Saintsbury George

A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1895)

George Saintsbury

A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1895)

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23147315
A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1895):
ISBN http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/31698

Содержание

George Saintsbury
A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1895)

PREFACE

In the execution of the present task (which I took over about two years ago from hands worthier than mine, but then more occupied) some difficulties of necessity occurred which did not present themselves to myself when I undertook the volume of Elizabethan Literature, or to my immediate predecessor in grappling with the period between 1660 and 1780.

The most obvious and serious of these was the question, "What should be done with living authors?" Independently of certain perils of selection and exclusion, of proportion and of freedom of speech, I believe it will be recognised by every one who has ever attempted it, that to mix estimates of work which is done and of work which is unfinished is to the last degree unsatisfactory. I therefore resolved to include no living writer, except Mr. Ruskin, in this volume for the purpose of detailed criticism, though some may be now and then mentioned

in passing.

Even with this limitation the task remained a rather formidable one. Those who are least disposed to overvalue literary work in proportion as it approaches their own time will still acknowledge that the last hundred and fifteen years are fuller furnished than either of the periods of not very dissimilar length which have been already dealt with. The proportion of names of the first, or of a very high second class, is distinctly larger than in the eighteenth century; the bulk of literary production is infinitely greater than in the Elizabethan time. Further, save in regard to the earliest subsections of this period, Time has not performed his office, beneficent to the reader but more beneficent to the historian, of sifting and riddling out writers whom it is no longer necessary to consider, save in a spirit of adventurous or affectionate antiquarianism. I must ask the reader to believe me when I say that many who do not appear here at all, or who are dismissed in a few lines, have yet been the subjects of careful reading on my part. If some exclusions (not due to mere oversight) appear arbitrary or unjust, I would urge that this is not a Dictionary of Authors, nor a Catalogue of Books, but a History of Literature; and that to mention everybody is as impossible as to say everything. As I have revised the sheets the old query has recurred to myself only too often, and sometimes in reference to very favourite books and authors of my own. Where, it may be asked, is Kenelm Digby and the *Broad Stone of Honour*? Where Sir Richard Burton (as great a contrast to Digby as can well be

imagined)? Where Laurence Oliphant, who, but the other day, seemed to many clever men the cleverest man they knew? Where John Foster, who provided food for the thoughtful public two generations ago? Where Greville of the caustic diaries, and his editor (latest deceased) Mr. Reeve, and Crabb Robinson, and many others? Some of these and others are really *neiges d'antan*; some baffle the historian in miniature by being rebels to brief and exact characterisation; some, nay many, are simply crowded out.

I must also ask pardon for having exercised apparently arbitrary discretion in alternately separating the work of the same writer under different chapter-headings, and grouping it with a certain disregard of the strict limits of the chapter-heading itself. I think I shall obtain this pardon from those who remember the advantage obtainable from a connected view of the progress of distinct literary kinds, and that, sometimes not to be foregone, of considering the whole work of certain writers together.

To provide room for the greater press of material, it was necessary to make some slight changes of omission in the scheme of the earlier volumes. The opportunity of considerable gain was suggested in the department of extract – which obviously became less necessary in the case of authors many of whom are familiar, and hardly any accessible with real difficulty. Nor did it seem necessary to take up room with the bibliographical index, the utility of which in my Elizabethan volume I was glad to find almost universally recognised. This would have had to be greatly more voluminous here; and it was much less necessary. With a

very few exceptions, all the writers here included are either kept in print, or can be obtained without much trouble at the second-hand bookshops.

To what has thus been said as to the principles of arrangement it cannot be necessary to add very much as to the principles of criticism. They are the same as those which I have always endeavoured to maintain – that is to say, I have attempted to preserve a perfectly independent, and, as far as possible, a rationally uniform judgment, taking account of none but literary characteristics, but taking account of all characteristics that are literary. It may be, and it probably is, more and more difficult to take achromatic views of literature as it becomes more and more modern; it is certainly more difficult to get this achromatic character, even where it exists, acknowledged by contemporaries. But it has at least been my constant effort to attain it.

In the circumstances, and with a view to avoid not merely repetition but confusion and dislocation in the body of the book, I have thought it better to make the concluding chapter one of considerably greater length than the corresponding part of the Elizabethan volume, and to reserve for it the greater part of what may be called connecting and comprehensive criticism. In this will be found what may be not improperly described from one point of view as the opening of the case, and from another as its summing up – the evidence which justifies both being contained in the earlier chapters.

It is perhaps not improper to add that the completion of this book has been made a little difficult by the incidence of new duties, not in themselves unconnected with its subject. But I have done my best to prevent or supply oversight.

CHAPTER I
THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The period of English literary history which is dealt with in the opening part of the present volume includes, of necessity, among its most illustrious names, not a few whose work will not be the subject of formal discussion here, because the major part of it was done within the scope of the volume which preceded. Thus, to mention only one of these names, the most splendid displays of Burke's power – the efforts in which he at last gave to mankind what had previously been too often devoted to party – date from this time, and even from the later part of it; while Gibbon did not die till 1794, and Horace Walpole not till 1797. Even Johnson, the type and dictator at once of the eighteenth century in literary England, survived the date of 1780 by four years.

Nevertheless the beginning of the ninth decade of the century did actually correspond with a real change, a real line of demarcation. Not only did the old writers drop off one by one, not only did no new writers of utterly distinct idiosyncrasy (Burns and Blake excepted) make their appearance till quite the end of it, but it was also marked by the appearance of men of letters and of literary styles which announced, if not very distinctly, the coming of changes of the most sweeping kind. Hard as it

may be to exhibit the exact contrast between, say, Goldsmith and men like Cowper on the one side and Crabbe on the other, that contrast cannot but be felt by every reader who has used himself in the very least to the consideration of literary differences. And as with individuals, so with kinds. No special production of these twenty years may be of the highest value; but there is a certain idiosyncrasy, if only an idiosyncrasy of transition – an unlikeness to anything that comes before, and to anything, unless directly imitated, that comes after – which is equally distinguishable in the curious succession of poetical satires from Peter Pindar to the *Anti-Jacobin*, in the terror-and-mystery novels of the school of Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis, in the large, if not from the literary point of view extremely noteworthy, department of politics and economics which in various ways employed the pens of writers so different as Moore, Young, Godwin, Priestley, Horne, Tooke, Cobbett, and Paine.

Giving poetry, as usual, the precedence even in the most unpoetical periods, we shall find in the four names already cited – those of Crabbe, Cowper, Blake, and Burns – examples of which even the most poetical period need not be ashamed. In what may be called the absolute spirit of poetry, the *nescio quid* which makes the greatest poets, no one has ever surpassed Burns and Blake at their best; though the perfection of Burns is limited in kind, and the perfection of Blake still more limited in duration and sustained force. Cowper would have been a great poet of the second class at any time, and in some times might have attained

the first. As for Crabbe, he very seldom has the absolute spirit of poetry just mentioned; but the vigour and the distinction of his verse, as well as his wonderful faculty of observation in rendering scene and character, are undeniable. And it is not perhaps childish to point out that there is something odd and out of the way about the poetical career of all these poets of the transition. Cowper's terrible malady postpones his first efforts in song to an age when most poets are losing their voices; Crabbe, beginning brilliantly and popularly, relapses into a silence of nearly a quarter of a century before breaking out with greater power and skill than ever; Burns runs one of the shortest, if one of the most brilliant, Blake one of the longest, the strangest, the most intermittent, of poetical careers. Nor is it superfluous to draw attention further to the fact that when we leave this little company – at the best august, at the worst more than respectable – we drop suddenly to the flattest and most hopeless bog of poesiless verse that lies anywhere on the map of England's literature. Passing from the ethereal music of the Scottish ploughman and the English painter, from Cowper's noble or gentle thought and his accomplished versification, from Crabbe's manly vigour and his Rembrandt touch, we find nothing, unless it be the ingenious but not strictly poetical burlesque of the Wolcots and the Lawrences, till we come to the drivel of Hayley and the drought of Darwin.

Of the quartette, William Cowper was by far the oldest; the other three being contemporaries within a few years. He was born on 26th November 1731 at Great Berkhampstead.

His father was a clergyman and a royal chaplain, his mother one of the Norfolk Donnes. Her early death, and that school discomfort which afterwards found vent in *Tirocinium*, appear to have aggravated a natural melancholia; though after leaving Westminster, and during his normal studies at both branches of the law, he seems to have been cheerful enough. How what should have been the making of his fortune, – his appointment as Clerk of the Journals to the House of Lords, – not unassisted by religious mania, drove him through sheer nervousness to attempt suicide, is one of the best known things in English literary biography, as indeed are most of the few events of his sad life, – owing partly to his own charming letters, partly to the biographies of Southey and others. His latest days were his unhappiest, and after years of more or less complete loss of reason he died on 27th April 1800.

It has been said that Cowper did not take to writing till late in life. He had had literary friends – Churchill, Lloyd, and others – in youth, and must always have had literary sympathies; but it was not till he was nearly fifty, nor till the greater part of twenty years after his first mental seizure, that he attempted composition at the instance of his friend Newton and the Unwins. Beginning with hymns and trifles, he before long undertook, at this or that person's suggestion, longer poems, such as *Truth*, *The Progress of Error*, and *Expostulation*, which were finished by 1781 and published next year, to be followed by the still better and more famous *Task*, suggested to him by Lady Austen. This

appeared in 1785, and was very popular. He had already begun to translate Homer, which occupied him for the greater part of seven years. Nothing perhaps settled him more in the public affections than "John Gilpin," the subject of which he also owed to Lady Austen; and he continued to write occasional pieces of exquisite accomplishment. Almost the last, if not actually the last, of these, written just before the final obscuration of his faculties, was the beautiful and terrible "Castaway," an avowed allegory of his own condition.

Cowper, even more than most writers, deserves and requites consideration under the double aspect of matter and form. In both he did much to alter the generally accepted conditions of English poetry; and if his formal services have perhaps received less attention than they merit, his material achievements have never been denied. His disposition – in which, by a common enough contrast, the blackest and most hopeless melancholy was accompanied by the merriest and most playful humour – reflected itself unequally in his verse, the lighter side chiefly being exhibited. Except in "The Castaway," and a few – not many – of the hymns, Cowper is the very reverse of a gloomy poet. His amiability, however, could also pass into very strong moral indignation, and he endeavoured to give voice to this in a somewhat novel kind of satire, more serious and earnest than that of Pope, much less political and personal than that of Dryden, lighter and more restrained than that of the Elizabethans. His own unworldly disposition, together with the excessively retired

life which he had led since early manhood, rather damaged the chances of Cowper as a satirist. We always feel that his censure wants actuality, that it is an exercise rather than an experience. His efforts in it, however, no doubt assisted, and were assisted by, that alteration of the fashionable Popian couplet which, after the example partly of Churchill and with a considerable return to Dryden, he attempted, made popular, and handed on to the next generation to dis-Pope yet further. This couplet, paralleled by a not wholly dissimilar refashioning of blank verse, in which, though not deserting Milton, he beat out for himself a scheme quite different from Thomson's, perhaps show at their best in the descriptive matter of *The Task* and similar poems. It was in these that Cowper chiefly displayed that faculty of "bringing back the eye to the object" and the object to the eye, in which he has been commonly and justly thought to be the great English restorer. Long before the end of the Elizabethan period, poetical observation of nature had ceased to be just; and, after substituting for justness the wildest eccentricities of conceit, it went for a long time into another extreme – that of copying and recopying certain academic conventionalities, instead of even attempting the natural model. It is not true, as Wordsworth and others have said, that Dryden himself could not draw from the life. He could and did; but his genius was not specially attracted to such drawing, his subjects did not usually call for it, and his readers did not want it. It is not true that Thomson could not "see"; nor is it true of all his contemporaries

and immediate followers that they were blind. But the eighteenth century had slipped into a fault which was at least as fatal as that of the Idealist-Impressionists of the seventeenth, or as that of the Realist-Impressionists of our own time. The former neglected universality in their hunt after personal conceits; the latter neglect it in the endeavour to add nothing to rigidly elaborated personal sensation. The one kind outstrips nature; the other comes short of art. From Dryden to Cowper the fault was different from both of these. It neglected the personal impression and the attention to nature too much. It dared not present either without stewing them in a sauce of stock ideas, stock conventions, stock words and phrases, which equally missed the universal and the particular. Cowper and the other great men who were his contemporaries by publication if not by birth, set to work to cure this fault. Even the weakest of them could never have been guilty of such a passage as that famous one which Congreve (as clever a man as any) wrote, and which Johnson (as clever a man as any) admired. The sentiment which actuated them was, if we may trust Coleridge's account of Boyer or Bowyer, the famous tyrant of Christ's Hospital, well diffused. "'Nymph,' boy? You mean your nurse's daughter," puts in a somewhat brutal and narrow form the correction which the time needed, and which these four in their different ways applied.

We have already glanced at the way in which Cowper applied it in his larger poems: he did it equally well, and perhaps more tellingly, in his smaller. The day on which a poet of no mean

pretensions, one belonging altogether to the upper classes of English society, and one whose lack of university education mattered the less because the universities were just then at their nadir, dared to write of the snake he killed was an epoch-making day. Swift would have done it; but Swift was in many ways a voice crying in the wilderness, and Swift was not, strictly speaking, a poet at all. Byrom would have done it; but Byrom was emphatically a minor poet. Cowper could – at least in and for his day – boast the major afflatus, and Cowper did not disdain vernacular truth. He never could have been vulgar; there is not in the whole range of English literature quite such a gentleman in his own way as Cowper. But he has escaped almost entirely from the genteel style – from the notion of things as below the dignity of literature.

"And taught him never to come there no more"

His prose in this respect is at least equal to his verse, though, as it was known much later, it has greater tendency than influence. All good critics have agreed that his letters are not surpassed, perhaps not surpassable. He has more freedom than Gray; he has none of the coxcombry of Walpole and Byron; and there is no fifth name that can be put even into competition with him. Ease, correctness, facility of expression, freedom from convention within his range, harmony, truth to nature, truth to art: – these things meet in the hapless recluse of Olney as they

had not met for a century – perhaps as they had never met – in English epistles. The one thing that he wanted was strength: as his madness was melancholy, not raving, so was his sanity mild but not triumphant.

George Crabbe was three and twenty years younger than Cowper, having been born on Christmas Eve 1754. But his first publication, *The Library*, the success of which was due to the generous and quick-sighted patronage of Burke after the poet had wrestled with a hard youth, coincided almost exactly with the first appearance of Cowper, and indeed a little anticipated it. *The Village* appeared in 1783, and *The Newspaper* in 1785, and then Crabbe (who had taken orders, had been instituted to livings in the East of England, and had married, after a long engagement, his first love) was silent for two and twenty years. He began again in 1807 with *The Parish Register*. *The Borough*, his greatest work, appeared in 1810. Shifting from the East of England to the West in 1813, he spent the last twenty years of his long life at Trowbridge in Wiltshire, and died in 1832 at the age of seventy-eight.

The external (and, as will be presently remarked, something more than the external) uniformity of his work is great, and its external conformity to the traditions and expectations of the time at which it first appeared is almost greater. A hasty judgment, and even one which, though not hasty, is not very keen-sighted, might see little difference between Crabbe and any poet from Pope to Goldsmith except the innovators. He is all but constant

to the heroic couplet – the Spenserian introduction to *The Birth of Flattery*, the variously-grouped octosyllabic quatrains of *Reflections*, *Sir Eustace Grey*, *The Hall of Justice*, and *Woman*, with a few other deviations, being merely islets among a wide sea of rhymed decasyllabics constituting at least nineteen-twentieths of the poet's outpouring. Moreover, he was as a rule constant, not merely to the couplet, but to what has been called the "shut" couplet – the couplet more or less rigidly confined to itself, and not overlapping. But he did sometimes overlap, and either in fealty to Dryden, or from a secret feeling of the craving for freedom which his more lawless contemporaries expressed in other ways, he reverted to the Drydenian triplet and Alexandrine on which Pope had frowned. In Crabbe's couplet, too, there is something which distinguishes it from almost all others. This something varies very much in appeal. It is sometimes, nay, too often, a rather ludicrous something, possessing a sort of awkward prosaic "flop," which is excellently caricatured in *Rejected Addresses*. But it always shows signs of a desire to throw the emphasis with more variation than the icy uniformity of the Popian cadence admitted; and it is sometimes curiously effective.

Crabbe's position, independently of the strange gap in his publication (which has been variously accounted for), is not a little singular. The greater and the better part of his work was composed when the Romantic revival was in full swing, but it shows little or no trace of the influence of that revival in versification or diction. His earliest attempts do indeed show the

same reaction from Pope to Dryden (of whom we know that he was an eager student) which is visible in Cowper and Churchill; and throughout his work, both earlier and later, there is a ruthless discarding of conventional imagery and a stern attention to the realities of scenery and character. But Crabbe has none of the Grace of the new dispensation, if he has some glimpses of its Law. He sails so close to the wind of poetry that he is sometimes merely prosaic and often nearly so. His conception of life is anti-idealist almost to pessimism, and he has no fancy. The "jewels five words long" are not his: indeed there clung to him a certain obscurity of expression which Johnson is said to have good-naturedly smoothed out in his first work to some extent, but from which he never got quite free. The extravagances as well as the graces of the new poetry were quite alien from him; its exotic tastes touched him not; its love for antiquity (though he knew old English poetry by no means ill) seems to have left him wholly cold. The anxieties and sufferings of lower and middle-class life, the "natural death of love" (which, there seems some reason to fear, he had experienced), the common English country scenery and society of his time – these were his subjects, and he dealt with them in a fashion the mastery of which is to this day a joy to all competent readers. No writer of his time had an influence which so made for truth pure and simple, yet not untouched by the necessary "disprosing" processes of art. For Crabbe is not a mere realist; and whoso considers him as such has not apprehended him. But he was a realist to this extent, that he

always went to the model and never to the pattern-drawing on the Academy walls. And that was what his time needed. His general characteristics are extremely uniform: even the external shape and internal subject-matter of his poems are almost confined to the shape and matter of the verse-tale. He need not, and indeed cannot, in a book like this, be dealt with at much length. But he is a very great writer, and a most important figure at this turning-point of English literature.

Yet, however one may sympathise with Cowper, however much one may admire Crabbe, it is difficult for any true lover of poetry not to feel the sense of a "Pisgah sight," and something more, of the promised land of poetry, in passing from these writers to William Blake and Robert Burns. Here there is no more allowance necessary, except in the first case for imperfection of accomplishment, in the second for shortness of life and comparative narrowness of range. The quality and opportuneness of poetry are in each case undeniable. Since the deaths of Herrick and Vaughan, England had not seen any one who had the finer lyrical gifts of the poet as Blake had them. Since the death of Dunbar, Scotland had not seen such strength and intensity of poetic genius (joined in this case to a gift of melody which Dunbar never had) as were shown by Burns. There was scarcely more than a twelvemonth between their births; for Blake was born in 1757 (the day appears not to be known), and Burns in January 1759. But Blake long outlived Burns, and did not die till 1828, while Burns was no more in July 1796.

Neither the long life nor the short one provided any events which demand chronicling here. Both poets were rather fortunate in their wives, though Blake clave to Catherine Boucher more constantly than Burns to his Jean. Neither was well provided with this world's goods; Burns wearing out his short life in difficulties as farmer and as excise-man, while all the piety of biographers has left it something of a mystery how Blake got through his long life with no better resources than a few very poorly paid private commissions for his works of design, the sale of his hand-made books of poetry and prophecy, and such occasional employment in engraving as his unconventional style and his still more unconventional habits and temper allowed him to accept or to keep. In some respects the two were different enough according to commonplace standards, less so perhaps according to others. The forty years of Burns, and the more than seventy of Blake, were equally passed in a rapture; but morality has less quarrel with Blake, who was essentially a "God-intoxicated man" and spent his life in one long dream of art and prophecy, than with Burns, who was generally in love, and not unfrequently in liquor. But we need no more either of antithesis or of comparison: the purely literary matter calls us.

It was in 1783 – a date which, in its close approximation to the first appearances of Crabbe and Cowper, makes the literary student think of another group of first appearances in the early "eighties" of the sixteenth century foreshadowing the outburst of Elizabethan literature – that Blake's first book appeared. His

Poetical Sketches, now one of the rarest volumes of English poetry, was printed by subscription among a literary coterie who met at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Mathew; but the whole edition was given to the author. He had avowedly taken little or no trouble to correct it, and the text is nearly as corrupt as that of the *Supplices*; nor does it seem that he took any trouble to make it "go off," nor that it did go off in any appreciable manner. Yet if many ears had then been open to true poetical music, some of them could not have mistaken sounds the like of which had not, as has been said, been heard since the deaths of Herrick and Vaughan. The merit of the contents is unequal to a degree not to be accounted for by the mere neglect to prepare carefully for press, and the influence of *Ossian* is, as throughout Blake's work, much more prominent for evil than for good. But the chaotic play of *Edward the Third* is not mere Elizabethan imitation; and at least half a dozen of the songs and lyrical pieces are of the most exquisite quality – snatches of Shakespeare or Fletcher as Shakespeare or Fletcher might have written them in Blake's time. The finest of all no doubt is the magnificent "Mad Song." But others – "How sweet I roamed from Field to Field" (the most eighteenth century in manner, but showing how even that manner could be strengthened and sweetened); "My Silks and Fine Array," beautiful, but more like an Elizabethan imitation than most; "Memory Hither Come," a piece of ineffable melody – these are things which at once showed Blake to be free of the very first company of poets, to be a poet who for real essence

of poetry excelled everything the century had yet seen, and everything, with the solitary exception of the *Lyrical Ballads* at its extreme end, that it was to see.

Unfortunately it was not by any means as a poet that Blake regarded himself. He knew that he was an artist, and he thought that he was a prophet; and for the rest of his life, deviating only now and then into engraving as a mere breadwinner, he devoted himself to the joint cultivation of these two gifts, inventing for the purpose a method or vehicle of publication excellently suited to his genius, but in other respects hardly convenient. This method was to execute text and illustrations at once on copper-plates, which were then treated in slightly different fashions. Impressions worked off from these by hand-press were coloured by hand, Blake and his wife executing the entire process. In this fashion were produced the lovely little gems of literature and design called *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794); in this way for the most part, but with some modifications, the vast and formidable mass of the so-called "Prophetic" Books. With the artistic qualities of Blake we are not here concerned, but it is permissible to remark that they resemble his literary qualities with a closeness which at once explains and is explained by their strangely combined method of production. That Blake was not entirely sane has never been doubted except by a few fanatics of mysticism, who seem to think that the denial of complete sanity implies a complete denial of genius. And though he was never, in the common

phrase, "incapable of managing" such very modest affairs as were his, the defect appears most in the obstinate fashion in which he refused to perfect and co-ordinate his work. He could, when he chose and would give himself the trouble, draw quite exquisitely; and he always drew with marvellous vigour and imagination. But he would often permit himself faults of drawing quite inexplicable and not very tolerable. So, too, though he had the finest gift of literary expression, he chose often to babble and still oftener to rant at large. Even the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*– despite their double charm to the eye and the ear, and the presence of such things as the famous "Tiger," as the two "Introductions" (two of Blake's best things), and as "The Little Girl Lost" – show a certain poetical declension from the highest heights of the *Poetical Sketches*. The poet is no longer a poet pure and simple; he has got purposes and messages, and these partly strangle and partly render turbid the clear and spontaneous jets of poetry which refresh us in the "Mad Song" and the "Memory." And after the *Songs* Blake did not care to put forth anything bearing the ordinary form of poetry. We possess indeed other poetical work of his, recovered in scraps and fragments from MSS., and some of it is beautiful. But it is as a rule more chaotic than the *Sketches* themselves; it is sometimes defaced (being indeed mere private jottings never intended for print) by personality and coarseness; and it is constantly puddled with the jargon of Blake's mystical philosophy, which, borrowing some of its method from Swedenborg and much of its imagery and

nomenclature from *Ossian*, spreads itself unhampered by any form whatever over the Prophetic Books. The literary merit of these in parts is often very high, and their theosophy (for that is the best single word for it) is not seldom majestic. But despite the attempts of some disciples to evolve a regular system from them, students of philosophy as well as of literature are never likely to be at much odds as to their real character. "Ravings" they are not, and they are very often the reverse of "nonsense." But they are the work of a man who in the first place was very slightly acquainted with the literature and antecedents of his subject, who in the second was distinctly *non compos* on the critical, though admirably gifted on the creative side of his brain, and who in the third had the ill luck to fall under the fullest sway of the Ossianic influence. To any one who loves and admires Blake – and the present writer deliberately ranks him as the greatest and most delectable poet of the eighteenth century proper in England, reserving Burns as specially Scotch – it must always be tempting to say more of him than can be allowed on such a scale as the present; but the scale must be observed.

There is all the more reason for the observance that Blake exercised on the literary *history* of his time no influence, and occupied in it no position. He always had a few faithful friends and patrons who kept him from starvation by their commissions, admired him, believed in him, and did him such good turns as his intensely independent and rather irritable disposition would allow. But the public had little opportunity of seeing his pictures,

and less of reading his books; and though the admiration of Lamb led to some appreciation from Southey and others, he was practically an unread man. This cannot be said of Robert Burns, who, born as was said a year or two after Blake, made his first literary venture three years after him, in 1786. Most people know that the publication, now famous and costly, called "the Kilmarnock Edition," was originally issued in the main hope of paying the poet's passage to Jamaica after an unfortunate youth of struggle, and latterly of dissipation. Nay, even after the appearance of the *Poems* and their welcome he still proposed to go abroad. He was summoned back to Edinburgh to reprint them, to make a considerable profit by them, and to be lionised without stint by the society of the Scottish capital. He then settled down, marrying Jean Armour, at Ellisland in Dumfriesshire, on a small farm and a post in the Excise, which, when his farming failed and he moved to Dumfries itself, became his only regular means of support. He might have increased this considerably by literature; but as it was he actually gave away, or disposed of for trifling equivalents, most of the exquisite songs which he wrote in his later years. These years were unhappy. He hailed the French Revolution with a perfectly innocent, because obviously ignorant, Jacobinism which, putting all other considerations aside, was clearly improper in a salaried official of the Crown, and thereby got into disgrace with the authorities, and also with society in and about Dumfries. His habits of living, though their recklessness has been vastly exaggerated, were not careful, and helped to

injure both his reputation and his health. Before long he broke down completely, and died on the first of July 1796, his poetical powers being to the very last in fullest perfection.

Burns' work, which even in bulk – its least remarkable characteristic – is very considerable when his short life and his unfavourable education and circumstances are reckoned, falls at once into three sharply contrasted sections. There are his poems in Scots; there are the verses that, in obedience partly to the incompetent criticism of his time, partly to a very natural mistake of ambition and ignorance, he tried to write in conventional literary English; and there is his prose, taking the form of more or less studied letters. The second class of the poems is almost worthless, and fortunately it is not bulky. The letters are of unequal value, and have been variously estimated. They show indeed that, like almost all poets, he might, if choice and fate had united, have become a very considerable prose-writer, and they have immense autobiographic value. But they are sometimes, and perhaps often, written as much in falsetto as the division of verse just ruled out; their artificiality does not take very good models; and their literary attraction is altogether second-rate. How far different the value of the Scots poems is, four generations have on the whole securely agreed. The moral discomfort of Principal Shairp, the academic distaste of Mr. Matthew Arnold for a world of "Scotch wit, Scotch religion, and Scotch drink," and the purely indolent and ignorant reluctance of others to grapple with Scottish dialect, need not trouble the catholic critic much. The

two first may be of some use as cautions and drags; the third may be thrown aside at once. Scots, though a dialect, is not a patois; it has a great and continuous literature; it combines in an extraordinary degree the consonant virtues of English and the vowel range of the Latin tongues. It is true that Burns' range of subject, as distinct from that of sound, was not extremely wide. He could give a voice to passion – passion of war, passion of conviviality, passion above all of love – as none but the very greatest poets ever have given or will give it; he had also an extraordinary command of *genre*-painting of all kinds, ranging from the merely descriptive and observant to the most intensely satirical. Perhaps he could only do these two things – could not be (as he certainly has not been) philosophical, deeply meditative, elaborately in command of the great possibilities of nature, political, moral, argumentative. But what an "only" have we here! It amounts to this, that Burns could "only" seize, could "only" convey the charms of poetical expression to, the more primitive thought and feeling of the natural man, and that he could do this supremely. His ideas are – to use the rough old Lockian division – ideas of sensation, not of reflection; and when he goes beyond them he is sensible, healthy, respectable, but not deep or high. In his own range there are few depths or heights to which he has not soared or plunged.

That he owed a good deal to his own Scottish predecessors, especially to Ferguson, is not now denied; and his methods of composing his songs are very different from those which a

lesser man, using more academic forms, could venture upon without the certainty of the charge of plagiarism. We shall never understand Burns aright if we do not grasp the fact that he was a "folk-poet," into whom the soul of a poet of all time and all space had entered. In all times and countries where folk-poetry has a genuine existence, its forms and expressions are much less the property of the individual than of the race. The business of collecting ballads is one of the most difficult and doubtful, not to say dangerous, open to the amateur. But it is certain that any collector who was not a mere simpleton would at once reject as spurious a version which he heard in identically the same terms from two different subjects. He would know that they must have got it from a printed or at least written source. Now Burns is, if not our only example, our only example of the very first quality, of the poet who takes existing work and hands it on shaped to his own fashion. Not that he was not perfectly competent to do without any existing canvas; while, when he had it, he treated it without the very slightest punctilio. Of some of the songs which he reshaped into masterpieces for Johnson and Thomson he took no more than the air and measure; of others only the refrain or the first few lines; of others again stanzas or parts of stanzas. But everywhere he has stamped the version with something of his own – something thenceforward inseparable from it, and yet characteristic of him. In the expression of the triumph and despair of love, not sicklied over with any thought as in most modern poets, only Catullus and Sappho can touch

Burns. "Green grow the Rashes O," "Yestreen I had a Pint of Wine," the farewell to Clarinda, and the famous death-bed verses to Jessie Lewars, make any advance on them impossible in point of spontaneous and unreflecting emotion; while a thousand others (the number is hardly rhetorical) come but little behind. "Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut" in the same way rides sovereign at the head of a troop of Bacchanalian verses; and the touches of rhetoric and convention in "Scots wha hae" cannot spoil, can hardly even injure it. To some it really seems that the much praised lines "To Mary in Heaven" and others where the mood is less boisterous, show Burns at less advantage, not because the kind is inferior, but because he was less at home in it; but it is almost impossible to praise too highly the equally famous "Mouse," and some other things. It was in this tremendous force of natural passion and affection, and in his simple observation of common things, that Burns' great lesson for his age and country lay. None even of the reformers had dared to be passionate as yet. In Cowper indeed there was no passion except of religious despair, in Crabbe none except that of a grim contemplation of the miseries and disappointments of life, while although there was plenty of passion in Blake it had all conveyed itself into the channel of mystical dreaming. It is a little pathetic, and more than a little curious, to compare "The Star that shines on Anna's Breast," the one approach to passionate expression of Cowper's one decided love, with any one of a hundred outbursts of Burns, sometimes to the very same name.

The other division of the Poems, at the head of which stand *The Jolly Beggars*, *Tam o' Shanter*, and *The Holy Fair*, exhibit an equal power of vivid feeling and expression with a greater creative and observant faculty, and were almost equally important as a corrective and alterative to their generation. The age was not ill either at drama, at manners-painting, or at satire; but the special kind of dramatic, pictorial, and satiric presentation which Burns manifested was quite unfamiliar to it and in direct contradiction to its habits and crotchets. It had had a tendency to look only at upper and middle-class life, to be conventional in its very indecorum, to be ironic, indirect, parabolical. It admired the Dutch painters, it had dabbled in the occult, it was Voltairian enough; but it had never dared to outvie Teniers and Steen as in *The Jolly Beggars*, to blend naturalism and *diablerie* with the overwhelming *verve* of *Tam o' Shanter*, to change the jejune freethinking of two generations into an outspoken and particular attack on personal hypocrisy in religion as in *Holy Willie's Prayer* and *The Holy Fair*. Even to Scotsmen, we may suspect (or rather we pretty well know, from the way in which Robertson and Blair, Hume and Mackenzie, write), this burst of genial racy humour from the *terræ filius* of Kilmarnock must have been somewhat startling; and it speaks volumes for the amiable author of the *Man of Feeling* that, in the very periodical where he was wont to air his mild Addisonian hobbies, he should have warmly commended the Ayrshire ploughman.

In a period where we have so many great or almost great

names to notice, it cannot be necessary to give the weakest writers of its weakest part more than that summary mention which is at once necessary and sufficient to complete the picture of the literary movement of the time. And this is more especially the case with reference to the minor verse of the end of the eighteenth century. The earliest work of the really great men who re-created English poetry, though in some cases chronologically *in*, is not in the least *of* it. For the rest, it would be almost enough to say that William Hayley, the preface to whose *Triumphs of Temper* is dated January 1781, and therefore synchronised very closely with the literary appearance of Cowper, Crabbe, and Blake, was one of the most conspicuous, and remains one of the most characteristic of them. Hayley's personal relations with the first and last of these poets – relations which have kept and will keep his name in some measure alive long after the natural death of his verse – were in both cases conditioned by circumstances in a rather trying way, but were not otherwise than creditable to him. His verse itself is impossible and intolerable to any but the student of literary history, who knows that all things are possible, and finds the realisation of all in its measure interesting. The heights, or at least the average levels, of Hayley may be fairly taken from the following quotation: —

> Her lips involuntary catch the chime
> And half articulate the soothing rhyme;
> Till weary thought no longer watch can keep,
> But sinks reluctant in the folds of sleep —

of which it can only be said that any schoolboy could write it; his not infrequent depths from the couplet: —

> Her airy guard prepares the softest down
> From Peace's wing to line the nuptial crown.

where the image of a guardian angel holding Peace with the firmness of an Irish housewife, and plucking her steadily in order to line a nuptial crown (which must have been a sort of sun-bonnet) with the down thereof, will probably be admitted to be not easily surpassable. Of Hayley's companions in song, I have been dispensed by my predecessor from troubling myself with Erasmus Darwin, who was perhaps intellectually the ablest of them, though the extreme absurdity of the scheme of his *Botanic Garden* brought him, as the representative of the whole school, under the lash of the *Anti-Jacobin* in never-dying lines. Darwin's friend and townswoman, Anna Seward; Mrs. Barbauld, the author of the noble lines, "Life, we've been long together" – the nobility of which is rather in its sentiment than in its expression – and of much tame and unimportant stuff; Merry, who called himself Della Crusca and gathered round him the school of gosling imitators that drew on itself the lash of Gifford; the Laureate Pye; and others who, less fortunate than the victims of Canning and Frere, have suffered a second death in the forgetting of the very satires in which they met their deserts, can be barely named now. Two, however, may claim, if no great

performance, a remarkable influence on great performers. Dr. Sayers, a member of the interesting Norwich school, directly affected Southey, and not Southey only, by his unrhymed verse; while the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles, now only to be read with a mild esteem by the friendliest critic most conscious of the historic allowance, roused Coleridge to the wildest enthusiasm and did much to form his poetic taste. To Bowles, and perhaps to one or two others, we may find occasion to return hereafter.

The satires, however, which have been more than once referred to in the preceding paragraph, form a most important feature, and a perhaps almost more important symptom, of the literary state of the time. They show, indeed, that its weakness did not escape the notice of contemporaries; but they also show that the very contemporaries who noticed it had nothing better to give in the way of poetry proper than that which they satirised. In fact, one of the chief of these satirists, Wolcot, has left a considerable mass of not definitely satirical work which is little if at all better than the productions of the authors he lampooned.

This very remarkable body of satirical verse, which extends from the *Rolliad* and the early satires of Peter Pindar at the extreme beginning of our present time to the *Pursuits of Literature* and the *Anti-Jacobin* towards its close, was partly literary and partly political, diverging indeed into other subjects, but keeping chiefly to these two and intermixing them rather inextricably. The *Pursuits of Literature*, though mainly devoted to the subject of its title, is also to a great extent political; the

Rolliad and the *Probationary Odes*, intensely political, were also to no small extent literary. The chief examples were among the most popular literary productions of the time; and though few of them except the selected *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* are now read, almost all the major productions deserve reading. The great defect of contemporary satire – that it becomes by mere lapse of time unintelligible – is obviated to no small extent here by the crotchet (rather fortunate, though sometimes a little tedious) which these writers, almost without exception, had for elaborate annotation. Of the chief of them, already indicated more than once by reference or allusion, some account may be given.

The Rolliad is the name generally given for shortness to a collection of political satires originating in the great Westminster election of 1784, when Fox was the Whig candidate. It derived its name from a Devonshire squire, Mr. Rolle, who was a great supporter of Pitt; and, with the *Political Eclogues*, the mock *Probationary Odes* for the laureateship (vacant by Whitehead's death), and the *Political Miscellanies*, which closed the series, was directed against the young Prime Minister and his adherents by a knot of members of Brooks' Club, who are identified rather by tradition and assertion than by positive evidence. Sheridan, Tierney, Burgoyne, Lord John Townshend, Burke's brother Richard, and other public men probably or certainly contributed, as did Ellis – afterwards to figure so conspicuously in the same way on the other side. But the chief writers were a certain Dr. Lawrence, a great friend of Burke, who was in

a way the editor; Tickel, a descendant of Addison's friend and a connection of the Sheridans; and another Irishman named Fitzpatrick. The various "skits" of which the book or series is composed show considerable literary skill, and there is a non-political and extraneous interest in the fact that it contains some *rondeaux* believed to be the only, or almost the only, examples of that form written in England between Cotton in the seventeenth century and the revival of it not very many years ago. The fun is often very good fun, and there is a lightness and brightness about the verse and phrasing which had been little seen in English since Prior. But the tone is purely personal; there are no principles at stake, and the book, besides being pretty coarse in tone, is a sort of object lesson in the merely intriguing style of politics which had become characteristic of England under the great seventy years' reign of the Whigs.

Coarseness and personality, however, are in the *Rolliad* refined and high-minded in comparison with the work of "Peter Pindar," which has the redeeming merit of being even funnier, with the defect of being much more voluminous and unequal. John Wolcot was a Devonshire man, born in May 1738 at Kingsbridge, or rather its suburb Dodbrooke, in Devonshire. He was educated as a physician, and after practising some time at home was taken by Sir William Trelawney to Jamaica. Here he took orders and received a benefice; but when he returned to England after Trelawney's death he practically unfrocked himself and resumed the cure of bodies. Although he had dabbled both in

letters and in art, it was not till 1782 that he made any name; and he did it then by the rather unexpected way of writing poetical satires in the form of letters to the members of the infant Royal Academy. From this he glided into satire of the political kind, which, however, though he was a strong Whig and something more, did not so much devote itself to the attack or support of either of the great parties as to personal lampoons on the king, his family, and his friends. Neither Charles the Second at the hands of Marvell, nor George the Fourth at the hands of Moore, received anything like the steady fire of lampoon which Wolcot for years poured upon the most harmless and respectable of English monarchs. George the Third had indeed no vices, – unless a certain parsimony may be dignified by that name, – but he had many foibles of the kind that is more useful to the satirist than even vice. Wolcot's extreme coarseness, his triviality of subject, and a vulgarity of thought which is quite a different thing from either, are undeniable. But *The Lousiad* (a perfect triumph of cleverness expended on what the Greeks called rhyparography), the famous pieces on George and the Apple Dumplings and on the King's visit to Whitbread's Brewery, with scores of other things of the same kind (the best of all, perhaps, being the record of the Devonshire Progress), exhibit incredible felicity and fertility in the lower kinds of satire. This satire Wolcot could apply with remarkable width of range. His artistic satires (and it must be admitted that he had not bad taste here) have been noticed. He riddled the new devotion to physical

science in the unlucky person of Sir Joseph Banks; the chief of his literary lampoons, a thing which is quite a masterpiece in its way, is his "Bozzy and Piozzi," wherein Boswell and Mrs. Thrale are made to string in am[oe]bean fashion the most absurd or the most laughable of their respective reminiscences of Johnson into verses which, for lightness and liveliness of burlesque representation, have hardly a superior. Until the severe legislation which followed the Jacobin terror in France cowed him, and to some extent even subsequently, Wolcot maintained a sort of Ishmaelite attitude, by turns attacking and defending himself against men of eminence in literature and politics, after a fashion the savagery whereof was excused sometimes by its courage and nearly always by an exuberant good-humour which both here and elsewhere accompanies very distinct ill-nature. His literary life in London covered about a quarter of a century, after which, losing his sight, he retired once more to the West, though he is said to have died at Somers Town in 1819. The best edition of his works is in five good-sized volumes, but it is known not to be complete.

Both the *Rolliad* men and Wolcot had been on the Whig, Wolcot almost on the Republican side; and for some years they had met with no sufficient adversaries, though Gifford soon engaged "Peter" on fairly equal terms. The great revulsion of feeling, however, which the acts of the French Revolution induced among Englishmen generally drew on a signal rally on the Tory part. The *Anti-Jacobin* newspaper, with Gifford as its

editor, and Canning, Ellis (now a convert), and Frere as its chief contributors, not merely had at its back the national sentiment and the official power, but far outstripped in literary vigour and brilliancy the achievements of the other side. The famous collection above referred to, *The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, which has been again and again reprinted, shows no signs of losing its attraction, – a thing almost unparalleled in the case of satirical work nearly a century old. Its very familiarity makes it unnecessary to dwell much on it, but it is safe to say that nothing of the kind more brilliant has ever been written, or is very likely ever to be written, than the parodies of Southey's Sapphics and "Henry Martin" sonnet, the litany of the Jacobins, French and English, the "skits" on Payne Knight and Darwin, *The Rovers*, – mocking the new German sentimentalism and mediævalism, – and the stately satire of "The New Morality," – where, almost alone, the writers become serious, and reach a height not attained since Dryden.

Gifford and Mathias differ from the others just mentioned in being less directly political in writing and inspiration, though Gifford at least was a strong politician. He was, like Wolcot, a Devonshire man, born at Ashburton in 1757, and, as his numerous enemies and victims took care often to remind him, of extremely humble birth and early breeding, having been a shoemaker's apprentice. Attracting attention as a clever boy, he was sent to Exeter College and soon attained to influential patronage. To do him justice, however, he made his reputation

by the work of his own hand, – his satires of *The Baviad*, 1794, and *The Mæviad* next year, attacking and pretty nearly extinguishing Merry and his Della Cruscans, a set of minor bards and mutual admirers who had infested the magazines and the libraries for some years.[1] The *Anti-Jacobin* and the editing of divers English classics put Gifford still higher; and when the *Quarterly Review* was established in opposition to the *Edinburgh*, his appointment (1809) to the editorship, which he held almost till his death (he gave it up in 1824 and died in 1826), completed his literary position. Gifford is little read nowadays, and a name which was not a very popular one even on his own side during his lifetime has, since the triumph of the politics and of some of the literary styles which he opposed, become almost a byword for savage and unfair criticism. The penalty of unfairness is usually and rightly paid in kind, and Gifford has paid it very amply. The struggles of his youth and lifelong ill-health no doubt aggravated a disposition at no time very sweet; and the feuds of the day, both literary and political, were apt to be waged, even by men far superior to Gifford in early and natural advantages, with the extremest asperity and without too

[1] Although *The Baviad* and *The Mæviad* are well worth reading, it may be questioned whether they are as amusing as their chief quarry, *The British Album*, "containing the poems of Della Crusca, Anna Matilda, Benedict, Cesario, The Bard, etc.," the two little volumes of which attained their third edition in 1790. "Della Crusca," or Robert Merry (1755-98), was a gentleman by birth, and of means, with a Harrow and Oxford training, and some service in the army. Strange to say, there is testimony of good wits that he was by no means a fool; yet such drivelling rubbish as he and his coadjutors wrote even the present day has hardly seen.

much scruple. But Gifford is perhaps our capital example in English of a cast of mind which is popularly identified with that of the critic, though in truth nothing is more fatal to the attainment of the highest critical competence. It was apparently impossible for him (as it has been, and, it would seem, is for others,) to regard the author whom he was criticising, the editor who had preceded him in his labours, or the adversary with whom he was carrying on a polemic, as anything but a being partly idiotic and partly villainous, who must be soundly scolded, first for having done what he did, and secondly to prevent him from doing it again. So ingrained was this habit in Gifford that he could refrain from indulging it, neither in editing the essays of his most distinguished contributors, nor in commenting on the work of these contributors, outside the periodicals which he directed. Yet he was a really useful influence in more ways than one. The service that he did in forcibly suppressing the Della Cruscan nuisance is even yet admitted, and there has been plentiful occasion, not always taken, for similar literary *dragonnades* since. And his work as an editor of English classics was, blemishes of manner and temper excepted, in the main very good work.

Thomas James Mathias, the author of *The Pursuits of Literature*, was a much nearer approach to the pedant pure and simple. For he did not, like Gifford, redeem his rather indiscriminate attacks on contemporaries by a sincere and intelligent devotion to older work; and he was, much more

than Gifford, ostentatious of such learning as he possessed. Accordingly the immense popularity of his only book of moment is a most remarkable sign of the times. De Quincey, who had seen its rise and its fall, declares that for a certain time, and not a very short one, at the end of the last century and the beginning of this, *The Pursuits of Literature* was the most popular book of its own day, and as popular as any which had appeared since; and that there is not very much hyperbole in this is proved by its numerous editions, and by the constant references to it in the books of the time. Colman, who was one of Mathias' victims, declared that the verse was a "peg to hang the notes on"; and the habit above referred to certainly justified the gibe to no small extent. If the book is rather hard reading nowadays (and it is certainly rather difficult to recognise in it even the "demon of originality" which De Quincey himself grants rather grudgingly as an offset to its defects of taste and scholarship), it is perhaps chiefly obscured by the extreme desultoriness of the author's attacks and the absence of any consistent and persistent target. Much that Mathias reprehends in Godwin and Priestley, in Colman and Wolcot, and a whole crowd of lesser men, is justifiably censured; much that he lays down is sound and good enough. But the whole – which, after the wont of the time, consists of several pieces jointed on to each other and all flooded with notes – suffers from the twin vices of negation and divagation. Indeed, its chief value is that, both by its composition and its reception, it shows the general sense that literature was not in a healthy state, and that

some renaissance, some reaction, was necessary.

The prominence of the French Revolution, which has already appeared more than once in the above account of late eighteenth century poetry, is still more strongly reflected in the prose writing of the period. Indeed, many of its principal writers devoted their chief attention either to describing, to attacking, or to defending the events and principles of this portentous phenomenon. The chief of them were John Moore, Arthur Young, Helen Maria Williams, Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Richard Price, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Holcroft. Of these Price, a veteran who had nearly reached his sixtieth year when our period commences, chiefly belongs to literature as an antagonist of Burke, as does Priestley, whose writing was very extensive, but who was as much more a "natural philosopher" than a man of letters as Price was much less a man of letters than a moralist and a statistician. Both, moreover, have been mentioned in the preceding volume, and it is not necessary to say much about them, or about John Horne Tooke (1736-1812), philologist and firebrand.

Of the others something may, and in some cases not a little must, appear. Dr. John Moore, sometimes called "Zeluco" Moore (from his most popular book), and father of the general who fell at Corunna, was born at Stirling in the winter of 1729-30. Studying medicine at Glasgow, he was apprenticed (as Smollett had been earlier) to Dr. John Gordon, and entered the army as surgeon's mate for the Laufeldt campaign. He then lived

two years in Paris, perfecting himself in medicine, after which he established himself in Glasgow. After many years' practice there, he accompanied the young Duke of Hamilton on various travels through Europe, and in 1778 settled in London. This was his headquarters for the rest of his life, till his death at Richmond on 21st January 1803. The chief interruption to his residence there was his memorable journey with Lord Lauderdale to Paris in the latter half of 1792, which resulted in one of the most vivid and trustworthy accounts by an eyewitness of the opening scenes of the Terror. This *Journal during a Residence in France* was published during the next two years. But Moore had earlier than this, though not very early in his own life, become an author. His *View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany*, the result of his journeyings with the Duke, appeared in 1779, with a continuation relating to Italy two years later; and in 1786 he published his one famous novel *Zeluco*. After the *Journal* he returned to novel writing in *Edward* (1796) and *Mordaunt* (1800) – books by no means contemptible, but suffering from the want of a central interest and of a more universal grasp of character and manners. He contributed a Life of Smollett and an Essay on Romance to an edition of his friend's works in 1797. One or two medical books also stand to his credit, while he had rather unadvisedly added to his admirable *Journal* a *View of the Causes of the French Revolution* which is not worthy of it. His complete works fill seven volumes.

Of these, the earlier travels are readable enough, and

sometimes very noteworthy in matter. It is almost enough to say that they contain some of the latest accounts by an Englishman of France while it was still merry, and of Venice while it was still independent; an early picture of Alpine travel; very interesting personal sketches of Voltaire and Frederick the Great; and one memorable passage (remembered and borrowed by Scott in *Redgauntlet*) telling how at Florence the shadow of Prince Charlie, passing the Duke of Hamilton in the public walks, fixed his eyes earnestly on the Duke, as though saying, "Our ancestors were better acquainted." *Zeluco* and the *Journal* alone deserve much attention from any one but a professed student of literature. The value of the latter has been admitted by all competent authorities, and it is enhanced by the fact that Moore was a strong Whig, and was even accused by some zealots of favouring Jacobinism. His picture, therefore, of the way in which political revolution glides into ethical anarchy is certainly unbiassed the other way. Of *Zeluco* everybody, without perhaps a very clear knowledge of its authorship, knows one passage – the extremely humorous letter containing the John Bull contempt of the sailor Dawson for the foolish nation which clothes its troops in "white, which is absurd, and blue, which is only fit for the artillery and the blue horse." But few know much more, though there is close by a much more elaborate and equally good piece of Smollettian fun in the quarrel of Buchanan and Targe, the Scotch Whig and Jacobite, over the reputation of Queen Mary. The book, however, besides the unlucky drawback that

almost all its interest lies in the latter part, has for hero a sort of lifeless monster of wickedness, who is quite as uninteresting as a faultless one, and shows little veracity of character except in the minor personages and episodes. In these, and indeed throughout Moore's work, there is a curious mixture of convention with extreme shrewdness, of somewhat commonplace expression with a remarkably pregnant and humorous conception. But he lacks concentration and finish, and is therefore never likely to be much read again as a whole.

There may appear to be some slight inconsistency in giving a paragraph, if only a short one, to Arthur Young where distinct mention has been refused to Price and Priestley. But Olivier de Serres has secured a place in all histories of French literature as a representative of agricultural writing, and Young is our English Serres. Moreover, his *Survey of France* has permanent attraction for its picture of the state of that country just before, and in the earliest days of, the Revolution. And though his writing is extremely incorrect and unequal, though its literary effect is much injured by the insertion of statistical details which sometimes turn it for pages together into a mere set of tables, he has constant racy phrases, some of which have passed into the most honourable state of all – that of unidentified quotation – while more deserve it. He was born in 1741, the son of a Suffolk clergyman, was connected by marriage with the Burneys, and very early developed the passion for agricultural theory and practice which marked his whole life, even when in his later

years (he lived till 1820) he fell under the influence of religious crotchets. His French travels were published in 1792-94, and form by far his most attractive book, though his surveys of England and Ireland contain much that is good. Young was a keen, though not a very consistent or clear-sighted politician, especially on the side of political economy. But, like other men of his time, he soon fell away from his first love for the French Revolution. In the literary, historical, and antiquarian associations of the places he visited, he seems to have felt no interest whatever.

Helen Maria Williams, with Young and Moore, is our chief English witness for the state of France and Paris just before and during the early years of the Revolution. She was one of Johnson's girl pets in his latest years, but Boswell is certainly justified in suggesting that if the sage had lived a little longer he would certainly not have repeated his elegant compliment: "If I am so ill when you are near, what should I be when you are away?" She outlived this phase also of her life, and did not die till 1828, being then sixty-five. Even in the early days she had been a Girondist, not a Jacobin; but she happened to live in Paris during the outbreak of the Revolution, wrote *Letters from France*, which had a great popularity, and was hand in glove with most of the English and Irish revolutionary leaders. Wolfe Tone in his diary speaks of her as "Miss Jane Bull completely," but neither prudery nor patriotism would have struck persons less prejudiced than the leader of the United Irishmen as the leading

points of Helen Maria. Her poems, published in 1786, during her pre-revolutionary days, are dedicated to Queen Charlotte, and nearly half the first of the two pretty little volumes (which have a horrific frontispiece of the Princes in the Tower, by Maria Cosway) is occupied by a stately list of subscribers, with the Prince of Wales at their head. They have little merit, but are not uninteresting for their "signs of the times": sonnets, a tale called *Edwin and Eltruda*, an address to Sensibility, and so forth. But the longest, *Peru*, is in the full eighteenth century couplet with no sign of innovation. The *Letters from France*, which extend to eight volumes, possess, besides the interest of their subject, the advantage of a more than fair proficiency on the author's part in the formal but not ungraceful prose of her time, neither unduly Johnsonian nor in any way slipshod. But it may perhaps be conceded that, but for the interest of the subject, they would not be of much importance.

The most distinguished members of the Jacobin school, from the literary point of view, were Thomas Paine and William Godwin. Paine was only a literary man by accident. He was born at Thetford on 29th January 1737, in the rank of small tradesman, and subsequently became a custom-house officer. But he lost his place for debt and dubious conduct in 1774, and found a more congenial home in America, where he defended the rebellion of the Colonies in a pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. His new compatriots rewarded him pretty handsomely, and after about a dozen years he returned to Europe, visiting

England, which, however, he left again very shortly (it is said owing to the persuasion of Blake), just in time to escape arrest. He had already made friends in France, and his publication of *The Rights of Man* (1791-92), in answer to Burke's attack on the Revolution, made him enormously popular in that country. He was made a French citizen, and elected by the Pas de Calais to the Convention. His part here was not discreditable. He opposed the King's execution, and, being expelled the Convention and imprisoned by the Jacobins, wrote his other notorious work, *The Age of Reason* (1794-95), in which he maintained the Deist position against both Atheism and Christianity. He recovered his liberty and his seat, and was rather a favourite with Napoleon. In 1802 he went back to America, and died there (a confirmed drunkard it is said and denied) seven years later. A few years later still, Cobbett, in one of his sillier moods, brought Paine's bones back to England, which did not in the least want them.

The coarse and violent expression, as well as the unpopular matter, of Paine's works may have led to his being rather unfairly treated in the hot fights of the Revolutionary period; but the attempts which have recently been made to whitewash him are a mere mistake of reaction, or paradox, or pure stupidity. The charges which used to be brought against his moral character matter little; for neither side in these days had, or in any days has, a monopoly of loose or of holy living. But two facts will always remain: first, that Paine attacked subjects which all require calm, and some of them reverent, treatment, in a tone of the coarsest

violence; and, secondly, that he engaged in questions of the widest reach, and requiring endless thought and reading, with the scanty equipments and the superabundant confidence of a self-educated man. No better instance of this latter characteristic could be produced or required than a sentence in the preface to the second part of the *Age of Reason*. Here Paine (who admitted that he had written the first part hastily, in expectation of imprisonment, without a library, and without so much as a copy of the Scriptures he was attacking at hand, and who further confessed that he knew neither Hebrew nor Greek nor even Latin) observes: "I have produced a work that no Bible-believer, though writing at his ease and with a library of Church books about him, can refute." In this charming self-satisfaction, which only natural temper assisted by sufficient ignorance can attain in perfection, Paine strongly resembles his disciple Cobbett. But the two were also alike in the effect which this undoubting dogmatism, joined to a very clear, simple, and forcible style, less correct in Paine's case than in Cobbett's, produced upon readers even more ignorant than themselves, and greatly their inferiors in mental strength and literary skill. Paine, indeed, was as much superior to Cobbett in logical faculty as he was his inferior in range of attainments and charm of style; while his ignorance and his arbitrary assumption and exclusion of premises passed unnoticed by the classes whom he more particularly addressed. He was thus among the lower and lower middle classes by far the most formidable propagator of anarchist ideas in religion and

politics that England produced; and his influence lasted till far into the present century, being, it is said, only superseded by new forms of a similar spirit. But he never could have had much on persons of education, unless they were prepared to sympathise with him, or were of singularly weak mind.

William Godwin, on the other hand, affected the "educated persons," and those of more or less intellectual power, even more forcibly than Paine affected the vulgar. This influence of his, indeed, is a thing almost unique, and it has perhaps never yet been succinctly examined and appraised. Born at Wisbech in 1756, the son of a dissenting minister, he himself was thoroughly educated for the Presbyterian ministry, and for some five years discharged its functions. Then in 1783 (again the critical period) he became unorthodox in theology, and took to literature, addicting himself to Whig politics. He also did a certain amount of tutoring. It was not, however, till nearly ten years after he had first taken to writing that he made his mark, and attained the influence above referred to by a series of works rather remarkably different in character. 1793 saw the famous *Inquiry concerning Political Justice*, which for a time carried away many of the best and brightest of the youth of England. Next year came the equally famous and more long-lived novel of *Caleb Williams*, and an extensive criticism (now much forgotten, but at the time of almost equal importance with these), published in the *Morning Chronicle*, of the charge of Lord Chief-Justice Eyre in the trial of Horne Tooke, Holcroft, and others for high

treason. Godwin himself ran some risk of prosecution; and that he was left unmolested shows that the Pitt government did not strain its powers, as is sometimes alleged. In 1797 he published *The Enquirer*, a collection of essays on many different subjects; and in 1799 his second remarkable novel (it should be said that in his early years of struggle he had written others which are quite forgotten) *St. Leon*. The closing years of the period also saw first his connection and then his marriage with Mary Wollstonecraft, who will be noticed immediately after him.

It is rather curious that Godwin, who was but forty-four at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and continued to be a diligent writer as well as a publisher and bookseller till his death in 1836, his last years being made comfortable by a place under the Reform Ministry, never did anything really good after the eighteenth century had closed. His tragedy *Antonio* only deserves remembrance because of Lamb's exquisite account of its damnation. His *Life of Chaucer* (1801) was one of the earliest examples of that style of padding and guesswork in literary biography with which literature has been flooded since. His later novels —*Fleetwood*, *Mandeville*, *Cloudesley*, etc. – are far inferior to *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon* (1799). His *Treatise of Population* (1820), in answer to Malthus, was belated and ineffective; and his *History of the Commonwealth*, in four volumes, though a very respectable compilation, is nothing more. Godwin's character was peculiar, and cannot be said to be pleasing. Though regarded (or at least described) by his enemies

as an apostle of license, he seems to have been a rather cold-blooded person, whose one passion for Mary Wollstonecraft was at least as much an affair of the head as of the heart. He was decidedly vain, and as decidedly priggish; but the worst thing about him was his tendency to "sponge" – a tendency which he indulged not merely on his generous son-in-law Shelley, but on almost everybody with whom he came in contact. It is, however, fair to admit that this tendency (which was probably a legacy of the patronage system) was very wide-spread at the time; that the mighty genius of Coleridge succumbed to it to a worse extent even than Godwin did; and that Southey himself, who for general uprightness and independence has no superior in literary history, was content for years to live upon the liberality not merely of an uncle, but of a school comrade, in a way which in our own days would probably make men of not half his moral worth seriously uncomfortable.

Estimates of the strictly formal excellence of Godwin's writing have differed rather remarkably. To take two only, his most recent biographer, Mr. Kegan Paul, is never weary of praising the "beauty" of Godwin's style; while Scott, a very competent and certainly not a very savage critic, speaks of the style of the Chaucer as "uncommonly depraved, exhibiting the opposite defects of meanness and of bombast." This last is too severe; but I am unable often to see the great beauty, the charm, and so forth, which Godwin's admirers have found in his writings. He shows perhaps at his best in this respect in *St. Leon*,

where there are some passages of a rather artificial, but solemn and grandiose beauty; and he can seldom be refused the praise of a capable and easily wielded fashion of writing, equally adapted to exposition, description, and argument. But that Godwin's taste and style were by no means impeccable is proved by his elaborate essay on the subject in the *Enquirer*, where he endeavours to show that the progress of English prose-writing had been one of unbroken improvement since the time of Queen Elizabeth, and pours contempt on passages of Shakespeare and others where more catholic appreciation could not fail to see the beauty. In practice his special characteristic, which Scott (or Jeffrey, for the criticism appeared in the *Edinburgh*) selected for special reprobation in the context of the passage quoted above, was the accumulation of short sentences, very much in the manner of which, in the two generations since his death, Macaulay and the late Mr. J. R. Green, have been the chief exponents. Hazlitt probably learnt this from Godwin; and I think there is no doubt that Macaulay learnt it from Hazlitt.

It may, however, be freely admitted that whatever Godwin had to say was at least likely not to be prejudicially affected by the manner in which he said it. And he had, as we have seen, a great deal to say in a great many kinds. The "New Philosophy," as it was called, of the *Political Justice* was to a great extent softened, if not positively retracted, in subsequent editions and publications; but its quality as first set forth accounts both for the conquest which it, temporarily at least, obtained over such

minds as those of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and for the horror with which it was regarded elsewhere. Godwin's system was not too consistent, and many of its parts were borrowed more or less directly from others: from Locke, from Hume, from the French materialists, from Jonathan Edwards, and, by way of reaction as well as imitation, from Rousseau. But Godwin's distinctive claim, if not exactly glory, is that he was the first systematic Anarchist. His cardinal principle was that government in itself, and with all its consequences of law, restriction, punishment, etc., is bad, and to be got rid of. He combined this (logically enough) with perfectibilism – supposing the individual to be infinitely susceptible of "melioration" by the right use of reason – and (rather illogically) with necessarianism. In carrying out his views he not only did not hesitate at condemning religion, marriage, and all other restrictions of the kind, but indulged in many curious crotchets as to the uselessness, if not mischievousness, of gratitude and other sentiments generally considered virtuous. The indefinite development of the individual by reason and liberty, and the general welfare of the community at large, were the only standards that he admitted. And it should be said, to his credit, that he condemned the use of violence and physical force *against* government quite as strongly as their use *by* government. The establishment of absolute liberty, in the confidence that it will lead to absolute happiness, was, at first at any rate, the main idea of the *Political Justice*, and it is easy to understand what wild work it must have made with heads already heated by the

thunder-weather of change that was pervading Europe.

Godwin has been frequently charged with alarm at the anarchist phantom he had raised. It is certain not merely that he altered and softened the *Political Justice* not a little, but that in his next work of the same kind, *The Enquirer*, he took both a very different line of investigation and a different tone of handling. In the preface he represents it as a sort of inductive complement to the high *a priori* scheme of his former work; but this is not a sufficient account of the matter. It is true that his paradoxical rebellion against conventions appears here and there; and his literary criticism, which was never strong, may be typified by his contrast of the "hide-bound sportiveness" of Fielding with the "flowing and graceful hilarity" of Sterne. Indeed, this sentence takes Godwin's measure pretty finally, and shows that he was of his age, not for all time. But, on the other hand, it is fair to say that the essays on "The Study of the Classics" and the "Choice of Reading," dealing with subjects on which, both then and since, oceans of cant and nonsense have been poured forth, are nearly as sound as they can be.

In his purely imaginative work he presents a contrast not much less strange. We may confine attention here to the two capital examples of it. *Caleb Williams* alone has survived as a book of popular reading, and it is no small tribute to its power that, a full century after its publication, it is still kept on sale in sixpenny editions. Yet on no novel perhaps is it so difficult to adjust critical judgment, either by the historical or the personal methods. Both

its general theme – the discovery of a crime committed by a man of high reputation and unusual moral worth, and the persecution of the discoverer by the criminal – and its details, are thoroughly leavened and coloured by Godwin's political and social views at the time; and either this or some other defect has made it readable with great difficulty at all times by some persons, among whom I am bound to enrol myself. Yet the ingenuity of its construction, in spite of the most glaring impossibilities, the striking situations it contains, and no doubt other merits, have always secured readers for it. *St. Leon*, a romance of the *elixir vitæ*, has no corresponding central interest, and, save in the amiable but very conventional figure of the heroine Marguerite, who is said to have been studied from Mary Wollstonecraft, no interest of character; while its defects of local colour and historical truth are glaring. But Godwin, who was in so many ways a mirror of the new thought of the time, had caught by anticipation something of its nascent spirit of romance. He is altogether a rather puzzling person; and perhaps the truest explanation of the puzzle, as well as certainly the most comfortable to the critic, is that his genius and literary temperament were emphatically crude and undeveloped, that he was a prophet rather than anything else, and that he had the incoherencies and the inconsistencies almost inseparable from prophecy.

Even if fate and metaphysical aid had not conjoined Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft in the closest bond possible between man and woman, it would have been proper to mention their

names together as authors. For as Godwin's "New Philosophy" was the boldest attempt made by any man of the time in print to overthrow received conventions of the relations of man to man, and incidentally of man to woman, so was his wife's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* a complement of it in relation to the status of the other sex as such. She was rather hardly treated in her own time; Horace Walpole calling her, it is said (I have not verified the quotation), a "hyena in petticoats": it would be at least as just to call Lord Orford a baboon in breeches. And though of late years she has been made something of a heroine, it is to be feared that admiration has been directed rather to her crotchets than to her character. This last appears to have been as lovable as her hap was ill. The daughter of an Irishman of means, who squandered them and became a burden on his children; the sister of an attorney who was selfishly indifferent to his sisters – she had to fend for herself almost entirely. At one time she and her sisters kept school; then she was, thanks to the recommendation of Mr. Prior, a master at Eton, introduced as governess to the family of Lord Kingsborough; then, after doing hack-work for Johnson, the chief Liberal publisher of the period, she went to Paris, and unluckily fell in with a handsome scoundrel, Gilbert Imlay, an American soldier. She lived with him, he deserted her, and she nearly committed the suicide which was actually the fate of her unfortunate daughter by him, Fanny Imlay or Godwin. Only at the last had she a glimpse of happiness. Godwin, who had some weaknesses, but who was not a scoundrel, met

her, and fell in love with her, and as both had independently demonstrated that marriage was a failure, they naturally married; but she died a week after giving birth to a daughter – the future Mrs. Shelley. The *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, on which Mary Wollstonecraft's fame as an author almost wholly rests, is in some ways a book nearly as faulty as it can be. It is not well written; it is full of prejudices quite as wrong-headed as those it combats; it shows very little knowledge either of human nature or of good society; and its "niceness," to use the word in what was then its proper sense, often goes near to the nasty. But its protest on the one hand against the "proper" sentimentality of such English guides of female youth as Drs. Fordyce and Gregory, on the other against the "improper" sentimentality of Rousseau, is genuine and generous. Many of its positions and contentions may be accepted unhesitatingly to-day by those who are by no means enamoured of advanced womanhood; and Mary, as contrasted with most of her rights-of-women followers, is curiously free from bumptiousness and the general qualities of the virago. She had but ill luck in life, and perhaps showed no very good judgment in letters, but she had neither bad brains nor bad blood; and the references to her, long after her death, by such men as Southey, show the charm which she exercised.

With Godwin also is very commonly connected Thomas Holcroft (or, as Lamb always preferred to spell the name, "*Ould*craft"), a curiosity of literature and a rather typical figure of the time. Holcroft was born in London in December 1745,

quite in the lowest ranks, and himself rose from being stable-boy at Newmarket, through the generally democratic trade of shoemaking, to quasi-literary positions as schoolmaster and clerk, and then to the dignity of actor. He was about thirty-five when he first began regular authorship; and during the rest of his life he wrote four novels, some score and a half of plays, and divers other works, none of which is so good as his Autobiography, published after his death by Hazlitt, and said to be in part that writer's work. It would have been fortunate for Holcroft if he had confined himself to literature; for some of his plays, notably *The Road to Ruin*, brought him in positively large sums of money, and his novels were fairly popular. But he was a violent democrat, – some indeed attributed to him the origination of most of the startling things in Godwin's *Political Justice*, – and in 1794 he was tried, though with no result, for high treason, with Horne Tooke and others. This brought him into the society of the young Jacobin school, – Coleridge, and the rest, – but was disastrous to the success of his plays; and when he went abroad in 1799 he entered on an extraordinary business of buying old masters (which were rubbish) and sending them to England, where they generally sold for nothing. He returned, however, and died on 23rd March 1809.

Holcroft's theatre will best receive such notice as it requires in connection with the other drama of the century. Of his novels, *Alwyn*, the first, had to do with his experiences as an actor, and *Hugh Trevor* is also supposed to have been more or less

autobiographical. Holcroft's chief novel, however, is *Anna St. Ives*, a book in no less than seven volumes, though not very large ones, which was published in 1792, and which exhibits no small affinities to Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, and indeed to the *Political Justice* itself. And Godwin, who was not above acknowledging mental obligations, if he was rather ill at discharging pecuniary ones, admits the influence which Holcroft had upon him. *Anna St. Ives*, which, like so many of the other novels of its day, is in letters, is worth reading by those who can spare the time. But it cannot compare, for mere amusement, with the very remarkable *Memoir* above referred to. Only about a fourth of this is said to be in Holcroft's own words; but Hazlitt has made excellent matter of the rest, and it includes a good deal of diary and other authentic work. In his own part Holcroft shows himself a master of the vernacular, as well as (what he undoubtedly was) a man of singular shrewdness and strength of mental temper.

The Novel school of the period (to which Holcroft introduces us) is full and decidedly interesting, though it contains at the best one masterpiece, *Vathek*, and a large number of more or less meritorious attempts in false styles. The kind was very largely written – much more so than is generally thought. Thus Godwin, in his early struggling days, and long before the complete success of *Caleb Williams*, wrote, as has been mentioned, for trifling sums of money (five and ten guineas), two or three novels which even the zeal of his enthusiastic biographer does not seem to have been able to recover. Nor did the circulating library, even

then a flourishing institution, lack hands more or less eminent to work for it, or customers to take off its products. The Minerva Press, much cited but little read, had its origin in this our time; and this time is entitled to the sole and single credit of starting and carrying far a bastard growth of fiction, the "tale of terror," which continued to be cultivated in its simplest form for at least half a century, and which can hardly be said to be quite obsolete yet. But as usual we must proceed by special names, and there is certainly no lack of them. "Zeluco" Moore has been dealt with already; Day, the eccentric author of *Sanford and Merton*, belongs mainly to an earlier period, and died, still a young man, in the year of the French Revolution; but, besides, Holcroft, Beckford, Bage, Cumberland, Mrs. Radcliffe, and Monk Lewis, with Mrs. Inchbald, are distinctly "illustrations" of the time, and must have more or less separate mention.

William Beckford is one of the problems of English literature. He was one of the richest men in England, and his long life – 1760 to 1844 – was occupied for the most part not merely with the collection, but with the reading of books. That he could write as well as read he showed as a mere boy by his satirical *Memoirs of Painters*, and by the great-in-little novel of *Vathek* (1783), respecting the composition of which in French or English divers fables are told. Then he published nothing for forty years, till in 1834 and 1835 he issued his *Travels in Italy, Spain, and Portugal*, recollections of his earliest youth. These travels have extraordinary merits of their kind; but *Vathek* is

a kind almost to itself. The history of the Caliph, in so far as it is a satire on unlimited power, is an eighteenth century commonplace; while many traits in it are obviously imitated from Voltaire. But the figure of Nouronihar, which Byron perhaps would have equalled if he could, stands alone in literature as a fantastic projection of the potentiality of evil magnificence in feminine character; and the closing scenes in the domain of Eblis have the grandeur of Blake combined with that finish which Blake's temperament, joined to his ignorance of literature and his lack of scholarship, made it impossible for him to give. The book is quite unique. It could hardly, in some of its weaker parts especially, have been written at any other time; and yet its greater characteristics have nothing to do with that time. In the florid kind of supernatural story it has no equal. Only Dante, Beckford, and Scott in *Wandering Willie's Tale* have given us Hells that are worthy of the idea of Hell.

Except that both were very much of their time, it would be impossible to imagine a more complete contrast than that which exists between Beckford and Bage. The former was, as has been said, one of the richest men in England, the creator of two "Paradises" at Fonthill and Cintra, the absolute arbiter of his time and his pleasures, a Member of Parliament while he chose to be so, a student, fierce and recluse, the husband of a daughter of the Gordons, and the father of a mother of the Hamiltons, the collector, disperser, bequeather of libraries almost unequalled in magnificence and choice. Robert Bage,

who was born in 1728 and died in 1801, was in some ways a typical middle-class Englishman. He was a papermaker, and the son of a papermaker; he was never exactly affluent nor exactly needy; he was apparently a Quaker by education and a freethinker by choice; and between 1781 and 1796, obliged by this reason or that to stain the paper which he made, he produced six novels: *Mount Henneth*, *Barham Downs*, *The Fair Syrian*, *James Wallace*, *Man as he is*, and *Hermsprong*. The first, second, and fourth of these were admitted by Scott to the "Ballantyne Novels," the others, though *Hermsprong* is admittedly Bage's best work, were not. It is impossible to say that there is genius in Bage; yet he is a very remarkable writer, and there is noticeable in him that singular *fin de siècle* tendency which has reasserted itself a century later. An imitator of Fielding and Smollett in general plan, – of the latter specially in the dangerous scheme of narrative by letter, – Bage added to their methods the purpose of advocating a looser scheme of morals and a more anarchical system of government. In other words, Bage, though a man well advanced in years at the date of the Revolution, exhibits for us distinctly the spirit which brought the Revolution about. He is a companion of Godwin and of Mary Wollstonecraft; and though it must be admitted that, as in other cases, the presence of "impropriety" in him by no means implies the absence of dulness, he is full of a queer sort of undeveloped and irregular cleverness.

The most famous, though not the only novel of Richard

Cumberland; *Henry*, shows the same tendency to break loose from British decorum, even such decorum as had really been in the main observed by the much-abused pens of Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne himself; but it has little purpose and indeed little vigour of any kind. Cumberland clung as close as he could to the method of Fielding, including the preliminary dissertation or meditation, but he would be a very strange reader who should mistake the two.

The school of Bage and Cumberland, the former of whom bears some little resemblance to his countrywoman George Eliot, was, with or without Bage's purpose, continued more or less steadily; indeed, it may be said to be little more than a variant, with local colour, of the ordinary school of novel-writing. But it was not this school which was to give tone to the period. The "tale of terror" had been started by Horace Walpole in the *Castle of Otranto*, and had, as we have seen, received a new and brilliant illustration in the hands of Beckford. But the genius of the author of *Vathek* could not be followed; the talent of the author of the *Castle of Otranto* was more easily imitated. How far the practice of the Germans (who had themselves imitated Walpole, and whose work began in the two last decades of the century to have a great reflex influence upon England) was responsible for the style of story which, after Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis had set the fashion, dominated the circulating libraries for years, is a question not easy and perhaps not necessary to answer positively. I believe myself that no foreign influence ever causes a change in

national taste; it merely coincides therewith. But the fact of the set in the tide is unmistakable and undeniable. For some years the two authors just mentioned rode paramount in the affections of English novel readers; before long Miss Austen devoted her early and delightful effort, *Northanger Abbey*, to satirising the taste for them, and quoted or invented a well-known list of blood-curdling titles;[2] the morbid talent of Maturin gave a fresh impulse to it, even after the healthier genius of Scott had already revolutionised the general scheme of novel-writing; and yet later still an industrious literary hack, Leitch Ritchie, was able to issue, and it may be presumed to find readers for, a variety of romance the titles of which might strike a hasty practitioner of the kind of censure usual in biblical criticism as a designed parody of Miss Austen's own catalogue. The style, indeed, in the wide sense has never lost favour. But in the special Radcliffian form it reigned for some thirty years, and was widely popular for nearly fifty.

Anne Radcliffe, whose maiden name was Ward, was born on 9th July 1764 and died on 7th February 1822. One of her novels, *Gaston de Blondeville*, was published posthumously; but otherwise her whole literary production took place between the years 1789 and 1797. The first of these years saw *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, a very immature work; the last *The Italian*, which is perhaps the best. Between them appeared *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), and the far-

[2] I used to think these titles sprouts of the author's brain; but a correspondent assured me that one or two at least are certainly genuine. Possibly, therefore all are.

famed *Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1795. Matthew Gregory Lewis, who, like Beckford, was a West-Indian landowner and member for Hindon, and was well-to-do if not extremely wealthy, was nine years younger than Mrs. Radcliffe, and did not produce his famous *Monk* till the same year which saw *Udolpho*. He published a good deal of other work in prose, verse, and drama; the most noteworthy of the second class being *Tales of Terror*, to which Scott contributed, and the most noteworthy of the third *The Castle Spectre*. Lewis, who, despite some foibles, was decidedly popular in the literary and fashionable society of his time, died in 1818 at the age of forty-five on his way home from the West Indies. Although he would have us understand that *The Monk* was written some time before its actual publication, Lewis' position as a direct imitator of Mrs. Radcliffe is unmistakable; and although he added to the characteristics of her novels a certain appeal to "Lubricity" from which she was completely free, the general scheme of the two writers, as well as that of all their school, varies hardly at all. The supernatural in Mrs. Radcliffe's case is mainly, if not wholly, what has been called "the explained supernatural," – that is to say, the apparently ghostly, and certainly ghastly, effects are usually if not always traced to natural causes, while in most if not all of her followers the demand for more highly spiced fare in the reader, and perhaps a defect of ingenuity in the writer, leaves the devils and witches as they were. In all, without exception, castles with secret passages, trap-doors, forests, banditti, abductions, sliding panels, and other

apparatus and paraphernalia of the kind play the main part. The actual literary value is, on the whole, low; though Mrs. Radcliffe is not without glimmerings, and it is exceedingly curious to note that, just before the historical novel was once for all started by Scott, there is in all these writers an absolute and utter want of comprehension of historical propriety, of local and temporal colour, and of all the marks which were so soon to distinguish fiction. Yet at the very same time the yearning after the historical is shown in the most unmistakable fashion from Godwin down to the Misses Lee, Harriet and Sophia (the latter of whom in 1783 produced, in *The Recess*, a preposterous Elizabethan story, which would have liked to be a historical novel), and other known and unknown writers.

Another lady deserves somewhat longer notice. Hannah More, once a substantially famous person in literature, is now chiefly remembered by her association with great men of letters, such as Johnson in her youth, Macaulay and De Quincey in her old age. She was born as early as 1745 near Bristol, and all her life was a Somerset worthy. She began – a curious beginning for so serious a lady, but with reforming intentions – to write for the stage, published *The Search after Happiness* when she was seventeen, and had two rather dreary tragedies, *Percy* and the *Fatal Secret*, acted, Garrick being a family friend of hers. Becoming, as her day said, "pious," she wrote "Sacred Dramas," and at Cowslip Green, Barley Wood, and Clifton produced "Moral Essays," the once famous novel of *C[oe]lebs in Search of a Wife*, and many

tracts, the best known of which is *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*. She died at a great age on 7th September 1833. Hannah More is not to be spoken of with contempt, except by ignorance or incompetence. She had real abilities, and was a woman of the world. But she was very unfortunately parted in respect of time, coming just before the days when it became possible for a lady to be decent in literature without being dull.

If a book and not a chapter were allowed about this curious, and on the whole rather neglected and undervalued, Fifth Act of the eighteenth century, many of its minor literary phenomena would have to be noticed: such as the last state of periodicals before the uprising of the *Edinburgh Review*, and the local literary coteries, the most notable of which was that of Norwich, with the Aldersons, Sayers the poet, who taught Southey and others to try blank verse in other measures than the decasyllabic, William Taylor, the apostle of German literature in England, and others. But, as it is, we must concentrate our attention on its main lines.

In these lines the poetical pioneers, the political and other satirists, the revolutionary propagandists, and the novelists of terror, are the four classes of writers that distinguish the period 1780 to 1800; and perhaps they distinguish it sufficiently, at least for those with whom historical genesis and connection atone to some extent for want of the first order of intrinsic interest. In less characteristic classes and in isolated literary personalities the time was not extremely rich, though it was not quite barren. We

can here only notice cursorily the theological controversialists who, like Paley, Horsley, and Watson, waged war against the fresh outburst of aggressive Deism coinciding with the French Revolution: the scholars, such as, in their different ways, Dr. Parr, the Whig "moon" of Dr. Johnson; Porson, the famous Cambridge Grecian, drinker, and democrat; Taylor the Platonist, a strange person who translated most of the works of Plato and was said to have carried his discipleship to the extent of a positive Paganism; Gilbert Wakefield, a miscellaneous writer who wrote rapidly and with little judgment, but with some scholarship and even some touches of genius, on a great variety of subjects; Jacob Bryant, mythologist, theologian, and historical critic, a man of vast learning but rather weak critical power; and many others. Of some of these we may indeed have more to say later, as also of the much-abused Malthus, whose famous book, in part one of the consequences of Godwin, appeared in 1798; while as for drama, we shall return to that too. Sheridan survived through the whole of the time and a good deal beyond it; but his best work was done, and the chief dramatists of the actual day were Colman, Holcroft, Cumberland, and the farce-writer O'Keefe, a man of humour and a lively fancy.

One, however, of these minor writers has too much of what has been called "the interest of origins" not to have a paragraph to himself. William Gilpin, who prided himself on his connection with Bernard Gilpin, the so-called "Apostle of the North" in the sixteenth century, was born at Carlisle. But he is best known in

connection with the New Forest, where, after taking his degree at Oxford, receiving orders, and keeping a school for some time, he was appointed to the living of Boldre. This he held till his death in 1814. Gilpin was not a secularly-minded parson by any means; but his literary fame is derived from the series of Picturesque Tours (*The Highlands*, 1778; *The Wye and South Wales*, 1782; *The Lakes*, 1789; *Forest Scenery*, 1791; and *The West of England and the Isle of Wight*, 1798) which he published in the last quarter of the century. They were extremely popular, they set a fashion which may be said never to have died out since, and they attained the seal of parody in the famous *Dr. Syntax* of William Combe (1741-1823), an Eton and Oxford man who spent a fortune and then wrote an enormous amount of the most widely various work in verse and prose, of which little but *Syntax* itself (1812 *sqq.*) is remembered. Gilpin himself is interesting as an important member of "the naturals," as they have been oddly and equivocally called. His style is much more florid and less just than Gilbert White's, and his observation correspondingly less true. But he had a keen sense of natural beauty and did much to instill it into others.

In all the work of the time, however, great and small, from the half-unconscious inspiration of Burns and Blake to the common journey-work of book-making, we shall find the same character – incessantly recurring, and unmistakable afterwards if not always recognisable at the time – of transition, of decay and seed-time mingled with and crossing each other. There are no distinct

spontaneous literary schools: the forms which literature takes are either occasional and dependent upon outward events, such as the wide and varied attack and defence consequent upon the French Revolution, or else fantastic, trivial, reflex. Sometimes the absence of any distinct and creative impulse reveals itself in work really good and useful, such as the editing of old writers, of which the labours of Malone are the chief example and the forgeries of Ireland the corresponding corruption; or the return to their study æsthetically, in which Headley, a now forgotten critic, did good work. Sometimes it resulted in such things as the literary reputation (which was an actual thing after a kind) of persons like Sir James Bland Burges, Under-Secretary of State, poetaster, connoisseur, and general fribble. Yet all the while, in schools and universities, in London garrets and country villages, there was growing up, and sometimes showing itself pretty unmistakably, the generation which was to substitute for this trying and trifling the greatest work in verse, and not the least in prose, that had been done for two hundred years. The *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, the clarion-call of the new poetry, so clearly sounded, so inattentively heard, might have told all, and did tell some, what this generation was about to do.

CHAPTER II
THE NEW POETRY

The opening years of the eighth decade of the eighteenth century saw, in unusually close conjunction, the births of the men who were to be the chief exponents, and in their turn the chief determining forces, of the new movement. The three greatest were born, Wordsworth in 1770, Scott in 1771, and Coleridge in 1772; Southey, who partly through accident was to form a trinity with Wordsworth and Coleridge, and who was perhaps the most typical instance of a certain new kind of man of letters, followed in 1774; while Lamb and Hazlitt, the chief romantic pioneers in criticism, Jeffrey and Sydney Smith, the chief classical reactionaries therein, were all born within the decade. But the influence of Scott was for various reasons delayed a little; and critics naturally come after creators. So that the time-honoured eminence of the "Lake Poets" – Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey – need not be disturbed.

The day of the birth of William Wordsworth was the 7th of April, the place Cockermouth. His father was an attorney, and, as Lord Lonsdale's agent, a man of some means and position; but on his death in 1783 the eccentric and unamiable character of the then Lord Lonsdale, by delaying the settlement of accounts, put the family in considerable difficulties. Wordsworth, however,

was thoroughly educated at Hawkshead Grammar School and St. John's College, Cambridge, where he took his B.A. degree in 1791. He travelled in France, and for a time, like many young men, was a fervent Republican; but, like all the nobler of those who had "hailed the dawn of the French Revolution," he lived to curse its noon. He published early, his first volume of poems bearing the date 1793; but, though that attention to nature which was always his chief note appeared here, the work is not by any means of an epoch-making character. He was averse from every profession; but the fates were kind to him, and a legacy of £900 from his friend Raisley Calvert made a man of such simple tastes as his independent, for a time at least. On the strength of it he settled first at Racedown in Dorset, and then at Alfoxden in Somerset, in the companionship of his sister Dorothy; and at the second of the two places in the neighbourhood of Coleridge. Massive and original as Wordsworth's own genius was, it is almost impossible to exaggerate the effect, both in stimulus and guidance, of the influence of these two; for Dorothy Wordsworth was a woman of a million, and Coleridge, marvellous as were his own powers, was almost more marvellous in the unique Socratic character of his effect on those who possessed anything to work upon. The two poets produced in 1798 the *Lyrical Ballads*, among the contents of which it is sufficient to mention *Tintern Abbey* and *The Ancient Mariner;* and they subsequently travelled together in Germany. Then Wordsworth returned to his native lakes and never left them

for long, abiding first at or near Grasmere, and from 1813 at his well-known home of Rydal Mount. When Lord Lonsdale died in 1802, his successor promptly and liberally settled the Wordsworth claims. The poet soon married his cousin Mary Hutchinson; and Lord Lonsdale, not satisfied with atoning for his predecessor's injustice, procured him, in the year of his migration to Rydal, the office of Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland – an office which was almost a sinecure, and was, for a man of Wordsworth's tastes, more than amply paid. It is curious, and a capital instance to prove that the malignity of fortune has itself been maligned, that the one English poet who was constitutionally incapable of writing for bread never was under any necessity to do so. For full sixty years Wordsworth wandered much, read little, meditated without stint, and wrote, though never hurriedly, yet almost incessantly. The dates of his chief publications may be best given in a note.[3] For some years his poems were greeted by the general public and by a few of its critical guides with storms of obloquy and ridicule; but Wordsworth, though never indifferent to criticism, was severely disdainful of it, and held on his way. From the first the brightest spirits of England had been his passionate though by no means always undiscriminating admirers; and about the end of the first

[3] *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, and with additions 1800; *Poems*, 1807 (in these four volumes even adorers have allowed all his greatest work to be included); *The Excursion*, 1814; *The White Doe of Rylston*, 1815; *Sonnets on the River Duddon*, and others, 1819-20. In 1836 he brought out a collected edition of his poems in six volumes. *The Prelude* was posthumous.

quarter of the century the public began to come round. Oxford, always first to recognise, if not always first to produce, the greatest achievements of English literature, gave him its D.C.L. in 1839. He received a pension of £300 a year in 1842 from Sir Robert Peel, who, unlike most English Prime Ministers, cared for men of letters; the laureateship fell to him in right of right on Southey's death in 1843, and he died on the 23rd of April 1850, having come to fourscore years almost without labour, and without many heavy sorrows.

Of his character not much need be said. Like that of Milton, whom he in many ways resembled (they had even both, as Hartley Coleridge has pointed out, brothers named Christopher), it was not wholly amiable, and the defects in it were no doubt aggravated by his early condition (for it must be remembered that till he was two and thirty his prospects were of the most disquieting character), by the unjust opposition which the rise of his reputation met with, and by his solitary life in contact only with worshipping friends and connections. One of these very worshippers confesses that he was "inhumanly arrogant"; and he was also, what all arrogant men are not, rude. He was entirely self-centred, and his own circle of interests and tastes was not wide. It is said that he would cut books with a buttery knife, and after that it is probably unnecessary to say any more, for the fact "surprises by itself" an indictment of almost infinite counts.

But his genius is not so easily despatched. I have said that it is now as a whole universally recognised, and I cannot but think

that Mr. Matthew Arnold was wrong when he gave a contrary opinion some fifteen years ago. He must have been biassed by his own remembrance of earlier years, when Wordsworth was still a bone of contention. I should say that never since I myself was an undergraduate, that is to say, for the last thirty years, has there been any dispute among Englishmen whose opinion was worth taking, and who cared for poetry at all, on the general merits of Wordsworth. But this agreement is compatible with a vast amount of disagreement in detail; and Mr. Arnold's own estimate, as where he compares Wordsworth with Molière (who was not a poet at all, though he sometimes wrote very tolerable verse), weighs him with poets of the second class like Gray and Manzoni, and finally admits him for his dealings with "life," introduces fresh puzzlements into the valuation. There is only one principle on which that valuation can properly proceed, and this is the question, "Is the poet rich in essentially poetical moments of the highest power and kind?" And by poetical moments I mean those instances of expression which, no matter what their subject, their intention, or their context may be, cause instantaneously in the fit reader a poetical impression of the intensest and most moving quality.

Let us consider the matter from this point of view.[4]

---

[4] It must be remembered that Wordsworth was a prose writer of considerable excellence and of no small volume. Many people no doubt were surprised when Dr. Grosart, by collecting his pamphlets, his essays, his notes, and his letters, managed to fill three large octavo volumes. But his poetry so far outweighs his prose (though, like most poets, he could write admirably in his pedestrian style when he chose) that

The chief poetical influences under which Wordsworth began to write appear to have been those of Burns and Milton; both were upon him to the last, and both did him harm as well as good. It was probably in direct imitation of Burns, as well as in direct opposition to the prevailing habits of the eighteenth century, that he conceived the theory of poetic diction which he defended in prose and exemplified in verse. The chief point of this theory was the use of the simplest and most familiar language, and the double fallacy is sufficiently obvious. Wordsworth forgot that the reason why the poetic diction of the three preceding generations had become loathsome was precisely this, that it had become familiar; while the familiar Scots of Burns was in itself unfamiliar to the English ear. On the other hand, he borrowed from Milton, and used more and more as he grew older, a distinctly stiff and unvernacular form of poetic diction itself. Few except extreme and hopeless Wordsworthians now deny that the result of his attempts at simple language was and is far more ludicrous than touching. The wonderful *Affliction of Margaret* does not draw its power from the neglect of poetic diction, but from the intensity of emotion which would carry off almost any diction, simple or affected; while on the other hand such pieces as "We are Seven," as the "Anecdote for Fathers,"

---

his utterances in "the other harmony" need not be specially considered. The two most considerable examples of this prose are the pamphlet on *The Convention of Cintra* and the five and twenty years later *Guide to the Lakes*. But minor essays, letters of a more or less formal character, and prefaces and notes to the poems, make up a goodly total; and always display a genius germane to that of the poems.

and as "Alice Fell," not to mention "Betty Foy" and others, which specially infuriated Wordsworth's own contemporaries, certainly gain nothing from their namby-pamby dialect, and sometimes go near to losing the beauty that really is in them by dint of it. Moreover, the Miltonic blank verse and sonnets – at their best of a stately magnificence surpassed by no poet – have a tendency to become heavy and even dull when the poetic fire fails to fuse and shine through them. In fact it may be said of Wordsworth, as of most poets with theories, that his theories helped him very little, and sometimes hindered him a great deal.

His real poetical merits are threefold, and lie first in the inexplicable, the ultimate, felicity of phrase which all great poets must have, and which only great poets have; secondly, in his matchless power of delineating natural objects; and lastly, more properly, and with most special rarity of all, in the half-pantheistic mysticism which always lies behind this observation, and which every now and then breaks through it, puts it, as mere observation, aside, and blazes in unmasked fire of rapture. The summits of Wordsworth's poetry, the "Lines Written at Tintern Abbey" and the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," – poems of such astonishing magnificence that it is only more astonishing that any one should have read them and failed to see what a poet had come before the world, – are the greatest of many of these revelations or inspirations. It is indeed necessary to read Wordsworth straight through – a proceeding which requires that the reader shall be in good literary training, but is

then feasible, profitable, and even pleasant enough – to discern the enormous height at which the great Ode stands above its author's other work. The *Tintern Abbey* lines certainly approach it nearest: many smaller things – "The Affliction of Margaret," "The Daffodils," and others – group well under its shadow, and innumerable passages and even single lines, such as that which all good critics have noted as lightening the darkness of the *Prelude*—

> Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone —

must of course be added to the poet's credit. But the Ode remains not merely the greatest, but the one really, dazzlingly, supremely great thing he ever did. Its theory has been scorned or impugned by some; parts of it have even been called nonsense by critics of weight. But, sound or unsound, sense or nonsense, it is poetry, and magnificent poetry, from the first line to the last – poetry than which there is none better in any language, poetry such as there is not perhaps more than a small volume-full in all languages. The second class of merit, that of vivid observation, abounds whereever the poems are opened. But the examples of the first are chiefly found in the lyrics "My Heart Leaps up," "The Sparrow's Nest"; the famous daffodil poem which Jeffrey thought "stuff," which some say Dorothy wrote chiefly, and which is almost perfect of its kind; the splendid opening of the "Lines to Hartley Coleridge," which connect themselves with

the "Immortality Ode"; the exquisite group of the "Cuckoo," the best patches of the Burns poems, and the three "Yarrows"; the "Peel Castle" stanzas; and, to cut a tedious catalogue short, the hideously named but in parts perfectly beautiful "Effusion on the Death of James Hogg," the last really masterly thing that the poet did. In some of these we may care little for the poem as a whole, nothing for the moral the poet wishes to draw. But the poetic moments seize us, the poetic flash dazzles our eyes, and the whole divine despair or not more divine rapture which poetry causes comes upon us.

One division of Wordsworth's work is so remarkable that it must have such special and separate mention as it is here possible to give it; and that is his exercises in the sonnet, wherein to some tastes he stands only below Shakespeare and on a level with Milton. The sonnet, after being long out of favour, paying for its popularity between Wyatt and Milton by neglect, had, principally it would seem on the very inadequate example of Bowles (see *infra*), become a very favourite form with the new Romantics. But none of them wrote it with the steady persistence, and none except Keats with the occasional felicity, of Wordsworth. Its thoughtfulness suited his bent, and its limits frustrated his prolixity, though, it must be owned, he somewhat evaded this benign influence by writing in series. And the sonnets on "The Venetian Republic," on the "Subjugation of Switzerland," that beginning "The world is too much with us," that in November 1806, the first "Personal Talk," the magnificent "Westminster

Bridge," and the opening at least of that on Scott's departure from Abbotsford, are not merely among the glories of Wordsworth, they are among the glories of English poetry.

Unfortunately these moments of perfection are, in the poet's whole work, and especially in that part of it which was composed in the later half of his long life, by no means very frequent. Wordsworth was absolutely destitute of humour, from which it necessarily followed that his self-criticism was either non-existent or constantly at fault. His verse was so little facile, it paid so little regard to any of the common allurements of narrative-interest or varied subject, it was so necessary for it to reach the full white heat, the absolute instant of poetic projection, that when it was not very good it was apt to be scarcely tolerable. It is nearly impossible to be duller than Wordsworth at his dullest, and unluckily it is as impossible to find a poet of anything like his powers who has given himself the license to be dull so often and at such length. The famous "Would he had blotted a thousand" applies to him with as much justice as it was unjust in its original application; and it is sometimes for pages together a positive struggle to remember that one is reading one of the greatest of English poets, and a poet whose influence in making other poets has been second hardly to that of Spenser, of Keats, or of the friend who follows him in our survey.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in Devonshire, at Ottery St. Mary, of which place his father was vicar, on the 21st October 1772. The family was merely respectable before his

day, but since it has been of very unusual distinction, intellectual and other. He went to Christ's Hospital when he was not quite ten years old, and in 1791 was admitted to an exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge, with his thoughts already directed to poetry by the sonnets of Bowles above mentioned, and with a reputation, exaggerated perhaps, but certainly not invented, in Lamb's famous "Elia" paper on his old school. Indeed, high as is Coleridge's literary position on the strength of his writing alone, his talk and its influence on hearers have been unanimously set higher still. He did very well at first, gaining the Browne Medal for Greek Verse and distinguishing himself for the Craven Scholarship; but he speedily fell in love, in debt, it is suspected in drink, and it is known into various political and theological heresies. He left Cambridge and enlisted at Reading in the 15th Light Dragoons. He obtained his discharge, however, in three or four months, and no notice except a formal admonition appears to have been taken of his resuming his position at Cambridge. Indeed he was shortly after elected to a Foundation Scholarship. But in the summer of 1794 he visited Oxford, and after he had fallen in with Southey, whose views were already Jacobinical, the pair engaged themselves to Pantisocracy[5] and the Miss Frickers. This curious and often told story cannot be even summarised here. Its immediate result was that Coleridge left the University

[5] This word, as well as "Aspheterism," which has had a less general currency, was a characteristic coinage of Coleridge's to designate a kind of Communism, partly based on the speculations of Godwin, and intended to be carried into practice in America.

without taking a degree, and, though not at once, married Sarah Fricker on October 1795. Thenceforward he lived on literature and his friends, especially the latter. He tried Unitarian preaching and newspaper work, of which at one time or another he did a good deal. The curious ins and outs of Coleridge's strange though hardly eventful life have, after being long most imperfectly known, been set forth in fullest measure by Mr. Dykes Campbell. It must suffice here to say that, after much wandering, being unable or unwilling to keep house with his own family, he found asylums, first with some kind folk named Morgan, and then in the house of Mr. Gillman at Hampstead, where for years he held forth to rising men of letters, and where he died on the 25th June 1834. His too notorious craving for opium had never been conquered, though it had latterly been kept in some check.

Despite this unfortunate failing and his general inability to carry out any schemes of work on the great scale, Coleridge's literary production was very considerable, and, except the verse, it has never been completely collected or systematically edited. He began verse-writing very early, and early found a vent for it in the *Morning Chronicle*, then a Radical organ. He wrote *The Fall of Robespierre* in conjunction with Southey in 1794, and published it. Some prose pamphlets followed, and then Cottle, the Bristol providence of this group of men of letters, offered thirty guineas for a volume of poems, which duly appeared in 1796. Meanwhile Coleridge had started a singular newspaper called *The Watchman*, which saw ten numbers,

appearing every eighth day. The *Lyrical Ballads* followed in 1798, and meanwhile Coleridge had written the play of *Osorio* (to appear long afterwards as *Remorse*), had begun *Christabel*, and had contributed some of his best poems to the *Morning Post*. His German visit (see *ante*) produced among other things the translation of *Wallenstein*, a translation far above the original. Some poetry and much newspaper work filled the next ten years, with endless schemes; but in 1807 Coleridge began to lecture at the Royal Institution – a course somewhat irregularly delivered, and almost entirely unreported. 1809 saw his second independent periodical venture, *The Friend*, the subsequent reprint of which as a book is completely rewritten. In 1811-12 he delivered his second course of lectures, this time on his own account. It was followed by two others, and in 1813 *Remorse* was produced at Drury Lane, had a fair success, and brought the author some money. *Christabel*, with *Kubla Khan*, appeared in 1816, and the *Biographia Literaria* next year; *Zapolya* and the rewritten *Friend* the year after, when also Coleridge gave a new course of lectures, and yet another, the last. *Aids to Reflection*, in 1825, was the latest important work he issued himself, though in 1828 he superintended a collection of his poems. Such of the rest of his work as is in existence in a collected form has been printed or reprinted since.

A more full account of the appearance of Coleridge's work than is desirable or indeed possible in most cases here has been given, because it is important to convey some idea of the

astonishingly piecemeal fashion in which it reached the world. To those who have studied the author's life of opium-eating; of constant wandering from place to place; of impecuniousness so utter that, after all the painstaking of the modern biographer, and after full allowance for the ravens who seem always to have been ready to feed him, it is a mystery how he escaped the workhouse; of endless schemes and endless non-performance – it is only a wonder that anything of Coleridge's ever reached the public except in newspaper columns. As it was, while his most ambitiously planned books were never written at all, most of those which did reach the press were years in getting through it; and Southey, on one occasion, after waiting fifteen months for the conclusion of a contribution of Coleridge's to *Omniana*, had to cancel the sheet in despair. The collection, after many years, by Mr. Ernest Coleridge of his grandfather's letters has by no means completely removed the mystery which hangs over Coleridge's life and character. We see a little more, but we do not see the whole; and we are still unable to understand what strange impediments there were to the junction of the two ends of power and performance. A rigid judge might almost say, that if friends had not been so kind, fate had been kinder, and that instead of helping they hindered, just as a child who is never allowed to tumble will never learn to walk.

The enormous tolerance of friends, however, which alone enabled him to produce anything, was justified by the astonishing genius to which its possessor gave so unfair a chance. As a

thinker, although the evidence is too imperfect to justify very dogmatic conclusions, the opinion of the best authorities, from which there is little reason for differing, is that Coleridge was much more stimulating than intrinsically valuable. His *Aids to Reflection*, his most systematic work, is disappointing; and, with *The Friend* and the rest, is principally valuable as exhibiting and inculcating an attitude of mind in which the use of logic is not, as in most eighteenth century philosophers, destructive, but is made to consist with a wide license for the employment of imagination and faith. He borrowed a great deal from the Germans, and he at least sometimes forgot that he had borrowed a great deal from our own older writers.

So, too, precise examination of his numerous but fragmentary remains as a literary critic makes it necessary to take a great deal for granted. Here, also, he Germanised much; and it is not certain, even with the aid of his fragments, that he was the equal either of Lamb or of Hazlitt in insight. Perhaps his highest claim is that, in the criticism of philosophy, of religion, and of literature alike he expressed, and was even a little ahead of, the nobler bent and sympathy of his contemporaries. We are still content to assign to Coleridge, perhaps without any very certain title-deeds, the invention of that more catholic way of looking at English literature which can relish the Middle Ages without doing injustice to contemporaries, and can be enthusiastic for the seventeenth century without contemning the eighteenth.[6] To him

[6] Yet this praise can only be assigned to Coleridge with large allowance. He was

more than to any single man is also assigned (and perhaps rightly, though some of his remarks on the Church, even after his rally to orthodoxy, are odd) the great ecclesiastical revival of the Oxford movement; and it is certain that he had not a little to do with the abrupt discarding of the whole tradition of Locke, Berkeley and Hartley only excepted. Difficult as it may be to give distinct chapter and verse for these assignments from the formless welter of his prose works, no good judge has ever doubted their validity, with the above and other exceptions and guards. It may be very difficult to present Coleridge's assets in prose in a liquid form; but few doubt their value.

It is very different with his poetry. Here, too, the disastrous, the almost ruinous results of his weaknesses appear. When one begins to sift and riddle the not small mass of his verse, it shrinks almost appallingly in bulk. *Wallenstein*, though better than the original, is after all only a translation. *Remorse* (either under that name or as *Osorio*) and *Zapolya* are not very much better than the contemporary or slightly later work of Talfourd and Milman. *The Fall of Robespierre* is as absurd and not so amusing as Southey's unassisted *Wat Tyler*. Of the miscellaneous verse with which, after these huge deductions, we are left, much is verse-impromptu, often learned and often witty, for Coleridge was (in early days at any rate) abundantly provided with both

---

always unjust to his own *immediate* predecessors, Johnson, Gibbon, etc.; and he was not too sensible of the real merits of Pope or even of Dryden. In this respect Leigh Hunt, an immeasurably weaker thinker, had a much more catholic taste. And it is not certain that, as a mere prose writer, Coleridge was a very good prose writer.

wit and humour, but quite occasional. Much more consists of mere Juvenilia. Even of the productions of his best times (the last lustrum of the eighteenth century and a lucid interval about 1816) much is not very good. *Religious Musings*, though it has had its admirers, is terribly poor stuff. *The Monody on the Death of Chatterton* might have been written by fifty people during the century before it. *The Destiny of Nations* is a feeble rant; but the *Ode on the Departing Year*, though still unequal, still conventional, strikes a very different note. *The Three Graves*, though injured by the namby-pambiness which was still thought incumbent in ballads, again shows no vulgar touch. And then, omitting for the moment *Kubla Khan*, which Coleridge said he wrote in 1797, but of which no mortal ever heard till 1816, we come to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and the birth of the new poetry in England. Here the stutters and flashes of Blake became coherent speech and steady blaze; here poetry, which for a century and a half had been curbing her voice to a genteel whisper or raising it only to a forensic declamation, which had at best allowed a few wood-notes to escape here and there as if by mistake, spoke out loud and clear.

If this statement seems exaggerated (and it is certain that at the time of the appearance of the *Ancient Mariner* not even Wordsworth, not even Southey quite relished it, while there has always been a sect of dissidents against it), two others will perhaps seem more extravagant still. The second is that, with the exception of this poem, of *Kubla Khan*, of *Christabel*, and

of *Love*, all of them according to Coleridge written within a few months of each other in 1797-98, he never did anything of the first class in poetry. The third is that these four – though *Christabel* itself does not exceed some fifteen hundred lines and is decidedly unequal, though the *Ancient Mariner* is just over six hundred and the other two are quite short – are sufficient between them to rank their author among the very greatest of English poets. It is not possible to make any compromise on this point; for upon it turns an entire theory and system of poetical criticism. Those who demand from poetry a "criticism of life," those who will have it that "all depends on the subject," those who want "moral" or "construction" or a dozen other things, – all good in their way, most of them compatible with poetry and even helpful to it, but none of them essential thereto, – can of course never accept this estimate. Mrs. Barbauld said that *The Ancient Mariner* was "improbable"; and to this charge it must plead guilty at once. *Kubla Khan*, which I should rank as almost the best of the four, is very brief, and is nothing but a dream, and a fragment of a dream. *Love* is very short too, and is flawed by some of the aforesaid namby-pambiness, from which none of the Lake school escaped when they tried passion. *Christabel*, the most ambitious if also the most unequal, does really underlie the criticism that, professing itself to be a narrative and holding out the promise of something like a connected story, it tells none, and does not even offer very distinct hints or suggestions or what its story, if it had ever been told, might have been. A thousand

faults are in it; a good part of the thousand in all four.

But there is also there something which would atone for faults ten thousand times ten thousand; there is what one hears at most three or four times in English, at most ten or twelve times in all literature – the first note, with its endless echo-promise, of a new poetry. The wonderful cadence-changes of *Kubla Khan*, its phrases, culminating in the famous distich so well descriptive of Coleridge himself —

> For he on honey dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise,

the splendid crash of the

> Ancestral voices prophesying war,

are all part of this note and cry. You will find them nowhere from Chaucer to Cowper – not even in the poets where you will find greater things as you may please to call them. Then in the *Mariner* comes the gorgeous metre, – freed at once and for the first time from the "butter-woman's rank to market" which had distinguished all imitations of the ballad hitherto, – the more gorgeous imagery and pageantry here, the simple directness there, the tameless range of imagination and fancy, the fierce rush of rhythm: —

> The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free:
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

And thereafter the spectre of Life-in-Death, the water-snakes, the rising of the dead men, the snapping of the spell. There had been nothing like all this before; and in all the hundred years, for all the great poetry we have seen, we have seen nothing so *new* as it. *Love* gave the magnificent opening stanza, the motto and defence at once of the largest, the most genuine, the most delightful part of poetry. And *Christabel*, independently of its purple patches, such as the famous descant on the quarrels of friends, and the portents that mark the passage of Geraldine, gave what was far more important – a new metre, destined to have no less great and much more copious influence than the Spenserian stanza itself. It might of course be easy to pick out anticipations in part of this combination of iambic dimeter, trochaic, and anapæstic; but it never had taken thorough form before. And how it seized on the imagination of those who heard it is best shown by the well-known anecdote of Scott, who, merely hearing a little of it recited, at once developed it and established it in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. In verse at least, if not in prose, there is no greater *master* than Coleridge.

Robert Southey, the third of this curiously dissimilar trio whom partly chance and partly choice have bound together for all time, was born at Bristol on 12th August 1774. His

father was only a linen-draper, and a very unprosperous one; but the Southeys were a respectable family, entitled to arms, and possessed of considerable landed property in Somerset, some of which was left away from the poet by unfriendly uncles to strangers, while more escaped him by a flaw in the entail. His mother's family, the Hills, were in much better circumstances than his father, and like the other two Lake Poets he was singularly lucky in finding helpers. First his mother's brother the Rev. Herbert Hill, chaplain to the English factory at Lisbon, sent him to Westminster, where he did very well and made invaluable friends, but lost the regular advancement to Christ Church owing to the wrath of the head-master Dr. Vincent at an article which Southey had contributed to a school magazine, the *Flagellant*. He was in fact expelled; but the gravest consequences of expulsion from a public school of the first rank did not fall upon him, and he matriculated without objection at Balliol in 1793. His college, however, which was then distinguished for loose living and intellectual dulness, was not congenial to him; and developing extreme opinions in politics and religion, he decided that he could not take orders, and left without even taking a degree. His disgrace with his own friends was completed by his engaging in the Pantisocratic scheme, and by his attachment to Edith Fricker, a penniless girl (though not at all a "milliner at Bath") whose sisters became Mrs. Coleridge and Mrs. Lovell. And when the ever-charitable Hill invited him to Portugal he married Miss Fricker the very day before he started. After a residence

at Lisbon, in which he laid the foundation of his unrivalled acquaintance with Peninsular history and literature, he returned and lived with his wife at various places, nominally studying for the law, which he liked not better but worse than the Church. After divers vicissitudes, including a fresh visit (this time not as a bachelor) to Portugal, and an experience of official work as secretary to Corry the Irish Chancellor of the Exchequer, he at last, at the age of thirty, established himself at Greta Hall, close to Keswick, where Coleridge had already taken up his abode. This, as well as much else in his career, was made possible by the rare generosity of his friend of school-days and all days, Charles Wynn, brother of the then Sir Watkin, and later a pretty well known politician, who on coming of age gave him an annuity of £160 a year. This in 1807 he relinquished on receiving a government pension of practically the same amount. The Laureateship in 1813 brought him less than another hundred; but many years afterwards Sir Robert Peel, in 1835, after offering a baronetcy, put his declining years out of anxiety by conferring a further pension of £300 a year on him. These declining years were in part unhappy. As early as 1816 his eldest son Herbert, a boy of great promise, died; the shock was repeated some years later by the death of his youngest and prettiest daughter Isabel; while in the same year as that in which his pension was increased his wife became insane, and died two years later. A second marriage in 1839 to the poetess Caroline Bowles brought him some comfort; but his own brain became more and more

affected, and for a considerable time before his death on 21st March 1843 he had been mentally incapable.

Many morals have been drawn from this melancholy end as to the wisdom of too prolonged literary labour, which in Southey's case had certainly been prodigious, and had been carried so far that he actually read while he was taking constitutional walks. It is fair to say, however, that, just as in the case of Scott the terrible shock of the downfall of his fortunes has to be considered, so in that of Southey the successive trials to which he, a man of exceptionally strong domestic affections, was exposed, must be taken into account. At the same time it must be admitted that Southey's production was enormous. His complete works never have been, and are never likely to be collected; and, from the scattered and irregular form in which they appeared, it is difficult if not impossible to make even a guess at the total. The list of books and articles (the latter for the most part written for the *Quarterly Review*, and of very great length) at the end of his son's *Life* fills nearly six closely printed pages. Two of these entries —*the Histories of Brazil* and of the *Peninsular War*– alone represent six large volumes. The Poems by themselves occupy a royal octavo in double columns of small print running to eight hundred pages; the correspondence, very closely printed in the six volumes of the *Life*, and the four more of *Letters* edited by the Rev. J. W. Warter, some five thousand pages in all; while a good deal of his early periodical work has never been identified, and there are large stores of additional letters – some printed,

more in MS. Nor was Southey by any means a careless or an easy writer. He always founded his work on immense reading, some of the results of which, showing the laborious fashion in which he performed it, were published after his death in his *Commonplace Book*. He did not write very rapidly; and he corrected, both in MS. and in proof, with the utmost sedulity. Of the nearly 14,000 books which he possessed at his death, it is safe to say that all had been methodically read, and most read many times; while his almost mediæval diligence did not hesitate at working through a set of folios to obtain the information or the corrections necessary for a single article.

It is here impossible to mention more than the chief items of this portentous list. They are in verse —*Poems*, by R. Southey and R. Lovell, 1794; *Joan of Arc*, 1795; *Minor Poems*, 1797-99; *Thalaba*, 1801; *Metrical Tales* and *Madoc*, 1805; *The Curse of Kehama*, 1810; *Roderick*, 1814; with a few later volumes, the chief being the unlucky *Vision of Judgment*, 1821, in hexameters. A complete edition of the Poems, except one or two posthumously printed, was published by himself in ten volumes in 1837, and collected into one ten years later with the additions. This also includes *Wat Tyler*, a rhapsody of the poet's youth, which was (piratically and to his infinite annoyance) published in 1817.

In prose Southey's most important works are the *History of Brazil*, 1810-19 (this, large as it is, is only a kind of off-shoot of the projected *History of Portugal*, which in a way occupied

his whole life, and never got published at all); the *History of the Peninsular War*, 1822-32; the *Letters from England by Don Manuel Espriella*, 1812; the *Life of Nelson* (usually thought his masterpiece), 1813; the *Life of Wesley*, 1820; *The Book of the Church*, 1824; *Colloquies on Society* (well known, if not in itself, for Macaulay's review of it), 1829; *Naval History*, 1833-40; and the great humorous miscellany of *The Doctor* (seven volumes), 1834-47; to which must be added editions, often containing some of his best work, of Chatterton, Amadis of Gaul, Palmerin of England, Kirke White, Bunyan, and Cowper, with divers *Specimens* of the British Poets, the charming prose and verse *Chronicle of the Cid*, the miscellany of *Omniana*, half-way between table- and commonplace-book, the *Commonplace Book* itself, and not a little else, besides letters and articles innumerable.

Certain things about Southey are uncontested and uncontestable. The uprightness and beauty of his character, his wonderful helpfulness to others, and the uncomplaining way in which he bore what was almost poverty, – for, high as was his reputation, his receipts were never a tithe of the rewards not merely of Scott or Byron or Tom Moore, but of much lesser men – are not more generally acknowledged than the singular and pervading excellence of his English prose style, the robustness of his literary genius, and his unique devotion to literature. But when we leave these accepted things he becomes more difficult if not less interesting. He himself had not the slightest doubt

that he was a great poet, and would be recognised as such by posterity, though with a proud humility he reconciled himself to temporary lack of vogue. This might be set down to an egotistic delusion. But such an easy explanation is negatived by even a slight comparison of the opinions of his greatest contemporaries. It is somewhat staggering to find that Scott, the greatest Tory man of letters who had strong political sympathies, and Fox, the greatest Whig politician who had keen literary tastes, enjoyed his long poems enthusiastically. But it may be said that the eighteenth century leaven which was so strong in each, and which is also noticeable in Southey, conciliated them. What then are we to say of Macaulay, a much younger man, a violent political opponent of Southey, and a by no means indiscriminate lover of verse, who, admitting that he doubted whether Southey's long poems would be read after half a century, had no doubt that if read they would be admired? And what are we to say of the avowals of admiration wrung as it were from Byron, who succeeded in working himself up, from personal, political, and literary motives combined, into a frantic hatred of Southey, lampooned him in print, sent him a challenge (which luckily was not delivered) in private, and was what the late Mr. Mark Pattison would have called "his Satan"?

The half century of Macaulay's prophecy has come, and that prophecy has been fulfilled as to the rarity of Southey's readers as a poet. Has the other part come true too? I should hesitate to say that it has. Esteem not merely for the man but for the

writer can never fail Southey whenever he is read by competent persons: admiration may be less prompt to come at call. Two among his smaller pieces – the beautiful "Holly Tree," and the much later but exquisite stanzas "My days among the dead are past" – can never be in any danger; the grasp of the grotesque-terrific, which the poet shows in the "Old Woman of Berkley" and a great many other places, anticipates the *Ingoldsby Legends* with equal ease but with a finer literary gift; some other things are really admirable and not a little pleasing. But the longer poems, if they are ever to live, are still dry bones. *Thalaba*, one of the best, is spoilt by the dogged craze against rhyme, which is more, not less, needed in irregular than in regular verse. *Joan of Arc*, *Madoc*, *Roderick*, have not escaped that curse of blank verse which only Milton, and he not always, has conquered in really long poems. *Kehama*, the only great poem in which the poet no longer disdains the almost indispensable aid to poetry in our modern and loosely quantified tongue, is much better than any of the others. The Curse itself is about as good as it can be, and many other passages are not far below it; but to the general taste the piece suffers from the remote character of the subject, which is not generally and humanly interesting, and from the mass of tedious detail.

To get out of the difficulty thus presented by indulging in contemptuous ignoring of Southey's merits has been attempted many times since Emerson foolishly asked "Who is Southey?" in his jottings of his conversation with Landor, Southey's most

dissimilar but constant friend and panegyrist. It is extremely easy to say who Southey is. He is the possessor of perhaps the purest and most perfect English prose style, of a kind at once simple and scholarly, to be found in the language. He has written (in the *Life of Nelson*) perhaps the best short biography in that language, and other things not far behind this. No Englishman has ever excelled him in range of reading or in intelligent comprehension and memory of what he read. Unlike many book-worms, he had an exceedingly lively and active humour. He has scarcely an equal, and certainly no superior, in the rare and difficult art of discerning and ranging the material parts of an historical account: the pedant may glean, but the true historian will rarely reap after him. And in poetry his gifts, if they are never of the very highest, are so various and often so high that it is absolutely absurd to pooh-pooh him as a poet. The man who could write the verses "In my Library" and the best parts of *Thalaba* and *Kehama* certainly had it in his power to write other things as good, probably to write other things better. Had it been in his nature to take no thought not merely for the morrow but even for the day, like Coleridge, or in his fate to be provided for without any trouble on his own part, and to take the provision with self-centred indifference, like Wordsworth, his actual production might have been different and better. But his strenuous and generous nature could not be idle; and idleness of some sort is, it may be very seriously laid down, absolutely necessary to the poet who is to be supreme.

The poet who, though, according to the canons of poetical criticism most in favour during this century, he ranks lower than either Wordsworth or Coleridge, did far more to popularise the general theory of Romantic poetry than either, was a slightly older man than two of the trio just noticed; but he did not begin his poetical career (save by one volume of translation) till some years after all of them had published. Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh on the 15th of August 1771. His father, of the same name as himself, was a Writer to the Signet; his mother was Anne Rutherford, and the future poet and novelist had much excellent Border blood in him, besides that of his direct ancestors the Scotts of Harden. He was a very sickly child; and though he grew out of this he was permanently lame. His early childhood was principally spent on the Border itself, with a considerable interval at Bath; and he was duly sent to the High School and University of Edinburgh, where, like a good many other future men of letters, he was not extremely remarkable for what is called scholarship. He was early imprisoned in his father's office, where the state of relations between father and son is supposed to be pretty accurately represented by the story of those between Alan Fairford and his father in *Redgauntlet*; and, like Alan, he was called to the bar. But even in the inferior branch of the profession he enjoyed tolerable liberty of wandering about and sporting, besides sometimes making expeditions on business into the Highlands and other out-of-the-way parts of the country.

He thus acquired great knowledge of his fatherland; while

(for he was, if not exactly a scholar, the most omnivorous of readers) he was also acquiring great knowledge of books. And it ought not to be omitted that Edinburgh, in addition to the literary and professional society which made it then and afterwards so famous, was still to no small extent the headquarters of the Scotch nobility, and that Scott, long before his books made him famous, was familiar with society of every rank. His first love affair did not run smooth, and he seems never to have entirely forgotten the object of it, who is identified (on somewhat more solid grounds than in the case of other novelists) with more than one of his heroines. But he consoled himself to a certain extent with a young lady half French, half English, Miss Charlotte Carpenter or Charpentier, whom he met at Gilsland and married at Carlisle on Christmas Eve 1797. Scott was an active member of the yeomanry as well as a barrister, an enthusiastic student of German as well as a sportsman; and the book of translations (from Bürger) above referred to appeared in 1796. But he did nothing important till after the beginning of the present century, when the starting of the *Edinburgh Review* and some other things brought him forward; though he showed what he could do by contributing two ballads, "Glenfinlas" and "The Eve of St. John," to a collection of terror-pieces started by Monk Lewis, and added Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* to his translations. He had become in 1799 independent, though not rich, by being appointed Sheriff of Selkirkshire.

His beginnings as an author proper were connected, as was

all his subsequent career, partly for good but more for ill, with a school friendship he had early formed for two brothers named Ballantyne at Kelso. He induced James, the elder, to start a printing business at Edinburgh, and unfortunately he entered into a secret partnership with this firm, which never did him much good, which caused him infinite trouble, and which finally ruined him. But into this complicated and still much debated business it is impossible to enter here. James Ballantyne printed the *Border Minstrelsy*, which appeared in 1802, – a book ranking with Percy's *Reliques* in its influence on the form and matter of subsequent poetry, – and then Scott at last undertook original work of magnitude. His task was *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, published in 1805. It may almost be said that from that day to his death he was the foremost – he was certainly, with the exception of Byron, the most popular – man of letters in Great Britain. His next poems —*Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) – brought him fame and money such as no English poet had gained before; and though Byron's following – for following it was – for the time eclipsed his master, the latter's *Rokeby, The Lord of the Isles*, and others, would have been triumphs for any one else.

How, when the taste for his verse seemed to cool, he struck out a new line in prose and achieved yet more fame and yet more money than the verse had ever given him, will concern us in the next chapter. But as it would be cumbrous to make yet a third division of his work, the part of his prose which is not fiction may

be included here, as well as the rest of his life. He had written much criticism for the *Edinburgh*, until he was partly disgusted by an uncivil review of *Marmion*, partly (and more) by the tone of increasing Whiggery and non-intervention which Jeffrey was imposing on the paper; and when the *Quarterly* was founded in opposition he transferred his services to that. He edited a splendid and admirably done issue of Dryden (1808) and another not quite so thoroughly executed of Swift (1814), and his secret connection with the Ballantynes induced him to do much other editing and miscellaneous work. In the sad last years of his life he laboured with desperation at a great *Life of Napoleon*, which was a success pecuniarily but not in many other ways, produced the exquisite *Tales of a Grandfather* on Scottish history, and did much else. He even wrote plays, which have very little merit, and, except abstract philosophy, there is hardly a division of literature that he did not touch; for he composed a sermon or two of merit, and his political pamphlets, the *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther*, opposing what he thought an interference with Scottish privileges in currency matters, are among the best of their kind.

His life was for many years a very happy one; for his marriage, if not passionately, was fairly successful, he was extremely fond of his children, and while his poems and novels began before he had fully reached middle life to make him a rich man, his Sheriffship, and a Clerkship of Session which was afterwards added (though he had to wait some time for its emoluments), had already made him secure of bread and expectant of affluence.

From a modest cottage at Lasswade he expanded himself to a rented country house at Ashestiel on the Tweed, having besides a comfortable town mansion in Edinburgh; and when he was turned out of Ashestiel he bought land and began to build at Abbotsford on the same river. The estate was an ill-chosen and unprofitable one. The house grew with the owner's fortunes, which, founded in part as they were on the hardest and most honest work that author ever gave, were in part also founded on the quicksand of his treacherous connection with men, reckless, ill-judging, and, though perhaps not in intention dishonest, perpetually trading on their secret partner's industry and fame. In the great commercial crash of 1825, Constable, the publisher of most of the novels, was involved; he dragged the Ballantynes down with him; and the whole of Scott's fortune, except his appointments and the little settled on his wife and children, was liable for the Ballantynes' debts. But he was not satisfied with ruin. He must needs set to work at the hopeless task of paying debts which he had never, except technically, incurred, and he actually in the remaining years of his life cleared off the greater part of them. It was at the cost of his life itself. His wife died, his children were scattered; but he worked on till the thankless, hopeless toil broke down his strength, and after a fruitless visit to Italy, he returned, to die at Abbotsford on 21st September 1832.

Scott's poetry has gone through various stages of estimate, and it can hardly be said even now, a hundred years after the

publication of his first verses, to have attained the position, practically accepted by all but paradoxers, which in that time a poet usually gains, unless, as the poets of the seventeenth century did in the eighteenth, he falls, owing to some freak of popular taste, out of really critical consideration altogether. The immense popularity which it at first obtained has been noted, as well as the fact that it was only ousted from that popularity by, so to speak, a variety of itself. But the rise of Byron in the long run did it far less harm than the long-delayed vogue of Wordsworth and Coleridge and the success even of the later schools, of which Tennyson was at once the pioneer and the commander-in-chief. At an uncertain time in the century, but comparatively early, it became fashionable to take Scott's verse as clever and spirited improvisation, to dwell on its over-fluency and facility, its lack of passages in the grand style (whatever the grand style may be), to indicate its frequent blemishes in strictly correct form and phrase. And it can hardly be said that there has been much reaction from this tone among professed and competent critics.

To a certain extent, indeed, this undervaluation is justified, and Scott himself, who was more free from literary vanity than any man of letters of whom we have record, pleaded guilty again and again. Dropping as he did almost by accident on a style which had absolutely no forerunners in elaborate formal literature, a style almost absolutely destitute of any restrictions or limits, in which the length of lines and stanzas, the position of rhymes, the change from narrative to dialogue, and so forth, depended

wholly and solely on the caprice of the author, it would have been extremely strange if a man whose education had been a little lacking in scholastic strictness, and who began to write at a time when the first object of almost every writer was to burst old bonds, had not been somewhat lawless, even somewhat slipshod. *Christabel* itself, the first in time, and, though not published till long afterwards, the model of his *Lay*, has but a few score verses that can pretend to the grand style (whatever that may be). Nor yet again can it be denied that, acute as was the sense which bade Scott stop, he wrote as it was a little too much in this style, while he tried others for which he had far less aptitude.

Yet it seems to me impossible, on any just theory of poetry or of literature, to rank him low as a poet. He can afford to take his trial under more than one statute. To those who say that all depends on the subject, or that the handling and arrangement of the subject are, if not everything, yet something to be ranked far above mere detached beauties, he can produce not merely the first long narrative poems in English, which for more than a century had honestly enthralled and fixed popular taste, but some of the very few long narrative poems which deserve to do so. Wordsworth, in a characteristic note on the *White Doe of Rylstone*, contrasts, with oblique depreciation of Scott, that poem and its famous predecessors in the style across the border; but he omits to notice one point of difference – that in Scott the *story* interests, and in himself it does not. For the belated "classical" criticism of the *Edinburgh Review*, which thought the story of

the *Last Minstrel* childish, and that of *Marmion* not much better, it may have been at least consistent to undervalue these poems. But the assumptions of that criticism no longer pass muster. On the other hand, to those who pin their poetical faith on "patches," the great mass of Scott's poetical work presents examples of certainly no common beauty. The set pieces of the larger poems, the Melrose description in *The Lay*, the battle in *Marmion*, the Fiery Cross in the *Lady of the Lake*, are indeed inferior in this respect to the mere snatches which the author scattered about his novels, some of which, especially the famous "Proud Maisie," have a beauty not inferior to that of the best things of his greatest contemporaries. And in swinging and dashing lyric, again, Scott can hold his own with the best, if indeed "the best" can hold *their* own in this particular division with "Lochinvar" and "Bonnie Dundee," with Elspeth's ballad in the *Antiquary*, and the White Lady's comfortable words to poor Father Philip.

The most really damaging things to be said against Scott as a poet are two. First, that his genius did not incline him either to the expression of the highest passion or to that of the deepest meditation, in which directions the utterances of the very greatest poetry are wont to lie. In the second place, that the extreme fertility and fluency which cannot be said to have improved even his prose work are, from the nature of the case, far more evident, and far more damagingly evident, in his verse. He is a poet of description, of action, of narration, rather than of intense feeling or thought. Yet in his own special divisions of the simpler lyric

and of lyrical narrative he sometimes attains the exquisite, and rarely sinks below a quality which is fitted to give the poetical delight to a very large number of by no means contemptible persons. It appears to me at least, that on no sound theory of poetical criticism can Scott be ranked as a poet below Byron, who was his imitator in narrative and his inferior in lyric. But it may be admitted that this was not the opinion of most contemporaries of the two, and that, much as the poetry of Byron has sunk in critical estimation during the last half century, and slight as are the signs of its recovery, those who do not think very highly of the poetry of the pupil do not, as a rule, show much greater enthusiasm for that of the master.

Byron, it is true, was only half a pupil of Scott's, and (oddly enough for the poet, who, with Scott, was recognised as leader by the Romantic schools of all Europe) had more than a hankering after the classical ideals in literature. Yet how much of this was due to wilful "pose" and a desire not to follow the prevailing school of the day is a question difficult to answer – as indeed are many connected with Byron, whose utterances, even in private letters, are very seldom to be taken with absolute confidence in their sincerity. The poet's character did no discredit to the doctrines of heredity. His family was one of considerable distinction and great age; but his father, Captain John Byron, who never came to the title, was a *roué* of the worst character, and the cousin whom the poet succeeded had earned the name of the Wicked Lord. His mother, Catherine Gordon of Gight, was

of an excellent Scotch stock, and an heiress; though her rascally husband made away with her money. But she had a most violent temper, and seems to have had absolutely no claims except those of birth to the title of lady. Byron was born in Holles Street, Cavendish Square, on 22nd January 1788; and his early youth, which was spent with his mother at Aberdeen, was one of not much indulgence or happiness. But he came to the title, and to an extremely impoverished succession, at ten years old, and three years later was sent to Harrow. Here he made many friends, distinguishing himself by obtruding mentions and memories of his rank in a way not common with the English aristocracy, and hence, in 1805, he proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge. He spent about the usual time there, but took no degree, and while he was still an undergraduate printed his *Hours of Idleness*, first called *Juvenilia*. It appeared publicly in March 1807, and a year later was the subject of a criticism, rather excessive than unjust, in the *Edinburgh Review*. Byron, who had plenty of pluck, and who all his life long inclined in his heart to the Popian school, spent a considerable time upon a verse-answer, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in which he ran amuck generally, but displayed ability which it was hopeless to seek in his first production. Then he went abroad, and the excitement of his sojourn in the countries round the Mediterranean for the next two years not only aroused, but finally determined and almost fully developed, his genius.

On his return home he took his seat and went into society with the success likely to attend an extremely handsome young

man of twenty-three, with a vague reputation both for ability and naughtiness, a fairly old title, and something of an estate. But his position as a "lion" was not thoroughly asserted till the publication, in February 1812, of *Childe Harold*, which with some difficulty he had been induced by his friend Dallas, his publisher Murray, and the critic Gifford to put before some frigid and trivial *Hints from Horace*. Over *Childe Harold* the English public went simply mad, buying seven editions in five weeks; and during the next three years Byron produced, in rapid succession, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Hebrew Melodies*. He could hardly write fast enough for the public to buy. Then the day after New Year's Day 1814, he married Miss Milbanke, a great heiress, a future baroness in her own right, and handsome after a fashion, but of a cold, prim, and reserved disposition, as well as of a very unforgiving temper. It probably did not surprise any one who knew the pair when, a year later, they separated for ever.

The scandals and discussions connected with this event are fortunately foreign to our subject here. The only important result of the matter for literature is that Byron (upon whom public opinion in one of its sudden fits of virtuous versatility threw even more of the blame than was probably just) left the country and journeyed leisurely, in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Shelley for the most part, to Venice. He never returned alive to England; and Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, and Genoa were successively his headquarters till 1823. Then the Greek Insurrection attracted

him, he raised what money he could, set out for Greece, showed in the distracted counsels of the insurgents much more practical and untheatrical heroism than he had hitherto been credited with, and died of fever at Missolonghi on the 19th of April 1824. His body was brought home to England and buried in the parish church of Hucknall Torkard, near Newstead Abbey, his Nottinghamshire seat, which, however, he had sold some time before. The best of Byron's poems by far date from this latter period of his life: the later cantos of *Childe Harold*, the beautiful short poems of *The Dream* and *Darkness*, many pieces in dramatic form (the chief of which are *Manfred*, *Cain*, *Marino Faliero*, and *Sardanapalus*), *Mazeppa*, a piece more in his earlier style but greatly superior to his earlier work, a short burlesque poem *Beppo*, and an immense and at his death unfinished narrative satire entitled *Don Juan*.

Although opinions about Byron differ very much, there is one point about him which does not admit of difference of opinion. No English poet, perhaps no English writer except Scott (or rather "The Author of Waverley"), has ever equalled him in popularity at home; and no English writer, with Richardson and Scott again as seconds, and those not very close ones, has equalled him in contemporary popularity abroad. The vogue of Byron in England, though overpowering for the moment, was even at its height resisted by some good judges and more strait-laced moralists; and it ebbed, if not as rapidly as it flowed, with a much more enduring movement. But abroad he simply

took possession of the Continent of Europe and kept it. He was one of the dominant influences and determining causes of the French Romantic movement; in Germany, though the failure of literary talent and activity of the first order in that country early in this century made his school less important, he had great power over Heine, its one towering genius; and he was almost the sole master of young Russia, young Italy, young Spain, in poetry. Nor, though his active and direct influence has of course been exhausted by time, can his reputation on the Continent be said to have ever waned.

These various facts, besides being certain in themselves, are also very valuable as guiding the inquirer in regions which are more of opinion. The rapidity of Byron's success everywhere, the extent of it abroad (where few English writers before him had had any at all), and the decline at home, are all easily connected with certain peculiarities of his work. That work is almost as fluent and facile as Scott's, to which, as has been said, it owes immense debts of scheme and manner; and it is quite as faulty. Indeed Scott, with all his indifference to a strictly academic correctness, never permitted himself the bad rhymes, the bad grammar, the slipshod phrase in which Byron unblushingly indulges. But Byron is much more monotonous than Scott, and it was this very monotony, assisted by an appearance of intensity, which for the time gave him power. The appeal of Byron consists very mainly, though no doubt not wholly, in two things: the lavish use of the foreign and then unfamiliar scenery, vocabulary, and manners

of the Levant, and the installation, as principal character, of a personage who was speedily recognised as a sort of fancy portrait, a sketch in cap and yataghan, of Byron himself as he would like to be thought. This Byronic hero has an ostentatious indifference to moral laws, for the most part a mysterious past which inspires him with deep melancholy, great personal beauty, strength, and bravery, and he is an all-conquering lover. He is not quite so original as he seemed, for he is in effect very little more than the older Romantic villain-hero of Mrs. Radcliffe, the Germans, and Monk Lewis, costumed much more effectively, placed in scheme and companionship more picturesquely, and managed with infinitely greater genius. But it is a common experience in literary history that a type more or less familiar already, and presented with striking additions, is likely to be more popular than something absolutely new. And accordingly Byron's bastard and second-hand Romanticism, though it owed a great deal to the terrorists and a great deal more to Scott, for the moment altogether eclipsed the pure and original Romanticism of his elders Coleridge and Wordsworth, of his juniors Shelley and Keats.

But although the more extreme admirers of Byron would no doubt dissent strongly from even this judgment, it would probably be subscribed, with some reservations and guards, by not a few good critics from whom I am compelled to part company as to other parts of Byron's poetical claim. It is on the question how much of true poetry lies behind and independent

of the scenery and properties of Byronism, that the great debate arises. Was the author of the poems from *Childe Harold* to *Don Juan* really gifted with the poetical "sincerity and strength" which have been awarded him by a critic of leanings so little Byronic in the ordinary sense of Matthew Arnold? Is he a poetic star of the first magnitude, a poetic force of the first power, at all? There may seem to be rashness, there may even seem to be puerile insolence and absurdity, in denying or even doubting this in the face of such a European concert as has been described and admitted above. Yet the critical conscience admits of no transaction; and after all, as it was doubted by a great thinker whether nations might not go mad like individuals, I do not know why it should be regarded as impossible that continents should go mad like nations.

At any rate the qualities of Byron are very much of a piece, and, even by the contention of his warmest reasonable admirers, not much varied or very subtle, not necessitating much analysis or disquisition. They can be fairly pronounced upon in a judgment of few words. Byron, then, seems to me a poet distinctly of the second class, and not even of the best kind of second, inasmuch as his greatness is chiefly derived from a sort of parody, a sort of imitation, of the qualities of the first. His verse is to the greatest poetry what melodrama is to tragedy, what plaster is to marble, what pinchbeck is to gold. He is not indeed an impostor; for his sense of the beauty of nature and of the unsatisfactoriness of life is real, and his power of conveying this sense to others is real also.

He has great, though uncertain, and never very *fine*, command of poetic sound, and a considerable though less command of poetic vision. But in all this there is a singular touch of illusion, of what his contemporaries had learnt from Scott to call gramarye. The often cited parallel of the false and true Florimels in Spenser applies here also. The really great poets do not injure each other in the very least by comparison, different as they are. Milton does not "kill" Wordsworth; Spenser does not injure Shelley; there is no danger in reading Keats immediately after Coleridge. But read Byron in close juxtaposition with any of these, or with not a few others, and the effect, to any good poetic taste, must surely be disastrous; to my own, whether good or bad, it is perfectly fatal. The light is not that which never was on land or sea; it is that which is habitually just in front of the stage: the roses are rouged, the cries of passion even sometimes (not always) ring false. I have read Byron again and again; I have sometimes, by reading Byron only and putting a strong constraint upon myself, got nearly into the mood to enjoy him. But let eye or ear once catch sight or sound of real poetry, and the enchantment vanishes.

Attention has already been called to the fact that Byron, though generally ranking with the poets who have been placed before him in this chapter as a leader in the nineteenth century renaissance of poetry, was a direct scholar of Scott, and in point of age represented, if not a new generation, a second division of the old. This was still more the case in point of age, and almost infinitely more so in point of quality, as regards Shelley

and Keats. There was nothing really new in Byron; there was only a great personal force directing itself, half involuntarily and more than half because of personal lack of initiative, into contemporary ways. The other two poets just mentioned were really new powers. They took some colour from their elders; but they added more than they took, and they would unquestionably have been great figures at any time of English literature and history. Scott had little or no influence on them, and Wordsworth not much; but they were rather close to Coleridge, and they owed something to a poet of much less genius than his or than their own – Leigh Hunt.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the elder of the two, was Byron's junior by four years, and was born at Field Place in Sussex in August 1792. He was the heir of a very respectable and ancient though not very distinguished family of the squirearchy; and he had every advantage of education, being sent to Eton in 1804, and to University College, Oxford, six years later. The unconquerable unconventionality of his character and his literary tastes had shown themselves while he was still a schoolboy, and in the last year of his Etonian and the first of his Oxonian residence he published two of the most absurd novels of the most absurd novel kind that ever appeared, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, imitations of Monk Lewis. He also in the same year collaborated in two volumes of verse, *The Wandering Jew* (partly represented by *Queen Mab*), and "*Poems* by Victor and Cazire" (which has vindicated the existence of reviewers by surviving only in its

reviews, all copies having mysteriously perished). His stay at Oxford was not long; for having, in conjunction with a clever but rather worthless friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg (afterwards his biographer), issued a pamphlet on "The Necessity of Atheism" and sent it to the heads of colleges, he was, by a much greater necessity, expelled from University on 25th March 1811. Later in the same year he married Harriet Westbrook, a pretty and lively girl of sixteen, who had been a school-fellow of his sister's, but came from the lower middle class. His apologists have said that Harriet threw herself at his head, and that Shelley explained to her that she or he might depart when either pleased. The responsibility and the validity of this defence may be left to these advocates.

For nearly three years Shelley and his wife led an exceedingly wandering life in Ireland, Wales, Devonshire, Berkshire, the Lake District, and elsewhere, Shelley attempting all sorts of eccentric propagandism in politics and religion, and completing the crude but absolutely original *Queen Mab*. Before the third anniversary of his wedding-day came round he had parted with Harriet, against whose character his apologists, as above, have attempted to bring charges. The fact is that he had fallen in love with Mary Godwin, daughter of the author of *Political Justice* (whose writings had always had a great influence on Shelley, and who spunged on him pitilessly) and of Mary Wollstonecraft. The pair fled to the Continent together in July 1814; and two years later, when the unhappy wife, a girl of twenty-one, had drowned

herself in the Serpentine, they were married. Meanwhile Shelley had wandered back to England, had, owing to the death of his grandfather, received a considerable independent income by arrangement, and in 1815 had written *Alastor*, which, though not so clearly indicative of a new departure when compared with *Queen Mab* as some critics have tried to make out, no other living poet, perhaps no other poet, could have written. He was refused the guardianship, though he was allowed to appoint guardians, of his children by the luckless Harriet, and was (for him naturally, though for most men unreasonably) indignant. But his poetical vocation and course were both clear henceforward, though he never during his life had much command of the public, and had frequent difficulties with publishers, while the then attitude of the law made piracy very easy. For a time he lived at Marlow, where he wrote or began *Prince Athanase*, *Rosalind and Helen*, and above all *Laon and Cythna*, called later and permanently *The Revolt of Islam*. In April 1818 he left England for Italy, and never returned.

The short remains of his life were spent chiefly at Lucca, Florence, and Pisa, with visits to most of the other chief Italian cities; Byron being often, and Leigh Hunt at the last, his companion. All his greatest poems were now written. At last, in July 1821, when the Shelleys were staying at a lonely house named Casa Magni, on the Bay of Spezia, he and his friend Lieutenant Williams set out in a boat from Leghorn. The boat either foundered in a squall or was run down. At any rate Shelley's

body was washed ashore on the 19th, and burnt on a pyre in the presence of Byron, Hunt, and Trelawny.

Little need be said of Shelley's character. If it had not been for the disgusting efforts of his maladroit adorers to blacken that not merely of his hapless young wife, but of every one with whom he came in contact, it might be treated with the extremest indulgence. Almost a boy in years at the time of his death, he was, with some late flashes of sobering, wholly a boy in inability to understand the responsibilities and the burdens of life. An enthusiast for humanity generally, and towards individuals a man of infinite generosity and kindliness, he yet did some of the cruellest and some of not the least disgraceful things from mere childish want of realising the *pacta conventa* of the world. He, wholly ignorant, would, if he could, have turned the wheel of society the other way, reckless of the horrible confusion and suffering that he must occasion.

But in pure literary estimation we need take no note of this. In literature, Shelley, if not of the first three or four, is certainly of the first ten or twelve. He has, as no poet in England except Blake and Coleridge in a few flashes had had before him for some century and a half, the ineffable, the divine intoxication which only the *di majores* of poetry can communicate to their worshippers. Once again, after all these generations, it became unnecessary to agree or disagree with the substance, to take interest or not to take interest in it, to admit or to contest the presence of faults and blemishes – to do anything except

recognise and submit to the strong pleasure of poetry, the charm of the highest poetical inspiration.

I think myself, though the opinion is not common among critics, that this touch is unmistakable even so early as *Queen Mab*. That poem is no doubt to a certain extent modelled upon Southey, especially upon *Kehama*, which, as has been observed above, is a far greater poem than is usually allowed. But the motive was different: the sails might be the same, but the wind that impelled them was another. By the time of *Alastor* it is generally admitted that there could or should have been little mistake. Nothing, indeed, but the deafening blare of Byron's brazen trumpet could have silenced this music of the spheres. The meaning is not very much, though it is passable; but the music is exquisite. There is just a foundation of Wordsworthian scheme in the blank verse; but the structure built on it is not Wordsworth's at all, and there are merely a few borrowed strokes of *technique*, such as the placing of a long adjective before a monosyllabic noun at the end of the line, and a strong cæsura about two-thirds through that line. All the rest is Shelley, and wonderful.

It may be questioned whether, fine as *The Revolt of Islam* is, the Spenserian stanza was quite so well suited as the "Pindaric" or as blank verse, or as lyrical measures, to Shelley's genius. It is certainly far excelled both in the lyrics and in the blank verse of *Prometheus Unbound*, the first poem which distinctly showed that one of the greatest lyric poets of the world had

been born to England. *The Cenci* relies more on subject, and, abandoning the lyric appeal, abandons what Shelley is strongest in; but *Hellas* restores this. Of his comic efforts, the chief of which are *Swellfoot the Tyrant* and *Peter Bell the Third*, it is perhaps enough to say that his humour, though it existed, was fitful, and that he was too much of a partisan to keep sufficiently above his theme. The poems midway between, large and small —*Prince Athanase*, *The Witch of Atlas* (an exquisite and glorious fantasy piece), *Rosalind and Helen*, *Adonais*, *Epipsychidion*, and the *Triumph of Life*– would alone have made his fame. But it is in Shelley's smallest poems that his greatest virtue lies. Not even in the seventeenth century had any writer given so much that was so purely exquisite. "To Constantia Singing," the "Ozymandias" sonnet, the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," the "Stanzas written in Dejection," the "Ode to the West Wind," the hackneyed "Cloud," and "Skylark," "Arethusa," the "World's Wanderers," "Music, when soft voices die," "The flower that smiles to-day," "Rarely, rarely, comest thou," the "Lament," "One word is too often profaned," the "Indian Air," the second "Lament," "O world! O life! O time!" (the most perfect thing of its kind perhaps, in the strict sense of perfection, that all poetry contains), the "Invitation," and the "Recollection," – this long list, which might have been made longer, contains things absolutely consummate, absolutely unsurpassed, only rivalled by a few other things as perfect as themselves.

Shelley has been foolishly praised, and it is very likely that

the praise given here may seem to some foolish. It is as hard for praise to keep the law of the head as for blame to keep the law of the heart. He has been mischievously and tastelessly excused for errors both in and out of his writings which need only a kindly silence. In irritation at the "chatter" over him some have even tried to make out that his prose – very fine prose indeed, and preserved to us in some welcome letters and miscellaneous treatises, but capable of being dispensed with – is more worthy of attention than his verse, which has no parallel and few peers. But that one thing will remain true in the general estimate of competent posterity I have no doubt. There are two English poets, and two only, in whom the purely poetical attraction, exclusive of and sufficient without all others, is supreme, and these two are Spenser and Shelley.

The life of John Keats was even shorter and even less marked by striking events than that of Shelley, and he belonged in point of extraction and education to a somewhat lower class of society than any of the poets hitherto mentioned in this chapter. He was the son of a livery stable keeper who was fairly well off, and he went to no school but a private one, where, however, he received tolerable instruction and had good comrades. Born in 1795, he was apprenticed to a surgeon at the age of fifteen, and even did some work in his profession, till in 1817 his overmastering passion for literature had its way. He became intimate with the so-called "Cockney school," or rather with its leaders Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt – an intimacy, as far as the former was concerned, not

likely to chasten his own taste, but chiefly unfortunate because it led, in the rancorous state of criticism then existing, to his own efforts being branded with the same epithet. His first book was published in the year above mentioned: it did not contain all the verse he had written up to that time, or the best of it, but it confirmed him in his vocation. He broke away from surgery, and, having some little means, travelled to the Isle of Wight, Devonshire, and other parts of England, besides becoming more and more familiar with men of letters. It was in the Isle of Wight chiefly that he wrote *Endymion*, which appeared in 1818. This was savagely and stupidly attacked in *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly*; the former article being by some attributed, without a tittle of evidence, to Lockhart. But the supposed effect of these attacks on Keats' health was widely exaggerated by some contemporaries, especially by Byron. The fact was that he had almost from his childhood shown symptoms of lung disease, which developed itself very rapidly. The sense of his almost certain fate combined with the ordinary effects of passion to throw a somewhat hectic air over his correspondence with Miss Fanny Brawne. His letters to her contain nothing discreditable to him, but ought never to have been published. He was, however, to bring out his third and greatest book of verse in 1820; and then he sailed for Italy, to die on the 23rd of February 1821. He spoke of his name as "writ in water." Posterity has agreed with him that it is – but in the Water of Life.

Nothing is more interesting, even in the endless and delightful

task of literary comparison, than to contrast the work of Shelley and Keats, so alike and yet so different. A little longer space of work, much greater advantages of means and education, and a happier though less blameless experience of passion, enabled Shelley to produce a much larger body of work than Keats has to his name, even when this is swollen by what Mr. Palgrave has justly stigmatised as "the incomplete and inferior work" withheld by Keats himself, but made public by the cruel kindness of admirers. And this difference in bulk probably coincides with a difference in the volume of genius of the two writers. Further, while it is not at all improbable that if Shelley had lived he would have gone on writing better and better, the same probability is, I think, to be more sparingly predicated of Keats.

On the other hand, by a not uncommon connection or consequence, Keats has proved much more of a "germinal" poet than Shelley. Although the latter was, I think, by far the greater, his poetry had little that was national and very little that was imitable about it. He has had a vast influence; but it has been in the main the influence, the inspiration of his unsurpassed exciting power. No one has borrowed or carried further any specially Shelleian turns of phrase, rhythm, or thought. Those who have attempted to copy and urge further the Shelleian attitude towards politics, philosophy, ethics, and the like, have made it generally ludicrous and sometimes disgusting. He is, in his own famous words, "something remote and afar." His poetry is almost poetry in its elements, uncoloured by race, language,

time, circumstance, or creed. He is not even so much a poet as Poetry accidentally impersonated and incarnate.

With Keats it is very different. He had scarcely reached maturity of any kind when he died, and he laboured under the very serious disadvantages, first of an insufficient acquaintance with the great masters, and secondly of coming early under the influence of a rather small master, yet a master, Leigh Hunt, who taught him the fluent, gushing, slipshod style that brought not merely upon him, but upon his mighty successor Tennyson, the harsh but not in this respect wholly unjust lash of conservative and academic criticism. But he, as no one of his own contemporaries did, felt, expressed, and handed on the exact change wrought in English poetry by the great Romantic movement. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, and even Southey to some extent, were the authors of this; but, being the authors, they were necessarily not the results of it. Byron was fundamentally out of sympathy with it, though by accidents of time and chance he had to enlist; Shelley, an angel, and an effectual angel, of poetry, was hardly a man, and still less an Englishman. But Keats felt it all, expressed what of it he had time and strength to express, and left the rest to his successors, helped, guided, furthered by his own example. Keats, in short, is the father, directly or at short stages of descent, of every English poet born within the present century who has not been a mere "sport" or exception. He begat Tennyson, and Tennyson begat all the rest.

The evidences of this are to be seen in almost his earliest

poems – not necessarily in those contained in his earliest volume. Of course they are not everywhere. There were sure to be, and there were, mere echoes of eighteenth century verse and mere imitations of earlier writers. But these may be simply neglected. It is in such pieces as "Calidore" that the new note is heard; and though something in this note may be due to Hunt (who had caught the original of it from Wither and Browne), Keats changed, enriched, and refashioned the thing to such an extent that it became his own. It is less apparent (though perhaps not less really present) in his sonnets, despite the magnificence of the famous one on Chapman's *Homer*, than in the couplet poems, which are written in an extremely fluent and peculiar verse, very much "enjambed" or overlapped, and with a frequent indulgence in double rhymes. Hunt had to a certain extent started this, but he had not succeeded in giving it anything like the distinct character which it took in Keats' hands.

Endymion was written in this measure, with rare breaks; and there is little doubt that the lusciousness of the rhythm, combined as it was with a certain lusciousness both of subject and (again in unlucky imitation of Hunt) of handling, had a bad effect on some readers, as also that the attacks on it were to a certain extent, though not a very large one, prompted by genuine disgust at the mawkishness, as its author called it, of the tone. Keats, who was always an admirable critic of his own work, judged it correctly enough later, except that he was too harsh to it. But it is a delightful poem to this day, and I do not think that it is quite

just to call it, as it has been called, "not Greek, but Elizabethan-Romantic." It seems to me quite different from Marlowe or the author of *Britain's Ida*, and really Greek, but Greek mediæval, Greek of the late romance type, refreshed with a wonderful new blood of English romanticism. And this once more was to be the note of all the best poetry of the century, the pouring of this new English blood through the veins of old subjects – classical, mediæval, foreign, modern. We were to conquer the whole world of poetical matter with our English armies, and Keats was the first leader who started the adventure.

The exquisite poetry of his later work showed this general tendency in all its latest pieces, – clearly in the larger poems, the fine but perhaps somewhat overpraised *Hyperion*, the admirable *Lamia*, the exquisite *Eve of St. Agnes*, but still more in the smaller, and most of all in those twin peaks of all his poetry, the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci." He need indeed have written nothing but these two to show himself not merely an exquisite poet but a captain and leader of English poetry for many a year, almost for many a generation to come. Wordsworth may have given him a little, a very quiet hint for the first, the more Classical masterpiece; Coleridge something a little louder for the second, the Romantic. But in neither case did the summons amount to anything like a cue or a call-bell; it was at best seed that, if it had not fallen on fresh and fruitful soil, could have come to nothing.

As it is, and if we wish to see what it came to, we must

simply look at the whole later poetry of the nineteenth century in England. The operations of the spirit are not to be limited, and it is of course quite possible that if Keats had not been, something or somebody would have done his work instead of him. But as it is, it is to Keats that we must trace Tennyson, Rossetti, Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Morris; to Keats that even not a little of Browning has to be affiliated; to Keats, directly or indirectly, that the greater part of the poetry of nearly three generations owes royalty and allegiance.

Of him, as of Shelley, some foolish and hurtful things have been said. In life he was no effeminate "æsthetic" or "decadent," divided between sensual gratification and unmanly *Katzenjammer*, between paganism and puerility, but an honest, manly Englishman, whose strength only yielded to unconquerable disease, whose impulses were always healthy and generous. Despite his origin, – and, it must be added, some of his friendships, – there was not a touch of vulgarity about him; and if his comic vein was not very full-pulsed, he had a merry laugh in him. There is no "poisonous honey stolen" from anywhere or extracted by himself from anything in Keats; his sensuousness is nothing more than is, in the circumstances, "necessary and voluptuous and right." But these moral excellences, while they may add to the satisfaction with which one contemplates him, hardly enhance – though his morbid admirers seem to think that the absence of them would enhance – the greatness and the value of his poetical position, both in the elaboration of a new poetic

style and language, and still more in the indication of a new road whereby the great poetic exploration could be carried on.

Round or under these great Seven – for that Byron was great in a way need not be denied; Southey, the weakest of all as a poet, had a very strong influence, and was one of the very greatest of English men of letters – must be mentioned a not inconsiderable number of men who in any other age would have been reckoned great. The eldest of these, both in years and in reputation, holds his position, and perhaps always held it, rather by courtesy than by strict right. Samuel Rogers[7] was born in London on 30th July 1763, and was the son of a dissenting banker, from whom he derived Whig principles and a comfortable fortune. It is said that he once, as a very young man, went to call on Dr. Johnson, but was afraid to knock; but though shyness accompanied him through life, the amiability which it is sometimes supposed to betoken did not. He published a volume of poems in 1786, and his famous *Pleasures of Memory*, the piece that made his reputation, in 1792. Twenty years afterwards *Columbus* followed, and yet two years later, in 1814, *Jacqueline*; while in 1822 *Italy*, on which, with the *Pleasures of Memory*, such fame as he has rests, was published, to be reissued some years afterwards in a magnificent illustrated edition, and to have a chance (in a classical French jest) *se sauver de planche en*

[7] Curiously enough, there was another and slightly older Samuel Rogers, a clergyman, who published verse in 1782, just before his namesake, and who dealt with Hope — Hope springs eternal in the aspiring breast.His verse, of which specimens are given in Southey's *Modern English Poets*, is purely eighteenth century. He died in 1790.

planche. He did not die till 1855, in his ninety-third year: the last, as he had been the first, of his group.

Rogers had the good luck to publish his best piece at a time when the general and popular level of English poetry was at the lowest point it has reached since the sixteenth century, and to be for many years afterwards a rich and rather hospitable man, the acquaintance if not exactly the friend of most men of letters, of considerable influence in political and general society, and master of an excessively sharp tongue. A useful friend and a dangerous enemy, it was simpler to court or to let him alone than to attack him, and his fame was derived from pieces too different from any work of the actual generation to give them much umbrage. It may be questioned whether Rogers ever wrote a single line of poetry. But he wrote some polished and pleasant verse, which was vigorous by the side of Hayley and "correct" by the side of Keats. In literature he has very little interest; in literary history he has some.

Felix opportunitate in the same way, but a far greater poet, was Thomas Campbell, who, like Rogers, was a Whig, like him belonged rather to the classical than to the romantic school in style if not in choice of subject, and like him had the good luck to obtain, by a poem with a title very similar to that of Rogers' masterpiece, a high reputation at a time when there was very little poetry put before the public. Campbell was not nearly so old a man as Rogers, and was even the junior of the Lake poets and Scott, having been born at Glasgow on the 27th July 1777. His

father was a real Campbell, and as a merchant had at one time been of some fortune; but the American War had impoverished him, and the poet was born to comparative indigence. He did, however, well at the college of his native city, and on leaving it took a tutorship in Mull. His *Pleasures of Hope* was published in 1799 and was extremely popular, nor after it had its author much difficulty in following literature. He was never exactly rich, but pensions, legacies, editorships, high prices for his not extensive poetical work, and higher for certain exercises in prose book-making which are now almost forgotten, maintained him very comfortably. Indeed, of the many recorded ingratitudes of authors to publishers, Campbell's celebrated health to Napoleon because "he shot a bookseller" is one of the most ungrateful. In the last year of the eighteenth century he went to Germany, and was present at (or in the close neighbourhood of) the battle of Hohenlinden. This he afterwards celebrated in really immortal verse, which, with "Ye Mariners of England" and the "Battle of the Baltic," represents his greatest achievement. In 1809 he published *Gertrude of Wyoming*, a short-long poem of respectable *technique* and graceful sentiment. In 1824 appeared a volume of poems, of which the chief, *Theodric* (not as it is constantly misspelled *Theodoric*), is bad; and in 1842 another, of which the chief, *The Pilgrim of Glencoe*, is worse. He died in 1844 at Boulogne, after a life which, if not entirely happy (for he had ill-health, not improved by incautious habits, some domestic misfortunes, and a rather sour disposition), had been

full of honours of all kinds, both in his own country, of where he was Lord Rector of Glasgow University, and out of it.

If Campbell had written nothing but his longer poems, the comparison above made with Rogers would be wholly, instead of partly, justified. Although both still retain a sort of conventional respect, it is impossible to call either the *Pleasures of Hope* or *Gertrude of Wyoming* very good poetry, while enough has been said of their successors. Nor can very high praise be given to most of the minor pieces. But the three splendid war-songs above named – the equals, if not the superiors, of anything of the kind in English, and therefore in any language – set him in a position from which he is never likely to be ousted. In a handful of others – "Lochiel," the exquisite lines on "A Deserted Garden in Argyleshire," with, for some flashes at least, the rather over-famed "Exile of Erin," "Lord Ullin's Daughter," and a few more – he also displays very high, though rather unequal and by no means unalloyed, poetical faculty; and "The Last Man," which, by the way, is the latest of his good things, is not the least. But his best work will go into a very small compass: a single octavo sheet would very nearly hold it, and it was almost all written before he was thirty. He is thus an instance of a kind of poet, not by any means rare in literature, but also not very common, who appears to have a faculty distinct in class but not great in volume, who can do certain things better than almost anybody else, but cannot do them very often, and is not quite to be trusted to do them with complete sureness of touch. For it is to be noted that even in

Campbell's greatest things there are distinct blemishes, and that these blemishes are greatest in that which in its best parts reaches the highest level – "The Battle of the Baltic." Many third and some tenth rate poets would never have left in their work such things as "The might of England flushed *To anticipate the scene*," which is half fustian and half nonsense: no very great poet could possibly have been guilty of it. Yet for all this Campbell holds, as has been said, the place of best singer of war in a race and language which are those of the best singers and not the worst fighters in the history of the world – in the race of Nelson and the language of Shakespeare. Not easily shall a man win higher praise than this.

In politics, as well as in a certain general kind of literary attitude and school, another Thomas, Moore, classes himself both historically and naturally with Rogers and Campbell; but he was a very much better poet than Rogers, and, though he never reached quite the same height as Campbell at his narrow and exceptional best, a far more voluminous verse writer and a much freer writer of good verse of many different kinds. He was born in Dublin on 28th May 1779; his father being a grocer, his mother somewhat higher in social rank. He was well educated, and was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, where he had but surmounted political difficulties; for his time as an undergraduate coincided with "Ninety-eight," and though it does not seem that he had meddled with anything distinctly treasonable, he had "Nationalist" friends and leanings. Partly to

sever inconvenient associations, partly in quest of fortune, he was sent to London in that year, and entered at the Temple. In a manner not very clearly explained, but connected no doubt with his leaning to the Whig party, which was then much in need of literary help, he became a protégé of Lord Moira's, by whom he was introduced to the Prince of Wales. The Prince accepted the dedication of some translations of Anacreon, etc., which Moore had brought over with him, and which were published in 1800; while two years later the *Poems of Thomas Little*, a punning pseudonym, appeared, and at once charmed the public by their sugared versification and shocked it by their looseness of tone – a looseness which is not to be judged from the comparatively decorous appearance they make in modern editions. But there was never much harm in them. Next year, in 1803, Moore received a valuable appointment at Bermuda, which, though he actually went out to take possession of it and travelled some time in North America, he was allowed to transfer to a deputy. He came back to England, published another volume of poems, and fought a rather famously futile duel with Jeffrey about a criticism on it in the *Edinburgh Review*. He began the *Irish Melodies* in 1807, married four years later, and from that time fixed his headquarters mostly in the country: first near Ashbourne in Derbyshire, then near Devizes in Wiltshire, to be near his patrons Lord Moira and Lord Lansdowne. But he was constantly in London on visits, and much in the society of men of letters, not merely of his own party. In particular he became, on the whole,

Byron's most intimate friend, and preserved towards that very difficult person an attitude (tinged neither with the servility nor with the exaggerated independence of the *parvenu*) which did him a great deal of credit. He was rather a strong partisan, and, having a brilliant vein of poetical satire, he wrote in 1813 *The Twopenny Post Bag*– the best satiric verse of the poetical kind since the *Anti-Jacobin*, and the best on the Whig side since the *Rolliad*.

Nor did he fail to take advantage of the popular appetite for long poems which Scott and Byron had created; his *Lalla Rookh*, published in 1817, being very popular and very profitable. It was succeeded by another and his best satirical work, *The Fudge Family*, a charming thing.

Up to this time he had been an exceedingly fortunate man; and his good luck, aided it must be said by his good conduct, – for Moore, with all his apparent weaknesses, was thoroughly sound at the core, – enabled him to surmount a very serious reverse of fortune. His Bermuda deputy was guilty of malversation so considerable that Moore could not meet the debt, and he had to go abroad. But Lord Lansdowne discharged his obligations; and Moore paid Lord Lansdowne. He returned to England in 1823, and was a busy writer for all but the last years of the thirty that remained to him; but the best of his work was done, with one exception. Byron left him his *Memoirs*, which would of course have been enormously profitable. But Lady Byron and others of the poet's connections were so horrified at the idea

of the book appearing that, by an arrangement which has been variously judged, but which can hardly be regarded as other than disinterested on Moore's part, the MS. was destroyed, and instead of it Moore brought out in 1830 his well-known *Life of Byron*. This, some not incompetent judges have regarded as ranking next to Lockhart's *Scott* and Boswell's *Johnson*, and though its main attraction may be derived from Byron's very remarkable letters, still shows on the part of the biographer very unusual dexterity, good feeling, and taste. The lives of *Sheridan* and *Lord Edward Fitzgerald* had, and deserved to have, less success; while a *History of Ireland* was, and was bound to be, an almost complete failure. For, though a very good prose writer, Moore had little of the erudition required, no grasp or faculty of political argument, and was at this time of his life, if not earlier, something of a trimmer, certain to satisfy neither the "ascendency" nor the "nationalist" parties. His prose romance of *The Epicurean* is much better, and a really remarkable, piece of work; and though the *Loves of the Angels*, his last long poem, is not very good, he did not lose his command either of sentimental or of facetious lyric till quite his last days. These were clouded; for, like his contemporaries Scott and Southey, he suffered from brain disease for some time before his death, on 25th February 1852.

During his lifetime, especially during the first half or two-thirds of his literary career, Moore had a great popularity, and won no small esteem even among critics; such discredit

as attached to him being chiefly of the moral kind, and that entertained only by very strait-laced persons. But as the more high-flown and impassioned muses of Wordsworth, of Shelley, and of Keats gained the public ear in the third and later decades of the century, a fashion set in of regarding him as a mere melodious trifler; and this has accentuated itself during the last twenty years or so, though quite recently some efforts have been made in protest. This estimate is demonstrably unjust. It is true that of the strange and high notes of poetry he has very few, of the very strangest and highest none at all. But his long poems, *Lalla Rookh* especially, though somewhat over-burdened with the then fashionable deck cargo of erudite or would-be erudite notes, possess merit which none but a very prejudiced critic can, or at least ought to, overlook. And in other respects he is very nearly, if not quite, at the top of at least two trees, which, if not quite cedars of Lebanon, are not mere grass of Parnassus. Moore was a born as well as a trained musician. But whereas most musicians have since the seventeenth century been exceedingly ill at verbal numbers, he had a quite extraordinary knack of composing what are rather disrespectfully called "words." Among his innumerable songs there are not one or two dozens or scores, but almost hundreds of quite charmingly melodious things, admirably adjusted to their music, and delightful by themselves without any kind of instrument, and as said not sung. And, what is more, among these there is a very respectable number to which it would be absolutely

absurd to give the name of trifle. "I saw from the beach" is not a trifle, nor "When in death I shall calm recline," nor "Oft in the stilly night," nor "Tell me, kind sage, I pray thee," nor many others. They have become so hackneyed to us in various ways, and some of them happen to be pitched in a key of diction which, though not better or worse than others, is so out of fashion, that it seems as if some very respectable judges could not "focus" Moore at all. To those who can he will seem, not of course the equal, or anything like the equal, of Burns or Shelley, of Blake or Keats, but in his own way, – and that a way legitimate and not low, – one of the first lyrical writers in English. And they will admit a considerable addition to his claims in his delightful satirical verse, mainly but not in the least offensively political, in which kind he is as easily first as in the sentimental song to music.

Something not dissimilar to the position which Moore occupies on the more classical wing of the poets of the period is occupied on the other by Leigh Hunt. Hunt (Henry James Leigh, who called himself and is generally known by the third only of his Christian names) was born in London on the 19th October 1784, was educated at Christ's Hospital, began writing very early, held for a short time a clerkship in a public office, and then joined his brother in conducting the *Examiner* newspaper. Fined and imprisoned for a personal libel on the Prince Regent (1812), Hunt became the fashion with the Opposition; and the *Story of Rimini*, which he published when he came out of gaol, and which was written in it, had a good deal of influence. He

spent some years in Italy, to which place he had gone with his family in 1822 to edit *The Liberal* and to keep house with Byron – a very disastrous experiment, the results of which he recorded in an offensive book on his return. Hunt lived to 18th August 1859, and was rescued from the chronic state of impecuniosity in which, despite constant literary work, he had long lived, by a Crown pension and some other assistance in his latest days. Personally, Leigh Hunt was an agreeable and amiable being enough, with certain foibles which were rather unfairly magnified in the famous caricature of him as Harold Skimpole by his friend Dickens, but which were accompanied by some faults of taste of which Mr. Skimpole is not accused.

In letters he was a very considerable person; though the best and far the largest part of his work is in prose, and will be noticed hereafter. His verse is not great in bulk, and is perhaps more original and stimulating than positively good. His wide and ardent study of the older English poets and of those of Italy had enabled him to hit on a novel style of phrase and rhythm, which has been partly referred to above in the notice of Keats; his narrative faculty was strong, and some of his smaller pieces, from his sonnets downwards, are delightful things. "Abou ben Adhem" unites (a rare thing for its author) amiability with dignity, stateliness with ease; the "Nile" sonnet is splendid; "Jenny kissed me," charming, if not faultless; "The Man and the Fish," far above vulgarity. The lack of delicate taste which characterised his manners also marred his verse, which is not

unfrequently slipshod, or gushing, or trivially fluent, and perhaps never relatively so good as the best of his prose. But he owed little to any but the old masters, and many contemporaries owed not a little to him.

A quaint and interesting if not supremely important figure among the poets of this period, and, if his poetry and prose be taken together, a very considerable man of letters, – perhaps the most considerable man of letters in English who was almost totally uneducated, – was James Hogg, who was born in Ettrick Forest in the year 1772. He was taken from school to mind sheep so early that much later he had to teach himself even reading and writing afresh; and, though he must have had the song-gift early, it was not till he was nearly thirty that he published anything. He was discovered by Scott, to whom he and his mother supplied a good deal of matter for the *Border Minstrelsy*, and he published again in 1803. The rest of his life was divided between writing – with fair success, though with some ill-luck from bankrupt publishers – and sheep-farming, on which he constantly lost, though latterly he sat rent free under the Duke of Buccleuch. He died on 21st November 1835.

Even during his life Hogg underwent a curious process of mythop[oe]ia at the hands of Wilson and the other wits of *Blackwood's Magazine*, who made him – partly with his own consent, partly not – into the famous "Ettrick Shepherd" of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. "The Shepherd" has Hogg's exterior features and a good many of his foibles, but is endowed with

considerably more than his genius. Even in his published and acknowledged works, which are numerous, it is not always quite easy to be sure of his authorship; for he constantly solicited, frequently received, and sometimes took without asking, assistance from Lockhart and others. But enough remains that is different from the work of any of his known or possible coadjutors to enable us to distinguish his idiosyncrasy pretty well. In verse he was a very fluent and an exceedingly unequal writer, who in his long poems chiefly, and not too happily, followed Scott, but who in the fairy poem of "Kilmeny" displayed an extraordinary command of a rare form of poetry, and who has written some dozens of the best songs in the language. The best, but only a few of the best, of these are "Donald Macdonald," "Donald M'Gillavry," "The Village of Balmanhapple," and the "Boy's Song." In prose he chiefly attempted novels, which have no construction at all, and few merits of dialogue or style, but contain some powerful passages; while one of them, *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, if it is entirely his, which is very doubtful, is by far the greatest thing he wrote, being a story of *diablerie* very well designed, wonderfully fresh and enthralling in detail, and kept up with hardly a slip to the end. His other chief prose works are entitled *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, *The Three Perils of Man*, *The Three Perils of Woman*, and *Altrive Tales*, while he also wrote some important, and in parts very offensive, but also in parts amusing, *Recollections of Sir Walter Scott*. His verse volumes, no one of which is good throughout,

though hardly one is without good things, were *The Mountain Bard*, *The Queen's Wake*, *Mador of the Moor*, *The Pilgrims of the Sun*, *Jacobite Relics* (some of the best forged by himself), *Queen Hynde*, and *The Border Garland*.

A greater writer, if his work be taken as a whole, than any who has been mentioned since Keats, was Walter Savage Landor, much of whose composition was in prose, but who was so alike in prose and verse that the whole had better be noticed together here. Landor (who was of a family of some standing in Warwickshire, and was heir to considerable property, much of which he wasted later by selling his inheritance and buying a large but unprofitable estate in Wales) was born at Ipsley Court, in 1775. He went to school at Rugby, and thence to Trinity College, Oxford, at both of which places he gained considerable scholarship but was frequently in trouble owing to the intractable and headstrong temper which distinguished him through life. He was indeed rusticated from his college, and subsequently, owing to his extravagant political views, was refused a commission in the Warwickshire Militia. He began to write early, but the poem of *Gebir*, which contains in germ or miniature nearly all his characteristics of style, passed almost unnoticed by the public, though it was appreciated by good wits like Southey and De Quincey. After various private adventures he came into his property and volunteered in the service of Spain, where he failed, as usual, from impracticableness. In 1811, recklessly as always, he married a very young girl of whom he knew next to nothing,

and the marriage proved anything but a happy one. The rest of his long life was divided into three residences: first with his family at Florence; then, when he had quarrelled with his wife, at Bath; and lastly (when he had been obliged to quit Bath and England owing to an outrageous lampoon on one lady, which he had written, as he conceived, in chivalrous defence of another) at Florence again. Here he died in September 1864, aged very nearly ninety.

Landor's poetical productions, which are numerous, are spread over the greater part of his life; his prose, by which he is chiefly known, dates in the main from the last forty years of it, the best being written between 1820 and 1840. The greater part of this prose takes the form of "Imaginary Conversations" – sometimes published under separate general headings, sometimes under the common title – between characters of all ages, from the classical times to Landor's. Their bulk is very great; their perfection of style at the best extraordinary, and on the whole remarkably uniform; their value, when considerations of matter are added to that of form, exceedingly unequal. For in them Landor not only allowed the fullest play to the ungovernable temper and the childish crotchets already mentioned, but availed himself of his opportunities (for, though he endeavoured to maintain a pretence of dramatic treatment, his work is nearly as personal as that of Byron) to deliver his sentiments on a vast number of subjects, sometimes without too much knowledge, and constantly with a plentiful lack of judgment. In politics, in satiric treatment, and especially

in satiric treatment of politics, he is very nearly valueless. But his intense familiarity with and appreciation of classical subjects gave to almost all his dealings with them a value which, for parallel reasons, is also possessed by those touching Italy. And throughout this enormous collection of work (which in the compactest edition fills five large octavo volumes in small print), whensoever the author forgets his crotchets and his rages, when he touches on the great and human things, his utterance reaches the very highest water-mark of English literature that is not absolutely the work of supreme genius.

For supreme genius Landor had not. His brain was not a great brain, and he did not possess the exquisite alertness to his own weaknesses, or the stubborn knack of confinement to things suitable to him, which some natures much smaller than the great ones have enjoyed. But he had the faculty of elaborate style – of style elaborated by a careful education after the best models and vivified by a certain natural gift – as no one since the seventeenth century had had it, and as no one except Mr. Ruskin and the late Mr. Pater has had since. Also, he was as much wider in his range and more fertile in his production than Mr. Pater as he was more solidly grounded on the best models than Mr. Ruskin. Where Landor is quite unique is in the apparent indifference with which he was able to direct this gift of his into the channels of prose and poetry – a point on which he parts company from both the writers to whom he has been compared, and in which his only analogue, so far as I am able to judge, is Victor Hugo. The style

of no Englishman is so alike in the two harmonies as is that of Landor. And it is perhaps not surprising that, this being the case, he shows at his best in prose when he tries long pieces, in verse when he tries short ones. Some of Landor's prose performances in *Pericles and Aspasia*, in the *Pentameron* (where Boccaccio and Petrarch are the chief interlocutors), and in not a few of the separate conversations, are altogether unparalleled in any other language, and not easy to parallel in English. They are never entirely or perfectly natural; there is always a slight "smell of the lamp," but of a lamp perfumed and undying. The charm is so powerful, the grace so stately, that it is impossible for any one to miss it who has the faculty of recognising charm and grace at all. In particular, Landor is remarkable – and, excellent as are many of the prose writers whom we have had since, he is perhaps the most remarkable – for the weight, the beauty, and the absolute finish of his phrase. Sometimes these splendid phrases do not mean very much; occasionally they mean nothing or nonsense. But their value as phrase survives, and the judge in such things is often inclined and entitled to say that there is none like them.

This will prepare the reader who has some familiarity with literature for what is to be said about Landor's verse. It always has a certain quality of exquisiteness, but this quality is and could not but be unequally displayed in the short poems and the long. The latter can hardly attain, with entirely competent and impartial judges, more than a success of esteem. *Gebir* is couched in a Miltonic form of verse (very slightly shot and varied by Romantic

admixture) which, as is natural to a young adventurer, caricatures the harder and more ossified style of the master. Sometimes it is great; more usually it intends greatness. The "Dialogues in Verse" (very honestly named, for they are in fact rather dialogues in verse than poems), though executed by the hand of a master both of verse and dialogue, differ in form rather than in fact from the Conversations in prose. The *Hellenics* are mainly dialogues in verse with a Greek subject. All have a quality of nobility which may be sought in vain in almost any other poet; but all have a certain stiffness and frigidity, some a certain emptiness. They are never plaster, as some modern antiques have been; but they never make the marble of which they are composed wholly flesh. Landor was but a half-Pygmalion.

The vast collection of his miscellaneous poems contains many more fortunate attempts, some of which have, by common consent of the fittest, attained a repute which they are never likely to lose. "Rose Aylmer" and "Dirce," trifles in length as both of them are, are very jewels of poetic quality. And among the hundreds and almost thousands of pieces which Landor produced there are some which come not far short of these, and very many which attain a height magnificent as compared with the ordinary work of others. But the hackneyed comparison of amber does something gall this remarkable poet and writer. Everything, great and small, is enshrined in an imperishable coating of beautiful style; but the small things are somewhat out of proportion to the great, and, what is more, the amber itself

always has a certain air of being deliberately and elaborately produced – not of growing naturally. Landor – much more than Dryden, of whom he used the phrase, but in the same class as Dryden – is one of those who "wrestle with and conquer time." He has conquered, but it is rather as a giant of celestial nurture than as an unquestioned god.

Even after enumerating these two sets of names – the first all of the greatest, and the greatest of the second, Landor, equalling the least of the first – we have not exhausted the poetical riches of this remarkable period. It is indeed almost dangerous to embark on the third class of poets; yet its members here would in some cases have been highly respectable earlier, and even at this time deserve notice either for influence, or for intensity of poetic vein, or sometimes for the mere fact of having been once famous and having secured a "place in the story." The story of literature has no popular ingratitude; and, except in the case of distinct impostors, it turns out with reluctance those who have once been admitted to it. Sometimes even impostors deserve a renewal of the brand, if not a freshening up of the honourable inscription.

The first of this third class in date, and perhaps the first in influence, though far indeed from being the first in merit, was William Lisle Bowles, already once or twice referred to. He was born on 24th September 1762; so that, but for the character and influence of his verse, he belongs to the last chapter rather than to this. Educated at Winchester, and at Trinity College, Oxford, he took orders, and spent nearly the last half century of his very

long life (he did not die till 1850) in Wiltshire, as Prebendary of Salisbury and Rector of Bremhill. It was in the year of the French Revolution that he published his *Fourteen Sonnets* [afterwards enlarged in number], *written chiefly on Picturesque Spots during a Journey*. These fell early into Coleridge's hands; he copied and recopied them for his friends when he was a blue-coat boy, and in so far as poetical rivers have any single source, the first tricklings of the stream which welled into fulness with the Lyrical Ballads, and some few years later swept all before it, may be assigned to this very feeble fount. For in truth it is exceedingly feeble. In the fifth edition (1796), which lies before me exquisitely printed, with a pretty aquatint frontispiece by Alken, and a dedication of the previous year to Dean Ogle of Winchester, the Sonnets have increased to twenty-seven, and are supplemented by fifteen "miscellaneous pieces." One of these latter is itself a sonnet "written at Southampton," and in all respects similar to the rest. The others – "On Leaving Winchester," "On the Death of Mr. Headley" the critic, a man of worth,[8] "To Mr. Burke on his

[8] Henry Headley, who, like Bowles and Landor, was a member of Trinity College, Oxford, and who died young, after publishing a few original poems of no great value, deserves more credit for his *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*, published in two volumes, with an exquisite title-page vignette, by Cadell in 1787, than has sometimes been allowed him by the not numerous critics who have noticed him recently, or by those who immediately followed him. His knowledge was soon outgrown, and therefore looked down upon; and his taste was a very little indiscriminate. But it was something to put before an age which was just awakening to the appetite for such things two volumes full of selections from the too little read poets of the seventeenth, with a few of the sixteenth century. Moreover, Headley's biographical information

Reflections," and so forth – are of little note. The same may be said of Bowles' later poetical productions, which were numerous; but his edition of Pope, finished in 1807, brought about a hot controversy not yet forgotten (nor, to tell the truth, quite settled) on the question Whether Pope was a poet? That Bowles can have had scant sympathy with Pope is evident from the very first glance at the famous sonnets themselves. Besides their form, which, as has been said, was of itself something of a reactionary challenge, they bear strong traces of Gray, and still stronger traces of the picturesque mania which was at the same time working so strongly in the books of Gilpin and others. But their real note is the note which, ringing in Coleridge's ear, echoed in all the poetry of the generation, the note of unison between the aspect of nature and the thought and emotion of man. In the sonnets "At Tynemouth," "At Bamborough Castle," and indeed in all, more or less, there is first the attempt to paint directly what the eye sees, not the generalised and academic view of the type-scene by a type-poet which had been the fashion for so long; and secondly, the attempt to connect this vision with personal experience, passion, or meditation. Bowles does not do this very well, but he tries to do it; and the others, seeing him try, went and did it.

His extreme importance as an at least admitted "origin" has

---

shows very praiseworthy industry, and his critical remarks a great deal of taste at once nice and fairly catholic. A man who in his day could, while selecting and putting forth Drayton and Carew, Daniel and King, speak enthusiastically of Dryden and even of Goldsmith, must have had the root of the matter in him as few critics have had.

procured him notice somewhat beyond his real deserts; over others we must pass more rapidly. Robert Bloomfield, born in 1760, was one of those unfortunate "prodigy" poets whom mistaken kindness encourages. He was the son of a tailor, went early to agricultural labour, and then became a shoemaker. His *Farmer's Boy*, an estimable but much overpraised piece, was published in 1800, and he did other things later. He died mad, or nearly so, in 1823 – a melancholy history repeated pretty closely a generation later by John Clare. Clare, however, was a better poet than Bloomfield, and some of the "Poems written in an Asylum" have more than merely touching merit. James Montgomery,[9] born at Irvine on 4th November 1771, was the son of a Moravian minister, and intended for his father's calling. He, however, preferred literature and journalism, establishing himself chiefly at Sheffield, where he died as late as 1854 (30th April). He had, as editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, some troubles with the law, and in 1835 was rewarded with a pension. Montgomery was a rather copious and fairly pleasing minor bard, no bad hand at hymns and short occasional pieces, and the author of longer things called *The Wanderer of Switzerland*, *The West Indies*, *The World before the Flood*, and *The Pelican Island*. Bernard Barton, an amiable Quaker poet, will probably always be remembered as

[9] Not to be confounded with *Robert*, or "Satan" Montgomery, his junior by many years, and a much worse poet, the victim of Macaulay's famous classical example of what is called in English "slating," and in French *éreintement*. There is really nothing to be said about this person that Macaulay has not said; though perhaps one or two of the things he has said are a little strained.

the friend and correspondent of Charles Lamb; perhaps also as the father-in-law of Edward FitzGerald. His verse commended itself both to Southey (who had a kindly but rather disastrous weakness for minor bards) and to Byron, but has little value. Barton died in 1849.

The same pair of enemies joined in praising Henry Kirke White, who was born in 1785 and died when barely twenty-one. Here indeed Southey's unsurpassed biographical skill enforced the poetaster's merit in a charming *Memoir*, which assisted White's rather pathetic story. He was the son of a butcher, a diligent but reluctant lawyer's clerk, an enthusiastic student, a creditable undergraduate at St. John's, Cambridge, and a victim of consumption. All this made his verse for a time popular. But he really deserved the name just affixed to him: he was a poetaster, and nothing more. The "genius" attributed to him in Byron's well-known and noble though rather rhetorical lines may be discovered on an average in about half a dozen poets during any two or three years of any tolerable poetic period. His best things are imitations of Cowper in his sacred mood, such as the familiar "Star of Bethlehem," and even these are generally spoilt by some feebleness or false note. At his worst he is not far from Della Crusca.[10]

---

[10] Some fifteen years ago, in a little book on Dryden, I called Kirke White a "miserable poetaster," and was rebuked for it by those who perhaps knew Byron's lines and nothing more. Quite recently Mr. Gosse was rebuked more loudly for a less severe denunciation. I determined that I would read Kirke White again; and the above judgment is the mildest I can possibly pronounce after the reading. A good young man

In the same year with Kirke White was born a much better poet, and a much robuster person in all ways, mental and physical. Allan Cunningham was a Dumfriesshire man born in the lowest rank, and apprenticed to a stone-mason, whence in after years he rose to be Chantrey's foreman. Cunningham began – following a taste very rife at the time – with imitated, or to speak plainly, forged ballads; but the merit of them deserved on true grounds the recognition it obtained on false, and he became a not inconsiderable man of letters of all work. His best known prose work is the "Lives of the Painters." In verse he is ranked, as a song writer in Scots, by some next to Burns, and by few lower than Hogg. Some of his pieces, such as "Fair shines the sun in France," have the real, the inexplicable, the irresistible song-gift. Cunningham, who was the friend of many good men and was liked by all of them, died on 29th October 1842. His elder by eleven years, Robert Tannahill, who was born in 1774 and died (probably by suicide) in 1810, deserves a few lines in this tale of Scots singers. Tannahill, like Cunningham in humble circumstances originally, never became more than a weaver. His verse has not the *gusto* of Allan or of Hogg, but is sweet and tender enough. William Motherwell too, as much younger than Allan as Tannahill was older (he was born in 1797 and died young in 1835), deserves mention, and may best receive it here. He was a Conservative journalist, an antiquary of some mark, and a useful editor of Minstrelsy. Of his original work,

---

with a pathetic career; but a poetaster merely.

"Jeanie Morrison" is the best known; and those who have read, especially if they have read it in youth, "The Sword Chant of Thorstein Raudi," will not dismiss it as Wardour Street; while he did some other delightful things. Earlier (1812) the heroicomic *Anster Fair* of William Tennant (1784-1848) received very high and deserved no low praise; while William Thom, a weaver like Tannahill, who was a year younger than Motherwell and lived till 1848, wrote many simple ballads in the vernacular, of which the most touching are perhaps "The Song of the Forsaken" and "The Mitherless Bairn."

To return to England, Bryan Waller Procter, who claimed kindred with the poet from whom he took his second name, was born in 1790, went to Harrow, and, becoming a lawyer, was made a Commissioner of Lunacy. He did not die till 1874; and he, and still more his wife, were the last sources of direct information about the great race of the first third of the century. He was, under the pseudonym of "Barry Cornwall," a fluent verse writer of the so-called cockney school, and had not a little reputation, especially for songs about the sea and things in general. They still, occasionally from critics who are not generally under the bondage of traditional opinion, receive high praise, which the present writer is totally unable to echo. A loyal junior friend to Lamb, a wise and kindly senior to Beddoes, liked and respected by many or by all, Procter, as a man, must always deserve respect. If and things like it are poetry, I admit myself, with a sad humility, to be wholly destitute of poetical appreciation.

The sea, the sea, the open sea,
The blue, the fresh, the ever free,

The Church of England contributed two admirable verse writers of this period in Henry Cary and Reginald Heber. Cary, who was born in 1772 and was a Christ Church man, was long an assistant librarian in the British Museum. His famous translation of the *Divina Commedia*, published in 1814, is not only one of the best verse translations in English, but, after the lapse of eighty years, during which the study of Dante has been constantly increasing in England, in which poetic ideas have changed not a little, and in which numerous other translations have appeared, still attracts admiration from all competent scholars for its combination of fidelity and vigour. Heber, born in 1783 and educated at Brasenose, gained the Newdigate with *Palestine*, a piece which ranks with *Timbuctoo* and a few others among unforgotten prize poems. He took orders, succeeding to the family living of Hodnet, and for some years bid fair to be one of the most shining lights of the English Church, combining admirable parochial work with good literature, and with much distinction as a preacher. Unfortunately he thought it his duty to take the Bishopric of Calcutta when it was offered him; and, arriving there in 1824, worked incessantly for nearly two years and then died. His *Journal in India* is very pleasant reading, and some of his hymns rank with the best in English.

Ebenezer Elliott, the "Corn-Law Rhymer," was born in Yorkshire on 7th March 1781. His father was a clerk in an iron-foundry. He himself was early sent to foundry work, and he afterwards became a master-founder at Sheffield. From different points of view it may be thought a palliation – and the reverse – of the extreme virulence with which Elliott took the side of workmen against landowners and men of property, that he attained to affluence himself as an employer, and was never in the least incommoded by the "condition-of-England" question. He early displayed a considerable affection for literature, and was one, and about the last, of the prodigies whom Southey, in his inexhaustible kindness for struggling men of letters, accepted. Many years later the Laureate wrote good-naturedly to Wynn: "I mean to read the Corn-Law Rhymer a lecture, not without some hope, that as I taught him the art of poetry I may teach him something better." The "something better" was not in Elliott's way; for he is a violent and crude thinker, with more smoke than fire in his violence, though not without generosity of feeling now and then, and with a keen admiration of the scenery – still beautiful in parts, and then exquisite – which surrounded the smoky Hades of Sheffield. He himself acknowledges the influence of Crabbe and disclaims that of Wordsworth, from which the cunning may anticipate the fact that he is deeply indebted to both. His earliest publication or at least composition, "The Vernal Walk," is said to date from the very year of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and of course owes no

royalty to Wordsworth, but is in blank verse, a sort of compound of Thomson and Crabbe. "Love" (in Crabbian couplets slightly tinged with overlapping) and "The Village Patriarch" (still smacking of Crabbe in form, though irregularly arranged in rhymed decasyllables) are his chief other long poems. He tried dramas, but he is best known by his "Corn-Law Rhymes" and "Corn-Law Hymns," and deserves to be best known by a few lyrics of real beauty, and many descriptions. How a man who could write "The Wonders of the Lane" and "The Dying Boy to the Sloe Blossom" could stoop to malignant drivel about "palaced worms," "this syllabub-throated logician," and so forth, is strange enough to understand, especially as he had no excuse of personal suffering. Even in longer poems the mystery is renewed in "They Met Again" and "Withered Wild Flowers" compared with such things as "The Ranter," though the last exhibits the author at both his best and worst. However, Elliott is entitled to the charity he did not show; and the author of such clumsy Billingsgate as "Arthur Bread-Tax Winner," "Faminton," and so forth, may be forgiven for the flashes of poetry which he exhibits. Even in his political poems they do not always desert him, and his somewhat famous Chartist (or ante-Chartist) "Battle-Song" is as right-noted as it is wrong-headed.

Sir Aubrey de Vere (1788-1846), a poet and the father of a poet still alive, was a friend and follower of Wordsworth, and the author of sonnets good in the Wordsworthian kind. But he cannot be spared much room here; nor can much even be given

to the mild shade of a poetess far more famous in her day than he. "Time that breaks all things," according to the dictum of a great poet still living, does not happily break all in literature; but it is to be feared that he has reduced to fragments the once not inconsiderable fame of Felicia Hemans. She was born (her maiden name was Felicia Dorothea Browne) at Liverpool on 25th September 1794, and when she was only eighteen she married a Captain Hemans. It was not a fortunate union, and by far the greater part of Mrs. Hemans' married life was spent, owing to no known fault of hers, apart from her husband. She did not live to old age, dying on 26th April 1835. But she wrote a good deal of verse meanwhile – plays, poems, "songs of the affections," and what not. Her blameless character (she wrote chiefly to support her children) and a certain ingenuous tenderness in her verse, saved its extreme feebleness from severe condemnation in an age which was still avid of verse rather than discriminating in it; and children still learn "The boy stood on the burning deck," and other things. It is impossible, on any really critical scheme, to allow her genius; but she need not be spoken of with any elaborate disrespect, while it must be admitted that her latest work is her best – always a notable sign. "Despondency and Aspiration," dating from her death-year, soars close to real sublimity; and of her smaller pieces "England's Dead" is no vulgar thing.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.