle hill, the ancient hall, in which the Scottish kings once held their Parliaments, lying ruinous and neglected. On returning to their inn, Burns, with a diamond he had bought for such purposes, wrote on the window-pane of his room some lines expressive of the disgust he had felt at that sight, concluding with some offensive remarks on the reigning family. The lines, which had no poetic merit, got into the newspapers of the day, and caused a good deal of comment. On a subsequent visit to Stirling, Burns himself broke the pane of the window on which the obnoxious lines were written, but they were remembered, it is said, long afterwards to his disadvantage.

Among the pleasantest incidents of the tour was the visit to Blair Castle, and his reception by the Duchess of Athole. The two days he spent there he declared were among the happiest of his life. We have seen how sensitive Burns was to the way he was received by the great. Resentful as he was equally of condescension and of neglect, it must have been no easy matter for persons of rank so to adapt their manner as to exactly please him. But his hosts at Blair Castle succeeded to admiration in this. They were assisted by the presence at the Castle of Mr., afterwards Professor, Walker, who had known Burns in Edinburgh, and was during that autumn living as a tutor in the Duke's family. At dinner Burns was in his most pleasing vein, and delighted his hostess by drinking to the

health of her group of fair young children, as "honest men and bonny lassies"—an expression with which he happily closes his *Petition of Bruar Water*. The Duchess had her two sisters, Mrs. Graham and Miss Cathcart, staying with her on a visit, and all three ladies were delighted with the conversation of the poet. These three sisters were daughters of a Lord Cathcart, and were remarkable for their beauty. The second, Mrs. Graham, has been immortalized as the subject of one of Gainsborough's most famous portraits. On her early death her husband, Thomas Graham of Balnagown, never again looked on that beautiful picture, but left his home for a soldier's life, distinguished himself greatly in the Peninsular War, and was afterwards known as Lord Lynedoch. After his death, the picture passed to his nearest relatives, who presented it to the National Portrait Gallery of Scotland, of which it is now the chief ornament. All three sisters soon passed away, having died even before the short-lived poet. By their beauty and their agreeableness they charmed Burns, and did much to make his visit delightful. They themselves were not less pleased; for when the poet proposed to leave, after two days were over, they pressed him exceedingly to stay, and even sent a messenger to the hotel to persuade the driver of Burns's chaise to pull off one of the horse's shoes, that his departure might be delayed. Burns himself would willingly have listened to their entreaties, but his travelling mate was inexorable. Likely enough Nicol had not been made so much of as the poet, and this was enough to rouse his irascible temper. For one day he had been persuaded to stay by the offer of good trout-fishing, which he greatly relished, but now he insisted on being off. Burns was reluctantly forced to yield.

This rapid departure was the more unfortunate because

Mr. Dundas, who held the keys of Scottish patronage, was expected on a visit to Blair, and had he met the poet he might have wiped out the reproach often cast on the ministry of the day, that they failed in their duty towards Burns. "That eminent statesman," as Lockhart says, "was, though little addicted to literature, a warm lover of his own country, and, in general, of whatever redounded to her honour; he was, moreover, very especially qualified to appreciate Burns as a companion; and had such an introduction taken place, he might not improbably have been induced to bestow that consideration on the claims of the poet, which, in the absence of any personal acquaintance, Burns's works ought to have received at his hands." But during that visit Burns met, and made the acquaintance of, another man of some influence, Mr. Graham of Fintray, whose friendship afterwards, both in the Excise business, and in other matters, stood him in good stead. The Duke, as he bade farewell to Burns at Blair, advised him to turn aside, and see the Falls of the Bruar, about six miles from the Castle, where that stream coming down from its mountains plunges over some high precipices, and passes through a rocky gorge to join the River Garry. Burns did so, and finding the falls entirely bare of wood, wrote some lines entitled *The Humble Petition of Bruar Water*, in which he makes the stream entreat the Duke to clothe its naked banks with trees. The poet's petition for the stream was not in vain. The then Duke of Athole was famous as a planter of trees, and those with which, after the poet's Petition, he surrounded the waterfall remain to this day.

After visiting Culloden Muir, the Fall of Fyers, Kilravock Castle, where, but for the impatience of Mr. Nicol, he would fain have prolonged his stay, he came on to Focha-

bers and Gordon Castle. This is Burns's entry in his diary:—"Cross Spey to Fochabers, fine palace, worthy of the noble, the polite, and generous proprietor. The Duke makes me happier than ever great man did; noble, princely, yet mild and condescending and affable—gay and kind. The Duchess, charming, witty, kind, and sensible. God bless them!"

Here, too, as at Blair, the ducal hosts seem to have entirely succeeded in making Burns feel at ease, and wish to protract his visit. But here, too, more emphatically than at Blair, his friend spoilt the game. This is the account of the incident, as given by Lockhart, with a few additions interpolated from Chambers:

"Burns, who had been much noticed by this noble family when in Edinburgh, happened to present himself at Gordon Castle just at the dinner-hour, and being invited to take a place at the table, did so, without for a moment adverting to the circumstance that his travelling companion had been left alone at the inn, in the adjacent village. On remembering this soon after dinner, he begged to be allowed to rejoin his friend; and the Duke of Gordon, who now for the first time learned that he was not journeying alone, immediately proposed to send an invitation to Mr. Nicol to come to the Castle. His Grace sent a messenger to bear it; but Burns insisted on himself accompanying him. They found the haughty schoolmaster striding up and down before the inn-door in a high state of wrath and indignation at, what he considered, Burns's neglect, and no apologies could soften his mood. He had already ordered horses, and was venting his anger on the postillion for the slowness with which he obeyed his commands. The poet, finding that he must choose between the ducal circle and his irascible associate, at once chose

the latter alternative. Nicol and he, in silence and mutual displeasure, seated themselves in the post-chaise, and turned their backs on Gordon Castle, where the poet had promised himself some happy days. This incident may serve to suggest some of the annoyances to which persons moving, like our poet, on the debatable land between two different ranks of society must ever be subjected." "To play the lion under such circumstances must," as the knowing Lockhart observes, "be difficult at the best; but a delicate business indeed, when the jackals are presumptuous. The pedant could not stomach the superior success of his friend, and yet—alas for poor human nature!—he certainly was one of the most enthusiastic of his admirers, and one of the most affectionate of all his intimates." It seems that the Duchess of Gordon had some hope that her friend, Mr. Addington, afterwards Lord Sidmouth and the future premier, would have visited at Gordon Castle while Burns was there. Mr. Addington was, Allan Cunningham tells us, an enthusiastic admirer of Burns's poetry, and took pleasure in quoting it to Pitt and Melville. On that occasion he was unfortunately not able to accept the invitation of the Duchess, but he forwarded to her "these memorable lines—memorable as the first indication of that deep love which England now entertains for the genius of Burns:"

"Yes! pride of Scotia's favoured plains, 'tis thine
The warmest feelings of the heart to move;
To bid it throb with sympathy divine,
To glow with friendship, or to melt with love.

"What though each morning sees thee rise to toil,
Though Plenty on thy cot no blessing showers,
Yet Independence cheers thee with her smile,
And Fancy strews thy moorland with her flowers

"And dost thou blame the impartial will of Heaven,
Untaught of life the good and ill to scan?
To thee the Muse's choicest wreath is given—
To thee the genuine dignity of man!

"Then to the want of worldly gear resigned,
Be grateful for the wealth of thy exhaustless mind."

It was well enough for Mr. Addington, and such as he, to advise Burns to be content with the want of worldly gear, and to refer him for consolation to the dignity of man and the wealth of his exhaustless mind. Burns had abundance of such sentiments in himself to bring forth, when occasion required. He did not need to be replenished with these from the stores of men who held the keys of patronage. What he wanted from them was some solid benefit, such as they now and then bestowed on their favourites, but which unfortunately they withheld from Burns.

An intelligent boy, who was guide to Burns and Nicol from Cullen to Duff House, gave long afterwards his remembrances of that day. Among these this occurs. The boy was asked by Nicol if he had read Burns's poems, and which of them he liked best. The boy replied, "'I was much entertained with *The Twa Dogs* and *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, but I like best *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, although it made me *greet* when my father had me to read it to my mother.' Burns, with a sudden start, looked at my face intently, and patting my shoulder, said, 'Well, my callant, I don't wonder at your *greeting* at reading the poem; it made me greet more than once when I was writing it at my father's fireside.'" . . .

On the 16th of September, 1787, the two travellers returned to Edinburgh. This tour produced little poetry directly, and what it did produce was not of a high order.

In this respect one cannot but contrast it with the poetic results of another tour made, partly over the same ground, by another poet, less than twenty years after this time. When Wordsworth and his sister made their first visit to Scotland in 1803, it called forth some strains of such perfect beauty as will live while the English language lasts. Burns's poetic fame would hardly be diminished if all that he wrote on his tours were obliterated from his works. Perhaps we ought to except some allusions in his future songs, and especially that grand song, *Macpherson's Farewell*, which, though composed several months after this tour was over, must have drawn its materials from the day spent at Duff House, where he was shown the sword of the Highland Reiver.

But look at the lines composed after his first sight of Breadalbane, which he left in the inn at Kenmore. These Lockhart has pronounced among "the best of his purely English heroics" If so, we can but say how poor are the best! What is to be thought of such lines as

> "Poetic ardours in my bosom swell,
> Lone wandering by the hermit's mossy cell," etc., etc.

Nor less stilted, forced, and artificial are the lines in the same measure written at the Fall of Fyers.

The truth is, that Burns's *forte* by no means lay in describing scenery alone, and for its own sake. All his really inspired descriptions of it occur as adjuncts to human incident or feeling, slips of landscape let in as a background. Again, as Burns was never at his best when called on to write for occasions — no really spontaneous poet ever can be — so when taken to see much talked-of scenes, and expected to express poetic raptures over them, Burns did not answer to the call.

"He disliked," we are told, "to be tutored in matters of taste, and could not endure that one should run shouting before him, whenever any fine object came in sight." On one occasion of this kind, a lady at the poet's side said, "Burns, have you nothing to say of this?" "Nothing, madam," he replied, glancing at the leader of the party, "for an ass is braying over it." Burns is not the only person who has suffered from this sort of officiousness.

Besides this, the tours were not made in the way which most conduces to poetic composition. He did not allow himself the quiet and the leisure from interruption which are needed. It was not with such companions as Ainslie or Nicol by his side that the poet's eye discovered new beauty in the sight of a solitary reaper in a Highland glen, and his ear caught magical suggestiveness in the words, "What! you are stepping westward," heard by the evening lake.

Another hindrance to happy poetic description by Burns during these journeys was that he had now forsaken his native vernacular, and taken to writing in English after the mode of the poets of the day. This with him was to unclothe himself of his true strength. His correspondent, Dr. Moore, and his Edinburgh critics had no doubt counselled him to write in English, and he listened for a time too easily to their counsel. He and they little knew what they were doing in giving and taking such advice. The truth is, when he used his own Scottish dialect he was unapproached, unapproachable; no poet before or since has evoked out of that instrument so perfect and so varied melodies. When he wrote in English he was seldom more than third-rate; in fact, he was but a common clever versifier. There is but one purely English poem of his which

at all approaches the first rank — the lines *To Mary in Heaven.*

These may probably have been the reasons, but the fact is certain that Burns's tours are disappointing in their direct poetic fruits. But in another way Burns turned them to good account. He had by that time begun to devote himself almost entirely to the cultivation of Scottish song. This was greatly encouraged by the appearance of *Johnson's Museum*, a publication in which an engraver of that name living in Edinburgh had undertaken to make a thorough collection of all the best of the old Scottish songs, accompanying them with the best airs, and to add to these any new songs of merit which he could lay hands on. Before Burns left Edinburgh for his Border tour, he had begun an acquaintance and correspondence with Johnson, and had supplied him with four songs of his own for the first volume of *The Museum.* The second volume was now in progress, and his labors for this publication, and for another of the same kind to be afterwards mentioned, henceforth engrossed Burns's entire productive faculty, and were to be his only serious literary work for the rest of his life. He therefore employed the Highland tour in hearing all he could, that had any bearing on his now absorbing pursuit, and in collecting materials that might promote it. With this view, when on his way from Taymouth to Blair, he had turned aside to visit the famous fiddler and composer of Scotch tunes, Neil Gow, at his house, which is still pointed out, at Inver, on the Braan Water, opposite the grounds of Dunkeld. This is the entry about him in Burns's diary: — "Neil Gow plays—a short, stout-built, honest Highland figure, with his grey hair shed on his honest social brow; an interesting face marking strong sense, kind open-heartedness, mixed

with unmistrusting simplicity; visit his house; Margaret Gow." It is interesting to think of this meeting of these two—the one a Lowlander, the other a Highlander; the one the greatest composer of words, the other of tunes, for Scottish songs, which their country has produced.

As he passed through Aberdeen, Burns met Bishop Skinner, a Bishop of the Scottish Episcopal Church; and when he learnt that the Bishop's father, the author of the song of *Tulloch-gorum*, and *The Ewie wi' the crookit horn*, and other Scottish songs, was still alive, an aged Episcopalian clergyman, living in primitive simplicity in *a but and a ben* at Lishart, near Peterhead, and that on his way to Aberdeen he had passed near the place without knowing it, Burns expressed the greatest regret at having missed seeing the author of songs he so greatly admired. Soon after his return to Edinburgh, he received from old Mr. Skinner a rhyming epistle, which greatly pleased the poet, and to which he replied—"I regret, and while I live shall regret, that when I was north I had not the pleasure of paying a younger brother's dutiful respect to the author of the best Scotch song ever Scotland saw, *Tulloch-gorum's my delight.*" This is strong, perhaps too strong praise. Allan Cunningham, in his *Songs of Scotland*, thus freely comments on it:—"*Tulloch-gorum* is a lively clever song, but I would never have edited this collection had I thought with Burns that it is the best song Scotland ever saw. I may say with the king in my favourite ballad—

> "I trust I have within my realm,
> Five hundred good as he."

We also find Burns, on his return to Edinburgh, writing to the librarian at Gordon Castle to obtain from him a correct copy of a Scotch song composed by the Duke, in

the current vernacular style, *Cauld Kail in Aberdeen.* This correct copy he wished to insert in the forthcoming volume of *Johnson's Museum*, with the name of the author appended.

At Perth he made inquiries, we are told, "as to the whereabouts of the burn-brae on which be the graves of Bessy Bell and Mary Gray." Whether he actually visited the spot, near the Almond Water, ten miles west of Perth, is left uncertain. The pathetic story of these two hapless maidens, and the fine old song founded on it, had made it to him a consecrated spot.

> "O Bessy Bell and Mary Gray!
> They were twa bonny lasses,
> They biggit a bower on yon burn-brae,
> And theekit it owre wi' rashes,"

is the beginning of a beautiful song which Allan Ramsay did his best to spoil, as he did in many another instance. Sir Walter Scott afterwards recovered some of the old verses which Ramsay's had superseded, and repeated them to Allan Cunningham, who gives them in his *Songs of Scotland.* Whether Burns knew any more of the song than the one old verse given above, with Ramsay's appended to it, is more than doubtful.

As he passed through Perth he secured an introduction to the family of Belches of Invermay, that, on crossing the River Earn on his southward journey, he might be enabled to see the little valley, running down from the Ochils to the Earn, which has been consecrated by the old and well-known song, *The Birks of Invermay.*

It thus appears that the old songs of Scotland, their localities, their authors, and the incidents whence they arose, were now uppermost in the thoughts of Burns,

whatever part of his country he visited. This was as intense and as genuinely poetical an interest, though a more limited one, than that with which Walter Scott's eye afterwards ranged over the same scenes. The time was not yet full come for that wide and varied sympathy, with which Scott surveyed the whole past of his country's history, nor was Burns's nature or training such as to give him that catholicity of feeling which was required to sympathize, as Scott did, with all ranks and all ages. Neither could he have so seized on the redeeming virtues of rude and half-barbarous times, and invested them with that halo of romance which Scott has thrown over them. This romantic and chivalrous colouring was an element altogether alien to Burns's character. But it may well be, that these very limitations intensified the depth and vividness of sympathy with which Burns conceived the human situations portrayed in his best songs.

There was one more brief tour of ten days during October, 1787, which Burns made in the company of Dr. Adair. They passed first to Stirling, where Burns broke the obnoxious pane; then paid a second visit to Harvieston, near Dollar—for Burns had paid a flying visit of one day there, at the end of August, before passing northward to the Highlands—where Burns introduced his friend, and seems to have flirted with some Ayrshire young ladies, relations of his friend Gavin Hamilton. Thence they passed on a visit to Mr. Ramsay at Ochtertyre, on the Teith, a few miles west from Stirling. They then visited Sir William Murray at Ochtertyre, in Strathearn, where Burns wrote his *Lines on scaring some waterfowl in Lock Turit*, and a pretty pastoral song on a young beauty he met there, Miss Murray of Lintrose. From Strathearn he next seems to have returned by Clackmannan, there to visit the old lady

who lived in the Tower, of whom he had heard from Mr. Ramsay. In this short journey the most memorable thing was the visit to Mr. Ramsay at his picturesque old country seat, situate on the River Teith, and commanding, down the vista of its old lime-tree avenue, so romantic a view of Stirling Castle rock. There Burns made the acquaintance of Mr. Ramsay, the laird, and was charmed with the conversation of that "last of the Scottish line of Latinists, which began with Buchanan and ended with Gregory"—an antiquary, moreover, whose manners and home Lockhart thinks that Sir Walter may have had in his recollection when he drew the character of Monkbarns. Years afterwards, in a letter addressed to Dr. Currie, Ramsay thus wrote of Burns:—"I have been in the company of many men of genius, some of them poets, but I never witnessed such flashes of intellectual brightness as from him, the impulse of the moment, sparks of celestial fire. I never was more delighted, therefore, than with his company two days *tête-à-tête*. In a mixed company I should have made little of him; for, to use a gamester's phrase, he did not know when to play off, and when to play on. . . . When I asked whether the Edinburgh literati had mended his poems by their criticisms, 'Sir,' said he, 'these gentlemen remind me of some spinsters in my country, who spin their thread so fine, that it is neither fit for weft nor woof.'"

There are other incidents recorded of that time. Among these was a visit to Mrs. Bruce, an old Scottish dame of ninety, who lived in the ancient Tower of Clackmannan, upholding her dignity as the lineal descendant and representative of the family of King Robert Bruce, and cherishing the strongest attachment to the exiled Stuarts. Both of these sentiments found a ready response

from Burns. The one was exemplified by the old lady conferring knighthood on him and his companion with the actual sword of King Robert, which she had in her possession, remarking, as she did it, that she had a better right to confer the title than some folk. Another sentiment she charmed the poet by expressing in the toast she gave after dinner, "*Hooi Uncos*," that is, Away Strangers, a word used by shepherds when they bid their collies drive away strange sheep. Who the strangers were in this case may be guessed from her known Jacobite sentiments.

On his way from Clackmannan to Edinburgh he turned aside to see Loch Leven and its island castle, which had been the prison of the hapless Mary Stuart; and thence passing to the Norman Abbey Church of Dunfermline, with deep emotion he looked on the grave of Robert Bruce. At that time the choir of the old church, which had contained the grave, had been long demolished, and the new structure which now covers it had not yet been thought of. The sacred spot was only marked by two broad flagstones, on which Burns knelt and kissed them, reproaching the while the barbarity that had so dishonoured the resting-place of Scotland's hero king. Then, with that sudden change of mood so characteristic of him, he passed within the ancient church, and mounting the pulpit, addressed to his companion, who had, at his desire, mounted the cutty stool, or seat of repentance, a parody of the rebuke which he himself had undergone some time before at Mauchline.

CHAPTER IV.

SECOND WINTER IN EDINBURGH.

These summer and autumn wanderings ended, Burns returned to Edinburgh, and spent there the next five months, from the latter part of October, 1787, till the end of March, 1788, in a way which to any man, much more to such an one as he, could give small satisfaction. The ostensible cause of his lingering in Edinburgh was to obtain a settlement with his procrastinating publisher, Creech, because, till this was effected, he had no money with which to enter on the contemplated farm, or on any other regular way of life. Probably in thus wasting his time, Burns may have been influenced more than he himself was aware, by a secret hope that something might yet be done for him—that all the smiles lavished on him by the great and powerful could not possibly mean nothing, and that he should be left to drudge on in poverty and obscurity as before.

During this winter Burns changed his quarters from Richmond's lodging in High Street, where he had lived during the former winter, to a house then marked 2, now 30, St. James's Square in the New Town. There he lived with a Mr. Cruikshank, a colleague of his friend Nicol in the High School, and there he continued to reside till he left Edinburgh. More than once he paid brief visits to Nithsdale, and examined again and yet again the farm on

the Dalswinton property, on which he had long had his eye. This was his only piece of serious business during those months. The rest of his time was spent more or less in the society of his jovial companions. We hear no more during this second winter of his meetings with literary professors, able advocates and judges, or fashionable ladies. His associates seem to have been rather confined to men of the Ainslie and Nicol stamp. He would seem also to have amused himself with flirtations with several young heroines, whose acquaintance he had made during the previous summer. The chief of these were two young ladies, Miss Margaret Chalmers and Miss Charlotte Hamilton, cousins of each other, and relatives of his Mauchline friend, Gavin Hamilton. These he had met during the two visits which he paid to Harvieston, on the River Devon, where they were living for a time. On his return to Edinburgh he continued to correspond with them both, and to address songs of affection, if not of love, now to one, now to another. To Charlotte Hamilton he addressed the song beginning—

"How pleasant the banks of the clear winding Devon;"

To Miss Chalmers, one with the opening lines—

"Where, braving angry winter's storms,
The lofty Ochils rise;"

And another beginning thus—

"My Peggy's face, my Peggy's form."

Which of these young ladies was foremost in Burns's affection, it is not easy now to say, nor does it much signify. To both he wrote some of his best letters, and some of not his best verses. Allan Cunningham thinks that he had

serious affection for Miss Hamilton. The latest editor of his works asserts that his heart was set on Miss Chalmers, and that she, long afterwards in her widowhood, told Thomas Campbell, the poet, that Burns had made a proposal of marriage to her. However this may be, it is certain that while both admitted him to friendship, neither encouraged his advances. They were better "advised than to do so." Probably they knew too much of his past history and his character to think of him as a husband. Both were soon after this time married to men more likely to make them happy than the erratic poet. When they turned a deaf ear to his addresses, he wrote: "My rhetoric seems to have lost all its effect on the lovely half of mankind; I have seen the day—but that is a tale of other years. In my conscience, I believe that my heart has been so often on fire that it has been vitrified!" Well perhaps for him if it had been so, such small power had he to guide it. Just about the time when he found himself rejected, notwithstanding all his fine letters and his verses, by the two young ladies on Devon banks, he met with an accident through the upsetting of a hackney-coach by a drunken driver. The fall left him with a bruised limb, which confined him to his room from the 7th of December till the middle of February (1788).

During these weeks he suffered much from low spirits, and the letters which he then wrote under the influence of that hypochondria and despondency contain some of the gloomiest bursts of discontent with himself and with the world, which he ever gave vent to either in prose or verse. He describes himself as the "sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and Bedlam passions. I wish I were dead, but I'm no like to die. . . . I fear I am something like un-

done; but I hope for the best. Come, stubborn Pride and unshrinking Resolution; accompany me through this to me miserable world! I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life, as an officer resigns a commission; for I would not take in any poor wretch by selling out. Lately I was a sixpenny private, and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough; now I march to the campaign, a starving cadet—a little more conspicuously wretched."

But his late want of success on the banks of Devon, and his consequent despondency, were alike dispelled from his thoughts by a new excitement. Just at the time when he met with his accident, he had made the acquaintance of a certain Mrs. M'Lehose, and acquaintance all at once became a violent attachment on both sides. This lady had been deserted by her husband, who had gone to the West Indies, leaving her in poverty and obscurity to bring up two young boys as best she might. We are told that she was "of a somewhat voluptuous style of beauty, of lively and easy manners, of a poetical fabric of mind, with some wit, and not too high a degree of refinement or delicacy—exactly the kind of woman to fascinate Burns." Fascinated he certainly was. On the 30th December he writes: "Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom, and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow, who has wit and wisdom more murderously fatal than the assassinating stiletto of the Sicilian bandit, or the poisoned arrow of the savage African." For several months his visits to her house were frequent, his letters unremitting. The sentimental correspondence which they began, in which Burns addresses her as Clarinda, assuming to himself the name of Sylvander, has been published separately, and become notorious. Though this correspondence may contain, as Lockhart says, "passages

of deep and noble feeling, which no one but Burns could have penned," it cannot be denied that it contains many more of such fustian, such extravagant bombast, as Burns or any man beyond twenty might well have been ashamed to write. One could wish that for the poet's sake this correspondence had never been preserved. It is so humiliating to read this torrent of falsetto sentiment now, and to think that a man gifted like Burns should have poured it forth. How far his feelings towards Clarinda were sincere, or how far they were wrought up to amuse his vacancy by playing at love-making, it is hard to say. Blended with a profusion of forced compliments and unreal raptures, there are expressions in Burns's letters which one cannot but believe that he meant in earnest, at the moment when he wrote them. Clarinda, it would seem, must have regarded Burns as a man wholly disengaged, and have looked forward to the possible removal of Mr. M'Lehose, and with him of the obstacle to a union with Burns. How far he may have really shared the same hopes it is impossible to say. We only know that he used again and again language of deepest devotion, vowing to "love Clarinda to death, through death, and for ever."

While this correspondence between Sylvander and Clarinda was in its highest flight of rapture, Burns received, in January or February, 1788, news from Mauchline which greatly agitated him. His renewed intercourse with Jean Armour had resulted in consequences which again stirred her father's indignation; this time so powerfully, that he turned his daughter to the door. Burns provided a shelter for her under the roof of a friend; but for a time he does not seem to have thought of doing more than this. Whether he regarded the original private marriage as entirely dissolved, and looked on himself as an unmarried

man, does not quite appear. Anyhow, he and Clarinda, who knew all that had passed with regard to Jean Armour, seem to have then thought that enough had been done for the seemingly discarded Mauchline damsel, and to have carried on their correspondence as rapturously as ever for fully another six weeks, until the 21st of March (1788). On that day Sylvander wrote to Clarinda a final letter, pledging himself to everlasting love, and following it by a copy of verses beginning—

"Fair empress of the poet's soul,"

presenting her at the same time with a pair of wine-glasses as a parting gift.

On the 24th of March, he turned his back on Edinburgh, and never returned to it for more than a day's visit.

Before leaving town, however, he had arranged three pieces of business, all bearing closely on his future life. First, he had secured for himself an appointment in the Excise through the kindness of "Lang Sandy Wood," the surgeon who attended him when laid up with a bruised limb, and who had interceded with Mr. Graham of Fintray, the chief of the Excise Board, on Burns's behalf. When he received his appointment, he wrote to Miss Chalmers, "I have chosen this, my dear friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of fortune's palace shall we enter in, but what doors does she open for us. I was not likely to get anything to do. I got this without hanging-on, or mortifying solicitation; it is immediate bread, and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life."

Next, he had concluded a bargain with Mr. Miller of Dalswinton, to lease his farm of Ellisland, on which he

had long set his heart, and to which he had paid several visits in order to inspect it.

Lastly, he had at last obtained a business settlement with Creech regarding the Second Edition of his Poems. Before this was effected, Burns had more than once lost his temper, and let Creech know his mind. Various accounts have been given of the profits that now accrued to Burns from the whole transaction. We cannot be far wrong in taking the estimate at which Dr. Chambers arrived, for on such a matter he could speak with authority. He sets down the poet's profits at as nearly as possible 500*l.* Of this sum Burns gave 180*l.* to his brother Gilbert, who was now in pecuniary trouble. "I give myself no airs on this," he writes, "for it was mere selfishness on my part; I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour, might help to smooth matters at the grand reckoning." This money was understood by the family to be the provision due from Robert on behalf of his mother, the support of whom he was, now that he was setting up for himself, about to throw on his younger brother. Chambers seems to reckon that as another 120*l.* must have been spent by Burns on his tours, his accident, and his sojourn in Edinburgh since October, he could not have more than 200*l.* over, with which to set up at Ellisland. We see in what terms Burns had written to Clarinda on the 21st of March. On his leaving Edinburgh and returning to Ayrshire, he married Jean Armour, and forthwith acknowledged her in letters as his wife. This was in April, though it was not till August that he and Jean appeared before the Kirk-Session, and were formally recognized as man and wife by the Church.

Whether, in taking this step, Burns thought that he was carrying out a legal, as well as a moral, obligation, we know not. The interpreters of the law now assert that the original marriage in 1786 had never been dissolved, and that the destruction of the promissory lines, and the temporary disownment of him by Jean and her family, could not in any way invalidate it. Indeed, after all that had happened, for Burns to have deserted Jean, and married another, even if he legally could have done so, would have been the basest infidelity. Amid all his other errors and inconsistencies—and no doubt there were enough of these—we cannot but be glad for the sake of his good name that he now acted the part of an honest man, and did what he could to repair the much suffering and shame he had brought on his frail but faithful Jean.

As to the reasons which determined Burns to marry Jean Armour, and not another, this is the account he himself gives when writing to Mrs. Dunlop, one of his most trusted correspondents, to whom he spoke out his real heart in a simpler, more natural way, than was usual with him in letter-writing:

"You are right that a bachelor state would have ensured me more friends; but, from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number. I found a once much-loved, and still much-loved, female, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements; but I enabled her to purchase a shelter;—there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery. The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me; vigorous health and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best ad-

vantage by a more than commonly handsome figure: these, I think, in a woman may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, nor have danced in a brighter assembly than a penny pay wedding."

To Miss Chalmers he says:

"I have married my Jean. I had a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposit, nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tittle-tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disquieted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the country. . . . A certain late publication of Scots poems she has perused very devoutly, and all the ballads in the country, as she has the finest wood-note wild I ever heard."

There have been many comments on this turning-point in Burns's life. Some have given him high praise for it, as though he had done a heroic thing in voluntarily sacrificing himself, when it might have been open to him to form a much higher connexion. But all such praise seems entirely thrown away. It was not, as it appears, open to him to form any other marriage legally; certainly it was not open to him morally. The remark of Lockhart is entirely true, that, "had he hesitated to make her his wife, whom he loved, and who was the mother of his children, he must have sunk into the callousness of a ruffian." Lockhart need hardly have added, "or into that misery of miseries, the remorse of a poet."

But even had law and morality allowed him to pass by Jean—which they did not—would it have been well for

Burns, if he had sought, as one of his biographers regrets that he had not done, a wife among ladies of higher rank and more refined manners? That he could appreciate what these things imply, is evident from his own confession in looking back on his introduction to what is called society: "A refined and accomplished woman was a being altogether new to me, and of which I had formed a very inadequate idea." It requires but little knowledge of the world and its ways to see the folly of all such regrets. Great disparity of condition in marriage seldom answers. And in the case of a wayward, moody man, with the pride, the poverty, and the irregularities of Burns, and the drudging toil which must needs await his wife, it is easy to see what misery such a marriage would have stored up for both. As it was, the marriage he made was, to put it at the lowest, one of the most prudent acts of his life. Jean proved to be all, and indeed more than all, he anticipates in the letters above given. During the eight years of their married life, according to all testimony, she did her part as a wife and mother with the most patient and placid fidelity, and bore the trials which her husband's irregular habits entailed on her, with the utmost long-suffering. And after his death, during her long widowhood, she revered his memory, and did her utmost to maintain the honour of his name.

With his marriage to his Ayrshire wife, Burns had bid farewell to Edinburgh, and to whatever high hopes it may have at any time kindled within him, and had returned to a condition somewhat nearer to that in which he was born. With what feelings did he pass from this brilliant interlude, and turn the corner which led him back to the dreary road of commonplace drudgery, which he hoped to have escaped? There can be little doubt that his feelings were

those of bitter disappointment. There had been, it is said, a marked contrast between the reception he had met with during his first and second winters in Edinburgh. As Allan Cunningham says, "On his first appearance the doors of the nobility opened spontaneously, 'on golden hinges turning,' and he ate spiced meats and drank rare wines, interchanging nods and smiles with high dukes and mighty earls. A colder reception awaited his second coming. The doors of lords and ladies opened with a tardy courtesy; he was received with a cold and measured stateliness, was seldom requested to stop, seldomer to repeat his visit; and one of his companions used to relate with what indignant feeling the poet recounted his fruitless calls and his uncordial receptions in the good town of Edinburgh. . . . He went to Edinburgh strong in the belief that genius such as his would raise him in society; he returned not without a sourness of spirit and a bitterness of feeling."

When he did give vent to his bitterness, it was not into man's, but into woman's sympathetic ear that he poured his complaint. It is thus he writes, some time after settling at Ellisland, to Mrs. Dunlop, showing how fresh was still the wound within. "When I skulk into a corner lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim, 'What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some previous state of existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the keys of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride? . . . Often as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in

proportion to his own conceit of his own consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a prospect-glass.'"

This is a feeling which Burns has uttered in many a form of prose and verse, but which probably never possessed him more bitterly than when he retired from Edinburgh. Many persons in such circumstances may have felt thoughts of this kind pass over them for a moment. But they have felt ashamed of them as they rose, and have at once put them by. Burns no doubt had a severer trial in this way than most, but he never could overcome it, never ceased to chafe at that inequality of conditions which is so strongly fixed in the system in which we find ourselves.

It was natural that he should have felt some bitterness at the changed countenance which Edinburgh society turned on him, and it is easy to be sarcastic on the upper ranks of that day for turning it: but were they really so much to blame? There are many cases under the present order of things, in which we are constrained to say, "It must needs be that offences come." Taking men and things as they are, could it well have been otherwise?

First, the novelty of Burns's advent had worn off by his second winter in Edinburgh, and, though it may be a weakness, novelty always counts for something in human affairs. Then, again, the quiet, decorous men of Blair's circle knew more of Burns's ways and doings than at first, and what they came to know was not likely to increase their desire for intimacy with him. It was, it seems, notorious that Burns kept that formidable memorandum-book already alluded to, in which he was supposed to sketch with unsparing hand, "stern likenesses" of his friends and benefactors. So little of a secret did he make

of this, that we are told he sometimes allowed a visitor to have a look at the figures which he had sketched in his portrait-gallery. The knowledge that such a book existed was not likely to make Blair and his friends more desirous of his society.

Again, the festivities at the Crochallan Club and other such haunts, the habits he there indulged in, and the associates with whom he consorted, these were well known. And it was not possible that either the ways, the conversation, or the cronies of the Crochallan Club could be welcomed in quieter and more polished circles. Men of the Ainslie and Nicol stamp would hardly have been quite in place there.

Again—what is much to the honour of Burns—he never, in the highest access of his fame, abated a jot of his intimacy and friendship towards the men of his own rank, with whom he had been associated in his days of obscurity. These were tradesmen, farmers, and peasants. The thought of them, their sentiments, their prejudices and habits, if it had been possible, their very persons, he would have taken with him, without disguise or apology, into the highest circles of rank or of literature. But this might not be. It was impossible that Burns could take Mauchline with its belles, its Poosie-Nansies and its Souter Johnnies, bodily into the library of Dr. Blair or the drawing-room of Gordon Castle.

A man, to whom it is open, must make his choice; but he cannot live at once in two different and widely sundered orders of society. To no one is it given, not even to men of genius great as that of Burns, for himself and his family entirely to overleap the barriers with which custom and the world have hedged us in, and to weld the extremes of

society into one. To the speculative as well as to the practically humane man, the great inequality in human conditions presents, no doubt, a perplexing problem. A little less worldly pride, and a little more Christian wisdom and humility, would probably have helped Burns to solve it better than he did. But besides the social grievance, which though impalpable is very real, Burns had another more material and tangible. The great whom he had met in Edinburgh, whose castles he had visited in the country, might have done something to raise him at once above poverty and toil, and they did little or nothing. They had, indeed, subscribed liberally for his Second Edition, and they had got him a gauger's post, with fifty or sixty pounds a year—that was all. What more could they, ought they to have done? To have obtained him an office in some one of the higher professions was not to be thought of, for a man cannot easily, at the age of eight-and-twenty, change his whole line and adapt himself to an entirely new employment. The one thing they might have combined to do, was to have compelled Dundas, or some other of the men then in power, to grant Burns a pension from the public purse. That was the day of pensions, and hundreds with no claim to compare with Burns's were then on the pension list: 300*l.* a year would have sufficed to place him in comfort and independence; and could public money have been better spent? But though the most rigid economist might not have objected, would Burns have accepted such a benefaction, had it been offered? And if he had accepted it, would he not have chafed under the obligation, more even than he did in the absence of it? Such questions as these cannot but arise, as often as we think over the fate of Burns, and ask ourselves if nothing

could have been done to avert it. Though natural, they are vain. Things hold on their own course to their inevitable issues, and Burns left Edinburgh, and set his face first towards Ayrshire, then to Nithsdale, a saddened and embittered man.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT ELLISLAND.

"Mr. Burns, you have made a poet's not a farmer's choice." Such was the remark of Allan Cunningham's father, land-steward to the laird of Dalswinton, when the poet turned from the low-lying and fertile farm of Foregirth, which Cunningham had recommended to him, and selected for his future home the farm of Ellisland. He was taken by the beautiful situation and fine romantic outlook of the poorest of several farms on the Dalswinton estate which were in his option. Ellisland lies on the western bank of the River Nith, about six miles above Dumfries. Looking from Ellisland eastward across the river, "a pure stream running there over the purest gravel," you see the rich holms and noble woods of Dalswinton. Dalswinton is an ancient historic place, which has even within recorded memory more than once changed its mansion-house and its proprietor. To the west the eye falls on the hills of Dunscore, and looking northward up the Nith, the view is bounded by the heights that shut in the river towards Drumlanrig, and by the high conical hill of Corsincon, at the base of which the infant stream slips from the shire of Ayr into that of Dumfries. The farmsteading of Ellisland stands but a few yards to the west of the Nith. Immediately underneath there is a red scaur of considerable height, overhanging the stream, and the rest

of the bank is covered with broom, through which winds a greensward path, whither Burns used to retire to meditate his songs. The farm extends to upwards of a hundred acres, part holm, part croft-land, of which the former yielded good wheat, the latter oats and potatoes. The lease was for nineteen years, and the rent fifty pounds for the first three years; seventy for the rest of the tack. The laird of Dalswinton, while Burns leased Ellisland, was Mr. Patrick Millar, not an ordinary laird, but one well known in his day for his scientific discoveries. There was no proper farm-house or offices on the farm—it was part of the bargain that Burns should build these for himself. The want of a house made it impossible for him to settle at once on his farm. His bargain for it had been concluded early in March (1788); but it was not till the 13th of June that he went to reside at Ellisland. In the interval between these two dates he went to Ayrshire, and completed privately, as we have seen, the marriage, the long postponement of which had caused him so much disquiet. With however great disappointment and chagrin he may have left Edinburgh, the sense that he had now done the thing that was right, and had the prospect of a settled life before him, gave him for a time a peace and even gladness of heart, to which he had for long been a stranger. We can, therefore, well believe what he tells us, that, when he had left Edinburgh, he journeyed towards Mauchline with as much gaiety of heart "as a May-frog, leaping across the newly-harrowed ridge, enjoying the fragrance of the refreshed earth after the long-expected shower." Of what may be called the poet's marriage settlement, we have the following details from Allan Cunningham:

"His marriage reconciled the poet to his wife's kindred: there was no wedding portion. Armour was a

respectable man, but not opulent. He gave his daughter some small store of plenishing; and, exerting his skill as a mason, wrought his already eminent son-in-law a handsome punch-bowl in Inverary marble, which Burns lived to fill often, to the great pleasure both of himself and his friends. . . . Mrs. Dunlop bethought herself of Ellisland, and gave a beautiful heifer; another friend contributed a plough. The young couple, from love to their native county, ordered their furniture from a wright in Mauchline; the farm-servants, male and female, were hired in Ayrshire, a matter of questionable prudence, for the mode of cultivation is different from that of the west, and the cold, humid bottom of Mossgiel bears no resemblance to the warm and stony loam of Ellisland."

When on the 13th June he went to live on his farm, he had, as there was no proper dwelling-house on it, to leave Jean and her one surviving child behind him at Mauchline, and himself to seek shelter in a mere hovel on the skirts of the farm. "I remember the house well," says Cunningham, "the floor of clay, the rafters japanned with soot, the smoke from a hearth-fire streamed thickly out at door and window, while the sunshine which struggled in at those apertures produced a sort of twilight." Burns thus writes to Mrs. Dunlop, "A solitary inmate of an old smoky spence, far from every object I love or by whom I am beloved; nor any acquaintance older than yesterday, except Jenny Geddes, the old mare I ride on, while uncouth cares and novel plans hourly insult my awkward ignorance and bashful inexperience." It takes a more even, better-ordered spirit than Burns's to stand such solitude. His heart, during those first weeks at Ellisland, entirely sank within him, and he saw all men and life coloured by his own despondency. This is the entry in his commonplace

book on the first Sunday he spent alone at Ellisland:—"I am such a coward in life, so tired of the service, that I would almost at any time, with Milton's Adam, 'gladly lay me in my mother's lap, and be at peace.' But a wife and children bind me to struggle with the stream, till some sudden squall shall overset the silly vessel, or in the listless return of years its own craziness reduce it to wreck."

The discomfort of his dwelling-place made him not only discontented with his lot, but also with the people amongst whom he found himself. "I am here," he writes, "on my farm; but for all the pleasurable part of life called social communication, I am at the very elbow of existence. The only things to be found in perfection in this country are stupidity and canting. . . . As for the Muses, they have as much idea of a rhinoceros as a poet."

When he was not in Ayrshire in bodily presence, he was there in spirit. It was at such a time that, looking up to the hills that divide Nithsdale from Ayrshire, he breathed to his wife that most natural and beautiful of all his love-lyrics—

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw
I dearly like the west,
For there the bonnie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best."

His disparagement of Nithsdale people, Allan Cunningham, himself a Dumfriesshire man, naturally resents, and accounts for it by supposing that the sooty hovel had infected his whole mental atmosphere. "The Maxwells, the Kirkpatricks, and Dalzells," exclaims honest Allan, "were fit companions for any man in Scotland, and they were almost his neighbours; Riddell of Friars Carse, an accomplished antiquarian, lived almost next door; and Jean

Lindsay and her husband, Patrick Millar, the laird of Dalswinton, were no ordinary people. The former, beautiful, accomplished, a writer of easy and graceful verses, with a natural dignity of manners which became her station; the latter an improver and inventor, the first who applied steam to the purposes of navigation." But Burns's hasty judgments of men and things, the result of momentary feeling, are not to be too literally construed.

He soon found that there was enough of sociality among all ranks of Dumfriesshire people, from the laird to the cotter, indeed, more than was good for himself. Yet, however much he may have complained, when writing letters to his correspondents of an evening, he was too manly to go moping about all day long when there was work to be done. He was, moreover, nerved to the task by the thought that he was preparing the home that was to shelter his wife and children. On the laying of the foundation-stone of his future house, he took off his hat and asked a blessing on it. "Did he ever put his own hand to the work?" was asked of one of the men engaged in it. "Ay, that he did, mony a time," was the answer; "if he saw us like to be beat wi' a big stane, he would cry, 'Bide a wee,' and come rinning. We soon found out when he put to his hand, he beat a' I ever met for a dour lift."

During his first harvest, though the weather was unfavourable, and the crop a poor one, we find Burns speaking in his letters of being industriously employed, and binding every day after the reapers. But Allan Cunningham's father, who had every opportunity of observing, used to allege that Burns seemed to him like a restless and unsettled man. "He was ever on the move, on foot or on horseback. In the course of a single day he might

be seen holding the plough, angling in the river, sauntering, with his hands behind his back, on the banks, looking at the running water, of which he was very fond, walking round his buildings or over his fields; and if you lost sight of him for an hour, perhaps you might see him returning from Friars Carse, or spurring his horse through the hills to spend an evening in some distant place with such friends as chance threw in his way." Before his new house was ready, he had many a long ride to and fro through the Cumnock hills to Mauchline, to visit Jean, and to return. It was not till the first week of December, 1788, that his lonely bachelor life came to an end, and that he was able to bring his wife and household to Nithsdale. Even then the house at Ellisland was not ready for his reception, and he and his family had to put up for a time in a neighbouring farm-house called the Isle. They brought with them two farm-lads from Ayrshire, and a servant lass called Elizabeth Smith, who was alive in 1851, and gave Chambers many details of the poet's way of life at Ellisland. Among these she told him that her father was so concerned about her moral welfare that, before allowing her to go, he made Burns promise to keep a strict watch over her behaviour, and to exercise her duly in the Shorter Catechism; and that both of these promises he faithfully fulfilled.

The advent of his wife and his child in the dark days of the year kept dulness aloof, and made him meet the coming of the new year (1789) with more cheerful hopes and calmer spirits than he had known for long. Alas, that these were doomed to be so short-lived!

On New-Year's morning, 1789, his brother Gilbert thus affectionately writes to the poet: "Dear Brother,—I have just finished my New-Year's Day breakfast in the usual

form, which naturally makes me call to mind the days of former years, and the society in which we used to begin them; and when I look at our family vicissitudes, 'through the dark postern of time long elapsed,' I cannot help remarking to you, my dear brother, how good the God of seasons is to us, and that, however some clouds may seem to lower over the portion of time before us, we have great reason to hope that all will turn out well." On the same New-Year's Day Burns addressed to Mrs. Dunlop a letter, which, though it has been often quoted, is too pleasing to be omitted here. "I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery. This day—the first Sunday of May—a breezy, blue-skied noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn—these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday. . . . We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that we should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which on minds of a different cast makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the fox-glove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild, mixing cadence of a troop of gray plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my

dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave!"

On reading this beautiful and suggestive letter, an ornithologist remarked that Burns had made a mistake in a fact of natural history. It is not the 'gray plover,' but the golden, whose music is heard on the moors in autumn. The gray plover, our accurate observer remarks, is a winter shore bird, found only at that season and in that habitat, in this country.

It was not till about the middle of 1789 that the farmhouse of Ellisland was finished, and that he and his family, leaving the Isle, went to live in it. When all was ready, Burns bade his servant, Betty Smith, take a bowl of salt, and place the Family Bible on the top of it, and, bearing these, walk first into the new house and possess it. He himself, with his wife on his arm, followed Betty and the Bible and the salt, and so they entered their new abode. Burns delighted to keep up old-world *freits* or usages like this. It was either on this occasion, or on his bringing Mrs. Burns to the Isle, that he held a house-heating mentioned by Allan Cunningham, to which all the neighbourhood gathered, and drank, "Luck to the roof-tree of the house of Burns!" The farmers and the well-to-do people welcomed him gladly, and were proud that such a man had come to be a dweller in their vale. Yet the ruder country lads and the lower peasantry, we are told, looked on him not without dread, "lest he should pickle

and preserve them in sarcastic song." "Once at a penny wedding, when one or two wild young lads quarrelled, and were about to fight, Burns rose up and said, 'Sit down and ——, or else I'll hang you up like potato-bogles in sang to-morrow.' They ceased, and sat down as if their noses had been bleeding."

The house which had cost Burns so much toil in building, and which he did not enter till about the middle of the year 1789, was a humble enough abode. Only a large kitchen, in which the whole family, master and servants, took their meals together, a room to hold two beds, a closet to hold one, and a garret, coom-ceiled, for the female servants, this made the whole dwelling-house. "One of the windows looked southward down the holms; another opened on the river; and the house stood so near the lofty bank, that its afternoon shadow fell across the stream, on the opposite fields. The garden or kail-yard was a little way from the house. A pretty footpath led southward along the river side, another ran northward, affording fine views of the Nith, the woods of Friars Carse, and the grounds of Dalswinton. Half-way down the steep declivity, a fine clear cool spring supplied water to the household." Such was the first home which Burns found for himself and his wife, and the best they were ever destined to find. The months spent in the Isle, and the few that followed the settlement at Ellisland, were among the happiest of his life. Besides trying his best to set himself to farm-industry, he was otherwise bent on well-doing. He had, soon after his arrival in Ellisland, started a parish library, both for his own use and to spread a love of literature among his neighbours, the portioners and peasants of Dunscore. When he first took up house at Ellisland, he used every evening when he was

at home, to gather his household for family worship, and, after the old Scottish custom, himself to offer up prayer in his own words. He was regular, if not constant, in his attendance at the parish church of Dunscore, in which a worthy minister, Mr. Kirkpatrick, officiated, whom he respected for his character, though he sometimes demurred to what seemed to him the too great sternness of his doctrine.

Burns and his wife had not been long settled in their newly-built farm-house, when prudence induced him to ask that he might be appointed Excise officer in the district in which he lived. This request Mr. Graham of Fintray, who had placed his name on the Excise list before he left Edinburgh, at once granted. The reasons that impelled Burns to this step were the increase of his family by the birth of a son in August, 1789, and the prospect that his second year's harvest would be a failure like the first. He often repeats that it was solely to make provision for his increasing family that he submitted to the degradation of—

> "Searching auld wives' barrels—
> Och, hon! the day!
> That clarty barm should stain my laurels,
> But—what 'ill ye say?
> These movin things, ca'd wives and weans,
> Wad move the very hearts o' stanes."

That he felt keenly the slur that attached to the name of gauger is certain, but it is honourable to him that he resolved bravely to endure it for the sake of his family.

"I know not," he writes, "how the word exciseman, or the still more opprobrious gauger, will sound in your ears. I, too, have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and

children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting this kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow, is no bad settlement for a poet."

In announcing to Dr. Blacklock his new employment, he says—

"But what d'ye think, my trusty fier,
I'm turned a gauger—Peace be here!
Parnassian queans, I fear, I fear,
Ye'll now disdain me!
And then my fifty pounds a year
Will little gain me.

* * * * *

"Ye ken, ye ken
That strang necessity supreme is
'Mang sons o' men.
I hae a wife and twa wee laddies,
They maun hae brose and brats o' duddies;
Ye ken yoursels my heart right proud is,
I need na vaunt,
But I'll sned besoms, thraw saugh woodies,
Before they want."

He would cut brooms and twist willow-ropes before his children should want. But perhaps, as the latest editor of Burns's poems observes, his best saying on the subject of the excisemanship was that word to Lady Glencairn, the mother of his patron, "I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed it from my profession."

In these words we see something of the bitterness about his new employment, which often escaped from him, both in prose and verse. Nevertheless, having undertaken it, he set his face honestly to the work. He had to survey ten parishes, covering a tract of not less than fifty miles each way, and requiring him to ride two hundred miles

a week. Smuggling was then common throughout Scotland, both in the shape of brewing and of selling beer and whiskey without licence. Burns took a serious yet humane view of his duty. To the regular smuggler he is said to have been severe; to the country folk, farmers or cotters, who sometimes transgressed, he tempered justice with mercy. Many stories are told of his leniency to these last. At Thornhill, on a fair day, he was seen to call at the door of a poor woman who for the day was doing a little illicit business on her own account. A nod and a movement of the forefinger brought the woman to the doorway. "Kate, are you mad? Don't you know that the supervisor and I will be in upon you in forty minutes?" Burns at once disappeared among the crowd, and the poor woman was saved a heavy fine. Another day the poet and a brother gauger entered a widow's house at Dunscore and seized a quantity of smuggled tobacco. "Jenny," said Burns, "I expected this would be the upshot. Here, Lewars, take note of the number of rolls as I count them. Now, Jock, did you ever hear an auld wife numbering her threads before check-reels were invented? Thou's ane, and thou's no ane, and thou's ane a'out — listen." As he handed out the rolls, and numbered them, old-wife fashion, he dropped every other roll into Jenny's lap. Lewars took the desired note with becoming gravity, and saw as though he saw not. Again, a woman who had been brewing, on seeing Burns coming with another exciseman, slipped out by the back door, leaving a servant and a little girl in the house. "Has there been ony brewing for the fair here the day?" "O no, sir, we hae nae licence for that," answered the servant maid. "That's no true," exclaimed the child; "the muckle black kist is fou' o' the bottles o' yill that my

mither sat up a' nicht brewing for the fair." . . . "We are in a hurry just now," said Burns, "but when we return from the fair, we'll examine the muckle black kist." In acts like these, and in many another anecdote that might be given, is seen the genuine human-heartedness of the man, in strange contrast with the bitternesses which so often find vent in his letters. Ultimately, as we shall see, the exciseman's work told heavily against his farming, his poetry, and his habits of life. But it was some time before this became apparent. The solitary rides through the moors and dales that border Nithsdale gave him opportunities, if not for composing long poems, at any rate for crooning over those short songs in which mainly his genius now found vent. "The visits of the muses to me," he writes, "and I believe to most of their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are short and far between; but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr."

Take as a sample some of the varying moods he passed through in the summer and autumn of 1789. In the May-time of that year an incident occurs, which the poet thus describes:—"One morning lately, as I was out pretty early in the fields, sowing some grass-seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came hirpling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when all of them have young ones. Indeed, there is something in the business of destroying, for our sport, individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue." The lad who fired the shot and roused the poet's indignation, was the son of a neighbouring farmer. Burns cursed him, and, being near

the Nith at the time, threatened to throw him into the river. He found, however, a more innocent vent for his feelings in the following lines:

"Inhuman man! curse on thy barbarous art,
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye!
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

"Go live, poor wanderer of the wood and field,
The bitter little that of life remains:
No more the thickening brakes and verdant plains
To thee shall home, or food, or pastime yield.

"Seek, mangled wretch, some place of wonted rest,
No more of rest, but now thy dying bed!
The sheltering rushes whistling o'er thy head,
The cold earth with thy bloody bosom prest.

"Perhaps a mother's anguish adds its woe;
The playful pair crowd fondly by thy side;
Ah! helpless nurslings, who will now provide
That life a mother only can bestow!

"Oft as by winding Nith, I, musing, wait
The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,
I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,
And curse the ruffian's aim, and mourn thy hapless fate."

This, which is one of the best of the very few good poems which Burns composed in classical English, is no mere sentimental effusion, but expresses what in him was a real part of his nature—his tender feeling towards his lower fellow-creatures. The same feeling finds expression in the lines on *The Mouse*, *The Auld Farmer's Address to his Mare*, and *The Winter Night*, when, as he sits by his fireside, and hears the storm roaring without, he says—

"I thought me on the ourie cattle,
Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle

O' wintry war.
Or thro' the drift, deep-lairing, sprattie,
Beneath a scaur.
Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That in the merry months o' spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Whare wilt thou cow'r thy chittering wing,
And close thy e'e?"

Though for a time, influenced by the advice of critics, Burns had tried to compose some poems according to the approved models of book-English, we find him presently reverting to his own Doric, which he had lately too much abandoned, and writing in good broad Scotch his admirably humorous description of Captain Grose, an Antiquary, whom he had met at Friars Carse:

"Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,
Frae Maidenkirk to Johnnie Groats—
If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede you tent it:
A chield's amang you, takin' notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it.

"By some auld, houlet-haunted biggin,
Or kirk deserted by its riggin,
It's ten to ane ye'll find him snug in
Some eldritch part,
Wi' deils, they say, Lord save's! colleagu'in'
At some black art.

"It's tauld he was a sodger bred,
And ane wad rather fa'n than fled;
But now he's quat the spurtle-blade,
And dog-skin wallet,
And taen the—Antiquarian trade,
I think they call it.

"He has a fouth o' auld nick-nackets:
Rusty airn caps, and jinglin' jackets,
Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets,
A towmont gude
And parritch-pats and auld saut-backets,
Before the Flood.

* * * * *

"Forbye, he'll shape you aff fu' gleg
The cut of Adam's philibeg;
The knife that nicket Abel's craig
He'll prove you fully,
It was a faulding jocteleg
Or lang-kail gullie."

The meeting with Captain Grose took place in the summer of 1789, and the stanzas just given were written probably about the same time. To the same date belongs his ballad called *The Kirk's Alarm*, in which he once more reverts to the defence of one of his old friends of the New Light school, who had got into the Church Courts, and was in jeopardy from the attacks of his more orthodox brethren. The ballad in itself has little merit, except as showing that Burns still clung to the same school of divines to which he had early attached himself. In September we find him writing in a more serious strain to Mrs. Dunlop, and suggesting thoughts which might console her in some affliction under which she was suffering. "... In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but when I reflected that I was opposing the most ardent wishes and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct."

That same September, Burns, with his friend Allan Masterton, crossed from Nithsdale to Annandale to visit their

common friend Nicol, who was spending his vacation in Moffatdale. They met and spent a night in Nicol's lodging. It was a small thatched cottage, near Craigieburn—a place celebrated by Burns in one of his songs—and stands on the right-hand side as the traveller passes up Moffatdale to Yarrow, between the road and the river. Few pass that way now without having the cottage pointed out as the place where the three merry comrades met that night.

"We had such a joyous meeting," Burns writes, "that Mr. Masterton and I agreed, each in our own way, that we should celebrate the business," and Burns's celebration of it was the famous bacchanalian song—

> "O, Willie brewed a peck o' maut,
> And Rob and Allan cam to pree."

If bacchanalian songs are to be written at all, this certainly must be pronounced "The king amang them a'." But while no one can withhold admiration from the genius and inimitable humour of the song, still we read it with very mingled feelings, when we think that perhaps it may have helped some topers since Burns's day a little faster on the road to ruin. As for the three boon-companions themselves, just ten years after that night, Currie wrote, "These three honest fellows—all men of uncommon talents—are now all under the turf." And in 1821, John Struthers, a Scottish poet little known, but of great worth and some genius, thus recurs to Currie's words:—

> "Nae mair in learning Willie toils, nor Allan wakes the melting lay,
> Nor Rab, wi' fancy-witching wiles, beguiles the hour o' dawning day;
> For tho' they were na very fou, that wicked wee drap in the e'e
> Has done its turn; untimely now the green grass waves o'er a' the three."

Willie brewed a Peck o' Maut was soon followed by another bacchanalian effusion, the ballad called *The Whistle.* Three lairds, all neighbours of Burns at Ellisland, met at Friars Carse on the 16th of October, 1789, to contend with each other in a drinking-bout. The prize was an ancient ebony whistle, said to have been brought to Scotland in the reign of James the Sixth by a Dane, who, after three days and three nights' contest in hard drinking, was overcome by Sir Robert Laurie, of Maxwelton, with whom the whistle remained as a trophy. It passed into the Riddell family, and now in Burns's time it was to be again contested for in the same rude orgie. Burns was appointed the bard to celebrate the contest. Much discussion has been carried on by his biographers as to whether Burns was present or not. Some maintain that he sat out the drinking-match, and shared the deep potations. Others, and among these his latest editor, Mr. Scott Douglas, maintain that he was not present that night in body, but only in spirit. Anyhow, the ballad remains a monument, if not of his genius, at least of his sympathy with that ancient but now happily exploded form of good fellowship.

This "mighty claret-shed at the Carse," and the ballad commemorative of it, belong to the 16th of October, 1789. It must have been within a few days of that merry-meeting that Burns fell into another and very different mood, which has recorded itself in an immortal lyric. It would seem that from the year 1786 onwards, a cloud of melancholy generally gathered over the poet's soul toward the end of each autumn. This October, as the anniversary of Highland Mary's death drew on, he was observed by his wife to "grow sad about something, and to wander solitary on the banks of Nith, and about his farm-yard, in the extremest agitation of mind nearly the whole night. He

screened himself on the lee-side of a corn-stack from the cutting edge of the night wind, and lingered till approaching dawn wiped out the stars, one by one, from the firmament." Some more details Lockhart has added, said to have been received from Mrs. Burns, but these the latest editor regards as mythical. However this may be, it would appear that it was only after his wife had frequently entreated him, that he was persuaded to return to his home, where he sat down and wrote, as they now stand, these pathetic lines:

"Thou lingering star, with lessening ray,
That lovest to greet the early morn,
Again thou usherest in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

That Burns should have expressed, in such rapid succession, the height of drunken revelry in *Willie brewed a Peck o' Maut* and in the ballad of *The Whistle*, and then the depth of despondent regret in the lines *To Mary in Heaven*, is highly characteristic of him. To have many moods belongs to the poetic nature, but no poet ever passed more rapidly than Burns from one pole of feeling to its very opposite. Such a poem as this last could not possibly have proceeded from any but the deepest and most genuine feeling. Once again, at the same season, three years later (1792), his thoughts went back to Highland Mary, and he poured forth his last sad wail for her in the simpler, not less touching song, beginning—

"Ye banks, and braes, and streams around
The castle o' Montgomery!

Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drumlie;
There simmer first unfauld her robes,
And there the langest tarry;
For there I took the last Fareweel
O' my sweet Highland Mary."

It would seem as though these retrospects were always accompanied by special despondency. For, at the very time he composed this latter song, he wrote thus to his faithful friend, Mrs. Dunlop:

"Alas! who would wish for many years? What is it but to drag existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery, like the gloom which blots out the stars, one by one, from the face of heaven, and leaves us without a ray of comfort in the howling waste?"

To fits of hypochondria and deep dejection he had, as he himself tells us, been subject from his earliest manhood, and he attributes to overtoil in boyhood this tendency which was probably a part of his natural temperament. To a disposition like his, raptures, exaltations, agonies, came as naturally as a uniform neutral-tinted existence to more phlegmatic spirits. But we may be sure that every cause of self-reproach which his past life had stored up in his memory tended to keep him more and more familiar with the lower pole in that fluctuating scale.

Besides these several poems which mark the variety of moods which swept over him during the summer and autumn of 1789, there was also a continual succession of songs on the anvil in preparation for *Johnson's Museum*. This work of song-making, begun during his second winter in Edinburgh, was carried on with little intermission during all the Ellisland period. The songs were on all kinds of subjects, and of all degrees of excellence, but

hardly one, even the most trivial, was without some small touch which could have come from no hand but that of Burns. Sometimes they were old songs with a stanza or two added. Oftener an old chorus or single line was taken up, and made the hint out of which a new and original song was woven. At other times they were entirely original both in subject and in expression, though cast in the form of the ancient minstrelsy. Among so many and so rapidly succeeding efforts, it was only now and then, when a happier moment of inspiration was granted him, that there came forth one song of supreme excellence, perfect alike in conception and in expression. The consummate song of this summer (1789) was *John Anderson my Joe, John*, just as *Auld Lang Syne* and *The Silver Tassie* had been those of the former year.

During the remainder of the year 1789 Burns seems to have continued more or less in the mood of mind indicated by the lines *To Mary in Heaven*. He was suffering from nervous derangement, and this, as usual with him, made him despondent. This is the way in which he writes to Mrs. Dunlop on the 13th December, 1789:

"I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous system—a system, the state of which is most conducive to our happiness, or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous headache, that I have been obliged for a time to give up my Excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir parishes. What is man? . . ."

And then he goes on to moralize in a half-believing, half-doubting kind of way, on the probability of a life to come, and ends by speaking of, or rather apostrophizing, Jesus Christ in a strain which would seem to savour of So-

cinianism. This letter he calls "a distracted scrawl which the writer dare scarcely read." And yet it appears to have been deliberately copied with some amplification from an entry in his last year's commonplace-book. Even the few passages from his correspondence already given are enough to show that there was in Burns's letter-writing something strained and artificial. But such discoveries as this seem to reveal an extent of effort, and even of artifice, which one would hardly otherwise have guessed at.

In the same strain of harassment as the preceding extract, but pointing to another and more definite cause of it, is the following, written on the 20th December, 1789, to Provost Maxwell of Lochmaben:

"My poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked and bedevilled with the task of the superlatively damned, to make one guinea do the business of three, that I detest, abhor, and swoon at the very word business, though no less than four letters of my very short surname are in it." The rest of the letter goes off in a wild rollicking strain, inconsistent enough with his more serious thoughts. But the part of it above given points to a very real reason for his growing discontent with Ellisland.

By the beginning of 1790 the hopelessness of his farming prospects pressed on him still more heavily, and formed one ingredient in the mental depression with which he saw a new year dawn. Whether he did wisely in attempting the Excise business, who shall now say? In one respect it seemed a substantial gain. But this gain was accompanied by counterbalancing disadvantages. The new duties more and more withdrew him from the farm, which, in order to give it any chance of paying, required not only the aid of the master's hand, but the undivided oversight of the master's eye. In fact, farming to profit and Excise-work were

incompatible, and a very few months' trial must have convinced Burns of this. But besides rendering regular farm industry impossible, the weekly absences from home, which his new duties entailed, had other evil consequences. They brought with them continual mental distraction, which forbade all sustained poetic effort, and laid him perilously open to indulgences which were sure to undermine regular habits and peace of mind. About this time (the beginning of 1790), we begin to hear of frequent visits to Dumfries on Excise business, and of protracted lingerings at a certain *howff*, place of resort, called the Globe Tavern, which boded no good. There were also intromissions with a certain company of players then resident in Dumfries, and writings of such prologues for their second-rate pieces, as many a penny-a-liner could have done to order as well. Political ballads, too, came from his pen, siding with this or that party in local elections, all which things as we read, we feel as if we saw some noble high-bred racer harnessed to a dust-cart.

His letters during the first half of 1790 betoken the same restless, unsatisfied spirit as those written towards the end of the previous year. Only we must be on our guard against interpreting his real state of mind too exclusively from his letters. For it seems to have been his habit when writing to his friends to take one mood of mind, which happened to be uppermost in him for the moment, and with which he knew that his correspondent sympathized, and to dwell on this so exclusively that for the moment it filled his whole mental horizon, and shut out every other thought. And not this only, which is the tendency of all ardent and impulsive natures, but we cannot altogether excuse Burns of at times half-consciously exaggerating these momentary moods, almost for certain

stage effects which they produced. It is necessary, therefore, in estimating his real condition at any time, to set against the account, which he gives of himself in his letters, the evidence of other facts, such as the testimony of those who met him from time to time, and who have left some record of those interviews. This I shall now do for the first half of the year 1790, and shall place, over against his self-revelations, some observations which show how he at this time appeared to others.

An intelligent man named William Clark, who had served Burns as a ploughman at Ellisland during the winter half-year of 1789–90, survived till 1838, and in his old age gave this account of his former master: "Burns kept two men and two women servants, but he invariably when at home took his meals with his wife and family in the little parlour." Clark thought he was as good a manager of land as most of the farmers in the neighbourhood. The farm of Ellisland was moderately rented, and was susceptible of much improvement, had improvement been then in repute. Burns sometimes visited the neighbouring farmers, and they returned the compliment; but that way of spending time was not so common then as now. No one thought that the poet and his writings would be so much noticed afterwards. He kept nine or ten milch cows, some young cattle, four horses, and several pet sheep: of the latter he was very fond. During the winter and spring-time, when not engaged in Excise business, "he sometimes held the plough for an hour or two for him (W. Clark), and was a fair workman. During seed-time, Burns might be frequently seen at an early hour in the fields with his sowing sheet; but as he was often called away on business, he did not sow the whole of his grain."

This old man went on to describe Burns as a kindly and

indulgent master, who spoke familiarly to his servants, both at home and a-field; quick-tempered when anything put him out, but quickly pacified. Once only Clark saw him really angry, when one of the lasses had nearly choked one of the cows by giving her potatoes not cut small enough. Burns's looks, gestures, and voice were then terrible. Clark slunk out of the way, and when he returned, his master was quite calm again. When there was extra work to be done, he would give his servants a dram, but he was by no means *over-flush* in this way. During the six months of his service, Clark never once saw Burns intoxicated or incapable of managing his business. The poet, when at home, used to wear a broad blue bonnet, a long-tailed coat, drab or blue, corduroy breeches, dark blue stockings, with *cootikens* or gaiters. In cold weather he would have a plaid of black and white check wrapped round his shoulders. The same old man describes Mrs. Burns as a good and prudent housewife, keeping everything neat and tidy, well liked by her servants, for whom she provided good and abundant fare. When they parted, Burns paid Clark his wages in full, gave him a written character, and a shilling for a *fairing*.

In the summer or autumn of the same year the scholarly Ramsay of Ochtertyre in the course of a tour looked in on Burns, and here is the record of his visit which Ramsay gave in a letter to Currie. "Seeing him pass quickly near Closeburn, I said to my companion, 'That is Burns.' On coming to the inn, the hostler told us he would be back in a few hours to grant permits; that where he met with anything seizable, he was no better than any other gauger; in everything else that he was perfectly a gentleman. After leaving a note to be delivered to him on his return, I proceeded to his house, being curious to see his

Jean. I was much pleased with his 'uxor Sabina qualis,' and the poet's modest mansion, so unlike the habitation of ordinary rustics. In the evening he suddenly bounced in upon us, and said, as he entered, 'I come, to use the words of Shakespeare, *stewed in haste*.' In fact, he had ridden incredibly fast after receiving my note. We fell into conversation directly, and soon got into the *mare magnum* of poetry. He told me he had now gotten a subject for a drama, which he was to call *Rob McQuechan's Elshin*, from a popular story of Robert Bruce being defeated on the water of Cairn, when the heel of his boot having loosened in his flight, he applied to Robert MacQuechan to fit it, who, to make sure, ran his awl nine inches up the king's heel. We were now going on at a great rate, when Mr. Stewart popped in his head, which put a stop to our discourse, which had become very interesting. Yet in a little while it was resumed, and such was the force and versatility of the bard's genius, that he made the tears run down Mr. Stewart's cheeks, albeit unused to the poetic strain. From that time we met no more, and I was grieved at the reports of him afterwards. Poor Burns! we shall hardly ever see his like again. He was, in truth, a sort of comet in literature, irregular in its motions, which did no good, proportioned to the blaze of light it displayed."

It seems that during this autumn there came a momentary blink in Burns's clouded sky, a blink which, alas! never brightened into full sunshine. He had been but a year in the Excise employment, when, through the renewed kindness of Mr. Graham of Fintray, there seemed a near prospect of his being promoted to a supervisorship, which would have given him an income of 200*l.* a year. So probable at the time did it seem, that his friend Nicol wrote to Ainslie expressing some fears that the poet might

turn his back on his old friends when to the pride of applauded genius was added the pride of office and income. This may have been ironical on Nicol's part, but he might have spared his irony on his friend, for the promotion never came.

But what had Burns been doing for the last year in poetic production? In this respect the whole interval between the composition of the lines *To Mary in Heaven*, in October, 1789, and the autumn of the succeeding year, is almost a blank. Three electioneering ballads, besides a few trivial pieces, make up the whole. There is not a line written by him during this year which, if it were deleted from his works, would anyway impair his poetic fame. But this long barrenness was atoned for by a burst of inspiration which came on him in the fall of 1790, and struck off at one heat the matchless *Tale of Tam o' Shanter*. It was to the meeting already noticed of Burns with Captain Grose, the antiquary, at Friars Carse, that we owe this wonderful poem. The poet and the antiquary suited each other exactly, and they soon became

"Unco pack and thick thegither."

Burns asked his friend, when he reached Ayrshire, to make a drawing of Alloway kirk, and include it in his sketches, for it was dear to him because it was the resting-place of his father, and there he himself might some day lay his bones. To induce Grose to do this, Burns told him that Alloway kirk was the scene of many witch stories and weird sights. The antiquary replied, "Write you a poem on the scene, and I'll put in the verses with an engraving of the ruin." Burns having found a fitting day and hour, when "his barmy noddle was working prime," walked out to his favourite path down the western bank of the river.

The poem was the work of one day, of which Mrs. Burns retained a vivid recollection. Her husband had spent most of the day by the river side, and in the afternoon she joined him with her two children. He was busily engaged *crooning to himsel;* and Mrs. Burns, perceiving that her presence was an interruption, loitered behind with her little ones among the broom. Her attention was presently attracted by the strange and wild gesticulations of the bard, who was now seen at some distance, agonized with an ungovernable access of joy. He was reciting very loud, and with tears rolling down his cheeks, those animated verses which he had just conceived—

> "Now Tam! O Tam! had thae been queans,
> A' plump and strappin' in their teens."

"I wish ye had seen him," said his wife; "he was in such ecstasy that the tears were happing down his cheeks." These last words are given by Allan Cunningham, in addition to the above account, which Lockhart got from a manuscript journal of Cromek. The poet having committed the verses to writing on the top of his sod-dyke above the water, came into the house, and read them immediately in high triumph at the fireside.

Thus in the case of two of Burns's best poems, we have an account of the bard as he appeared in his hour of inspiration, not to any literary friend bent on pictorial effect, but from the plain narrative of his simple and admiring wife. Burns speaks of *Tam o' Shanter* as his first attempt at a tale in verse—unfortunately it was also his last. He himself regarded it as his master-piece of all his poems, and posterity has not, I believe, reversed the judgment.

In this, one of his happiest flights, Burns's imagination bore him from the vale of Nith back to the banks of

Doon, and to the weird tales he had there heard in childhood, told by the winter firesides. The characters of the poem have been identified; that of Tam is taken from a farmer, Douglas Graham, who lived at the farm of Shanter, in the parish of Kirkoswald. He had a scolding wife, called Helen McTaggart, and the tombstones of both are pointed out in Kirkoswald kirkyard. Souter Johnnie is more uncertain, but is supposed, with some probability, to have been John Davidson, a shoemaker, who lies buried in the same place. Yet, from Burns's poem we would gather that this latter lived in Ayr. But these things matter little. From his experience of the smuggling farmers of Kirkoswald, among whom "he first became acquainted with scenes of swaggering and riot," and his remembrance of the tales that haunted the spot where he passed his childhood, combined with his knowledge of the peasantry, their habits and superstitions, Burns's imagination wove the inimitable tale.

After this, the best poetic offspring of the Ellisland period, Burns composed only a few short pieces during his tenancy of that farm. Among these, however, was one which cannot be passed over. In January, 1791, the Earl of Glencairn, who had been his first, and it may be almost said, his only real friend and patron among the Scottish peerage, died at the early age of forty-two, just as he returned to Falmouth after a vain search for health abroad. Burns had always loved and honoured Lord Glencairn, as well he might—although his lordship's gentleness had not always missed giving offence to the poet's sensitive and proud spirit. Yet, on the whole, he was the best patron whom Burns had found, or was ever to find among his countrymen. When then he heard of the earl's death, he mourned his loss as that of a true friend, and poured forth

a fine lament, which concludes with the following well-known lines:

"The bridegroom may forget the bride,
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown,
That on his head an hour has been;
The mother may forget the child,
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a' that thou hast done for me."

Burns's elegies, except when they are comical, are not among his happiest efforts. Some of them are frigid and affected. But this was the genuine language of sincere grief. He afterwards showed the permanence of his affection by calling one of his boys James Glencairn.

A few songs make up the roll of the Ellisland productions during 1791. One only of these is noteworthy—that most popular song, *The Banks o' Doon.* His own words in sending it to a friend are these:—"March, 1791. While here I sit, sad and solitary, by the side of a fire, in a little country inn, and drying my wet clothes, in pops a poor fellow of a sodger, and tells me he is going to Ayr. By heavens! say I to myself, with a tide of good spirits, which the magic of that sound, 'Auld Toon o' Ayr,' conjured up, I will send my last song to Mr. Ballantine."

Then he gives the second and best version of the song, beginning thus:

"Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair?
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care!"

The latest edition of Burns's works, by Mr. Scott Douglas, gives three different versions of this song. Any one

who will compare these, will see the truth of that remark of the poet, in one of his letters to Dr. Moore, "I have no doubt that the knack, the aptitude to learn the Muses trade is a gift bestowed by Him who forms the secret bias of the soul; but I as firmly believe that excellence in the profession is the fruit of industry, attention, labour, and pains; at least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience."

The second version was that which Burns wrought out by careful revision, from an earlier one. Compare, for instance, with the verse given above, the first verse as originally struck off:

"Sweet are the banks, the banks of Doon,
The spreading flowers are fair,
And everything is blythe and glad,
But I am fu' of care."

And the other changes he made on the first draught are all in the way of improvement. It is painful to know, on the authority of Allan Cunningham, that he who composed this pure and perfect song, and many another such, sometimes chose to work in baser metal, and that songware of a lower kind escaped from his hands into the press, and could never afterwards be recalled.

When Burns told Dr. Moore that he was resolved to try by the test of experience the doctrine that good and permanent poetry could not be composed without industry and pains, he had in view other and wider plans of composition than any which he ever realized. He told Ramsay of Ochtertyre, as we have seen, that he had in view to render into poetry a tradition he had found of an adventure in humble life which Bruce met with during his wanderings. Whether he ever did more than think over the

story of Rob McQuechan's Elshin, or into what poetic form he intended to cast it, we know not. As Sir Walter said, any poem he might have produced on this subject would certainly have wanted that tinge of chivalrous feeling which the manners of the age and the character of the king alike demanded. But with Burns's ardent admiration of Bruce, and that power of combining the most homely and humorous incidents with the pathetic and the sublime, which he displayed in *Tam o' Shanter*, we cannot but regret that he never had the leisure and freedom from care which would have allowed him to try his hand on a subject so entirely to his mind.

Besides this, he had evidently, during his sojourn at Ellisland, meditated some large dramatic attempt. He wrote to one of his correspondents that he had set himself to study Shakespeare, and intended to master all the greatest dramatists, both of England and France, with a view to a dramatic effort of his own. If he had attempted it in pure English, we may venture to predict that he would have failed. But had he allowed himself that free use of the Scottish dialect of which he was the supreme master, especially if he had shaped the subject into a lyrical drama, no one can say what he might not have achieved. Many of his smaller poems show that he possessed the genuine dramatic vein. *The Jolly Beggars*, unpleasant as from its grossness it is, shows the presence of this vein in a very high degree, seeing that from materials so unpromising he could make so much. As Mr. Lockhart has said, "That extraordinary sketch, coupled with his later lyrics in a higher vein, is enough to show that in him we had a master capable of placing the musical drama on a level with the loftiest of our classical forms."

Regrets have been expressed that Burns, instead of ad-

dressing himself to these high poetic enterprises, which had certainly hovered before him, frittered away so much of his time in composing for musical collections a large number of songs, the very abundance of which must have lessened their quality. And yet it may be doubted whether this urgent demand for songs, made on him by Johnson and Thomson, was not the only literary call to which he would in his circumstances have responded. These calls could be met, by sudden efforts, at leisure moments, when some occasional blink of momentary inspiration came over him. Great poems necessarily presuppose that the original inspiration is sustained by concentrated purpose and long-sustained effort; mental habits, which to a nature like Burns's must have at all times been difficult, and which his circumstances during his later years rendered simply impossible. From the first he had seen that his farm would not pay, and each succeeding year confirmed him in this conviction. To escape what he calls "the crushing grip of poverty, which, alas! I fear, is less or more fatal to the worth and purity of the noblest souls," he had, within a year after entering Ellisland, recourse to Excise work. This he did from a stern sense of duty to his wife and family. It was, in fact, one of the most marked instances in which Burns, contrary to his too frequent habit, put pride in his pocket, and sacrificed inclination to duty. But that he had not accepted the yoke without some painful sense of degradation, is shown by the bitterness of many of his remarks, when in his correspondence he alludes to the subject. There were, however, times when he tried to take a brighter view of it, and to persuade himself, as he says in a letter to Lady Harriet Don, that "one advantage he had in this new business was the knowledge it gave him of the various shades of character in man—consequently assisting

him in his trade as a poet." But, alas! whatever advantages in this way it might have brought, were counteracted tenfold by other circumstances that attended it. The continual calls of a responsible business, itself sufficient to occupy a man—when divided with the oversight of his farm, overtasked his powers, and left him no leisure for poetic work, except from time to time crooning over a random song. Then the habits which his roving Excise life must have induced were, even to a soul less social than that of Burns, perilous in the extreme. The temptations he was in this way exposed to, Lockhart has drawn with a powerful hand. "From the castle to the cottage, every door flew open at his approach; and the old system of hospitality, then flourishing, rendered it difficult for the most soberly inclined guest to rise from any man's board in the same trim that he sat down to it. The farmer, if Burns was seen passing, left his reapers, and trotted by the side of Jenny Geddes, until he could persuade the bard that the day was hot enough to demand an extra libation. If he entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled round the ingle; the largest punch-bowl was produced, and—

'Be ours to-night—who knows what comes to-morrow?'

was the language of every eye in the circle that welcomed him. The highest gentry of the neighbourhood, when bent on special merriment, did not think the occasion complete unless the wit and eloquence of Burns were called in to enliven their carousals."

It can readily be imagined how distracting such a life must have been, how fatal to all mental concentration on

high objects, not to speak of the habits of which it was too sure to sow the seeds. The frequent visits to Dumfries which his Excise work entailed, and the haunting of the Globe Tavern, already spoken of, led to consequences which, more than even deep potations, must have been fatal to his peace.

His stay at Ellisland is now hastening to a close. Before passing, however, from that, on the whole the best period of his life since manhood, one or two incidents of the spring of 1791 must be mentioned. In the February of that year Burns received from the Rev. Archibald Alison, Episcopalian clergyman in Edinburgh, a copy of his once famous, but now, I believe, forgotten, *Essay on Taste*, which contained the authorized exposition of that theory, so congenial to Scotch metaphysics, that objects seem beautiful to us only because our minds associate them with sensible objects which have previously given us pleasure. In his letter to the author, acknowledging the receipt of his book, Burns says, "I own, sir, at first glance, several of your propositions startle me as paradoxical: that the martial clangour of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime than the twingle-twangle of a Jew's-harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all association of ideas—these I had set down as irrefragable orthodox truths until perusing your book shook my faith." These words so pierce this soap-bubble of the metaphysicians, that we can hardly read them without fancying that the poet meant them to be ironical. Dugald Stewart expressed surprise that the unschooled Ayrshire ploughman should have

found "a distinct conception of the general principles of the doctrine of association;" on which Mr. Carlyle remarks, "We rather think that far subtler things than the doctrine of association had been of old familiar to him."

In looking over his letters at this time (1791), we are startled by a fierce outburst in one of them, apparently apropos of nothing. He had been recommending to the protection of an Edinburgh friend a schoolmaster, whom he thought unjustly persecuted, when all at once he breaks out: "God help the children of Dependence! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas! almost unexceptionally, received by their friends with disrespect and reproach, under the thin disguise of cold civility and humiliating advice. Oh to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the pride of his independence, amid the solitary wilds of his deserts, rather than in civilized life helplessly to tremble for a subsistence, precarious as the caprice of a fellow-creature! Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings; and curse on that privileged plain-speaking of friendship which, in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth the helping-hand without at the same time pointing out those failings, and apportioning them their share in procuring my present distress. . . . I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning."

What may have been the cause of this ferocious explosion there is no explanation. Whether the real source of it may not have lain in certain facts which had occurred during the past spring, that must have rudely broken in on the peace at once of his conscience and his home, we cannot say. Certainly it does seem, as Chambers suggests, like one of those sudden outbursts of temper which fasten on some mere passing accident, because the real seat of it

lies too deep for words. Some instances of the same temper we have already seen. This is a sample of a growing exasperation of spirit, which found expression from time to time till the close of his life.

Let us turn from this painful subject, to one of the only notices we get of him from a stranger's hand during the summer of 1791. Two English gentlemen, who were travelling, went to visit him; one of whom has left an amusing account of their reception. Calling at his house, they were told that the poet was by the river side, and thither they went in search of him. On a rock that projected into the stream, they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap of fox's skin on his head, a loose great-coat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broadsword. It was Burns. He received them with great cordiality, and asked them to share his humble dinner—an invitation which they accepted. "On the table they found boiled beef, with vegetables and barley broth, after the manner of Scotland. After dinner the bard told them ingenuously that he had no wine, nothing better than Highland whiskey, a bottle of which he set on the board. He produced at the same time his punch-bowl, made of Inverary marble; and, mixing it with water and sugar, filled their glasses and invited them to drink. The travellers were in haste, and, besides, the flavour of the whiskey to their southern palates was scarcely tolerable; but the generous poet offered them his best, and his ardent hospitality they found impossible to resist. Burns was in his happiest mood, and the charm of his conversation was altogether fascinating. He ranged over a variety of topics, illuminating whatever he touched. He related the tales of his infancy and youth; he recited some of his gayest

and some of his tenderest poems; in the wildest of his strains of mirth he threw in some touches of melancholy, and spread around him the electric emotions of his powerful mind. The Highland whiskey improved in its flavour; the marble bowl was again and again emptied and replenished; the guests of our poet forgot the flight of time and the dictates of prudence; at the hour of midnight they lost their way to Dumfries, and could scarcely distinguish it when assisted by the morning's dawn. There is much naïveté in the way the English visitor narrates his experience of that 'nicht wi' Burns.'"

Mr. Carlyle, if we remember aright, has smiled incredulously at the story of the fox-skin cap, the belt, and the broadsword. But of the latter appendage this is not the only record. Burns himself mentions it as a frequent accompaniment of his when he went out by the river.

The punch-bowl here mentioned is the one which his father-in-law had wrought for him as a marriage-gift. It was, when Chambers wrote his biography of Burns, in the possession of Mr. Haistie, then M.P. for Paisley, who is said to have refused for it three hundred guineas—"a sum," says Chambers, "that would have set Burns on his legs for ever."

This is the last glimpse we get of the poet in his home at Ellisland till the end came. We have seen that he had long determined, if possible, to get rid of his farm. He had sunk in it all the proceeds that remained to him from the sale of the second edition of his poems, and for this the crops he had hitherto reaped had given no adequate return. Three years, however, were a short trial, and there was a good time coming for all farmers, when the war with France broke out, and raised the value of farm produce to a hitherto unknown amount. If Burns could

but have waited for that!—but either he could not, or he would not wait. But the truth is, even if Burns ever had it in him to succeed as a farmer, that time was past when he came to Ellisland. Independence at the plough-tail, of which he often boasted, was no longer possible for him. He could no more work as he had done of yore. The habits contracted in Edinburgh had penetrated too deeply. Even if he had not been withdrawn from his farm by Excise duties, he could neither work continuously himself, nor make his servants work. "Faith," said a neighbouring farmer, "how could he miss but fail? He brought with him a bevy of servants from Ayrshire. The lasses did nothing but bake bread (that is, oat-cakes), and the lads sat by the fireside and ate it warm with ale." Burns meanwhile enjoying himself at the house of some jovial farmer or convivial laird. How could he miss but fail?

When he had resolved on giving up his farm, an arrangement was come to with the Laird of Dalswinton by which Burns was allowed to throw up his lease and sell off his crops. The sale took place in the last week in August (1791). Even at this day the auctioneer and the bottle always appear side by side, as Chambers observes; but then far more than now-a-days. After the roup, that is the sale, of his crop was over, Burns, in one of his letters, describes the scene that took place within and without his house. It was one which exceeded anything he had ever seen in drunken horrors. Mrs. Burns and her family fortunately were not there to witness it, having gone many weeks before to Ayrshire, probably to be out of the way of all the pain that accompanies the breaking up of a country home. When Burns gave up his lease, Mr. Millar, the landlord, sold Ellisland to a stranger, because the farm was an outlying one, inconveniently situ-

ated, on a different side of the river from the rest of his estate. It was in November or December that Burns sold off his farm-stock and implements of husbandry, and moved his family and furniture into the town of Dumfries, leaving at Ellisland no memorial of himself, as Allan Cunningham tells us, "but a putting-stone with which he loved to exercise his strength, and 300*l.* of his money, sunk beyond redemption in a speculation from which all had augured happiness."

It is not without deep regret that even now we think of Burns's departure from this beautiful spot. If there was any position on earth in which he could have been happy and fulfilled his genius, it would have been on such a farm — always providing that it could have given him the means of a comfortable livelihood, and that he himself could have guided his ways aright. That he might have had a fair opportunity, how often one has wished that he could have met some landlord who could have acted towards him, as the present Duke of Buccleuch did towards the Ettrick Shepherd in his later days, and have given a farm on which he could have sat rent-free. Such an act, one is apt to fancy, would have been honourable alike to giver and receiver. Indeed, a truly noble nature would have been only too grateful to find such an opportunity put in his way of employing a small part of his wealth for so good an end. But the notions of modern society, founded as they are so entirely on individual independence, for the most part preclude the doing and the receiving of such favours. And with this social feeling no man was ever more filled than Burns.

CHAPTER VI.

MIGRATION TO DUMFRIES.

A GREAT change it must have been to pass from the pleasant holms and broomy banks of the Nith at Ellisland to a town home in the Wee Vennel of Dumfries. It was, moreover, a confession visible to the world of what Burns himself had long felt, that his endeavour to combine the actual and the ideal, his natural calling as a farmer with the exercise of his gift as a poet, had failed, and that henceforth he must submit to a round of toil, which, neither in itself nor in its surroundings, had anything to redeem it from commonplace drudgery. He must have felt, from the time when he first became Exciseman, that he had parted company with all thought of steadily working out his ideal, and that whatever he might now do in that way must be by random snatches. To his proud spirit the name of gauger must have been gall and wormwood, and it is much to his credit that for the sake of his wife and children he was content to undergo what he often felt to be a social obloquy. It would have been well for him if this had been the only drawback to his new calling. Unfortunately the life into which it led him exposed him to those very temptations which his nature was least able to withstand. If social indulgence and irregular habits had somewhat impaired his better resolves, and his power of poetic concentration, before he left Ellisland, Dumfries,

and the society into which it threw him, did with increased rapidity the fatal work which had been already begun. His biographers, though with varying degrees of emphasis, on the whole, agree that, from the time he settled in Dumfries, "his moral course was downwards."

The social condition of Dumfries at the time when Burns went to live in it was neither better nor worse than that of other provincial towns in Scotland. What that was, Dr. Chambers has depicted from his own youthful experience of just such another country town. The curse of such towns, he tells us, was that large numbers of their inhabitants were either half or wholly idle; either men living on competences, with nothing to do, or shopkeepers with their time but half employed; their only amusement to meet in taverns, soak, gossip, and make stupid personal jokes. "The weary waste of spirits and energy at those soaking evening meetings was deplorable. Insipid toasts, petty raillery, empty gabble about trivial occurrences, endless disputes on small questions of fact, these relieved now and then by a song"—such Chambers describes as the items which made up provincial town life in his younger days. "A life," he says, "it was without progress or profit, or anything that tended to moral elevation." For such dull companies to get a spirit like Burns among them, to enliven them with his wit and eloquence, what a windfall it must have been! But for him to put his time and his powers at their disposal, how great the degradation! During the day, no doubt, he was employed busily enough in doing his duty as an Exciseman. This could now be done with less travelling than in the Ellisland days, and did not require him, as formerly, to keep a horse. When the day's work was over, his small house in the Wee Vennel, and the domestic hearth with the family ties gath-

ered round it, were not enough for him. At Ellisland he had sung—

"To make a happy fire-side clime,
For weans and wife,
Is the true pathos and sublime
Of human life.'

But it is one thing to sing wisely, another to practise wisdom. Too frequently at nights Burns's love of sociality and excitement drove him forth to seek the companionship of neighbours and drouthy cronies, who gathered habitually at the Globe Tavern and other such haunts. From these he was always sure to meet a warm welcome, abundant appreciation, and even flattery, for to this he was not inaccessible; while their humble station did not jar in any way on his social prejudices, nor their mediocre talents interfere with his love of pre-eminence. In such companies Burns no doubt had the gratification of feeling that he was, what is proverbially called, cock of the walk. The desire to be so probably grew with that growing dislike to the rich and the titled, which was observed in him after he came to Dumfries. In earlier days we have seen that he did not shrink from the society of the greatest magnates, and when they showed him that deference which he thought his due, he even enjoyed it. But now so bitter had grown his scorn and dislike of the upper classes, that we are told that if any one named a lord, or alluded to a man of rank in his presence, he instantly "crushed the offender in an epigram, or insulted him by some sarcastic sally." In a letter written during his first year at Dumfries, this is the way he speaks of his daily occupations:—"Hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise, making ballads, and then drinking and singing

them; and over and above all, correcting the press of two different publications." But besides these duties by day and the convivialities by night, there were other calls on his time and strength, to which Burns was by his reputation exposed. When those of the country gentry whom he still knew were in Dumfries for some hours, or when any party of strangers passing through the town had an idle evening on their hands, it seems to have been their custom to summon Burns to assist them in spending it; and he was weak enough, on receiving the message, to leave his home and adjourn to the Globe, the George, or the King's Arms, there to drink with them late into the night, and waste his powers for their amusement. Verily, a Samson, as has been said, making sport for Philistines!

To one such invitation his impromptu answer was—

> "The king's most humble servant, I
> Can scarcely spare a minute;
> But I'll be with you by-and-by,
> Or else the devil's in it."

And this we may be sure was the spirit of many another reply to these ill-omened invitations. It would have been well if, on these occasions, the pride he boasted of had stood him in better stead, and repelled such unjustifiable intrusions. But in this, as in so many other respects, Burns was the most inconsistent of men.

From the time of his migration to Dumfries, it would appear that he was gradually dropped out of an acquaintance by most of the Dumfriesshire lairds, as he had long been by the parochial and all other ministers. I have only conversed with one person who remembered in his boyhood to have seen Burns. He was the son of a Dumfriesshire baronet, the representative of the House of Red-

gauntlet. The poet was frequently in the neighbourhood of the baronet's country seat, but the old gentleman so highly disapproved of "Robbie Burns," that he forbade his sons to have anything to do with him. My informant, therefore, though he had often seen, had never spoken to the poet. When I conversed with him, his age was nigh four-score years, and the one thing he remembered about Burns was "the blink of his black eye." This is probably but a sample of the feeling with which Burns was regarded by most of the country gentry around Dumfries. What were the various ingredients that made up their dislike of him it is not easy now exactly to determine. Politics most likely had a good deal to do with it, for they were Tories and aristocrats, Burns was a Whig and something more. Though politics may have formed the chief, they were not probably the only element in their aversion. Yet though the majority of the county families turned their backs on him, there were some with which he still continued intimate.

These were either the few Whig magnates of the southern counties, whose political projects he supported by electioneering ballads, charged with all the powers of sarcasm he could wield; or those still fewer, whose literary tastes were strong enough to make them willing, for the sake of his genius, to tolerate both his radical politics and his irregular life. Among these latter was a younger brother of Burns's old friend, Glen Riddel, Mr. Walter Riddel, who with his wife had settled at a place four miles from Dumfries, formerly called Goldie-lea, but named after Mrs. Riddel's maiden name, Woodley Park. Mrs. Riddel was handsome, clever, witty, not without some tincture of letters, and some turn for verse-making. She and her husband welcomed the poet to Woodley Park, where for two years

he was a constant and favourite guest. The lady's wit and literary taste found, it may be believed, no other so responsive spirit in all the south of Scotland. In the third year came a breach in their friendship, followed by a savage lampoon of Burns on the lady, because she did not at once accept his apology; then a period of estrangement. After an interval, however, the Riddels forgave the insult, and were reconciled to the poet, and when the end came, Mrs. Riddel did her best to befriend him, and to do honour to his memory when he was gone.

It ought perhaps to have been mentioned before, that about the time of Burns's first settling at Dumfries, that is towards the close of 1791, he paid his last visit to Edinburgh. It was occasioned by the news that Clarinda was about to sail for the West Indies, in search of the husband who had forsaken her. Since Burns's marriage the silence between them seems to have been broken by only two letters to Clarinda from Ellisland. In the first of these he resents the name of "villain," with which she appears to have saluted him. In the second he admits that his past conduct had been wrong, but concludes by repeating his error and enclosing a song addressed to her in the most exaggerated strain of love. Now he rushed to Edinburgh to see her once more before she sailed. The interview was a brief and hurried one, and no record of it remains, except some letters and a few impassioned lyrics which about that time he addressed to her. The first letter is stiff and formal, as if to break the ice of long estrangement. The others are in the last strain of rapturous devotion—language which, if feigned, is the height of folly; if real, is worse. The lyrics are some of them strained and artificial. One, however, stands out from all the rest, as one of the most impassioned effusions that Burns ever

poured forth. It contains that one consummate stanza in which Scott, Byron, and many more, saw concentrated "the essence of a thousand love-tales"—

> "Had we never loved so kindly,
> Had we never loved so blindly;
> Never met, or never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

After a time Mrs. M'Lehose returned from the West Indies, but without having recovered her truant husband. On her return, one or two more letters Burns wrote to her in the old exaggerated strain—the last in June, 1794—after which Clarinda disappears from the scene.

Other Delilahs on a smaller scale Burns met with during his Dumfries sojourn, and to these he was ever and anon addressing songs of fancied love. By the attentions which the wayward husband was continually paying to ladies and others into whose society his wife could not accompany him, the patience of "bonny Jean," it may easily be conceived, must have been severely tried.

It would have been well, however, if stray flirtations and Platonic affections had been all that could be laid to his charge. But there is a darker story. The facts of it are told by Chambers in connexion with the earlier part of the Dumfries period, and need not be repeated here. Mrs. Burns is said to have been a marvel of long-suffering and forgivingness; but the way she bore those wrongs must have touched her husband's better nature, and pierced him to the quick. When his calmer moments came, that very mildness must have made him feel, as nothing else could, what self-reproach was, and what

> "Self-contempt bitterer to drink than blood."

To the pangs of that remorse have, I doubt not, been tru-

ly attributed those bitter outpourings of disgust with the world and with society which are to be found in some of his letters, especially in those of his later years. Some samples of these outbreaks have been given; more might easily have been added. The injuries he may have received from the world and society, what were they compared with those which he could not help feeling that he had inflicted on himself? It is when a man's own conscience is against him that the world looks worst.

During the first year at Dumfries, Burns for the first time began to dabble in politics, which ere long landed him in serious trouble. Before this, though he had passed for a sort of Jacobite, he had been in reality a Whig. While he lived in Edinburgh he had consorted more with Whigs than with Tories, but yet he had not in any marked way committed himself as a partisan. The only exception to this were some expressions in his poetry favourable to the Stuarts, and his avowed dislike to the Brunswick dynasty. Yet, notwithstanding these, his Jacobitism was but skin deep. It was only with him, as with so many another Scot of that day, the expression of his discontent with the Union of 1707, and his sense of the national degradation that had followed it. When in song he sighed to see *Jamie come hame*, this was only a sentimental protest against the existing order of things. But by the time he came to Dumfries the day of Jacobitism was over, and the whole aspect of the political heavens seemed dark with coming change. The French Revolution was in full swing, and vibrations of it were felt in the remotest corners of Europe. These reached even to the dull provincial towns of Scotland, and roused the pot-house politicians with whom Burns consorted, at the Globe and other taverns, to unwonted excitement. Under this new stimulus, Burns's

previous Jacobitism passed towards the opposite, but not very distant, extreme of Jacobinism. At these gatherings we may easily imagine that, with his native eloquence, his debating power, trained in the Tarbolton Club, and his ambition to shine as a public speaker, the voice of Burns would be the loudest and most vehement. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, these were words which must have found an echo in his inmost heart. But it was not only the abstract rights of man, but the concrete wrongs of Scotland that would be there discussed. And wrongs no doubt there were, under which Scotland was suffering, ever since the Union had destroyed not only her nationality, but almost her political existence. The franchise had become very close—in the counties restricted to a few of the chief families—in the boroughs thrown into the hands of the Baillies, who were venal beyond conception. It was the day, too, of Henry Dundas. A prominent member of the Pitt administration, he ruled Scotland as an autocrat, and as the dispenser of all her patronage. A patriotic autocrat no doubt, loving his country, and providing well for those of her people whom he favoured—still an autocrat. The despotism of Dundas has been pictured, in colours we may well believe sufficiently strong, by Lord Cockburn and others bent on inditing the Epic of Whiggery, in which they and their friends should figure as heroes and martyrs. But whatever may be said against Dundas's régime as a permanent system, it must be allowed that this was no time to remodel it when England was face to face with the French troubles. When the tempest is breaking over the ship, the captain may reasonably be excused for thinking that the moment would be ill chosen for renewing cordage or repairing timbers. Whatever may have been right in a time of quiet, it was

not unnatural that the Pitt administration should postpone all thoughts of reform, till the vessel of the State had weathered the storm which was then upon her.

Besides his conviction as to public wrongs to be redressed, Burns had, he thought, personal grievances to complain of, which, as is so often seen, added fuel to his reforming zeal. His great powers, which he believed entitled him to a very different position, were unacknowledged and disregarded by the then dispensers of patronage. Once he had been an admirer of Pitt, latterly he could not bear the mention of his name. Of the ministry, Addington, we have seen, was fully alive to his merits, and pressed his claims on Pitt, who himself was quite awake to the charm of Burns's poetry. The Premier, it is said, "pushed the bottle on to Dundas, and did nothing"—to Dundas, too practical and too prosaic to waste a thought on poets and poetry. Latterly this neglect of him by public men preyed on the spirit of Burns, and was seldom absent from his thoughts. It added force, no doubt, to the rapture with which he, like all the younger poets of the time, hailed the French Revolution, and the fancied dawn of that day, which would place plebeian genius and worth in those high places, whence titled emptiness and landed incapacity would be at length thrust ignominiously down.

Burns had not been more than three months in Dumfries, before he found an opportunity of testifying by deed his sympathy with the French Revolutionists. At that time the whole coast of the Solway swarmed with smuggling vessels, carrying on a contraband traffic, and manned by men of reckless character, like the Dirk Hatteraick of *Guy Mannering*. In 1792, a suspicious-looking brig appeared in the Solway, and Burns, with other excisemen,

was set to watch her motions. She got into shallow water, when the gaugers, enforced by some dragoons, waded out to her, and Burns, sword in hand, was the first to board her. The captured brig "Rosamond," with all her arms and stores, was sold next day at Dumfries, and Burns became the purchaser of four of her guns. These he sent, with a letter, to the French Legislative Assembly, requesting them to accept the present as a mark of his admiration and sympathy. The guns with the letter never reached their destination. They were, however, intercepted by the Custom-house officers at Dover, and Burns at once became a suspected man in the eye of the Government. Lockhart, who tells this incident, connects with it the song, *The Deil's awa' wi' the Exciseman*, which Burns, he said, composed while waiting on the shore to watch the brig. But Mr. Scott Douglas doubts whether the song is referable to this occasion. However this may be, the folly of Burns's act can hardly be disputed. He was in the employ of Government, and had no right to express in this way his sympathy with a movement which, he must have known, the Government, under whom he served, regarded, if not yet with open hostility, at least with jealous suspicion. Men who think it part of their personal right and public duty unreservedly to express, by word and deed, their views on politics, had better not seek employment in the public service. Burns having once drawn upon himself the suspicions of his superiors, all his words and actions were no doubt closely watched. It was found that he "gat the Gazetteer," a revolutionary print published in Edinburgh, which only the most extreme men patronized, and which after a few months' existence was suppressed by Government. As the year 1792 drew to a close, the political heaven, both at home and abroad,

became ominously dark. In Paris the king was in prison, the Reign of Terror had begun, and innocent blood of loyalists flowed freely in the streets; the republic which had been established was threatening to propagate its principles in other countries by force of arms. In this country, what at the beginning of the year had been but suspicion of France, was now turned to avowed hostility, and war against the republic was on the eve of being declared. There were uneasy symptoms, too, at home. Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason* were spreading questionable doctrines and fomenting disaffection. Societies named Friends of the People were formed in Edinburgh and the chief towns of Scotland, to demand reform of the representation and other changes, which, made at such a time, were believed by those in power to cover seditious aims. At such a crisis any government might be expected to see that all its officers, from the highest to the lowest, were well affected. But though the Reign of Terror had alarmed many others who had at first looked favourably on the Revolution in France, Burns's ardour in its cause was no whit abated. He even denounced the war on which the ministry had determined; he openly reviled the men in power; and went so far in his avowal of democracy that at a social meeting, he proposed as a toast, "Here's the last verse of the last chapter of the last Book of Kings." This would seem to be but one specimen of the freedom of political speech in which Burns at this time habitually indulged—the truculent way in which he flaunted defiance in the face of authority. It would not have been surprising if at any time the Government had ordered inquiry to be made into such conduct, much less in such a season of anxiety and distrust. That an inquiry was made is undoubted; but as to the result

which followed it, there is uncertainty. Some have thought that the poet received from his superiors only a slight hint or caution to be more careful in future. Others believed, that the matter went so far that he was in serious danger of dismissal from his post; and that this was only averted by the timely interposition of some kind and powerful friends. That Burns himself took a serious view of it, and was sufficiently excited and alarmed, may be seen from two letters which he wrote, the one at the time of the occurrence, the other soon after it. It was thus that in December, 1792, he addressed Mr. Graham of Fintray, the same person whose good offices had at first obtained for the poet his appointment, and whose kindness never failed him while he lived:

"SIR, — I have been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr. Mitchell, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to Government.

"Sir, you are a husband and a father. You know what you would feel to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence.

"Alas! sir, must I think that such soon will be my lot! and from the dark insinuations of hellish, groundless envy, too! I believe, sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head; and I

say, that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached. You, sir, have been much and generously my friend.—Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you. Fortune, sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent—has given you patronage, and me dependence. I would not, for my single self, call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye. I would brave misfortune—I could face ruin, for at the worst Death's thousand doors stand open; but—the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve courage and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due. To these, sir, permit me to appeal; by these may I adjure you to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which—with my latest breath I will say it—I have not deserved. R. B."

That this appeal was not without effect may be gathered from a letter on this same affair, which Burns addressed on the 13th April, 1793, to Mr. Erskine, of Mar, in which he says one of the supervisors-general, a Mr. Corbet, "was instructed to inquire on the spot, and to document me that my business was to act, *not to think:* and that, whatever might be men or measures, it was for me to be *silent* and *obedient.*"

Much obloquy has been heaped upon the Excise Board—but on what grounds of justice I have never been able to discover—for the way in which they on this occasion

dealt with Burns. The members of the Board were the servants of the Government, to which they were responsible for the conduct of all their subordinates. To have allowed any of their subordinates to set themselves up by word or deed in opposition to the Ministry, and especially at such a crisis, was inconsistent with the ideas of the time as to official duty. And when called on to act, it is hard to see how they could have done so with more leniency than by hinting to him the remonstrance which so alarmed and irritated the recipient of it. Whatever may be said of his alarm, his irritation, if perhaps natural, was not reasonable. No man has a right to expect that, because he is a genius, he shall be absolved from those rules of conduct, either in private or in public life, which are held binding on his more commonplace brethren. About the time when he received this rebuke, he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop, "I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips as to these unlucky politics." But neither his own resolve nor the remonstrance of the Excise Board seem to have weighed much with him. He continued at convivial parties to express his feelings freely; and at one of these, shortly after he had been rebuked by the Excise Board, when the health of William Pitt was drunk, he followed it by craving a bumper "to the health of a much better man—General Washington." And on a subsequent occasion, as we shall see, he brought himself into trouble by giving an injudicious toast. The repression brought to bear on Burns cannot have been very stringent when he was still free to sport such sentiments. The worst effect of the remonstrance he received seems to have been to irritate his temper, and to depress his spirits by the conviction, unfounded though it was, that all hope of promotion for him was over.

But amid all the troubles entailed on him by his conduct, domestic, social, and political, the chief refuge and solace which he found was in exercising his gifts of song. All hope of his ever achieving a great poem, which called for sustained effort, was now over. Even poems descriptive of rustic life and characters, such as he had sketched in his Ayrshire days — for these he had now no longer either time or inclination. His busy and distracted life, however, left him leisure from time to time to give vent to his impulses, or to soothe his feelings by short arrow-flights of song. He found in his own experience the truth of those words of another poet—

> "They can make who fail to find
> Short leisure even in busiest days,
> Moments to cast a look behind,
> And profit by those kindly rays
> Which through the clouds will sometimes steal,
> And all the far-off past reveal."

Such breaks in the clouds he eagerly waited for, and turned every golden gleam to song.

It may be remembered that while Burns was in Edinburgh he became acquainted with James Johnson, who was engaged in collecting the songs of Scotland in a work called the *Musical Museum*. He had at once thrown himself ardently into Johnson's undertaking, and put all his power of traditional knowledge, of criticism, and of original composition at Johnson's disposal. This he continued to do through all the Ellisland period, and more or less during his residence in Dumfries. To the *Museum* Burns from first to last gratuitously contributed not less than one hundred and eighty-four songs, original, altered, or collected.

During the first year that Burns lived in Dumfries, in

September, 1792, he received an invitation from Mr. George Thomson to lend the aid of his lyrical genius to a collection of Scottish melodies, airs, and words, which a small band of musical amateurs in Edinburgh were then projecting. This collection was pitched to a higher key than the comparatively humble *Museum*. It was to be edited with more rigid care, the symphonies and accompaniments were to be supplied by the first musicians of Europe, and it was to be expurgated from all leaven of coarseness, and from whatever could offend the purest taste. To Thomson's proposal Burns at once replied, "As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyment in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. . . .

"If you are for English verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue. . . . As to remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall be absolutely the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c., would be downright prostitution of soul."

In this spirit he entered on the enterprise which Thomson opened before him, and in this spirit he worked at it to the last, pouring forth song after song almost to his latest breath. Hardly less interesting than the songs themselves, which from time to time he sent to Thomson, were the letters with which he accompanied them. In these his judgment and critical power are as conspicuous as his genius and his enthusiasm for the native melodies. For all who take interest in songs and in the laws which govern

their movement, I know not where else they would find hints so valuable as in these occasional remarks on his own and others' songs, by the greatest lyric singer whom the modern world has seen.

The bard who furnished the English songs for this collection was a certain Dr. Wolcot, known as Peter Pindar. This poetizer, who seems to have been wholly devoid of genius, but to have possessed a certain talent for hitting the taste of the hour, was then held in high esteem; he has long since been forgotten. Even Burns speaks of him with much respect. "The very name of Peter Pindar is an acquisition to your work," he writes to Thomson. Well might Chambers say, "It is a humiliating thought that Peter Pindar was richly pensioned by the booksellers, while Burns, the true sweet singer, lived in comparative poverty." Hard measure has been dealt to Thomson for not having liberally remunerated Burns for the priceless treasures which he supplied to the Collection. Chambers and others, who have thoroughly examined the whole matter, have shown this censure to be undeserved. Thomson himself was by no means rich, and his work brought him nothing but outlay as long as Burns lived. Indeed once, in July, 1793, when Thomson had sent Burns some money in return for his songs, the bard thus replied:

"I assure you, my dear sir, that you truly hurt me with your pecuniary parcel. It degrades me in my own eyes. However, to return it would savour of affectation; but, as to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear, by that honour which crowns the upright statue of *Robert Burns's Integrity*, on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the by-pact transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you. Burns's character for generosity of sentiment and independence of

mind will, I trust, long outlive any of his wants which the cold, unfeeling ore can supply; at least I will take care that such a character he shall deserve."

This sentiment was no doubt inconsistent, and may be deemed Quixotic, when we remember that for his poems Burns was quite willing to accept all that Creech would offer. Yet one cannot but honour it. He felt that both Johnson and Thomson were enthusiasts, labouring to embalm in a permanent form their country's minstrelsy, and that they were doing this without any hope of profit. He too would bear his part in the noble work; if he had not in other respects done full justice to his great gifts, in this way he would repay some of the debt he owed to his country, by throwing into her national melodies the whole wealth and glory of his genius. And this he would do, "all for love, and nothing for reward." And the continual effort to do this worthily was the chief relaxation and delight of those sad later years. When he died, he had contributed to Thomson's work sixty songs, but of these only six had then appeared, as only one half-volume of Thomson's work had then been published. Burns had given Thomson the copyright of all the sixty songs; but as soon as a posthumous edition of the poet's works was proposed, Thomson returned all the songs to the poet's family, to be included in the forthcoming edition, along with the interesting letters which had accompanied the songs. Thomson's collection was not completed till 1841, when the sixth and last volume of it appeared. It is affecting to know that Thomson himself, who was older than Burns by two years, survived him for more than five-and-fifty, and died in February, 1851, at the ripe old age of ninety-four.

CHAPTER VII.

LAST YEARS.

During those Dumfries years little is to be done by the biographer but to trace the several incidents in Burns's quarrel with the world, his growing exasperation, and the evil effects of it on his conduct and his fortunes. It is a painful record, but since it must be given, it shall be with as much brevity as is consistent with truth.

In July, 1793, Burns made an excursion into Galloway, accompanied by a Mr. Syme, who belonging, like himself, to the Excise, admired the poet, and agreed with his politics. Syme has preserved a record of this journey, and the main impression left by the perusal of it is the strange access of ill-temper which had come over Burns, who kept venting his spleen in epigrams on all whom he disliked, high and low. They visited Kenmure, where lived Mr. Gordon, the representative of the old Lords Kenmure. They passed thence over the muirs to Gatehouse, in a wild storm, during which Burns was silent, and crooning to himself what, Syme says, was the first thought of *Scots wha hae.* They were engaged to go to St. Mary's Isle, the seat of the Earl of Selkirk; but Burns was in such a savage mood against all lords, that he was with difficulty persuaded to go thither, though Lord Selkirk was no Tory, but a Whig, like himself, and the father of his old friend, Lord Daer, by this time deceased, who had first convinced

him that a lord might possibly be an honest and kind-hearted man. When they were once under the hospitable roof of St. Mary's Isle, the kindness with which they were received appeased the poet's bitterness. The Earl was benign, the young ladies were beautiful, and two of them sang Scottish songs charmingly. Urbani, an Italian musician who had edited Scotch music, was there, and sang many Scottish melodies, accompanying them with instrumental music. Burns recited some of his songs amid the deep silence that is most expressive of admiration. The evening passed very pleasantly, and the lion of the morning had, ere the evening was over, melted to a lamb.

Scots wha hae has been mentioned. Mr. Syme tells us that it was composed partly while Burns was riding in a storm between Gatehouse and Kenmure, and partly on the second morning after this, when they were journeying from St. Mary's Isle to Dumfries. And Mr. Syme adds that next day the poet presented him with one copy of the poem for himself, and a second for Mr. Dalzell. Mr. Carlyle says, "This Dithyrambic was composed on horseback; in riding in the middle of tempests over the wildest Galloway moor, in company with a Mr. Syme, who, observing the poet's looks, forbore to speak—judiciously enough—for a man composing Bruce's address might be unsafe to trifle with. Doubtless this stern hymn was singing itself, as he formed it, through the soul of Burns, but to the external ear it should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind."

Burns, however, in a letter to Mr. Thomson, dated September, 1793, gives an account of the composition of his war-ode, which is difficult to reconcile with Mr. Syme's statement. "There is a tradition which I have met with in many places in Scotland," he writes, "that the old air,

Hey, tutie taitie, was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn. This thought, in my yesternight's evening walk, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning." He adds that "the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some struggles of the same nature, *not quite so ancient*, roused my rhyming mania." So *Bruce's Address* owes its inspiration as much to Burns's sympathy with the French Republicans as to his Scottish patriotism. As to the intrinsic merit of the ode itself, Mr. Carlyle says, "So long as there is warm blood in the heart of Scotchmen or man, it will move in fierce thrills under this war-ode, the best, we believe, that was ever written by any pen." To this verdict every son of Scottish soil is, I suppose, bound to say Amen. It ought not, however, to be concealed that there has been a very different estimate formed of it by judges sufficiently competent. I remember to have read somewhere of a conversation between Wordsworth and Mrs. Hemans, in which they both agreed that the famous ode was not much more than a commonplace piece of school-boy rhodomontade about liberty. Probably it does owe not a little of its power to the music to which it is sung, and to the associations which have gathered round it. The enthusiasm for French Revolution sentiments, which may have been in Burns's mind when composing it, has had nothing to do with the delight with which thousands since have sung and listened to it. The poet, however, when he first conceived it, was no doubt raging inwardly, like a lion, not only caged, but muzzled with the gag of his servitude to Government.

But for this, what diatribes in favour of the Revolution might we not have had, and what pain must it have been to Burns to suppress these under the coercion of external authority! Partly to this feeling, as well as to other causes, may be ascribed such outbursts as the following, written to a female correspondent, immediately after his return from the Galloway tour:

"There is not among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets. In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination, and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, . . . in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity—and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet." This passage will recall to many the catalogue of sore evils to which poets are by their temperament exposed, which Wordsworth in his *Leech-gatherer* enumerates.

> "The fear that kills,
> And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
> And mighty poets in their misery dead."

In writing that poem Wordsworth had Burns among others prominently in his eye. What a commentary is the life of the more impulsive poet on the lines of his

younger and more self-controlling brother! During those years of political unrest and of growing mental disquiet, his chief solace was, as I have said, to compose songs for Thomson's Collection, into which he poured a continual supply. Indeed it is wonderful how often he was able to escape from his own vexations into that serener atmosphere, and there to suit melodies and moods most alien to his own with fitting words.

Here in one of his letters to Thomson is the way he describes himself in the act of composition. "My way is—I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then choose my theme; begin one stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me that are in unison and harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom; humming every now and then the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my Muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures as my pen goes on." To this may be added what Allan Cunningham tells us. "While he lived in Dumfries he had three favourite walks — on the Dock-green by the river-side; among the ruins of Lincluden College; and towards the Martingdon-ford, on the north side of the Nith. This latter place was secluded, commanded a view of the distant hills and the romantic towers of Lincluden, and afforded soft greensward banks to rest upon, within sight and sound of the stream. As soon as he was heard to hum to himself, his wife saw that he had something in his mind, and was prepared to see him

snatch up his hat, and set silently off for his musing-ground. When by himself, and in the open air, his ideas arranged themselves in their natural order — words came at will, and he seldom returned without having finished a song. . . . When the verses were finished, he passed them through the ordeal of Mrs. Burns's voice, listened attentively when she sang; asked her if any of the words were difficult; and when one happened to be too rough, he readily found a smoother; but he never, save at the resolute entreaty of a scientific musician, sacrificed sense to sound. The autumn was his favourite season, and the twilight his favourite hour of study."

Regret has often been expressed that Burns spent so much time and thought on writing his songs, and, in this way, diverted his energies from higher aims. Sir Walter has said, "Notwithstanding the spirit of many of his lyrics, and the exquisite sweetness and simplicity of others, we cannot but deeply regret that so much of his time and talents was frittered away in compiling and composing for musical collections. There is sufficient evidence that even the genius of Burns could not support him in the monotonous task of writing love-verses, on heaving bosoms and sparkling eyes, and twisting them into such rhythmical forms as might suit the capricious evolutions of Scotch reels and strathspeys." Even if Burns, instead of continual song-writing during the last eight years of his life, had concentrated his strength on "his grand plan of a dramatic composition" on the subject of Bruce's adventures, it may be doubted whether he would have done so much to enrich his country's literature as he has done by the songs he composed. But considering how desultory his habits became, if Johnson and Thomson had not, as it were, set him a congenial task, he might not have produced any-

thing at all during those years. There is, however, another aspect in which the continual composition of love-ditties must be regretted. The few genuine love-songs, straight from the heart, which he composed, such as *Of a' the Airts*, *To Mary in Heaven*, *Ye Banks and Braes*, can hardly be too highly prized. But there are many others, which arose from a lower and fictitious source of inspiration. He himself tells Thomson that when he wished to compose a love-song, his recipe was to put himself on a "regimen of admiring a beautiful woman." This was a dangerous regimen, and when it came to be often repeated, as it was, it cannot have tended to his peace of heart, or to the purity of his life.

The first half of the year 1794 was a more than usually unhappy time with Burns. It was almost entirely songless. Instead of poetry, we hear of political dissatisfaction, excessive drinking-bouts, quarrels, and self-reproach. This was the time when our country was at war with the French Republic—a war which Burns bitterly disliked, but his employment under Government forced him to set "a seal on his lips as to those unlucky politics." A regiment of soldiers was quartered in the town of Dumfries, and to Burns's eye the sight of their red coats was so offensive, that he would not go down the plainstones lest he should meet "the epauletted puppies," who thronged the street. One of these epauletted puppies, whom he so disliked, found occasion to pull Burns up rather smartly. The poet, when in his cups, had in the hearing of a certain captain proposed as a toast, "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause." The soldier called him to account—a duel seemed imminent, and Burns had next day to write an apologetic letter, in order to avoid the risk of ruin. About the same time he was

involved, through intemperance, in another and more painful quarrel. It has been already noticed that at Woodley Park he was a continual guest. With Mrs. Riddel, who was both beautiful and witty, he carried on a kind of poetic flirtation. Mr. Walter Riddel, the host, was wont to press his guests to deeper potations than were usual even in those hard-drinking days. One evening, when the guests had sat till they were inflamed with wine, they entered the drawing-room, and Burns in some way grossly insulted the fair hostess. Next day he wrote a letter of the most abject and extravagant penitence. This, however, Mr. and Mrs. Riddel did not think fit to accept. Stung by this rebuff, Burns recoiled at once to the opposite extreme of feeling, and penned a grossly scurrilous monody on "a lady famed for her caprice." This he followed up by other lampoons, full of "coarse rancour against a lady who had showed him many kindnesses." The Laird of Friars Carse and his lady naturally sided with their relatives, and grew cold to their old friend of Ellisland. While this coldness lasted, Mr. Riddel, of Friars Carse, died in the spring-time, and the poet, remembering his friend's worth and former kindness, wrote a sonnet over him—not one of his best or most natural performances, yet showing the return of his better heart. During the same spring we hear of Burns going to the house of one of the neighbouring gentry, and dining there, not with the rest of the party, but, by his own choice, it would seem, with the housekeeper in her room, and joining the gentlemen in the dining-room after the ladies had retired. He was now, it seems, more disliked by ladies than by men—a change since those Edinburgh days, when the highest dames of the land had spoken so rapturously of the charm of his conversation.

Amid the gloom of this unhappy time (1791), Burns turned to his old Edinburgh friend, Alexander Cunningham, and poured forth this passionate and well-known complaint:—"Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tossed on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Of late, a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these cursed times—losses which, though trifling, were what I could ill bear—have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be envied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.—Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. A heart at ease would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the Gospel. . . . Still there are two great pillars that bear us up amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The one is composed of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of Courage, Fortitude, Magnanimity. The other is made up of those feelings and sentiments which, however the sceptic may deny them, or the enthusiast may disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul, those senses of the mind—if I may be allowed the expression—which connect us with and link us to those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful and equally beneficent God, and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field: the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure."

This remarkable, or, as Lockhart calls it, noble letter,

was written on February 25, 1794. It was probably a few months later, perhaps in May of the same year, while Burns was still under this depression, that there occurred an affecting incident, which has been preserved by Lockhart. Mr. David McCulloch, of Ardwell, told Lockhart, "that he was seldom more grieved than when, riding into Dumfries one fine summer's evening, to attend a country ball, he saw Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite part was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom seemed willing to recognize the poet. The horseman dismounted and joined Burns, who, on his proposing to him to cross the street, said, 'Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now;' and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizzell Baillie's pathetic ballad:

"'His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his brow,
His auld ane looked better than mony ane's new;
But now he lets 't wear ony way it will hing,
And casts himsell dowie upon the corn-bing.

"'O, were we young, as we ance hae been,
We suld hae been galloping down on yon green,
And linking it owre the lily-white lea—
And werena my heart light, I wad die.'"

"It was little in Burns's character to let his feelings on certain subjects escape in this fashion. He immediately after citing these verses assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably until the hour of the ball arrived, with a bowl of his usual potation, and Bonnie Jean's singing of some verses which he had recently composed."

In June we find him expressing to Mrs. Dunlop the earliest hint that he felt his health declining. "I am afraid," he says, "that I am about to suffer for the follies of my youth. My medical friends threaten me with flying gout; but I trust they are mistaken." And again, a few months later, we find him, when writing to the same friend, recurring to the same apprehensions. Vexation and disappointment within, and excesses, if not continual, yet too frequent, from without, had for long been undermining his naturally strong but nervously sensitive frame, and those symptoms were now making themselves felt, which were soon to lay him in an early grave. As the autumn drew on, his singing powers revived, and till the close of the year he kept pouring into Thomson a stream of songs, some of the highest stamp, and hardly one without a touch such as only the genuine singer can give.

The letters, too, to Thomson, with which he accompanies his gifts, are full of suggestive thoughts on song, hints most precious to all who care for such matters. For the forgotten singers of his native land he is full of sympathy. "By the way," he writes to Thomson, "are you not vexed to think that those men of genius, for such they certainly were, who composed our fine Scottish lyrics, should be unknown?"

Many of the songs of that autumn were, as usual, love-ditties; but when the poet could forget the lint-white locks of Chloris, of which kind of stuff there is more than enough, he would write as good songs on other and manlier subjects. Two of these, written, the one in November, 1794, the other in January, 1795, belong to the latter order, and are worthy of careful regard, not only for their excellence as songs, but also as illustrations of the poet's mood of mind at the time when he composed them.

The first is this—

"Contented wi' little, and cantie wi' mair,
Whene'er I forgather wi' sorrow and care,
I gie them a skelp as they're creepin' alang,
Wi' a cog o' gude swats, and an auld Scottish sang.

'I whyles claw the elbow o' troublesome thought;
But man is a soger, and life is a faught:
My mirth and gude humour are coin in my pouch,
And my Freedom's my lairdship nae monarch dare touch.

"A towmond o' trouble, should that be my fa',
A night o' gude fellowship sowthers it a';
When at the blythe end o' our journey at last,
Wha the deil ever thinks o' the road he has past?

"Blind Chance, let her snapper and stoyte on her way;
Be't to me, be't frae me, e'en let the jade gae:
Come Ease, or come Travail, come Pleasure or Pain,
My warst word is—Welcome, and welcome again."

This song gives Burns's idea of himself, and of his struggle with the world, when he could look on both from the placid, rather than the despondent side. He regarded it as a true picture of himself; for, when a good miniature of him had been done, he wrote to Thomson that he wished a vignette from it to be prefixed to this song, that, in his own words, "the portrait of my face and the picture of my mind may go down the stream of time together." Burns had more moods of mind than most men, and this was, we may hope, no unfrequent one with him. But if we would reach the truth, we probably ought to strike a balance between the spirit of this song and the dark moods depicted in some of those letters already quoted.

The other song of the same time is the well-known *A Man's a Man for a' that.* This powerful song speaks out

in his best style a sentiment that through all his life had been dear to the heart of Burns. It has been quoted, they say, by Béranger in France, and by Goethe in Germany, and is the word which springs up in the mind of all foreigners when they think of Burns. It was inspired, no doubt, by his keen sense of social oppression, quickened to white heat by influences that had lately come from France, and by what he had suffered for his sympathy with that cause. It has since become the watchword of all who fancy that they have secured less, and others more, of this world's goods than their respective merit deserves. Stronger words he never wrote.

> "The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
> The man's the gowd for a' that."

That is a word for all time. Yet perhaps it might have been wished that so noble a song had not been marred by any touch of social bitterness. A lord, no doubt, may be a "birkie" and a "coof," but may not a ploughman be so too? This great song Burns wrote on the first day of 1795.

Towards the end of 1794, and in the opening of 1795, the panic which had filled the land in 1792, from the doings of the French republicans, and their sympathizers in this country, began to abate; and the blast of Government displeasure, which for a time had beaten heavily on Burns, seemed to have blown over. He writes to Mrs. Dunlop on the 29th of December, 1794, "My political sins seem to be forgiven me;" and as a proof of it he mentions that during the illness of his superior officer, he had been appointed to act as supervisor—a duty which he discharged for about two months. In the same letter he sends to that good lady his usual kindly greeting for the coming year,

and concludes thus:—"What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t' other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame. With all the follies of youth, and, I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself on having had, in early days, religion strongly impressed on my mind." Burns always keeps his most serious thoughts for this good lady. Herself religious, she no doubt tried to keep the truths of religion before the poet's mind. And he naturally was drawn out to reply in a tone more unreserved than when he wrote to most others.

In February of the ensuing year, 1795, his duties as supervisor led him to what he describes as the "unfortunate, wicked little village" of Ecclefechan, in Annandale. The night after he arrived, there fell the heaviest snow-storm known in Scotland within living memory. When people awoke next morning they found the snow up to the windows of the second story of their houses. In the hollow of Campsie hills it lay to the depth of from eighty to a hundred feet, and it had not disappeared from the streets of Edinburgh on the king's birthday, the 4th of June. Storm-stayed at Ecclefechan, Burns indulged in deep potations and in song-writing. Probably he imputed to the place that with which his own conscience reproached himself. Currie, who was a native of Ecclefechan, much offended, says, "The poet must have been tipsy indeed to abuse sweet Ecclefechan at this rate." It was also the birthplace of the poet's friend Nicol, and of a greater than he. On the 4th of December in the very year on which Burns visited it, Mr. Thomas Carlyle was born in that village. Shortly after his visit, the poet beat his brains to find a rhyme for Ecclefechan, and to twist it into a song.

In March of the same year we find him again joining in local politics, and writing electioneering ballads for Heron of Heron, the Whig candidate for the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, against the nominee of the Earl of Galloway, against whom and his family Burns seems to have harboured some peculiar enmity.

Mr. Heron won the election, and Burns wrote to him about his own prospects:—"The moment I am appointed supervisor, in the common routine I may be nominated on the collectors' list; and this is always a business of purely political patronage. A collectorship varies much, from better than 200*l.* to near 1000*l.* a year. A life of literary leisure, with a decent competency, is the summit of my wishes."

The hope here expressed was not destined to be fulfilled. It required some years for its realization, and the years allotted to Burns were now nearly numbered. The prospect which he here dwells on may, however, have helped to lighten his mental gloom during the last year of his life. For one year of activity there certainly was, between the time when the cloud of political displeasure against him disappeared towards the end of 1794, and the time when his health finally gave way in the autumn of 1795, during which, to judge by his letters, he indulged much less in outbursts of social discontent. One proof of this is seen in the following fact. In the spring of 1795, a volunteer corps was raised in Dumfries, to defend the country, while the regular army was engaged abroad, in war with France. Many of the Dumfries Whigs, and among them Burns's friends, Syme and Dr. Maxwell, enrolled themselves in the corps, in order to prove their loyalty and patriotism, on which some suspicions had previously been cast. Burns too offered himself, and was received into the corps. Al-

lan Cunningham remembered the appearance of the regiment, "their odd but not ungraceful dress; white kerseymere breeches and waistcoat; short blue coat, faced with red; and round hat, surmounted by a bearskin, like the helmets of the Horse Guards." He remembered the poet too, as he showed among them, "his very swarthy face, his ploughman stoop, his large dark eyes, and his awkwardness in handling his arms." But if he could not handle his musket deftly, he could do what none else in that or any other corps could, he could sing a patriotic stave which thrilled the hearts not only of his comrades, but every Briton from Land's End to Johnny Groat's.

This is one of the verses:—

"The kettle o' the kirk and state
Perhaps a clout may fail in't;
But deil a foreign tinkler loun
Shall ever ca' a nail in't.
Our fathers' blude the kettle bought,
And wha wad dare to spoil it?
By heavens! the sacrilegious dog
Shall fuel be to boil it!
By heavens! the sacrilegious dog
Shall fuel be to boil it!"

This song flew throughout the land, hit the taste of the country-people everywhere, and is said to have done much to change the feelings of those who were disaffected. Much blame has been cast upon the Tory Ministry, then in power, for not having offered a pension to Burns. It was not, it is said, that they did not know of him, or that they disregarded his existence. For Mr. Addington, afterwards Lord Sidmouth, we have seen, deeply felt his genius, acknowledged it in verse, and is said to have urged his claims upon the Government. Mr. Pitt, soon after the po-

et's death, is reported to have said of Burns's poetry, at the table of Lord Liverpool, "I can think of no verse since Shakespeare's that has so much the appearance of coming sweetly from nature." It is on Mr. Dundas, however, at that time one of the Ministry, and the autocrat of all Scottish affairs, that the heaviest weight of blame has fallen. But perhaps this is not altogether deserved. There is the greatest difference between a literary man, who holds his political opinions in private, but refrains from mingling in party politics, and one who zealously espouses one side, and employs his literary power in promoting it. He threw himself into every electioneering business with his whole heart, wrote, while he might have been better employed, electioneering ballads of little merit, in which he lauded Whig men and theories, and lampooned, often scurrilously, the supporters of Dundas. No doubt it would have been magnanimous in the men then in power to have overlooked all these things, and, condoning the politics, to have rewarded the poetry of Burns. And it were to be wished that such magnanimity were more common among public men. But we do not see it practised even at the present day, any more than it was in the time of Burns.

During the first half of 1795 the poet had gone on with his accustomed duties, and, during the intervals of business, kept sending to Thomson the songs he from time to time composed.

His professional prospects seemed at this time to be brightening, for about the middle of May, 1795, his staunch friend, Mr. Graham, of Fintray, would seem to have revived an earlier project of having him transferred to a post in Leith, with easy duty and an income of nearly 200*l.* a year. This project could not at the time be carried out; but that it should have been thought of proves

that political offences of the past were beginning to be forgotten. During this same year there were symptoms that the respectable persons who had for some time frowned on him were willing to relent. A combination of causes, his politics, the Riddel quarrel, and his own many imprudences, had kept him under a cloud. And this disfavour of the well-to-do had not increased his self-respect or made him more careful about the company he kept. Disgust with the world had made him reckless and defiant. But with the opening of 1795, the Riddels were reconciled to him, and received him once more into their good graces; and others, their friends, probably followed their example.

But the time was drawing near when the smiles or the frowns of the Dumfries magnates would be alike indifferent to him. There has been more than enough of discussion among the biographers of Burns as to how far he really deteriorated in himself during those Dumfries years, as to the extent and the causes of the social discredit into which he fell, and as to the charge that he took to low company. His early biographers—Currie, Walker, Heron—drew the picture somewhat darkly; Lockhart and Cunningham have endeavoured to lighten the depth of the shadows. Chambers has laboured to give the facts impartially, has faithfully placed the lights and the shadows side by side, and has summed up the whole subject in an appendix on *The Reputation of Burns in his Later Years*, to which I would refer any who desire to see this painful subject minutely handled. Whatever extenuations or excuses may be alleged, all must allow that his course in Dumfries was on the whole a downward one, and must concur, however reluctantly, in the conclusion at which Lockhart, while decrying the severe judgments of Currie, Heron, and others, is forced by truth to come, that "the

untimely death of Burns was, it is too probable, hastened by his own intemperances and imprudences." To inquire minutely, what was the extent of those intemperances, and what the nature of those imprudences, is a subject which can little profit any one, and on which one has no heart to enter. If the general statement of fact be true, the minute details are better left to the kindly oblivion, which, but for too prying curiosity, would by this time have overtaken them.

Dissipated his life for some years certainly had been—deeply disreputable many asserted it to be. Others, however, there were who took a more lenient view of him. Findlater, his superior in the Excise, used to assert that no officer under him was more regular in his public duties. Mr. Gray, then teacher of Dumfries school, has left it on record, that no parent he knew watched more carefully over his children's education—that he had often found the poet in his home explaining to his eldest boy passages of the English poets from Shakespeare to Gray, and that the benefit of the father's instructions was apparent in the excellence of the son's daily school performances. This brighter side of the picture, however, is not irreconcilable with that darker one. For Burns's whole character was a compound of the most discordant and contradictory elements. Dr. Chambers has well shown that he who at one hour was the *douce* sober Mr. Burns, in the next was changed to the maddest of Bacchanals: now he was glowing with the most generous sentiments, now sinking to the very opposite extreme.

One of the last visits paid to him by any friend from a distance would seem to have been by Professor Walker, although the date of it is somewhat uncertain. Eight years had passed since the Professor had parted with

Burns at Blair Castle, after the poet's happy visit there. In the account which the Professor has left of his two days' interview with Burns at Dumfries, there are traces of disappointment with the change which the intervening years had wrought. It has been alleged that prolonged residence in England had made the Professor fastidious, and more easily shocked with rusticity and coarseness. However this may be, he found Burns, as he thought, not improved, but more dictatorial, more free in his potations, more coarse and gross in his talk, than when he had formerly known him.

For some time past there had not been wanting symptoms to show that the poet's strength was already past its prime. In June, 1794, he had, as we have seen, told Mrs. Dunlop that he had been in poor health, and was afraid he was beginning to suffer for the follies of his youth. His physicians threatened him, he said, with flying gout, but he trusted they were mistaken. In the spring of 1795, he said to one who called on him, that he was beginning to feel as if he were soon to be an old man. Still he went about all his usual employments. But during the latter part of that year his health seems to have suddenly declined. For some considerable time he was confined to a sick-bed. Dr. Currie, who was likely to be well informed, states that this illness lasted from October, 1795, till the following January. No details of his malady are given, and little more is known of his condition at this time, except what he himself has given in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, and in a rhymed epistle to one of his brother Excisemen.

At the close of the year he must have felt that, owing to his prolonged sickness, his funds were getting low. Else he would not have penned to his friend, Collector Mitchell, the following request:

"Friend of the Poet, tried and leal,
Wha, wanting thee, might beg or steal;
Alake, alake, the meikle deil
Wi' a' his witches
Are at it, skelpin'! jig and reel,
In my poor pouches.

"I modestly fu fain wad hint it,
That one pound one, I sairly want it;
If wi' the hizzie down ye sent it,
It would be kind;
And while my heart wi' life-blood dunted,
I'd bear't in mind.

* * * * *

"POSTSCRIPT.

"Ye've heard this while how I've been licket,
And by fell death was nearly nicket:
Grim loun! he gat me by the fecket,
And sair me sheuk;
But by gude luck I lap a wicket,
And turn'd a neuk.

"But by that health, I've got a share o't,
And by that life, I'm promised mair o't,
My heal and weel I'll take a care o't
A tentier way:
Then fareweel, folly, hide and hair o't,
For ance and aye."

It was, alas! too late now to bid farewell to folly, even if he could have done so indeed. With the opening of the year 1796 he somewhat revived, and the prudent resolve of his sickness disappeared with the first prospect of returning health. Chambers thus records a fact which the local tradition of Dumfries confirms:—"Early in the month of January, when his health was in the course of improvement, Burns tarried to a late hour at a jovial party in the Globe tavern. Before returning home, he unluckily

remained for some time in the open air, and, overpowered by the effects of the liquor he had drunk, fell asleep. . . . A fatal chill penetrated his bones; he reached home with the seeds of a rheumatic fever already in possession of his weakened frame. In this little accident, and not in the pressure of poverty or disrepute, or wounded feelings or a broken heart, truly lay the determining cause of the sadly shortened days of our national poet."

How long this new access of extreme illness confined him seems uncertain. Currie says for about a week; Chambers surmises a longer time. Mr. Scott Douglas says, that from the close of January till the month of April, he seems to have moved about with some hope of permanent improvement. But if he had such a hope, it was destined not to be fulfilled. Writing on the 31st of January, 1796, to Mrs. Dunlop, the trusted friend of so many confidences, this is the account he gives of himself:

"I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance, too, and so rapidly as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until, after many weeks of a sick-bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street." In these words Burns would seem to have put his two attacks together, as though they were but one prolonged illness.

It was about this time that, happening to meet a neighbour in the street, the poet talked with her seriously of his health, and said among other things this: "I find that a man may live like a fool, but he will scarcely die like

one." As from time to time he appeared on the street during the early months of 1796, others of his old acquaintance were struck by the sight of a tall man of slovenly appearance and sickly aspect, whom a second look showed to be Burns, and that he was dying. Yet in that February there were still some flutters of song, one of which was, *Hey for the Lass wi' a Tocher*, written in answer to Thomson's beseeching inquiry if he was never to hear from him again. Another was a rhymed epistle, in which he answers the inquiries of the colonel of his Volunteer Corps after his health.

From about the middle of April, Burns seldom left his room, and for a great part of each day was confined to bed. May came — a beautiful May — and it was hoped that its genial influences might revive him. But while young Jeffrey was writing, "It is the finest weather in the world—the whole country is covered with green and blossoms; and the sun shines perpetually through a light east wind," Burns was shivering at every breath of the breeze. At this crisis his faithful wife was laid aside, unable to attend him. But a young neighbour, Jessie Lewars, sister of a brother exciseman, came to their house, assisted in all household work, and ministered to the dying poet. She was at this time only a girl, but she lived to be a wife and mother, and to see an honoured old age. Whenever we think of the last days of the poet, it is well to remember one who did so much to smooth his dying pillow.

Burns himself was deeply grateful, and his gratitude as usual found vent in song. But the old manner still clung to him. Even then he could not express his gratitude to his young benefactress without assuming the tone of a fancied lover. Two songs in this strain he addressed to Jessie Lewars. Of the second of these it is told, that one

morning the poet said to her that if she would play to him any favourite tune for which she desired to have new words, he would do his best to meet her wish. She sat down at the piano, and played over several times the air of an old song beginning thus:

"The robin cam to the wren's nest,
And keekit in, and keekit in."

As soon as Burns had taken in the melody, he set to, and in a few minutes composed these beautiful words, the second of the songs which he addressed to Jessie:

"Oh! wert thou in the cauld blast,
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.
Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'.

"Or were I in the wildest waste,
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,
The desert were a paradise,
If thou wert there, if thou wert there:
Or were I monarch o' the globe,
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen."

Mendelssohn is said to have so much admired this song, that he composed for it what Chambers pronounces an air of exquisite pathos.

June came, but brought no improvement, rather rapid decline of health. On the 4th of July (1796) he wrote to Johnson, "Many a merry meeting this publication (the

Museum) has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow consuming illness will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit or the pathos of sentiment." On the day on which he wrote these words, he left Dumfries for a lonely place called Brow, on the Solway shore, to try the effects of sea-bathing. He went alone, for his wife was unable to accompany him. While he was at Brow, his former friend, Mrs. Walter Riddel, to whom, after their estrangement, he had been reconciled, happened to be staying, for the benefit of her health, in the neighbourhood. She asked Burns to dine with her, and sent her carriage to bring him to her house. This is part of the account she gives of that interview:

"I was struck with his appearance on entering the room. The stamp of death was imprinted on his features. He seemed already touching the brink of eternity. His first salutation was, 'Well, madam, have you any commands for the other world?' I replied that it seemed a doubtful case which of us should be there soonest, and that I hoped he would yet live to write my epitaph. He looked in my face with an air of great kindness, and expressed his concern at seeing me look so ill, with his accustomed sensibility. . . . We had a long and serious conversation about his present situation, and the approaching termination of all his earthly prospects. He spoke of his death without any of the ostentation of philosophy, but with firmness as well as feeling, as an event likely to happen very soon, and which gave him concern chiefly from leaving his four children so young and unprotected, and his wife hourly expecting a fifth. He mentioned, with seeming pride and

satisfaction, the promising genius of his eldest son, and the flattering marks of approbation he had received from his teachers, and dwelt particularly on his hopes of that boy's future conduct and merit. His anxiety for his family seemed to hang heavy on him, and the more perhaps from the reflection that he had not done them all the justice he was so well qualified to do. Passing from this subject, he showed great concern about the care of his literary fame, and particularly the publication of his posthumous works. He said he was well aware that his death would create some noise, and that every scrap of his writing would be revived against him to the injury of his future reputation; that his letters and verses written with unguarded and improper freedom, and which he earnestly wished to have buried in oblivion, would be handed about by idle vanity or malevolence, when no dread of his resentment would restrain them, or prevent the censures of shrill-tongued malice, or the insidious sarcasms of envy, from pouring forth all their venom to blast his fame.

"He lamented that he had written many epigrams on persons against whom he entertained no enmity, and whose characters he would be sorry to wound; and many indifferent poetical pieces, which he feared would now, with all their imperfections on their head, be thrust upon the world. On this account he deeply regretted having deferred to put his papers in a state of arrangement, as he was now incapable of the exertion. . . . The conversation," she adds, "was kept up with great evenness and animation on his side. I had seldom seen his mind greater or more collected. There was frequently a considerable degree of vivacity in his sallies, and they would probably have had a greater share, had not the concern and dejection I could not dis

guise damped the spirit of pleasantry he seemed not unwilling to indulge.

"We parted about sunset on the evening of that day (the 5th July, 1796); the next day I saw him again, and we parted to meet no more!"

It is not wonderful that Burns should have felt some anxiety about the literary legacy he was leaving to mankind. Not about his best poems; these, he must have known, would take care of themselves. Yet even among the poems which he had published with his name, were some "which dying" he well might "wish to blot." There lay among his papers letters too, and other "fallings from him," which he no doubt would have desired to suppress, but of which, if they have not all been made public, enough have appeared to justify his fears of that idle vanity, if not malevolence, which, after his death, would rake up every scrap he had written, uncaring how it might injure his good name, or affect future generations of his admirers. No poet perhaps has suffered more from the indiscriminate and unscrupulous curiosity of editors, catering too greedily for the public, than Burns has done.

Besides anxieties of this kind, he, during those last days, had to bear another burden of care that pressed even more closely home. To pain of body, absence from his wife and children, and haunting anxiety on their account, was added the pressure of some small debts and the fear of want. By the rules of the Excise, his full salary would not be allowed him during his illness; and though the Board agreed to continue Burns in his full pay, he never knew this in time to be comforted by it. With his small income diminished, how could he meet the increased expenditure caused by sickness? We have seen how at the beginning of the year he had written to his friend Mitchell to ask the loan of a

guinea. One or two letters, asking for the payment of some old debts due to him by a former companion, still remain. During his stay at Brow, on the 12th of July, he wrote to Thomson the following memorable letter:

"After all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel scoundrel of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song-genius you have seen. I tried my hand on Rothermurchie this morning. The measure is so difficult that it is impossible to infuse much genius into the lines. They are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me!" And on the other side was written Burns's last song, beginning, "Fairest maid, on Devon banks." Was it native feeling, or inveterate habit, that made him that morning revert to the happier days he had seen on the banks of Devon, and sing a last song to one of the two beauties he had there admired? Chambers thinks it was to Charlotte Hamilton; the latest editor refers it to Peggy Chalmers.

Thomson at once sent the sum asked for. He has been much, but not justly, blamed for not having sent a much larger sum, and indeed for not having repaid the poet for his songs long before. Against such charges it is enough to reply that when Thomson had formerly volunteered some money to Burns in return for his songs, the indignant poet told him that if he ever again thought of such a thing, their intercourse must thenceforth cease. And

for the smallness of the sum sent, it should be remembered that Thomson was himself a poor man, and had not at this time made anything by his Collection of Songs, and never did make much beyond repayment of his large outlay.

On the same day on which Burns wrote thus to Thomson, he wrote another letter in much the same terms to his cousin, Mr. James Burnes, of Montrose, asking him to assist him with ten pounds, which was at once sent by his relative, who, though not a rich, was a generous-hearted man.

There was still a third letter written on that 12th of July (1796) from Brow. Of Mrs. Dunlop, who had for some months ceased her correspondence with him, the poet takes this affecting farewell:—"I have written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that 'bourn whence no traveller returns.' Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!"

On the 14th he wrote to his wife, saying that though the sea-bathing had eased his pains, it had not done anything to restore his health. The following anecdote of him at this time has been preserved:—"A night or two before Burns left Brow, he drank tea with Mrs. Craig, widow of the minister of Ruthwell. His altered appearance excited much silent sympathy; and the evening being beautiful, and the sun shining brightly through the casement, Miss

Craig (afterwards Mrs. Henry Duncan) was afraid the light might be too much for him, and rose to let down the window-blinds. Burns immediately guessed what she meant, and regarding the young lady with a look of great benignity, said, 'Thank you, my dear, for your kind attention; but oh! let him shine: he will not shine long for me.'"

On the 18th July he left Brow, and returned to Dumfries in a small spring-cart. When he alighted, the onlookers saw that he was hardly able to stand, and observed that he walked with tottering steps to his door. Those who saw him enter his house, knew by his appearance that he would never again cross that threshold alive. When the news spread in Dumfries that Burns had returned from Brow and was dying, the whole town was deeply moved. Allan Cunningham, who was present, thus describes what he saw:—"The anxiety of the people, high and low, was very great. Wherever two or three were together, their talk was of Burns, and of him alone. They spoke of his history, of his person, and of his works; of his witty sayings, and sarcastic replies, and of his too early fate, with much enthusiasm, and sometimes with deep feeling. All that he had done, and all that they had hoped he would accomplish, were talked of. Half a dozen of them stopped Dr. Maxwell in the street, and said, 'How is Burns, sir?' He shook his head, saying, 'He cannot be worse,' and passed on to be subjected to similar inquiries farther up the way. I heard one of a group inquire, with much simplicity, 'Who do you think will be our poet now?'"

During the three or four days between his return from Brow and the end, his mind, when not roused by conversation, wandered in delirium. Yet when friends drew near his bed, sallies of his old wit would for a moment return.

To a brother volunteer who came to see him he said, with a smile, "John, don't let the awkward squad fire over me." His wife was unable to attend him; and four helpless children wandered from room to room gazing on their unhappy parents. All the while, Jessie Lewars was ministering to the helpless and to the dying one, and doing what kindness could do to relieve their suffering. On the fourth day after his return, the 21st of July, Burns sank into his last sleep. His children stood around his bed, and his eldest son remembered long afterwards all the circumstances of that sad hour.

The news that Burns was dead, sounded through all Scotland like a knell announcing a great national bereavement. Men woke up to feel the greatness of the gift which in him had been vouchsafed to their generation, and which had met, on the whole, with so poor a reception. Self-reproach mingled with the universal sorrow, as men asked themselves whether they might not have done more to cherish and prolong that rarely gifted life.

Of course there was a great public funeral, in which the men of Dumfries and the neighbourhood, high and low, appeared as mourners, and soldiers and volunteers with colours, muffled drums, and arms reversed, not very appropriately mingled in the procession. At the very time when they were laying her husband in his grave, Mrs. Burns gave birth to his posthumous son. He was called Maxwell, after the physician who attended his father, but he died in infancy. The spot where the poet was laid was in a corner of St. Michael's churchyard, and the grave remained for a time unmarked by any monument. After some years his wife placed over it a plain, unpretending stone, inscribed with his name and age, and with the names of his two boys, who were buried in the same place. Well

had it been, if he had been allowed to rest undisturbed in this grave where his family had laid him. But well-meaning, though ignorant, officiousness would not suffer it to be so. Nearly twenty years after the poet's death, a huge, cumbrous, unsightly mausoleum was, by public subscription, erected at a little distance from his original resting-place. This structure was adorned with an ungraceful figure in marble, representing "The muse of Coila finding the poet at the plough, and throwing her inspiring mantle over him." To this was added a long, rambling epitaph in tawdry Latin, as though any inscription which scholars could devise could equal the simple name of Robert Burns. When the new structure was completed, on the 19th September, 1815, his grave was opened, and men for a moment gazed with awe on the form of Burns, seemingly as entire as on the day when first it was laid in the grave. But as soon as they began to raise it, the whole body crumbled to dust, leaving only the head and bones. These relics they bore to the mausoleum which had been prepared for their reception. But not even yet was the poet's dust to be allowed to rest in peace. When his widow died, in March, 1834, the mausoleum was opened, that she might be laid by her husband's side. Some craniologists of Dumfries were then permitted, in the name of so-called science, to desecrate his dust with their inhuman outrage. At the dead of night, between the 31st of March and the 1st of April, these men laid their profane fingers on the skull of Burns, "tried their hats upon it, and found them all too little;" applied their compasses, registered the size of the so-called organs, and "satisfied themselves that Burns had capacity enough to compose *Tam o' Shanter*, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, and *To Mary in Heaven*." This done, they laid the head once

again in the hallowed ground, where, let us hope, it will be disturbed no more. This mausoleum, unsightly though it is, has become a place of pilgrimage whither yearly crowds of travellers resort from the ends of the earth, to gaze on the resting-place of Scotland's peasant poet, and thence to pass to that other consecrated place within ruined Dryburgh, where lies the dust of a kindred spirit by his own Tweed.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARACTER, POEMS, SONGS.

If this narrative has in any way succeeded in giving the lights and the shadows of Burns's life, little comment need now be added. The reader will, it is hoped, gather from the brief record of facts here presented a better impression of the man as he was, in his strength and in his weakness, than from any attempt which might have been made to bring his various qualities together into a moral portrait. Those who wish to see a comment on his character, at once wise and tender, should turn to Mr. Carlyle's famous essay on Burns.

What estimate is to be formed of Burns—not as a poet, but as a man—is a question that will long be asked, and will be variously answered, according to the principles men hold, and the temperament they are of. Men of the world will regard him one way, worshippers of genius in another; and there are many whom the judgments of neither of these will satisfy. One thing is plain to every one; it is the contradiction between the noble gifts he had and the actual life he lived, which make his career the painful tragedy it was. When, however, we look more closely into the original outfit of the man, we seem in some sort to see how this came to be.

Given a being born into the world with a noble nature,

endowments of head and heart beyond any of his time, wide-ranging sympathies, intellectual force of the strongest man, sensibility as of the tenderest woman, possessed also by a keen sense of right and wrong which he had brought from a pure home—place all these high gifts on the one side, and over against them a lower nature, fierce and turbulent, filling him with wild passions which were hard to restrain and fatal to indulge—and between these two opposing natures, a weak and irresolute will, which could overhear the voice of conscience, but had no strength to obey it; launch such a man on such a world as this, and it is but too plain what the end will be. From earliest manhood till the close, flesh and spirit were waging within him interminable war, and who shall say which had the victory? Among his countrymen there are many who are so captivated with his brilliant gifts and his genial temperament, that they will not listen to any hint at the deep defects which marred them. Some would even go so far as to claim honour for him, not only as Scotland's greatest poet, but as one of the best men she has produced. Those who thus try to canonize Burns are no true friends to his memory. They do but challenge the counter-verdict, and force men to recall facts which, if they cannot forget, they would fain leave in silence. These moral defects it is ours to know; it is not ours to judge him who had them.

While some would claim for Burns a niche among Scotland's saints, others would give him rank as one of her religious teachers. This claim, if not so absurd as the other, is hardly more tenable. The religion described by Burns in *The Cotter's Saturday Night* is, it should be remembered, his father's faith, not his own. The fundamental truths of natural religion, faith in God and in immortality, amid sore trials of heart, he no doubt clung to,

and has forcibly expressed. But there is nothing in his poems or in his letters which goes beyond sincere deism—nothing which is in any way distinctively Christian.

Even were his teaching of religion much fuller than it is, one essential thing is still wanting. Before men can accept any one as a religious teacher, they not unreasonably expect that his practice should in some measure bear out his teaching. It was not as an authority on such matters that Burns ever regarded himself. In his *Bard's Epitaph*, composed ten years before his death, he took a far truer and humbler measure of himself than any of his critics or panegyrists have done:

"The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow
And softer flame;
But thoughtless folly laid him low,
And stained his name.

"Reader, attend! whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flight beyond the pole,
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,
In low pursuit;
Know, prudent, cautious self-control
Is wisdom's root."

"A confession," says Wordsworth, "at once devout, poetical, and human—a history in the shape of a prophecy."

Leaving the details of his personal story, and—

"Each unquiet theme,
Where gentlest judgments may misdeem,"

it is a great relief to turn to the bequest that he has left to the world in his poetry. How often has one been tempted to wish that we had known as little of the actual

career of Burns as we do of the life of Shakespeare, or even of Homer, and had been left to read his mind and character only by the light of his works! That poetry, though a fragmentary, is still a faithful transcript of what was best in the man; and though his stream of song contains some sediment we could wish away, yet as a whole, how vividly, clearly, sunnily it flows! how far the good preponderates over the evil!

What that good is must now be briefly said. To take his earliest productions first, his poems as distinct from his songs. Almost all the best of these are, with the one notable exception of *Tam O'Shanter*, contained in the Kilmarnock edition. A few pieces actually composed before he went to Edinburgh were included in later editions, but after leaving Mossgiel he never seriously addressed himself to any form of poetry but song-writing. The Kilmarnock volume contains poems descriptive of peasant life and manners, epistles in verse generally to rhyming brethren, a few lyrics on personal feelings, or on incidents like those of the mouse and the daisy, and three songs. In these, the form, the metre, the style and language, even that which is known as Burns's peculiar stanza, all belong to the traditional forms of his country's poetry, and from earlier bards had been handed down to Burns by his two immediate forerunners, Ramsay and Fergusson. To these two he felt himself indebted, and for them he always expresses a somewhat exaggerated admiration. Nothing can more show Burns's inherent power than to compare his poems with even the best of those which he accepted as models. The old framework and metres which his country supplied, he took; asked no other, no better, and into those old bottles poured new wine of his own, and such wine! What, then, is the peculiar flavour of this new po-

etic wine of Burns's poetry? At the basis of all his power lay absolute truthfulness, intense reality, truthfulness to the objects which he saw, truthfulness to himself as the seer of them. This is what Wordsworth recognized as Burns's leading characteristic. He who acknowledged few masters, owned Burns as his master in this respect when he speaks of him—

> "Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
> And showed my youth,
> How verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth."

Here was a man, a son of toil, looking out on the world from his cottage, on society low and high, and on nature homely or beautiful, with the clearest eye, the most piercing insight, and the warmest heart; touching life at a hundred points, seeing to the core all the sterling worth, nor less the pretence and hollowness of the men he met, the humour, the drollery, the pathos, and the sorrow of human existence; and expressing what he saw, not in the stock phrases of books, but in his own vernacular, the language of his fireside, with a directness, a force, a vitality that tingled to the finger tips, and forced the phrases of his peasant dialect into literature, and made them for ever classical. Large sympathy, generous enthusiasm, reckless abandonment, fierce indignation, melting compassion, rare flashes of moral insight, all are there. Everywhere you see the strong intellect made alive, and driven home to the mark, by the fervid heart behind it. And if the sight of the world's inequalities, and some natural repining at his own obscure lot, mingled from the beginning, as has been said, "some bitterness of earthly spleen and passion with the workings of his inspiration, and if these in the end ate

deep into the great heart they had long tormented," who that has not known his experience may venture too strongly to condemn him?

This prevailing truthfulness of nature and of vision manifested itself in many ways. First. In the strength of it, he interpreted the lives, thoughts, feelings, manners of the Scottish peasantry to whom he belonged, as they had never been interpreted before, and never can be again. Take the poem which stands first in the Kilmarnock edition. The Cotter's Dog and the Laird's Dog are, as has been often said, for all their moralizing, true dogs in all their ways. Yet through these, while not ceasing to be dogs, the poet represents the whole contrast between the Cotters' lives, and their Lairds'. This old controversy, which is ever new, between rich and poor, has never been set forth with more humour and power. No doubt it is done from the peasant's point of view. The virtues and hardships of the poor have full justice done to them; the prosperity of the rich, with its accompanying follies and faults, is not spared, perhaps it is exaggerated. The whole is represented with an inimitably graphic hand, and just when the caustic wit is beginning to get too biting, the edge of it is turned by a touch of kindlier humour. The poor dog speaks of

> "Some gentle master,
> Wha, aiblins thrang a-parliamentin,
> For Britain's guid his saul indentin—"

Then Cæsar, the rich man's dog, replies—

> "Haith, lad, ye little ken about it:
> For Britain's guid!—guid faith! I doubt it.
> Say rather, gaun as Premiers lead him,
> An' saying aye or no 's they bid him:

At operas an' plays parading,
Mortgaging, gambling, masquerading:
Or, may be, in a frolic daft,
To Hague or Calais takes a waft,
To make a tour an' tak a whirl,
To learn *bon ton*, an' see the worl'.

"Then, at Vienna or Versailles,
He rives his father's auld entails;
Or by Madrid he takes the rout,
To thrum guitars and fecht wi' nowt.
* * * * *
For Britain's guid! for her destruction!
Wi' dissipation, feud an' faction."

Then exclaims Luath, the poor man's dog—

"Hech, man! dear sirs! is that the gate
They waste sae mony a braw estate!
Are we sae foughten and harass'd
For gear to gang that gate at last?"

And yet he allows, that for all that

"—— Thae frank, rantin', ramblin' billies,
Fient haet o' them's ill-hearted fellows."

"Mark the power of that one word, 'nowt,'" said the late Thomas Aird. "If the poet had said that our young fellows went to Spain to fight with bulls, there would have been some dignity in the thing, but think of his going all that way 'to fecht wi' nowt.' It was felt at once to be ridiculous. That one word conveyed at once a statement of the folly, and a sarcastic rebuke of the folly."

Or turn to the poem of *Halloween*. Here he has sketched the Ayrshire peasantry as they appeared in their hours of merriment—painted with a few vivid strokes a dozen distinct pictures of country lads and lasses, sires and

dames, and at the same time preserved for ever the remembrance of antique customs and superstitious observances, which even in Burns's day were beginning to fade, and have now all but disappeared.

Or again, take *The auld Farmer's New-year-morning Salutation to his auld Mare.* In this homely, but most kindly humorous poem, you have the whole toiling life of a ploughman and his horse, done off in two or three touches, and the elements of what may seem a commonplace, but was to Burns a most vivid, experience, are made to live for ever. For a piece of good graphic Scotch, see how he describes the sturdy old mare in the plough setting her face to the furzy braes.

"Thou never braing't, an' fetch't, and fliskit,
But thy auld tail thou wad hae whiskit,
An' spread abreed thy weel-fill'd brisket,
Wi' pith an' pow'r,
Till spritty knowes wad rair't and riskit,
An' slypet owre."

To paraphrase this, "Thou didst never fret, or plunge and kick, but thou wouldest have whisked thy old tail, and spread abroad thy large chest, with pith and power, till hillocks, where the earth was filled with tough-rooted plants, would have given forth a cracking sound, and the clods fallen gently over." The latter part of this paraphrase is taken from Chambers. What pure English words could have rendered these things as compactly and graphically?

Of *The Cotter's Saturday Night* it is hardly needful to speak. As a work of art, it is by no means at Burns's highest level. The metre was not native to him. It contains some lines that are feeble, whole stanzas that are

heavy. But as Lockhart has said, in words already quoted, there is none of his poems that does such justice to the better nature that was originally in him. It shows how Burns could reverence the old national piety, however little he may have been able to practise it. It is the more valuable for this, that it is almost the only poem in which either of our two great national poets has described Scottish character on the side of that grave, deep, though undemonstrative reverence, which has been an intrinsic element in it.

No wonder the peasantry of Scotland have loved Burns as perhaps never people loved a poet. He not only sympathized with the wants, the trials, the joys and sorrows of their obscure lot, but he interpreted these to themselves, and interpreted them to others, and this too in their own language, made musical and glorified by genius. He made the poorest ploughman proud of his station and his toil, since Robbie Burns had shared and had sung them. He awoke a sympathy for them in many a heart that otherwise would never have known it. In looking up to him, the Scottish people have seen an impersonation of themselves on a large scale—of themselves, both in their virtues and in their vices.

Secondly. Burns in his poetry was not only the interpreter of Scotland's peasantry, he was the restorer of her nationality. When he appeared, the spirit of Scotland was at a low ebb. The fatigue that followed a century of religious strife, the extinction of her Parliament, the stern suppression of the Jacobite risings, the removal of all symbols of her royalty and nationality, had all but quenched the ancient spirit. Englishmen despised Scotchmen, and Scotchmen seemed ashamed of themselves and of their country. A race of literary men had sprung up in Edin-

burgh who, as to national feeling, were entirely colourless, Scotchmen in nothing except their dwelling-place. The thing they most dreaded was to be convicted of a Scotticism. Among these learned cosmopolitans in walked Burns, who with the instinct of genius chose for his subject that Scottish life which they ignored, and for his vehicle that vernacular which they despised, and who, touching the springs of long-forgotten emotions, brought back on the hearts of his countrymen a tide of patriotic feeling to which they had long been strangers.

At first it was only his native Ayrshire he hoped to illustrate; to shed upon the streams of Ayr and Doon the power of Yarrow, and Teviot, and Tweed. But his patriotism was not merely local; the traditions of Wallace haunted him like a passion, the wanderings of Bruce he hoped to dramatize. His well-known words about the Thistle have been already quoted. They express what was one of his strongest aspirations. And though he accomplished but a small part of what he once hoped to do, yet we owe it to him first of all that "the old kingdom" has not wholly sunk into a province. If Scotchmen today love and cherish their country with a pride unknown to their ancestors of the last century, if strangers of all countries look on Scotland as a land of romance, this we owe in great measure to Burns, who first turned the tide, which Scott afterwards carried to full flood. All that Scotland had done and suffered, her romantic history, the manhood of her people, the beauty of her scenery, would have disappeared in modern commonplace and manufacturing ugliness, if she had been left without her two "sacred poets."

Thirdly. Burns's sympathies and thoughts were not confined to class nor country; they had something more

catholic in them, they reached to universal man. Few as were his opportunities of knowing the characters of statesmen and politicians, yet with what "random shots o' countra wit" did he hit off the public men of his time! In his address to King George III. on his birthday, how gay yet caustic is the satire, how trenchant his stroke! The elder and the younger Pitt, "yon ill-tongued tinkler Charlie Fox," as he irreverently calls him — if Burns had sat for years in Parliament, he could scarcely have known them better. Every one of the Scottish M.P.'s of the time, from—

"That slee auld-farran chiel Dundas"

to—

That glib-gabbit Highland baron
The Laird o' Graham,"

and—

Erskine a spunkie Norlan billie,"

—he has touched their characters as truly as if they had all been his own familiars. But of his intuitive knowledge of men of all ranks there is no need to speak, for every line he writes attests it. Of his fetches of moral wisdom something has already been said. He would not have been a Scotchman, if he had not been a moralizer; but then his moralizings are not platitudes, but truths winged with wit and wisdom. He had, as we have seen, his limitations—his bias to overvalue one order of qualities, and to disparage others. Some pleading of his own cause and that of men of his own temperament, some disparagement of the severer, less-impulsive virtues, it is easy to discern in him. Yet, allowing all this, what flashes of moral insight, piercing to the quick! what random sayings flung forth, that have become proverbs in all lands—"mottoes of the heart!"

Such are—

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us,
To see oursel as ithers see us:
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion;"

Or the much-quoted—

"Facts are chiels that winna ding
And downa be disputed;"

Or—

"The heart ay's the part ay
That makes us right or wrang."

Who on the text, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone," ever preached such a sermon as Burns in his *Address to the unco Guid?* and in his epistle of advice to a young friend, what wisdom! what incisive aphorisms! In passages like these scattered throughout his writings, and in some single poems, he has passed beyond all bonds of place and nationality, and spoken home to the universal human heart.

And here we may note that in that awakening to the sense of human brotherhood, the oneness of human nature, which began towards the end of last century, and which found utterance through Cowper first of the English poets, there has been no voice in literature, then or since, which has proclaimed it more tellingly than Burns. And then his humanity was not confined to man, it overflowed to his lower fellow-creatures. His lines about the pet ewe, the worn-out mare, the field-mouse, the wounded hare, have long been household words. In this tenderness towards animals we see another point of likeness between him and Cowper.

Fourthly. For all aspects of the natural world he has the same clear eye, the same open heart that he has for man. His love of nature is intense, but very simple and

direct, no subtilizings, nor refinings about it, nor any of that nature-worship which soon after his time came in. Quite unconsciously, as a child might, he goes into the outward world for refreshment, for enjoyment, for sympathy. Everywhere in his poetry, nature comes in, not so much as a being independent of man, but as the background of his pictures of life and human character. How true his perceptions of her features are, how pure and transparent the feeling she awakens in him! Take only two examples. Here is the well-known way he describes the burn in his *Halloween*—

"Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays,
As thro' the glen it wimpl't;
Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays,
Whyles in a wiel it dimpl't;
Whyles glitter'd to the nightly rays,
Wi' bickerin', dancin' dazzle;
Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
Below the spreading hazel,
Unseen that night."

Was ever burn so naturally, yet picturesquely described? The next verse can hardly be omitted—

"Amang the brachens on the brae,
Between her an' the moon,
The deil, or else an outler quey,
Gat up an' gae a croon:
Poor Leezie's heart maist lap the hool;
Near lav'rock height she jumpit;
But miss'd a fit, an' in the pool
Out-owre the lugs she plumpit,
Wi' a plunge that night."

"Maist lap the hool," what condensation in that Scotch phrase! The hool is the pod of a pea—poor Lizzie's heart almost leapt out of its encasing sheath.

Or look at this other picture:

"Upon a simmer Sunday morn,
When Nature's face is fair,
I walkèd forth to view the corn,
And snuff the caller air.
The risin' sun owre Galston muirs
Wi' glorious light was glintin;
The hares were hirplin down the furrs,
The lav'rocks they were chantin
Fu' sweet that day."

I have noted only some of the excellences of Burns's poetry, which far outnumber its blemishes. Of these last it is unnecessary to speak; they are too obvious, and whatever is gross, readers can of themselves pass by.

Burns's most considerable poems, as distinct from his songs, were almost all written before he went to Edinburgh. There is, however, one memorable exception. *Tam o' Shanter*, as we have seen, belongs to Ellisland days. Most of his earlier poems were entirely realistic, a transcript of the men and women and scenes he had seen and known, only lifted a very little off the earth, only very slightly idealized. But in *Tam o' Shanter* he had let loose his powers upon the materials of past experiences, and out of them he shaped a tale which was a pure imaginative creation. In no other instance, except perhaps in *The Jolly Beggars*, had he done this; and in that cantata, if the genius is equal, the materials are so coarse, and the sentiment so gross, as to make it, for all its dramatic power, decidedly offensive. It is strange what very opposite judgments have been formed of the intrinsic merit of *Tam o' Shanter*. Mr. Carlyle thinks that it might have been written "all but quite as well by a man, who, in place of genius, had only possessed talent; that it is not so much a

poem, as a piece of sparkling rhetoric; the heart of the story still lies hard and dead." On the other hand, Sir Walter Scott has recorded this verdict: "In the inimitable tale of *Tam o' Shanter*, Burns has left us sufficient evidence of his abilities to combine the ludicrous with the awful and even the horrible. No poet, with the exception of Shakespeare, ever possessed the power of exciting the most varied and discordant emotions with such rapid transitions. His humorous description of death in the poem on Dr. Hornbrook, borders on the terrific; and the witches' dance in the Kirk of Alloway is at once ludicrous and horrible." Sir Walter, I believe, is right, and the world has sided with him in his judgment about *Tam o' Shanter*. Nowhere in British literature, out of Shakespeare, is there to be found so much of the power of which Scott speaks —that of combining in rapid transition almost contradictory emotions — if we except perhaps one of Scott's own highest creations, the tale of Wandering Willie, in *Redgauntlet*.

On the songs of Burns a volume might be written, but a few sentences must here suffice. It is in his songs that his soul comes out fullest, freest, brightest; it is as a song-writer that his fame has spread widest, and will longest last. Mr. Carlyle, not in his essay, which does full justice to Burns's songs, but in some more recent work, has said something like this, "Our Scottish son of thunder had, for want of a better, to pour his lightning through the narrow cranny of Scottish song — the narrowest cranny ever vouchsafed to any son of thunder." The narrowest, it may be, but the most effective, if a man desires to come close to his fellow-men, soul to soul. Of all forms of literature the genuine song is the most penetrating, and the most to be remembered; and in this kind Burns is the su-

preme master. To make him this, two things combined. First, there was the great background of national melody and antique verse, coming down to him from remote ages, and sounding through his heart from childhood. He was cradled in a very atmosphere of melody, else he never could have sung so well. No one knew better than he did, or would have owned more feelingly, how much he owed to the old forgotten song-writers of his country, dead for ages before he lived, and lying in their unknown graves all Scotland over. From his boyhood he had studied eagerly the old tunes, and the old words where there were such, that had come down to him from the past, treasured every scrap of antique air and verse, conned and crooned them over till he had them by heart. This was the one form of literature that he had entirely mastered. And from the first he had laid it down as a rule, that the one way to catch the inspiration, and rise to the true fervour of song, was, as he phrased it, "to *sowth* the tune over and over," till the words came spontaneously. The words of his own songs were inspired by pre-existing tunes, not composed first, and set to music afterwards. But all this love and study of the ancient songs and outward melody would have gone for nothing, but for the second element, that is the inward melody born in the poet's deepest heart, which received into itself the whole body of national song; and then when it had passed through his soul, sent it forth ennobled and glorified by his own genius.

That which fitted him to do this was the peculiar intensity of his nature, the fervid heart, the trembling sensibility, the headlong passion, all thrilling through an intellect strong and keen beyond that of other men. How mysterious to reflect that the same qualities on their emotional side made him the great songster of the world, and on

their practical side drove him to ruin! The first word which Burns composed was a song in praise of his partner on the harvest-rig; the last utterance he breathed in verse was also a song—a faint remembrance of some former affection. Between these two he composed from two to three hundred. It might be wished, perhaps, that he had written fewer, especially fewer love songs; never composed under pressure, and only when his heart was so full he could not help singing. This is the condition on which alone the highest order of songs is born. Probably from thirty to forty songs of Burns could be named which come up to this highest standard. No other Scottish song-writer could show above four or five of the same quality. Of his songs one main characteristic is that their subjects, the substance they lay hold of, belongs to what is most permanent in humanity, those primary affections, those permanent relations of life which cannot change while man's nature is what it is. In this they are wholly unlike those songs which seize on the changing aspects of society. As the phases of social life change, these are forgotten. But no time can superannuate the subjects which Burns has sung; they are rooted in the primary strata, which are steadfast. Then, as the subjects are primary, so the feeling with which Burns regards them is primary too—that is, he gives us the first spontaneous gush—the first throb of his heart, and that a most strong, simple, manly heart. The feeling is not turned over in the reflective faculty, and there artistically shaped—not subtilized and refined away till it has lost its power and freshness; but given at first hand, as it comes warm from within. When he is at his best, you seem to hear the whole song warbling through his spirit, naturally as a bird's. The whole subject is wrapped in an element of music, till it is penetrated and

transfigured by it. No one else has so much of the native lilt in him. When his mind was at the white heat, it is wonderful how quickly he struck off some of his most perfect songs. And yet he could, [illegible] was required, go back upon them, and retouch them line by line, as we saw him doing in *Ye Banks and Braes*. In the best of them the outward form is as perfect as the inward music is all-pervading, and the two are in complete harmony.

To mention a few instances in which he has given their ultimate and consummate expression to fundamental human emotions, four songs may be mentioned, in each of which a different phase of love has been rendered for all time—

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,"

"Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,"

"Go fetch to me a pint o' wine;"

and that other, in which the calm depth of long-wedded and happy love utters itself, so blithely yet pathetically—

"John Anderson, my Jo, John."

Then for comic humour of courtship, there is—

"Duncan Gray cam here to woo."

For that contented spirit which, while feeling life's troubles, yet keeps "aye a heart aboon them a'," we have—

"Contented wi' little, and cantie wi' mair."

For friendship rooted in the past, there is—

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,"

even if we credit antiquity with some of the verses.

For wild and reckless daring, mingled with a dash of

finer feeling, there is *Macpherson's Farewell.* For patriotic heroism—

"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled;"

and for personal independence, and sturdy, if self-asserting, manhood—

"A man's a man for a' that."

These are but a few of the many permanent emotions to which Burns has given such consummate expression, as will stand for all time.

In no mention of his songs should that be forgotten which is so greatly to the honour of Burns. He was emphatically the purifier of Scottish song. There are some poems he has left, there are also a few among his songs, which we could wish that he had never written. But we who inherit Scottish song as he left it, can hardly imagine how much he did to purify and elevate our national melodies. To see what he has done in this way, we have but to compare Burns's songs with the collection of Scottish songs published by David Herd, in 1769, a few years before Burns appeared. A genuine poet, who knew well what he spoke of, the late Thomas Aird, has said, "Those old Scottish melodies, sweet and strong though they were, strong and sweet, were, all the more for their very strength and sweetness, a moral plague, from the indecent words to which many of them had long been set. How was the plague to be stayed? All the preachers in the land could not divorce the grossness from the music. The only way was to put something better in its stead. This inestimable something better Burns gave us."

So purified and ennobled by Burns, these songs embody human emotion in its most condensed and sweetest essence. They appeal to all ranks, they touch all ages, they

cheer toil-worn men under every clime. Wherever the English tongue is heard, beneath the suns of India, amid African deserts, on the western prairies of America, among the squatters of Australia, whenever men of British blood would give vent to their deepest, kindliest, most genial feelings, it is to the songs of Burns they spontaneously turn, and find in them at once a perfect utterance, and a fresh tie of brotherhood. It is this which forms Burns's most enduring claim on the world's gratitude.

THE END.