

NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

PRE-VICTORIAN POETS

PERHAPS the 19th century is the greatest of all English poetical periods. It certainly would be so called, but for the fact that the Elizabethan age includes Shakespeare; and the weight of Shakespeare is so great that we must still regard the age in which he lived as the greatest, altogether, in English history. However, the 19th century is in some respects well worthy to compare with even Shakespeare's age. It contains a greater number of poets of high rank; and, if we except the lyric, it contains a much wider variety of poetical work. Of course perfect drama, the greatest drama is the highest form of literary art possible; but here the 19th century has nothing of the first class to show. So we must take its poetry first—as the highest form of its later production.

The first thing to remember is that the poetical history of the century begins with the apparition of seven great poets, — Sir Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Byron, Shelley and Keats. This first group of seven may be said to represent the romantic triumph during the first half of the century. All were romantics — though one or two showed sympathy with classical ideas at various times. But this group of seven cannot be considered together. Almost every one of the seven might be said to have founded a little school of his own,—to have exerted a very direct influence, with the possible exception of Southey. Besides we find that the group may be otherwise classed. It naturally divides itself into two sub-groups — Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott and Southey on one side; and Byron, Shelley and Keats on the other. Walter Scott may be separately considered; and in that case, we should accept the classification of the time,—and call Wordsworth, Cole-

ridge and Southey “The Lake Poets,” or “The Lake School”; and call the other group, at least two of them, “The Satanic School,” for Keats is really very different from them; he was accused of founding a school of his own called “The Cockney School,”—“cockney” being a nickname for a Londoner, one having the peculiarities of speech and manner by which the inhabitant of London can be distinguished. But all these names are absurd; they are not founded upon facts of any kind; and they need not have any interest for us except as curiosities of literary history. It will be better for us to make two groups; and call the first, “The First Romantic School,” and to call the second, “The Second Romantic School.”

THE FIRST ROMANTIC SCHOOL

The First Romantic School includes Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. Before we go any further let us clearly understand the difference separating the two schools from one another,—the reason that Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, and Southey are widely separated from Shelley, Byron, and Keats.

The difference is a difference in romantic feeling. All the poets of the first romantic group observed certain forms of convention. They broke classical conventions in the matter of subject and form; but they remain—all four of them conservative enough in regard to literary ethics. They allow free rein to the imagination in most directions, but not in the direction of religious and social thinking. To put the matter in the plainest possible way, they were very moral people in their books—quite respectable. In the other school all conventions were broken—not indeed by Keats, but by Shelley and Byron. This was especially the reason for their being called “The Satanic School,” or “The School of the Devil.” Neither Byron nor Shelley observed any respect toward religious and social conventions; while Keats was altogether a pagan in sentiment—bewitched by the beauty and poetry and the truth of the old

Greek world. It is not for us to express our sympathy here with either school, nor to criticize. We can do that afterwards. But for the present only remember this, that the first romantic group represents less of the romantic feeling than the second group. Byron and Shelley carried romanticism further than their predecessors. Therefore these two schools represent distinct movements or stages in the romantic evolution.

Now we may talk about the history and the work of the first group; and we shall begin with Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter Scott was the greatest influence of all in the direction of the revival of an interest in the Gothic and the mediæval. His influence has lasted well into our own time, and is not yet quite dead. All the great poets of the later Victorian era were influenced by him. I do not mean as to form, but as to subject and feeling; and in these respects the power of Sir Walter Scott became a European influence. Almost every European literature was affected by him in a twofold way.

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Now the history of Sir Walter Scott¹ is really the history of the influence of popular literature upon academic literature: at least it is the greatest chapter in the record of the effect which peasant ballads and other forms of popular emotional expression produced upon English poetry. Those of us disgusted with Sir Walter Scott by having been obliged to read his *Lady of the Lake* as a school text are apt to overlook entirely that part of his work which belongs to folklore. For Scott was one of the greatest collectors of folklore that ever lived; and he did much more for English literature by his work in this direction than by his long romances in verse. You will remember that Bishop Percy was the first to collect the ballads of the peasantry in book form; and you will remember that he apologized for the work as if he had done something vulgar

¹ Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832).

and you will remember that Dr. Johnson laughed at the ballads. Neither Bishop Percy nor Dr. Johnson could have dreamed that such common literature would ever profoundly change and improve the best quality of English poetry. But Walter Scott may have been wiser. At all events he was so charmed by Percy's collection read in his boyhood, that his whole life was thereby influenced. While still a student he began to collect all the ballads and songs that he could find in his native Scotch neighbourhood — going out himself among the people, and coaxing them to dictate to him all the verses that they remembered. Thus he wrote down and preserved hundreds of beautiful and curious songs and ballads. Nor was he content to study only the folklore of his own country. He collected and translated poems and songs of the same class from many European languages, and he was one of the first, if not the first, to interest English readers in the ballads of the great German poets. In Germany, Percy's books had aroused much interest, and had influenced a romantic movement there. Many ballads had been written there already in imitation of the local folklore ballads; and among the German ballad makers were great poets like Goethe, Schiller, Bürger, Uhland, and others. Sir Walter Scott made his first appearance in literature in 1796, with a little book containing only two ballads translated from the German Bürger; but the translations were not only worthy of the original, but are still said, by good judges, to surpass them. One of these ballads was *The Wild Huntsman* and the other *Lenore*; but Scott first entitled them *The Chase* and *William and Helen*.¹ As the time is short I shall not dwell upon the subject of *The Wild Huntsman*, — further than to remind you that this strange story must always have a weird charm for any imagination able to appreciate the wild character of the sounds made by a storm wind in the forest at night. Sir Walter's translation is very impressive. But the subject of *William and Helen* is a subject possessing the quality called "universality" — that is, it touches something in our minds

¹ *The chase and William and Helen: two ballads from the German of Gottfried A. Burger* (anon.) Edinburgh and London, 1796.

and feelings much deeper than custom and independent of nationality. Perhaps you will find some version of the legend in every European literature. The tale is laid in the time of the Crusades; a maiden betrothed to a Crusader despairs upon finding that he does not return from the Holy Wars; and supposing him to be dead she upbraids heaven for having treated her unjustly. But, in the dead of the night, she hears the voice of her lover at the door and, looking out, sees him standing there in full armour. He says, "I have come for you;—to-night is our bridal night. But we have a long way to go. Be quick; dress yourself and come down." She descends the stairs and finds a great black horse standing at the gate. The knight puts her on the horse, mounts before her, and they ride away like the wind. The speed is something terrible and unnatural; under the hoofs of the horse the stones continually flash fire. But she is not afraid because she loves. They pass a cemetery, where a dead man is about to be buried; and the knight calls out to the dead, "Come to my wedding; you can be buried just as well to-morrow." Then the dead man rises and follows the horse. Presently they pass the skeleton of a murderer hanging in chains. "Come and dance at my wedding," the knight cries; and the skeleton descends and follows the horse. Morning begins to dawn as the rider dashes into a graveyard and halts the horse at an open grave. "And here is our bridal bed," he says. Of course the girl dies of terror. In the ballad the emotions and the sights of the incident are treated with so much artistic skill that we quite forget the impossible and find ourselves alternately touched or terrified by the recital. Sir Walter Scott's version is perhaps the best in any European tongue and is especially famous for the lines, which recur almost like a burden, describing the gallop:

Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,
Splash! splash! along the sea;

as well as for the simple force of the adjectives in such verses as these:

“No room for me?” “Enough for both;—
 Speed, speed, my Barb, thy course!”
 O'er *thundering* bridge, through *boiling* surge
 He drove the *furious* horse.

The success of the little book containing this masterly ballad encouraged Sir Walter Scott to attempt a much more important publication—*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.¹

Minstrelsy of course signifies the songs or compositions of the minstrels, or wandering musicians, as well as the whole art of popular song which these represented. The collection—consisting of all the popular songs and ballads that Sir Walter Scott had been able to collect along the border-land between England and Scotland—was very well named. And it remains the most valuable book of its kind, and the most successful after Percy. Even the great modern collection edited by the late Professor Child would be a very poor collection indeed if we were to take out of it these pieces originally collected by Sir Walter Scott. The border-land between England and Scotland, as you may well suppose, teemed with traditions and songs of the old wars between the two countries; and it was chiefly through the impression obtained from this popular literature that Scott subsequently found inspiration, not only for his poetical, but for his prose romances.

The effect of this book, published in 1802, upon almost every poet of the first rank in the 19th century literature has been very great.

Nor did Scott content himself with collecting and translating ballads; he imitated them with astonishing success—producing ballads and songs of his own, some of which will probably live quite as long as the ancient ones. Some of these—and the best of them—are scattered through the pages of his later works. Others were contributed to Lewis' *Tales of Wonder* such as *Glenfinlas* (the most terrible ghost story of its kind to be found in ballad form), *The Eve of St. John*, *The Gray Brother*, *The Fire-King*, and a number of others.

¹ *Minstrelsy of the Scottish border*. Vols. I and II. Kelso, 1802, Vol. III. London and Edinburgh, 1803.

But as a singer — I mean as a writer of *songs* as distinguished from ballads,—Scott was even more successful. Every English regimental band is to-day playing *Bonny Dundee* the whole world over; every English schoolboy learns how to recite *Young Lochinvar*, and I may say that almost every English girl learns how to sing *Jock of Hazeldean*. Scott was a great song writer; and if he had done nothing else but write songs he would still have been famous, yet perhaps the most wonderful of his little songs are the least talked about, such as *Proud Maisie*.

Proud Maisie is in the wood,
Walking so early;
Sweet Robin sits on the bush,
Singing so rarely.

‘Tell me, thou bonny bird,
When shall I marry me?’

‘When six braw gentlemen
Kirkward shall carry ye.’

‘Who makes the bridal bed,
Birdie, say truly?’

‘The grey-headed sexton
That delves the grave duly.

‘The glow-worm o’er grave and stone
Shall light thee steady;
The owl from the steeple sing,
“Welcome, proud lady.”’

What a weird little thing this songlet is! There are a number of things like it scattered through the novels of Sir Walter Scott.

He next began to write poetical romances of his own — romances of a new kind dealing with old Scotch or old English history, especially Border history, and written with many of the strange and beautiful or terrible old words and phrases which he had learned in his studies of peasant literature. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*¹ was the first of these, and, in the pre-

¹ *The lay of the last minstrel*, 1805.

sent lecturer's opinion, the best of all. It teems especially with the elements of the supernatural and the mediæval. *Marmion*¹ has finer passages, — such as the splendid description of the battle of Flodden; but *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* has a Gothic charm and a ghostly charm comparable only to the work of Coleridge — though less exquisitely shaped. Many others—too many—followed; not only *The Lady of the Lake*,² which is of better class, and *The Lord of the Isles*,³ containing a battle piece almost as fine as anything in *Marmion*, but also *Rokeby*⁴ and various inferior productions, which might have been more successfully treated in prose. In fact Scott did not know that he was a poet—did not think of taking the pains that men like Coleridge and Wordsworth were taking to perfect their verses. He only thought of the matter this way: “The people like stories in verse; and I can write verse nearly as easily as prose, so I shall tell them stories in verse.” He might have gone on and written the whole of the Waverley novels in verse; but an accident changed his purpose. Byron had suddenly begun to attract popularity by writing romances in very much the same kind of verse; and Sir Walter Scott imagined that he could not compete as a poet with Byron. So he took to writing prose, and became an immortal novelist, whose work has been translated into every European language. He never knew that he was a great poet. If he had known—or rather, if he had not been too modest to know—he might have risen to a very great position in poetry. But we have no reason to regret it. He would always have done beautiful things of a certain kind in verse; but the loss of his prose would have been irreparable to literature, and there were other men able to write romances in verse. Observe, however, that although Scott took very little pains with his verse, that verse still bears the test of time; and Byron's does not.

I think that you know the sad history of this good and great man's life—how he killed himself by overwork in trying

¹ *Marmion: a tale of Flodden Field* 1808.

² *The lady of the lake: a poem.* Edinburgh, 1810.

³ *The lord of the isles; a poem in six cantos* 1815.

⁴ *Rokeby, a poem.* Edinburgh, 1813.

to pay off the enormous debts of £120,000 incurred through the fault of an unscrupulous man whom he had trusted. And I suppose you remember that this vast debt was actually paid—most of it before he died and the remainder soon afterwards.

No more honest, generous or noble-hearted man ever lived than Scott. But we need not dwell much upon his life here, as its details are very familiar. A word, however, about the peculiar form of his verse, and its history—I mean the verse of his romances.

The poetical measure is perhaps the very best possible in English for the telling of a long romance, and it is this for several reasons. It allows the poet the greatest possible amount of liberty, with the least number of rules. It is never monotonous; because the form is, or may be, varied at will. Most of it is in the measure of four iambic feet, or eight syllables; but the trochaic measure and the anapæstic measure are also used;—while the feet sometimes lengthen to five in number or shrink up to two. Moreover although the bulk of the work is in couplets—that is to say, in lines of which two or every *couple* rhyme together,—nevertheless the rhymes may be alternate as in the ballad measure, and this is frequently done.

So you will see that there are some extraordinary things about this form,—of which the best example in Scott is *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. In this form you can lengthen your line from four syllables to ten or eleven; you can use the couplet, or you can alternate the rhymes; you can change the foot from the iambic to the trochaic or anapæstic, and back again; or you can use different kinds of feet in the same line. In fact you can do almost everything that you please—on the single condition of being musical and of maintaining a certain emotional quality. That is to say, you can use any form you like, provided that you keep to *poetry*, and that the different measures that you use be of a kind which harmonize together. Of course you cannot use 16 syllable couplets very well and you cannot use blank verse—because these would not harmonize with each other in the general construction nor with octosyllabic or five foot measures. But that is all. Again there are

no stanzas; but you can make pauses wherever you please — dividing the whole thing into cantos, which correspond to chapters in prose, and dividing the cantos into parts separated by blank lines; these separations correspond to paragraphs of a chapter.

Some years ago there was an effort made by Professors and others in this University to turn the attention of the new generation of poets to new forms of verse,—or at least to such modifications of the old forms as would allow of much greater liberty in narrative poetry. I believe that the attempt was not very successful; and the form suggested did not seem to me to differ very much from forms already existing in old Japanese literature, the irregular “*naga-uta*” for example. Really I do not know enough about these things to venture any definite opinion as to the worth of the form just mentioned. But I may say this without hesitation, that I believe Japanese poets can learn something from the study of the measures used by Scott and by Coleridge much better than by the study of other forms of English verse. Here is a verse, as I tell you, which allows the line to more than double its length at will, to vary accents, to make sudden alterations of form, to bring changes upon the expression of emotion by making the tone of the utterance sink or swell; we can also strengthen them according to the sentiment of the moment. It is much more irregular than the irregular “*naga-uta*”; and it allows very much more liberty. Could such a thing be successfully attempted in Japanese poetry? It is worth while thinking about — if you have not thought about it already. But I am quite convinced now of one thing, that further advances in Japanese literature will not be made until scholars cease to despise the spoken language as a vehicle of the highest and most serious expression of thought and emotion. The 18th century in England was just as conservative in regard to what might be called the spoken language of that time; but eventually it was found that further advance could only be made by a bold return to the language of the people. And the poets that we are now talking of especially represent this fact.

But Scott did not invent the wonderful measure of which I tell you. He got it from Coleridge,—about whom we are going to talk. The first appearance of this measure is in *Christabel*.¹ Coleridge could not or did not get *Christabel* printed for many years after writing it; and then he got it printed only through the kindness of Lord Byron, who wrote to the great publisher Murray on his behalf. While the poem was still in manuscript, Coleridge used to read it to his friends; and he sometimes lent the manuscript to persons who would read it in their own literary circles. Scott, hearing *Christabel* read for the first time, at once caught the measure, and adopted it for his *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Byron imitated Scott. And Coleridge, the inventor of the new form, was not able to use it in print until those who learned its form had already made fortunes out of it. This is a good example of the injustice of circumstances—though not an example of the injustice of men, for both Scott and Byron helped Coleridge in every way they could.

Well, as Coleridge first invented the measure, it is better we should illustrate it by an example from *Christabel* than by any example from Scott. Just take the opening lines of the poem for a brief example:

'Tis the mid | dle of night | by the cas | tle clock, |
 And the owls | have awak | ened the crow | ing cock; |
 Tu—whit! | —Tu—whoo! |
 And hark, | again! | the crow | ing cock, |
 How drow | sily | it crew. |

Now mark the extraordinary irregularity at the very beginning—I do not mean merely the irregularity in the length of the line, which varies from four syllables to eleven, but in the measure. The first line is anapæstic except in the last foot, which is iambic. The same is the case with the second line. The third short line of four syllables, the fourth line of eight,

¹ *Christabel* [Composed 1797] 1816.

and the fifth line of six, are all iambic. I might show you in another quotation a sudden change to the trochee; but that will not be necessary. You will perceive well enough how very great is the liberty allowed to the narrative poet in so varying a meter as this. But how musical the effect! That is the apology for any and every form. What does it matter whether a form be according to old rules or to new rules if you can produce a beautiful effect with it? If that American eccentric Whitman had been able to produce a beautiful effect we could not justly condemn his form, but the trouble with such men is that they have neither the power to produce the effect of music nor the power to produce emotional beauty. Not Coleridge!

How did Coleridge invent this measure?

Here let me remind you that the student of literature must be as careful about using the word "invent" as the student of science. This word is very frequently and very wrongfully used in the sense of "to create"—to make something out of nothing or to manufacture something out of one's own head, somewhat as a spider manufactures a thread out of the contents of her own belly. The word "create" does belong to literature, but only as referring to real creations of the brain,—dreams of persons or of incidents such as Shakespeare's mind could and did actually manufacture. But, otherwise, please to remember that the Latin verb *inventare* from which our "invent" comes signifies only to find, to discover, and in the true sense the literary inventor is only a discoverer. For literature is an evolutionary growth; and the poet does not create it at all: he can only discover something new about the possible arrangement of forms already existing. Where did Coleridge get this measure from?—that is the real meaning of my question.

He got it from the old ballads and popular songs. I do not mean that he found in any old ballads and songs the same variation of meter, the same changes of line. He did not find these in any one ballad or song, but he found them all in different songs, in different ballads, in different kinds of poetry. Then he amused himself by joining different varieties discovered in this way, by combining them and recombining them,

much as a child plays with wooden blocks. Putting some of the different songs together he found that the effect was bad or unsatisfactory ; putting other forms together he found that very pretty effects could be obtained. And making at last a mosaic work of different ballad measures and song measures he discovered the form of *Christabel*.

I sometimes imagine that a Japanese poet might do very much the same thing. Listening, as I often do, to the songs of children, and the songs of soldiers, and the songs of the peasants walking beside their burden horses, I think to myself that there are suggestions in all these greatly varying melodies for a future Japanese Coleridge. The words, too, fit the times so well in many cases that I cannot but imagine it some day possible to produce new tonic effects in some yet undiscovered form of Japanese stanza. I know that many will answer, "Oh, the effect of those songs is altogether due to the music, not to the measure and accent of the line!" I suppose that is true ; but there is another truth worth thinking about. *The real art of the poet is to make words sing!* That is at least in all Western poetry. By the phrase "to make words sing" I mean to put words together in such a way that as you read them you cannot help singing them in your mind : they force you to think of music ;— they really sing. And I believe that Japanese words can be made to sing in yet unknown ways.

WORDSWORTH

The Lake School owes its name to the fact that its chief representative Wordsworth¹ happened to live near the Lake at Grasmere—a very beautiful place ; and that his sympathizers, like Coleridge and Southey, spent some time there with him. The appellation has nothing to do with the poetry of the group at all ; the great poet of the lakes was really Sir Walter Scott, who did not belong to Wordsworth's school at all.

¹ William Wordsworth (1770-1850).

Wordsworth is not in any sense an attractive personality. He was the son of a lawyer, and was educated at Cambridge—being the only member of the Law School who took a degree. Still he did not distinguish himself at study. Obtaining through relatives a very small annuity, he went to live in the country with his sister and resolved to devote his entire life to poetry, regardless of comfort. He must have been a man of very great determination; for nobody could ever resolve to be a poet under more discouraging circumstances. He had only about one hundred pounds a year to support himself upon; and he was an old man before his books began to obtain any kind of attention from the public. Yet he never flinched. For pleasure he certainly had no natural disposition. His was a cold, dry, ascetic nature—hard and selfish, with very little feeling or sympathy for others,—but with a natural inclination towards contemplation, and a love of nature that had in it a good deal of religious feeling, probably inherited. Wordsworth would have been a good monk. His whole nature, even his love of natural scenery was ecclesiastical rather than anything else; and we must acknowledge that it was a nature in many respects deficient, atrophied. But if he had the faults of the monk, he had also the strong resolve and self-mastery of the monk; and it was this that enabled him to do so much. Nothing is more remarkable than the curious mixture of influences that made him a poet. The religious side of him had been completely captivated by Milton; and Milton he studied very hard for the grand and serious qualities of verse. On the other hand his love of nature had been charmed by the work of Percy,—in the old ballad,—and by the poetry of Burns. Percy's collection no doubt inspired him with the early idea of the *Lyrical Ballads*,¹—even to the title of the book. He wanted to attempt new poetry in two widely different styles. He divulged his plans to Coleridge; and Coleridge seconded him in the enterprise,—even to the extent of contributing to the first book. The plan was this. One serious poem was to be written as

¹ *Lyrical ballads, with a few other poems* 1798. *Lyrical ballads with other poems* 2 vols, 1800.

simply as the old ballad or as simply as Burns' song; and this class was to describe common human life with its pleasure and pain. The other class of poems was later to be written in song and serious verse,—verse serious as that of Milton; but the subject was to be the feeling produced upon the imagination and the heart by nature. Such were Wordsworth's purposes after having left his University; and from these purposes he never departed until the end of his long life. Always he was trying to write very simply about real life, objective life, and very grandly about subjective life. Those ideas alone show you that his range was of necessity limited. And he never quite succeeded in either direction. A vast portion of his verse is simply unreadable; and no matter what critics may say about it, it cannot be read without extreme weariness and provocation. A small proportion of his work is very beautiful—so beautiful that it were hard to praise it overmuch; but this does not really represent what Wordsworth hoped to do; it represents something which he did do in spite of himself. And you must pick out the beauties of Wordsworth from the nonsense and rubbish of Wordsworth exactly as a gold-washer separates the grains of metal from the mass of sand.

In our own time a scholar and genius named Stephen (James K.) has very fairly expressed in some cruel but very witty lines the present literary opinion of Wordsworth:—

Two voices are there: one is of the deep;
 It learns the storm-cloud's thunderous melody,
 Now roars, now murmurs with the changing sea,
 Now bird-like pipes, now closes soft in sleep:
 And one is of an old half-witted sheep
 Which bleats articulate monotony,
 And indicates that two and one are three,
 That grass is green, lakes damp, and mountains steep:
 And, Wordsworth, both are thine: at certain times,
 Forth from the heart of thy melodious rhymes
 The form and pressure of high thoughts will burst:
 At other times—good Lord! I'd rather be
 Quite unacquainted with the A.B.C.
 Than write such hopeless rubbish as thy worst.

Of course the lines which close this wicked but truthful wit are in imitation of Wordsworth's famous sonnet,

The world is too much with us—

of which a few verses are often quoted :

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn:
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn.

Really I do not know any better criticism of Wordsworth than the mocking sonnet of Stephen complains; for it gives large praise as well as ridicule, — and this is exactly what Wordsworth deserves. There was a time when he was much more ridiculed—the time when Reynolds wrote his famous parody called *Peter Bell: a Lyrical Ballad*, containing such lines as these:—

He mutters ever, 'W. W.,'
Never more will trouble you, trouble you.

And when the world first read the original *Peter Bell*, it indeed made up its mind not to read anything more by W. W. Happily things were to change, and the first follies of the *Lyrical Ballads* were to be succeeded by verse so splendid that the world can easily forgive all the dulness for the sake of these few beauties.

I say "few," because the really grand things of Wordsworth can be put into a very small book indeed. You will find them nearly all in the anthologies, where they represent scarcely more than a hundred pages. But Wordsworth has given more than ten times a hundred pages—I may say fully 2,000 pages of small type of verse. Even in the one volume Macmillan edition—two columns a page—the mass of his poetry considerably exceeds that of Tennyson. But of Tennyson, there is scarcely a line which cannot be called exquisite; and in Wordsworth there is very little that we can even call true poetry. So that we have here a most extraordinary phenomenon—flashes of incomparable beauty from a mind ordinarily

barren and dull, and below the average. There is scarcely any poetry finer than are bits of *The Excursion*, the lines of *Tintern Abbey*, the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* (notwithstanding its errors of imagination), *The Daffodils*, *The Affliction of Margaret*, *We are Seven*, *Westminster Bridge*, and *In King's College Chapel, Cambridge*—poems of great variety in form and feeling. But they are oases in a desert. We must suppose that except at moments of extraordinary emotion the deeper feeling of Wordsworth could not find expression. Ordinarily he wrote by theory and by rule—made poetry a mechanic exercise. Yet through the thick chest of his dulness an impression would occasionally force its way to depth of character undivined, — and then true poetry would leap out of him, like water from an Artesian well.

What did he give to English literature that made him great after his death?—what was the particular quality in his work that made him an influence? As for poetical form, he gave us nothing new. Of invention he had absolutely nothing. His rare merit is not in novelty of fact or thought; it is in novelty of feeling. Before his time there was plenty of the expression of the love of nature; but it was an expression of a purely sensuous thought—a mere record of visual and auditory impression. Other poets told you that they saw mountains, woods, and streams, and how beautiful they thought mountains, woods and streams were. But Wordsworth did more than this—did what is one of the most difficult things in this world to do; he explained his own innermost feelings, — and those feelings were the feelings of a *pantheist*.

But do not mistake my use of this term. Wordsworth was only unconsciously pantheistic. Had he been accused of pantheism, he would have been very much shocked and frightened. He was a most conventional Christian, and thought it necessary to make an apology for writing his ode on intimations of immortality of soul—because in that one he has spoken of the soul as having existed possibly before the body. Nevertheless his feeling towards nature was pantheistic, just as we find the same feeling to be in the great German poet. He felt the unity

of life—in the flowers, the birds, the life of setting sun, the mind of man—in all the sorrow and joy of the world;—and he called this all-embracing life God; but it was not the God of the old-fashioned Christianity. It was the Supreme Life that had revealed itself to Wordsworth—feeling himself with a new ecstasy, inspiring him with new poetry and making him sometimes afraid to utter what he thought without great caution of expression. Now the natural tendency of a monotheistic faith, enlarging under the influence of later knowledge, is toward pantheistic; and a good deal of the highest form of cultivated Christianity is indistinguishable from pantheism. A fine tone of pantheistic sentiment colours everything in the work of Tennyson, for example, — although he would not have acknowledged himself a pantheist. The same feeling touches a great deal of Victorian poetry and Victorian prose. But in Wordsworth's day, the feeling was almost new to Englishmen. It was he that first expressed in English poetry what we may call the artistic pantheism — the highest emotional expression of the spirit of nature as a kind of Holy Ghost. During his lifetime, which was long, Wordsworth had little attention. He became poet laureate; but the fact did not help to sell his books. After his death, matters changed. Slowly and steadily his works began to “take” with the public, until at last these developed what has been called a “Wordsworth craze” — that is admiration pushed to foolish extreme. To-day there is a natural reaction, and Wordsworth is less liked. But some of his poems must always be prized; and his influence in 19th century literature must be recognized as even greater than the merits of his work would presuppose.

COLERIDGE

Let us now speak of Coleridge.¹ Coleridge was the son of a clergyman,—nicely cared for in his childhood, but peculiarly

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834).

unfitted to cope with the difficulties of life by reason of delicate health. In his childhood everything seemed to go to brain, and very little to make body. He was all mind, all fancy, all imagination—very sensitive and very sickly. When he was at last sent away to a public school, he found school life very difficult. Even when he was less than six years old his little school-fellows made him a butt for ill-treatment and ridicule. In higher schools, he remained almost always alone. Though very amiable, he could not make himself liked by his comrades—partly because he did not join in their games which were too rough for him, and partly because his thoughts were always running upon subjects in which they were not interested. Fancy a little boy of fourteen or fifteen spending all his time in the study of metaphysics—I do not mean English—metaphysics of the ancient world, the works of Plato and neo-Platonists, and together with these the works of such writers of the early Christian world as Synesius! and the boy was reading these and translating them from the original Greek. On the other hand Coleridge was extraordinarily distinguished as a student. Though he seemed only a fool in the playground, he was forever first in the class room. Eventually he was picked out with two or three other extraordinary students for a special training and fitting for a special course of study at the University. Students thus selected and honoured come under the particular training of a particular master, and he looks after them in every way, mentally, morally,—and, in Coleridge's time, physically. He trained their minds, corrected their morals and inflicted severe pain upon their bodies occasionally by way of correction. Coleridge, perhaps, needed correction. It was while receiving this special education that he began to do certain extraordinary things which marked him out as an eccentric of the bewildering kind. For example, one day, he took it into his head that he would rather be a shoemaker than a student, and he induced the shoemaker in the neighbourhood of the college to go to the director and ask him to let Coleridge immediately become his apprentice. This made the master so angry that he beat the shoemaker and I

need scarcely add that Coleridge also got a beating. Later on he wanted to become something else, equally extraordinary; but he did not get into serious trouble until one day, after having read Voltaire, he went to the master and told him that he wished to become an infidel. You must remember that Coleridge was being educated for the Church. He was then very severely flogged. Somehow or other he got through the school in spite of his queer ways, taking all the honours as he went; and he landed successfully in Cambridge University. There also he quickly became distinguished, but there also he did very curious things; and the University was not quite so forgiving as the master of the school had been. However they did show a certain amount of consideration for him. He ran away from the University and enlisted under a false name, as a soldier in a cavalry regiment; and he was a soldier for almost six months before being discovered and helped out of his difficulty by friends. As a soldier he was very bad; he could not ride a horse properly and he could not do the work that every soldier was expected to do; but he talked to his fellow soldiers so cleverly and pleased them so much that they used to do the work for him—and he thus escaped a great deal of punishment. Eventually after a public reprimand he was readmitted to the University; but he left it without taking his degree. I have said this much about him only because a great deal of his literary history cannot be understood without a knowledge of his character.

The whole of the great *original* work done by this man consists of less than 2,500 lines. *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* together represent 2,100 lines; and there are only two other pieces of the first class, — *Kubla Khan* and *Love*. Either of these could be printed on one page. And it is by this very small quantity of poetry that Coleridge is great. He did indeed do some wonderful things in translating; but translations seldom put a poet into the first class, and they do not influence native literature very often. You may ask why Coleridge wrote only about 2,400 lines of poetry. But before answering this question, observe another fact: all of these poems

are dreams — not pictures of real life, and the greatest two, *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*, were never finished. For leaving *Kubla Khan* unfinished, there is a very good reason; but for leaving *Christabel* unfinished, there is no reason at all of a justifiable kind. The fact is that Coleridge remained helpless all his life, could never earn his living. I might say that he never made any money; certainly we may say that he never tried very hard to make money. He lived entirely upon his friends, sometimes living with them until they got tired of him; sometimes borrowing money from them. Before his death he had made nearly every body who knew him very angry with him. And the reason was—opium. From early manhood he had become a victim of opium, and with his very delicate health, such indulgence almost destroyed his powers of work.

English literature has two great names which are names of opium-eaters. Coleridge is one; the other is his contemporary De Quincey. De Quincey was better able, however, than Coleridge to fulfil the duties of existence. He worked hard and successfully. Coleridge could only work at rare moments.

Very few men could impose upon their friends as Coleridge did; and this requires explanation. No man was more fascinating, more sympathetic, more strangely eloquent and strangely caressing in his manner than Coleridge. He was so gentle, so agreeable, so affectionate in his manner that it was almost impossible to refuse him anything; and he was furthermore the most delightful of companions. Just as in the barracks he had been able to charm the soldiers and to persuade them to do his own work for him, so in the literary world, he was able to charm all his acquaintances into helping him pecuniarily and otherwise. Nor can we regret this fact altogether; for Coleridge, while imposing upon men of letters, was able to influence the literary art of nearly everybody that he met. He greatly influenced Wordsworth, Scott, Southey, and indirectly Byron, Shelley and Keats. He gave them all new ideas; he gave some of them new forms. And they continued to admire his mind even when they were obliged to forbid his visits. His

great fault was helplessness. He never could have been an unkind husband or father; but his wife could not live with him. He gave her nothing to eat. That is, in brief, the story of Coleridge. But having stated it, let us reconsider his influence in poetry.

Already I told you about the new form of poetry that he invented, which Scott and Byron at once adopted. But he also affected poetry very considerably through his astonishing skill in playing with ballad-measure—especially the common octosyllabic, or eight-syllable form. This is the basis of *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*; and the changes which he introduced in the use of meter are as beautiful as they are surprising. Here again he changes the place of rhymes—makes the four-line stanza occasionally in a five-line stanza,—and introduces leonine rhymes; that is, makes two rhymes follow each other in the same line, as in

We were the *first* that ever *burst*
Into that silent sea.

In all his work he also carefully introduced a new element, a new idea of artistic *irregularity*—careful study of ways and means to avoid monotony of any kind. He made English poetry much more free and flexible than it had ever been since the time of Elizabeth; but he introduced beauties of melodies and variety which the Elizabethan did not know. And I may also remind you that he was very influential as a prose-poetry writer. Here he followed in the steps of Blake; but he greatly excelled Blake by his *Wanderings of Cain*. Unfortunately, this too is only the fragment of a dream; but there is nothing in English prose superior to it, and it has had a great deal of influence upon the prose romance of the Victorian period. But we cannot here speak of Coleridge either as a philosopher nor as an essayist; we are concerned only with his poetry.

Now observe one thing about all the poets of the school so far considered: Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge—none of them followed classic subjects. They did not attempt any imitation of the Latin nor of the Greek writers, their inspiration was

chiefly from old popular literature, and the romance of the Middle Ages. The fourth, and last of this school, was equally opposed to classic models; he took, however, Oriental subjects for his chief themes—I mean Robert Southey.

ROBERT SOUTHEY

Southey¹ was a very great scholar and a very hard worker. If we except Defoe, it would be hard to mention any Englishman who wrote so much as Robert Southey. At no moment of his life did he allow himself to be idle. When he took a walk into the country, he walked with a book in his hand; when he sat down to eat, a book was always opened before him beside his place. He wrote so much that all of it could not be published; but the astonishing thing is that he always wrote well. He was an Oxford man; the others, excepting Scott, being Cambridge men. The character of Southey can be well compared even with that of Sir Walter Scott. Inferior to Scott in genius, he was quite equal to him in nobility of disposition, and may be called one of the best men of letters that any country ever produced. I will not tell you now the details of his friendships with Wordsworth and Coleridge, his pranks in boyhood, his travels in Spain and Portugal, his generosity to struggling men of letters, his domestic joys and sorrows and his sad death from over-work. But his place in poetry needs to be well explained to you.

I told you of what Coleridge did in freeing English poetry from old restraints. Southey wanted to do still more than that—in the direction of form. Southey wanted to do away with rhyme altogether. I do not mean that he wanted everything to be written in classical blank verse. No. He proposed a new form of blank verse, quite as irregular and elastic as the rhymed measure invented by Coleridge. The result was very strange; but it was not without a certain beauty and dignity.

¹ Robert Southey (1774-1843).

The best way in which I can explain to you what this kind of verse looks like is to tell you that it looks like a grand inscription on a tombstone. Western inscriptions (and remember there is a special literary form used for inscriptions), modelled after Greek and Roman inscriptions for the most part, present to the eye a series of horizontal lines of different length, often so arranged as to give us the form of a great vase of something of the kind. Such forms of inscription may be called monumental or marmoreal (marble-like in more senses than one). The shape suggested is often just such a shape as we find in old classic marble monuments or in the great marble urns placed in ancient cemeteries. But Southey did not copy this form of verse from any literature of epitaphs, though the appearance of the poetry might lead us to imagine this. He got it partly from the study of the poet Cowley and of another poet of the 18th century called Sayers — both of whom had tried to imitate in English verse the Greek form of verse used in the grand *Odes* of Pindar. And all this was a mistake. The *Odes* of Pindar are not written in irregular verse at all, but are composed upon a method so complicated and so exquisitely artistic that in the 18th century there was scarcely anybody (except perhaps Gray) learned enough to understand it. Nevertheless Cowley and Sayers and Dryden, above all, wrote irregular forms of verse which they thought to be in the style of Pindar and they called this Pindaric verse. Dryden's ode to *St. Cecilia's Day* is an example of the idea. The idea is wrong. But even the mistake produced some fine effects, and Southey imagined that it would be possible to write a whole romance in a kind of false Pindaric verse. It was possible—because he actually did it and his verse often looks like inscriptions upon monuments in consequence. Let me give you a short example.

Cold! cold! 'tis a chilly clime
 That the youth in his journey hath reach'd,
 And he is aweary now,
 And faint for lack of food.
 Cold! cold! there is no Sun in heaven,
 A heavy and uniform cloud

Overspreads the face of the sky,
 And the snows are beginning to fall.
 Dost thou wish for thy deserts, O Son of Hodeirah?
 Dost thou long for the gales of Arabia?
 Cold! cold! his blood flows languidly,
 His hands are red, his lips are blue.
 His feet are sore with the frost.
 Cheer thee! cheer thee! Thalaba!
 A little yet bear up!

If we added a few more lines as the poet actually does, we should find the quotation taking the form of a vase, pedestal and all. From this kind of freedom, to the absurdity of Walt Whitman, is only a short step. But Southey never takes that step. He preserved certain limits of measure, certain dignified forms, certain laws of rhythm and proportion; and he produces very fine effect. You may say that this is not poetry; but if you make the test of scanning it you will find that it is poetry—that every line has a certain well-arranged number of feet. It is only blank verse of irregular length, put together after a plan invented partly by Southey, partly by the poet Cowley and the imitators or would-be imitators of Pindaric verse. Southey wanted to do away with rhyme; but after all he had to come back to it. In a later poem he used rhyme with this irregular verse; and the result was fine. I refer to *The Curse of Kehama*.¹

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**,

¹ *The curse of Kehama* 1810, 1818.

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 ;
 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.

This famous curse, which English schoolboys used to learn by heart and repeat for pastime in the last generation, is a very good example of the fine effect that Southey could produce with rhymed irregular verse. But when Southey put rhyme in his verse—what was really gained? I mean what advance did this represent in the direction of freer form of English poetry? Just exactly nothing at all! The most irregular of Southey's, irregular rhymed verse cannot compare with the free measure of Coleridge either as to liberty or musical effect. So as an innovator Southey could not and did not influence English poetry—though his experiments were worth making, and were admirable in their way. He tried irregular blank verse; and could not produce anything really new in effect. He tried irregular rhymed verse and could not advance beyond Coleridge. Such experiments are not rightly to be attempted a second time. But for all that, Southey was by nature a good poet, as well as by training a good scholar; and his poetry must not be despised. Indeed, a great deal of it has been undeservedly forgotten—though some of it must always live.

The forgotten part, or at least the part now seldom read, includes four long compositions of a very curious and, I still think, highly interesting kind. Southey made a tremendous plan for a new series of poetical romances—a plan too large to

be carried out by any one man, unless indeed the work were very carelessly done. He proposed to embody the whole poetry of the different great religions of the world in a series of romantic narratives. The religion of the Arabs was to be the subject of one romance;—the religions of India were to furnish the subject of another romance;—the religion of ancient Mexico was to inspire a third romance,—Scandinavian and Northern mythologies were to be represented in a fourth; mediæval Christianity might be expressed in a fifth and so on. The astonishment is that Southey did produce three of these proposed narratives. The first *Thalaba the Destroyer*¹ contains all the wildest fancies of the Persian and Arabian story-tellers; and as a poem it is certainly a success. Still greater, as a romance, is *The Curse of Kehama*—based upon the study of Indian religion and superstition, and of Indian philosophy—at that time very little known in England. None of the great Indian system—the six schools of philosophy—were then clearly understood; nor had Sanscrit studies made any great progress. No system of satisfactory transliteration had yet been agreed upon; and different scholars would spell Indian names in very different ways. Southey's spelling of Indian names is quite amusing to one who is to-day acquainted with *The Sacred Books of the East*. But Southey took the spelling from the books of the old pioneers in Indian studies,—just as he took most of his Arabian material from D'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, a book now known only as a great curiosity. Semitic as well as Indian studies have so much progressed since Southey's time that nearly all the sources of his poetic material have now become useless. But imagination saves the poetry in spite of this fact. We do not care whether Southey's mythology is right or wrong, nor whether his proper names are correctly or incorrectly spelled, because he is telling us a wonderful story in a wonderful way. Very fine, for example, is the chapter where Kehama, after having, by magical religious practices, conquered the kingdom of heaven and all the religions of earth, proceeds to

¹ *Thalaba the destroyer (a metrical romance)* 2 vols. 1801. 2nd edn, 1809. 3rd edn, 1814.

subdue the kingdom of Hell and Death—the kingdom of Yama, as we spell the name to-day: Southey spelled it “Yamen.” Kehama knows that the kingdom of Death has eight gates. He multiplies himself eight times, breaks through the eight gates of Hell at once, drives down the eight roads at once, making bridges grow before him over the rivers of fire, and, at last, *surrounding* Yama, he attacks him at once from eight directions. These legends of magical power are no doubt familiar to you, and you will be all the better able to appreciate the power and skill with which Southey used such material. You may find that the sentiment and mythology are all wrong, but that does not make any difference. The work is both great and good.

So we must think of Southey as generously in this regard as we think of Chaucer. Who cares now whether Chaucer’s Greek stories and Roman stories are or are not historically correct? What we love in them, as he tells them, is the beautiful study of character—English character—that he gives. And in Southey’s Oriental studies we can also find something to love and respect. A great moral idea forms the chief motive of each. In *Thalaba* the great moral motive is Duty. In *Kehama* it is Courage—a really astonishing conception of Southey’s own. He is teaching us that even a God, armed with all power to destroy, cannot conquer the spirit of one brave man. The third great romance, *Madoc*,¹ dealing with Aztec mythology, is less pleasing, and less well carried out; but there are fine passages in it; and the central idea is Love. The fourth great romance *Roderick*,² a story of mediæval Spain, is more successful than *Madoc*—though less interesting than the Oriental studies in regard to imaginative display. Here the motive is Atonement—the brave resolve of a king to do every thing in his power to redress an error of youth. I am almost certain that in some future time these long poems of Southey will again come into favour and will be given a higher place in literature than they ever received before. The English is too

¹ *Madoc* 1805. 2 vols. 1815. 1825.

² *Roderick, the last of the Goths* 1814. 2nd edn, 2 vols. 1815. Also 1818, 1826.

beautiful, and imagination too fine, to admit of their becoming utterly forgotten.

As poet laureate Southey composed an immense variety of poems upon an immense variety of subjects. I shall only mention two subjects in which he continues famous. One is the ballad. Southey's ballads—at least the best of them cannot die; notwithstanding the fact that he never polished them. He never tried to make exquisite ballads like Tennyson or like Rossetti. His idea was to write a ballad exactly as professional ballad writers wrote; and you know that professional ballad writers are not highly educated men. But, without any polish, Southey's ballads remain popular even among good critics and among men of letters generally. Southey knew how to make readers tremble or weep or laugh with very simple words. As an example of the weird quality, mixed with deep pathos, we have for example the ballad of *Lord William*. As an example of the grotesquely terrible, there is no modern ballad better than *The Old Woman of Berkeley*. And as an example of merely legendary ballad *The Inchcape Rock* or *Bishop Hatto* would, either of them, take a high place. Finally I need not praise to you that wonderful little thing *The Battle of Blenheim*, which can at once delight the child, and yet set the philosopher thinking.

The other subject in which Southey made himself famous as a writer of light verse is rhyme-play. He delighted to play with rhyme and produce nonsensical jingling effects with them, merely for the delight of children. And in this respect he had a very peculiar talent. If you have not read, for example, *The Cataract of Ladore*, you ought to read it for fun. It was written to amuse his own children—one of whom had asked him how the water fell at the great Ladore cataract. And he replied in wonderful verses, containing no less than 162 different present-participles each describing a different appearance of the water. Another celebrated example is *The March of Moscow*. Here Southey, recounting the defeat of the French by the Russians, plays strange tricks with Russian names—tricks that amuse us less to-day than formerly, but that will always amuse children:—

There was Tormazow and Jemalow,
 And all the others that end in "ow ;"
 Milarodovitch and Jaladovitch
 And Karatschkowitch,
 And all the others that end in "itch ;"
 Schoamscheff, Souchosanef, f,
 And Schepaleff,
 And all the others that end in "eff ;"
 Wasiltschikoff, Kostomaroff
 And Tchoglokoff,
 And all the others that end in "off."

These are the names of the Russian generals and officers ;
 and he tells us what they did to the French :—

And Platoff he played them off,
 And Shouvaloff he shovelled them off,
 And Markoff he marked them off,
 And Krosnoff he crossed them off, . . .
 And Boroskoff he bored them off,
 Kutousoff he cut them off, . . .
 And Worrnozoff he worried them off,
 And Doctoroff he doctored them off, etc.

Of course you may say that this is mere nonsense : but it is nonsense that requires great talent to write well, and good nonsense takes a real place in the literature of every country. Southey could not change English verse ; Coleridge had done that too well. But Southey did change English taste in a certain way. He was the first poet of the century who really turned the attention of the general reader to the romance of the East. Prose writers had begun to do this even at the end of the 18th century. But Southey was certainly the first poet who made Oriental poetry—I mean poetry on Oriental subjects—really popular. For you must remember that Southey's books were very popular at one time. In this way English literature must regard him as a pioneer. A new interest in the subject, but of a much less serious kind, was to be aroused by the Oriental romances of the new school—by the romances of Byron and Moore.

THE SECOND ROMANTIC SCHOOL

We now come to the history of the so-called Satanic School and its relation. The four poets of the first group, so I have told you before, were in their writings most rigidly moral. Indeed it has been said, even by good critics, that they were too moral, too timid to deal with the deeper passions and tragedies of human life. But, by a compensatory process, the other school were decidedly immoral in a certain sense—at least two of them were. Moralists may regret this fact; preachers may preach about it—but it was really a very good thing for English literature. Poetry has been too much restrained by ethical and social conventions;—somebody was needed to break down those conventions, and nobody could do it without greatly offending all the prejudices of the time. Byron and Shelley did both. But let me say that so far as their poetical production is concerned, the charge of immorality would not be tolerated by any man of letters. I mean that there is nothing really bad either in the writings of Byron nor in the writings of Shelley—nothing bad at all. Such is the literary judgment. But from a religious point of view and conventional and social point of view, they are not so judged by a certain people. Remember, however, that *literary judgment* must be without prejudice; and if we leave mere English convention out of the question, there is nothing in Byron or in Shelley to be called really bad. In our own time much worse things are written every year by members of the French Academy; and if either Byron or Shelley had been Frenchmen nobody would have anything bad to say about their work from a moral point of view.

It is quite otherwise in the case of their lives. These cannot be defended, either from a literary or from any other point of view. But we may find certain excuses—especially in the case of Byron.

BYRON

You cannot understand his poetry or the history of his poetry without knowing the tragedy of his existence;—and we must speak of him first—as he was the leader of the new movement—the second romantic wave which passed over the previously sleepy surface of English poetry.

Very briefly, then, let us say that Byron¹ was born in 1788, and died in 1824—so that the whole of his career was compressed into the brief space of 36 years. Within that time he travelled much and studied much—wrote the most successful poems of the century—was a member of Parliament for a little time—turned away from poetry to take part in the Greek movement for independence, and proved himself a good military organizer in the service of the country to which he gave his life. This alone would not have been much for any man to do even within a shorter space of time. But you must remember that Byron really wrote all his poetry very quickly—at sudden intervals, and that much of the rest of the time at his disposal he wasted in pleasure seeking. Again, the latter part of his existence was filled with bitterness. Socially he was outlawed—driven out of England by public opinion. Considering these facts what he actually did in literature seems amazing. Indeed, I need scarcely tell you the minor details of his biography. You know that he had inherited good blood as well as some bad blood; that he was very passionate and very generous; that he had much more of what we might call the Celtic than of the English temperament. He was all impulse; and his impulse was natural toward good and beautiful things. But, as I told you, the strain of bad blood must not be forgotten; and so passionate a man could be impelled toward wrong without very much difficulty. A separation from his wife—of which no mortal man really knows the history—caused society to turn against him. Society took the part of the woman without knowing. this injustice, with the only possible result

¹ George Gordon, sixth Baron Byron (1788-1824)

of strengthening the power of public opinion against him. A single man might as well try to move the whole range of the Himalaya mountains as to try to fight English society when it has declared war. So Byron was practically forced out of England; and he determined recklessly to be what he had before been falsely accused of being. They had said that he was a rake—now he should be a rake. They had said that he was an immoral scoundrel—now he would really be a scoundrel and defy all moral criticism. At heart he could not be supremely bad; but he tried to be very bad for a few years, merely to vex people—after which he resolved to be noble and good. And he was both noble and good thereafter; but he had already greatly injured his body by excesses, and he easily fell a prey to fever in the best years of his youth. There is the whole history. It deserves blame. It also calls for sympathy. Englishmen now do not hesitate to acknowledge that Byron was unjustly treated.—The question of his poetry next concerns us. That poetry was everything which the poetry of the Lake School had not been, and it was also something more. It openly mocked all conventions that society loved and that Byron hated; it even mocked at common notions of morality, it preached revolt against rigid beliefs and fixed rules of every kind—and yet it delighted people. There was something more in it than the spirit of revolt—a new spirit of tolerance, a large sense of indulgence for human weakness. And English literature needed this—needed somebody to proclaim that thousands of things in this world ought to be pitied rather than hated, and that want of generosity, want of kindness, may be in itself much wickeder than any of the errors which it condemns. He attacked hypocrisy and cant of every sort; and he did it so well that sensible people could forgive him for occasional mockery of a less pardonable kind. And he created sympathy in all his poems for some imaginary hero or demi-god or adventurer or renegade, represented in rebellion against law and order—yet for all that in nowise really bad at heart. People said that these characters were just so many pictures of Byron himself—which is probably true. They can be criticized from many

points of view. But they gave to English literature a new element of colour, and a new quality of feeling. Apart from the mere question of poetic value Byron's verses deserve the gratitude of literature, simply because they helped to give literature a kind of freedom never enjoyed before—at least not in England.

It would scarcely be possible for you to understand the facts stated in the last paragraph without some little explanation. It will puzzle you to understand how a man can be driven out of a country by public opinion and yet become the most popular of all men of letters in that same country. To understand this, you must understand very clearly what is meant by the English word "society." Society signifies the aristocratic class of wealth and power, holding in its hand every important position to which a man can aspire in political or higher social life. It is a very small class. It can make and unmake the fortune of any man that belongs to it. It can shut all the doors of high position to any man whom it dislikes. The higher offices of the state, the army, the navy, the church, the civil service, the great educational interests, are in its control. But, as I said, it is a small thing as to numbers;—it by no means represents the nation. And it has nothing to do with literature or with art—except to patronize them. Society may help an artist—which it very seldom does; but it cannot prevent a man of genius from expressing his genius; and you cannot make the nation refuse to admire his work. It is no use to say that the work of such a man ought not to be admired because society does not like him. This was the case of Byron. Society banished Byron; and society would have put all his books into the fire if possible; but, happily, that was not possible and the great critics could not be frightened into declaring that the books were not worth reading. The great public judges such matters quite independently of society. You would have to imagine, for a parallel case, some young scholar of Tokyo, who, having given offense to some member of an aristocratic family, should suddenly find the whole power of Government silently turned against him. He might find it very disagreeable to live

in Tokyo; but if he should have the power to talk to the millions of people in print,—to talk to them about things that they love, or that amuse them, he might always remain as an author, a popular favourite in spite of all social obstacles. Byron even did more. He made the great mass of the nation sympathize with him.

A word about the peculiar class of poets which he represents. In Italy, from old times, there has been always a class of poets who compose poetry, whenever asked to do so, immediately — not writing it, but speaking it, composing as fast as they can speak, making perfectly correct verse, rhymes and all, and pronouncing it just as if they were reading from a book. To-day this art is practised chiefly among the lower classes; but in old times it used to be practised by great scholars. Such wonderful men were called “improvisatori”—that is to say, improvisators; to improvise is to compose immediately without preparation. Now the early 19th century witnessed something very like this in the case of two of their poets. They were not exactly in the habit of doing what the Italian improvisatori did;—they did not make their poetry in public; but they showed the same astounding faculty in off-hand compositions. Scott was essentially an improvisator, in the fact that he wrote his political romances off-hand, as other men would write prose, and also in the fact that he composed many of his best things while riding on horseback. Byron was a still greater improvisator—the greatest in all English literature—though his work is more defective than that of Scott. No other poet ever wrote so much, in so many different forms of verse, in so many different kinds of compositions without study—without preparation—without correction—without even caring to read over again and to revise a great deal of the work done. For Byron is a voluminous poet; the new edition of his works, now being issued, will represent no less than 10 ample volumes. He was not only a lyric poet, but also a narrative poet, a poet of description, a dramatist of considerable range, a satirist, and a translator from various languages. But most of this work can be classed only as poetry of improvisation;

and that is why it has so many faults—faults even against grammar;—that is why Byron cannot rank with such poets as Wordsworth or Coleridge. Defective in form, nevertheless, his immediate influence was prodigious. No English poet before him had ever obtained such a hearing, nor was this hearing in England only. Byron affected every existing European literature. He influenced German literature in the case of even such men as Heine and Goethe; he influenced French literature, to the extent that the French romantic movement will always be connected with his name;—he influenced the younger literature of northern Europe as well as those of Latin countries; and even modern Russian literature owes to him not a little of the stimulus that made its awakening.

Now you must remember that Byron's poetry was known in other countries than England only through translation; and that most of the translations were in prose. In that time English was very little studied upon the Continent: it did not form a part of public education. So Byron was known in Europe chiefly through prose translations. You will see at once that his power as a poet could not have depended upon form. In one sense, the translations improved upon him;—the faults of his verse disappeared in the French and German and other prose translations. But the fact speaks for itself. If Byron could influence all European literature through prose translations, the mere faults of his verse, no more than the merits of his verse, can determine his great place in the history of literature. He was, in one way—in form—rather a great improvisator than a great poet; but his power proves to be a real power of sentiment and feeling. And, remember again, that although Byron is not now popular in England, he has never ceased to be popular in other countries. There is the proof of his real importance.

I have told you before that he brought into literature an entirely new element of feeling. He brought into it a new spirit of revolt against conventions and against shams of every kind; and he compelled the world to sympathize with the struggles of great minds resisting the old conventional and

social restraints. Poets before him had tried to make their readers sympathize chiefly with good men or good women unjustly persecuted or wronged. But Byron struck a different note: he taught the world to sympathize with what society would call bad men or bad women in revolt against established authority. He forced people to think: "Are we really right in judging such splendid persons as bad?" Then this first doubt naturally suggested another — "Are the standards of right and wrong—the standards of the 18th century—by which we have been judging everybody's conduct, just and correct?" And when you set people thinking about whether established customs and conventions are good or bad, you are really shaking the whole foundations of the existing fabric of received opinion. Byron could do that, not only for England, but for almost every country of the time. He obliged nations to think and to feel in a new way. And he used the facts of his own life to illustrate his teaching.

For, through nearly all of his poems, the real hero—disguised under many names—is really himself. He is the Giaour,¹ the European adventurer living as a pirate or renegade among men of another race and another face. He is Alp, the renegade leader in *The Siege of Corinth*.² He is Lara,³ mysteriously loved and mysteriously wronged. Something of him is visible even in the singular and splendid study of the Cossack hetman Mazeppa.⁴ When Cain and Lucifer speak together among the stars⁵ — speak against the God of the Universe — we recognize in the conversation that Byron has simply multiplied himself; for he is both Lucifer and Cain. I need not remind you that he is Childe Harold⁶ or Manfred⁷ or Sardanapalus,⁸ — for whoever reads these must know. Every one of his greater poems is a study and an expression of himself. Perhaps it would be

¹ *The Giaour, a fragment of a Turkish tale* 1813, 14th edn. 1815.

² *The siege of Corinth. A poem* 1816.

³ *Lara, a tale* 1814.

⁴ *Mazeppa, a poem* 1819. Paris, 1819. Also 1824.

⁵ *Cain; a mystery. By Lord Byron. To which is added a Letter from the author to Mr Murray, the original publisher* 1822.

⁶ *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* [Cantos I and II]. *A romaunt* 1812. 11th edn. 1819. *Canto the third* 1816. *Canto the fourth* 1818. *A romaunt in four cantos, 2 vols* 1819.

⁷ *Manfred, a dramatic poem* 1817. 2nd edn, 1817. Also 1824.

⁸ *Sardanapalus, a tragedy* 1821.

unjust to say that he is altogether himself in *Don Juan*;¹—but there can be no doubt that he really wished the world to think of him as *Don Juan*, and that not a few of the adventures related in the poem were founded upon personal experiences. Understand me clearly: I do not wish to imply for a moment that Byron did all the things and experienced all the adventures attributed to his heroes. I only mean that every time he made a hero—and all his heroes are rebels against society—he represented that person as imbued with his own particular hates and loves, convictions and doubts. And the world knew this, and felt him.

In conclusion I need only make a few remarks as to choice of reading in the study of Byron. The student should know that even in *Childe Harold* the later cantos are the best;—these were added in the latter part of his life. Of the narrative poems or romances written in the style of Scott, the best two are *Mazeppa* and *The Siege of Corinth*—both were written in the later years of his career. About the plays critics greatly differ. Goethe admired *Manfred* most of all; English writers generally differ with him. I should recommend to the student *Marino Faliero*² as representing one side of Byron's dramatic power, and *Cain* as representing another. *Don Juan* is Byron's greatest work—though unfinished; and the student is almost bound to read the whole of it,—forgetting the faults for the sake of the wit, brilliancy and even occasional beauty of tenderness which may be found in it. It is a narrative of intrigues with women—an imaginary history of a decidedly nonmoral kind, but it is also to be considered as a study of human nature and of nature in many aspects, and the student should think of the art and the truth as not excusing, indeed, but as partly atoning for the rebellion against accepted ethics. Of the shorter poems there are two which ought to be read; and both of them are of the same subject. One is *Darkness*. It is perhaps the best of all the shorter pieces produced by Byron—it is the fanciful

¹ *Don Juan* [Cantos I and II]. 6th edn, 1822. Cantos III, IV and V. 1821. 5th edn, 1821. Cantos VI, VII and VIII 1823. Cantos IX, X and XI 1823. Cantos XII, XIII and XIV 1823. Cantos XV and XVI 1824. A poem [16 cantos] 5 pts. 1822 [-4].

² *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice. An historical tragedy, in five acts. With notes* 1821. Also 1823 and 1824.

picture of what might have happened in this world if the sun suddenly went out. It is very terrible. The other *The Dream* is retrospective: it is the story of a man's life in three episodes—childhood, youth, manhood; and there is a tenderness in it of a very beautiful kind. You will find in Byron almost every tone—from the highest expression of aspiration to the lowest depth of brutal frankness. He can make you hate him or love him as he pleases; but he will never tire you, unless you should waste time over his juvenile poems. And now we turn to Shelley.

SHELLEY

Wordsworth had introduced into English poetry a tone of dreamy religious feeling much resembling pantheism;—but it was not a real pantheism; it was only the philosophical Christianity of Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* revived in a new form and applied to the study of nature. Wordsworth always remained fundamentally orthodox. Real pantheism first comes into English poetry with Shelley,¹ — thought of a strange and splendid kind that startles us by its appearance in English literature. Rather we should expect to find such thought in the utterance of some Hindoo or Persian poetry, for example:—

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
 From creation to decay,
 Like the bubbles on a river
 Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
 But they are still immortal
 Who, through birth's orient portal
 And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
 Clothe their unceasing flight
 In the brief dust and light
 Gathered around their chariots as they go.

This significant verse is totally different from anything

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822).

that ever had been heard from English lips before. It is from the great poem *Hellas*.¹ First we are told of the perishableness of all that has form or name. In the awful flowing of time, even suns and worlds are nothing but bubbles;—they rise and pass, sparkle a moment only to vanish forever. Because they are only forms. But the spirits of men are more than forms: these are eternal;—these always have been, and forever will be, each one like a traveller, journeying upon an endless road, through light and darkness—the light which is life, the darkness which is death. Each life, each death, is but a gateway through which the chariot of existence is rapidly driven. And of course by chariots the poet means the perishable body, with all that belongs to it—the individuality of a human being. That is nothing; but the eternal principle never ceases its journey through birth and death.

Or take these lines from the wonderful elegy of *Adonais*² (I suppose that you know that *Adonais* means the poet Keats, whose untimely death Shelley passionately regretted):

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

This is much grander poetry than even Wordsworth's famous line about "the light that never was on sea or land." This is even something more than pantheism: it is rather what we would call to-day monism—the conception of the universe as one. But we could not call Shelley a monist in the modern sense, which implies a certain amount of agnosticism. Shelley was not an agnostic in his later life: he believed that the universe was one; but to him that one was the Spirit of Love.

¹ *Hellas*. A lyrical drama 1822.

² *Adonais*. An elegy on the death of John Keats. Pisa, 1821.

This philosophy is fully expressed in the verse that I have quoted. The universe is created by the smile of the Spirit of Love; all things have been shaped in accord with the will of the Spirit of Beauty;—and within ourselves, all that is good and true belongs to the Eternal Principle. Of course we cannot clearly see or know; every succeeding universe eclipses or darkens our memory and our knowledge of the infinite goodness out of which we come. Nevertheless we can feel a little of it. All beings are but mirrors that reflect the everlasting fire of the everlasting Life. If the mirror be bright and pure, the reflection is bright—if the mirror be foul and dim it can scarcely reflect at all. Yet behind all things, which are only a veil, the infinite Love exists. It is very strange to find in this verse almost exactly the idea expressed in the *Jātakas*, or birth stories of the Buddha, recently translated but quite unknown in Shelley's time. In almost every story we are told that the memory of the person referred to has been darkened by successive birth. Shelley's impression "eclipsed by the curse of birth" has precisely the same signification; but with him the idea was original. You will see then that, in addition to poetic workmanship of the highest quality, Shelley brought into English poetry a new philosophy. The school of which I am speaking to you was breaking down all the conventions which the Wordsworth school had spared. Byron had taught men to look upon life in a more tolerant spirit than that of the 18th century, and had shattered the fences established by prudery and cant. Shelley was to break down the conventions relating to expression of religious belief or non-belief and to preach a new gospel of love. Apostles of new doctrines are generally persecuted and made thoroughly unhappy. In this respect Shelley fared even worse than Byron. To put the matter briefly he was outlawed by society; his children were taken away from him by the power of English law; and he died in a foreign country even before reaching the full term of manhood. But what he tried to do in poetry he did well—so well, that he represents the supreme perfection of the romantic spirit. Now let us try to understand the extraordinary stories of his follies

and his misfortune. This story will bring us back to the subject of that famous William Godwin about whom we talked when considering the later prose writers of the 18th century.

If you were to see, placed before you in a line, good pictures of all the English poets who sang during the last 800 years,—from the old Anglo-Saxon singers even to the time of Swinburne and of Tennyson,—you would almost immediately pick out the face of Shelley as the most interesting. It is also the most beautiful. Shelley, not excepting Milton, whose feminine beauty made his fellow students call him the Lady, was the most attractive-looking person ever connected with English poetry. And the face is a true index of character. Some great French critics have defined a poet as a man that is half a woman. By this, the critic meant, of course, a man who has the tenderness of woman, the same capacity for sympathy, the same horror of doing wrong, the same spirit of kindness in small things. Shelley had all this—all the charm of the feminine character, though he also possessed a certain masculine strength of his own. He looked very much like his mother, who was a remarkable beauty; and he retained the resemblance of her all through his life. The family, if not exactly noble, was at least very aristocratic, and related to the nobility. Shelley was born in 1792 and died in 1822.

When a pretty boy goes to an English public school for the first time, his good looks are never to his advantage. Rough boys at once judge him to be a “milk-sop,” a soft, cowardly fellow; and they make him fight, to prove his courage. Then you know that they have what is called fagging in English schools;—that is, the younger boys are obliged to obey the older boys, to act like servants for them, sometimes to bear a good deal of cruel treatment. The elder student is supposed to protect his own fags from other big students; but he is apt to be a good deal of a tyrant himself. English public opinion has never yet been fairly aroused against this system. It is alleged that fagging is good in a certain way,—that the boy who does not learn to obey never can learn to command; and that fagging really is a good test of patience on one side and of

self-control on the other. Good thinkers denounce the whole system as utterly brutal; but public opinion has not as yet been moved by such denunciation.

Well, Shelley's first experience of having to fight against his will, and of having to fag for bigger boys, were not at all pleasant. Gentle as he was, he had a great deal of quiet obstinate courage; and to the astonishment of everybody this delicate lad stood alone in rebellion against the whole time-honoured custom of Eton. He would not fag;—they might beat him, but he would never do it. He would not fight, except when obliged to in self-defence against torture; and then he "could be dangerous"—that is, ready to kill, so he had his way. Everybody called him mad, foolish, and other bad things;—they tormented him all they could; but he boldly went to work at his studies and endured all. He proved himself to be an excellent scholar; and no matter how much his fellow students affected to despise him, he obtained the recognition of the masters as a most promising scholar. But of course the long irritation produced by years of bad treatment could not but have its effect upon his mind. He knew that he was being cruelly and unjustly treated, because he would not submit to conditions which he felt to be in their nature essentially brutal and wrong. Yet the great school was supposed to be conducted upon the strictest principles of Christianity—the so-called religion of love! Naturally Shelley began to doubt the intrinsic value of Christianity. His experiences of Christianity have been experiences of hate or of contempt—not of love of enemy. I am sure that you can very well imagine how he felt. And while he was feeling this way he got hold of the books of the famous William Godwin, about whom I have before told you. Of course Shelley was delighted with the opinions of this man, full of revolutionary doctrines; and his every word came like a balm to his wounded mind. Godwin had said that existing society was all selfish and wrong; and Shelley had come to the same conclusion. Godwin had said that the religious ideas of the time were all wrong, and Shelley thought so too. And Godwin had preached the doctrine of the fullest individual

liberty, the right to do as one pleases in all directions save that of unkindness,—the right to rebel against all unjust constraint. Even the laws concerning marriage were unjust. Godwin's books completely changed Shelley's mind. We shall see presently into what mischief those opinions led him.

Understand, I do not wish you to think bad about Godwin and his books. Godwin was a sincere man, who wished to do well, and whose books can be very safely read by trained and disciplined minds. If there are great errors in them there is also much good. But Shelley's was not a disciplined mind; it was the mind of an innocent and sensitive child—doubly sensitive because of harsh experiences. To other lads Godwin would have done no harm at all. To Shelley he was deadly and poisonous.

Somehow or other, Shelley was able to finish his studies creditably at Eton; then he went to Oxford. Now the opinions of Godwin began to bear fruit. Shelley published a little pamphlet—that is a small book in paper covers, entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*.¹ You know that at the great English University the ancient ecclesiastical system still lives; and all students are required to subscribe to—I mean, pledge themselves to recognize—certain general doctrines of religion. So that it was really a grave matter for a student to publish such a book. But the University authorities were good, kind men, and they took no notice of this little foolishness. Then Shelley was vexed, because they took no notice. He sent copies of the book to all the bishops, and to the heads of all the University colleges. After that it was impossible not to take notice. This was a direct breach of discipline.

Now, as Shelley had only studied so far those sides of religious and social questions which accorded with his spirit of revolt, he could not understand that he deserved to be expelled from the University, and especially that the expulsion was not on account of his opinion (which in the case of a boy of 18 signifies nothing at all), but for insubordination and insolent breach of discipline which signify a great deal. He thought

¹ *The necessity of atheism*. Worthing [1811].

that he was persecuted because of his courage to express his non-religious conviction; he believed himself a martyr in a good cause; and he thought he might yet be able to convert the rest of the world to a better way of thinking. This was his first great misfortune in life; and it was not to be the last—for he had no really wise friend to guide him. The next misfortune was the refusal of the parents of the girl to whom he had been engaged, to let their daughter marry a young man of such dangerous opinions. Again, Shelley thought himself a victim of religious persecution—being still unable to understand the social idea of the matter. The next thing that happened to him was still more unfortunate. He entered into a very hasty marriage with a pretty girl of 16, of a class inferior to his own—not out of love, be it observed, but rather out of pity. He said that he married her in order to save her from pain and trouble—in order to protect her. But as Godwin had said that marriage should not be a legal constraint, he told her that if they ever came to dislike each other, then he would have the right to separate from her. Up to this time society was not at all angry with Shelley. He had so far done foolish things, but nothing very bad. Not to do what is bad unfortunately depends upon a certain amount of practical knowledge of the world; and Shelley had not this knowledge. The bad was to come.

So after his marriage he made the personal acquaintance of Godwin, whose books had had such an effect upon his mind. Godwin's family was then a very strange one. His first wife, the famous Mary Wollstonecraft, was dead; but her two daughters were in the house—Fanny (Imlay) Godwin, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft before her marriage with Godwin—and Mary Godwin, her daughter by Godwin. And Godwin had married again, and had a step-daughter Clare, who afterwards became the mistress of Lord Byron. Fanny Godwin committed suicide. It was a very strange and unhappy household. And Shelley fell in love with Mary Godwin, and ran away with her out of the country—after which he wrote a letter to his wife of a most foolish and cruel kind—saying that he would always

take care of her, but that Mary suited him better. You see that he was simply following the teachings of Godwin; and Godwin, in this case, was very angry at the consequence of his own doctrine. Still Shelley did not know what a wicked thing he was doing;—he was quite a child in his knowledge of women. The ultimate result of his elopement was that his first wife drowned herself in one of the London parks.

Society could not endure that. Either Shelley was a selfish and cruel brute, or he was a very extraordinary fool. In either case it was necessary to punish him. And he was outlawed indeed—England could not suffer his presence any longer. Thereafter his eyes were opened and his heart was opened. He who had been preaching love had sinned against all love in the most cruel way. He who had been teaching the gospel of kindness, now had the testimony of the dead against him for more than unkindness. He understood at last that one cannot deny the value of all human moral experience without serious mischief. It was the pain of the death that made a good man out of Shelley—not the anger of society. Thereafter he was greatly changed.

New ideas of religion came to him: he was not now an atheist, but a real thinker — preaching the doctrine that the Spirit of the Universe is love, and singularly tolerant in his views of human error. He had always been of a generous nature. Now he became as much of a philanthropist as his means permitted. His new wife was, after all, a very good wife for him — a woman of strong character who helped to make him a wiser man. The English law deprived him of his children by the first wife—it being decided that he could not be trusted to educate his children. But by his second marriage he had children, and as he returned no more to England he was probably consoled for this loss. Meanwhile his poetry had been obtaining attention. Perhaps he might have become, even in his lifetime, a great influence to poetry; but he was drowned by the wreck of his pleasure yacht in a storm off the Italian coast, in 1822. His body was burned on the seashore in the presence of his friend Byron.

All this, I think, will give you a just idea of Shelley's history. His follies were, as suggested, not without some excuse; and although the one great shame of his life cannot be excused, nobody now believes that it was the wickedness of intention, but the wickedness of ignorance that caused it. The world now recognizes that Shelley was by nature a very lovable and generous man—ready to sacrifice himself for any doctrine which he believed to be right—passionate as a woman, but strangely forgiving and kindly,—and, in addition to all this, one of the greatest poets that ever lived.

Now we go to his poetry. He began writing poetry when he was a schoolboy at Eton, but his early poetry is not good. His first poem that really attracted attention and that still keeps it, is *Queen Mab*¹—still read, in spite of its attack on Christianity, by many fervent Christians. For in this composition Shelley is only uttering his cry of indignation against injustice or wrong done in the name of religion, and proposing to substitute a new gospel of kindness. The work is not yet mature, but it is full of beautiful things. Next in succession came a number of maturer pieces—such as *Alastor*,² *Laon*,³ *The Witch of Atlas*,⁴ *Hellas*, *The Revolt of Islam*,⁵ interspersed with beautiful little lyrical pieces that appeared from time to time.

Later came those great dramatic compositions—*Prometheus Unbound*,⁶ a composition imitating Greek tragedy; and the sinister and powerful play of *The Cenci*,⁷—a tragedy in the Elizabethan manner. Finally mention must be made of Shelley's translations—wonderful metrical translations from Italian and Greek and German: above all the translations from Homer and from Goethe's *Faust*. It would be difficult to name, in the course of this lecture, half of the titles; for the large part of Shelley's bequest to us is in short poems, and these are multitude. In a general way I may say that Shelley's work as ar-

¹ *Queen Mab; a philosophical poem: with notes* 1813.

² *Alastor; or, the spirit of solitude: and other poems* 1816.

³ *Laon and Cythna; or, the revolution of the golden city. A vision of the nineteenth century. In the stanzas of Spenser* (dated 1818) 1817.

⁴ *The witch of Atlas* (Composed Aug. 1820; published in *Posthumous poems* 1824.)

⁵ *The Revolt of Islam: a poem, in twelve cantos.* Jan. 1818.

⁶ *Prometheus unbound. A lyrical drama in four acts. With other poems* 1820.

⁷ *The Cenci. A tragedy, in five acts.* Italy, 1819. 2nd edn, 1821, 1827.

ranged in chronological order, shows the most extraordinary growth of form and thought, from the boyish platitude of the first compositions to the superlative excellence of supreme poetry in the last pieces. Had Shelley lived, he would probably have become greater than anybody else in English poetry. Even as it is, he has surpassed all other poets in a few wonderful pieces.

But now we must make a second general statement about Shelley's poetry. The longer compositions, though containing dazzling jewels scattered through them, do not compare with the perfection of the shorter poems; and even these shorter poems are to a great extent mere fragments. They were not collected and published in a complete edition until after his death. If you will look at Professor Dowden's edition, the edition edited first by Mrs. Shelley, you will see that there are a great many lines containing blank spaces. Shelley had shaped the poem in every such case, but had not finished it—could not for the moment find the exact word that he wanted. So he left blank spaces for these words; and no succeeding poet has yet found the courage to fill up these blank spaces. Well, I was saying that this shorter work, though fragmentary, surpasses the other work; and you will observe that nearly all the shorter pieces take the form of the song. In other words Shelley's greatness was in lyrical poetry and it is only in lyrical poetry that we cannot find anybody to compare with him. This does not mean, however, that his longer compositions are not great. Certainly the two dramas are very great. But I doubt whether as students you could have patience to read through the other longer poems. They are of no significance as to "story"; there is no story,—none at least that could interest you. All these long poems must be studied chiefly for form and music and the splendid flashes of thought and emotion to be found in them by painful research. You must work hard at the text—just as a gold miner must labour carefully to separate the precious matter from the rock with which it is mixed. That is to say, in very plain English, that it is hard work to read the big poems of Shelley. But it is quite different when we come to the short poems. These appeal immediately to every feeling

for truth and beauty that we possess; and the completed ones are almost Greek in their perfection of form.

The third consideration that we must make about Shelley is this:—What place does he occupy in the romantic movement?—What did he do for English poetry? He did not invent new forms to any great extent; and he introduced very few new subjects,—if we except his position towards religious and social questions. He did not and could not found a school. Really he did only one great thing,—that was to express what Wordsworth and Coleridge and Scott and Southey and even Byron wanted to express, better than any of them had done; the full capacities of the English language for lyric—lyric unfettered by any kind of convention except the law of beauty and of truth. Byron and Shelley together successfully opposed old standards; but Shelley especially in the world of thought, in religion and in philosophy; Byron rather in social directions. Both were imbued with something of the spirit of the French Revolution. It is curious to observe, however, that Shelley, in all his poetry, is wonderfully chaste, almost cold in regard to things of sense; there is a ghostly purity about him. Byron, on the other hand, is deliberately sensuous, and sometimes decidedly sensual. Nevertheless both helped to reform poetry in one way—by giving it larger freedom. After Byron, anybody could express his honest conviction about social morality. After Shelley, anybody could express his belief or aspiration in regard to metaphysics, religion, or a future life. Before these two, it would have been dangerous to do that. So we may say that Shelley is to be remembered as the greatest lyrical poet of the romantic movement, and as a great reformer in winning, to his own cost, freedom to think in new ways about the universe, for all future poets.

KEATS

One more great poet was destined to carry the romantic movement still farther than Byron and Shelley—but in quite

another way. The third great name of the second group of the pre-Victorian poets is the name of Keats. John Keats was no exception to the general misfortune that fell upon all the members of this group—though in his case he never did anything blameworthy and the misfortune was no fault either of society or of his own. Like the other two he lived but a very short time, he was the youngest of all, having been born in 1795 and was the first to die,—which occurred in 1821, the year before Shelley's death. Byron and Shelley were noblemen, at least both belonged to the noble classes. But Keats was a man of the common people—the son of a person who lived by hiring out horses and carriages. Byron and Shelley both had the best educational opportunities. Keats had very little schooling. Nevertheless, this boy—for we may really call him a boy—did work which neither Byron nor Shelley could have done, and in some directions must be regarded as superior to both of them.

This may seem to you an extraordinary fact; and the statement certainly needs explanation. If I tell you that Keats did more for English poetry in certain respects than either Wordsworth or Coleridge or Byron or Shelley, it is quite necessary that you should know how and why he did so. And before we go any farther, I shall try to make this quite clear. Now you will remember that I asked you to remark the revolt of the whole romantic school against classical—that is, Greek and Roman—subjects. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Byron left classical subjects almost alone. Even Shelley meddled with them only in his great drama of *Prometheus* and in his translations from the Greek. Classical subjects had been generally condemned, if not tabooed. This was natural, because the school of Pope had made the classical subjects wearisome and disgusting. But that was not a reason, after all, for refusing to recognize the beauty which the Greek world still had to offer. Now what Keats did was this. He taught English poets how to return to classical subjects by successfully treating those subjects in the purely romantic manner. He introduced what has been very prettily called “romantic classicism.”

The classical poets, remember, knew a great deal more

than Keats about classical subjects from a merely pedantic point of view. Most of them had been Greek scholars;—all of them knew Latin. But Keats never studied Greek at all; and all the Latin that he knew was what a student of medicine could learn in a few months. He read Greek authors only in translations; and the translations were very bad. About Greek mythology he learned a little only from Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*. This dictionary is to-day of very little value. But it had a great many pictures. It was from these pictures chiefly, if not altogether, that Keats learned to know more about Greek life than any other English poet before him. Is not this a very wonderful thing in literature, the story of this poor sick boy divining from the pictures in an old classical dictionary the spirit of Greek life? Looking at those pictures he may have thought to himself, "How beautiful and gentle must have been the soul of the people who worshipped the Gods like these! How wise and yet simple and yet true must have been the minds that conceived the beautiful stories about them! How very fair and good must the world have appeared to such minds!" And you know that one result of these boyish studies was the matchless *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.¹ This is the most perfectly Greek poem in English literature. It is the most perfect because it is the most human. Greek life was more human—more natural, more emotionally sincere than any other life of any other western civilization; and Keats felt that. Other poets had tried to show their learning of Greek texts, but Keats, instead of troubling himself about texts, went straight to the question, "How did these people feel and think and worship their Gods and love their families?" Observe another fact in this poem—the new thought in it, the new note of pathos. Let us suppose that there is placed before you a little Japanese painting, painted four hundred years ago—some little picture of men, women and children engaged in some pleasant pursuit. You cannot look at it, I think, without feeling a peculiar emotion. Those pictures were certainly drawn by somebody who had seen what he drew; but the hand that painted them is dust;

¹ *Ode on a Grecian urn* (Jan. 1820).

and the place and the name are forgotten; and the world has so much changed since then that the dresses and the attitude seem very strange. Strange, yet beautiful perhaps—you are peeping at the vision of dead happiness. All those people are gone; but they still smile and play in the picture. Well, this was the way that Keats felt when he looked at the urn; and he was not afraid to tell the whole world how he felt—just as finely as a Greek might have done. No other poet had even thought of doing the same thing before him. Later on, he did it again in his poem of *Lamia*.¹

Lamia was a generic name for a particular kind of evil spirit or phantom believed in by the Greeks and by the Romans. There are many strange old stories about “*Lamiæ*.” They appeared in the shape of beautiful women, and tempted men to love them; but this was only in order that they might suck the blood of their lovers. In all countries, or nearly all, there is some old belief concerning such spirits. Keats found a Greek story about a rich man’s son who had married a “*Lamia*.” At the wedding an old philosopher came in who had the power to distinguish a spirit in any shape; and he denounced the illusion, whereupon the bride changed into a serpent and fled away. Perhaps you do not think this story very interesting. Before Keats’ time nobody cared much about it; but Keats discovered a new suggestion in it. Suppose, he thought, that this phantom woman really loved the man, what monstrous cruelty it would have been to destroy her little magic! And he wrote the story from that point of view, sympathizing with the ghost—not with the philosopher. Immediately the old story assumed a new and beautiful interest and set an example to romantic writers for a century to come. Formerly the Church, while not denying the existence of pagan gods and spirits, had declared them all to be devils, and had implied that it was monstrously wicked to praise them or to sympathize with them. But, by the 19th century, people had ceased to be so extravagantly pious as to refuse to utilize a pagan myth for such reasons. A whole school of writers since the time of Keats, have followed

¹ *Lamia* (July 1820).

the example in lending new human interest to all myths; and the French romantics have here especially distinguished themselves. The most beautiful story of the kind in French romantic literature is by Théophile Gautier and is entitled *La Morte Amoureuse*. It is almost exactly the Lamia story over again, with the slight difference that the woman is a vampire, the lover a priest and the scene is laid in the 16th century or perhaps a little earlier.

Now what Keats did for Greek subjects he also did for old fairy tales, for incidents of history, for mediæval love stories, for a host of subjects. He taught men to think about all these subjects in a new way, with pure sympathy—it is even true that he taught them to think and to feel like pagans, not like Christians. But he did this only in a beautiful and legitimate way; and his paganism was nothing more than pure Greek feeling. The result of his work was—Tennyson! Keats made Tennyson. And he also made almost every great poet of the Victorian period. He was the teacher of what is called the neo-romantic movement.

It is for this reason that I have spoken to you about Keats at such length: he is immensely important—as an influence—more than Wordsworth or Shelley or Byron or any other poet of the first period. I do not mean that he is greater as a poet; but he is greater as a poetical teacher. He died, as you know, of consumption when only about 26 years old. I suppose that you have heard the story once believed, that his death was caused by cruel criticism. Byron and Shelley both believed that story; and wrote poems about it which are famous for their splendid indignation. But the story is not true. The poet died of disease; and he bore criticism very bravely. What is true is the story about the wicked attacks upon him in newspapers and magazines. He was jeered at because he was a poor student and they told him that a doctor's apprentice had no business to try to write poetry. Even this needs some explanation. Brutal as English prejudice is, it is seldom so wanton as to try to ridicule an honourable profession, or to express contempt for honest poverty. But it is capable of much wick-

edness when the question is one of political or party prejudices. The attacks on Keats were chiefly made for political reasons; and they were made by mistake. Keats had no politics at all; he was only a poet—but he had two political friends, one of whom was Leigh Hunt. These friends were radical, and had given offence to the Government; therefore Keats was supposed also to be an enemy of the Government.

Much as I have said about the importance of Keats, I should be sorry that any of you should try to read all that he wrote. The “all” is not very big, but some of it is by no means perfect. He knew that himself, and was very much ashamed of his first work. For example you ought not to try to read *Endymion*¹ as a whole. It is the old Greek story of how the moon saw a shepherd boy asleep on a mountain and came down and kissed him and became his wife. As Keats conceived the story, it is full of beautiful passages; but the whole composition is not successful. It is tiresome. *Hyperion*,² another Greek subject, is far finer. It is founded upon the Greek myth that before the time of the Gods there had been older and greater Gods, who had been turned out of Heaven by the later ones. Keats wanted to represent the Greek idea of the more ancient Gods and he imagined an assembly of Gods in which the injustice of the past and hopes of the future were to be discussed. But he never finished the composition and I should recommend you to read only the wonderful beginning with perhaps an extract here and there. Yet these two things represent the bulk of Keats’ work. The rest of it consists chiefly of short pieces—if we except *The Eve of St. Agnes*,³ *Lamia* and *The Pot of Basil*,⁴ which are of moderate length. The first is a mediæval love story—Gothic work and full of charm—resembling the work of Coleridge more than anything else. The second I have told you about; the third is a terrible story from Boccaccio, told over again with a new spirit of tenderness—the story about the girl who, after her lover had been killed by

¹ *Endymion: a poetic romance* 1818.

² *Hyperion* (1820).

³ *The eve of St. Agnes* (Composed Jan. 1819; published July 1820).

⁴ *Isabella; or, the pot of basil. A story from Boccaccio* (July 1820).

her brothers, kept his head concealed in a flower-pot containing a basil plant, where it was afterwards discovered through the accidental breaking of the pot. I should not insist too much upon any of these; but every student should read such pieces as the sonnet after reading Chapman's Homer,¹ or such lighter pieces as the peerless ballad of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.² The latter is perhaps the most perfect of all modern ballads. Then there are such things to be carefully studied as *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, the marvellous *Ode to a Nightingale*,³ the splendid address *To Autumn*,⁴ and at least half a dozen of the most precious sonnets on the subjects of love, regret or the prospect of death. Some day we shall study the rest of these together. At present we may leave Keats — the last of the seven great poets of the first period, or First Romantic Period, —and discourse a little about the smaller poets in their train. Some of these have a good deal of importance.

MINOR POETS OF THE FIRST ROMANTIC PERIOD

The whole of the minor poets before Tennyson cannot here be considered; nor could we here obtain any profit from any acquaintance with all of them. But there are a number of very considerable significance, whose names you can easily remember. The most notable of these are Moore, Rogers, Campbell, Landor, Beddoes, Hood, Praed, Peacock, and a few whom we need to mention only by name — such as Hogg and Mrs. Hemans. All were romantics. The most important of this group is perhaps Thomas Moore,⁵ a great friend of Byron, who, although born before the last decade of the 18th century, lived to the middle of the 19th. As a poet there is still a great deal of hot discussion regarding his value; some people become impatient at the mere mention of his name; while others praise

¹ *On first looking into Chapman's Homer* (1817).

² *La belle dame sans merci* (Published in *The Indicator* 10 May 1820).

³ *Ode to a nightingale* (Composed May, published July, 1819).

⁴ *To autumn* (Composed September 1819, published July 1820).

⁵ Thomas Moore (1779-1852).

him more than he deserved. I am glad to assure you that the most severe critics are just those who speak well of him. But, no matter of what may be said about him as a poet, he is a very great figure in the early literature of the period; and his influence in favour of the romantic movement was prodigious—second only to that of Byron in the strictly popular direction. He resembled, neither in his career nor in his condition, any of his brother poets. You must try to imagine him as a fine, old-fashioned gentleman, a great lover of society, and a man who never thought himself a great poet, though he knew himself to be a great singer.

I use the word “singer” here in its most literal meaning; for Moore was a natural musician; and his great fame was chiefly made in the drawing-rooms of rich men, where he would sit down at a piano and play and sing for the amusement of friends. The poetry which made his name once a household word in every part of Great Britain—which caused his picture to be hung up in almost everybody’s house—which still causes the Irish people to mention his name only with love and reverence—was merely composed for the purpose of singing. He had learned all the popular airs of the Irish, the English, the Scotch peasantry; and he wrote new words for these airs and popularized them by singing them. Afterwards he did the same thing for Spanish, French, Italian and Greek airs,—though his masterwork in song is compiled in the collection of Irish airs.¹ In short Moore did for the music of the common people exactly what Walter Scott and others have done for the poetry and the folk-lore of the peasants. So you see that his place as a musician takes him a little away from the true place of poets. This, however, is only true so far as his songs are concerned. Besides the greatest singer of his time, he was really a romantic poet of no mean order. Like Byron and Southey he went to the East for inspiration; and produced Oriental romances in verse which can still be read with much pleasure even by persons who know that his Orientalism is all wrong. In those stories of his, the scenery and the characters

¹ *Irish melodies* 1807-35.

are Oriental only in a theatrical way; but the verse is always sweet and musical, and passages of beauty might easily be mentioned which cannot die. Thus Moore's reputation is to be decided by his songs on the one hand and by his Oriental poems on the other; and we find that though there is genius in both, it is not enough to place him in the first rank of poets. He is only second class.

But this second class is quite unique. One gift which Moore had, even to excess, was the gift possessed by very few English men of letters—a perfect musical ear. Even when the words of his song are little better than nonsense, you have only to read them aloud in order to understand this. Most of them are pure delights of sounds; they ring and thrill like the notes of a well played musical instrument. I shall presently give you some examples of the art of melody. But as poetry, scarcely half a dozen of the hundreds of songs he wrote could live by their merit. What keeps them alive is the music for which they were written. As long as those airs are remembered the poems will be remembered too. Otherwise we might say that such pieces as “Oft, in the stilly night,” “When in death I shall calm recline,” and “Believe me, if all those endearing young charms” alone deserve high praise. On the other hand, read with the music such a trifling thing as *Love's Young Dream*, and you cannot help wondering at the exactness with which the syllables strike out the notes of the air - every syllable fitting exactly into its place, like keys of a piano board. The Oriental work is comprised under the title of *Lalla Rookh*.¹ Lalla Rookh is an Indian princess betrothed to a prince of a neighbouring kingdom. According to custom she leaves her father's house, with a great retinue of attendants and slaves, to meet her future husband; and she feels a little anxious as to whether he will love her. Now the future husband is equally anxious to find out if his betrothed is a nice girl; so he disguises himself as a wandering musician, and joins the retinue in order to get a chance to look at her. He is asked to amuse the party every evening during the journey with music and

¹ *Lalla Rookh. An oriental romance* 1817. 6th edn 1817, 15th edn 1829.

song; and he sings four romances to please the princess. These romances make up the greater part of the volume: all are Oriental stories of a strange and imaginative kind: *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan*, *The Fire-Worshippers*, *Paradise and the Peri*, and *The Light of the Haram*. When the journey is ended the princess is at once frightened and delighted to discover that the musician who sang for her is the prince whom she must wed. In all these poems only the stories—the skeleton of narrative—is Oriental; the sentiments, the thoughts are European, and European of the age of extravagant sentiment. But it would be just as absurd to deny them value as poetry for that reason, as it would be absurd to deny poetic merit to the classic stories of Chaucer, whose Greek women think and talk like English women of the 14th century. The poems have very great beauty of a certain kind and the lilt of the verse is sometimes even finer in sound than the music of Coleridge. Take an example from *The Light of the Haram*:—

The Georgian's song was scarcely mute,
 When the same measure, sound for sound,
 Was caught up by another lute,
 And so divinely breathed around,
 That all stood hush'd and wondering,
 And turn'd and look'd into the air,
 As if they thought to see the wing
 Of Israfil, the Angel, there;—
 So powerfully on every soul
 That new, enchanted measure stole.
 While now a voice, sweet as the note
 Of the charm'd lute, was heard to float
 Along its chords, and so entwine
 Its sound with theirs, that none knew whether
 The voice or lute was most divine,
 So wonderously they went together.

No, Coleridge himself never uttered any sweeter music than that. Or, take this:—

Come hither, come hither—by night and by day,
 We linger in pleasures that never are gone;

Like the waves of the summer, as one dies away,
 Another as sweet and as shining comes on.
 And the love that is o'er, in expiring, gives birth
 To a new one as warm, as unequall'd in bliss,
 And oh! if there be an elysium on earth,
 It is this, it is this.

The above is but one verse of a song out of which it would be very hard to choose the most musical stanza. And four great romances full of such poetry are certainly of no little importance in English literature.

But I do not want you to think that Moore is never a serious poet. He can be both a painter and a serious poet at times. It is when he is most simple that he is often at his best. One little song, very simple indeed, I shall quote here—a little song that is well known all the world over.

Those evening bells! those evening bells!
 How many a tale their music tells,
 Of youth, and home, and that sweet time,
 When last I heard their soothing chime.

Those joyous hours are pass'd away;
 And many a heart, that then was gay,
 Within the tomb now darkly dwells,
 And hears no more those evening bells.

And so 'twill be when I am gone;
 That tuneful peal will still ring on,
 While other bards shall walk these dells,
 And sing your praise, sweet evening bells!

In any country I think the same thought must have occurred to many minds when hearing the sound of old bells—bells of temples, bells of churches: it makes no difference—the vibration of the sound measuring time reminds us that the same sound was heard by thousands before us, and will still be heard by thousands after we have ceased to view the song. It is not because a thought is old that it is not a good subject for verse or song: on the contrary he who repeats the old

thought in the best and simplest way is the best poet. And Moore often does this very thing.

It would require a special lecture to illustrate the beauties of Moore, because these are of great variety. For the present I only wish to suggest to you what his merits are. Besides the songs and romances which I have spoken of, and the comic poems and *The Loves of the Angels*¹ which I have not spoken of because they would not interest you at present, you must remember that Moore wrote many excellent things in prose. His romance of *The Epicurean*,² a story of Egyptian life, is almost worthy to be called a classic; and his *Life of Byron*³ is worthy to be compared with any English biography—indeed, some consider it almost as good as Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. And there is another thing to remember about Moore—his great influence in helping the romantic victory by his choice of new subjects and by his musical rendering of old ones. Though now old-fashioned, his poetry is worth studying even for that reason alone.

The next of the minor poets can be very briefly dismissed—Samuel Rogers.⁴ He lived almost into the middle of the new era; but he belonged also to the 18th century—a man who was both a contemporary of Dr. Johnson and of Thomas Carlyle. His influence was social, much more than literary; nevertheless it was important. By occupation he was a banker,—a very rich banker; and he only played at literature because he really loved poetry and would have been a great poet if he could. He did not succeed in doing any great thing in verse; but he was acquainted with nearly every literary man of the later 18th century and with nearly every literary man of the time before Tennyson. He invited them to his house, and made much of them and helped them with his influence in society. For he was a very great social power—so great in fact that nobody dared to say anything bad about his poetry while he was alive.

¹ *The loves of the angels. A poem* 1823. 5th edn 1823.

² *The Epicurian. A tale* 1827. Illustrated by Turner, J.M.W. 1839.

³ *Letters and journals of Lord Byron, with notices of his life.* 2 vols 1830. *The works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and journals, and his life by Thomas Moore.* 17 vols 1832-5.

⁴ Samuel Rogers (1763-1855),

He was rich; therefore it was not wise to offend him. He knew everybody, therefore it was dangerous to offend him. And he had a terribly venomous tongue—such a tongue that nobody would risk getting talked about by such a person. Nevertheless, to literary men he was kind. His productions, all written in blank verse very correctly, were romantic only in subject, the subject being his own travels in Europe. I do not think that his *Pleasures of Memory*¹ are now much read; and some critics declare that they never were worth reading. But there is one thing of his which I should like to have you read—the little story of *Ginevra*. Ginevra was a beautiful Italian girl who on the night of her wedding suddenly disappeared. Twenty or thirty years afterwards, an old wooden chest which had been lying in some lumber-room of the house was opened;—and there her skeleton was found, still wearing the bridal dress and jewels. The chest had what we call a “spring-lock”—so contrived that it locked itself by the simple act of shutting the lid down. The young bride had wanted to hide from her husband, by way of play—being little more than a child; she wanted to put him to the trouble of finding her. So she got into the box, forgetting all about the spring-lock. This true and sad story has been told by Rogers in blank verse better than it has been told by any other English poet; and there are many poems and songs on the subject of Ginevra.

The third minor poet of importance was Thomas Campbell.² Campbell also belonged to both centuries; and he began to write in blank verse and in couplets. His *Pleasures of Hope*³ belong to classic rather than to romantic literature; and they are no longer read. But when the romantic movement fairly set in, Campbell became a romantic; and he produced ballads and songs of a very great kind. Also he produced a romance of North American life in Spenserian stanza, *Gertrude of Wyoming*,⁴ which has considerable merit. It is not read to-day,

¹ *The pleasures of memory, with other poems* 1792. 9th edn 1796. 15th edn 1806.

² Thomas Campbell (1777-1844).

³ *The pleasures of hope, with other poems*. Edinburgh, 1799. 6th edn, Edinburgh, 1802. 9th edn, Edinburgh, 1807.

⁴ *Gertrude of Wyoming: A Pennsylvanian tale, and other poems* 1809. 2nd edn, 2 vols, 1810. 7th edn, 1819.

nevertheless—probably because of the kind of verse in which it was composed; and Campbell's fame rests upon his short poems altogether. Who does not know some of these, such as *Lord Ullin's Daughter*? You will find them in every anthology. Every English boy learns them by heart. Great critics, however, find that Campbell produced only three immortal things—three songs, battle songs which are the best in the English language. These are *Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, and *Ye Mariners of England*. Therefore it is as a song writer, like Moore, that Campbell takes his place. Three songs alone might give him even a better place than he has, were it not for some blemishes in the songs. The best of the three, for example, is *The Battle of the Baltic*, but we have in that grand composition one stanza thus beginning:

But the might of England flushed
To anticipate the scene—.

Of course this is very bad, though very musical: it is bad grammar, or, at least, bad sense. How can a scene be anticipated in this meaning? What Campbell meant was that the English wanted to begin fighting as soon as possible—to rush at the enemy even before the proper time had come. According to an old law of good English and clear expression, this is very bad—but the song was the best of the kind ever written by any Englishman, or rather by a Scotchman.

Another Scotchman must be mentioned; but as he wrote his best things in Scotch dialect, we cannot pay much attention to him. His name was James Hogg,¹ and he is celebrated in the 19th century literature under the name of Ettrick Shepherd. Hogg learned the alphabet as a child; but as his parents were miserably poor, he was put to taking care of sheep while he was still a little boy and he remained a shepherd until the age of 23 or 24. Alone upon the mountains all day with his sheep and having no books or means of buying books, he soon forgot even how to read the letters of the alphabet—could not tell big C from G. About that time Sir Walter Scott was riding

¹ James Hogg (1770-1835).

about the country, trying to find peasants who knew old songs and old stories, and who would dictate these to him. One day he found Hogg; and Hogg sang to him many songs and dictated to him many ballads. Sir Walter was greatly pleased, but he was astonished to find that this song-loving shepherd was unable to read or write. Hogg increased this surprise by repeating to Scott a number of poems which he "had composed in his own head," without being able to write them down. Sir Walter Scott wrote them down. They were very fine, and a poet who could not write was a great discovery. Hogg was taken to Edinburgh by Sir Walter, and partly educated under his patronage; and he became a famous man of letters,—writing excellent prose as well as many fine songs which are still sung. The best of his prose appeared in a collection of Scotch traditions and legends called *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, over the name or pseudonym of "The Ettrick Shepherd." Many famous men of letters contributed to this collection; and the editors of the *Edinburgh Review* may have helped Hogg with his English prose. But nobody helped him with his verse; and such songs as "When the kye comes hame" ranks only second to the songs of Robert Burns. Hogg was essentially a natural poet.

The greatest scholar of this minor group—perhaps the greatest scholar among all of the early 19th century poets—and one of the strangest figures in the history of English letters was Walter Savage Landor.¹ Landor is much greater as a prose writer than as a poet; but it is here impossible to separate his poetry from his prose, for he himself mixed the two together—writing a large proportion of work in verse. Landor resembled Byron and Shelley in one respect,—namely that he refused to obey English conventions—indeed he refused to obey any laws or customs; and he was consequently obliged to pass nearly the whole of his life in Italy. His terrible temper rendered it impossible for him to remain in England. But he never did anything very bad, and never hurt anybody except himself. He was a man who when angry was really dangerous; yet he had a most generous heart and was just as ready

¹ Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864).

to help people in every possible way as he was ready to get angry with them. He was a giant in stature and strength; and even as a schoolboy his athletic feats were astonishing. Also he proved himself an excellent student, mastering Latin so perfectly that he could write in Latin verse quite as easily as in English verse, and mastering Greek to almost an equal degree. In English literature, as distinguished from English scholarship, there have been only two Latinists of this class — Landor and Calverley. Calverley, a fellow of Cambridge, who died only a few years ago leaving behind him two wonderful volumes of poetry, could immediately, without any study at all, readily read Wordsworth or Tennyson or any other English poet into Latin verse—I mean that he would take up an English poet read a page of the book and then repeat the meaning of the page, line for line, in Latin verse. Calverley was a better Latinist than Landor; but Landor came very near-by. Such a man ought to have taken the highest honours at Oxford; but the University was obliged to send him away after he had been there only one year and a half. Then he tried to enter the Army, but he was refused an officer's commission because of his radical opinions. Every opinion contrary to the opinions of the time he loudly championed and was always therefore in "hot water." An interesting fact is that he was the first student at Oxford who wore his hair contrary to the custom of the time. Students then powdered their hair white, tying it behind with a little ribbon: they wore a kind of queue. But Landor, sympathizing with the French Revolution, which had abolished the same custom in France, cut his hair short in spite of University protest. Afterwards Southey did the same thing. You may imagine how reckless Landor was from the fact that he was able to remain married only for a few months—he chose the wrong woman of course; and although not unkind to her, it was impossible for the two to live together. He remained unmarried for the rest of his life, which was very long; for he was born in 1775 and died only in 1864—thus being close upon 90 years of age. He devoted the best part of his long life, not to folly or pleasure, but to patient, unceasing study, and pro-

duced an immense mass of scholarly work dealing chiefly with classical subjects.

Classical—but this master of classics was a pure romantic at heart. He wrote in severe prose; but he felt and expressed his feelings in the rich emotional tone of his age. The largest part of his work appeared in the form of dialogue¹—dialogues supposed to have occurred between great characters of different age—Greek, Roman, Egyptian, also Mediæval and Italian. I suppose you know that a famous Greek author known as Lucian wrote a book called *Dialogues of the Dead*—this perhaps inspired Landor. Every personage of antiquity whom he loved in a literary way he made to talk in the same manner. This is the finest kind of severe prose; but it had a tenderness in it, a gentleness of spirit—rather Greek than Latin. And mixed with prose there is a great deal of poetry. It does not rise to the highest class as the prose did, but some of it is very beautiful and I want to read to you on some future day one composition about a Greek tree spirit:² it will remind you of some old Japanese legends about tree-spirits, which are quite as beautiful and quite as sad as the Greek story. The chief trouble with Landor's work is that you must be a very good scholar to understand him without explanations and he never condescended to explain anything. Besides the dialogues of which I have told you, he wrote a long romantic poem called *Gebir*,³ which first made him widely known in the world of letters. The poem is founded upon a mediæval romance, and contains one Greek episode which he treated very prettily. It is the story of a shepherd who used to keep his flocks by the sea-shore. One night a beautiful nymph rose up from the sea and came to him and said, "Will you wrestle with me?" The shepherd answered, "Why should I wrestle with a woman, and especially so fair as you?" The sea nymph answered, "If I win, you must give me a sheep; and if you win, then I will belong to you." So they wrestled and the shepherd lost. Every

¹ *Imaginary conversations*. Vols. I, II. 1824. 2nd edn, enlarged, 1826. Vols. III, IV, 1828. Vol. V, 1829. *Imaginary conversations of Greeks and Romans*, 1853.

² See *On Poetry* ch. xviii "On Tree Spirits in Western Poetry."

³ *Gebir* 1798. 2nd edn, Oxford, 1803. Latin version, Oxford, 1803.

night after that the maiden came and wrestled with the shepherd and overcame him and took away a sheep—so that at last the whole flock was lost. You can see what a very good subject for a poem is furnished by this queer old story, and Landor treated the scene very beautifully. Also he wrote a great number of short poems upon different subjects, and some of his shorter things are famous. Before he died he made a quatrain upon himself—a kind of epitaph which really tells us the story of his life:—

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
 Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art;
 I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
 It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

Thomas Hood,¹ who was born almost at the same time that Johnson died, is a very strong and original figure in the early 19th century literature. He was a very extraordinary man in a very different sense from Landor. And he possessed one of the sweetest characters ever given to a human being. Of course you know that Hood is the greatest of all English comic poets; but he was not merely a comic poet. In no other mind, perhaps, has there ever been so strange a mixture of tenderness with humour. Observe also that Hood is never cruel, never a satirist, never a mocker in the real meaning of the word. His fun is only happy or grotesque; it is never unkind. Hood was born in London and educated for business; but various reasons caused him to adopt the profession of letters instead; and he became a journalist. A journalist he always remained, never being able to make enough money to devote himself to more serious literature. Toward the end of his life he got a pension of about £ 100 a year; but even that help, in view of a large family which he had to support, scarcely kept him above want. Now these circumstances are important to remember because they had a most serious influence upon Hood's literary work. He never could do the best of which he was capable;—he never was allowed sufficient time. Readers

¹ Thomas Hood (1799-1845).

of newspapers discovered that he had a real genius for fun; and they wanted him to amuse them as often as possible; and he was obliged to produce a fixed quantity of fun every week in order to make a living—or, as he put it himself, he “had to be a lively Hood in order to make a livelihood.” That, you know, is what is called in English a pun; and Hood was the greatest punster that ever lived. Hundreds of things which he wrote—ballads, stories, stories in verse, mock odes, etc.—are simply masses of puns; yet the playing upon words never spoils the interest of the tale or the theme. But to give one’s life to this sort of thing means, of course, that a man cannot do his best. There is another thing—a most extraordinary thing to remember about this wonderful man. Hood was sick from boyhood with consumption, always sick, always unhappily situated—and, in later years, always tormented by the greatest of all fears that a man can have, fears for the sake of his children. Perhaps he never had a single happy day after he began to work for a living. Yet never in his life did he once complain, or allow himself to look unhappy, or speak of his sickness to friends, except when much spitting of blood obliged him to delay his work a little. And then he only apologized for his weakness and made a joke about it. He joked even when he was dying.

We must consider his work as naturally dividing itself into two parts—the comic and the serious; but there is also a half-way region of production between these—a collection of things half serious, half comic. So we may better say that Hood’s productions represent three different classes of composition. We cannot include the comic among his best works—simply because it is comical; but, it is the cleverest work of the kind ever done in English, and I should recommend the students to read a number of comic ballads merely to acquire a new knowledge of the value of words. These funny ballads ought to be of much greater use to Japanese students than even to English students—they teach you certain things that cannot be taught in any other way. As for the half-way poems—those partly comical and partly serious—several take a very high

place in English literature. They are mostly terrible and ghostly subjects. They represent what is called "grimmum" or what Professor Saintsbury would call "grotesque-tarfit"; such is the long mock romance of *Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg*,¹ — a story about a young woman who had a leg made of solid gold to replace the leg which she had lost by accident, and who was married first and murdered afterwards by a man who wanted to steal the leg. Such also is the grim poem of *The Forge*,²—a tale of some wicked iron workers who threw a man alive into a furnace, but presently discovered that the man was the devil himself. Such also is the celebrated *Haunted House*,³ — the most "creepy" poem ever produced in English. Certainly it is a little too long; but it ought to delight anybody who can feel horror. No ghost really appears; but as we look, with the poet, through all the lonely mouldering rooms, and the long deserted garden, or, as we ascend with him the groaning stairs which have not been trodden for years, we experience a thrill of fear such as any real ghost experience would give. Only a genius could have written that. As for the third class of poems—the purely serious and these are very great in most cases. I do not indeed refer especially to such studies of classical mythology as *Lycus, the Centaur*, with its never-to-be-forgotten account of living trees, whose branches shed blood when broken, and whose flesh-coloured fruits cry out when eaten. Any other clever poet might have written quite as well on the same subject. But no other poet could have written *The Song of the Shirt*,⁴ — picturing the mental and physical agony of the poor woman obliged to sew for a living — the poor sewing girls so touchingly afterwards described by another poet, Rossetti, as having their strength proclaimed by hollow cheeks and faded forms: he means, of course, their moral strength. No other poet could have written *The Bridge of Sighs*,⁵ the story of the poor outcast girl who drowns herself in despair: — the name of the poem is the name of a

¹ Printed in *New Monthly Magazine*, September 1840.

² *The forge, a romance of the iron age* 1844.

³ Published in *Hood's Magazine*, January 1844.

⁴ Published in *Punch*, Christmas Number, 1843.

⁵ In *Hood's Magazine*, May 1844.

bridge in Venice, but Hood gives this name to London Bridge, from which many unhappy girls have committed suicide. And no other poet has given us more touching bits of natural sentiment than have been expressed in such light sweet verses:—

I remember, I remember,
 The house where I was born,
 The little window where the sun
 Came peeping in at morn;
 He never came a wink too soon,
 Nor brought too long a day,
 But now, I often wish the night
 Had borne my breath away!

* * *

I remember, I remember,
 The fir trees dark and high;
 I used to think their slender tops
 Were close against the sky:
 It was a childish ignorance,
 But now 'tis little joy
 To know I'm farther off from heav'n
 Than when I was a boy.

Some day I should like to read with you parts of the less familiar works of Hood. For the present we must leave him, with reminding you that the best pieces are preserved in every anthology of the 19th century poems.

Coupled with the name of Hood we often find the name of Praed.¹ Praed also was a humorous poet, but his specialty was light "society verse"; and he will be remembered only by a few pieces. He was as fortunate in his career as Hood was unfortunate, but he occupied a much smaller place in literature. We cannot notice him well except in a special lecture upon society verse — on which occasion something may be quoted from him. Very little can be said here of Peacock—Thomas L. Peacock.² Peacock as a prose writer is very important indeed, and we shall have to consider him among the novelists.

¹ Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802-1839).

² Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866).

In this place I only mention him to you as a poet; and here his chief claim to merit is as the author of a drinking song. Perhaps no other modern Englishman has done so well in the same direction—though we must remember that the best of all drinking songs is not modern: it is that old “Back and side go bare, go bare!” which dates back to before the time of Elizabeth. Peacock’s drinking songs are humourous mostly, but the fun is of a strange ironical kind—making us laugh by the exposition of extraordinary facts with mock indifference of feeling. Sometimes he even puns. Here is an example:—

The mountain sheep are sweeter,
 But the valley sheep are fatter;
 We therefore deemed it meeter
 To carry off the latter.
 We made an expedition;
 We met a host and quelled it;
 We forced a strong position,
 And killed the men who held it.

* * *

As we drove our prize at leisure,
 The king marched forth to catch us:
 His rage surpassed all measure,
 But his people could not match us.
 He fled to his hall-pillars;
 And, ere our horse we led off,
 Some sacked his house and cellars,
 While others cut his head off.

These two stanzas give a good idea of the general tone of Peacock’s rolling fun. It is always, however, more ironical than comic, and we can only call him very clever—nothing more.

Something must be said about Mrs. Felicia Hemans,¹ who had so great a popularity in that time, and now has no popularity at all—although the poem of *Casabianca* is still read and recited in children’s schools. Mrs. Hemans was a very pretty woman and a very good woman who married a decidedly bad

¹ Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793-1835).

man and found herself obliged to support her own children in consequence of his practical desertion. She wrote an immense number of poems, rather pretty always, and sentimental;—never very strong. But it was an age of sentiment; and thousands of people who could not care for Wordsworth, and who did not want their children to read Byron, found Mrs. Hemans both charming and soothing. Her books sold by tens of thousands; she became a successful author, and remained successful just long enough to be able to fulfil her duty as a mother. You need never trouble to read her; but you should always think of her generously. Her best poem is said to be the little piece entitled *England's Dead*. But you will find two or three pieces by her in the anthology. I may close this notice of the minor poets with a brief mention of Beddoes.

Thomas Beddoes¹ is very little known, except to the lovers of something rare and fine in verse. He was altogether unknown until a few years ago when Mr. Gosse revived him and brought out a new edition of his works. He was an English doctor who studied and settled in Germany, and there produced a most phantastic kind of literature, not published in complete form until after his death. His death was a suicide,—a most curious and horrible suicide, effected partly by poison, partly by cutting his veins. The bulk of his composition is represented by a drama in the Elizabethan style called *Death's Jest Book*;² and we need not say much about it as drama. But, scattered through that gloomy composition, there are about half a dozen—perhaps a dozen—songs of the most exquisite beauty and feeling. These little songs are not comparable with anything of the second rank—they are comparable only with the best work of Shelley and Keats and other great masters. Some day we can read them. But now we must turn to the prose writers of this period.

¹ Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-1849).

² *Death's jest book, or the fool's tragedy* 1850.