ROBERT SOUTHEY AND HIS POETRY.

A CRITICAL STUDY.

Thesis presented by

ARTHUR CYRIL HARRISON

for the degree of Master of Arts (English).

University of Birmingham.

May 1920.

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

CONTENTS.

Chapter. Page

I. INTRODUCTION: 1

Southey as man, as man of letters, as poet.- His popularity.- His own verdict and those of friendly critics upon his poetry, not lightly to be set aside.

II. FORMATIVE INFLUENCES AND EARLY POEMS: (1774-1792) 8

Necessity for some biographical details.- Southey's education and early reading.- Westminster,- Balliol College.- Outbreak of French Revolution.- Friendship with Coleridge. Pantisocracy.- "Poems" by Lovell and Southey (1794).- Southey's literary debt to predecessors.

III. THE REVOLUTIONARY POEMS: (1793-1795). 25

English literature stimulated by revolutionary doctrines from France.- "Joan of Arc"- "The Fall of Robespierre"- "Wat Tyler"- "Botany Bay Eclogues"- Southey and the "Anti-Jacobin"- Occasional poems of revolutionary origin.

IV. BALLADS AND MISCELLANEOUS POEMS: (1796-1800). 47

Effects of Southey's visit to Portugal.- "Poems" 1797 & 1799. "Annual Anthology" 1799 & 1800.- Reflective poems.- "English Eclogues"- Ballads.- The grotesque in Southey's poetry - "All for Love" & "Pilgrim to Compostella" (1829) Southey's prosody.- "The Amatory Poems of Abel Shufflebottom".

V. THE MYTHOLOGICAL EPICS (1800-1815). 59

Southey's poetic ambitions and plans
"Thalaba" 61
"Kehama" 73
"Madoc" 82
"Roderick" 88
Death of Herbert, his son, in 1816 crushes the poet. "A Tale of Paraguay" (1825).

Chapter Page

VI. THE LAUREATE ODES: (1816-1843) 98

Southey's pension (1807).- Appointed Laureate (1813)- Occasional official odes- "The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo" & "The Lay of the Laureate"- "The Vision of Judgment"- Quarrel with Byron.- Southey's conception of liberty- His patriotism - Versification of "The Vision"- Further honours - Collective Edition of Poems published 1837-8.- Southey's death.

VII. CONCLUSION. 122

Adverse conditions under which Southey wrote.- His association with the "Lake School" and the Romantic revival in Literature.- Southey's influence on his successors.- The importance of his poetry to-day.

LIST OF POETICAL WORKS BY R. SOUTHEY. 139

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 140

N.B. The dates in the chapter headings are only intended as a general indication, and as this is primarily a critical, not a biographical study, the contents of each chapter have not been strictly confined to the dates at its head.

--------:-:-:-:--------

REFERENCE.

C. indicates correspondence, and is followed by name of addressee and date, as these particulars not only affect the critical value of the quotation but are a sufficient guide to enable the letter quoted to be readily found in any of the standard editions.

--------:-:-:-:--------

INTRODUCTION.

"Genius is the heir of fame; but the hard condition on which the bright reversion must be earned is the loss of life."(1)

In 1843 Robert Southey, D.C.L., the Poet Laureate, dying, fulfilled that hard condition of Hazlitt's and became a candidate for immortal renown.

The dust of fierce conflict, the mists of prejudice which prevent contemporaries from forming accurate judgments on the character and performance of their fellow actors, which distort pigmies into giants, and sages into fools, have now all settled down or been swept aside. After a lapse of nearly eighty years, criticism can now stand far enough away from the man and his work to see both in their true proportions. The test of time has been applied and it remains only to separate the imperishable from the perishable.

As to Robert Southey, the man, there can be no two opinions. In the words of Thackeray, he was "An English worthy, doing his duty for fifty years of noble labour, day by day storing up learning, day by day working for scant wages, most charitable out of his small means, bravely faithful to the calling which he had chosen, refusing to turn from his path for popular praise or prince's favour. ------- I hope his life will not be forgotten for it is sublime in its simplicity, its energy, its honour, its affection."(2)

(1) Hazlitt, "Lectures on the English Poets." Lecture VIII.

(2) Thackeray, "The Four Georges." George IV.

As a man of letters Southey's fame is secure. Literature was not only the staff of his material life, providing for him and his dependants a comfortable, if not a luxurious subsistence, but also the prop of his imaginative and intellectual existence whereby alone his highest ambitions and desires could be attained. Very few are the English authors who can show such vast achievements in so many and so diverse fields of literary activity, and only a lifetime of laborious devotion to his self-imposed tasks could possibly have produced such a body of writings.

In his powers of composition in both mediums, prose and verse Dryden is perhaps the only great English writer who can stand beside him; and competent modern critics have frequently praised Southey's prose style as possibly the purest and most perfect -of a type at once simple and scholarly - of which our language can boast. He was for years the mainstay of the Quarterly Review, when that periodical was at the height of its power and importance; of short biographies his "Life of Nelson" is probably the best in English literature; while his great humorous miscellany "The Doctor Etc." in which erudition and playfulness, strange lore and quaint proverbs in many languages, together with much absolute but delightful nonsense are massed together, was but a relaxation from the life-long labours of his great History of Portugal, of which only the "History of Brazil" was ever completed for publication. This by no means exhausts the list of his chief prose works, while as translator and editor, as well as a delightful letter-writer, his name appears on the title-pages of many goodly volumes.

Nor when we come to the special task we have set ourselves and consider Southey's poetry do we find him less prolific or more limited in range. Lyrics, odes and inscriptions, dramatic monologues "a drama", long narrative poems, epics and epistles display his versatility, and assiduity, and he is reported to have burnt much more poetry than he ever published. He wrote also in varying moods, serious, humorous, or grotesque by turns, and there is God's plenty indeed in the great double-columned royal octavo into which his poetical works were finally collected.

Another remarkable feature of his poetic achievements is made by his experiments in versification, to judge of which justly we must also remember the date at which he wrote. Both in theory and practice he had a sound knowledge of his craft from the point of view of technique, founded on wide and careful study of the older English poets, and perfected by constant use from a very early age. Apart from his attempts to acclimatise the hexameter in English, and to write English sapphics and dactylics, his irregular pindaric stanzas, both rhymed and unrhymed, and his method of handling ballad measures in the grotesque poems, are not less noteworthy and symptomatic than his almost entire avoidance of the heroic couplet.

Popularity is another factor which should not be lost sight of, although neither great popularity nor entire lack of it should be allowed to prejudice the critic in his task of dividing the literary sheep from the goats. It is a factor which may be helpful in summing up an author's merits, and its presence or absence, growth or decline, must provoke interesting inquiries into the reasons which lie behind them.

"This, indeed," said Hazlitt, "is one test of genius and real greatness of mind, whether a man can wait patiently and calmly for the award of posterity, satisfied with the unwearied exercise of his faculties, retired within the sanctuary of his own thoughts." (1) Of English poets few have been so well able to face this test as Southey. In the preface to the collected edition of 1837 he wrote, "My poetical works have obtained a reputation equal to my wishes; and I have this ground for hoping it may not be deemed hereafter more than commensurate with their deserts, that it has been gained without ever accommodating myself to the taste or fashion of the times." That this had been his settled opinion during the whole of his adult life, many passages from his correspondence could be brought to prove, as for example, this from a letter to his friend John May in 1803: - "I have a full and well-founded faith in the hope you express, that my reputation will indeed stand high hereafter:" - or this from his letter to his brother Tom in 1809, with reference to one of the most popular of his long poems,

"Very, very few persons will like 'Kehama' --- I care little about this; every generation will afford me some half dozen admirers of it, and the everlasting column of Dante's fame does not stand upon a wider base." Nor does he hesitate to compare his poems with "The Faerie Queene," or "Samson Agonistes," and in his satisfaction with "Thalaba" he says, "I should not dread a trial with Ariosto." (2)

---

(1) Hazlitt, "Lectures on the English Poets." Lecture VIII.

(2) C. C.W.Wynn. 21 - 2 - 1801.

It is a commonplace that an author is usually a very unreliable critic of his own work yet the fact cannot be denied that Southey was a capable critic, and that many of his judgments, on the older English poetry, on his great contemporaries, and on his own work too showed considerable acumen. And it may well be asked if reasons cannot be found for the certainty with which Southey could remark, "Me iudice, I am a good poet."(1)

In support of his own unqualified approval of his poetry Southey had the knowledge that it was at any rate more popular with the public than the work of other great contemporary poets; of Coleridge for instance, or of Wordsworth, although Southey well knew the true value of the "Lyrical Ballads" of which he wrote, "I would risk my whole future fame on the assertion that they will one day be regarded as the finest poems in the language."(2)

And although Southey often laments that the pecuniary profit from the sale of his poetry is not such as to make him independent of the "little money-getting employments of silent and obscure exertion"(3), the literary hack-work which absorbed all too much of his time, nor to enable him, as he wished, to devote his whole time to his Muse, yet it was sufficient to content him and he felt assured that he would "yet make what will be a fortune" to him with his pen.

Much more did he rejoice in the approval of his many friends, and of those fellow-craftsmen whose ideals and practice he admired.

---

(1) C. Wm.Taylor. 9 - 3 - 1805.
(2) C. J.May, Bristol, 1803.
(3) C. Id.

In a letter to Coleridge written immediately upon his arrival in Lisbon in 1800, Southey mentioned that his travelling companions had included "The Lyrical Ballads", a volume of Burns, and "Gebir". The last named poem he had re-read and states that "Gebir" "grows upon me." The author of this poem which he found full of "miraculous beauties" was "God knows who" and unknown to Southey, and it was not until 1808, that as another of his letters tells us,"At Bristol I met with the man of all others whom I was most desirous of meeting,- the only man living of whose praise I was ambitious, or whose censure would have humbled me - Savage Landor, the author of "Gebir". I have often said before we met that I would walk forty miles to see him, and having seen him, I would gladly walk fourscore to see him again." (1)

Landor not merely praised Southey's poems, especially "Thalaba", but upon hearing that the long-planned series of mythological epics had been perforce laid aside in favour of more lucrative employment, urged him to "go on with them" offering to pay all the expenses of printing "as many as you will write and as many copies as.you please".

This was indeed a princely offer, and feeling that "it is something to be praised by one's peers," (2) Southey had awakened in him "old dreams and hopes which had been laid aside" and considered himself bound to the completion of "Kehama" at least.

Nor did Landor cease to praise the poet of whom he afterwards wrote,

"No firmer breast than thine hath Heaven
To poet sage or hero given,"

calling him the

"Rare architect of many a wondrous tale
Which till Helvellyn's head lie prostrate shall remain." (3)

---

(1) C. G.C.Bedford. 26 - 4 - 1808.
(2) Id.
(3) Landor, Invocations, CCLXXIX.

And Macaulay writing in 1830 could find it in him to say that Southey's "poems taken in the mass stand far higher than his prose works"(1) always excepting the "Life of Nelson."

If then Southey's work as a poet was bought and appreciated by a considerable section of the reading public, and this in spite of the political and religious animosities which ran high in those troubled times; if it earned for him the highest public reward officially held out for the encouragement of literature in this country; if it gained for him the admiration of such fellow-craftsmen as Scott and Coleridge, the enthusiastic praise of such a poet and critic as Landor, if it has won the appreciation of minds so widely different as those of Fox, Macaulay and Newman, we must consider carefully the merits of that work and find due cause for setting aside the verdict of such learned judges, before we can condemn it to the complete and deserved oblivion which many modern critics, as well as the general public, seem to consider its fate.

Before we pass over, as unjustifiable egotism, such lines as those in the proem to his "Carmen Nuptiale" which tell of his aspirations to "build the imperishable lay" and of his proud conviction that

"Thus in the ages which are past I live,
And those which are to come my sure reward will give"

we must be sure that the breath of life has fled, and for ever, from Southey's voluminous metrical compositions.

---

(1) Macaulay, "Essay on Southey's Colloquies."

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES AND EARLY POEMS. (1774 - 1792)

Adequately to understand any poet's work, we must have some knowledge of his biography; we must learn under what conditions he wrote, what influences - social, intellectual, and moral - helped to mould his character, and the works which are to a considerable extent the outcome of that character. Hence a critical survey of Southey's poetry must include some biographical details, and especially those bearing upon his upbringing and education in childhood and youth.

Robert Southey was born on August 12th. 1774. His congenital qualities seem to have included an alertness of intellect, an optimistic temperament, and a nervous sensibility, all of which he is said to have inherited from his mother (née Margaret Hill). His mother's half-sister, Miss Tyler, took him under her care soon after he was three years old, and educated him according to Rousseau's "Emile", and her own old-maidish notions. In Chapter 74 of "The Doctor, Etc." Southey has drawn a character sketch of his aunt as Miss Trewbody, "whose single life was no blessedness either to herself or others." With her, he led a lonely life, varied, however, by visits to the play, of which Miss Tyler was inordinately fond. Thither Southey was taken regularly from the age of four until, at six years old he returned to his father's house and began his education by attending as a day scholar with a Mr. Foot, a dissenting minister. Next he spent a year at Corston, at a school kept by a Mr. Thos. Flower, and his recollections of this school inspired one of his early poems, "The Retrospect", in which he tells us that "years intervening have not worn away/The deep remembrance of that wretched day" when he first left home to go there.

What he learned during these two years, he owed solely to that love of literature which seems to have been inborn in Southey. Miss Tyler had not only interested his youthful imagination in plays and playwrights, her acquaintance including Colman, Sheridan, Cumberland and Holcroft, but had given him access to Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher which he read and re-read before he was eight years old. This turned his literary aspirations towards the drama, and while still at Corston, he had attempted to write a tragedy, and thought it "very odd" that his schoolfellows "should not be able to write plays as well as to do their lessons."

With the opening of the year 1783 Southey, as a day scholar, entered the school kept by a Mr.Williams, at Bristol, where he learned some Latin and began to read Vergil, - but was never taught prosody. Perhaps it would be unfair to schoolmasters in general to suggest that this omission may account for Southey's keen and life-long interest in that subject.

A far more important event in Soutney's literary career occurred while he was staying with his aunt at Weymouth during his summer holidays the same year, for there one of her friends gave him a copy of Tasso's "Jerusalem Delivered" in Hoole's translation. This was the first real book he had owned, and it gave him unbounded delight. From the notes to this volume he was led to inquire at Bull's Circulating Library at Bath for Hoole's version of "Orlando Furioso", and afterwards for Spenser's "Faerie Queene". Hoole's translations he "perused and re-perused"(1) for the sake of their stories, but in Spenser he found the added charm of musical versification, while his

---

(1) Preface to VolumeI. 1837 Edn.

"obsolete language" against which the manager of the Library, not knowing what a book-worm born and bred stood before him in the person of this small boy of nine years old, had warned the youthful Southey, was no obstacle to one who "had learned all he then knew of the history of England from Shakespeare; and who had moreover read Beaumont and Fletcher."

So from that time, Southey tells us, he took Spenser for his master:

"He whose green bays shall bloom for ever young,
And whose dear name whenever I repeat,
Reverence and love are trembling on my tongue;
Sweet Spenser, sweetest Bard;"(1)

"I drank also betimes of Chaucer's well," Southey goes on to tell us, and "the taste which had been acquired in that school was confirmed by Percy's "Reliques" and Warton's "History of English Poetry"; and a little later by Homer and the Bible. It was not likely to be corrupted afterwards."(2)

After this propitious introduction to literature, Southey plunged into that ocean of miscellaneous reading which, beginning with Josephus (purchased with the hoarded pocket-money of many weeks), Goldsmith, Arabian tales, and Sidney's "Arcadia", ended with that library of fourteen thousand volumes which filled his Keswick home, and "like Pharoah's frogs, found their way everywhere, even into the bedchambers,"(3) of which Professor Saintsbury assures us that "it is safe to say all had been methodically read, and most read many times."(4)

---

(1) Lay of the Laureate, Proem, 18.
(2) Preface to Volume I 1837 Edn.
(3) C. G.C.Bedford. 26 - 4 - 1808.
(4) Nineteenth Cent. Lit. Chap.II. p.66.

It may be worth noting , before we leave this subject, that his early favourites among his books retained his affections, and in 1828 he included among the twelve English books he would choose if restricted to that number, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, and Sidney's "Arcadia."(1)

During the next year,(1787) Southey again changed his teacher, spending a year as the pupil of Mr.Lewis, a Bristol clergyman, from whom, however, he learned but little.

Nevertheless, Southey tells us, "I do not remember in any part of my life to have been so conscious of intellectual improvement -------an improvement derived not from books or instruction, but from constantly exercising myself in English verse." In a poem "On My Own Miniature Picture"(2) Southey attributes to this period his first wayward steps from "Preferment's pleasant path" for the purpose of "loitering beneath the laurel's barren shade." He began various epics on such subjects as the Trojan Brutus, King Richard III, and Egbert, and these were followed by heroic epistles, translations from Latin poetry, poems in dialogue and so forth. Thus he put into practice his own precept that "poetry must be studied as an art by those who would excel in it, though excellence in it is not attainable by art alone."(3)

To complete the tale of the authors who exercised a considerable formative influence upon Southey's juvenile poetry a further quotation from the 1837 preface will be as succinct a statement as any. "My school-boy verses," we are told, "savoured

---

(1) C. G.C.Bedford. 28 - 11 - 1828.
(2) Poems, 1797.
(3) Preface, Vol.2. 1837 Edn.

of Gray, Mason, and my predecessor Warton; and in the best of my juvenile pieces it may be seen how much the writer's mind had been imbued by Akenside. I am conscious also of having derived much benefit at one time from Bowles "whose famous, if mediocre, sonnets were published in 1789 when Southey was fifteen years old.

Yet bookish as he was, there is no reason to suppose that his imagination was entirely occupied by the fictions of the poets and the tales of historians. Many were the summer days he spent roaming over the Gloucestershire meadows, and along the banks of the Avon, and three years later, in 1793, we find him affirming that "Nature is a much better guide than antiquity,"(1) while in his "Hymn to the Penates"(2) he wrote of his youthful days

"When most I loved in solitude to rove
Amid the woodland gloom; or where the rocks
Darkened old Avon's stream, in the ivied cave
Recluse, to sit and brood the future song."

Meanwhile another important change had taken place in Southey's scholastic career, for in 1788 he had entered Westminster School where he was destined to spend four years, his expenses there being defrayed by his maternal uncle, the Rev. Herbert Hill.

---

(1) C. G.C.Bedford. 16 - 3 - 1793.
(2) Poems, 1797.

These were years of patient study, but not necessarily on the lines of the school curriculum. Books were still the chief factor in his life. He read Gibbon's "Decline and Fall", delighted in Ovid, planned six books to complete the "Faerie Queene" and wrote a few cantos; here he chose already the subject of his poem "Madoc", written some fifteen years later, and the great plan for a series of mythological epics which bore fruit in "Thalaba" and "Kehama" grew characteristically from his reading at this time of Picart's "Religious Ceremonies." (1)

The story of this all-important youthful conception is well told in his own words:-

"When I was a schoolboy at Westminster I frequented the house of a schoolfellow ---- and I had free access to the library. --- There many of my truant hours were delightfully spent in reading Picart's "Religious Ceremonies." The book impressed my imagination strongly; and before I left school I had formed the intention of exhibiting all the more prominent and poetical forms of mythology, which have at any time obtained among mankind, by making each the groundwork of an heroic poem." (2)

Here, too,

"At Westminster where little poets strive
To set a distich upon six and five,
Where discipline helps op'ning buds of sense
And makes his pupils proud with silver pence," (3)

Southey first tasted the pecuniary fruits of literary skill, winning a silver penny (4) for English composition.

---

(1) "Ceremonies et Coutumes Religeuses de Tous les Peuples du Monde." Bernard Picard. Amsterdam, 1723.
(2) Southey, "Vindiciae Ecclesiae Anglicanae" 6 - 7.
(3) Cowper, "Table Talk" L. 506 - 9.
(4) Then worth sixpence; present value probably fabulous.

And here also he learned how easily cleverness rouses the animosity of fools, and to what lengths the enmity of wounded conceit can go. In 1792 Southey, now grown beyond boyhood, became one of the chief promoters of a school-periodical, and wrote Number Five of the "Flagellant" as it was named, to prove that flogging was an invention of the Devil.

For this jeu d'esprit, the pompous headmaster Dr.Vincent, not only privately expelled Southey, but followed up this unwarranted persecution by reporting the matter to the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, whither Southey had hoped to go, in such a light that he was refused admission. He matriculated therefore at Balliol and, still at the expense of his uncle, entered into residence in January 1793.

This was a stirring time in the history of Europe, a time of great enthusiasms and high hopes, when dazzling new worlds were being offered for old, and by some subtle political alchemy the Age of Gold was to be produced immediately.

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven."(1)

Southey's nervous temperament and ardent spirit made him particularly sensitive to this flame of freedom which was burning across Europe like a prairie fire. Of this state of mind when he went up to Oxford he says, "I left Westminster in a perilous state - a heart full of feeling and poetry, a head full of Rousseau and Werther, and my religious principles shaken by Gibbon."(2)

---

(1) Wordsworth, "French Revolution, as it appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement" - and Prelude Bk.XI. L.108.
(2) C. C.H.Townshend. 5 - 6 - 1816.

But if his political and intellectual codes were those of thorough-going revolt against all the bonds of the past, his moral code remained almost puritanical in its severity and self-control, in spite of his surroundings. And once again a book was destined to count for much in deciding his line of conduct.

Mrs.Carter's translation of Epictetus came into his hands and he made of it a constant companion and guide. "The longer I live and the more I learn, the more am I convinced that Stoicism properly understood, is the best and noblest of systems" he wrote to his brother, and in recommending it to his friend Miss Barker he says,"Next to the Bible, it is the best practitional book, and the truest philosophy in existence".

The lofty ethical philosophy of that lame slave of Nicopolis tinged Southey's thought most deeply throughout his life, and its influence is observable in all his serious poems.

Southey was also very fortunate in his friendships among his fellows, and to those he had made at Westminster with Chas. W.W.Wynn and Grosvenor C.Bedford he now added a close alliance with Edmund Seward and Nicholas Lightfoot.

In the Easter vacation of 1793, Southey had tramped with Seward along the leafy lanes of Worcestershire visiting Evesham and Bewdley, and in the summer he visited the Wye district where Wordsworth, at the same time, was storing up those impressions of beauty to which he so often "turned in spirit" during the next five years.(1)

---

(1) cf. Wordsworth's "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a tour July 13. 1798."

Thus was fostered Southey's love of natural beauty and of the green meadows and quiet villages of our English countryside which inspired many pleasant passages in his poetry, and not a few in his first successful effort to write a poem 'à longue haleine', - an effort which he was to make immediately. He returned from Monmouthshire to stay with his friend Bedford at Brixton, and there, the day after his nineteenth birthday, Southey commenced to write "Joan of Arc", an epic in ~~twelve~~ ten books, and in six weeks the first sketch of the poem was completed.

The poem was written when Southey, with most of the ardent youth of his day, was full of enthusiasm for liberty, equality, fraternity and the whole revolutionary creed. But he belonged to a generation whose best hearts and minds were doomed to bitter disillusionment, to complete loss of faith in all their cherished ideals, to despair if not of God's goodness, at least of that of their fellow men. Southey's hopes were all with the Girondin party, and immediately after he had written this prophetic paean of victory for French patriotism, came the news that the Girondins had lost all power and were now in their turn filling the tumbrils and suffering the steely kiss of our Lady of the Guillotine. Finally Brissot, Southey's ideal of political courage, purity and wisdom was "murdered" on Oct. 31st. 1793. "I look round the world and everywhere find the same spectacle,- the strong tyrannizing over the weak, man and beast, ---- there is no place for virtue", Southey wrote at this time.

Neither were his personal prospects much more cheerful than his political and intellectual outlook. His uncle had expected that as soon as Southey's Oxford studies were over he would become ordained as a clergyman of the Church of England. But in December 1793 we find him writing to his friend Bedford, "What is to become of me at ordination Heaven only knows! After keeping the straight path so long the Test Act will be a stumbling-block to honesty. --- The wants of man are so few that they must be attainable somewhere, and whether here or in America, matters little; I have long learned to look upon the world as my country". Southey's religious opinions at this time were Unitarian and he would not honestly seek ordination.

His vague dreams of an idyllic life in the New World were soon, however, to be expanded into a new philosophy of life. For in June of the next year his famous meeting with Coleridge took place. It is easy to ridicule the unworldly hopes and impracticable imaginings which are summed up in Pantisocracy- the well-known term of Coleridge's invention; but idealists are all too few and the world would be a sad place if none had ever existed. Under the pressure of monetary requirements the bright dream soon faded, its only practicable results being the marriages of Southey to Edith and Coleridge to Sarah Fricker, the daughters of an unsuccessful sugar-pan maker of Bristol; the final rupture of Southey's friendly relations with his aunt, Miss Tyler; and a temporary estrangement between Southey and Coleridge. But before the final collapse of the scheme, Southey and Coleridge had delivered a series of lectures in Bristol, mainly on historical subjects, and with considerable success.

They had also continued their poetical exercises, the results of which were a drama entitled "The Fall of Robespierre" of which Southey, Coleridge, and Lovell, who had married Mary Fricker, were to write an act apiece within twenty-four hours; a drama entitled "Wat Tyler" which Southey wrote in three days and of which more was heard at a later date; and finally at the end of 1794[1] a published volume of "Poems by Robert Lovell and Robert Southey". The poems were printed by R.Crutwell of Bath who doubtless hoped the volume would be as successful a venture as the one he had printed for a young and unknown poet in 1789 - the fourteen sonnets of Bowles.

As Southey himself very justly remarks "The cases are very few in which anything more can be inferred from juvenile poetry than that the aspirant possesses imitative talent and the power of versifying, for which, as for music, there must be a certain natural aptitude,[2] and these poems serve only to show that he certainly did possess the power of versifying and no little portion of talent. They tell us also on what poetical models his imitative faculties were employed.

When in "The Retrospect" we read

> "Rejoicing patriots run the news to spread
> Of glorious conquests, and of thousands dead"

we are at once reminded of the antithetical heroic couplet of Pope and of the Eighteenth Century school of poetry, already in decay, which Southey and his compeers were destined finally to discredit.

---

(1) Published autumn 1794; dated on title page 1795.
(2) Preface to Vol.2. 1837 Edn.

Yet the title and subject matter of "Romance" a pindaric ode in this volume, suggest that his sympathies were not with the age that was passing away and that he was looking forward to the conquest of new realms for poetry, for he sings the praises of "Spenser's tender strain" and of Rousseau "To whom romance and Nature formed all good".

Like its companion pindarics "To Horror" and "Hospitality", this ode bears the impress of Gray's irregular odes "The Progress of Poetry" and "The Bard", and shows also that the poet was attempting to modify the flow of his verse in accord with the emotions expressed. The ideas of Rousseau again appear in "Hospitality" where after describing the irreproachable habits of primitive man, the poem goes on

> "Such virtue Nature gives: when man withdraws
> To fashion's circle, far from nature's laws
> How chang'd, how fall'n the human breast!"

Another early experiment in this form is the ode "To Hymen" written in the rhymeless stanza of Collins "Ode to Evening" which Southey much admired[1]. The poet here urges himself to abandon Fancy, who

> "Soothes sad reality
> With visionary bliss",

and seek Learning, so that his life may be placid if monotonous. In later editions it is considerably altered and such poor lines as

> "And teach how dreadful death to happiness"

become quite respectable in the guise of

> "Is it not happiness
> That gives the sting to Death".

---

(1) Preface to Vol. 1. 1837 Edn.

As Wordsworth saw the romance, the poetry that lies in the common round of every-day life; as Coleridge did not hesitate to pierce into the realms of the supernatural; so Southey turned to another field of experience which was afterwards to be further exploited by the great Romantic writers, and sought in the past an escape from the present. In a letter to Bedford in March 1793, he wrote, "I have walked over the ruins of Godstow Nunnery with sensations such as Troy or Carthage would inspire; a spot so famed by our minstrels, so celebrated by tradition, and so memorable in the annals of legendary, yet romantic truth. Poor Rosamund!" and thus, musing upon "unhappy far-off things", he reconstructed in his imagination the personalities and scenes of times long gone by, as we see in his "Epistle of Rosamund de Clifford to King Henry II." Although still in the imitative stage, and still following Pope, it is the Pope of the passionate "Eloisa to Abelard" that Southey here copies.

Later in the same year in proposing a walking tour in Scotland he urges, among other attractions, that they will be able to "wander over the hills of Morven, and mark the driving blast, perchance bestrodden by the spirit of Ossian." The spirit of the wild northern mythologies appealed to Southey and inspired such early productions as his celebrations of Odin in his first volume of poems.

Here the influence of Dr.Sayers first becomes visible. In a review of Sayers, which in later years he wrote for the Quarterly,(1)

---

(1) Quar. Rev. v.35, p.204. pp. 175-220

Soutney remarks that the Gods of the Greeks and Romans were growing stale, while the attempt to substitute angels and demons had not proved popular, and hence poets were well disposed to adopt the Gods and heroes of Valhalla. In a note to the same article he tells us that he had seen Mrs. Siddons in the role of "Elfrida" in William Mason's play of that name when it was performed at Bath. Now the choruses of Saxon maidens in this play took the form of irregular odes under the influence of Gray[1] and in turn affected Dr.Sayers in his choice both of form and matter. This is to be seen from the preface to his "Dramatic Sketches" where he writes, "It is much to be lamented that we should discover only the faintest traces of the splendid and sublime religion of our Northern Ancestors", and explains that he chose the form of Greek tragedy "as affording in its chorus the most favourable opportunity for the display of mythological imagery."

Thus all the poets in this group which dealt with the ode form and with Northern Mythology, - Gray, Mason, Collins, Wharton and especially Sayers, who summed up all their aims, - attracted and influenced Southey.

Unfortunately Southey also followed Sayers in a further innovation, which had been adopted from the German poets such as Klopstock. Rhyme was "to be abandoned altogether because, said Sayers in his preface, "it appeared unnecessary if not prejudicial in this species of poetry." And Southey tells us "I read his "Dramatic Sketches" when they were first published and convinced myself ---- that the kind of verse in which his choruses were composed was not less applicable to narration than to lyrical poetry."[2]

---

(1) cf. Gray's letter to Horace Walpole, written Ash-Wednesday 1751
(2) Preface to Vol.1. 1837 Edn.

Southey's "Race of Odin" and "Death of Odin" are rhymed and owe less to Sayers than to such poems as Gray's "Descent of Odin." But with the "Death of Moses" and the "Death of Matathias" we have rhymeless imitations of Sayers, in a verse form which Southey can already handle with more skill than his master, and which contains the germ of Thalaba's metrical form. Here too, it is to be noted that biblical legends and phraseology, and the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, a link too with Ossian - all appealed very strongly to Southey who constantly employed them throughout his writings.

Southey, like the other poets of the new generation, attempted the sonnet form which their eighteenth century predecessors had neglected. The sonnets included in this first volume are but mediocre performances and not much better than his models. For it is the "meditative grace" of Bowles that Southey is imitating when he apostrophises Dunnington Castle where

> "Old Chaucer slowly sunk at last to night;
> Still shall his forceful line, his varied strain
> A firmer, nobler monument remain,
> When the high grass waves o'er thy lonely site;"

and when, with eye characteristically turned already toward his later end, he watches his dying fire and says:-

> "And I would wish, like thee, to shine serene
> Like thee, within mine influence, all to cheer;
> And wish at last, in life's declining scene
> As I had beam'd as bright, to fade as clear."

Alas for the vanity of human wishes, Southey's spirit was dimmed by mental decay some years before his death.

His other poems in this 1794 volume are less important for the study of Southey's development, and have even less intrinsic merit. "The Miser's Mansion", a feeble imitation of Gray's "Elegy",

displays its author's fondness for alliteration and word-play at its worst in such lines as;-

"Thy tall towers tremble to the touch of Time."

While such poems as those to Urban and to Lycon, praising philosophy and science as a via media between the canker of grief and the poison of pleasure, in which Grief and Hope and "Science, celestial maid" are personified with capital letters, although they contain occasional promising lines as, for example

"And what, my friend, is life ?
What but the many-weather'd April day ?"

are mostly of the flattest and dullest description.

Such were the poems with which Southey made his bow to the general public. It would be idle to pretend that they have extraordinary merit of any kind.

Yet as the snowdrop, which would pass unnoticed in the full glory of June, is hailed with delight in drear February as the harbinger of Spring, so we must take into account, in considering these poems, the date of their publication. Crabbe had published "The Village" in 1783, Cowper "The Task" in 1785, and Burns his Kilmarnock Edition in 1786, so that the heralds of the new poetry had not proclaimed their message for more than ten or twelve years, no very lengthy period for the preparation of such a literary revival; while Blake, one of the greatest among these forerunners, although his "Songs of Innocence" appeared in 1789 was still unknown owing to his methods of publication. Venturing forth as it did, in the days of Hayley, Darwin and the Della Cruscans, Southey's unpretentious volume was at least a gleam of hope and promise

While whatever may be urged against these early poems, Southey is at least justified in the boast he made when republishing them, that "In condemning the greater part of my juvenile pieces, it is only as crudities I condemn them; for in all that I have written whether in prose or verse, there has never been a line which for any compunctious reason, living or dying, I could wish to blot." (1)

---------------:-:-:-:-:---------------

(1) Preface to Vol.2. 1837 Edn.

THE REVOLUTIONARY POEMS. (1793 - 1795).

Mr.G.K.Chesterton, in his little book on Nineteenth Century Literature, has very characteristically stated that "towards the end of the eighteenth century the most important event in English history happened in France." The seed sown by Rousseau, which in France proved to be dragons' teeth producing crops of armed men, had germinated no less vigorously in England, but here its chief fruits were a rank growth of pamphlets, poems, periodicals, fat quartos and ponderous folios.

All thinking Englishmen were stimulated by the new rationalistic doctrines to re-explore the whole field of learning. The accepted ideas in philosophy, in history, in religion, in politics were all being challenged and investigated, while momentous discoveries in science, and inventions in mechanics had opened delirious vistas of new worlds awaiting the conquering mind of man. It was a second Renaissance with a renewed passion for learning; men tried once again to emulate Erasmus, whose single brain contained the whole of human knowledge.

A Coleridge, bewildered by the vast possibilities of the human mind thus newly revealed, could only dream upon his plans, too expansive ever to be worked out within his lifetime.

A Southey, with his "mimosa sensibility" was over-stimulated, and so eager to see the concrete results of his new ideas, that he was content to produce the immature and the incomplete.

Wordsworth tells us in his "Prelude" of the mental excitement of those times

> "When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
> When most intent on making of herself
> A prime enchantress",

and

> "the whole Earth
> The beauty wore of promise,- that which sets
> The budding rose above the rose full blown." (1)

And Southey, looking back in 1824, wrote to Caroline Bowles that "Few persons but those who have lived in it can conceive or comprehend what the memory of the French Revolution was, nor what a visionary world seemed to open upon those who were just entering it. Old things seemed to pass away and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race."

Since "young poets are, or at least used to be, as ambitious of producing an epic poem, as stage-stricken youths of figuring in Romeo or Hamlet" (2) what was more to be expected than that Southey should embody these yeasty notions of his youth in the ten books of an epic.

The subject of "Joan of Arc" was suggested to Southey at Oxford, early in July 1793 by his friend Bedford, - the poem was planned at home immediately afterwards, and the first sketch completed in August at Brixton Causeway.

An announcement at the end of the 1794 volume of poems, printed by Crutwell, contained proposals for the publication of "Joan of Arc" in a quarto volume, price one guinea. The list of subscribers grew very slowly, but a chance reading of part of the

---

(1) Wordsworth, Prelude Bk. XI. L. 117.
(2) Preface to "Joan of Arc", 1837 Edn.

poem to Joseph Cottle, the Bristol publisher, (who had literary aspirations himself and rather lionised the young fire-brand poets Coleridge and Southey), led to his offer of fifty guineas for the copyright and fifty copies for subscribers. "It can rarely happen", wrote Southey, "that a young author should meet with a bookseller as inexperienced and as ardent as himself, and it would be still more extraordinary if such mutual indiscretion did not bring with it cause for regret for both."(1) Yet the offer having been accepted, and a new fount of type and fine-woven paper employed to make "Joan of Arc" the finest book ever produced in Bristol, the poem had a considerable success, and when the copyright was eventually sold to Longmans, Cottle's profits reached the sum of £250, while the author had received £138.

The sight of the first printed proof-sheet made Southey, in spite of an author's natural pride in his first-born, only too conscious of the many glaring faults in his composition. Half the first book had to be left in its original state, but Southey spent six arduous months in correcting and revising the remainder of his poem as it went through the press. This revision was one of style, not of sense, for the fiery republican of 1793 was not much cooled by 1795; thus in its original form "Joan of Arc" gives us the fullest expression of its author's boyish enthusiasms - an account not tempered, as was Wordsworth's "Prelude" to our great disadvantage, with the caution and conservative discretion which years bring to most men.

---

(1) Preface to "Joan of Arc", 1837 Edn.

To turn to "Joan of Arc" itself, "that work in which the love of liberty is exhaled like the breath of Spring, mild, balmy, heaven-born, that is full of tears and virgin sighs, and yearnings of affection after truth and good, gushing warm and crimsoned from the heart,"(1) as no less a critic than Hazlitt has enthusiastically declared, the poem is full of the youthful exuberance we should expect in a work written in 1793 by an author nineteen years of age.

Deistic notions of a God revealed in nature, so that "natural" and "good" become synonymous terms; ill-digested but fervent ideas about liberty, about universal brotherhood, and about domestic bliss amid rural peace, with a corresponding hatred of kings and priests and war, cannot be employed as the basis of an epic. But an epic poem will provide endless opportunities for the display and illustration of these ideas, and for pertinent references to topics and personalities of the day. Hence we find in "Joan of Arc" a clearer account of the political and philosophic ideas of the late eighteenth century, than of the ideas, manners, and costume of the early fifteenth.

The idea of a people unanimously rising in revolt against tyranny appealed to Southey, as "Joan of Arc", "Madoc", and "Roderick" all show, and this idea had been strengthened by his reading in history and poetry.

Liberty-loving Athens fighting with Sparta against Persian aggression, the Roman republicans in their struggles with despots, and the account by Josephus of the unavailing efforts of the Jews

---

(1) "Spirit of the Age - Mr Southey."

to escape the Roman yoke were the themes that most attracted him. Many of the epics which he had devoured in his youth were filled with a similar spirit of national unity against oppression.

For example, Glover's Leonidas, declaring that

> "Death is vain
> To shake the firmness of the mind which knows
> That, wanting virtue, life is pain and woe;
> That, wanting liberty, even virtue mourns,
> And looks around for happiness in vain.
> Then speak, O Sparta! and demand my life;
> My heart exulting, answers to thy call."

is one of Southey's favourite heroes in poetry. These ideas gained added weight from his belief "that a happier order of things had commenced with the independence of the United States; and would be accelerated by the French Revolution." (1)

Just as Glover had versified Herodotus' account of Thermopylae, so Southey used Holinshed, Rapin, Monstrellet and Hume, as his copious notes show. Of the real Jeanne d'Arc revealed by more recent study and research Southey knew nothing. All he had to work upon were a small number of somewhat mean legends showing her, on the one hand as a witch, or at best a dupe of King Charles, or on the other, in a few cases, as a saintly martyr; while Voltaire's "La Pucelle" had done much to vulgarize the story. (2)

Southey, however, was not so much interested in her personality as in the part she played in the politics of her day, and he formed for himself quite a new conception of Joan as a warrior-heroine, made invincible by her virtue,- since, Nature being good,

---

(1) Preface to "Joan of Arc", 1837 Edn.
(2) Of this book Southey says, "I have never been guilty of looking into it." Preface to "Joan of Arc".

natural phenomena were on the side of Joan and virtue,- and leading a patriotic people to certain victory.

Herein lay the weakness of the poem, a weakness inherent in the Deism which underlies it; the heroine is felt to be invincible and the issue is never in doubt, hence there is no suspense and the reader's interest soon flags.

It is curious to note the double course taken by the literary influence of this rather shallow, optimistic philosophy from Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke to Southey and his fellow authors. Pope had tried, but in vain, to build great poetry on its slender foundation, and later Akenside's "Pleasures of Imagination"(1) made a similar attempt, admirable but for its lack of passion. Meanwhile Pope's "Essay on Man" had carried Deism to France, delighting the encyclopedists and Jean Jacques Rousseau who considered it a "metrical gospel" and became a convert.(2) Hence when this religion of nature was accepted by enthusiastic young republicans in England as part of the revolutionary creed, they were delighted to find it already so competently expressed in English by the poet who had written

> "Thus the men
> Whom Nature's work can charm, with God himself
> Hold converse,"

and Akenside soon became a favourite with them. Mottoes from his works adorn the 1797 volume of Southey's poems, Coleridge's "Religious Musings" and other early "romantic" productions. Deism, however, had not the weight of tradition, and was too thin-spun a system to support an epic, and its ultimate and finest expression

---

(1) Published 1744.
(2) Vide. "Jean-Jacques Rousseau et le cosmopolitisme literaire" par Joseph Texte, Chap.II. Sec.II.

is found in the lyrical poetry of Wordsworth.

In accordance, then, with Akenside's philosophy, Southey depicts Joan as owing all her power to a "natural" education.

"In solitude and peace
here I grew up, amid the loveliest scenes
Of unpolluted nature. Sweet it was,
As the white mists of morning roll'd away
To see the upland's wooded heights appear
Dark in the early dawn, and mark the slope
With gorse-flowers glowing, as the sun illumined
Their golden glory." (1)

Thus was her childhood spent in solitary, pastoral occupations her placid happiness dimmed, however, by such effects of the constant war against English aggression as the death of her friend Madelon from grief for her husband slain in battle, and the story of the warrior Conrade whose arguments (fac similes of those so constantly in the mouths of members of the recent conscription tribunals) convince Joan that it is indeed "woe to him ---
For little less his guilt --- who dwells in peace
When every arm is needed for the strife." (2)

At length she "heard of Orleans, by the foe Walled in from human help" and sought counsel of nature.

"There is a fountain in the forest call'd
The Fountain of the Fairies: when a child
With a delightful wonder I have heard
Tales of the Elfin tribe who on its banks
Hold midnight revelry. An ancient oak,
The goodliest of the forest, grows beside;
Alone it stands, upon a green grass plat,
By the woods bounded like some little isle.
It hath been ever deemed their favourite tree,
They love to lie and rock upon its leaves
And bask in moonshine. ----
Fancy had cast a spell upon the place
Which made it holy; and the villagers
Would say that never evil thing approach'd
Unpunish'd there. The strange and fearful pleasure
Which filled me by that solitary spring,
Ceased not in riper years; and now it woke
Deeper delight, and more mysterious awe." (3)

---

(1) Joan of Arc, Bk.1. lines 243 - 250.
(2) Joan of Arc, Bk.1. line 434.
(3) " " " Bk.1 line 490 - 510

Sitting at this spot on a Spring evening Joan experiences a great storm

> "The glory of the tempest fill'd my soul
> All sense of self annihilate, I seem'd
> Diffused into the scene"

and then she felt that God was within her and that it was her mission to work his wrath upon the oppressors.

As the story continues in the same smooth and pleasing, if not majestic, blank verse, Southey's revolutionary theorising is still further developed. The Maid is examined by the Doctors of Theology to know if she is "of holy Church a duteous child." A priest, venturing to state that "Nature doth lead to sin" is rebuked by Joan who indignantly repudiates such a doctrine:

> "If it be a sin to seek the wounded lamb,
> To bind its wounds and bathe them with my tears,
> This is what Nature taught. No, Fathers, No.
> It is not Nature that doth lead to sin:
> Nature is all benevolence, all love,
> All beauty." (1)

The priests are not convinced, and in suggesting trials by various ordeals, expose their own lust and cruelty. Joan, however, miraculously discovers the "Sword of God" whereupon they ratify her mission.

King Charles does not escape more lightly than the reverend Fathers and is made to look a very sorry figure indeed. His mistress Agnes Sorrel, taunts him with being

> "Fit only like the Merovingian race
> On a May morning deck'd with flowers to mount
> His gay-bedizen'd car, and ride abroad
> And make the multitude a holiday.
> Go, Charles, and hide thee in a woman's garb,
> And these long locks will not disgrace thee then."(2)

---

(1) Bk.III. lines 496 - 501.
(2) Bk.III. lines 149 - 154.

he is "given up to vain delights" and the only arms he wears are "gaudily graceful, Gay lady-dazzling armour"

There is a sarcastic description of

> "The train of courtiers, summer flies that sport
> In the sunbeam of favour, insects sprung
> From the court dunghill, greedy blood-suckers
> The foul corruption-gender'd swarm of state." (1)

We find also descriptions of the havoc wrought by war:-

> "The autumnal rains had beaten to the earth
> The unreap'd harvest and the shepherd's dog
> Prey'd on the scatter'd flock", (2)

and a highly alliterative invective against "the mighty ones" since

> "with its shade
> Does Power, a barren, death-dew-dropping tree
> Blast ev'ry herb beneath its baleful boughs." (3)

Contrasted with these are passages telling of that Golden Age of yore

> "when all the family of man
> Freely enjoy'd their goodly heritage,
> And only bow'd the knee in prayer to God." (4)

Finally, when Joan has anointed Charles "chief servant of the people" she lectures him on his office:-

> "Thy duty is to fear the Lord, and rule
> According to His word, and to the laws,"

bearing always in mind that

> "At the Judgment-day from those to whom
> The power was given, the Giver of all power
> Will call for righteous and severe account"

for unless gratitude and love establish his reign, hireling guards

> "would be weak to save
> A tyrant on the blood-cemented throne
> That totters underneath him."

---

(1) Bk.IV. lines 90 - 94.
(2) Bk.III. lines 6 - 8.
(3) Bk.V. line 91.
(4) Bk.VII. lines 453-455

Of direct references to the French Revolution the most striking is that where the poet speaks of Paris

> "Thro' many a dark age drenched with innocent blood,
> And one day doom'd to know the damning guilt
> Of Brissot murder'd, and the blameless wife
> Of Roland. --- --- Yet still survives,
> Sown by your toil, and by your blood manur'd
> The imperishable seed; and now its roots
> Spread, and strike deep, and soon shall it become
> That Tree beneath whose shade the sons of men
> Shall pitch their tents in peace." (1)

The story of "Joan of Arc" makes undeniably interesting reading and was considerably improved by the introduction of a new Book IX; the original ninth book, which had broken the continuity of the poem,- with its 'capital letter' personifications of Justice, Wealth, Power, Oppression, Poverty, etc. crowding its lines in true eighteenth century manner, - being afterwards reprinted separately as "The Vision of the Maid of Orleans."

The ideas which find expression in "Joan of Arc", if somewhat raw and crude, are at least unselfish and magnanimous,- are in fact, highly creditable - in an age of corruption and self-seeking, for they prove that Southey had honesty of mind, as well as the power of thought, and was prepared to sacrifice his hopes of advancement rather than abandon his convictions.

Passages have been quoted from the poem and many more could be adduced to prove that Southey was already a keen and accurate observer of nature and natural phenomena, passages such as are not to be paralleled anywhere amid the poetic productions of the age of Goldsmith and Pope; while his technical descriptions in the battle

---

(1) Bk.III. lines 85 - 94.

episodes, of wounds and deaths, owe to his brief studies in the anatomy school, before his horror of the dissecting-room forced him to abandon the idea of becoming a surgeon, a grim realism that would have shocked those polite authors who had written to amuse the Town earlier in the century.

It is obvious that Southey purposely chose a heroine rather than a hero, as the central figure of his poem, from the opinions expressed in his later poem "The Triumph of Woman" and its dedication to Mary Wolstonecraft, the type of the emancipated woman in those days, and in his inscription "For a tablet at Godstow Nunnery" urging men to "learn to reverence woman-kind."

Yet Southey's Joan can hardly be considered as a truly feminine personality, for he has endowed her with his own masculine self-assertiveness, his eagerness to be doing, and his own characteristic homilectic tendencies.

De Quincey's criticism that she is only portrayed as doing, never as suffering, is not strictly true, - being refuted by such passages as those describing her home-sickness when in

> "such dreams
> As Memory in her melancholy mood
> Most loves, the wonted scenes of Arc arose," (1)

or her joy when

> "Mindless of her high call,
> Again the lowly shepherdess of Arc
> In half-articulated words the maid
> Expressed her joy"

at seeing her gentle lover Theodore once again. (2)

Yet it must be admitted that Joan, as she appears in this poem, is not a creature of like passions with normal humanity.

---

(1) "Joan of Arc", Bk.IV. line 379
(2) Bk.IV. line 395.

her love, for instance, is no more than the affection of a child, and she is more sinless and unsullied than a daughter of Eve could hope to be. There seems to be no reason, however, why an abnormally virtuous heroine, although admittedly less interesting, should not be a refreshing change, on occasion, from the abnormally depraved heroine who seems to monopolize modern literature.

With this first epic, then, did Southey, as Coleridge said of him, "make the Adamantine gate of Democracy turn on its golden hinges to most sweet music", with a youthful lack of restraint, and in vigorous declamatory verse expressing the revolutionary ideas and ideals which were seething in the minds of so many of his contemporaries. This forceful, rhetorical expression of ideas not originally his, was at once Southey's chief contribution to the revolutionary cause, and the foundation of his own poetical reputation.

Practically no long poem, in the pretentious epic style with which eighteenth century criticism had almost exclusively concerned itself, had appeared since Pope, for the productions of Glover, Hayley and Rogers never aroused much enthusiasm and soon fell into oblivion. Yet the thoughts and aspirations of the eighteenth century which finally culminated in the Revolution were calling aloud for idealistic and poetic utterance. This double opportunity Southey had seized and "Joan of Arc" was the first poem for a generation that, even if unable to sustain it, could at least challenge comparison with Spenser and Milton.

The reviews being all of the liberal mode of thought were fairly unanimous in praise of the poem: its political principles

were described as uniformly noble, liberal and enlightened, and its author's poetical powers as "of a very superior kind."(1) So when Southey returned from Portugal in May 1796, he found that "Joan of Arc" had acquired for him a considerable reputation,- a reputation which established him as an author, and enabled him to live by his pen and devote himself, as he wished, to literature.

"Joan of Arc" saw a second edition in 1798, and was considerably improved by a revision which, among other changes, omitted the four hundred lines of incongruous philosophising by Coleridge from Book II, eliminated all miraculous intervention, and softened many asperities of language and sentiment. There were three further early editions for which the poem was again revised, and it received a final polishing for the collective edition of 1837 - 8, in which King Charles appears no longer as "chief servant of the people" but as "King over this great nation" and from which all references to "blood-cemented thrones" have vanished.

The "Anti-Jacobin" having been founded in 1797, the second edition above mentioned, was not allowed to pass unscathed by criticism as was the first. The poem was attacked as breaking all the recognised rules for epic poems, having no "epic machinery" and so forth, but chiefly because it was republican and anti-national.

Southey's own considered and mature judgment on the merits of "Joan of Arc" can be seen from his letter advising a young poet, Ebenezer Elliott of the "Corn-Law Rhymes", not to publish hastily.

"No young man", he wrote, "can possibly write a good narrative poem; though I believe he cannot by any other means so effectually improve himself as by making the attempt. I myself published one at

---

(1) Monthly Review, 1796.

the age of twenty-one: it made a reputation for me,- not so much by its merits, as because it was taken up by one party, and abused by another, almost independently of its merits or demerits, at a time when party-spirit was more violent than it is to be hoped it will ever be again. What has been the consequences of this publication? That the poem from beginning to end was full of incorrect language and errors of every kind: that all the weeding of years could never weed it clean; and that many people at this day rate me, not according to the standard of my present intellect, but by what it was fourteen years ago." (1)

Although "Joan of Arc" is the most important of Southey's political poems it was not the only poetic expression of his revolutionary opinions.

During the long vacation of 1794, Coleridge, returning from a walking tour in Wales, came in August, to Bath, where Southey was living with his mother, to elaborate with him the Pantisocratic scheme. On July 28th. Robespierre had finished his career of terror on the scaffold. With this news came fresh hope for the principles which Southey had felt to be almost discredited by the execution of Marie-Antoinette in October 1793 and the orgy of bloodshed which had followed. To celebrate the fall of this villain who had usurped the seat of authority where Liberty and Mercy should have reigned, Coleridge, Southey and Lovell, decided to write within twenty-four hours an act apiece of a tragedy to be called the "Fall of Robespierre", "As fast as newspapers could be put into blank verse" it was done. Coleridge being characteristically tardy with his portion, it was Southey who re-wrote Lovell's act, to make it compatible with the other two. This youthful and bombastic performance, which

---

(1) C. Ebenezer Elliott. 3 - 2 - 1809

continually hovered on the brink of bathos, was refused by the Bristol and London publishers to whom it was offered, but was finally issued under Coleridge's own name at Cambridge in 1794. Although the first act alone was originally written by Coleridge, the tragedy is usually included in the complete editions of Coleridge's poetical works and never in Southey's.

In the Summer of the same year Southey attempted to utilise his knowledge of old plays and of stage-craft independently, and in three mornings[(1)] produced "Wat Tyler", a drama in three acts. It is a much cruder production than "Joan of Arc", so much so that it might be regarded as parodying the ideas expressed in that poem. Belief in the goodness of simple folk, and in the righteousness of power when wielded by them to obtain liberty, hatred of kings, priests and lawyers, are the main themes, and they are treated with a naïveté that is quite refreshing and amusing.

The King, to whom only fear can give courage, and who knights Walworth for the "bold deed" of stabbing Tyler by treachery; the Archbishop, counselling the King if need be to ratify the treaty with an oath, from which he can easily be absolved, and urging the King to go to meet the rebels although afraid to face them himself; Sir John Tresilian, advising that

> "there's nothing like
> A fair, free open trial, where the King
> Can choose his jury and appoint his judges," (2)

are all drawn with clumsy attempts at sarcasm which verge on the ludicrous.

The play is of little interest apart from the story of its publication, and it would probably never have been published, but for the malice and greed of some of Southey's opponents.

---

(1) Preface to "Wat Tyler", 1837 Edn.
(2) "Wat Tyler". Act III. Sc.II.

In 1794, soon after it was written, the play was accepted for publication by a London publisher named Ridgeway. When Southey took upon himself the unpleasant duty of seeking out Coleridge on behalf of Miss Sarah Fricker, and after tracking him to the "Salutation and Cat", finally ran him to earth at "The Angel", he took the opportunity, while in town, of interviewing Mr.Ridgeway also, and found him domiciled in Newgate prison. The publisher agreed to make arrangements to print the play forthwith, but Southey heard no more of it, until in 1817 it was piratically produced.

Sixty thousand copies were sold, and Southey's application for an injunction to stop its publication was refused by Lord Eldon on a preposterous legal quibble. Finally the Liberal member for Norwich Mr.William Smith, read contrasted extracts from "Wat Tyler" of 1794 and "The Quarterly Review" of 1817 and accused Southey as a renegade. In his "Letter to William Smith,Esq.,*M.P.*", a "triumphant answer" as Walter Scott called it, Southey sufficiently vindicated his character, and he had the good sense and pluck to print "Wat Tyler" just as it stood, with his collected poetry in 1837.

Another vehicle for the expression of his political sympathies for sympathies they were, founded on his emotions, rather than opinions based on reason,- and of his very sincere feeling for the poor, was found and utilised in the "Botany Bay Eclogues." Their form was adapted from Gay's "Pastorals" which Southey had read in his youth, taking them as serious poems. The Eclogues tell of the convict-settlements in Australia, where those whom "the crimes and vices of luxurious life", the game-laws, the recruiting-sergeant and the press-gang, had driven or enticed into folly and sin, at last experience the regenerating influences of Nature which "fit the faithful penitent for heaven."

Four of the five of them were published in another volume of "Poems" which Cottle brought out for Southey in 1797, and along with them such other occasional pieces, propounding similar sentiments, as "The Pauper's Funeral", and "The Soldier's Funeral" in blank verse, "The Soldier's Wife" in dactylics, and "The Widow" in sapphics.

His contemporaries for many years judged of Southey as a poet by the merits of these revolutionary poems, and to a great number of modern readers he is only known by clever parodies upon them. They gained for him a reputation as a Jacobin in politics, which he never was, and as a revolutionary innovator in literature, the leader of a coterie of young poets working with common aims at the exploitation of new forms and new subjects, although, here again, judged from our standpoint Southey is seen to be the least "romantic" of the whole group.

In November 1797, under the editorship of William Gifford, was founded "The Anti-Jacobin and Weekly Examiner." The purpose of Canning and his friends in establishing this paper is sufficiently explained by its title, and Canning's talent for witty parody and flashing satire which amounted almost to genius, produced verses which have done more to secure immortality for the poems they travesty, than the merits of those poems could hope to do.

Thus in the first number of the new paper (1) after a satiric introduction explaining that the best thing for anti-jacobin poets was to imitate the superior jacobin poets, appeared Southey's "Inscription for the Apartment in Chepstow Castle, where Henry Marten, the Regicide, was imprisoned Thirty Years" printed in full from his 1797 volume of poems.

---

(1) "Anti-Jacobin", Nov.20. 1797. p.35.

" -------- Dost thou ask his crime ?
He had rebell'd against the King, and sat
In judgment on him; for his ardent mind
Shap'd goodliest plans of happiness on earth
And peace and liberty. Wild dreams. But such
As Plato lov'd; such as with holy zeal
Our Milton worshipp'd."

Immediately below came the "Imitation", an "Inscription for the Door of the Cell in Newgate where Mrs.Brownrigg, the 'Prentice-cide, was confined previous to her Execution." of which the corresponding lines were:-

" -------- Dost thou ask her crime ?
She whipp'd two female 'prentices to death,
And hid them in the coal-hole. For her mind
Shap'd strictest plans of discipline. Sage schemes
Such as Lycurgas taught, when at the shrine
Of the Orthyan Goddess he bade flog
The little Spartans; such as erst chastised
Our Milton, when at college. For this act
Did Brownrigg swing. Harsh laws. But time shall come
When France shall reign, and laws be all repealed."

The next number, dated Nov.27th., returned to the charge with the famous "Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder," a parody of Southey's experiment in English sapphics, not cleverer than the "Inscription" but more widely known. After quoting one verse of "The Widow" to prove that his model was not fictitious, Canning crushed it with ridicule. The Friend of Humanity commiserates with the Knife-Grinder:-

"Weary Knife-Grinder! little think the proud ones,
Who in their coaches roll along the turnpike-
road, what hard work 'tis crying all day,"Knives and
Scissors to grind O!"

but finding that he "never loves to meddle with politics,sir," answers thus his request for a modest "pourboire":-

"I give thee sixpence. I will see thee damn'd first-
Wretch! whom no sense of wrongs can rouse to vengeance;
Sordid, unfeeling, reprobate,degraded,
Spiritless outcast."
(Kicks the Knife-Grinder, overturns his wheel, and exit
in a transport of Republican enthusiasm
and universal philanthropy.)

"The Soldier's Friend"(1) and "Wearisome Sonnetteer"(2), (imitations of "The Soldier's Wife" in dactylics by Southey and Coleridge,) were only less admirable as parodies than those quoted.

It was rather like using a sledge-hammer to crush a gnat, to let fall this avalanche of ridicule on Southey's youthful and innocuous vapourings, and it would be labouring the point to prove in detail how completely Southey's life-story refutes the charge that "universal philantrophy" was in his case a mean excuse for neglecting calls for private charity. The amusement these travesties still afford is however their amply sufficient excuse.

In the last issue of the "Anti-Jacobin or Weekly Examiner"(3) a general attack was made on all who denied the validity of the established laws in politics or poetry.

"I love the bold, uncompromising mind
Whose principles are fix'd, whose view defined"

sang the Anti-Jacobin, and after an onslaught on the politicians and economists of the new school, accused

"COleriDGE and SOuTHeY, LLoyD and LaMBE and Co." of tuning their "mystic harps to praise Lepaux" an obscure republican philosopher of whom they had probably never heard; for the Anti-Jacobin's spelling of Lamb's name does not inspire much confidence in the accuracy of his information.

In September 1798 appeared the first number of the new "Anti-Jacobin Review" which tried to carry on the principles of its forerunner, and in an early number produced "The Anarchists, an Ode" in which Southey is once more associated with a group of young poets Coleridge, Lloyd, and Lamb.

---

(1) Anti-Jacobin. Dec.11, 1797.
(2) id. Dec.18, 1797.
(3) Pub July 9 1798

"Coleridge, Southey, Lloyd and Lambe
In splay-foot madrigals of love
Soft-moaning like the widow'd dove
Pour, side by side, their sympathetic notes
Of equal rights and civic feasts
And tyrant kings and knavish priests
Swift through the land the tuneful mischief floats."

Here we can see the origins of that line of attack which was to be developed and reinforced by Jeffrey, when in 1802, the "Edinburgh Review" was inaugurated. (1)

To return from this amusing and interesting digression into contemporary criticism, considerable attention is also merited by Southey's lines "On a Landscape of Gaspar Poussin." Written in 1795, as were the occasional pieces last mentioned, this fine poem is also concerned with revolutionary ideas. It gives adequate expression to the noblest aspirations of the poet's mind,- that mind which had conceived the system of aspheterism to abolish "the Moloch shrines of Wealth and Power", and the scheme of pantisocracy to enable him and his friends to lead

"a life of blessedness to reap
The fruit of honourable toil, and bound
Our wishes with our wants."

Alas! he is wakened from such visions to face the stern realities of life,

"Like the poor captive, from some fleeting dream
Of friends and liberty and home restored,
Startled, and listening as the midnight storm
Beats hard and heavy through his dungeon bars."

Southey's deism is also voiced in the 1797 volume, in the amusing poem which shows that he had, like many another undergraduate, a heartfelt dislike for "The Chapel Bell" which called

---

(1) Vide Chap. VII p. 125

him unseasonably to "The prayer that trembles on a yawn to heaven"; and more seriously in the lines "Written on Sunday Morning" in which he declares that

> "The swelling organ's peal
> Wakes not my soul to zeal
> Like the sweet music of the vernal grove", (1)

and turning from the Church he seeks the woodlands to "meet religion there."

The year that saw these poems written was a very momentous one in Southey's life-history. This was the year of his majority - in this year he definitely decided not to take Holy Orders, and it was on November 14, 1795 that he married Edith Fricker, immediately before starting for Falmouth on his way to Lisbon. The voyage marks a turning-point in his career. Behind him he left all the welter of conflicting political, social and religious ideas. His life at Bristol with the ever-eloquent, philosophical and disputatious Coleridge had already begun to weary him of extremist arguments and notions. In a letter to John May, describing the events of this period, he says, "My opinion of Coleridge was not what it had been; for by long living with him, I knew much of his character now"(2), while in a letter to Bedford in October 1795, Southey says that he "could teach the deist that the arguments in favour of Christianity were not to be despised, and to esteem metaphysics to be mere difficult trifles."

He was thus well on the way to be cured of some of his revolutionary notions, and his sympathies having been alienated by this time from France, he was free to transfer them to Portugal and

---

(1) cf. Wordsworth, "One impulse from a vernal wood" etc.
(2) C. 19 - 7 - 1797.

Spain,- a more lasting friendship which was soon to make him one of the most determined opponents of Napoleon.

---------------:-:-:-:-:----------------

BALLADS AND MISCELLANEOUS POEMS. (1796 - 1800)

Southey's ideas were so much coloured by the events of the next four years, and his literary production was so much influenced by his mode of life during this period from 1796-1800, that it is impossible to consider the poetry then written entirely apart from the biographical details connected with it.

His uncle's hopes that six months of reflection amid entirely new surroundings might show nephew Robert the imprudence of his proposed marriage, had been forestalled as we have seen. The errors of his religious and political ways were already beginning to dawn upon the young enthusiast, and the effect upon his opinions of his observations in the Spanish Peninsular, although probably quite unforeseen by Mr Hill was in the long run doubtless as satisfactory as could be hoped. The decadent feudalism which he saw coupled with avarice, flagrant vice, and crime, when the King and his courtesans with the royal court swept like a swarm of devouring locusts across the country, the misery of the poor whose most assiduous labour scarcely provided the bare necessities of life, the ignorance and superstition of a priest-ridden populace, and most forcibly of all, the dirt and discomfort of flea-ridden posadas forced Southey to think well of England "with all her faults". In a long letter to Wynn he writes, "I have learnt to thank God that I am an Englishman; for though things are not quite so well there as in El Dorado, they are better than anywhere else." (1)

He learnt also to read Spanish and Portuguese and used the knowledge indefatigably, acquiring interests which led to some

---

(1) C. 26 - 1 - 1796.

translating, much reviewing, and finally to his great unfinished life-task the "History of Portugal."

There also he first acquired his half-amused interest in monkish legends, with their grisly concomitants of bone-yard relics.

After six months of reading, and of writing the long letters that were to be the foundation of his "Letters written during a short stay in Spain and Portugal" for Cottle, Southey took ship for home on May 5th., 1796.

The financial difficulties which he never entirely escaped were at this period most pressing, for his mother, his consumptive cousin Margaret Hill, his young brothers, and his wife's mother and sisters all looked to him for help and never in vain. But to keep the pot boiling, unremitting toil was necessary.

His friend Wynn certainly provided him with an annuity of £160, which for Southey's frugal habits was a sufficiency, but with it he accepted the obligation to study law and make himself independent as soon as possible. Two sets of influences thus pulled him in opposite directions; law and lodgings in London on the one hand, and literature and home in the country on the other.

Southey's love of home and the domestic virtues was a very marked trait in his character, and the dignified "Hymn to the Penates" written at Bristol about this time tells of the poet's long dream of

> "Home, the mystic circle that surrounds
> Comforts and virtues never known beyond
> The hallowed limit"

and his practical sense that his first duty lay there. He has given up the pursuit of Fame and "crusading for mankind", and the Hymn is intended as a last song before he "hangs up the silent harp" and renounces poetry.

Sincere as this renunciation, and his efforts to study law may have been, his memory refused to be burdened with legal data; "the tares would not grow", while, to change the metaphor, poetry was a disease with him. "I have a Helicon kind of dropsy upon me and crescit indulgens sibi"(1), he wrote.

Hence he fled from London as soon as he had "kept" each term, to Exeter, to Burton in Hampshire, to Bristol, to Westbury or wherever he had "pitched his moving tent". He renewed old friendships, with Lamb, and in spasmodic fashion with Coleridge; and made new friends such as the hyper-sensitive Lloyd, and the sturdy Rickman. While visiting George Burnett, a former pantisocrat, now a Unitarian minister at Yarmouth, he was introduced into the literary coterie at Norwich(2), and met Dr.Sayers and William Taylor. The latter strongly attracted Southey who kept up a correspondence with him and was much influenced by his ideas.

Soon afterwards Southey began his happy year at Westbury (1798-1799), a period of which he tells us he had "never before or since produced so much poetry in the same space of time." The smaller pieces "were communicated by letter to Charles Lamb and had the advantage of his animadversions"(3) while readings of "Madoc" were exchanged with Humphrey Davy for doses of the newly discovered laughing-gas.

In 1797 he published yet another volume of poems, and also, at Taylor's suggestion, the first "Annual Anthology." For these publications and for the Morning Post and various periodicals, he had produced a vast quantity of miscellaneous verse. Amongst this are

---

(1) C. 12 - 6 - 1796.
(2) Vide Preface to Vol.VI. 1837 Edn.
(3) Preface to Vol.IV. 1837 Edn.

to be found not only the pieces by which he is most generally known to this day, such as "The Inchcape Rock", "The Well of St Keyne", "Bishop Hatto", "The Battle of Blenheim" and so on, but also "The Holly Tree", one of those short poems of Southey's which are among the imperishable treasures of English lyric poetry, a number of ballads having a permanent interest, and many poems which are useful as throwing side-lights upon Wordsworth's poetic theories and practice.

The most noteworthy characteristic of all these poems is their definitely didactic aim. "I will at least leave something behind me", he wrote on June 26, 1797, "to strengthen those feelings and excite those reflections in others from which virtue must spring. In writing poetry with this end, I hope I am not uselessly employing my leisure hours."

The themes for these poems were suggested by his reading, and by the convictions that experience had at length confirmed within him. He had come to mistrust metaphysics, and writing to John May says, "God knows I would exchange every intellectual gift which He has blessed me with for implicit faith"(1) in the tenets of the Church. Southey had, however, something of Wordsworth's mystic apprehension of a deity in Nature, and in another letter to May says, "The recollection of scenery that I love recalls to me those theistic feelings which the beauties of nature are best fitted to awaken."(2) These were the feelings that inspired many of his short poems.

Man's best teacher is Nature,"In solitude The rivulet is pure-- But passing on amid the haunts of man It finds pollution"(3). Hence the lesson

"Seek'st thou for Happiness ?
"Go, Stranger, sojourn in the woodland cot
Of Innocence, and thou shalt find her there."

---

(1) C. 19 - 7 - 1797.
(2) C. 10 - 9 - 1797.
(3) Inscription "For a tablet on the banks of a stream", Bristol, 1796

"Man creates the evil he endures"[1] by building towns and living in them, hence the wise man will leave the world and its vanities and learn from natural phenomena:- "The Ebb Tide"
"That speaks of human joys that rise so slow
So rapidly decay",
"The Oak of our Fathers", "The Holly Tree", "The Autumn". Even the humbler denizens of earth, "The Bee", "The Spider", the weevil in a filbert nut, or such friends as the old spaniel who was a constant companion of Southey's youth, all these have each a lesson for the sage.

Children, and the simple uneducated folk who judge of affairs by mother-wit alone, are a further source of moral instruction, as we see in "The Battle of Blenheim" and in "The Old Man's Comforts", (the latter being more edifying if less amusing in Southey's version than is Lewis Caroll's famous parody of it.)

On similar subjects, but distinguished by their form which Southey, with his delight in experimentation, was glad to think "bore no resemblance to any other poems in our language", were the English Eclogues. He was induced to re-attempt this style of composition, for which the Botany Bay Eclogues, written in 1794, were rough sketches, by what William Taylor told him of similar poems by Voss and Goethe, and he now aimed at eclogues with a domestic interest.

"The Old Mansion House" is written on a topic that always lay near to Southey's heart, a dislike for material changes which force us to take notice of the flight of time. It is obviously reminiscent of youthful days spent at his grandmother Hill's house at Bedminster. The jessamine there, so sweet that "it did one good To pass within ten yards when 'twas in blossom" is found again over

---

(1) Inscription "For a cavern that overlooks the Avon", Bristol, 1796.

the porch of the Old Mansion House and when the old man in the poem tells us how he used to thread its flowers, he is only versifying passages from Southey's letters.[1]

"Hannah" is a story which might have come from "The Parish Register" telling "what a world of woes" a too-trustful innocence may bring upon the unfortunate so that they find their only comfort in that last cold bed, the grave. "The Wedding" is also reminiscent of Crabbe's acrid realism.

"The Sailor's Mother" and "The Ruined Cottage" are Wordsworthian in style and subject as well as in title.[2] While "The Witch", the most curious of the Eclogues, recalls the tale of Harry Gill and has much more probability than Wordsworth's poem.

These "English Eclogues" have an added interest in that they inspired not only the general title of Tennyson's "English Idylls" but also their manner. This is quite obvious in such of the Idylls as "Dora" and "Walking to the Mail".

In choice of diction and subject matter, not only several of these Eclogues, but many others of Southey's miscellaneous poems are obviously aiming at effects similar to those obtained by Wordsworth in his "Lyrical Ballads."[3]

He had met Wordsworth at Nether Stowey in 1797 but neither seems to have been much attracted by the other. Yet that he had a deep kinship with Wordsworth in spite of their very different natures is seen in his poem "To a Friend inquiring if I would live over my youth again."[4] He is tired of change and uncertainty, and

---

(1) Vide also "Common-Place Book", Series IV, p.193.
(2) cf. Wordsworth, "The Sailor's Mother" and "Excursion" Bk.I "The Ruined Cottage".
(3) Published Sept. 1798.
(4) Written at Westbury 1798.

though he can look back on his past life with some pleasure and no regret, he is glad to have found a sheltered harbour. Experience is too rough and uncouth a teacher. As for the future "it is now the cheerful noon

And on the sunny-smiling fields I gaze
With eyes alive to joy;
When the dark night descends,
I willingly shall close my weary lids,
In sure and certain hope to wake again."

Another poem which inevitably recalls Wordsworth, and by no means in his less-inspired moments, is "The Victory" versifying the story of a midshipman who had been on terms of friendship with the poet's sailor-brother, Tom. This plan of relating actual happenings in verse, somewhat as Victor Hugo is stated to have searched the "faits divers" columns of the daily newspapers for subjects, and the custom of reinforcing the moral lessons implied in his poems by carefully citing the exact sources of the stories they tell, is yet another link with Wordsworth and his methods.

While the mechanism of such a poem as"The Cross Roads"- an old man encountered by the road side - casual conversation - some material object, in this case a post, as a peg whereon to hang a pathetic if sordid story - is also quite Wordsworthian. It was written after Southey had read the "Lyrical Ballads" and bears traces of their influence, and it would prove, were proof needed, that it was not theories of diction, his choice of subjects from humble life, nor any peculiarities of method or technique that made Wordsworth a great poet, but the vitalizing power of his mighty imagination. "The Cross Roads",indeed, might pass for a parody of Wordsworth's manner and is only like the greater poet in his weak moments. It is , however, more nearly allied with Southey's ballads than with his reflective poems.

These ballads were the happy result of another of the suggestions taken from William Taylor of Norwich. In the "Monthly Magazine" of March 1796 Taylor had published a translation of Burger's ballads, entitled "Lenora", and in the same year Southey at Bristol wrote his very popular "Mary the Maid of the Inn" in emulation of it. The metre of Southey's poem was the invention of M.G.Lewis, author of the notorious "Monk", an advocate and exponent of the freer use of anapaests in English verse, from whom Southey may also have taken a hint for the "diablerie" of many of his ballad themes. "Donica" and "Rudiger" followed in swift succession founded on stories taken from Thomas Heywood.(1)

Southey lacked the magic touch of romance with which Coleridge could cast a spell of haunting horror over such stories. But when he evolved his own peculiar combination of grim humour, and horror, with a vein of moralizing, he contributed to English humorous verse, not only many poems of permanent value such as "The King of the Crocodiles", "Bishop Bruno", "The Old Woman of Berkeley", "Lord William" and many others, but a new and original note. "The Old Woman of Berkeley" was praised by Taylor as "the best original English ballad we know of" and it is certainly one of the best of its kind, even Ingoldsby can show nothing better.

It would be absurd to look to these poems for a criticism of life, or for sublimity of treatment, but they show Southey to be no mean humorist himself, and the originator of a special kind of macabre humour which was later to be taken up by Hood and Praed and finally developed by Barham in the delightful "Ingoldsby Legends".

---

(1) "The Hierarchies of the Blessed Angels" 1635.

Southey's search for grotesque materials and for that farcical horror which he so often found in the "Acta Sanctorum" and such-like treasuries of legendary lore was one of his favourite literary amusements and probably a bye-product of his projected "History of the Monastic Orders" for which he read widely.
The story of the "Old Woman of Berkely", for instance, he copied from Matthew of Westminster, one of the chained books in Hereford Cathedral Library. The volume was fastened to one of the top shelves and by so short a chain that he could only make notes from it by standing on a chair, having added to the height of the reading desk by piling upon it captive folios less closely bound. Testimony to his search for "grotesque magic" is borne by his Common-Place Book(1) which also registers his regret that he has no copy of the old bird and beast book at Bedminster "an old book of natural history has such fine lies"; and in a letter to Charles Wynn he makes this quaint request: "If you should meet with a ghost, a witch or a devil pray send them to me."

Southey's ballads and metrical tales also had some influence on Scott and Byron, while both Byron and Shelley were sufficiently interested in "The Devil's Walk" to write variations upon the same theme. This ballad, at one time much admired, was the joint production of Southey and Coleridge. The lines which describe the Devil's favourite sin have become a stock quotation, but the poem is of little note except for its odd history. It was originally published anonymously in the "Morning Post" for September 6th., 1799, and when it became popular was ascribed to various authors, especially to that "erudite bibber" Professor Porson.

---

(1) Common Place Book. Series IV. p.193.

Whereupon Southey wrote an extended version denying all such assertions.

"All for Love or A Sinner Well Saved" and "The Pilgrim to Compostella being the Legend of a Cock and a Hen", which were published together in one volume in 1829, are much later "sports" from the same stock. Both are miraculous stories, well supported by notes from the "Acta Sanctorum", to the honour of Saint Basil and of Santiago respectively. "All for Love" deals in ballad fashion with the old story of a pact with the Devil,- the Devil being, in this case, cheated of his due by a wife's sanctity and the legal chicanery of Bishop Basil, from whose book Lord Chancellor Eldon had apparently taken a leaf in the matter of "Wat Tyler" twelve years earlier.

> "The Deed is null, for it was framed
> With fraudulent intent
> A thing unlawful in itself
> A wicked instrument
> Not to be pleaded in the Courts----
> Sir Fiend, thy cause is shent."(1)

"The Pilgrim to Compostella" in a still more roguish style of humour, pours ridicule upon the superstitions supported by the Roman Catholic Church, and upon the avaricious mummery practised by her priests.

> "For Santiago will always
> Befriend his true believers;
> And the money is for him, the Priests
> Being only his receivers."
>
> "To make the miracle the more,
> Of these feathers there is always store,
> And all are genuine too;
> All of the original Cock and Hen,
> Which the Priests will swear is true."(2)

---

(1) "All for Love" IX. 22.
(2) "Pilgrim to Compostella" IV. 25 & 26.

Light is perhaps thrown on both these compositions by the fact that a few months before their publication Southey wrote for "The Quarterly Review" an article strongly opposing Catholic Emancipation of which, like Wordsworth and Scott, he was a consistent enemy.

To return to the poems published in the last few years of the century, it is difficult at the present time to realise how daring their form and metre must have seemed to a generation whose ears were not yet disabused of the "regular Jew's harp twing-twang of heroic measure.(1)" Nor can we fully comprehend how strange and almost shocking the ideas and subjects with which they dealt would be to those in whose critical vocabulary "low" and "gothic" and "eccentric" were still epithets implying complete damnation.

With regard to the metre of his ballads it should be noted that Southey not only practised that "principle of substitution",- the occasional use of trisyllabic feet in place of disyllabics,- which was the great metrical rediscovery of the romantic innovators, but also formulated it clearly as part of his prosodic creed, earlier than Coleridge to whom this important advance in technique is usually attributed, or any other of the early romantic poets. Southey wrote "Mary the Maid of the Inn" and other ballads as early as 1796, over eighteen months before the composition of "The Ancient Mariner", and on April 9th. 1799 he wrote a letter to Charles Wynn on this question of the metre of his ballads stating that "two syllables may be counted as one: they take up only the time of one." He then proceeded to make his meaning quite plain by scanning a line from his "Old Woman of Berkeley",

---

(1) Preface to 4th. Edn. of "Thalaba" 1800.

"I have made candles of infants fat",

thus, as Professor Saintsbury points out,[1] clearly implying feet.

This principle he had doubtless discovered in his early and very thorough studies in Elizabethian literature, and he would find it again in Chatterton of whose works he began to edit and edition for a charitable purpose in 1797.[2]

Since few poets have been so frequently and so cleverly parodied as was Southey himself, it is interesting to note that yet another class of verses composed by him at Westbury were a series of parodies. "The amatory poems of Abel Shufflebottom" consisting of four sonnets and four elegies to Delia are amusing imitations of the productions of the Della Cruscan School in which English poetry seems to have reached its nadir. These parodies have in addition an intrinsic comic element; and this evidence that Southey's undoubted abilities as a critic were tempered with humour is all the more pleasant since by reputation he was not one who could suffer fools gladly.

---------:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:----------

(1) "History of English Prosody" Vol.III. Chap.II.
(2) Vide C. John May, 11 - 7 - 97.

THE MYTHOLOGICAL EPICS. (1800-1815)

When Southey had finished transcribing his first sketch of "Joan of Arc", his ambitions were thus formulated, "Once more a clear field and then another epic poem, and then another, and so on".[1] On one occasion he jocularly accused Coleridge of "spawning plans like a herring"[2] but his own fertility in that respect is little short of astounding. His correspondence, and the four volumes of his Common Place Book show that extensive as his epics are, only a modest proportion of his poetic plans came finally to maturity.

On Friday July 12th. 1799 he wrote to his brother Thomas, "Yesterday, I finished "Madoc", thank God! It was my design to identify Madoc with Mango Capac --- in this I have totally failed, therefore Mango Capac is to be the hero of another poem." The ruthlessness of Southey's "therefore" is noteworthy for it emphasises a rather ludicrous aspect of his idea of the poet's functions, which was noted as one of Southey's characteristics by Coleridge. Southey's attitude seems to be that of one who should say, "Go to, let us write an epic", and his delight in his work is rather that of a manufacturer in the completed article, than an artist's joy in the doing.

Writing to Walter Scott he says, "I am finishing Roderick and deliberating what subject to take up next. ---- If I do not fix upon a tale of Robin Hood or a New England story --- I shall either go far North or far East for scenery and superstitions and pursue my old scheme of my mythological delineations."[3] In addition there were plans for a great epic on "The Deluge" planned after the reading

(1) C. G.C.Bedford, 14 - 12 - 1793.
(2) C. S.T.Coleridge, 4 - 8 - 1802.
(3) C. 27 - 4 - 1814.

of Jacob Cat's poem on that subject;[1] for a Persian epic to illustrate the teaching of the Zend-Avesta; for a hexameter poem on "Mohammed" to be written with Coleridge, and numerous others.

Southey's finished epics, fruits of that seed sown in his schooldays by the reading of Picart,[2] include "Thalaba or The Destroyer"(1801); "Madoc"(1805); "The curse of Kehama"(1810); "Roderick, The Last of the Goths"(1814); and "A Tale of Paraguay"(1825) which is best included here although it can scarcely be called an epic.

The restless energy thus betokened was probably the chief cause of his failure to achieve the highest rank as a poet, for there is, in his poetry, a lack of that imaginative passion which can only be evoked by long and quiet brooding on the problems of life and death.

Unfortunately Southey was dependent on the earnings of his pen for his livelihood, and verse, apart from his first success, proved comparatively unremunerative. Hence perforce he turned his attention to other literary work, and while reviewing and writing for periodicals to secure the necessaries of life, devoted his real energies to history and biography and treated poetry as an amusement for his scanty leisure. But in 1799 when "Thalaba" was begun Southey still considered himself as before everything else a poet, and since "Joan of Arc" had already arrived at a second edition, was looking forward to ensuring both fame and fortune by publishing an epic masterpiece.

---

(1) Common-Place Book, Series IV.2-3.

(2) Vide ~~ante~~ Chap. II. p.13

While Wordsworth continued very much in the way he had begun with the "Lyrical Ballads", letting his life slip away in a mood of intense and mystical contemplation of nature, and of the ways of the God immanent in nature to man, Southey with his quixotic indignation against wrong and oppression, was only happy when belabouring his enemies whom he always identified with the very principle of evil. In his poems, with few exceptions, wickedness is always ugly and always obvious. Here he has forgotten, or has failed to learn the lesson taught by his master Spenser that fair is sometimes foul, and foul is fair, and that hypocrisy and insidious suggestion are weapons only too powerful and too often victorious in the struggle of darkness against light.

Southey found his inspiration for this "oriental" poem on the destruction of the Dom Daniel in a pseudo-Arabian story. The translation of the "Arabian Nights Entertainments" from the French version early in the eighteenth century had stimulated English interest in the fabulous lore of those eastern climes whence English "nabobs" were bringing such vast wealth and where the nation was acquiring such wide dominion. Various eighteenth century authors were prompted by this new-born interest in Eastern affairs to write stories with oriental plots, but like Goldsmith's eastern tales in "The Citizen of the World" or Johnson's "Rasselas" they have only a gilding of exotic phraseology and allusion so that "the sober charms of truth may be divested of their austerity by the graces of innocent fiction", as Johnson puts it.

In 1792 Robert Heron translated from the French "La Suite des Mille et Une Nuits, Contes Arabes" which purporting to be of oriental origin was, however, mainly the work of a French author. From this

doubtful source Southey obtained the general scheme for "Thalaba", and some of his "local" colour. The poem was developed, however, along Spenserian lines, and magic was not introduced as in the "Arabian" tales for its intrinsic interest but only to further the moral aims of the story. In this definite moral purpose and in its learned notes are found the poem's chief resemblances to another interesting work which was part of the same wave of orientalism, "Vathek" published in 1786 by William Beckford.

The learned Sir William Jones, who was master of twenty-eight languages, had published in 1774 his "Commentaries on Asiatic Poetry" and his researches had been to some extent exploited by Beckford. Southey went beyond "Vathek" however in his efforts to "illustrate" the scenery, the inhabitants and the customs of the Eastern countries where the action of his poem took place.

From this point of view the poem was doomed to failure, in spite of its author's conscientious and laborious efforts, since Southey had to depend on books of travel, Sale's translation of the Koran, the notes to the oriental poems of Sir William Jones, the Old Testament, the Apochrypha and similar works which can never be satisfactory substitutes for personal acquaintance and observation. Nor had the poet the one magic gift of breathing life into his creations. He could only construct lay-figures elaborately draped in correct trappings and set amid carefully painted theatrical scenery. Indeed Southey's lack of imaginative sympathy as displayed in the notes to "Thalaba", which condemn the Koran as "dull tautology

---

(1) For original sketch of "Thamama" (Thalaba) vide "Common-place Book" IV, pp. 181-189.

Oriental art and literature as "equally worthless" and praise the Arabian Tales because they have been passed "through the filter of a French translation"[1], has quite a smack of eighteenth century complacency about it.

Southey's aim, however, was not dramatic but didactic. "My aim has been", he wrote, "to diffuse through my poems a sense of the beautiful and good." And his conceptions of the beautiful and the good were still tinged to a great extent with those of Jean Jacques. In the second dialogue of "Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques" we find Rousseau complacently announcing of Jean-Jacques that "he is what nature has made him". Forty years later Carlyle, writing like Southey of an Arabian hero, attributes his greatness to the fact that "he is alone there, deep down in the bosom of the Wilderness; has to grow up so, - alone with Nature and his own thoughts."[2]

Similarly:-

"It was the wisdom and the will of Heaven
That in a lonely tent had cast
The lot of Thalaba;
There might his soul develope best
Its strengthening energies;
There might he from the world
Keep his heart pure and uncontaminate
Till at the written hour he should be found
Fit servant of the Lord, without a spot."(3)

As for the youthful Wordsworth, there was for Thalaba "A time with all its aching joys and all its dizzy raptures", when "The sounding cataract haunted me like a passion"[4] for

"when the winter torrent rolls
Down the deep-channel'd rain-course, foamingly,
Dark with its mountain spoils,
With bare feet pressing the wet sand,
There wanders Thalaba,
The rushing flow, the flowing roar,
Filling his yielded faculties,
A vague, a dizzy, a tumultuous joy."(5)

---

(1) Notes to "Thalaba" Bk.I. 4, 13, and passim.
(2) "The Hero as Prophet", May 8th. 1840. (3) Bk. III. 16.
(4) Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey". (5) Bk. III. 19.

Home, with its innocent pleasures and occupations, is another great influence for good, and a charming stanza depicts life in the Arab tent during the rainy season:

"Within there is the embers' cheerful glow,
The sound of the familiar voice
The song that lightens toil, ----
Domestic Peace and Comfort are within
Under the common shelter, on dry sand,
The quiet Camels ruminate their food;
The lengthening cord from Moath falls
As patiently the Old Man
Entwines the strong palm-fibres; by the hearth
The Damsel shakes the coffee-grains,
That with warm fragrance fill the tent;
And while with dexterous fingers, Thalaba
Shapes the green basket, haply at his feet
Her favourite kidling gnaws the twig
Forgiven plunderer, for Oneiza's sake."(1)

Southey too can sincerely sing, like Horace, in praise of that blest middle state in human affairs

"Nor rich nor poor was Moath; God hath given
Enough and blest him with a mind content
No hoarded gold disquieted his dreams:" (2)

Yet another lesson which this poem strives to inculcate, is that love and care for animals, - a love which he shares with so many of the contemporary romantic poets; Byron with his menagerie at Newstead, Scott with his horses and dogs at Abbotsford; and upon which the English, with some show of reason, pride themselves as a nation. Southey's description in "The Doctor" of the "Cattery of Cats Eden"(3) and his indignant letter(4) to certain "young gentlemen" who at Keswick enlivened their leisure from vacation reading with cat-worrying, show that he had real affection for animals. And just as the Ancient Mariner won pardon when "A spring of love gushed from his heart" and unaware he blessed the water-snakes, so in "Thalaba",

---

(1) Bk.III. 18. (2) Bk.III. 21.
(3) "The Doctor Etc." Fragments p.681.
(4) C. 12 - 7 - 1834.

the only survivor when the people of Ad were smitten by the wrath of God, was one Aswad who by his charitable deed in preserving the life of a poor camel had "saved his soul from utter death."(1)

The religious teaching in "Thalaba", implies that religion, as distinguished from priestcraft is to be found in the instinctive worship of unsophisticated man, taught by a long experience of natural phenomena. Thus when Thalaba's impatience to be acting against the evil enemies of his race makes him wonder if "the will of Providence Be mutable like man?"(2), his foster-father Moath draws the necessary lesson of God's inexorable plan ever-working for good, from a cloud of locusts and the birds preying upon them, which like "all created things Obey the written doom."(3) Moath is certainly a rationalistic Mohammedan and expresses his disgust at "priest mummery and fantastic rites Which fool the multitude." But neither is it this homilectic strain that for a modern reader, constitutes the charm of Thalaba. Unlike our forbears of a century ago we resent rather than admire sermons in the guise of a poem, a fact which largely accounts for the neglect from which Southey's poems have suffered since the cry of "art for art's sake" was first raised.

The charm of "Thalaba", besides the elusive melody of its verse, lies in those aspects of it which make it a magnificent, kaleidoscopic fairy-tale such as might have beguiled a sultry Mesopotamian night for Haroun Al Raschid. Romanticism seems to have had an oriental tendency all over Europe. A Danish critic(4) has pointed out that Oehlenschlager's "Alladin" was published

---

(1) Bk.I. 27. (2) Bk.III. 27. (3) Bk.III. 29.
(4) George Brandes "Main Currents in 19th. Century Literature", Vol.IV. Chap.8.

in 1804, about midway between Southey's "Thalaba" and "Kehama", and that a little later Victor Hugo was writing "Les Orientales." The "gorgeous East" had particular attractions for authors whose native climate was so dull and whose national character so cold as severely proper as those of England. Moore's highly coloured "Lalla Rookh" (1) and Byron's oriental poems which had the advantage of his first-hand knowledge, owed much of their popularity to their use of the unfamiliar and romantic scenery and manners of the Levant. And Southey's rather bourgeois character and outlook upon life did not prevent his imagination taking the most dizzy flights, while the glowing colours and Arabesque ornamentation of long passages in "Thalaba" present a striking contrast with the chilly propriety of the feelings represented in the poem.

Its earthly scenery includes the pleasant oasis, the scorching desert sands, snow-clad solitudes and ice-bound mountains; we get glimpses of paradises true and false, we are introduced into witches' caves and magical islands, and finally into that devils' seminary the Dom-Daniel, vaulted beneath the ocean.

Few characters are to be met except magicians, holy prophets, angels and demons, the murderous Old Man of the Mountains, and the all-wise Simorg, somnolent Bird of the Ages. A locust brings a message, a bird acts as a guide, travelling is done on reinless steeds, in oar-less, mast-less, rudder-less boats, and in sleighs drawn by weeping, praying dogs; until we are inclined to sympathise with Thalaba who finds "Everywhere magic the Arabian's heart
Yearn'd after human intercourse." (2)

---

(1) Published 1817.   (2) Bk.X. 8.

These magical details and many of the descriptive passages are supported by a mass of erudite notes, quotations from that stout traveller and "undaunted liar" Sir John Mandeville, from martyrologies, and histories of the saints, with such "quaintologia" as Southey called it, as that bearing on the properties of precious stones, whereof the most negligible mentioned "is not wholly useless since it will cast out devils."

Another frequent source of pleasure in the poem are delightful descriptive passages, wherein can be seen that "naturalism" which was a mark of the English Romantic poets at this period. The admirable opening stanza, which Shelley imitated so faithfully at the commencement of his "Queen Mab" will bear re-quotation, oft-quoted as it has been.

> "How beautiful is night.
> A dewy freshness fills the silent air;
> No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
> Breaks the serene of heaven;
> In full-orb'd glory yonder Moon divine
> Rolls through the dark blue depths.
> Beneath her steady ray
> The desert-circle spreads,
> Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.
> How beautiful is night."

His observation of nature was detailed and accurate and he kept records of its results as his Common-Place Book shows. In the preface to Volume IV of the collected edition Southey tells us that being detained at Falmouth by contrary winds "I walked on the beach, caught soldier-crabs, admired the sea-anemonies in their ever varying shapes of beauty, read "Gebir", and wrote half a book "Thalaba". The sea-anemonies "That trembled on the sand with rainbow hues" flower again in "Thalaba".(1)

---

(1) Bk.XII. 3.

His stay in Portugal would provide materials for such pictures as the following:-

"And winding through the verdant vale
Went streams of liquid light;
And fluted cypresses rear'd up
Their living obelisks;
And broad-leav'd plane trees in long colonnades
O'er arch'd delightful walks,
Where round their trunks the thousand tendrill'd vine
Wound up and hung the boughs with greener wreaths
And clusters not their own.
Wearied with endless beauty, did his eyes
Return for rest ? beside him teems the earth
With tulips, like the ruddy evening streak'd,
And here the lily hangs her head of snow;"(1)

Southey had a sensuous delight in natural melody and in natural perfumes that reminds us of Keats:-

"Then on his ear what sounds
Of harmony arose.
The waterfall remote;
The murmuring of the leafy groves
The single nightingale
Perch'd in the rosier by, so richly toned,
That never from that most melodious bird,
Singing a love-song to his brooding mate,
Did Thracian shepherd by the grave
Of Orpheus hear a sweeter melody."

"And oh! what odours the voluptuous gale
Scatters from jasmine bowers,
From yon rose wilderness,
From clustered henna and from orange groves."(2)

With yet more obvious delight does the poet describe the fields of his own dear land, telling how "the Travellers" in a mirage
"Saw a green meadow, fair with flowers besprent
Azure and yellow, like the beautiful fields
Of England, when amid the growing grass
The blue-bell bends, the golden king-cup shines
And the sweet cowslip scents the genial air,
In the merry month of May."(3)

This passage which for sweetness of cadence, and for simple yet beautiful description inspired by the love of the home country could not be matched, except in the very greatest of our poets, has an appeal strong indeed to those who have known arid landscapes shimmering through the heat-haze in far countries, and longed for the

---

(1) Bk.VI. 20. (2) Bk.VI. 21 & 22. (3) Bk.IV. 23.

green meadows of England.

"Thalaba" has many obvious defects:- the disconnected and somewhat confused manner in which the story is presented; the fantastic machinery; the lack of suspense owing to our knowledge that the hero "a male Joan of Arc" as Southey admitted,- is invincible; the basic confusion of Arabian fatalism, which is indifference, with the Christian stoicism which was Southey's own faith; and the fact that the poem is difficult to remember owing to the apparent suspension of the laws of cause and effect, and owing to its irregular rhymeless metre. Nevertheless, when all this and more has been admitted, "Thalaba" remains a very notable performance with passages of great beauty, and a dazzling if rather bewildering cumulative effect.

It is overflowing with youthful vigour, noble and courageous in intention and skilfully executed. Begun in July,1799, it was finished in Portugal in July of the following year. Southey had gone there at the advice of Dr.Beddoes, to try the effect of a warmer and more equable climate upon his health which was endangered by nervous disorders the outcome of his unsettled mode of life and his excitable disposition.

At Lisbon and Cintra he passed a golden year, for his health was restored as if by magic in the first week, and for perhaps the only period of his life Southey enjoyed spells of dolce far niente, and mingled work and play in reasonable proportions. It was here that he wrote the last six books and then revised and remodelled the whole of "Thalaba" which is the fullest expression of his romanticism and his passionate and assertive idealism.

It remained the poet's own favourite among his productions in verse, perhaps because in the hero, as we cannot fail to see, Southey's own moral character is portrayed,-his devotion to duty, the single-heartedness and the faith that supported his stoicism, his crusading spirit, and the puritanic severity of his own rules of conduct.

Chapter V.

"Thalaba" was also the boldest of its author's many experiments, being novel in subject, in style, and in versification, and it is boldly headed by a motto from Lucian, proclaiming that the poet is free and his own law giver.

It was one of Southey's standing principles in poetry that the style must be in complete accord with the matter. On one occasion disputing with "Judge Jeffrey" of the "Edinburgh Review" who was abusing "Madoc" because it was not written in heroic complets, the epic measure par excellence in his opinion, Southey said that if he should write satire he might use that metre. "That is a great concession" quoth Jeffrey; "On the contrary" replied Southey, "for how can that which is suitable for satire be a suitable style of composition for narrative poetry?" (1) Hence he abandoned in "Thalaba" the blank verse of his "Joan of Arc" although it was in his judgment the noblest measure of which our language is capable (2) because it was less suited to the varied subject of his new poem.

His admiration for the metre of Sayer's "Dramatic Sketches" still continued and his practise in that rhythm (3) had taught him its full capabilities so that now he could use it with confidence as the suitable "Arabesque" ornament of an Arabian Tale. (2) His aims were to secure a wider range of expression than could be attained in the fetters of rhyme and of metres in a stereotyped form. Not a few English poets from Sidney and Spenser to

(1) C. G.C.Bedford 2.1.1807 (2) Preface to "Thalaba" 180[illegible] Edn.
(3) Vide Chap 11. p. 21

Chapter V.

Mr. Bridges have felt the obligation of rhyme to be a hindrance that in some cases detracted more from the beauty of their verse than it added.

In the reaction from the artificial versification of the eighteenth century which aimed at making each thought fill out a complet and provide the necessary rhyme, and in which the sense was crammed into the verse as into a portmanteau, frequently to its detriment, Southey went further even than Wordsworth in his attempts to write poetry that should conform to the natural speech of man, and should make the harmony of language and the accent of feeling mutually support and enhance each the other. The rhymeless irregular verse he evolved is distinguished from prose not only by its rhythm but by a general heightening of the tone, and a greater intensity. Hence it is more rather than less exacting and Southey who had expected it to become popular and be widely imitated soon found that novelty in such things is an obstacle to success since "the mass of mankind hate innovation"(1) while would-be imitators found the verse by no means so easy as they had expected.

One of its chief difficulties is to avoid falling into mere chopped prose on the one hand, or into chopped blank verse on the other. Southey realised that "no two lines must be employed in sequence which can be read into one" and succeeded in avoiding these mistakes which had been the bane of his master Sayers and from which neither Matthew Arnold's "Strayed Reveller" nor the latest poems of Mr. Bridges (2) are free.

(1) W.S. Landor 20.5.1808 (2) "October and other Poems" Heineman 1920.

Chapter V.

"One advantage" as Southey's preface says "this metre assuredly possesses, - the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord: he may read it prosaically but its flow and fall will still be perceptible," while the variation of rhythm and length of verse to accompany changes of sentiment affords many subtle and pleasing cadences.

The Metre of "Thalaba" was flung like a challenge into the lists of poetry, and that it was taken up by no less a prosodic genius than Shelley(1) is a testimony to its value.

Its disadvantages however, are that it disappoints the ear accustomed to rhymed verse, and deprives the poem as a whole of any sustained harmony. It also makes it very difficult to remember. The attention of the reader is never allowed to relax, or recline on any certainty that its anticipation will be satisfied, and this in a long narrative poem is apt to become wearisome even though the verse is never flat or monotonous.

Perhaps rhyme is essential for irregular verse in English, at any rate it is difficult to assign Southey's want of success in the versification of Thalaba to any other cause. Here and there for a few stanzas he seems to be completely successful but the poem as a whole would have been better, probably Southey's best, had it been rhymed.

How novel all this must have seemed to readers of 1801 we can hardly judge. And although "Thalaba" falls short of complete success, in a style which demands complete success, and is neither the finest, nor certainly the most pleasing of Southey's

(1) "Queen Mab" 1813.

long poems, yet since his later writings become more orthodox in conformity with the growing conservatism of temper which commonly accompanies advancing years "Thalaba" remains the high-water mark of Southey's poetical endeavour if not of his achievement.

As such it has been treated at morelength than its compeers.

It is usual to couple with "Thalaba" not Southey's next published epic "Madoc" but the poem"in metre Thalabian, in mythology Hindoo, by name 'The Curse of Kehama'"(1) commenced in May 1801 just before his return from Portugal, but not completed until November 1809.

"Madoc" although not published until 1805 was, as we have seen (2) completely written before "Thalaba" was begun, so that in order of production "Thalaba" and "Kehama" were consecutive. Both were definitely mythological poems, didadic in intention and exotic in scene, and both written in the same irregular metre. The most striking difference in form was the return to the use of rhyme which makes "Kehama" a considerable improvement upon its forerunner

Southey keeps the same fretted and irregular outline as in "Thalaba", since, "blank verse would not suit 'Kehama'. There must be quicker, wilder movements; there must be a gorgeousness of ornament also, eastern gem-work, and sometimes rhyme must be rattled upon rhyme, till the reader is half dizzy with the thundering echo." (3) In the same letter he indicates that he now sees

(1) C. G.C. Bedford 19. 8. 1801 (2) Vide Chap.V. p.59
(3) W.S. Landor 20. 5. 1808.

rhyme to be more rather than less needed in irregular verse, for he decides when he slips out of rhyme to do so "generally into some metre so strongly marked as to leave the ear fully satisfied."

He has also come to the conclusion that much more may be done with rhyme than has yet been done with it, the correctness of which Shelley was soon to prove, and he mentions the effects which will be attainable by contrasting sparsely and profusely rhymed passages. In Kehama he also leaves sustained conversation unrhymed.[1]

As the 1838 Preface explains "It appeared to me ------ that all the skill I might possess in the art of poetry was required to counterbalance the disadvantage of a mythology with which few readers were likely to be well acquainted. I endeavoured therefore, to combine the utmost richness of versification with the greatest freedom."

Hence the return to rhyme which Southey evidently considers a characteristic of "the highest strain of Poetry" and "the utmost richness of versification."

The sale of "Thalaba" contrary to its Author's expectations, was very slow, only 300 copies being sold in nine months (with which we may compare the 300,000 copies of Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel" sold so rapidly in 1805) and we find him complaining to William Taylor that "My poor books make their own fortune but not mine; they get me reputation and I want money."[2] This need to confine his output to money-

(1) e.g. VI.4 etc. (2) C. 23. 6. 1803

making reviews and translations forced him to abandon for a time the composition of "Kehama". However upon the publication of "Madoc" in 1805 he writes "If the sale of "Madoc" should prove that I can afford to write poetry, "Kehama" will not long lie unfinished. After lying fallow since October I feel prolific propensities that way" and so the poem was resumed, then again laid aside until finally Landor's offer (1) in 1808 spurred Southey on to its completion.

In subject "Kehama" forms part of the one great scheme "I will use such materials" Southey wrote to Landor, "as have stood the test; these materials are the same in all languages".(2) Since the poetry of classical and northern mythologies seemed to possess the gift of immortality, why should not other mythologies confer a similar boon; and Southey thought that "Somebody should do for the Hindoo Gods, what Dr. Sayers has done for Odin; we know enough of them for a poetical system".(3)

It does not seem to have occurred to Southey that there is a difference between the lay-figure of a "poetical system" contrived from the dry-bones of a but half understood mythology, and the living "corpus" of a poetry in which the inspiration of a real faith has been shadowed forth in mythological language.

Blinded as he was, by his pre-conceptions of life, and that lack of imaginative sympathy with times, peoples,

(1) cf. Chap. 1. p.6. (2) C. W.S. Landor 20. 5. 1808.
(3) C. W. Taylor 23. 6. 1803.

civilisations and religions other than his own, which has already been mentioned[1] Southey was only interested in securing "fit machinery for an English Poem"[2]

The story which he constructed on this Hindoo framework was "altogether mythological" and although "the spirit of the poem was Indian"[2] Southey gave up all idea of "illustrating" the Asiatic Arts and for any attempt at oriental style substituted the language of poetry learned from our own and classical poets.

He endeavoured to compensate by moral sublimity for the extravagance of the fictions which Hazlitt has described as "the daring creations of a mind curbed by no law, tamed by no fear - the trances rather than the waking dreams of genius - the very paradoxes of poetry."[3]

"Thalaba" bears to "Kehama" something of the same resemblance that Spring with its wealth of bright tints, green, and white and golden does to the more gorgeous and richly toned display of Summer.

The latter poem was dedicated to the "Author of Gebir" and for motto Coleridge provided Southey with a Greek translation of the familiar proverb "curses like chickens always come home to roost". Southey originally heard this wise saw from the lips of a half-witted brother of his Aunt Tyler who was a veritable storehouse of proverbs and quaint sayings. "The Squire" as he was called

(1) Vide Chap. V. p. 62. (2) Preface 1838 Edn.
(3) Hazlitt "Spirit of the Age" "Mr. Southey"

Chapter V.

is described in "The Doctor"[1] under the name of William Dove and makes in many respects an interesting parallel with Mr. Dick in "David Copperfield"

"The Cürse of Kehama" deals with a story founded on the Hindoo belief that by monstrous penances and sacrifices a mortal, however wicked, can obtain power over the elements and even over the Immortal Gods, a story even more remote from human life and interests than "Thalaba"

Kehama is a Hindoo Prince who has obtained such power. Ladurlad a Hindoo peasant of stoical firmness and rectitude, in defence of the virtue of his daughter Kailyal, a maiden as supremely good as she is beautiful, has slain Arvalan the vicious son of Kehama. The spirit of Arvalan demands revenge and Kehama puts a mighty curse upon Ladurlad. Ladurlad's indomitable spirit under atrocious sufferings, even the intervention of a Good Spirit who loves Kailyal with an ethereal love, are powerless to oppose more than a temporary check to the vindictive Arvalan and his impious father. But finally Kehama's own over-reaching pride and ambition bring about his destruction and doom him to endless torment.

The moral import of this story is certainly superior to that of "Thalaba" in which the hero actuated only by revenge triumphed by powers not his own over magicians actuated only by fear. The telling of it too, is less devious and involved; and while the

(1) "The Doctor etc" Chap.X. pp. 27-29.

lessons the poet strives to teach are less insistently forced upon our notice, they are philosophically sounder.

The central themes of the poem are the triumph of man's unconquerable soul over the worst that matter can do to subdue it

> "But still the resolute heart
> And virtuous will are free." (1)

and secondly the failure of Kehama because he had been madman enough

> "to deem
> Less than Omniscience could suffice
> To wield Omnipotence." (2)

Perhaps the most famous passage in the poem is one inspired by Southey's own deepest feelings. He had already lost many dear friends by death when his mother for whom he had a great affection, died in 1802; his first child Margaret died in 1803 while in 1809 another daughter Emma was taken from him.

For his children he felt "a love which passeth the love of women, and which is more lightly alarmed than the wakefullest jealousy. There is an evil too," he goes on, "in seeing all things like a poet; circumstances which would glide over a healthier mind sink into mine ---------and thus I am made to remember what I would give the world to forget." (3)

(1) Bk. XXIV. 10. (2) Bk. XXIV. 16.
(3) C. W.S. Landor 23. 4. 1809.

Hence Southey's deepest convictions are expressed in the stanzas:-

"They sin who tell us love can die,
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity.
In Heaven ambition cannot dwell,
Nor Avarice in the vaults of Hell;
Earthly these passions of the Earth,
They perish where they have their birth;
But Love is indestructible.
Too oft on Earth a troubled guest
At times deceived, at times opprest,
It here is tried and purified,
Then hath in Heaven its perfect rest:
It soweth here with toil and care,
But the harvest time of love is there.

Oh! when a mother meets on high
The babe she lost in infancy
Hath she not then, for pains and fears,
The day of woe, the watchful night,
For all her sorrow, all her tears,
An over-payment of delight?"(1)

The magnificent description of the under-sea city

"A place too God-like to be held by us
The poor degenerate children of the Earth"

where the fair gardens have suffered a sea-change so that

"It was a garden still beyond all price,
Even yet it was a place of Paradise;
For where the mighty Ocean could not spare.
There had he with His own Creation
Sought to repair his work of devastation;(2)

and the no less magnificent description of that under-world

(1) Bk. X. 10 & 11. . (2) Bk. XVl. 3 & 5.

Chapter V.

city Yamenpur, the capital of dread Padalon

"Oh what a gorgeous sight it was to see
  The Diamond City blazing on its height
With more than mid-sun splendour, by the light
  Of its own fiery river!
Its towers and domes and pinnacles and spires,
  Turrets and battlements, that flash and quiver
Through the red restless atmosphere for ever;
  And hovering over head
The smoke and vapours of all Padalon." (1)

indeed the whole of the Padalon episodes and many other descriptive passages, which must tempt to quotation in vain, have a sweep and vivacity of narrative, and a splendour of imagery that cannot fail to interest and to charm.

The curse itself, a most comprehensive and forceful specimen of malediction, has always been considered most adequate by the critics, Professor Saintsbury going so far as to say that "there are no better six-and-twenty lines for their purpose in all English Poetry"(2)

"I charm thy life
From the weapons of strife
From stone and from wood
From fire and from flood
From the serpent's tooth,
And the beasts of blood:
From sickness I charm thee
And Time shall not harm thee
But Earth which is mine
Its fruits shall deny thee;
And Water shall hear me,
And know thee and fly thee;
And the Winds shall not touch thee
When they pass by thee,
And the dews shall not wet thee
When they fall nigh thee
And thou shalt seek Death
To release thee in vain;

(1) Bk.XXIII. 10.   (2) "Essays in English Literature (1780 - 1860)"

Chapter V.

Thou shalt live in thy pain
While Kehama shall reign,
With a fire in thy heart
And a fire in thy brain;
And sleep shall obey me,
And visit thee never
And the curse shall be on thee
For ever and ever." (1)

Yet with all his knowledge and power Kehama did not know the Holy mystery

"Of that divinest cup, that as the lips
Which touch it, even such its quality."

and he drinks of the amreeta cup of Immortality wrested from Yamen the Lord of Hell. It runs through his veins "torture at once and immortality" and so the incarnation of Blasphemy goes to take his place of endless torment under Yamen's judgment-seat, with "Wealth, Power and Priest-craft" which Southey still held to be the trinity of Evil." (2)

This most artistically contrived "catastrophe" is then rounded off with the re-union of Ladurlad, Kailyal, and Ereenia the blessed Glendoveer, in the Swerga bowers of endless happiness.

Thus does Southey's poetic inspiration shine forth in "the full blaze of the "Kehama" - a gallery of finished pictures in one splendid fancy piece, in which, notwithstanding, the moral grandeur rises above the brilliance of the colouring and the boldness and novelty of the machinery" (3) as Coleridge says in the "Biographia Literaria"

(1) Bk.11. 14. (2) Commonplace Book 1V. p. 186
(3) Biog. Lit. Chap. 111.

Chapter V.

It would be absurd to call this poem, which itself contains sufficient fine passages to make the poetic fortunes of some half dozen minor poets, anything less than great, for it is the product of no ordinary imagination.

Southey's own opinion was that he had left the public "nothing to abuse but the strangeness of the fable"(1) and indeed beyond the uncouth nomenclature, and the modern reader's disinclination to attempt the perusal of long poems, it is difficult to see why "Kehama" is so little known.

Perhaps the child-like clarity of vision with which Southey saw all the details of his imaginary pictures in hard and concrete outlines, detracts from our delight, by forestalling any endeavour after that hazy fairy-tale glamour which adds to the enchantment of this kind of story.

Nor has the poem, it must be admitted, the crash and splendour of the grand epic style; - but what English poet besides Milton and perhaps Spenser, ever achieved the very highest class in this kind of verse?

And in any class except the highest "The Curse of Kehama" must stand high indeed!

When still a schoolboy of fourteen years old Southey had been greatly interested and impressed by the story of the discovery of America and the foundation of a Colony on the banks

(1) C. W.S. Landor 20. 5. 1808.

Chapter V.

of the Missouri by a Welsh Prince and his followers in the 12th century A.D. . To this as a suitable epic theme, he was further attracted by that newly aroused interest in legends, folk-lore and "patois" which found expression in Ossian, in Percy's "Reliques", in Scott's collection of border ballads and Evans' "Specimens of Welsh Poetry"; an interest by no means confined to the British Isles but widespread throughout Europe.

In 1894 when the great pantisocratic scheme was originated, a new motive arose for interest in stories of American settlements, and it is perhaps significant that when the practically minded Southey saw that financial considerations made the Susquehanna plan impossible, he proposed that the system should be tried in Wales - a suggestion which Coleridge naturally scorned.

In that year however was commenced what proved to be the only tangible product of the poet's dreams of over-sea exploration, the blank verse poem "Madoc" in which they find an imaginative record.

> "What he had found an idle wilderness
> Now gave rich increase to the husbandmen
> ----------and now he saw
> More fields reclaim'd, more habitations rear'd,
> More harvests rising round. The reptile race,
> And every beast of rapine, had retired
> From man's asserted Empire; and the sound
> Of axe and dashing oar, and fisher's net,
> And song beguiling toil, and pastoral pipe,
> Were heard, where late the solitary hills
> Gave only to the mountain - cataract
> Their wild response." (1)

(1) Part 11. "Madoc in Aztlan" Bk. 1. Ls 100 - 113.

Chapter V.

For this poem, Southey specifically rejects "the degraded title of epic" and demands that it be tested not by the "rules of Aristotle" but by its adaptability "to the purposes of poetry"(1)

The story here related, like that of "Joan of Arc" or of "Roderick" is one of revolt against oppression, cruelty and vice. When Madoc was planned and the first part draughted out, its author, fresh from writing "Wat Tyler" was still a fervid revolutionary. He was, however, swayed rather by feelings engendered in his personal struggles for freedom to live his own life after his own ideals, rather than by opinions founded on argument and thought.

In July 1799 when he wrote "Yesterday I finished Madoc, thank God, and thoroughly to my own satisfaction"(2) he was still in sympathy with revolutionary ideals in spite of the excesses of the Paris mob; while he felt that England's armed opposition was partly responsible for driving the French into those excesses, and that England's entry into the War had been unjustified.

But on March 27th 1802, the Treaty of Amiens was signed. This says Southey "restored in me the English feeling which had been deadened; it placed me in sympathy with my country, bringing me thus into that natural and healthy state of mind upon which time and knowledge and reflexion were sure to produce their proper and salutary effect."(3)

(1) Preface to 1st Edn. 1805 (2) C. Thos. Southey 12. 7. 1799.
(3) Dedication to Lord Sidmouth of Southey's "History of Peninsular War" 1823.

Chapter V.

When im May 1803 Napoleon forced England again into War with France, Southey saw that the protagonists had changed roles, England was now fighting for liberty and France for the triumph of a vulgar conqueror.

In "Madoc" we see something of these changes in Southey's opinions, for it was not finally revised for publication until during the end of 1803 and the year following.

Liberty is here treated as a national not an individual concern. Madoc does not dream of raising the sword against the oppression of David, usurper and tyrant as he is. For Madoc, the Saxons only are the opponents of liberty in Wales the Aztecas its opponents in Aztlan. Love of Freedom and of Fatherland are kindred virtues; 'tis "He who hath felt the throb of pride, to hear our old illustrious annals" who will leave Wales, now a prey to the Saxon, and "mount the bark to seek for liberty." Neither are there any republican ideals among those who forsake the wicked Prince David only to pledge themselves to the good Prince Madoc. And in the closing lines of the poem Southey can paint the horrors of the Spanish conquest of Mexico as the will of "Heaven", Making blind zeal and bloody avarice Its ministers of vengeance," a statement that now seems little short of blasphemy.

One of the four triads of Bardism with which the poem

Chapter V.

is headed reads thus:-

Three things should all poetry be: thoroughly erudite, thoroughly animated, and thoroughly natural."

"Madoc" like most of Southey's poetry is certainly thoroughly erudite. In his search for accurate information he even comtemplated learning Welsh and in his preface to the first edition Southey boasts that "The manners of the Poem in both its Parts, will be found historically true" a statement supported by the usual imposing array of notes in small type.

To comply with the third stipulation of his triad and be thoroughly faithful to nature Southey had undertaken in September 1801, a tour in Wales with his friends Wynn and Elmsley, and was so delighted with its scenery of mountain and lake and waterfall that he almost jeopardised his claim to be classed as a Lake Poet by settling in the Vale of Neath.

Something of the sober beauty of autumn among the Welsh hills where

> "All things assorted well
> With that grey mountain hue; the low stone walls
> Which scarcely seemed to be the work of man,
> The dwelling rudely rear'd with stones unhewn,
> The stubble flax, the crooked apple-trees,
> Grey with their fleecy moss and mistletoe,
> The white-bark'd birch now leafless, and the ash
> Whose knotted roots were like the rifted rock,
> Through which they forced their way." (1)

seems to have impregnated the poem.

(1) Part 1. XIV. l. 23 - 31

Chapter V.

Where Southey has fallen short of his bardic motto is in his failure to make the poem "thoroughly animated" In spite of the stirring scenes and incidents in the second part, fights with serpents, sacrificial fights, battles extraordinary on the water and ordinary battles on land, told too in the skilful narrative style which distinguishes his best prose works, we are never roused to enthusiasm, nor allowed any real suspense. The personages are types and instead of bearing names might be simply designated 'the bard', 'the depraved savage' 'the enlightened savage' 'the chief-priest' (a villain)'la belle sauvage' (a heroine) and so on, while the ultimate victory of Madoc's party is assured by their superior faith no less than by their superior weapons.

Nor was the subject of the poem one that came home to men's business and bosoms in those stiring early years of the nineteenth century, and few were the minds sufficiently detached to find much interest in the fraticidal strife between petty Welsh Princes of the twelfth century, or the imaginary adventures of one of their number among a race of central American savages.

The mythological details being those of an extinct religion were of even less interest to the average reader than those of the still powerful Mohamedan and Hindoo religions, while the poet is here less zealous in enunciating his own ethical opinions which give his other long poems a universal appeal.

Chapter V.

In addition the blank verse in which the poem is written, though smooth and accomplished is never inspired or even strongly marked with originality. Hence although the poem was highly esteemed by Landor, was read four or five times by Scott, and kept Fox from his bed until he had finished reading it, we are nevertheless tempted to ask ourselves why the story could not have been equally well told in prose.

In 1808 before "Kehama" was finished Southey planned yet another heroic poem taking for his hero Pelayo the Restorer of Spain. The very characteristic letter to John May in which Southey announces the project shows too that with this, his last "epic" poem, he had come round "full circle" strangely close to the manner of his first. "Since the stiring days of the French Revolution" he wrote, "I have never felt half so much excitement in political events as the present state of Spain has given me. I have often said that if Europe was to be delivered in our days, in no country was its deliverance so likely to begin as in Spain" (1)

After his lomg excursion among remote mythological fictions, he returns to earthly scenes, and even to a theme bearing on the practical politics of the day. Just as he had been moved by the French Revolutionary wars to think of a former deliverer of France, so now he

(1) C. John May 29. 6. 1808.

looks to the ancient history of his beloved Spain for inspiration.

"Nothing but a spirit of liberty and of patriotism" his remarkable prophecy continued, "can check the power of France. That spirit has arisen in a country where it cannot easily be checked - Biscay - Astúrias - Galicia. The remembrance that they have once before recovered their country will assist them not a little in recovering it again"

Thus he came to choose Pelayo as his hero and the mountain - strongholds of Asturias as the scene of his story. As to its form Southey tells his brother Tom that "Pelayo is to be in blank verse: where the whole interest is to be derived from human character and the inherent dignity of the story, I will not run the hazard of enfeebling the finer parts for the sake of embellishing the weaker ones"(1) Realising as he does, the danger of blank verse, which no English poet save Milton has overcome, in that it exposes the weaker parts of a long poem, Southey nevertheless will not compromise the "inherent dignity" of his theme by using any but "the noblest measure of which our language is capable." (2)

On December 2nd 1809 the poem was commenced and advanced but slowly. Realising that he would be "a third of the way through the poem before Pelayo appeared"(3) and that "Roderick is the pre-eminent personage" (4) he found when it neared completion by the beginning of 1814

(1) Lieut.Southey (H.M.S.Lyra) 25.11.1809
(2) C. W.S.Landor 20.5.1808 (3) C. W.S.Landor 12.2.1811
(4) C. W. Scott 8. 9. 1811

that he must change its title in accordance. It was therefore published towards the end of 1814 as "Roderick the Last of the Goths"

"Roderick" is certainly the finest of Southey's blank-verse poems and in some ways the finest of all his long "epics". Its story is clear and well told, its descriptions being taken direct from nature, have the stamp of reality, its language is simple and sincere, while we feel throughout, the power of an imagination restrained by deep feeling. Above all, the hero, although a saint and a prodigy of valour, is yet a real man among men; a man consumed with those passions and endowed with those virtues which are displayed only by great souls.

Count Julian, to avenge the violation of his daughter by King Roderick, turns apostate and calls in the aid of the Moors. In an eight days battle Roderick is defeated by perfidy, steals away in disguise, and is thought to be dead. After years of solitary asceticism, tortured by remorse, he is inspired by a vision to return to his people, and having persuaded Prince Pelayo to assume the crown, preaches a Holy War against the invaders. The mountaineers rise in revolt under Pelayo's leadership and so begins the long and finally successful war in which the Moors were driven back to Africa.

So runs the main plot of the story which allowed Southey free play for his sympathy with Spain, his knowledge

of that country and her history, and also for his mature opinions on those moral and ethical questions in which he had always been absorbingly interested.

Evil is no longer the hocus-pocus of magicians not the blatant villainy of men wholly in the power of Satan. He portrays it as perchance the result of one unguarded moment of passion in an otherwise blameless life, or the outcome of a "proper" pride, smarting under unbearable insult; it may show itself on the one hand in temptations to self-excuse, on the other, in temptations to despair of God's mercy and to end remorse by self-murder.

Yet he is as uncompromising in his hatred of evil as ever. War against evil must be righteous. "Call it not Revenge! this sanctified and thus sublimed, 'Tis duty, 'tis devotion" says Adosinda.(1) The age-old problems of evil and sorrow amd death still perplex the poet, but he has now found a sure buckler to ward off despair in this life, and as sure a password into the life of happiness to come:-

> "Nature hath assigned
> Two sovereign remedies for human grief
> Religion, surest, firmest, first and best
> And strenuous action next." (2)

and these remedies Southey himself had already put to severe test.

Renunciation of all pleasures not under the control of his own will was a stoical principle which Southey had

(1) Bk. 111. lines 397-399 (2) Bk.X1V line 1

also long tried to practise. To this he now adds the Christian ideal of renunciation of worldly vanity, and so Roderick replies thus to his mother's visionary hopes that some day he may again assume his kingly honours:-

> "Dreams such as thine pass now
> Like evening clouds before me; if I think
> How beautiful they seem, 'tis but to feel
> How soon they fade, how fast the night shuts in.
> But in the world to which my hopes look on
> Time enters not, nor Mutability." (1)

In Section XXI. of the poem, which bears a sub-title recalling the episode in "Joan of Arc" when by "The Fountain in the Forest" she feels herself "diffused into the scene" and inspired by God,(2) there is a long and impassioned argument between the apostate Count Julian, and Roderick in his disguise as a hermit. Julian urges

> "That Creeds like colours being but accident
> Are therefore in the scale imponderable
> – – – – – – that from every faith
> As every clime, there is a way to Heaven,"

that in any case we are the slaves of inexorable Destiny, and ends by exclaiming with dramatic irony

> "What volumes of calamity
> Would be unfolded here, if either heart
> Unfolded its sad record. Tell me not
> Of goodness! Either in some freak of power
> This frame of things was fashion'd, then cast off
> To take its own wild course, the sport of chance;
> Or the Bad Spirit o'er the Good prevails,
> And in the Eternal Conflict hath arisen
> Lord of the Ascendant!" (3)

(1) Bk.XIX L 87-92. (2) Vide Chap.III. p.32
(3) Bk. XXI. L 93-209

Chapter V.

Roderick, in his reply, falls back on his faith in another world which will redress the wrongs of this:-

"Rightly would'st thou say
Were there no world but this ------
Oh! who could bear the haunting mystery
If Death and retribution did not solve
The Riddle."

In a beautiful descriptive passage Southey uses again his parable of the stream which, pure at its source, is defiled when passing through the haunts of men to be again purified in the sea, and draws the moral thus:-

"So is it
With the great stream of things, if all were seen
Good the beginning, good the end shall be,
And transitory evil only make
The good end happier. Ages pass away,
Thrones fall and nations disappear, and worlds
Grow old and go to wreck; the soul alone
Endures." (1)

At last subdued by toil of spirit, as these star-crossed mortals sit silent with their hearts "open to the healing power of nature" (2) their tumultuous thoughts are calmed by the splendour of the night, the flow of waters, and the song of the nightingale. For although sometimes

"Alas! the gales of morn
Reach not the fever of a wounded heart!" (3)

yet Southey thinks with Wordsworth that more frequently man may find in the contemplation of nature

"that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery
In which the heavy and the weary weight,
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened." (4)

(1) Bk.XXI. L. 270-314 (2) Bk.XXI. L. 366.
(3) Bk. XV. L. 93-94. (4) "Tintern Abbey" L.38-41.

Chapter V.

Not fortuitously was the motto for this poem taken from "The Excursion" [1] For if the nobility of the style, its dignity and restraint, owe much to Southey's close study of Landor's longer poems, the lofty ideals which inspire the poem, the high-souled character of its hero, and its noble conception of man's character and destiny, sinful and ignorant as man may be, owe no less to Southey's great admiration for Wordsworth's poetry.

It was in the preface to "Roderick" that Southey writing of a remark about Jeffrey's "crushing review of the 'Excursion'" retorted "He crush 'The Excursion'!! Tell him he might as easily crush Skiddaw!"

There is not space to dilate upon or quote from the magnificent descriptions of scenery in "Roderick" such as that of the profoundly silent night under a sub-tropical moon with which Section XV. opens, or Section XVl. describing the rugged mountain valley of Covodonga as it appeared to Pelayo newly escaped from captivity, and many others. Nor can we dwell upon the spirited accounts of councils and battles, more dramatic and convincing than are to be found anywhere else in Southey's poetry.

The poem, with its wild scenery and its romantic story of battles long ago and human hearts once passion-torn, but now for many centuries dust, has an austere and tragic beauty.

(1) "Excursion" Bk.lV. L. 1062-1077.

Chapter V.

Byron who had poured scorn on "Thalaba" and "Madoc" praised "Roderick" as the "first poem of the time", even Jeffrey admitted that "much may be said in its favour", and if the Ettrick Shepherd was perhaps too enthusiastic he was nearer the truth thanthose critics who damn the poem with faint praise when he wrote "I have read Roderick over and over again and am the more and more convinced that it is the noblest epic of the age"

"Roderick," probably because it was more intelligible to the ordinary readerand because it dealt with a subject that could not fail to interest a generation which had witnessed the great Peninsular War, was more successful financially than "Thalaba" or "Kehama". "In two years" Southey writes, "Roderick has produced for me above £500 by three editions and the fourth will by this time have paid its expenses." (1)

Almost as soon as "Roderick" was completed Southey, as was his wont, turned to fresh themes. In 1814 he began "A Tale of Paraguay" and in 1815 "Oliver Newman" another ethical poem, this time in a Puritan setting, which was never finished. In this year also he republished his "Minor Poems" in three volumes.

Then in 1816 came the heaviest trial of all that Southey was ever called upon to bear. On April 17th his little nine-year-old son died and, as Southey wrote to Grosvenor Bedford, even his dearest friends were "far from

(1) C. J. May 18. 10. 1816.

Chapter V.

knowing how large a portion of my hopes and happiness will be laid in the grave with Herbert"[1] It was a blow from which the poet never recovered and it left him little heart for song, so that beyond the odes which he considered it his duty as Laureate to produce on state occasions, henceforth he wrote very little in verse.

He resumed "The Tale of Paraguay" in the following Autumn, yet eight years later he still writes, "I have been getting on with my "Tale of Paraguay" and when I have once escaped from that most difficult of all stanzas I shall feel like a racer let loose."[2]

At last in 1825 it was published, a poem of four cantos in the Spenserian stanza, dedicated in tender and melancholy strains to his daughter Edith: "thy father's latest lay, perhaps his last - - - - a garland for the brow of Death."

A quaint and touching story in Dobrizhoffer's "History of the Abipones" telling of a small native family the sole survivors of a small-pox epedemic which had destroyed their tribe, living alone in the wilds, of their discovery by a Jesuit Expedition, their conversion to Christianity, and their pious deaths, had appealed to Southey. But the story suffers from the same remoteness of interest as so many of Southey's long poems; and the "Tale" has at best only the

(1) C. 17.4.1816. (2) C. W.S.Landor 14.8.1824

quiet charm that is looked for in an old-fashioned devotional treatise, and the pleasure that sweet and facile if undistinguished versification affords. The poet's imagination dwells almost with longing on the "Garden of the Dead"

> "Where solemnly committed earth to earth,
> Waiting the summons for their second birth,
> Whole generations in Death's peaceful fold
> Collected lay; green innocence, ripe worth,
> Youth full of hope, and age whose days were told
> Compressed alike into that mass of mortal mould"(1)

Eighteen years were yet to elapse before Southey himself was laid in "God's Garden" and fifteen of them were years of steady application to literary pursuits. But the poetry which he produced in these years is almost negligible. He might have said with Chaucer

> "For eld, that in my spirit dulleth me,
> Hath of endyting al the sotelte
> Wel ny bereft out of my remembrance;" (2)

---

(1) Canto IV. 31.

(2) "The Compleynt of Venus" L. 77-79.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAUREATE ODES. (1816 - 1843)

In 1807 there was conferred upon Southey a Government pension of £200 (£144 net) mainly through the good offices of his friend Charles Wynn. He thereupon relinquished the annuity of £160 which Wynn had made him out of his own private means since 1797. Upon these transactions Southey's comment to Bedford was "Some odd things have happened to me, in this world, and this is one of them."(1)

Six years later a similar "odd thing" happened to him, for upon the death of Pye, the vacant Laureateship was rejected by Scott who recommended that it should be offered to Southey. Scott advised Southey to take the appointment and wrote that he did not refuse it himself from any foolish prejudice against the situation, but because he was already financially provided for, and also in the hope that it would be given to Southey "upon whom it would be so much more worthily conferred. For I am not such an ass as not to know that you are my better in poetry, though I have had (probably but for a time) the tide of popularity in my favour."

Southey's first impulse was to decline it; not from any fear of ridicule, still less of obloquy but because he had ceased for several years to write occasional verses. Other considerations, including a growing family dependent

(1) C. 7. 4. 1807.

upon him not only for the supply of their immediate needs, but for provision against future contingencies, overcame this reluctance, and made it his duty to accept the appointment. He stipulated however, that nothing like a "schoolboy's task" should be exacted, but that the New Laureate should be left to choose his own times and subjects. The insanity of George lll. had caused the birthday ode to fall into desuetude and the New Year Ode soon followed it into oblivion. Southey thus succeeded in helping to "render the office as honourable as it was intended to be"(1) Its emoluments however, were a mere pittance, reduced by taxes to about £90 per annum. To this Southey added £12 from his yearly earnings and insured his life for a further £3000 so that his family might not be quite unprovided for in the event of his death. Thus Southey became the "hired minion" of the court party, and came to produce "highly paid adulatory verses," but only in the opinions and writings of his malicious opponents or ignorant critics.

For although his official productions add little to his poetic fame, Southey was never the man to turn a hairsbreadth from the path of absolute integrity; and the ill-chosen title of his "Lay of the Laureate" and the ill-chosen scheme, ~~indefensi~~ indefensible in its bad taste of his "Vision of Judgment" are the only real blemishes on his performance of a thankless

(1) Preface to Vol. lll. 1837 Edn.

Chapter V1.

task at which, as was his wont, he laboured only too conscientiously.

A harsh task-master may demand and obtain bricks without straw, but poetry without inspiration and delivered according to schedule, will rarely be worthy the name; nor, to vary the metaphor, will Pegasus show his true form when running in official harness. And in addition to his loss of inclination for writing occasional poetry, - "My poems, hang on hand. I want no monitor to tell me it is time to leave off" he wrote in 1820, [1] - he felt a diffidence and an uncertainty about the propriety of the sentiments of several of his court odes, not surprising in one who had never frequented fashionable society and who had for years lived remote from towns, engrossed in his family and his library. This diffidence, which on several occasions led him to seek advice as to publication [2] was unfortunately counter-balanced by a self-assertiveness which, as he grew older had hardened almost into truculence. This was reinforced by a firm belief in the justice and righteousness of his own moral judgments, founded, as he was convinced they were, on the rock of religious truth, which makes many of his writings savour more and more of self-righteousness and pharisaism.

Moreover the young poet who like an eagle could gaze steadily at the newly risen sun of liberty was now on his way to becoming an old man with eyes bedimmed and unsteady nerve. Poetry is above all, an outpouring from

(1) C. W.S. Landor 20.3.1820. (2) C. G.C. Bedford 30.4.1816 & 12.4.1820 etc.

Chapter VI.

the strong and joyous heart of youth. Precautions, doubts and after-thoughts can have no part in it. The shadow of the wings of Azrael, Angel of Death, which it has been said gives an added intensity and splendour to fine prose,(1) chills and deadens poetry for which life and the fierce will to live, are as the very breath and fire of its being.

Hence it would be vain to seek for lofty flights of imagination, or passionate lyrical outbursts among the odes and songs which Southey wrote in his official capacity.

They began with the "Carmen Triumphale" for the commencement of 1814, wherein the poet sings:-

> "In happy hour doth he receive
> The Laurel, meed of famous Bards of yore,
> Which Dryden and diviner Spenser wore ---
> In happy hour, and well may he rejoice
> Whose earliest task must be
> To raise the exultant hymn for victory."

and we can sympathise with Sir ~~Walter~~ William Parsons, accustomed to the regular stanzas and rhymes of the late Mr. Pye, when he found himself called upon to set such verses to music.

There followed odes breathing vengeance against Napoleon, irresistibly reminiscent of recent journalistic fulminations against a later and less worthy foe; the "Carmina Aulica" in a vein of fulsome compliment to the

(1) Cf. J.C. Squire "London Mercury" Jan. 1920.

Chapter Vl.

allied sovereigns; a lively and interesting historical ode on St. George's Day; odes on the King's visits to distressful Ireland and to loyal Scotland, and under the title of the "Warning Voice" two irregular rhymeless odes preaching piquantly enough, against the revolutionary notions which Southey feared were about to plunge England into anarchy.

"The Poets Pilgrimage to Waterloo" (1) is a somewhat pedestrian performance, the first part being an account of his tour written as a mere sight-seer rather than as an historian, or military critic, or poet. The second part, which like almost all his laureate poems, takes the form of a vision, the most commonplace, because the most convenient of poetic frameworks, is more interesting because it gives us a summary of its author's final opinions in political philosophy.

The materialistic school which taught that "Pleasure is the end and Self the spring of all" and that "As from nothing man began, to nothing they must needs return at length" had produced, says the poem, as its great exponent in practical affairs the tyrant Buonaparte who had sought to brutalise and degrade mankind under his military despotism.

Southey looks back to the days when

"the morning star of
Freedom on rejoicing France arose

(1) Pub. 1816.

Chapter VI.

> Over her vine-clad hills and regions gay
> Fair even as Phosphor who foreruns the Day"

and seeing that now

> "On Waterloo in hath gone down in blood"

he thinks the course it took was appointed and inevitable:

> "In sorrow and in fear I turn'd my eye
> From the dark aspects of futurity."

But his doubt and despair are cured by a draught from the sacred spring that wells from the Rock of Ages. His good angel points out to him that man has free-will, and that nations are subject to the same morality as individuals, while public crimes receive their inevitable punishment here on earth. Had Napoleon triumphed, there must have been a second Flood, but England at Waterloo averted that danger and saved the best hopes of humanity.

Then, as in a magic glass, the poet is shown the England of the future, more mighty and more wealthy than ever, holding her power in trust from Heaven, and wielding it righteously for the benefit of mankind.

A similar faith in the excellence of the established institutions of his native land is seen in his "Carmen Nuptiale, The Lay of the Laureate"(1) Its Proem has considerable biographical interest and in pleasant verse thanks Providence that the poet's life has been

> "In solitude with studious leisure blest
> The mind unfetter'd and the heart at rest
> For therefore have my days been days of joy
> And all my paths are paths of pleasantness
> And still my heart, as when I was a boy,
> Doth never know an ebb of cheerfulness."

(1) Pub. 1816.

Chapter VI.

In reply to accusations of egotism made against this proem by contemporary critics Southey wrote rather bitterly, "If egotism in poetry be a sin, God forgive all great poets. But perhaps it is allowable in them when they have been dead a few centuries." (1)

The "Lay" itself, taking the form of a dream, urges the Princess to use any power she may come to possess, to uphold the Constitution, the "talisman of England's Strength" and to hand it on "unimpair'd"; to support the Church of England, and its missionary efforts to convert heathendom; and to help make it a duty of the State to supply "all needful knowledge" to every citizen. This extraordinary marriage song, begun with Spenser's beautiful "Epithalamion" ringing in the poet's ear,(2) ends with an apologetic explanation that

> "Light strains, though cheerful as the hues of Spring
> Would wither like a wreath of vernal flowers;
> The amaranthine garland which I bring
> Shall keep its verdure through all after hours."

and, like the skeleton at the feast, he reminds the Princess of Death, "the last best friend" of all.

Ill-omened words, for his next poem was to be a "Funeral Song" for the same Princess Charlotte. In perhaps the best of his official poems, for here he is dealing with a subject that

(1) C. G.C. Bedford 15.5.1816. (2) Proem St. 19.

had long pre-occupied his mind, Southey commends the Spirit of the Princess to those other royal personages who already rest at Windsor. The stanzas of swift seven-syllabled verse, have the effect of long drawn sighs, as

> "One who reverently, for thee
> Raised the strain of bridal verse
> Flower of Brunswick mournfully
> Lays a garland on thy herse."

Did the list of these productions end here, little comment would be called for. The poems provide some good passages of patriotic rhetoric, and many indications of Southey's political and social outlook in his later years. These indications show that he had moved along the circumference of a circle as it were, and though his face had always been turned the same way, he had reached a point almost diametrically opposed to that from which he started. Southey's development in this respect throws many interesting side-lights on that of Wordsworth and of Coleridge, although far from identical with that of either.

But the publication in 1821 of "The Vision of Judgment" and its provocative preface, forces us to take a wider view of the whole question and consider what was Southey's conception of liberty, what grounds there were for the charge of apostacy brought against him, and what might be the underlying causes of his quarrel with Lord Byron.

Isaac D'Israeli in his interesting volume entitled "Miscellanies of Literature" quotes Voltaire as saying

Chapter VI.

"So violent did I find parties in London that I was assured by several that the Duke of Marlborough was a coward, and Mr. Pope a fool" and remarks, "a foreigner indeed could hardly expect that in collecting the characters of English authors by English authors ------- literary history should turn out a collection of personal quarrels." (1)

It was from party feeling, to a great extent, that arose this quarrel between Southey and Byron which cost the former so much of his hard earned reputation; and, alas for the 'genus irritabile vatum'! no account of the work of either author can be complete without some mention of the controversy.

When Byron ran amuck as a satirist in his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" he attacked Southey apparently because he was too prolific, and prayed "God help thee, Southey and thy readers too." For this he afterwards apologised and the poets met "three or four times on courteous terms" when Southey decided that Byron was "rather to be shunned than sought." (2)

Then came Byron's ironical dedication of "Don Juan" to the Laureate, which Southey, before he had seen more than a few excerpts from the poem, affected to treat with contempt:-

"Attack me as he will, I shall not go out of my course to break a spear with him; but if it comes in my way to give him a passing touch, it will be one that will leave a scar."(3)

(1) 1840 Edn. p. 254 (2) C. C.H. Townshead 20.7. 1819.
(3) C. id.

Chapter VI.

But when he had read the first canto, in addition to the personal affront offered him by the dedication, he felt also that the poem was a danger to the community. In February 1820, he writes to Landor that "There is an infernal spirit abroad and crushed it must be - - - - - - otherwise we shall go on through a bloodier revolution than that of France to an iron military government - the only possible termination of Jacobinism. It is employed a misery to see in what manner the press is employed to poison the minds of the people and eradicate everything that is virtuous, everything that is honourable, everything upon which the order, peace and happiness of society are founded."

The recent laws he says, have stopped "the twopenny supply of blasphemy and treason" but a more aristocratic version is still in circulation.

Finally he accuses Lord Byron by name, "with his 'Beppo' which implied the profligacy of the writer and with his 'Don Juan' which is a foul blot on the literature of his country, an act of high treason against English Poetry."

Hence when a year later he published "The Vision of Judgment" a poem in hexameters apotheosising George III. and dedicated to George IV. we are not surprised, knowing Southey's vehemence and passion for committing himself, to find in Section III. of the preface, a fierce attack on "those monstrous combinations of horrors and mockery, lewdness and impiety, with which English poetry has, in our days, first been polluted[1]

Chapter Vl.

He invented for Byron the tile of "leader of the Satanic School" - an epithet which rankled, - and having prophesied for him a poignant death-bed repentance, called the attention of the "rulers of the state" to the corruption of the people which was sure to follow this poisoning of the waters of literature.

Modern critics with so much more knowledge of both sides of the question than either of these opponents could possibly have possessed, see in this an attempt to inflame the educated mob against a greater and more popular literary rival, by a mean accusation of immorality and irreligion. But Southey, who had not begun this quarrel, firmly believed that the whole fabric of society was based on the sacredness of family ties; in an age of libertinage he had lived a strictly moral life, and his writings reflect a mind that might be called prudish. Hence as a father, a churchman, and a citizen he felt bound to oppose a writer whose own life was a byword for immorality, and who deliberately wrote "pour épater les bourgeois"

. Yet Southey's method of attack was singularly inept and Byron in a dignified and cutting rejoinder emphasized his adversary's bad taste and accused him as a renegade and a slanderer.

In January 1822 Southey replied in a truculent and abusive style, and made the unfortunate mistake of advising Byron, if he replied again, "to do so in verse."

Chapter VI.

Marsyas had challenged Apollo; there could be no doubt as to the verdict of the Muses; and the presumptuous Southey was flayed alive with merciless satire in Byron's "Vision of Judgment" which appeared in 1822. Byron's publisher was prosecuted and fined, but the victory remained with him and with the concentrated irony of his magnificent parody.

But wit and truth are not inseparable companions. All Byron's attacks press the accusation that Southey is an "Epic Renegade" who has sold himself for his Laureateship, just as Wordsworth had for his place in the excise; and the preface to the second "Vision of Judgment" rakes up "Wat Tyler" and William Smith Esq., M.P. as if they were new and unanswerable arguments. What basis was there for such accusations?

Southey, all his life, would have stoutly proclaimed himself, a warm friend of liberty, but as he said, he "moved with the sun" and did not continue to worship the east because there the sun first appeared. His practical experience had forced him to distrust ideals, and Liberty became for him, not that tremendous figure, divine and awful of which Shelley sings

> "But keener thy gaze than the lightning's glare,
> And swifter thy step than the earthquake's tramp;
> Thou deafenest the rage of the ocean; thy stare
> Makes blind the volcanoes; the sun's bright lamp
> To thine is a fen-fire damp."(1)

(1) "Poems written in 1820" "Liberty" 3.

Chapter VI.

It was rather for Southey as an individual the aggregate of the liberties conferred by the British Constitution, and for Southey as an Englishman, freedom from foreign tyranny especially from that which Napoleon sought to impose upon these islands. The "martyrs of freedom" were now such as Egmont and Horn(1) in the Netherlands, rather than such as Marten the Regecide, and while still deploring the necessity for slaughter the poet could now sing the praises of every British victory.

He could even write of the England of 1816

"From bodily and mental bondage there
Hath man his full emancipation gain'd"(2)

Yet this was Byron's "Age of Bronze" when the "being, end, aim, religion" of the ruling classes was "rent, rent, rent"; and in 1819 occurred the Manchester riots! When only one out of the thirty millions inhabitants of these islands possessed the franchise what control could the people exercise over their own concerns, held down as they were "by the bitter compulsion of their wants?"(3)

But Southey seemed to have grown blind to tyranny and coercion when exercised by a constitutional monarchy, and to the possibility of a Protestant Church showing intolerance, and hiding ignorance under prejudice.

Hence the attacks Byron made upon him; hence a contemporary critic's declaration that "filled with the

(1) "Carmen Triumphale" XVII. (2) "The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo" IV. 28. (3) Coleridge "The Friend" Section I. Essay XVI.

enthusiasm of reverence he (Southey) not only venerates old institutions but the very moss and lichens with which time has covered them"(1) hence Hazlitt's quotation - question (which also provides the motto for "Don Juan") "Because he is virtuous are there to be no more cakes and ale?"; hence in short Southey's reputation as a hypocrite and a renegade.

Yet Hazlitt does him more justice and hits upon the real causes of the changes in Southey's opinions when he goes on to say "At the corner of his pen 'there hangs a vaporous drop profound' of independence and liberality. In all those questions on which he is not sore from old bruises or sick from the extravagance of youthful intoxication as from a last night's debauch, our 'laureate' is still bold, free, candid, - a reformist." (2)

The rather timid liberalism of Southey's later years was but the residue from which courage and idealism had been squeezed by the remorseless pressure of events, and uninspiring as that cautious policy may now seem, it must be admitted that he kept "the same ardent wishes for the melioration of mankind" as had inspired his youth, but that "as he grew older his opinions altered concerning the means by which that melioration was to be effected."(3)

Although today we can see that Byron and Shelley were truer patriots in their apparent rebellion than those older poets who lent their aid to the forces of reaction, it must

(1) T.N. Talfourd "Attempt to estimate the Poetical Talent of the Present Age" 1815. (2) "The Spirit of the Age" Mr. Southey.
(3) "A letter to William Smith Esq., M.P. 1817."

be recognised that Southey was still as good a patriot as any, according to the light vouchsafed him. His laureate odes, no less than his "Colloquies on Society"(1) show how keenly interested he was in his country's welfare; and his ideals of national welfare were decidedly in advance of his time.

He never lost his hatred of personal slavery and continually advocated its complete abolition. He prays his country to

> "Bestir thyself against thine inward foes
> Ignorance and Want, with all their brood
> Of miseries and crimes." (2)

and that his efforts to secure a broader system of education were not mere pious wishes, there is ample evidence in his correspondence which among other efforts in this direction records (just over a hundred years before the great Army Education Scheme) that tomorrow he is to do "Nothing less than draw up instructions with Dr. Bell for a system of education to be introduced into every regiment throughout the army"(3)

More than this, in an age which on the secession of the American Colonies from the British Empire, had formed the theory that Colonies like fruit drop off when ripe, Southey had the fore-sight to see and the courage to sing

(1) Pub. 1829. (2) "Ode written during War with America" 1814. St. 5. (3) C. Miss Barker 4. 11. 1812.

the advantages of colonization and thus exhorts the Motherland

"Send thou thy swarms abroad!
For in the Years to come
Where'er thy progeny
Thy language and thy spirit shall be found
Where'er thy language lives
By whatsoever name the land be called
That land is England still." (1)

Long before Kippling and his numerous imitators sang their songs of Empire, Southey, with prophetic faith and true dignity told of cities that should grow

"On Ontario's shores
Or in that Austral world long-sought
The many-isled Pacific"(2)

wherein, surviving all meaner things, the influential spirit and imperishable mind of England should still flourish and rule.

Southey judged of political and social questions as a poet, remembering that man does not live by bread alone, and that material needs are not his only, nor his most important needs. The horrors of the factory system, the gross and uncultured materialism of "the cotton and worsted and flax kings"[2] the grime and ugliness that went with poverty to make up the lot of factory operative and agricultural labourer under the new grasping regime were not

(1) "Ode during War with America" (2) C.. Cardine Bowles 6. 2. 1833.

justified by accessions however enormous to the wealth of the nation, but called for vigorous denunciation. For such warfare prose was the keenest and weightiest weapon, and prose he used, so that having vindicated Southey's political character we must here leave this interesting subject.

"The Vision of Judgment" raised other questions besides these political and social ones, and egregious as the poem is in many respects it is unfair as well as uncritical to judge it solely in the light of Byron's parody. Prominent among these questions is that of its versification. In spite of his return to rhyme in Kehama[(1)] Southey, as "The Warning Voice" odes show, had not recanted his rhymeless heresy, and now the unhappy "Vision" was chosen by Southey as a suitable poem for another experiment he had long had in mind - the attempt to naturalise quantitative verse in English. English verse written in classical meters, as another means of escape from the Popian rhymed couplet had interested him from his youth. The fate of his sapphics and dactylics we have seen[(2)] and they deserved no better. He next tried English hexameters, and had contemplated a long poem on Mohammed in this metre with which he was to have had the advantage of Coleridge's assistance as he did with his Sapphics. "The Hexameter"

(1) Vide Chap. V. p.74. (2)Chap. 111. p.42.

he wrote to Landor in 1808 "remains the most perceptible of all measures," defying even mispronunciation to rob it of harmony; he studied former attempts to use the ancient metres in English, and quotes French and Spanish precedents for his efforts, while he was much encouraged by the success of German hexameters.

For his information about Klopstock's hexameters and for an example of their effect when translated into corresponding metre in English, Southey was indebted once again to William Taylor.

When at length he tried the measure "upon a more adequate scale and upon a subject suited to the movement"(1) he was amply satisfied with the result and wrote to Bedford "I have proved that hexameters may as well be written in English as in German; that they are in no respect dissuited to the genius of our language; and that the measure is full, stately sonorous, capable of great variety, great sweetness and great strength." (2)

The unfortunate preface with which the "Vision" was published has also suffered from attention being exclusively directed to its third section which contains the attack on Lord Byron. The neglected remainder, with the notes thereto, forms an admirable and interesting little

(1) Preface to "Vision of Judgment" IV. (2) C. 12. 4. 1820

Chapter Vl.

treatise on the English hexameter, and emphasises the fact that he does not intend it to compete for favour against any established measure but as a new variation in, and a useful addition to English prosody.

If it can fulfil the claims he makes for it in the letter quoted above, it should have proved a useful acquisition; and examples from the "Vision" provide many good lines in support of those claims. For example

"the whole deep body of darkness (1)
Roll'd like a troubled sea, with a wide and manifold motion"

is surely full, stately, sonorous and of great strength, admirable in every way. Again, of the lines:-

"Low as the softest breath that passes in summer at evening
O'er the Eolian strings, felt there when nothing is moving
Save the thistledown, lighter than air, and the leaf of the aspen." (2)

the first is sweet and pleasing as is the third, and they offer an example of the variety of melodious movement this measure affords. The weakness of the second line is due, not to any fault inherent in the measure, but to slovenly workmanship, for the poet has used insignificant and colourless phraseology which does not even express his meaning accurately, and such faults are pitilessly exposed in rhymeless verse. This weakness is exaggerated in such a

(1) "Vision" lV. final line. (2)"Vision" ll. 25 - 27.

line as :-

"Yea in the heart it sunk; for this was the day when the herald"

- an interminable jumble! Here again it must be attributed to Southey and not to the Hexameter.

For serious poetry which aims at nobility of effect the hexameter has however an inherent defect in its tendency to read itself as an anapaestic, rollicking measure, as in the line describing Napoleon who on St. Helena

"Frets| and complains and intrigues and abuses the mercy that spared |him"

If the first and last syllable be taken away it will be found not to alter the reading of the remaining line which is seen to consist of five anapaests, a most unpleasing arrangement.

While another most serious failing is that in a long hexameter poem, the continuous sing-song caused by the recurring and strongly marked accentuation of the last two feet of each line contrasting with the variability of the first four feet becomes increasingly obvious and a weariness to the flesh.

There seems no reason however, why in the hands of a great poet the measure should not be used for noble and majestic utterance in poems fused by strong passion into harmonious unity. And should such a poet arise it seems safe to prophesy that he would use hexameters of the type which Southey tried to popularise.

The nineteenth century saw almost continuous efforts to establish the hexameter in English of which Longfellow's

Chapter Vl.

"Evangeline" Clough's "Bothie of Toper - na - fuosich" and Matthew Arnold's examples in recommending its use for translating Homer all follow Southey more or less closely with a general tendency towards giving the metre still more variety and freedom, since narrative poetry was their aim. Tennyson, Stone and Mr. Bridges carried on these experiments with hexameters on rather different principles; but any experimenter with hexameters in English must owe a considerable debt to Southey.

The subject matter of much of the poem[1] has the painful interest that the spectacle of a baby playing with an open razor might be expected to afford, for the poet, in blissful unconsciousness of any such danger is continually verging on the maudlin and the blasphemous.

But where Southey deals with history or literature he is on safer ground. Hence the interest of the eighth book dealing with the worthies of history, King Alfred's Mariners for instance

"Who in battle
Put the Raven to flight: or invading the kingdom of Winter
Plough'd with audacious keel the Hyperborean Ocean";

of the ninth paying homage to Chaucer

"And Shakespeare who in our hearts for himself hath erected an Empire
Not to be shaken by time, nor e'er by another divided,"

to Spenser and Milton; of the tenth dealing with great men of more recent date, Wolfe, Hogarth, Wesley and Burke, a

(1) Bks. 1. - Vll & Xll.

Chapter VI.

comprehensive list,

"Cowper thy lovely spirit was there by death disenchanted
From that heavy spell which had bound it in sorrow and darkness"

and there also was Southey's hero Nelson; and finally of book eleven in memory of the "young spirits"

"Many are they whose bones beneath the billows have whiten'd
Or in foreign earth they have moulder'd, hastily cover'd
In some wide and general grave"

the price of freedom and victory as in our own day; and with them the poet celebrates the eager young scientists, thinking of Davy when first he knew him, artists such as Haydon, the marvellous boy Chatterton, and gifted, unfortunate, young Henry Kirke White. These books have the interest which Southey's opinions on such topics must always have, and they are by no means to be set aside as part of the dull poem in gouty hexameters which most critics who mention Southey seem to dismiss as beneath contempt.

With this remarkably controversial and ill-conceived poem Southey brought to an end the series of compositions which we owe to his appointment as Poet Laureate. In 1820 he had conferred upon him another distinction when on June 14th he was "ell - ell - deed" as he humorously explains in a letter to his daughters[1] and became a D.C.L. of Oxford University pro honoris causa. The only literary outcome

(1) C. Bertha, Kate and Isabel Southey. 26. 6. 1820.

of this appointment appears to have been the remark, in a French criticism of "A Tale of Paraguay" that Dr. Southey ought not to have shown off his professional knowledge by dwelling upon vaccination and the cow-pox - whereat the "Doctor" was much amused.(1)

The literary results of a still more striking honour which was paid him in 1826 when he was returned to Parliament without his knowledge, through the influence of Lord Radnor, and offered the gift of an estate of £300 per annum to qualify him for a seat, were even less. "As it gratifies my friends, it gratifies me, now that I have done laughing at it" (2) was Southey's own opinion of the offer which for many reasons he refused.

The offer of a baronetcy which was made to him, in a most kindly and sympathetic way by Sir Robert Peel in 1835, he also refused upon the grounds that it would be unwise and unbecoming to accept a rank so much above his restricted means.(3) Whereupon Sir Robert substituted an additional pension of £300 and Southey, about eight years ~~befo~~ before his death was at last relieved from anxiety about financial affairs, and from dependence upon his pen for a livelihood.

In 1837 "in a mood resembling in no slight degree that wherewith a person in sound health, makes his will and sets his worldly affairs in order" Southey "entered upon the

(1) C. Henry Taylor 31.12.1825. (2) C. Caroline Bowles 2. 7. 1826
(3) C. Sir Robert Peel. 3. 2. 1835

serious task of arranging and revising the whole of his poetical works"[1] correcting to a small extent, dating the minor poems and arranging all of them as far as possible in chronological order. In 1838 the tenth and final volume of this edition was published, and soon afterwards Southey began to show signs of failing mental powers.

On March 21st 1843 came the end, and the poet was laid to rest in Crosthwaite Churchyard, whither his wife[2] after forty-two years of companionship had preceded him in 1837.

"My notions about life" he had once written "are much the same as they are about travelling - there is a good deal of amusement on the road, but, after all, one wants to be at rest;"[3] and thinking of his last long sleep, Southey with his dear master Spenser would have asked:-

"Now why should he that loves me, sorie bee
For my deliverance, or at all complaine
My good to heare, and toward joyes to see?
I goe, and long desired have to goe
I goe with gladnesse to my wished rest"[4]

---

(1) Preface Vol. 1. 1837 Edn. (2) On June 5th 1839 Southey married as his second wife the poetess Caroline Bowles who nursed him till his death. (3) C. Lieut.T. Southey H.M.S. "Dreadnought" 22. 5. 1809. (4) "Daphnaïda" L. 278-282.

CHAPTER V11.

CONCLUSION.

In Emerson's records of his literary friendships there is the following note under the date May 15th 1833:- "I dined with Landor. He pestered me with Southey; but who is Southey?" This from Emerson to Southey was mere idle impertinence, for beyond the fact that Southey could have given Emerson useful lessons on the subject of English prose composition, the author of "The Holly Tree", "The Old Woman of Berkeley", "The Battle of Blenheim", of "Kehama" and of "Roderick" displayed such high and varied poetical powers that even in the glorious history of English poetry he must be allowed a far from negligible place.

This position he achieved in spite of a continuous struggle against poverty which forced him to lead a life of unremitting toil from his youth up, and against ill-health which was only kept at bay by a stern and watchful guard over those feelings and sensibilities to which a poet ought frequently to give full rein, if he is to give complete expression to his personality.

If Southey had only been blessed with Coleridge's happy knack of avoiding obligations and letting the morrow take thought for itself, or had he been endowed with a modest competence such as Wordsworth enjoyed, and been thus enabled to devote his whole life and thought to poetry for its

own sake, his powers of observation coupled with his strong imagination, keen sensibility, lofty moral convictions and perseverance in the practise of his craft, could hardly have failed to lift him into the very first class of English poets.

Yet with Wordsworth's sufficiency of material goods he would also have needed Wordsworth's self-centred aloofness from the rest of his kind, for otherwise his ready sympathy and open-handed generosity would soon have betrayed him. That Southey was exceptionally generous let one action out of many such, bear witness. In 1821 immediately upon hearing that his friend John May had lost his entire fortune in business, he sent him £625, the whole savings of his arduous life-time, without reserve or condition.(1)

As for the effect of his excitable disposition upon his poetry, his health obliged him to adopt a special intellectual regimen and to order his tasks accordingly, even after his second visit to Portugal where the climate had "completely changed his whole animal being"(2) and cured the nervous disorders which had forced him to go abroad. In a letter to Bedford giving a list of four volumes, including "Kehama", upon the composition of all of which he is actively engaged, he says "Don't swear and bid me do one thing at a time. I tell you I can't afford to do one thing at a time, no, nor two neither: and it

(1) C. John May. 10.12.1821. (2) C. C.W.Wynn 21.2. 1801

is only by doing many things that I contrive to do so much."(1)

While still later, when he was writing "Roderick", he complains to Landor that he is still compelled to follow a similar plan. "You wonder that I can think of two poems at once; it proceeds from weakness, not from strength. I could not stand the continuous excitement which you have gone through in your tragedy(2); in me it would not work itself off in tears, the tears would flow while in the act of composition and would leave behind a throbbing head and a whole system in the highest state of nervous excitability, which would soon induce disease in one of its most fearful forms."(3)

With indomitable energy and courage Southey continued the struggle against these adverse circumstances, sustained by the prospect of winning great and lasting renown, and by a scholarly love of learning for its own sake. He hoped and expected that his reputation would be illuminated by those of Wordsworth and Coleridge and immortalised along with theirs: "Wordsworth comes in for a very large share(of abuse) and very ofetn we go together. If my name is found in such company hereafter, it will be enough"(4) he wrote in 1819.

(1) C. 5. 7. 1806 (2) Landor's "Count Julian". Landor and Scott were also occupied at this time on the same subject as that of Southey's "Roderick" (3) C. W.S. Landor 12.2.181[illegible]
(4) C. W.S. Landor 7. 5. 1819.

Chapter V11.

Instead, it has been overshadowed and depressed by those of his associates. Yet his contemporaries regarded him as the leader of the new school of poets, even before he settled at Keswick and so enabled the convenient but somewhat misleading appelation of "Lake-poet" to be fixed upon him.(1)

When the Edinburgh Review was founded in October 1802 Jeffrey immediately seized the opportunity to sum up in one regular indictment, all the carpings and gibings, of the "Monthly", the "Critical " the "Analytical" and the "Anti-Jacobin" Reviews. He therefore made an article on "Thalaba" the excuse for attacking Southey as the heresiarch under whose leadership a new sect of poets were in active dissent against the standards of poetry which, like those of religion, "were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question."(2) This sect, the Edinburgh Critic charged with being followers of Rousseau, with affecting great simplicity and familiarity of language which involved the "bona fide rejection of art altogether", with an over-strained sympathy for the poor and vindictive hatred of the rich. Another characteristic fault was "perpetual exaggeration of thought" while the versification of "Thalaba" was typical of all their heresies.

In conclusion Jeffrey sums up his criticism of Southey thus: "His faults are always aggravated and often created,

(1) Vide Chap. 111. p. 43. (2) Edinburgh Review. Vol.1. pp. 63 - 83.

by his partiality for the peculiar manner of that new school of poetry - - - - to the glory of which he has sacrificed greater talents and acquisitions than can be boasted of by any of his associates."

Perhaps the fact that Wordsworth as well as Coleridge and Southey was associated in his early years with the Bristol publisher Cottle, had helped to group these poets together.

Wordsworth was still almost unknown to the general public, and it was not until 1807 that any of his works formed the subject of an article in the "Edinburgh" when Jeffrey said of him, "He is known to belong to a certain brotherhood of poets who have haunted for some years about the lakes of Cumberland." Here is found the first mention of the Lakes in connection with this "brotherhood of poets"

This coupling of his name with that of Wordsworth Southey, as we have seen, regarded as a good omen, and at first was not unwilling to acknowledge some such connection. In a letter to John May on the subject of Jeffrey's review of "Thalaba" while denying any intimacy with Wordsworth, Southey makes the interesting remark that "In whatever we resemble each other, the resemblance has not sprung from chance but because we have both studied poetry in the same school - in the works of nature, and in the heart of man."

Later on, however, after praising Wordsworth as a man, and as a poet to be ranked with Milton, Southey says

Chapter V11.

"I speak not from the partiality of friendship, nor because we have been so absurdly held up as writing upon one concerted system of poetry"(1) While in the 1837 preface to Volume 1V. of the collective edition, Southey is quite ungracious in his remarks about the difference between his poetry and that of Wordsworth. "Certainly" he says, "there were no two poets in whose productions, the difference not being that between good and bad, less resemblance could be found."

This was not true, and it was much less true in 1802 than in 1837. But perhaps Southey, like Coleridge (2) was tired of being drenched with the spray, whenever Wordsworth was under the Waterfall of Criticism, an explanation which is supported by Southey's further remarks in the preface, complaining that "every young sportsman who carried a pop-gun in the field of satire considered the Lake Poets as fair game"

Wordsworth's reputation grew slowly; a fit audience had to be educated for the appreciation of his poetry and a new taste created for its enjoyment. In this process of providing a cultivated literary public, with a demand for the productions of Wordsworth and to some extent of Coleridge, Southey undoubtedly played a useful part for several years until his historical and mythological interests led him to exploit other fields than those marked out for themselves by his fellow "Lake Poets". And he is obviously glad to

(1) C. Bernard Barton. 19.12.1814. (2) "Biographia Literaria" Chap. 111.

associate himself with the growing appreciation of Wordsworth's work, when in 1823 he writes that "every year shows more and more how strongly his poetry has leavened the rising generation."(1) while not only the motto, but the matter also of his last epic, "Roderick" imply no feeble compliment to his great neighbour. (2)

Too little rather than too much stress seems to have been laid by the critics on Southey's affinity with Wordsworth and Coleridge and the Romantic movement in general. Some external similarities between Southey and the eighteenth century poets remain visible throughout his work; and these are the more prominent because he chose a quasi-epic form for his most ambitious poems, a form more closely connected than any other with the poetic age that immediately preceded his own. There is also, it is true, a kind of externality about some of Southey's romanticism, which occasionally depends too much upon gorgeous descriptions and fairy-tale strangeness and variety of incident. But when we remember the masters from whom he learned his art; Spenser, the makers of the English Bible the great Elizabethan dramatists, Chaucer, Gray, Cowper, Chatterton and Bowles; when we remember the subjects he chose for his poetry, and the freedom with which he exercised his right of choice, his "naturalism" his

(1) C. Geo. Ticknor 16.7.1823. (2) Vide Chap.V. p.94

recognition of the grotesque as an element of art, his orientalism, his prosodic discoveries and metrical exploits, we are forced to admit that here was one who would accept no rules or laws from another.

His antipathies are as significant as his sympathies. He condemned the "jew's-harp, twing-twang of the heroic couplet"(1) and in spite of his prosodic curiosity scarcely even attempted this measure. He told William Taylor "It is an article in my creed that from the days of John Milton English poetry has gone on from bad to worse. We have had froth and flummery imposed upon us, contortions of language that passed for poetry because they were not prose"(2) The passage he chooses to illustrate Gifford's "mercilessly mutilations" of his Quarterly Review articles is also significant. "Gifford has no business" he writes, "to insert his own opinions in direct opposition and contradiction to mine. He has said for me, that as an Englishman, I am proud of the general merits of Pope's 'Homer'! "(3)

"Romanticism" said Victor Hugo" "est un genie qui jaillit directement de la nature et de l'humanité."(4) These were the schools in which Southey had studied. "Lakes and mountains are good friends" he wrote, while "Cities are poisonous to genius and virtue —— neither are men to be studied in cities, except indeed, as students walk the hospital, you go to see all the modifications of disease."(5)

(1) Preface to "Thalaba" 1801 Edn. (2) C. 23. 6. 1803
(3) C. G.C.Bedford 14.1.1815 (4) "Post Scriptum de ma Vie"
(5) C. Wm.Taylor 14. 2. 1803.

Chapter Vll.

Hence Southey although at first sight apparently less a romantic than the other lake-poets was both in theory and practise as much in revolt against classicism as either of his fellows, and as determined an individualist in his mode of self-expression.

Yet his influence as a leader in the great romantic revival, except such as he exercised through the influence of Coleridge and Wordsworth seems to be of no great account in literary history. Like the dethroned Titans in Keat's "Hyperion", Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge withdrew in no very magnanimous spirit upon the advent of their young successors and showed very little interest in their work. Scott alone acted the part of Clymene and delighted in the "new, blissful, golden melody" of "morning - bright Apollo" his successful rival Byron. On the other hand, Shelley not only thought well enough of "Thalaba" to imitate it in his "Queen Mab" but visited Southey in 1812 when the elder poet thought the younger "just what I was in 1794"[1] and later on, in 1820, was anxious to be assured that Southey was not one of his calumniators in the "Quarterly" and to justify to Southey his own course of action. But Southey's highly moral, if scarcely charitable replies, the outcome of that spiritual pride which was the vice of his virtue, naturally completed the severance between himself and the Poet's poet.

(1) C. G.C. Bedford 4. 1. 1812.

Chapter V11.

Tennyson, the super-craftsman and elaborator of form was naturally interested in Southey's numerous experiments and owed him not only the particular debt before mentioned (1) but a general one also.

Furthermore, Southey's defence of the Church against religious anarchs and his distrust of science and scientists although he does not "undervalue their knowledge not the utility of their discoveries" (2) because they tend to "become mere materialists, account for everything by mechanism, and would put out of the world all that makes the world endurable;" (3) gave his work considerable value in the eyes of adherents of the "Oxford Movement" Newman expressed great admiration for "Thalaba" on account of the lofty moral principles it inculcates and in his "Loss and Gain" makes one of the characters refer to Oneiza's fate in illustration of his views of celibacy. (4)

What we look for in poetry, however, is example rather than precept, new experiences rather than old dogmas. Southey distrusted his emotions which had threatened to ruin his health and wreck his peace of mind, and so he tends to substitute fancy for imagination, and tries to confine his appeal to the sensations rather than the emotions.

Thus, when the ever-shifting warfare of the human mind became a battle for spiritual more than for political liberty , and Southey was no longer thought to hold "advanced"

(1) Chap. 1V. p.52. (2) C. W.S.Landor 23. 4. 1809
(3) Cf. the moral of Keat's "Lamia" (4) "Loss & Gain" Chap.1V. (p.192.)

views, the puritanic severity of his moralising tone gave his poetry the stamp of propriety in the eyes of those who were shocked by Byron, Shelley, Keats and Moore. But if ideas are to have any far-reaching, any lasting influence they must be in advance of their day, and if an author who deals with ideas is to attract and influence the thinkers of succeeding generations, it seems almost inevitable that he should shock his contemporaries.

Hence, Southey's literary influence was never of any great importance, and this in spite of his consistently sympathetic attitude towards all of the young literary aspirants who applied to him for advice. There were many such and they make a strangely assorted band of disciples, including, for example, Henry Kirke White an "Evangelical" poet of whose "methodistical and calvinistic letters" the orthodox Southey smiled to find himself editor(1); Ebenezer Elliott to whom he gave praise strongly tempered with discouraging advice against publication(2) and whose later work as the Radical Corn-law rhymer could not have aroused much enthusiasm in Southey's tory bosom; John Jones(3) an old serving-man whose poems the erudite Southey edited with an introduction on uneducated poets; and the passionate, lyrical Charlotte Bronte whom he told that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and

(1) C. Richard Duppa 23.5.1807. (2) C. Ebenezer Elliott 3.2.1819
(3) C. Mrs. Hughes 21. 9. 1827.

it ought not to be"[1] and whose ardour he endeavoured, in accordance with his stoical philosophy, to abate by showing her, "a poet in the decline of life, and the effect which age produces upon our hopes and aspirations."

Yet although Southey's poetical works have fallen into disrepute, and his poetic influence seems almost negligible, the student of English poetry cannot afford to neglect his productions. "Humanity" said Vigny "is delivering an interminable discourse, and every distinguished man is one of the ideas it expresses" Every such "idea" has an intrinsic value and also a relative value dependent upon the other "ideas" with which it is associated which it supports or contradicts. A man may thus gain importance from the importance of the time or the "milieu" in which he lived.

There is no period in our history, which in so many respects foreshadows the situation in which England finds herself today, as does the corresponding decade of the last century, when after a long and desperate struggle for continued national existence, she had laid her enemy prostrate and could turn to the no less urgent affairs of peace.[2]

Once again, after "the long tragedy" as Southey wrote to Sir Walter Scott upon the peace of 1814, "the curtain is fallen" and once again "there is the after-piece of the Devil to Pay to be performed." then, as now, the

(1) C. Charlotte Bronte March 1837. (2) Cf. "English Poets & the National Ideal" E.de Selincourt Lect.111. p.61

greatest danger was a class war, to prevent which the Government had to be given such powers as threatened the liberty of the individual.

"The abuse of liberty has always been punished with loss of liberty"(1) said Southey, and went on to prophesy that "we shall beat down the enemy in the field, become a mighty military power - and lose our civil and religious liberty." Not only were the problems which confronted Englishmen of 1816 similar to those we have to face, but also the conditions under which they had to be solved. The generation which had carried on the struggle was ineradicably marked thereby; "the sudden termination (of the war) putting an end at once to those hopes and fears and speculations which, for many years past, have made up so large a part of every man's intellectual existence seemed like a change in life itself." (2) Southey's storm-tossed generation, in the effort to avoid total shipwreck, had been forced to jettison not only its cargo of ideals, but its very tackle and spars, and now the tempest was over lay stripped, disillusioned, almost incapable of progress.

We too have come to look upon compromises as inevitable, upon utility and practicability as the only real tests. The conditions are not identical, history never repeats itself , but if humanity is ever to make any progress men must learn by the experience of their predecessors. Hence

(1) C. Rev. Herbert Hill 30. 5. 1812. (2) C . Walter Scott 27. 4. 1814

the study of the affairs in England during the first quarter of the nineteenth century is intensely interesting and of great importance not only to the student but also to the nation at large. And the first-hand material for that study is to be found in the literature which the period produced. Hence the importance of Southey's poetry from the point of view of its relations with life and affairs.

The student of poetic technique will never be able to neglect Southey's attempts and achievements in verse; and his rhymeless experiments seem about to become of renewed importance now that not only young poets in search of yet greater freedom of expression but even typically conservative literary journals proclaim that "our poetry seems to be weary of rhyme and unable to achieve any new excellence with it"(1) Even the simplicity and freshness of his outlook on life as a clearly defined combat between right and wrong, as an adventurous pilgrimage, is in many ways a pleasant change from the complexity of modern art which usually treats life as a psychological puzzle or a mechanical procession.

Southey was quite decided as to what his aim as an artist was, and ought to be, and made it plain in his poetry. When Thalaba is about to consummate his life's work by the destruction of the Dom Daniel he prays thus, and we realise

(1) "Times Lit. Supplement" 8. 4. 1920.

that it is Southey himself who speaks:-

"If from my childhood up I have look'd on
With exultation to my destiny;
If in the hour of anguish I have own'd
The justice of the hand that chasten'd me;
If of all selfish passions purified
I go to work thy will, and from the world
Root up the ill-doing race,
Lord! let not Thou the weakness of my arm,
Make vain the enterprize! " (1)

With sublime faith in his own powers and in his high calling as a Poet, he aimed at achieving supreme excellence. To be less than Milton and Spenser was to be infinitely small in Southey's estimation. Whatever patience and toil and complete self-devotion to the task could do to improve those talents with which he had been entrusted, and to win fame, if not in the present, then from posterity, Southey did willingly. And although he realised that fame might have been his as a humorous poet, or along the lines indicated by M.G.Lewis, he would play for nothing less than the highest stakes, nor be content to base his reputation on anything but the noblest form of poetry.

How little he lacked for complete success we have seen; but what whole worlds away from the goal of his desires, that incompleteness has left him! Had he succeeded he would have been loudly acclaimed as an example of the magnificent courage and self-confidence of true genius. Since he did not succeed he is only remembered as the

(1) "Thalaba" Bk. Xll. St. 1.

Chapter VII.

hypocritical renegade his enemies painted him to be in his lifetime, or as an outstanding example of a vanished reputation after death.

Yet Robert Southey has done enough to ensure that his memory and fame as a poet shall never be utterly extinct while the language he loved survives.

His association with Wordsworth and Coleridge, his position as a leader in the Romantic Revolt, his value as an expert craftsman and technician, his actual achievements in so many kinds of poetry will forbid his ever falling as a prey into the maw of oblivion.

It is possible that his verdict upon Daniel and Drayton, favourite poets of his, that they would never be popular but ought not to be despised, will be pronounced upon Southey's own poetry too. But whether or not he ever witnesses any such return to fame as Donne and Dryden for instance have experienced, nothing but good can come from the memory of the poet whose life with all its hopes and ambitions is told simply and with true nobility of expression in the following singularly beautiful stanzas:-

"My days among the Dead are past;
Around me I behold,
Where'er these casual eyes are cast
The mighty minds of old;
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.

Chapter Vll.

"With them I take delight in weal,
And seek relief in woe;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thankful gratitude.

My thoughts are with the Dead, with them
I live in long-past years,
Their virtues love, their faults condemn,
Partake their hopes and fears,
And from their lessons seek and find
Instruction with an humble mind.

My hopes are with the Dead, anon
My place with them will be,
And I with them shall travel on
Through all Futurity;
Yet leaving here a name I trust,
That will not perish in the dust."

FINIS.

POETICAL WORKS BY R. SOUTHEY.

	Date of Publication.
"Poems": by Robert Lovell and Robert Southey of Balliol Coll. Oxford. Printed by R. Crutwell, Bath.	1795
"Joan of Arc": Pub. by Joseph Cottle, Bristol.	1796
"Poems": by Robert Southey (2nd Edn.) Cottle, Bristol.	1797
"Poems": (Vol. II.) Cottle, Bristol.	1799
"Annual Anthology" (mainly by R. Southey) Bristol. Vol I	1799
Vol. II.	1800
"Thalaba the Destroyer" (2 vols.) Longman & Co. London.	1801
"Madoc" " "	1805
"Metrical Tales and Other Poems" " "	1805
"The Curse of Kehama" " "	1810
"Roderick the Last of the Goths" " " Translated into French 1820, into Dutch 1823.	1814
"Carmina Aulica" Longman. London.	1814
"Minor Poems by R. Southey" (3 vols) " "	1815
"The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo" " "	1816
"Wat Tyler". A dramatic poem in three acts", pub. by Sherwood, Neely & Jones, London. Numerous editions after Lord Eldon's decision.	1817
"A Vision of Judgment" Longman, London.	1821
and in such pamphlets as "The Two Visions, or Byron v. Southey."	1822
"A Tale of Paraguay" Longman, London.	1825
"All for Love & the Pilgrim to Compostella" Longman, London.	1829
"The Poetical Works of R. Southey". Complete in one volume. A. & W. Galignani, Paris.	1829
"The Poetical Works of R. Southey". Collected by himself. (10 vols.) Vols. I - III. Longman, London.	1837
Vols. IV - X. " "	1838
"The Poetical Works of R. Southey" in one volume, Longman, London.	1845.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

"The Poetical Works of R. Southey" 1Vol. Longman. 1845

"The Life and Correspondence of R. Southey"
Edited by the Rev.Cuthbert C.Southey (6 vols.) 1849-50

"Selections from the Letters of R. Southey."
Edited by John Wood Warter B.D. (4 vols.) 1856

"The Correspondence of R. Southey with Caroline Bowles."
Edited by Edward Dowden. 1881

Two useful and handy volumes of selected letters are:-
"Letters of R. Southey, A Selection" (with a useful biographical table) edited by M.H.Fitzgerald, 'World's Classics' Series'. Oxford Univ.Press. 1912
and "Robert Southey: The Story of His Life written in His Letters" edited by John Dennis. Bohn's Standard Library. 1887

"Southey's Common-place Book" (4 vols.)
Edited by J.W.Warter B.D. 1850

"Reminiscences of S.T.Coleridge and R.Southey"
by Joseph Cottle. 1847

Critical pronouncements upon Southey's poetry are by no means numerous. Passages in the following works are among the most interesting of such criticisms:-

"Biographia Literaria" by S.T.Coleridge. 1817

"The Spirit of the Age" by William Hazlitt. 1825

"Southey". 'English Men of Letters' Series
by E.Dowden. 1879

"Essays in English Literature, 1780-1860"
by Geo.Saintsbury. 1895

"Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature"
by George Brandes. Vol.IV. 1875

"The Age of Wordsworth" by C.H.Herford. 1897

--------:-:-:-:-:-:--------