

ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM OF THE
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY. 1798-1830.

by

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CONTENTS

Chap. 1.	Introduction--A General Survey of Early Nineteenth Century Criticism.....	1
Chap. II.	Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads.....	8
Chap. III.	The Critical Writings of Coleridge and Shelley	
	1. The Biographia Literaria.....	18
	2. Lectures on Shakespeare.....	28
	3. Shelley's Defence of Poetry.....	34
Chap. IV.	Charles Lamb and the New Shakespearean and Elizabethan Criticism.....	40
Chap. V.	The Place of Hazlitt in English Criticism.....	50
Chap. VI.	Minor Subjective Critics of the Period.....	59
Chap. VII.	The Rise of the Quarterly Reviews and Monthly Magazines.....	66
Chap. VIII.	Francis Jeffrey--A Man Looking Both Ways.....	75
Chap. IX.	Jeffrey's Associates in Objective Criticism-- William Gifford, John Wilson, and John Lockhart..	85
	Chronological Survey of the Period.....	93
	Bibliography.....	95

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction--A General Survey of Early
Nineteenth Century Criticism.

While the most noteworthy literary achievement of the period from 1798 to 1830 was undoubtedly the blossoming of the Romantic movement in English poetry, no appreciation of the literature of the period can be complete without a realization of the fact that side by side with the new poetry there grew up a body of critical writing which is deserving of a place in the first ranks of English critical literature. This criticism, a large part of which was the work of the great creative writers of the period, reflects in an interesting way the reaction of Romanticism against the theory and practice of Neo-Classicism, which dominated the literary activity of the period.

Between the poetry of the two periods there is a marked contrast in both material and method. The poetry of the Classical school was an expression of conscious thought directed towards social, political, or religious conditions of the time. The "Absalom and Achitophel" of John Dryden or Pope's "Dunciad" are typical examples of such poetry, making its appeal purely to man's reason. As a result the work of the Classicists tended to the common-place. With the writers of the early nineteenth century a new creative power came into play. The impelling force behind their verse was no longer man's powers as a rational being; nor was their appeal to his reason. The creative agency in the new poetry was the Imagination, whether that faculty was employed in creating from unreality a world of mystery, as in Coleridge's

"The Ancient Mariner," or in interpreting the world of Nature, as in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." The appeal of the Romanticists was to the emotional or spiritual side of man's nature. Appreciation of their poetry demanded not intellectual keenness and alertness of mind, as did the work of Pope and his contemporaries, but imaginative sympathy on the part of the reader.

Between the criticism of the two periods much the same contrast can be noticed, and the critics of the early nineteenth century may be divided into two distinct groups, on the basis of their attitude to the Romantic and Neo-Classic principles of criticism. In the age of Pope, under the leadership of Dr. Johnson, a literary dictatorship had arisen, as a result of which Neo-Classical criticism had determined upon certain fixed rules and principles, in the light of which all poetry was judged. In the main these rules followed those set forth by Aristotle centuries before. Having decided upon the supreme value of fixed forms such as the heroic couplet, believing in the unapproachable perfection of the ancients and the value of imitating them closely, and being convinced of the utter inferiority of everything Gothic or Mediaeval and of the absolute supremacy of the Reason over the Imagination, the critic of Neo-Classicism, in the light of these first principles, passed sentence upon all literature which came to his notice, with the ruthless severity of a magistrate administering an immutable law. Failure to meet the required standards meant certain excommunication at the hands of the ruling critical tribunal. This explains the failure of the age of Pope to

appreciate the greatness of Elizabethan literature or the sublime imagery of Milton. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton, by failure to conform with the regulations laid down by Johnson and his school, had brought upon themselves the stigma of disapproval.

The work of the Subjective or Impressionist critics, who formed by far the most important group of the critical writers of the early nineteenth century, was a direct reaction against this bondage of rule and custom. Just as the poets of the new century rebelled against the narrow restrictions of Pope and his contemporaries, the critics of the period reacted against the failure of Neo-Classicism to appreciate outside the narrow range of its own limits. There were no definite aims for the new criticism, or no organized plan of attack, but as the result of a gradual change critics began to judge a work by its essential worth, regardless of its particular style or subject matter.

As imagination had become the creative agency of poetry, it became also the guiding principle of criticism. Instead of the critic analyzing objectively, according to a set of rules and under the guidance of Reason, he aimed to put himself into imaginative sympathy with the aims and purposes of the poet, and to interpret the work of the poet, as the poet might interpret nature. "The principal uniformity amid the wide diversities of the new critics was, that, without any direct concert, without any formulated anti-creed, they all labored to remove the bolts and bars, to antiquate the stipulations, to make the great question of criticism not, 'What kind have you elected to try,

and have you followed the rules of it?' but, 'What is this that you have done, and is it good?'"¹

A spirit of 'Aesthetic Inquiry' thus made its way into English criticism. Realizing that no period could lay down rules that would govern the literature of all others, and, indeed, believing that rules of any kind were undesirable, critics began to look in literary effort for that which pleased. The motto of the new criticism might be said to be "By their fruits ye shall know them." Under the influence of the new spirit critics came to regard their art as secondary to creative effort, and to realize that criticism must adjust itself to literature, instead of expecting literature to conform to the demands of criticism.

With the publication, in 1800, of Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads it looked for a time as if there were a danger of new rules being set up to replace those of the eighteenth century, to which Wordsworth raised objections. "There was a danger of fresh arbitrary rules being set up in place of the old ones,--of the old, infinitely mischievous question of 'Does the poet please as he ought to please?' being juggled into the place of the simple 'Does he please?'"² These rules, however, had little influence on subsequent literary effort; Wordsworth himself disregarded them in his best work; and Coleridge in his reply to Wordsworth's theories in his "Biographia Literaria" clearly demonstrated that no rules could be laid down for the judgment of poetry. Criticism, he argued, must be the result

¹ Saintsbury, George; A History of English Criticism
New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1911. P. 302.

² Ibid., P. 303.

of sympathetic imaginative interpretation of a poet's work, since poetry is essentially the product of the Imagination. In this claim Coleridge was supported by Shelley, whose whole "Defence of Poetry" is merely a further exposition of its opening proposition, that Poetry is "the expression of the imagination."¹

The theory thus enunciated became the guiding principle of the critics who associated themselves with the Romantic ideal in criticism. Coleridge himself gave a practical demonstration of the new appreciative criticism in his "Lectures On Shakespeare." In fact the changed attitude towards the Elizabethans and their work is one of the clearest indications of the new spirit which had invaded the realms of English criticism. Charles Lamb in his "Specimens of the Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare," and his "Tragedies of Shakespeare," and William Hazlitt in his "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays," and "Dramatic Literature in the Age of Elizabeth" reflected the new attempt to criticize with sympathetic insight and imaginative interpretation. One of the finest examples of the criticism which resulted from this attempt on the part of the critic to place himself as far as possible in line with the intentions of the poet at the time of writing is Thomas De Quincey's essay, "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth." Here De Quincey followed the method of approach previously adopted by Maurice Morgann in his "Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff, 1777," when he repudiated the Understanding or Reason as the criterion of truth and accepted intuition as the guide in critical appreciation.

¹Shelley, Percy Bysshe; A Defence of Poetry, edited by L. Winstanley, in Belles Lettres Series. Boston, U.S.A.: D. C. Heath & Co., 1911. P. 4.

The work of Coleridge, Shelley, Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Thomas De Quincey and the best work of William Hazlitt thus belongs to the school of Subjective or Impressionist criticism, which is the parallel movement to the Romantic Movement in English poetry.

In contrast with these critics is a group of critical writers of the same period who associated themselves with the ideals and principles of the Classical school. For the most part, their criticism was voiced through the medium of the quarterly reviews and monthly magazines which sprang up in the early years of the nineteenth century. Inheriting the tradition of dogmatism from Johnson and his contemporaries, these writers accepted the claim of the critic to infallibility and proceeded to pronounce judgment, often in terms of the most scurrilous abuse. Among this group of Objective critics the most characteristic figures were those of William Gifford, the editor of the Quarterly Review, whose virulent review of Keats's "Endymion" was at one time believed to have killed that author; John Lockhart his coadjutor; and John Wilson, the Christopher North notorious for his abuse of the Cockney School in Blackwood's Magazine. The following extract from the pen of Hazlitt, in an article referring to Gifford, is a typical comment on the method of this school: "He believes that modern literature should wear the fetters of classical antiquity; that truth is to be weighed in the scales of opinion and prejudice; that power is equivalent to right; that genius is dependent on rules; that taste and refinement of language consist in word-catching."¹

¹ R. Brimley Johnson: Famous reviews, selected and edited with introductory notes. Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916. See Article on Wm. Gifford, Page 138.

With the work of these Objective critics, that of Francis Lord Jeffrey must also be considered. The most important of the writers in the critical periodicals of the time, Jeffrey is less consistently classical in his ideals and methods. An enthusiastic appreciation of Elizabethan drama and a higher appreciation of the work of Keats than was common at the time, might seem to argue that Jeffrey's sympathies were with the Romantics. But while he repudiated any critical standard which placed Shakespeare and the early Elizabethan dramatists outside its pale, and while he accepted no definite set of rules by which all poetry was to be judged, Jeffrey was, nevertheless, decidedly objective in method, in the bulk of his work at least. The "This will never do"¹ of his review of Wordsworth's *Excursion* is typical of Jeffrey's manner of dogmatic pronouncement. "Jeffrey rarely appreciates a piece of literature, interprets it imaginatively, lends himself to its peculiar charm and expresses this charm through sympathetic symbolism.--- He is always for or against his author; he is always making points. The intellectual interest predominates in his work, and his discussions often seem, particularly to a reader of modern impressionistic criticism, hard, unsympathetic, searchingly analytical, repellingly abstract and systematic.-----For delicate and subtle appreciation, then, of the best modern type it is useless to look in Jeffrey's essays." ²

¹ Farous Reviews, ed. cit., P. 38.

² Gates, Lewis E.; *Three Studies in Literature*. New York, London: MacMillan Co., 1899. Study 1, Francis Jeffrey. P. 13.

CHAPTER 11

Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

For several reasons Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" forms a natural starting point for a study of the Subjective Criticism of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Published in 1800, the Preface, in point of time, comes first among the critical writings of the period. Then too, it is the first instance of a writer defending in prose the reaction against Classicism which was characterizing English poetry at the beginning of the century. Above all, the theories set forth in the Preface became the starting point for Coleridge's statement of his views in the chapters of the "Biographia Literaria" in which he dealt with Wordsworth's principles of poetry. As these views were the guiding principle of the group of Impressionist critics in whom we are at present interested, it is well to start with the document, in reply to which they were first expressed. "In no instance---did a protagonist of the new poetry take the field in prose so early and so aggressively as did Wordsworth in the Preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads. In none was such an attack so searchingly criticized and so powerfully seconded, with correction of its mistakes, as in the case of the well-known chapters of the Biographia Literaria, in which Coleridge examined Wordsworth's examination"¹

¹ Saintsbury, History of English Criticism.
ed. cit., P. 310.

In general terms, the Preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads was a mistaken attempt on the part of Wordsworth to replace the rules of eighteenth century criticism by a new code of rules which would govern all poetry. The first appearance of Lyrical Ballads in 1798 had been the occasion for a heated controversy between the supporters of the Romantic movement and the admirers of Pope and his school. As a result, when a second edition was published in 1800, a preface was added in which Wordsworth, to use his own words, undertook "to state what I have proposed to myself to perform and to explain some of the chief reasons which have determined me in the choice of my purpose."¹ In so doing Wordsworth was probably actuated to a large extent by a sincere desire to protest against what he believed to be the false poetic practices of the eighteenth century, particularly in the matter of diction. On the other hand, it is doubtless true that Wordsworth was not at all pleased by the reception which had been accorded to his work in the 1798 volume, and that an element of pique entered into his attitude when he applied his principles to all poetic composition, and claimed for them the right to govern all poetry worthy of the name. The most obvious example of this truth will be found in Wordsworth's argument on the subject of diction. In his account of the plan and writing of Lyrical Ballads Coleridge tells us that "Lyrical Ballads were presented as an experiment whether subjects, which from their nature rejected the ornaments and extra-colloquial style of poems in general, might not be so managed

¹ Wordsworth, William. Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Complete Poetical Works of Wm. Wordsworth, Royal Edition, Vol. V, Prefatory Essays and Notes P. 6. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and N.Y., 1919.

in the language of ordinary life as to produce the pleasurable interest which it is the peculiar business of poetry to impart. To the second edition a preface was added in which Wordsworth--- was understood to contend for the extension of this style to poetry of all kinds, and to reject as vicious and indefensible all phrases and forms of style which were not included in what he (unfortunately, I think, adopting an equivocal expression) called the language of real life."¹ In so doing Wordsworth was in reality placing himself on a level with the critics of Neo-Classicism, and was proposing that, instead of the principles of Aristotle, those of William Wordsworth should govern the judgment of the worth of all poetry. That Wordsworth was here carried beyond his original intentions might be gathered from the fact that the poet does not seem to practise in his own work that theory of diction which he preaches as a critic. Probably Saintsbury is right when he claims that "no doubt resentment, and a dogged determination to 'spite the fools' made him here represent the principle as much more deliberately carried out than it actually was"---for, "from Tintern Abbey onwards he never achieves his highest poetry, and very rarely achieves high poetry at all, without putting that principle in his pocket."²

In the Preface Wordsworth propounds two main theories: that the best subject matter for poetry is derived from incidents chosen from common life, made interesting by throwing over them a coloring of imagination, and by tracing in them the fundamental

¹ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria* Bohn's Library, P. 146.
George Bell and Sons, London, 1904.

² Saintsbury, *Op. cit.*, P. 311.

passions of human nature; and that poetry is best written in the language of ordinary men. These principles are clearly stated in Wordsworth's own words in his explanation of the purpose of Lyrical Ballads. "The principal object proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature."¹ It soon becomes evident that by "common life" Wordsworth means "humble and rustic life," and that "the language really used by men" is to be interpreted as the language of the rural peasantry of England. In further explanation of his purpose Wordsworth states that "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language.----- The language too of these men has been adopted---because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived."² This is a direct reflection of Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature as we find it expressed in Tintern Abbey. To him man was but one reflection of the great

¹Wordsworth, Op. cit. P. 7.

²Ibid., P. 7.

spirit which lay behind all Nature,--

"Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."¹

What Wordsworth in the Preface says of the Poet in general is certainly true of himself. "He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature."² The man who lived in the closest contact with the beauties of the natural world was, to his mind, the man most likely to represent truly the essential passions of the human heart, and therefore the man in whose life and character poetry must look for its subject matter. To a poet who declared himself

"well pleased to recognize

In Nature, and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being."³

it was an easy step to the belief that daily communion with Nature would influence even language, and that the proper language for poetry was that of those who lived remote from "the din of towns and cities."

¹ Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey, lines 97-102.

² Wordsworth, Op. cit., P. 22.

³ Tintern Abbey, lines 107-111.

In both theory and practice Wordsworth set himself to counteract the style of the eighteenth century poets, who, he claimed, "separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in idle and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation."¹ In comparing his own work with the poetry popular at the time he points out distinctions of both matter and style. The subject matter of the poems is simple, and depends on the feeling connected with it to give it importance and significance. The style differs from that of the Classicists by avoiding personification,—"a device to elevate the style and raise it above prose,"² and in substituting for so-called poetic diction, the language of real men.

So convinced is Wordsworth of the evil of this artificial diction common in poetry, that he devotes an Appendix to the Preface to a discussion of the topic, in which he traces the history of poetic diction. Early poets, he points out, wrote poetry as an expression of a powerful emotion produced in them by the contemplation of some real event. As a result, they made use, with pleasing effect, of a highly figurative language, which is the natural accompaniment of a high degree of excitement. Later poets, desiring to achieve the same pleasurable effect, copied this language, without being animated by the same intense emotion, and without regard to its propriety in relationship to the thought expressed. Thus there grew up an artificial way of expressing one's thoughts, which came to be considered as

¹ Wordsworth, Op. cit., P. 8.

² Ibid. P. 12.

peculiarly the privilege of the poet. The addition of metre aggravated the tendency to artificiality, and in course of time "metre became a symbol or promise of this unusual language."¹ Against this false diction Wordsworth vigorously protests, and in his enthusiasm for rustic life he suggests replacing it by the language of the peasantry.

Expanding further his discussion of diction, Wordsworth quotes passages from Milton and Gray in support of the claim that "the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the elevated character, except with reference to metre, in no respect differs from that of prose, and likewise, some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written."² Finally Wordsworth goes so far as to affirm that "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition."³ The proper language for poetry is a selection of the language really spoken by men. A proper choice of subject matter will lead to a vocabulary sufficiently rich in metaphor and figures of speech, and if metre be added to such language, it will give all the dissimilitude necessary between prose and poetry.

This insistence upon the incidents of humble rustic life as the proper subject matter of poetry, on the language of men who live such a life as its ideal medium of expression, and on the essential similarity between the language of prose and poetry are the main principles enunciated by Wordsworth in the

¹ Wordsworth, Appendix on Poetic Diction, ed. cit., P. 41.

² Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads. P. 14.

³ Ibid., P. 15.

Preface. The remainder of the work is devoted to a somewhat philosophical discussion of the question,--What is a poet?, and to a somewhat unconvincing attempt to answer the question,--Why have I written in verse?

In reply to the first question Wordsworth defines a poet as "a man speaking to man."¹ He is differentiated from other men by feeling more keenly than they, being more given to thinking and feeling without external excitement, and being better able to express thoughts and emotions so aroused. His aim and purpose is to give pleasure to Man. Since Man is essentially adapted to Nature, and his mind is but one manifestation of the spirit of Nature, the poet's subject matter should be Nature, and since the poet wishes to arouse the sympathetic interest of men, he must express himself in the language in which they would express themselves.

To the question, "Why have I written in verse?" Wordsworth returns two answers. Words metrically arranged give pleasure, and metrical language adds a charm to the "endless combinations of forms and imagery"² supplied to the poet by the passions of men, their occupations, and the world of Nature. As Saintsbury puts it, Wordsworth's "rather weak retort" is, "Why should I not add the charm of metrical language to what I have to say?"³ To this the critic adds the argument that the presence of metre counteracts any tendency to over-excitement of the emotions or passions, which might over-balance the pleasurable effect which is the ultimate end of poetry. "Whatever passions a poet communicates

¹ Wordsworth, Op. cit., P. 15.

² Ibid., P. 27.

³ Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 314.

to his reader, they should, if the reader's mind be sound and vigorous, always be accompanied by an over-balance of pleasure. The music of harmonious metrical language gives a feeling of delight which is most important in tempering the painful feelings always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions."¹ In lighter poetry, the main source of pleasure is the skill with which the poet manages his metre. Wordsworth dismisses the question with the somewhat sweeping statement that "of two descriptions, either of passions, manners or characters, each of them well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once."²

In estimating the influence of the Preface upon subsequent creative and critical literature, it must be borne in mind that Wordsworth himself, in his best poetry, failed to conform with the principles there set down, thus demonstrating the impracticable nature of these principles. This inconsistency has been noted by both Wordsworth's contemporaries and modern critical writers. In commenting on Wordsworth's Preface, William Blake remarked, "I don't know who wrote these; they are very mischievous and directly contrary to Wordsworth's own practice."² Saintsbury adds the comment, "If Blake had added the words, 'when he is a poet,' he would have given the conclusion of the whole matter."³ Francis Jeffrey, writing in 1807 in a review of Wordsworth's Poems published in that year remarked, "This author of bad verses can write good verses when he pleases. In point

¹ Wordsworth, Op. cit., P. 32.
 Ibid., P. 32

² In Annotations upon Wordsworth's Prefaces, quoted by Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 378.

³ Ibid., P. 378.

of fact, he does always write good verses when by any accident he is led to abandon his system and to transgress the laws of that school which he would fain establish on the ruin of all existing authority."¹ W. J. Courthope, a modern critic, draws attention to the same fact when he says, "Wordsworth's own practice is a complete violation of his principles."² If Wordsworth himself did not put his theories into practice, it is hardly to be expected that they would exert much influence upon the creative work of those who followed him. Such indeed is the case, and the principles of diction and subject matter there set forth, have had little effect on the course of English poetry. In the sphere of critical literature the greatest influence of the Preface is exerted indirectly through the replies which it called forth, particularly Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. "Interesting, however, as the Preface and its satellites are in themselves, they are far more interesting as the occasion of the much longer examination of the main document which forms the centre, and as criticism the most valuable part of the *Biographia Literaria* of Coleridge, Wordsworth's fellow worker in these same Lyrical Ballads."³ The work, then, is of interest chiefly as the initial provocation underlying Coleridge's statement of his poetic creed, and as a historical document, representing the first prose manifesto of the reaction against Romanticism. That it was mistaken in its method, in which it attempts to set up new arbitrary laws governing poetry, makes it none the less interesting.

¹ Jeffrey, Francis; Review of Poems by Wm. Wordsworth, 1807. In *Selections from the Edinburgh Review*, edited by Maurice Cross.

² Courthope, Wm. John; *The Life of Alexander Pope*, *Pope's Works*, edited by Elwin and Courthope, Vol. V. John Murray, Albemarle St., London, 1889.

³ Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 315.

CHAPTER III

The Critical Writings of Coleridge and Shelley.

1. The Biographia Literaria.

The Biographia Literaria, published in 1817, is the main store house of Coleridge's work as a critic. For our present purpose our interest centres on those chapters of the book in which Coleridge sets forth his poetical creed and makes clear his attitude towards the principles enunciated by Wordsworth in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, published seventeen years previously. As Mr. Saintsbury has suggested, these chapters in themselves form a complete book which might well be entitled, "A critical Enquiry into the Principles which guided the Lyrical Ballads, and Mr. Wordsworth's Account of them."¹

Coleridge's first literary association with Wordsworth had been in the collaboration which resulted in the publication of Lyrical Ballads in 1798. In the opening part of Chapter 14 of the Biographia, Coleridge tells the story of how this volume came into existence. In common with Wordsworth he shared the beliefs that it was possible to arouse the interest and sympathy of a reader by "a faithful adherence to the truth of nature," and that the interest of novelty might be added through "the modifying colors of the imagination."² Lyrical Ballads was an attempt to combine these two ideas in a practical experiment. "The thought suggested itself that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural, and the

¹ Saintsbury, Op. cit.; P. 317.

² Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. cit., P. 145.

excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real.--- For the second class subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them or notice them, when they present themselves."¹ In working out the plan for the volume it was agreed that Coleridge was to deal with the supernatural and romantic, but in such a way as to create a semblance of reality, and to induce in the reader "that willing suspension of disbelief, which constitutes poetic faith."² Wordsworth, on the other hand, undertook to deal with characters and incidents chosen from real life, but in such a way as to give to them the charm of novelty and unreality.

When a second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in 1800, Wordsworth, as we have seen, added a Preface in which he apparently endeavoured to contend that the principles which underlay the poems in that volume should be considered as the guiding principles of all poetry. The result was a bitter controversy, in which, naturally enough, it was often taken for granted that Coleridge unconditionally agreed with all the conclusions of his collaborator. After a lapse of seventeen years Coleridge undertook, in the chapters of the *Biographia* before mentioned, to point out the limits of his agreement with Wordsworth's theories, and the points of difference between

¹ Coleridge, *Op. cit.*, P. 145.

² *Ibid.* P. 145.

them. Coleridge clearly declared his purpose in the following paragraph. "With many parts of the Preface, in the sense attributed to them, and which the words undoubtedly seem to authorize, I never concurred; but on the contrary, objected to them as erroneous in principle, and as contradictory both to other parts of the Preface, and to the author's own practice in a greater number of the poems themselves. Considering the Preface as the source of a controversy in which I have been honored more than I deserve by the frequent conjunction of my name with his, I think it expedient to declare in what points I coincide with his opinions and in what points I altogether differ."¹

Wordsworth, in his discussion of poetry in general, and the mission of the poet, had not gone beyond the question, "Who is a poet?" to answer the question, "What is a poem?" His fellow critic agrees with Wordsworth in his conception of the fundamental nature of the poet, but he goes beyond him to a discussion of the essential distinguishing features of a true poem. The poet and the prose writer are dealing with the same raw materials, but they combine them differently in view of a different object. In one sense, Coleridge admits, any composition with a metrical arrangement is a poem. "As a peculiar pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities, all compositions that have this charm super-added, whatever be their contents, may be called poems."² This basis of distinction Coleridge disregards as too wide, for, he points out, it would include even such ditties as the familiar,

"Thirty days hath September

April, June and November."

¹Coleridge, Op. cit., P. 147
²Ibid., P. 148.

Another distinction between prose and poetry is to be found in the underlying purpose, and the nature of the contents. The immediate purpose of a poem must be to convey pleasure rather than truth. But even this is not a satisfactory basis of division, and Coleridge narrows it still further by insisting that a true poem must give delight from the whole, and not merely from the parts; that is, it must be a unit. In summing up the discussion Coleridge says, "If a man chooses to call every composition a poem which is in rhyme, or measure, or both, I must leave his opinion uncontroverted.---If it were subjoined that the whole is likewise entertaining or affecting as a tale, or as a series of interesting reflections, I, of course, admit this as another fit ingredient of a poem, and an additional merit. But if the definition sought be that of a legitimate poem, it must be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other, all in their proportion harmonizing with and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."¹ True to the great central principle of the romantic school, which recognizes the Imagination as the creative agency of all poetry, Coleridge finds in the poet's Imagination the governing factor in determining the unity of a poem, for Imagination is the soul of poetic genius, "which is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."²

Coleridge gives a practical demonstration of the theories outlined in Chapter 14, when he discusses Venus and Adonis, and Lucrece as examples of legitimate poems, the products of original poetic genius. In his criticism of these specimens of Shakespeare's non-dramatic work, he draws attention to the

¹ Coleridge, *Op.cit.*, P. 148

² *Ibid.*, P. 151.

following characteristics of original poetic genius in general:

1. Sweetness of versification and melody; 2. A choice of subjects somewhat removed from the poet's immediate interests; 3. The moulding of all images to a predominant passion; 4. Depth and energy of thought, the result of a wide range of knowledge and reflection.

Chapter 17 of the *Biographia* is devoted to a discussion of Wordsworth's theories of diction and his choice of rural and rustic life as the ideal subject matter for poetry. While Coleridge does not, by any means, corroborate all the principles set forth by his colleague, he nevertheless declares the Preface to be a highly commendable piece of work. In voicing the need for reaction against prevailing poetic diction, in justifying its use by the early poets, and in tracing its history, Coleridge believed that Wordsworth had performed a useful service, the effect of which was apparent in the changed nature of the diction used in the poetry of the decade following the publication of his views. Beyond this Coleridge does not go, for he cannot agree with Wordsworth in his claim that low and rustic life provides the poet with the most perfect manifestations of human nature, and that the proper diction of poetry lies entirely in the language used by ordinary men in their conversation. "He proceeds to show by obvious arguments that a doctrine of this kind is neither adequate nor accurate,--that Wordsworth's poems do not bear it out, and that poetry must be disrealized. He proceeds cautiously and politely, but very decidedly to set the puerilities and anilities of the *Idiot Boy* and *The Thorn* in a clear light, which must have been extremely disagreeable to the

author, and goes on to pull Wordsworth's arguments, as well as his examples, to shreds and shreds."¹

Coleridge doubts Wordsworth's theory on which his choice of characters was said to rest, and refuses to admit that the ideal life is necessarily that of the rustic. To his mind rustic life in itself is not necessarily an unmixed blessing. To profit by it a man must have certain pre-requisites of education, etc. Not only does Coleridge dispute the theory on grounds of principle, but he proceeds to argue that Wordsworth himself has not followed it consistently, and that in his best poems the characters are not chosen from rustic life in the ordinary sense of the words. Neither are their thoughts and feelings the result of causes or circumstances necessarily the outcome of their rural residence and occupations.

The second theory from which Coleridge differs is that embodied in Wordsworth's statement that "the language too of these men is adapted,---(purified indeed from what appeared to be its real defects, from all lasting or rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men communicate hourly with the best objects from which the best part of language is derived."² Here again Coleridge bases his argument in part on principle and in part on the practice of Wordsworth in the most worth while of his poems. As Coleridge sees it, the only distinction between the language of a rustic and of any other man is that the former is more limited in the range of his thoughts, and therefore in the vocabulary necessary to express them. Coleridge objects in particular to

¹ Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 320.

² Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, ed. cit., P. 7.

the latter part of Wordsworth's statement--that "such men communicate hourly with the best objects from which the best part of our language is derived." Our best language, he claims is the result of reflections of which the rustic has no consciousness. In short, the language which Wordsworth has in mind as a substitute for false poetic diction is in reality not that of rustic men at all, but merely a language of common sense, as opposed to one of artificiality.

This claim is substantiated by Wordsworth's own writing when he is at his best, which shows "how little a mere theory, though of his own workmanship, interferes with the processes of genuine imagination in a man of true poetic genius, who possesses as Wordsworth, if ever man did, most assuredly does possess 'The Vision and The Faculty Divine.'¹" To adopt the language of men as Wordsworth theoretically would have the poet do, it would be necessary not only to limit oneself to words actually used by common man in ordinary conversation, but also to follow their order. A mere glance at "Tintern Abbey," or "The Prelude," will demonstrate beyond doubt that Coleridge was quite right when he claimed that in actual practice Wordsworth did not limit himself to either of these restrictions, except in those poems or parts of poems in which he left himself open to the charge of inanity and banality. "Were there excluded from Wordsworth's poetic compositions, what a liberal adherence to the theory of his Preface would exclude, two thirds at least of the marked beauties of his poetry must be erased."²

¹Coleridge, Op. cit., P. 173.

²Ibid., P. 201.

On one other point Coleridge finds it impossible to support Wordsworth. This is in the contention that, "There neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and poetry."¹ In support of his argument Wordsworth had submitted the claim that much of the language of even the highest poetry does not differ in any respect from that of prose. This, Coleridge contends is a fact which has never been denied. The real question at stake is whether there is not a style proper to prose which would be entirely out of place in poetry, and vice versa. Such he believes to be the case, and in support of the claim he puts forth the following reasons.

1. The origin of metre.

Metre originated in an attempt to counter-balance the effect of the excitement resulting from the working of passion. Metre is therefore an artificial thing, the result of volition, which aims at mingling delight with emotion. As a result we expect to find it accompanied by language which is colored by the vivid and the picturesque and varied by frequent figures of speech.

2. The effect of metre.

Metre tends to quicken and stimulate the feelings and the attention, which then demand the unusual in language, if disappointment is not to result. "Metre resembles yeast, worthless or disagreeable in itself, but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionately combined."² Coleridge, who is somewhat obviously afraid of committing himself on the question of metre, hesitates to announce any pleasure in the

¹ Wordsworth, Op. cit., P. 15.

² Coleridge, Op. cit., P. 178.

metre itself and can find its only justification in the fact that it provides the poet with an opportunity of using this unfamiliar language. "I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of prose."¹

3. Poetry always implies passion and excitement of the feelings which justifies and commands a different language from that of prose. "The very act of poetic composition is itself, and is allowed to imply and produce, an unusual state of excitement which justifies and demands a corresponding difference of language."²

4. The practice of the best poets of all ages would authorize the opinion "that in every import of the word 'essential,' which would not here involve a mere truism, there may be, is, and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition."³ while it may be true that there are passages which would be equally suitable as prose or verse, it is undoubtedly true also, that many passages are unpoetical merely because they are in the style of prose.

In endeavoring to explain Wordsworth's mistaken attempt to lay down rigid rules to govern poetry, and his apparent inconsistency in his failure to carry out his own principles, Coleridge argues that Wordsworth had been swept away by his own enthusiasm for reform. What he really aimed at was merely a reformation in existing poetic diction; but he allowed himself to be carried away by his disgust and swung to the other extreme. His original purpose was to seek the most apt expression of his thought, while preserving rhyme and metre. "Feeling a justifiable preference for the language of nature and good sense, even in its humblest

¹ Coleridge, Op. cit., P. 178.

² Ibid., P. 181.

³ Ibid., P. 182.

and least ornamented forms, he suffered himself to express, in terms at once too large and exclusive, his predilection for a style the most remote possible from the false and showy splendour which he wished to explode."¹

Coleridge's attitude to Wordsworth's rules and principles of poetry is summed up in the sentence, "Could a rule be given from without, poetry would cease to be poetry and sink into a mere mechanical art."² This, indeed, forms the heart of all his poetical creed, and the guiding principle of the Impressionist school of criticism in the period. To Coleridge the only guiding power for poetry lay in the poet's Imagination, which forms a law unto itself. And as it must be the pervading power in creative literary activity, so too its sympathetic appreciation must prevail in the realm of the critical.

Having made clear his guiding principle for all poetry, and therefore for all criticism of poetry, Coleridge concludes his discussion with a valuable critique of Wordsworth's poetic achievement. Here he follows the method which his theories of poetry presuppose, when he endeavors to place himself in sympathy with Wordsworth, and then to point out both his defects and his excellencies. Most of the defects are merely occasional, but his excellencies, including his purity of diction, his depth and originality of thought, the truth of his imagery of nature, and his sympathy with man as man, are almost everywhere visible. Chief among these Coleridge, as might be expected, places Wordsworth's imaginative power, in which, he claims, "he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton.----To employ his

¹ Coleridge, *Op. cit.*, P. 191.

² *Ibid.*, P. 187.

own words, he does to all thoughts and objects

"add the gleam,

The light that never was on sea or land,

The consecration, and the poet's dream."¹

The chapter is a splendid example of Coleridge's method of criticism, and deserves to rank high among the appreciative criticism of the period. From Saintsbury it wins the following commendation: "There is no other critical document known to me which attacks the chief and principal things of poetry proper--poetic language and poetic numbers--in so satisfactory a manner."²

2. Lectures on Shakespeare.

Between the years 1811 and 1818 Coleridge delivered three series of lectures on Shakespeare and other English poets. These form the outstanding example of a practical illustration of his method of criticism, which aimed at setting aside all dogmatism and prejudice, and arriving at an estimate of a writer's real contribution to the sum total of English criticism by approaching his work with sympathetic understanding. They are also of the utmost importance as a reflection of the new attitude to Shakespeare and Elizabethan literature, which marked the criticism of the Romantic school.

The first course of Lectures was delivered by Coleridge in the Hall of the London Philosophical Society, in the years 1811 and 1812. In the prospectus which was circulated prior to the series,

¹ Coleridge, Op. cit., P. 232.

² Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 324.

Coleridge announced it as "A Course of Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton, in illustration of the Principles of Poetry and their Application, as Grounds of Criticism, to the most popular works of later English poets, those of the Living included."¹ The lectures were mainly on Shakespeare; two or three of them dealt with Milton; and the first was devoted to a discussion of general principles of poetry. Our only remains of these lectures are the newspaper reports of the current journals of the time; extracts from the diary of H. Crabbe Robinson; and transcripts from shorthand notes taken at the lectures by Mr. J. Payne Collier and transcribed some forty-five years later. From these sources we have been able to collect more or less complete outlines of Lectures 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12.

In the winter of 1813-14 Coleridge fulfilled an engagement for a series of lectures in Bristol. This course apparently included six lectures on Shakespeare and four on Milton. In all probability the material presented was very similar to that used in the London series of 1811-12. The rather detailed reports of the lectures published by the Bristol Gazette of the day, may therefore, be taken as supplementary to the extant remains of the preceding course.

The early months of 1818 found Coleridge again lecturing in London. Of this series, numbering fourteen lectures in all, three only were concerned with Shakespeare, and one other with his contemporary dramatists. The tenth dealt with Milton and Dante, and the others covered a vast range of subject matter,

¹ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor; Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets. Collected by T. Ashe, Bohn Libraries, P. 5. Geo. Bell and Sons, London, 1904.

including Italian, Spanish, and French literature. Our records of this series are limited to the memoranda made at the time by Mr. H. H. Cardwardine, and to a vast accumulation of notes collected after Coleridge's death by H. N. Coleridge and published in "The Literary Remains of S. T. Coleridge" in 4 volumes, 1836-39. These notes were, in all probability used equally as much in preparation for the other course, but they give us, at least, the bulk of Coleridge's criticism of the Elizabethan drama.

The Shakespearelectures provided an illustration of both the merits and the defects of Coleridge's genius. For the most part they were given without notes, and were almost extemporaneous in their nature. Their subject matter was familiar, having been the object of years of meditation, and the preparation for the lectures seems, in a general way, to have been somewhat intensive. But the actual form which the lecture of any given evening might take was decided by the whim of the lecturer at the moment of delivery. Thus the lectures were marked by the brilliancy of Coleridge's mind and thinking, and held the listeners spell bound by their eloquence. In a letter to Mr. J. Payne Collier, Coleridge describes his method of lecturing thus:-

"During a course of lectures, I faithfully employ all the intervening days in collecting and digesting the materials-----The day of the lecture till the hour of commencement, I devote to the consideration, what of the mass before me is best fitted to answer the purposes of a lecture-----Several times however--- I have previously written the lecture; but before I had proceeded twenty minutes I have been obliged to push the MS. away, and give the subject a new turn-----I take far, far more pains than would go to the set composition of a lecture, both by varied reading and

by meditation; but for the words, illustration, etc., I know almost as little as anyone of the audience what they will be five minutes before the lecture begins."¹ By this method the lectures gained in intimacy, and charmed the audience by their display of "splendid talent, original thought, and rare powers of expression and fancy."² On the other hand, the lectures gave evidence of Coleridge's worst besetting sin, a tendency to digression, and lack of steadiness in purpose. Frequently a lecture degenerated into a desultory discussion of topics far-removed from the subject in hand. This tendency was the cause of much dismay among the lecturer's friends and admirers, as is evidenced by the following quotation from a letter written by H. Crabbe Robinson to Mrs. Clarkson. "As you express it, 'an enchanter's spell seems to be upon him,' which takes from him the power of treating of the only subject which his hearers are anxious he should consider, while it leaves him infinite ability to riot and run wild on a variety of moral and religious themes."³

In spite of all their shortcomings the Shakespeare lectures are of supreme importance to the student of English literary criticism. As has already been stated they are a splendid illustration of Coleridge's critical method. Time after time he states his determination to disregard formal rules and to break away from all traditional prejudices, that he might arrive at a sympathetic appreciation of what Shakespeare had endeavored to do, and how, and to what extent he had achieved his purpose.

¹ Coleridge to Collier, 1819. Lectures on Shakespeare.
² ed. cit., P. 19.

² H. Crabbe Robinson to Mrs. Clarkson. Ibid. P. 23.

³ Ibid. P. 23.

His aim was to understand, and understanding, to appreciate; to place himself in the position of the great dramatist himself, and thus attempt to see as Shakespeare intended that his audience should see. As a reporter of the Bristol Gazette remarked in his review of Coleridge's second lecture, which dealt with Macbeth, "he seemed to have been admitted into the closet of Shakespeare's mind; to have shared his secret thoughts, and been familiarized with his most hidden motives."¹ This was the direct result of Coleridge's decided belief that imaginative sympathy was the essential qualification of the true critic. Like his friend Southey he believed that "Not to sympathize is not to understand."

The Lectures are important secondly, as a reflection of the new interest in and appreciation of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Age which is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Romantic Movement. This topic will be dealt with somewhat more fully in a later chapter, but a just realization of the position of Coleridge among Shakespearean critics necessitates a clear understanding of the fact that at the beginning of the 19th century Shakespeare's reputation in England was at a low ebb, and his works were largely disregarded. To Coleridge goes the credit for being one of the pioneers of the movement which restored Shakespeare to his rightful place at the summit of achievement in English literature. His work becomes vastly more significant in view of the fact that it constituted an important part of a revolution in thinking with regard to Shakespeare, and that it replaced the dogmatism and prejudice resulting from a faith in arbitrary rules, which for the past two centuries had prevented

¹Lectures on Shakespeare, ed. cit., p. 468.

a proper appreciation of the Elizabethans, by a plea for a study of their work itself. This plea is strongly voiced in the following passages: "If all that had been written upon Shakespeare by Englishmen were burned in the want of candles, merely to enable us to read one half of what our dramatist produced, we should be great gainers. Providence has given England the greatest man that ever put on and put off mortality, and has thrown a sop to the envy of other nations, by inflicting upon his native country the most incompetent critics."¹ "His critics, among us, during the whole of the last century, have neither understood nor appreciated him; for how can they appreciate what they could not understand?"²

Finally, the lectures are infinitely valuable for the contribution which they make to the field of Shakespearean criticism. To the present day they remain as one of our finest analyses and appreciations of the genius of that great master.

¹ Coleridge Op. cit., 1st. series, Lecture 9, P. 128.

² Ibid., P. 129.

3. Shelley's Defence of Poetry.

While there is much in the letters and prefaces of Percy Bysshe Shelley, which is of interest to the student of nineteenth century critical literature, his formal critical pronouncements are limited to the "Defence of Poetry," published in 1821. The immediate occasion of its writing was an essay by Shelley's friend, Peacock, on "The Four Ages of Poetry." In reality, however, Shelley forgets all about Peacock and his unorthodox ideas, and makes the Defence a means of expressing his own inmost thoughts on the question of poetry in general. "He drifts far away from what was apparently his starting point, over a measureless ocean of abstract thinking."¹ While in part the essay seems overly-abstract and philosophical, it contains much that is of great value in a study of the new spirit which had come to pervade English criticism at the opening of the new century. Like Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," and Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria," the essay is interesting in itself, as a reflection of the mind of one of the great creative artists of the day, and is valuable also as an evidence of the ideals of the new Romantic movement in poetry and in critical appreciation.

The Defence is closely akin to Coleridge's Biographia in the emphasis which it places upon the Imaginative element in poetry and in criticism. In the opening paragraphs Shelley defines Imagination as "mind acting upon thoughts so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them other thoughts."² It is thus a synthetic process, as opposed to the working of Reason,

¹ Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 384.

² Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, ed. cit., P. 3.

which is essentially analytical. The writer then proceeds to demonstrate that the Imagination is the indispensable element which becomes the creative agency for all poetry, and that through that faculty of man's mind, poetry exerts its influence upon the moral nature of man.

Poetry, as Shelley defines it, is "the expression of the imagination."¹ In the widest sense the term includes all the arts--music, dancing, painting etc., because all of them are the embodiment of imaginative ideas. In a more restricted sense, however, the word refers to imaginative creative effort which finds its expression through language, and particularly metrical language. This is the highest type of poetry, for language itself is intellectual in its nature, and being the product of the Imagination it is more easily controlled by that faculty than are color, and form, the mediums through which the other arts work. Like Wordsworth, Shelley insists upon the kinship between the subject matter of poetry and of science, and finds the supreme end for which poetry exists in pleasure to man. "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds.-----It thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world."²

The main difference between Shelley's conception of poetry and that of his contemporaries lies in the emphasis which he places upon the essential importance of outward form and of the musical element in poetry. He strongly asserts the necessity of a harmony between the thought of a poem and the medium through

¹Shelley, Op. cit., P. 4.

²Ibid., P. 50.

which it is expressed. A beautiful thought must be clothed in only beautiful language. While he does not admit the popular distinction between prose and poetry,^{and} he considers the use of metre optional, he insists that harmony and rhythm of thought and of language are the essential characteristics of all true poetry; and because there is an indispensable relationship between thought and language, translation, according to Shelley, is impossible. This theory precludes the possibility of Shelley's accepting any theories of diction such as Wordsworth propounded. In his preface to the *Revolt of Islam*, published in 1818, Shelley unmistakably is referring to Wordsworth's Preface when he remarks, "Nor have I permitted any system relating to mere words to divert the attention of the reader from whatever interest I may have succeeded in creating.----- I have simply clothed my thoughts in what appeared to me the most obvious and appropriate language. A person familiar with Nature, and with the most celebrated productions of the human mind, can scarcely err in following the instinct, with respect to selection of language, produced by that familiarity."¹

A further characteristic of poetry which Shelley stresses somewhat more strongly than his contemporaries is spontaneity. The best poetry, he apparently believed, was produced easily, and without great effort or prolonged labor on the part of the poet. This point is also perhaps, better illustrated from the Preface to the *Revolt of Islam* when, with reference to that work

¹ Shelley, Percy Bysshe; Preface to *Revolt of Islam*, Vol. 1, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, in 4 volumes, P. 119. Edited by Geo. E. Woodberry. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, New York, 1892.

he says, "I would willingly have sent it forth to the world with that perfection which long labor and revision is said to bestow, But I found that if I should gain something in exactness, I might lose much of the newness and energy of imagery and language as it flowed fresh from my mind."¹ It is at least an interesting conjecture whether or not the phrase "which labor and revision is said to bestow," is a reference to Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works. In Chapter 15 of the *Biographia* Coleridge remarks on the depth and energy of thought which underlies the poetry of the true genius. With Shakespeare, he claims, this is not the result of idle chance or even of sheer genius; it is the inevitable outcome of careful study and conscious effort. It seems highly probable that Shelley had in mind this passage when he put in a plea for freshness and spontaneity.

Having discussed the nature of Poetry, Shelley devotes the rest of his essay to a discussion of its effect upon society. Here, again, all centres around the Imagination. Poetry produces in the reader a sympathy with the beautiful and the good, and calls attention to the beauties of common scenes and incidents. There is a distinctly Wordsworthian note in the sentence, "Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."² By thus supplying the mind with new thoughts of delight, poetry strengthens the imagination. But the imagination is man's greatest instrument of moral good. Man has never lacked a knowledge of what is right; he has lacked merely the

¹ Shelley, Preface to *Revolt of Islam*, ed. cit., P. 123.
² Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*, ed. cit., P. 18.

imaginative sympathy which forces him to put his knowledge into effect. The lack of sympathy which results in moral callousness is a result of imaginative weakness, and therefore, by strengthening the imaginative faculty, poetry indirectly plays an important part in raising the moral ideals of the world. Shelley believes that this is the true moral purpose of poetry, and that a poet who attempts to inculcate direct moral teaching is falling short of his highest moral opportunities. The moral precepts of any poet are limited by time and place, but in this indirect effect upon man's imaginative and emotional faculties he can exert an influence unlimited. That Shelley himself aimed at this indirect method of conveying moral truth is illustrated by the following extract from the preface to the *Revolt of Islam*. "I would only awaken the feelings so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue, and be incited to those inquiries which have led to my moral and political creed."¹

In this theory of the moral efficacy of poetry Shelley was obviously strongly influenced by Aristotle's definition of tragedy and its purifying effect upon the emotions. In Shelley's discussion of the drama the parallel is very striking. "The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived. The good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror and sorrow."²

Shelley concludes his *Defence* with a comprehensive survey of the world's poetry. His main pre-occupation is with Athenian

¹ Shelley, *Preface to Revolt of Islam*, ed. cit., P. 115.

² Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*, ed. cit., P. 24.

drama, which he extols as the highest achievement of all time in the realm of poetry. Latin poetry he passes over very briefly because to Shelley's mind the true poetry of Rome--the highest expression of her imagination--was reflected not in the works of her poets, but in her institutions. His enthusiasm for Italian poetry is great, for he finds a spiritual kinship with Petrarch and Dante in their emphasis upon love. Of English poetry Shelley says little except in comparing Shakespeare's greatest dramas with the tragedies of Greece, and Milton's Paradise Lost with Dante's Divine Comedy.

CHAPTER IV

Charles Lamb and the New Shakespearean
and Elizabethan Criticism.

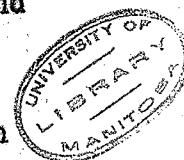
To the general lover of English literature, Charles Lamb has endeared himself by the familiar chattiness of the Elia essays. Marked throughout by a constant under-current of allusion and quotation, they reveal their author's genuine passion for books and reading. In a sense, therefore, there is a shadow of literary criticism even here. "Everywhere there is evident the abiding, unfailing love of 'the book.'"¹ In Lamb's letters, especially those to Coleridge, there is abundant proof of this same characteristic of the essayist and his work. From these two sources alone there might be culled much of interest for the student of critical literature, in the way of informal comment. Lamb's main contribution, however, to English literary criticism is to be found in his more formal critical endeavor in the field of Shakespearean and Elizabethan drama. His best known, and most important contributions as a critic are his "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare," published in 1808, and his essay on "The Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation," first published in 1811, in "The Reflector," edited by Leigh Hunt.

In order to appreciate fully Lamb's contribution to the appreciation of Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists of the Elizabethan Age, a clear understanding of the eighteenth century attitude to these writers is essential. In the period of the influence of Neo-Classicism critics had demanded that both poetry and the drama should break with the idealism and

¹ Saintsbury, Op. Cit., P. 353.

romantic fervor of the Elizabethans and adopt as their model the style with which Charles and his court had become familiar during the years of their exile in France. Realism and a polish and elegance in expression replaced romantic fervor and the Elizabethan tendency towards extravagance of thought and language. In the dramatic literature of the time, the tendency was at first thoroughly bad. In an attempt to copy the style of the brilliant French dramatists of the day, such as Moliere, Racine and Corneille, their English imitators succeeded often in reflecting only their vices, and failed to catch the sparkle of true wit, and the genuine poetic inspiration which marked their work. An attempt at realistic portrayal of life, without any mask of the ideal, resulted in coarse vulgarity, and immoral pictures of the corruption of court life. Gradually the tendency to realism became less objectionable, but the neglect of romantic poetry and drama remained.

One result of this movement was the dismissal of Shakespeare to a place of second-rate importance. The diaries of Pepys and Evelyn reveal the fact that Shakespeare was no longer considered interesting, that *Midsummer Night's Dream* appeared insipid and ridiculous, and that *Hamlet* was disgusting to the supposed refinement of the age. The plays of Shakespeare were kept in evidence mainly by mutilated stage versions such as Tate's perversions, which purported to be improvements upon the originals. Because Shakespeare failed to conform with the rules for drama as laid down by Aristotle and the ancients, and because his plays violated the three unities of the classic drama, he was regarded as a freak of nature, of some genius certainly, but not to be



taken too seriously. As for his immediate fore-runners and contemporaries, they and their works were practically ignored.

One of the outstanding features of the Romantic movement was a return to Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser as models, and sources of inspiration. In critical literature this characteristic of the movement is reflected in a renewed interest in Elizabethan drama, and a new appreciation of Shakespeare and his genius. In this new movement Charles Lamb is to be regarded as the leader, but he was ably supported by Coleridge and William Hazlitt, and by Francis Jeffrey and William Gifford, the editors of the two most important Reviews of the period.

Lamb's first contribution to the renewed interest in Elizabethan drama came in 1808 with the publication of his "Dramatic Specimens." Through this work he first drew the attention of the English reading public to the vast treasure land awaiting exploration in the work of our early dramatists. Lamb's correspondence reveals that the subject is one which had interested him from early manhood. As early as 1796 he had forwarded to Coleridge a series of extracts from Beaumont and Fletcher, with the comment that he was collecting extracts from early drama, "from Beaumont and Fletcher in particular, in which authors I can't help thinking there is a greater richness of poetical fancy than in anyone, Shakespeare excepted."¹ In the same year the heavy clouds which gathered over his life as a result of the tragic circumstances of his mother's death, blotted out all

¹ Lamb to Coleridge,
See Specimens of Dramatic Poets Contemporary with
Shakespeare, p. 598. Vol. IV, The works of
Chas. and Mary Lamb, edited by E. V. Lucas,
Methuen and Co., 36 Essex St., W. C., London, 1904.

interest in literature. In time, however, Lamb adjusted himself to the responsibility which faced him, and gradually gathered up the tangled threads of his life and resumed his old interests. In the year 1799, his enthusiasm for the early Elizabethan drama reflected itself in the poetical drama "John Woodvil." So thoroughly had Lamb steeped himself in the style and manner of the Elizabethans that William Godwin mistook part of the play for the actual work of Beaumont and Fletcher. This work won the interest of Southey for the poets who were its inspiration; Coleridge had already caught Lamb's enthusiasm, and Wordsworth soon joined the little circle. The actual compilation of the Specimens was begun in 1806. In preparation for the work Lamb exhausted his private resources, and searched the shelves of the British Museum and of private collectors. "More than a third of the following specimens are from plays which are to be found only in the British Museum and in some scarce private libraries. The rest are from Dodsley's and Hawkins's collections and the works of Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger."¹

The book, when it appeared, consisted of extracts from the plays of some twenty or twenty-five dramatists who lived about the time of Shakespeare. These included Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Ford, Webster, Massinger, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher. The extracts consisted chiefly of whole scenes or successive scenes, with short explanatory prefixes to make them intelligible, accompanied by very brief critical notes by Lamb. The principle which underlay the choice of extracts is given

¹ Lamb, Op. cit., Preface, Page XI.

by Lamb in the Preface to the volume. "The kind of extracts which I have sought after have been, not so much passages of wit and humor, though the old plays are rich in such, as scenes of passion, sometimes of the deepest quality, interesting situations, serious descriptions, that which is more nearly allied to poetry than to wit, and to tragic rather than to comic poetry. The plays which I have made choice of have been, with few exception those which treat of human life and manners, rather than masques and Arcadian pastorals.-----Another object which I had in making these selections was to bring together the most admired scenes in Fletcher and Massinger, in the estimation of the world the only dramatic poets of that age who are entitled to be considered after Shakespeare, and to exhibit them in the same volume with the more impressive scenes of old Marlowe, Heywood, Tourneur, Webster, Ford, and others; to show what we have slighted, while beyond all proportion we have cried up one or two favorite names."¹

Through the Specimens Charles Lamb may be said to have been the discoverer of the minor Elizabethan dramatists. The effect of the work spread slowly, but surely. In spite of the fact that its editor was in hearty accord with Lamb's purpose in the book, The Edinburgh Review allowed its publication to pass unnoticed. A direct result of the volume, and of Lamb's interest in its subject, was a series of Lectures on the Elizabethan Dramatists delivered by William Hazlitt in 1821. It was probably due largely to Lamb's enthusiasm that Coleridge devoted a lecture of the 1818 series to Beaumont and Fletcher and their contemporaries.

¹Lamb. Op. cit., P. XI and XII.

"It was Lamb rather than anyone else who first led the average well-read Englishman to think that he ought to know something about Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Massinger, Heywood, and Webster."¹

While recognizing the supreme importance of the Specimens in opening up a new field of study, and in setting an example for those who came after Lamb, we cannot fail to see that they are not without faults. After all, they are only Specimens, and the extracts chosen reveal the dramatists in question at their best, without any notice of their crudity, and their tendency to the melodramatic. Lamb makes little or no attempt to evaluate a work as a whole, but simply dwells on the merits of passages which have pleased him. Thus he tends to give an exaggerated impression of the merits of an author. This, however, was perhaps exactly what was needed at the time to revive interest in the poets under consideration. At any rate the Specimens remain as one of Lamb's finest achievements as a critic. "Everything necessary to excite Lamb's critical excellence united here--actual merit, private interest, presence of the highest excellence, and, as we see from the Letters, years of familiarity and fondness on the part of the critic."²

The first literary reflection of Lamb's interest in Shakespeare's plays came in 1807 when he collaborated with his sister in the production of "Tales from Shakespeare." The book was intended primarily for children, and was an attempt to re-tell the stories of Shakespeare's plays in language as near to the

¹ Winchester, C. T.; A Group of English Essayists of the Early Nineteenth Century, P. 97.

MacMillan Co., New York, Toronto, 1910.

² Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 350.

original as possible, but bringing them to the level of a child's understanding. While the book lies somewhat without the bounds of literary criticism, it is important as evidence of the increasing interest in Shakespearean drama which marked the period.

In 1811 Lamb contributed to "The Reflector," a literary periodical edited by his friend Leigh Hunt, an essay entitled, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation." In this essay Lamb puts forth the argument that Shakespeare's plays lose much of their strength and intellectual dignity when they are performed upon the stage. Lamb admits that a well acted representation of Shakespeare's plays brings with it a certain delight, but this he believes to be only temporary. "When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that instead of realizing an idea, we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance."¹ In fact, Lamb finds that Shakespeare's plays are decidedly unsuitable for stage presentation. "I cannot help being of the opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on the stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. There is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do."²

¹ Lamb, Charles; On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, English Critical Essays of the Nineteenth Century, edited by Edmund D. Jones, P. 98,

² World's Classics Series, Oxford University Press, 1916. Ibid., P. 98.

Lamb supports his theory with arguments founded on the nature of Shakespeare's greatest plays. Hamlet he claims, for instance, is an essentially intellectual play, in which the interest centres in a conflict within the hero's own moral nature. It is therefore entirely misrepresented when an actor attempts to convey Hamlet's thoughts and actions to a vast audience by means of words and gestures. The sweet love-dialogues of Romeo and Juliet were not intended for other's ears; and lose much in being repeated before an audience. The crimes of Richard the Third, and the fierce passion of Othello tend in the acting to be reduced to the level of the hateful and of the merely wicked; while all sense of sublime intellectual strength, and of the deep motives underlying their actions tends to lose itself. "The truth is, the Characters of Shakespeare are so much the objects of meditation rather than of interest or curiosity as to their actions, that while we are reading any of his great criminal characters--Macbeth, Richard, even Iago,--we think not so much of the crimes which they commit, as of the ambition, the aspiring spirit, the intellectual activity, which prompts them to overleap these moral senses.-----But when we see these things represented the acts which they do are comparatively everything, their impulses nothing."¹

The play which Lamb most strongly condemns for stage purposes is King Lear. His opinions may be best noted in his own words. "So to see Lear acted,--to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and

¹ Lamb, Op. cit., p. 110.

disgusting.-----But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horror of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear.-----The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual.-----On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it we see not Lear, but we are Lear."

With regard to these criticisms of Shakespeare's plays, we cannot help feeling with Harley Granville Barker that Lamb was mistaken. Shakespeare was not only a great poet; he was a great play-wright, and he wrote his plays to be acted. Lamb's mistakes, for the most at least, seem to rise out of a failure to realize the essential facts of Elizabethan stage-craft. Shakespeare depended almost entirely upon poetry and the spoken word for his effects, for he wrote for a stage almost devoid of scenic effects. "The chief strength of Elizabethan stage-craft lay in its comprehensive use of poetry. Plot was carried on, character developed, and environment created by the aid of poetry; emotion was sustained by it, and illusion held."¹ Speaking of Lamb's objections to the acting of Lear, Barker says, "Shakespeare has no other resource than the spoken words of the actor, such actions as will not mar it, and a negative background to that action. Therefore, Lear, Kent, and the rest must act the storm together by identifying Lear's passions with the storm.

¹ Barker, Harley Granville; Prefaces to Shakespeare, 1st series, Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., London, 1930. Ibid., P. 140.

And if Lamb saw "an old man tottering about the stage with a walking stick he did not see the Lear of Shakespeare's intentions,"¹

Whatever may be our estimate of Lamb's critical dicta, it cannot be denied that he played an ~~important~~ part in redirecting the attention of his age to Shakespearean drama. Nor should we forget that while he is not, in many respects, one of our greatest critics, he is undoubtedly one of our most delightful. Through all that he wrote there breathed the charm of a loveable personality, and the courage of a soul not to be crushed by the bleakest tragedy. His style is marked by a kindly wit, and an unusual felicity of phrase which makes him one of the most pleasing writers of the period.

¹ Granville Barker, Op. cit., P. 140.

CHAPTER V

The Place of William Hazlitt in English Criticism.

"So have I loitered my life away," says Hazlitt of himself in his essay, "My First Acquaintance with Poets," "reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best."¹ The result of this wide reading, thinking, and writing is a vast accumulation of delightful and valuable prose, much of which belongs to the category of critical literature. One of our most delightful personal essayists, Hazlitt touches everything he writes with an intimate charm, and through every page his personality makes itself felt. In the matter of style he is a master of the serviceable idiomatic prose of Addison and Steele, and of Swift. Few writers have achieved a more thoroughly interesting and entertaining prose style. Robt. Louis Stevenson, whose style is somewhat similar, declared, "We are mighty fine fellows, but we cannot write like William Hazlitt."

In the general method of his criticism Hazlitt is one of the outstanding exponents of the school of impressionist criticism established by Coleridge. Over and over again Hazlitt repudiates the critical method of the preceding century which was content with "setting up a foreign jurisdiction over poetry and making criticism a kind of Procrustes' bed of genius, where the critic might cut down imagination to matter-of-fact, regulate the passions according to reason, and translate the whole into logical diagrams and rhetorical declamations."²

¹ Hazlitt, William; *My First Acquaintance with Poets*, *Critical Essays of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. cit., P. 180.

² Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, Preface, P. 176. Vol. IV, *The Complete Works of Wm. Hazlitt*, Centenary Edition, edited by P. P. Howe, J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., London and Toronto, 1930.

His ideal of the true critic, he claimed, was Montaigne, who told you what he liked in an author, rather than applying to his work a set of fore-ordained rules and regulations. And he followed closely his ideal. Hazlitt's outstanding characteristic as a critic is his capacity to enjoy an author, and his happy gift of conveying to his readers a sense of his enjoyment. A true lover of literature, he was able to respond to the best that was in an author or poet, and to sympathetically interpret that best to his readers. The result is a series of "such appreciations, in the best, the most thorough, the most delightful, the most valuable sense, as had been seldom seen since Dryden, never before, and in him not frequently."¹

Much of Hazlitt's best work as a critic was done as an exponent of the new school of Shakespearean and Elizabethan criticism, for he was one of the greatest prophets of the Elizabethan revival. His main contributions to the renewed interest in Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists are his "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays," first published in 1817, and his "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth," delivered in 1820. In these two books he did much to carry further Lamb's efforts to arouse in the public a new enthusiasm for the greatest of English dramatists, and for lesser stars dimmed by his superior brightness. His friendship with Charles and Mary Lamb, between the years 1805 and 1825 strengthened his interest in this subject, and when the "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays" was published Hazlitt dedicated it to Charles Lamb as "a mark of old friendship and lasting esteem." The volume consists of a series of sympathetic and

¹ Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 364.

pertinent comments on the main characters of each of Shakespeare's plays. When the volume appeared, nothing of its kind had been written in English. Coleridge's Lectures had not been published and had reached a comparatively small circle. The best of existing accounts of Shakespeare's plays came from the pen of the German critic, Schlegel, and Hazlitt claims that it was partly a sense of the unfitness of allowing another nation to take the lead in Shakespearean criticism, which induced him to undertake the work. "We will at the same time confess, that some little jealousy of the character of the national understanding was not without its share in producing the following undertaking, for 'we were piqued' that it should be reserved for a foreign critic to give 'reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakespeare.'"¹ In many ways, Hazlitt's comments are similar to those made by Lamb, in his essay, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare." Hazlitt supports his friend in the claim that the greatest of Shakespeare's plays cannot be acted. He concludes his discussion of Lear with a quotation from Lamb in regard to this subject and in the comments on Hamlet he says, "We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, Hamlet. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems scarcely capable of being acted."² Another parallel between the two writers lies in the emphasis which they place on Shakespeare's tendency to let the intellectual interest preponderate in his characters.

The volume shows a wide knowledge of Shakespeare's plays and an intelligent and sympathetic appreciation of his motives and genius. Side by side with Coleridge's Lectures ^{the} and work stands

¹ Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, ed. cit., P. 172.

² Ibid., P. 237.

as the best criticism of Shakespeare written in that generation, and indeed, as one of the best of all time.

In the "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth" Hazlitt's interest in the early English drama extends from Shakespeare to his contemporaries, who were only less gifted than he. In a few places Hazlitt's political prejudices colored his decisions, but on the whole the estimates are true to Hazlitt's guiding principles of criticism. The series demonstrate Hazlitt's enthusiasm for his subject, and his unusual ability to produce a corresponding enthusiasm in his reader. "Nowhere do we find a better expression of that gusto--that amorous quest of literary beauty and that rapturous enjoyment of it--which has been noted as Hazlitt's great merit."¹

Of the remaining works of Hazlitt, the "Lectures on the English Poets," and "The Spirit of the Age" are most worthy of mention, and stand among Hazlitt's best work. The Lectures on the English Poets were given in 1818, at the Surrey Institution in London. They were delivered as they had been written previously, and were published in the same year. The volume consists of an introductory lecture, "On Poetry in General," and a series of critical studies in which Hazlitt deals with the outstanding literary figures from Chaucer to his own day. This is typical of a general division in Hazlitt's critical writing. Some of it is general in nature, and aims at a discussion of first principles. The essay mentioned above, and his discussion, "On Wit and Humor," which introduces the "Lectures on the English Comic Writers," delivered in 1819, are among the best

¹ Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 367.

examples of this type of criticism. This lecture, "On Poetry" is, for the most part, directly Coleridgean, in the emphasis which it places on the Imagination as the essential impelling motive of all poetry, and the deciding factor in the choice of subject matter and of diction. On the other hand, in the emphasis which he places on musical expression Hazlitt resembles Shelley. Along with the poetical creeds of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, which have already been discussed, this lecture is one of the most important reflections of the attitude of the Romanticists to the essential principles of poetry.

The second group of Hazlitt's critical deliverances consists of a series of studies of individual authors and their work. This type of work was his most valuable contribution to the critical writing of the period. The work of this class to be found in the Lectures on the English poets is representative of the wide range of Hazlitt's interest and of his passionate enthusiasm for literature. The lectures are marked by a gusto and spirit which was typical of Hazlitt's writing. They are almost conversational in their manner, and they are marked by an inspirational fervour capable of arousing in the reader something of the enthusiasm of the critic himself. Hazlitt was a man to whom literature was a real, and a live thing, and he had a happy faculty for arousing a similar sense of its reality in his reader. Nor were his interests limited to a few favorite poets or writers. His Romantic liking for Shakespeare and the Elizabethan drama, which we have already noted, found further expression in his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton." But it did not blind Hazlitt to the merits of the leaders of the classical school, and perhaps the best estimate of Pope which has been written is to be found in the

lecture "On Pope and Dryden." If he was an admirer of Chaucer and Spenser, he also demonstrated an interest in, and a real appreciation of the work of his contemporaries. His appraisal of the genius of Coleridge, which occurs near the end of the lecture, "On the Living Poets," is a fine example of Hazlitt's ability to estimate the true worth of a poet. "It would be difficult to name any critic who has shown sufficient breadth of appreciation to estimate with equal justice the work of such widely different poets as Shakespeare, Pope, Burns, Byron, and Wordsworth."¹

At the same time, the Lectures on the English Poets are not by any means the best of Hazlitt's work as a critic. In fact, they may perhaps be rightly considered as his least successful work. In delivering the Lectures Hazlitt felt himself limited by the necessity of conforming to the expectations of his audience by passing definite sentence upon the authors under consideration, and by providing the subscribers to his course with a definite body of information with regard to the poets and their poems. Looked at in this light, the Lectures are really an attempt at Objective criticism and in work of that type Hazlitt is not in his element. He was at his best when stating the effect produced on his own mind by a poet's writing and when endeavoring to interpret by means of imaginative sympathy. For Hazlitt at his best, therefore, we must turn elsewhere.

"The Spirit of the Age" was first published anonymously in January, 1825. Some of the essays which it included had been published previously in the periodicals of the day. Since the "Lectures on the English poets" had been delivered Hazlitt had

¹ Winchester, A Group of English Essayists of the Nineteenth Century, ed. cit., P. 62.

published his "Lectures on the English Comic Writers" and his "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature in the Age of Elizabeth," besides "Table Talk," and a great deal of material which had appeared in journals and magazines. The work is, as a result, more mature, and represents indeed, some of Hazlitt's best work as a critic.

The book consists of a series of essays in which Hazlitt gives us his impressions of many of his contemporaries,-- politicians, philosophers, poets, journalists, etc.,-- men whose names are familiar in the social and literary history of the period, men such as Jeremy Bentham, William Godwin, and Malthus; Byron, Coleridge, Scott, Southey, and Wordsworth; and Francis Jeffrey, William Gifford and Lord Brougham. The Spirit of the Age "is a splendid portrait gallery wherein some of his contemporaries appear in the pillory and others in frames of honor."¹ In places, it is true, Hazlitt's critical faculties have been sadly warped by prejudice, but on the whole, the volume is a series of critical essays not easily equalled.

The outstanding characteristic of the Spirit of the Age, and indeed, of all of Hazlitt's best work, is his interest in men. He came to an author's literary productions with a determination to appreciate them as a reflection of the personality which produced them. To him, the real interest of any book lay in the fact that back of it was a human soul, and that through its pages the voice of a man or woman spoke. A splendid example of this

¹ Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Poets, and the Spirit of the Age, with an introduction by A. R. Waller, P. lx. Everyman's Library. No. 459. J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London, 1910.

interest in character and personality is the appreciation of Burns and his work which is one of the best of the "Lectures on the English Poets." In estimating the greatness of Burns as a poet, Hazlitt demands that a critic should remember Burns, the man. In his own critique, he aims at placing himself in the position in which the Scotch poet found himself, at realizing the temptations with which he was faced, and at judging Burns and his work in the light of his limited opportunities. In the Spirit of the Age, this interest in personalities is perhaps best illustrated by the essay on Sir Walter Scott. True, the value of its criticism is somewhat lowered by the effect of prejudice, but in his enthusiastic praise of Scott's portrayal of character Hazlitt is at his best. The characters of the Waverley Novels were living persons to him, and he makes them such for the readers of his essay.

If Hazlitt, when at his best, is capable of sympathetic interpretation of the highest type, at his worst, he is capable of the most bitter and heartless satire. Even Charles Lamb, and Leigh Hunt, who were among Hazlitt's best friends, have witnessed to the fact that Hazlitt was not an even-tempered man, and that his personality was often even decidedly unpleasant. When prejudiced by political differences of opinion, or worse still by personal antipathy, or a combination of both, Hazlitt was capable of a type of abuse almost without equal in the records of English literature. This, however, was only occasional, and it is perhaps hardly fair to hold such instances against Hazlitt as a critic, for "not only does Hazlitt then cease to be a critic, he ceases to be a rational human being."¹

¹Saintsbury, Op. cit., P. 363.

This type of abusive ridicule is represented in the Spirit of the Age by the outburst against William Gifford, the editor of the Quarterly Review, who had roused Hazlitt's wrath by his review of the "Lectures on the English Poets," in which he designated the book as worse than worthless.

In addition to the critical works mentioned Hazlitt produced a great body of literature, much of which appeared in periodicals of the day, and has since been collected by his son in a volume entitled "Sketches and Essays." In these series of papers which include "The Round Table," "Table Talk," "The Plain Speaker," etc., the literary articles are occasional and scattered. Hazlitt was also a frequent contributor to the Edinburgh Review, one of the quarterly Reviews to be discussed in a later chapter.

CHAPTER VI

Minor Subjective Critics of the Period.

In addition to the outstanding leaders of the new criticism of the first years of the nineteenth century, we must make some mention of the work of the less important critics who were governed by the new spirit. Among these somewhat minor figures the names of Leigh Hunt, Robert Southey, and Thomas de Quincey are most important. All three were important figures in their own day, and produced an abundance of critical material, most of which has lost its interest for present day readers. Nevertheless, enough of their work has survived, and proved its real worth, to make a survey of the critical literature of the period incomplete without some notice, at least, of their contribution.

The work of Leigh Hunt shows an unusually wide range of critical performance, and an unusual catholicity of taste. Much of his work, however, belonged rather to the category of journalism than to critical literature proper; it was of interest at the time, but has since been forgotten except by the student who values it for its historical significance. Then too, Hunt has been over-shadowed by men greater than himself, by the marked superiority of intellect manifested by Coleridge and Hazlitt, and by the greater attractiveness of Lamb's style.

For over thirty years, Hunt wrote continuously as the editor of periodicals, or as an essayist. His personal acquaintances numbered the outstanding men of letters of two generations, for he was the friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, Lamb and Hazlitt, and also of Dickens, Thackeray, the Brownings, Carlyle and Macaulay. He was particularly happy in

his appreciations of the work of his contemporaries. He was an enthusiastic admirer of Wordsworth; and exerted a strong influence over Hazlitt, Shelley, and Keats. His praise of Keats's poetry laid that poet open to the satirical abuse of Blackwood's Magazine, which strongly derided Hunt and his Cockney School of poetry.

Hunt was a sincere lover of good books, and like Hazlitt, he had a happy felicity of expression which enabled him to communicate his interest to his readers. His deliberate purpose in all that he wrote seems to have been to make good literature known and appreciated. His range of interest was wide. One of our finest appreciations of Spenser comes from his pen; his interest in the drama is reflected in his discussions of the work of Shakespeare and the minor dramatists such as Marlowe, Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, Dekker, Middleton and Webster. He was ardent in his praise of Milton, and his appreciation of the poetic genius of Dryden is outstanding in a period which tended to neglect or repudiate this author. His appreciation of Spenser and of Dryden, and his sympathy with the genius of his contemporaries are among his outstanding contributions to the criticism of the day.

The name of Robert Southey has always been associated with those of Wordsworth and Coleridge as making up the group of so-called Lake Poets. This has been due rather to personal association than to any equality of literary merit, for from early life he was closely associated with these poets, and particularly with Coleridge, whose family he practically supported when Coleridge's fatal lack of concentration and of steadfastness of purpose left his wife and children to the mercies of their friends. Throughout

his long life Southey labored diligently at literature, which he regarded as his sole occupation. Depending upon it for a livelihood for himself and his family, and often that of his friend, he could not afford to wait for inspiration, and he set himself definitely to the task of producing something every day.

The result of this astonishing industry which produced over one hundred volumes, in addition to countless magazine articles, is disappointing. In his own day Southey was widely read and immensely popular; for over twenty-five years he was one of the most important contributors to the Quarterly Review, one of the greatest critical periodicals of the period. Yet today practically nothing of his critical writings is considered of importance, and he does not hold a high place among English literary critics.

The most interesting among this group of minor critics is Thomas De Quincey. Like Southey, he was a friend and associate of the Lake Poets, and like Coleridge, he was a man of remarkable intellectual capacity, but an inveterate dreamer. His literary productions are marked by a marvellous brilliancy of style, but they lack organization, and leave one with a sense of chaos and confusion. This is largely the result of the manner in which they were written. A most eccentric figure, De Quincey would steal away from his family, find rooms somewhere in Edinburgh, and proceed to unburden his brain of his teeming thoughts. When every available corner of his lodgings had become cluttered with manuscripts in a wild confusion, De Quincey would move out and repeat the same process elsewhere. All of his work was published in magazines, such as Blackwood's, to which he contributed regularly, and was hastily collected just before his death.

De Quincey was a wide reader, and was keenly interested in literature. His familiarity with many of the literary men of his day, united with his brilliant conversational style to make his "Literary Reminiscences," a series of striking appreciations of his contemporaries, including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Shelley, Keats and Hazlitt.

Of his other critical essays, "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth," published in 1823, is undoubtedly the most important. The essay, indeed, may be considered as one of the finest fruits of the new subjective criticism, and as such, it is of primary importance to the student of critical literature in the period. The essay is an attempt to explain the peculiar effect produced by the knocking on the gate which follows closely upon the murder of Duncan in Act 11, Scene 2 of Macbeth. In setting forth his explanation of the point in question, De Quincey enunciates a fundamental principle of Impressionist Criticism. Viewed purely in the light of Reason, the incident, De Quincey admits, has no bearing whatever upon the murder. Yet it does produce the impression of adding to the murder a more awful solemnity. The critic, therefore, calls upon the reader to reject the Reason as a guide to critical appreciation, and to follow rather his own feelings. "Here I pause for one moment to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding, when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind and the most to be distrusted."¹

¹ De Quincey, Thomas; On the Knocking At the Gate in Macbeth. The Works of Thos. De Quincey, Vol. 1V, P. 533. Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Boston and New York, 1876.

This is the very essence of the creed of the Romantic critics, who wished to replace the rule of Reason by an appeal to the Imagination, and an attempt to interpret through sympathy. De Quincey defines 'sympathy' as "the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity or approbation."¹ In endeavoring to explain the effect produced by the knocking at the door in the incident under discussion, De Quincey, with most satisfactory results, endeavors to place himself in sympathy with Shakespeare's purpose in introducing this detail, and to interpret it accordingly.

In thus repudiating the understanding as the criterion of truth and accepting intuition as the guide in critical appreciation De Quincey is adopting a method of approach which had been used by an earlier critic. The parallel between De Quincey's method and that of Maurice Morgann in his essay on "The Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff," published in 1777, is not only striking but most interesting and suggestive. In the essay Morgann contends that Falstaff was not intended to be shown as a coward, although on an appeal to Reason, he would probably be considered as such. He bases his argument on the fact that "Cowardice is not the Impression which the whole character of Falstaff is calculated to make on the minds of an unprejudiced audience, though there be a great deal in the composition likely enough to puzzle, and consequently to mislead the Understanding."²

¹ De Quincey, Op. cit., P. 536.

² Morgann, Maurice; An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff, 1777. Eighteenth Century Essays in Shakespeare, edited by D. Nichol Smith, P. 220. James Maclehose and Sons, Glasgow, 1903.

To Morgann, the Impression produced by a work upon the feelings of the reader, even if that Impression be contradictory to the dictates of his Reason, is the important thing. "There are none of us unconscious of certain feelings or sensations of mind which do not seem to have passed through the Understanding; the effects of some secret influences from without, acting upon a certain mental sense and producing feelings and passions in just correspondence to the force and variety of those influences on the one hand, and to the quickness of our sensibility on the other.----- And it is equally a fact, which every man's experience may avouch, that the Understanding and those feelings are frequently at variance."¹ As Morgann sees it, no criticism can be just which makes us "condemn or applaud characters or actions on the credit of some logical process, while our hearts revolt, and would fain lead us to a very different conclusion."²

Maurice Morgann has usually been considered as a man apart, who had been guided by the same general principles of criticism which were accepted by Coleridge and his followers, but who exerted no influence upon these critics. This is the view taken by D. Nichol Smith in the Preface to the volume of Shakespearean criticism mentioned above. A new light has recently been thrown on the relative importance of Morgann's essay when Prof. P. L. Carver, in an article on the influence of Maurice Morgann, published in the Review of English Studies for July, 1930, suggests that perhaps Morgann was not an isolated figure, who had arrived at principles of criticism which the critics of the next century introduced independently of his essay. Prof. Carver's theory is

¹ Morgann, Op. cit., P. 220.

² Ibid., P. 220.

supported by quotations from Hazlitt which seem to show a familiarity with Morgann's essay. "If that conjecture could be strengthened, we should be on the way to discover that Hazlitt knew Morgann's essay in the original edition of 1777. The possibility would then arise that he might have known it all his life, and even have discussed it with Coleridge, whose estimate of Falstaff's qualities is not essentially different from his own. In that case Morgann would emerge, not as the uncertain and shadowy precursor, but as the prophet and founder of that school of subjective criticism of which Hazlitt and Coleridge are the principle exponents, and of which De Quincey's essay on The Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth is, perhaps, the finest product."¹ The whole theory is only a possibility, but it is at least an interesting one.

¹ Carver, P. L.; The Influence of Maurice Morgann.
Review of English Studies, Vol VI, No. 23, July, 1930.

CHAPTER VII

The Rise of the Quarterly Reviews
and Monthly Magazines.

One of the startling phenomena of the early nineteenth century was the rapid increase in periodical criticism, the result of the rise of the new Reviews and Monthly Magazines. These are of special interest in a study of the critical literature of the period because they provided a medium of expression for a group of Objective critics, who carried over to the new century the critical ideals of Neo-Classicism. Before attempting, therefore, to discuss the work of the outstanding figures among the representatives of the Classical survival in the field of criticism, some survey of the rise of the periodicals with which they were connected is necessary. This fact becomes clearly evident when we consider that Thomas Jeffrey, the most important of the group, was editor of the Edinburgh Review for a period of nearly thirty years; that William Gifford, the most truly representative of the tradition of Johnson and his school, was editor of the Quarterly Review, and John Lockhart, for a time, his intimate associate; and that Christopher North, notorious for his abuse of Keats, and later, of Tennyson, was John Wilson, the moving spirit of Blackwood's Magazine.

Almost from the beginning, journals and periodicals had attempted something approaching literary criticism of a kind. As far back as 1681 Sir Roger L'Estrange had edited The Observator, which purported to be a weekly review rather than a chronicle of events. Another effort of the same type was John Dunton's Athenian Mercury, which appeared in 1690. The name of Daniel Defoe is also connected with journalism of this type through his Review, published in 1704.

Even Richard Steele and Joseph Addison treated literary topics in the delightful essays of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. In these publications, however, literary criticism was incidental and it remained for *The Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* of the nineteenth century to establish the custom of serious discussions of contemporary writers and to produce the modern essay--"an extended discussion of one some theme, popular in manner, yet accurate in statement, and admitting high literary finish."¹

The immediate fore-runners of *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly* were the reviews of the second half of the eighteenth century. In this period the two standard Reviews were *The Monthly*, and *The Critical Reviews*. *The Monthly Review* was established in 1749 by Ralph Griffiths, a Whig bookseller. The Review therefore reflected Whig theories in matters of politics, and Low Church doctrine in affairs pertaining to religion. *The Critical Review*, established in 1756 by Smollett, represented the opposite opinions of the High Church Tories. Both Reviews were published monthly, and their articles were anonymous. They contained a vast amount of general information and only an occasional example of impartial criticism.

The success of the *Monthly Review* led to a rapid increase in periodicals of this nature. For the most part, these eighteenth century reviews produced criticism of little or no value. Generally they amounted to little more than bookseller's advertisements. The so-called reviews consisted of a series of extracts from a new work, loosely strung together with practically no attempt to judge of the value of the book on grounds of first principles. Authors were

¹ Winchester, *A Group of English Essayists of the 19th Century*, ed. cit., P. 3.

praised or condemedⁿ without apparent reason, except the whim of the bookseller who controlled the paper. If not edited by a bookseller himself, as in the case of the Monthly Review, the eighteenth century review was under the close supervision of a publisher. Almost invariably the reviews were used methodically and systematically to further the trade of its editor or director. If the sale of a book was slow, extravagant praise attempted to increase its popularity; if the publication of a rival was proving overly successful, it was subjected to the most abusive criticism.

The writers who provided the reviews to suit these demands were miserably paid, and became mere drudges working under the strictest supervision of a bookseller. The result was hack-writing by third rate critics. Occasionally a man of the foremost ranks of contemporary literature contributed, as is the case with Dr. Johnson, but on the whole, first class writers were unwilling to associate themselves with the Reviews.

With the founding of The Edinburgh Review by four young Edinburgh students, in 1802, all this was suddenly changed. In an article in the Edinburgh Annual Register for 1809, attributed to Sir Walter Scott, the effect of the new Review is described as follows: "A conspiracy of beardless boys innovated upon the memorable laws of the old republic of literature, scourged the booksellers out of her senate house, overset the tottering thrones of the idols whom they had set up, awakened the hundred-necked snake of criticism, and curdled the whole ocean of milk and water in which he had wreathed and wallowed in unwieldy sloth for a quarter of a century. Then too, amidst the dire combustion, like true revolutionists, they erected

themselves into a committee of public safety whose decrees were written in blood and executed without mercy."¹

The idea of establishing the Edinburgh Review originated in the mind of Sydney Smith and was worked out with the help of Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Francis Horner. The first number appeared in October, 1802, under the direction of Sydney Smith. Following its publication, however, Francis Jeffrey was made the editor, and from that time till 1829 he remained the director of the policy of the Review. The object of its founding was to give to the reading public impartial criticism, free from the time-serving of previous Reviews. The prime principle underlying its organization was independence of the booksellers. To achieve this independence its reviewers, from the beginning, were well paid. Jeffrey's salary, we are told, was 300 pounds a year, and the minimum price paid to its other reviewers ran from 12 to 16 guineas a sheet, instead of the 2 guineas for which the drudges of the eighteenth century reviews had labored. Every contributor to the Edinburgh was forced to accept remuneration, and soon literary men of the first class began to contribute. The result of this new order of things was the lifting of review-writing from the level of mere hack-writing to a standard of literary excellence previously unparalleled in that type of journalism.

Other factors contributed to the phenomenal success of the Edinburgh. The Review was published quarterly instead of monthly. This gave time for more careful writing and more thoughtful preparation on the part of the reviewer. Then too, instead of

¹Quoted from the introduction to Selections from the Edinburgh Review, edited by Maurice Cross, 1833.

attempting to provide the public with a catalogue of new publications, its reviews were limited to publications of outstanding importance and real significance, which had appeared during the last quarter. This improvement is noted by Coleridge in the discussion of the Reviews and their criticism which appears in Chapter 21 of the *Biographia Literaria*. "The Edinburgh Review has a claim upon the gratitude of the literary republic, and indeed, of the reading public at large, for having originated the scheme of reviewing those books only which are susceptible and deserving of argumentative criticism."¹

Another cause for the rapid success of the Edinburgh Review was the fact that it provided an easy means of becoming familiar with new knowledge and with the thought of leading minds on the burning questions of the day. The writers in the new Review did not limit themselves to literary subjects. Their interests were varied, and spread into the domains of politics, religion, social conditions, education, etc. Instead of being a mere series of disjointed extracts from a recent book, a review came to be an excuse for the reviewer to put forth his own ideas on the vital questions of the day, the book under consideration serving only as a starting point, or a necessary conclusion. Thus from the old review articles of the eighteenth century there developed the modern essay, and the Edinburgh Review became "an organ of thought, a busy intellectual centre from which the newest ideas were sent out in a perpetual stream to the minds of sympathetic readers."² Coleridge found in this change another reason for commendation,

¹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. cit., Chap. 21 P. 203 .

² Gates, *Three Studies in Literature*, ed. cit., P. 54.

and voices his approval of "the plan of supplying the vacant place of the trash or mediocrity, wisely left to sink into oblivion by their own weight, with original essays on the most interesting subjects of the time, religious or political; in which the titles of the books or pamphlets prefixed furnish only the name and occasion of the disquisition."¹ To what extent the book under discussion was a secondary matter is evidenced by the following extract from a letter from Horner to Jeffrey. "Have you any good subjects in view for your nineteenth? There are two I wish you yourself would undertake if you can pick up books that would admit of them."² Viewed from the standpoint of criticism this tendency has left the Edinburgh critics open to censure, on the grounds that they carried the reaction against the over-generous supply of extracts to be found in eighteenth century reviews to extremes, which sometimes resulted in dismissing the work supposedly under discussion without a single remark of either praise or censure.

The greatest weakness of the Edinburgh Review is to be found in the fact that political principles were carried into literature, and allowed to prejudice its criticism. All of its founders were Whigs, and with the exception of Jeffrey, all were more interested in politics than in literature itself. The almost inevitable result was that all too frequently a book was judged with reference to the party colors of its writer, rather than its real worth. Unfortunately the step taken to combat this evil was not to establish a Review free from literary prejudice, but rather to set up a Tory paper which would counter-act the influence of the Whig Review. February, 1809, saw the establishment in London of the Quarterly Review, as an organ of Toryism. From the first edition, the Review, under the editorship

¹Coleridge, Op. cit., Chap. 21, P. 203.

²Quoted by Gates, Op. cit., P. 57.

of William Gifford, carried to extremes the vice of political prejudice. Associated with Gifford were John Wilson Croker, and for a time, John Lockhart. Walter Scott and Robert Southey were also frequent contributors to the review, but both were much more generous than their associates in the verdicts which they pronounced.

For some time the two rival Reviews stood practically alone in the field of periodical criticism. Leigh Hunt, it is true, attempted to break into a similar type of journalism when, with the aid of Hazlitt, he edited *The Examiner* and *The Reflector*. *The Examiner* was a Sunday paper, interested chiefly in politics, while *The Reflector* was published quarterly and dealt with both politics and literature. In it Lamb's "Tragedies of Shakespeare" first appeared, while *The Examiner* included the series of essays which later developed into Hazlitt's Round Table essays.

A more serious challenge to the supremacy of the quarterly Reviews came with the establishment of the new magazines. The first of these of importance was *The New Monthly Magazine*, founded in 1814, under the editorship of Campbell. Among its contributors it numbered many of the outstanding literary figures of the day, including William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt.

Outstanding among these new Magazines was Blackwood's, first published in October, 1817. From it came the first real challenge to the supremacy of *The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly Reviews*. The magazine arose largely as a protest to the unfair political criticism of *The Edinburgh*. Many of the younger Tories felt that *The Quarterly* failed to counter-balance successfully the brilliancy of the Whig journal. A group of brilliant young Tories in the city of Edinburgh determined to set up a new rival to the opposing political party's

publication. Circumstances favored the scheme. Constable and Blackwood, a somewhat daring publishing company, had started a monthly magazine, which soon proved a failure. Here John Wilson, and John Gibson Lockhart stepped in, and took control. The resulting periodical, known as Blackwood's Magazine, was an outstanding success, and created a real stir in Edinburgh. Like The Quarterly, however, it attempted to remedy an evil by an evil, and it protested against the political prejudice, which colored the criticism of the Edinburgh Review, by following the same tradition in its own pages. Nothing but the bitterness of political controversy can explain the scathing abuse of the articles on the Cockney School, and particularly John Keats.

Although it was short lived, the London Magazine, 1820-29, has made a large contribution of permanent value to English literature. John Scott, its first editor, seems to have had a remarkable ability to attract men of genius to him. The greatest glory of the London Magazine is that Charles Lamb was one of its main contributors, and that in it the delightfully familiar Essays of Elia first appeared. Other contributors of importance were Hazlitt and DeQuincey, and Mary Russell Mitford. To a large extent the magazine succeeded in keeping free from the evils of political prejudice. It was not, it is true, free from political associations but its political ideals were those of a small band of advanced Liberals. Whig and Tory alike stood outside of this group, and as a result the criticism of the work of writers associated with either of these parties was quite impartial. Unfortunately however, the majority of people read periodicals for their political interest, rather than for their literary worth, and the London Magazine failed to draw the support necessary for its continuation.

The new magazines were deservedly popular, and their number increased rapidly. The new standard of periodical writing set by the Reviews raised them far above the level of the eighteenth century magazine. Published monthly they were somewhat fresher than the Reviews, and the type of material which appeared in them was more varied. In their pages the best personal essays of the period first appeared. Above all, the most brilliant writers of the day were their constant contributors. This is further illustrated by a glance at a few of the journals which sprang up in the next decade. In 1824 the Westminster Review was established to voice the viewpoint of a group of radical leaders. Among the names associated with it are those of George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and John Stuart Mill. To Fraser's Magazine, however, established in 1824, go the honors for collecting on its staff men of sheer intellectual genius, in the persons of Coleridge, Carlyle, and Thackeray.

CHAPTER VIII

Francis Jeffrey--A Man Looking Both Ways.

Among the writers for the new Reviews and Magazines the most important, both in his own day and ours, is undoubtedly Francis Jeffrey. The influence which he exerted as a literary dictator in the world of letters of his day was similar to that of Dr. Johnson in the preceding century. The editor of The Edinburgh Review from the time of its establishment in October, 1802, until June, 1829, and a constant contributor to it till June 1848, Jeffrey was regarded by a large part of the intellectual public of the day as an almost infallible judge in all matters pertaining to literature, and, to a very large extent, he held the temporary reputation of authors in his hand. This astonishing contemporary popularity was the result of a number of factors. In large part, at least, it was the outcome of Jeffrey's association with the phenomenal success of The Edinburgh Review. The critical periodicals which were its predecessors were trashy and insipid, and as the editor of the first really successful Review Jeffrey basked in the reflected glory which resulted from the hearty approval which greeted its appearance. Closely associated with this fact, is that of Jeffrey's position as an interpreter of the ideas of the Whig party in politics. The Edinburgh was a more or less official mouthpiece of Whig principles, and as its most brilliant critic Jeffrey was certain of favor among the members of that party, whose views he echoed. "Jeffrey's literary essays interpreted the freshest, most vital thought of the time, so far as possible in harmony with Whig formulas, and judged it by Whig

standards. They made happily articulate Whig prejudices on all subjects, from the French Revolution to Wordsworth's peasant poetry."¹

The happy coincidence of his relationship with the Whig Review does not suffice to explain fully Jeffrey's position of authority among his contemporaries. A man of keenly alert mind, he was well fitted for his task as a reviewer. He had read widely, not only in literature, but in history, philosophy and political theory. He had been trained as a lawyer, and had the ability to assimilate new material rapidly, fastening upon its central ideas or characteristics of style, with all the certainty of a barrister preparing his brief. His style was clear, rapid and fluent. He spoke with authority, and won his reader by the brilliance of his clear-cut, serviceable English. His pages are marked by the sparkle of wit and of satire, and by a wealth of fact and allusion. To us his satire seems cutting and unsympathetic, and his viewpoint was undoubtedly narrow, but "from a partisan critic audacious and brilliant dogmatism was just what was sure to win the widest hearing."²

With the passing of the years, the estimate placed upon Jeffrey as a critic has changed considerably. The circumstances which gave him pre-eminence over such men as Lamb, Hazlitt, and Coleridge--undoubtedly his superiors in intellect and in the capacity to appreciate and interpret good literature--no longer influence us. Nevertheless, though Jeffrey is no longer considered as infallible, time has shown the importance of his contribution to English criticism. His services in raising the standard of review-writing were in themselves of sufficient importance to warrant for him

¹Gates, *Three Studies in Literature*, ed. cit., P. 12.

²Gates, *Op. cit.*, P. 40.

a permanent place in the history of our critical literature. The change in the general character of periodical criticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which has already been noted in the preceding chapter, was largely the result of Jeffrey's efforts. Under his guidance a new literary form took shape, a critical essay of the modern type, dealing with outstanding interests of the day in the literary, social or political world. The influence which he exerted over the periodicals of the day is aptly stated by Bagehot when he says, "He invented the trade of editorship; before him an editor was a bookseller's drudge, he is now a distinguished functionary."¹

Leaving aside his work in establishing the new type of reviewing and raising the standard of periodical criticism, Jeffrey has made an important contribution through his own judgments of literary men and their work. His criticism is, in spite of many limitations, undoubtedly the best of that produced by the reviewers of the period, and as such it is representative of a type.

A study of Jeffrey's criticism reveals a two-fold aspect. For the most part, his work is that of a member of the Classical school, and places Jeffrey among the Objective critics who followed the standards of the eighteenth century. This phase of his work is illustrated by the general method of his criticism, which is that of the dogmatists, and in particular, by his attitude to Wordsworth and the Lake Poets. On the other hand, much of Jeffrey's best work reveals a decided Romantic tendency which clearly shows

¹ Quoted by Hugh Walker, in *The English Essay and Essays*. Page 205. Channels of English Literature Series. J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London and Toronto. 1915.

that he is not consistently Classical in his judgments. His intense interest in Shakespeare and the early Elizabethan drama demonstrates this tendency, as does also his appreciation of the genius of Keats. Jeffrey thus stands as a man looking both ways, as somewhat of a transition figure between the two groups of critics in the period. As Saintsbury puts it, his work is "a noteworthy instance of Neo-Classical inconsistency."¹

In the general method of his criticism Jeffrey is obviously a survival of the Neo-Classical school. The general trend of his criticism is toward the dogmatic and objective. He rarely sets out merely to appreciate a piece of literature or to interpret its meaning. His aim is rather to pass his estimate upon its worth. Here again Jeffrey is the lawyer, always arguing the case for or against, but always either defending or accusing. In thus passing sentence with unquestioning authority Jeffrey places himself in the tradition of Johnson and his followers who set themselves up as infallible judges, meting out sentences in accordance with the terms of a code of laws derived largely from the works of writers long dead. But in one respect Jeffrey broke with this tradition. He still regarded himself as a final authority, it is true, but nowhere did he attempt to set down fixed rules or principles in the light of which all literary efforts were to be judged. Instead of finding his standards whereby literary excellence might be judged in absolute laws passed down from the ancients, he declared the real test of a piece of literature to lie in its ability to appeal to a select intellectual aristocracy, qualified by natural gifts and by wide reading and experience to decide upon

¹ Saintsbury, *History of English Criticism*, ed. cit., P. 399.

the relative values of different types of beauty. Of this select group Jeffrey considered himself a member, and as such, he passed judgment. The personal element thus entered strongly into his criticism. That which appealed to him personally, he commended in terms of high praise; that which he failed to appreciate or understand he condemned, often in terms of the bitterest abuse.

Perhaps the best example of Jeffrey's dogmatism is to be found in his reviews of the work of the Lake Poets, and of Wordsworth in particular. His failure to appreciate much of the best poetry of his day is undoubtedly the greatest blot upon Jeffrey's reputation as a critic. Of Wordsworth and his poetry he had little or no understanding, and accordingly, he subjects the poet and his work either to neglect or to dogmatic, adverse criticism, based upon his own personal reaction. His best known review of Wordsworth's work is the famous review of "The Excursion" published in Nov. 1814.¹ "This will never do," the opening sentence of the review, is typical of Jeffrey's arbitrary verdicts. In the course of the article his main objections to Wordsworth's poetry become evident. The poet is accused of mysticism; he is criticized for attempting to adapt "commonplace notions and expressions" to sublime ends, and for "the wilfulness with which he persists in choosing his examples of intellectual dignity and tenderness exclusively from the lowest ranks of society." Jeffrey's estimate of the work is expressed in the sentence in which he condemns it as "a tissue of moral and devotional ravings with an accompaniment of long words, long sentences and unwieldy phrases." Its main

¹ See On Wordsworth's The Excursion.
Famous Reviews, edited by R. Brimley Johnson,
ed. cit., P. 38.

characteristics he claims are "a kind of mystical morality" and a frequently unintelligible prolixity.

From the quotations above it is plainly evident not only that Wordsworth's poetry was a closed book to Jeffrey, but also that he had no sympathy for the Romantic movement in many of its most characteristic aspects. "To the practical mundane intelligence of Jeffrey, all the most characteristic excellencies of Wordsworth's poetry were quite invisible. His feeling of an all-pervading spiritual power in nature, his resulting conviction of the direct influence of nature upon character, his notion of the effect of the imagination on moral culture--all this to Jeffrey was mere mystical nonsense."¹

Nevertheless, Jeffrey is more than a survival of Neo-Classicism, and in many respects he is directly opposed to the principles of that school. To Jeffrey's mind no appreciation of literature which excluded Shakespeare and Milton could be aesthetically sound. Indeed the absorbing literary interest of Jeffrey's life was an interest in Shakespeare and the early Elizabethan drama. His reverence for Shakespeare is unbounding, and he prides himself on being one of the first to draw attention to the wealth of beauty to be found in the old English drama. This keen interest in the contemporaries of Shakespeare was one of the important contributions of Jeffrey to the critical thought of his day. It is well illustrated by his review on Ford and his works, from which the following passage is quoted. "Of the old English dramatists it may be said in general that they are more poetical and more

Winchester--A Group of English Essayists, ed. cit., P. 21.

original in their diction than the dramatists of any other age or country. Their scenes abound more in varied images and gratuitous excursions of fancy. Their illustrations and figures of speech are more borrowed from rural life and from the simple occupations or universal feelings of mankind. They are not confined to a certain range of dignified expressions, nor restricted to a particular assortment of imagery, beyond which it is not lawful to look for embellishments."¹ This enthusiasm for minor Elizabethan drama places Jeffrey in line with Lamb, Coleridge and Hazlitt, as one of the supporters of the Elizabethan revival.

A second characteristic of Jeffrey's criticism which would argue him a Romanticist is his appreciation of the poetry of Keats. In part this may be explained in terms of Jeffrey's political associations. Keats had been ill-treated by the Tories, and had been befriended by Leigh Hunt. Jeffrey therefore would be inclined to favor him. But we must look elsewhere for a satisfactory explanation of the fact that the critic who had no sympathy for Wordsworth and the early Romanticists was most enthusiastic in his praise of Keats. The Review of *Endymion and Other Poems*, which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1820, admits that the poetry under discussion is marked by the most obvious evidences of inexperience, but begging indulgence for its extravagances and obscurity, the critic gives unstinted praise to its "rich lights of fancy," and "flowers of poetry." Throwing aside his Neo-classical principles, Jeffrey speaks of the new poetry as follows: "A great part of the work is written in the strangest and most fantastical manner that can be imagined. There is no work accord-

¹ See Essay on Ford's Dramatic Works, August, 1811, in Selections from *Edinburgh Review*, ed. cit.

ingly from which a malicious critic could cull more matter for ridicule or select more obscure, unnatural, or absurd passages. But we do not take that to be our office-----and just beg leave, on the contrary, to say that any one who, on this account, would render the whole poem as despicable, must either have no notion of poetry, or no regard to truth-----We do not know any book which we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm."¹

The explanation of this unusual tolerance on the part of Jeffrey is to be found in the fact that he found in Keats a reflection of the Elizabethan dramatists in whom he was so interested. In the opening paragraph of the Review mentioned above occur these words. "The imitation of our older dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were a second spring in our poetry, and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness, or richer in promise, than that which is now before us."² A little later, in the same article, Jeffreys expresses still more openly this theory. "The models upon which Keats has formed himself in *The Endymion* are obviously *The Faithful Shepherdess* of Fletcher, and *The Sad Shepherd* of Ben Jonson, the exquisite metre and inspired diction of which he has copied with great boldness and fidelity."²

Here indeed, lies the key to Jeffrey's apparent inconsistency. When the Romantic Movement shows itself in a richness of fancy, and a spontaneity of expression, Jeffrey is ready to endorse it as a

¹ Jeffrey, On Keats, August 1820. See Famous Review, ed. cit., P. 52.

² Ibid. P. 52.

return to the fervor of the Elizabethans. When, however, the reaction to Classicism becomes an absorbing passion, finding expression in new moral and spiritual ideas, Jeffrey is utterly incapable of appreciating it. Naturally, therefore, his criticism is limited in its value, but in the field of his own interests, he is capable of valuable and acute judgments of the best kind. His estimate of his contemporaries illustrates the limitations of Jeffrey's range of appreciation. His attitude to Wordsworth and to Keats we have already noted. Of Shelley, he never ventured to express an opinion, the Edinburgh review of Shelley's poems being the work of Hazlitt. The minor poets of the period, who had closer associations with the classic ideals of poetry appeal more to his liking. His praise of Rogers and of Campbell is excessive, but it is perhaps carrying the point too far to claim that Jeffrey considered them the only true poets of his day. The passage from which this conclusion has sometimes, it would seem, be drawn, is interesting as a reflection of the current thought of the day rather than as Jeffrey's own sentiments. The passage referred to occurs in a review article on Mrs. Hemans, and is as follows: "Since the beginning of our critical career we have seen a vast deal of beautiful poetry pass into oblivion in spite of our feeble efforts to recall or retain it in remembrance. The tuneful quarts of Southey are already little better than lumber, and the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth and the plebian pathos of Crabbe are melting fast from the field of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness except where they have been married to immortal music; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride-----The two who have the longest withstood

this rapid withering of the laurel, and with the least marks of decay on their branches are Rogers and Campbell."¹

Another interesting comment on the poets of the day is to be found in an article on Campbell's *Specimens of the Poets*, written in 1819. "There shall posterity still hang with rapture on the half of Campbell--and the fourth part of Byron--and the sixth of Scott--and the scattered tithes of Crabbe--and the three per cent of Southey,--while some good-natured critic shall sit in our mouldering chair, and more than half prefer them to those by whom they have been superseded."² The most interesting feature of this passage is the omission of the names of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats. The omission is indicative of Jeffrey's failure to understand the fullest expression of the Romantic revival. But despite his shortcomings Jeffrey is worthy of consideration as the creator of the modern critical essay, and the presiding genius of the first worth-while Review. He did noteworthy work in connection with the restoration of the Elizabethan drama, and for a period of almost half a century exercised a remarkably strong influence over the public opinion of his day.

¹ Jeffrey: Review on Mrs. Hemans.
Selections from *Edinburgh Review*, ed. cit.

² Quoted from Walker, *English Essay and Essayists*,
ed. cit., p. 202.

CHAPTER IX.

Jeffrey's Associates in Objective Criticism--
William Gifford, John Wilson, and John Lockhart.

The remaining figures of the group of critics who were associated with the Reviews and Magazines of the period were, on the whole, more consistently Objective in their method than Jeffrey, and represent more fully the survival, in the nineteenth century, of Neo-Classical ideas of the function of the literary critic. Of this group at least three--William Gifford, John Wilson, and John Lockhart--are of sufficient importance to warrant a brief study of their contribution to the critical literature of the period.

William Gifford was editor of The Quarterly Review from its foundation in February 1809, until September 1824, and is largely responsible for its reputation for scurrility. In ideals and method, Gifford was a Classicist, and he expressed his eighteenth century tastes with a severity and brusqueness which left behind them a real sting. Added to the arbitrary tone in which, as a follower of the tradition of the past century, he delivered his verdicts, was a political partisanship almost unparalleled in the history of criticism. No one, in an age of prejudiced criticism, ever carried to a greater extreme the vice of judging literary merit on the basis of political principles. From a man of such ideals and practices, little could be hoped for in the way of fair play for his opponents either in the literary or political field. Of the general method of Gifford's criticism Walker gives the following estimate: "He seemed to be forever addressing the author criticized in the phrase, Prisoner at the bar; and most commonly his head is crowned with the black cap. The

one thing in which his judgments differ from that pronounced upon the criminal is the absence of the appeal for mercy on the erring soul."¹

A sample of the general tone of Gifford's criticism is to be found in the review of Keats's *Endymion*, from the *Quarterly* for April, 1818. The article illustrates Gifford's personal and political prejudice, for Keats had been warmly praised by Leigh Hunt in *The Examiner*, and was therefore, the object of Tory abuse. This fact, even in the light of the political enmities which colored almost all the periodical criticism of the period, will scarcely excuse a virulence so extreme that the review was at one time believed to have caused the death of Keats. Byron was but voicing a common thought when he penned his lines to

"John Keats, who was killed off by one critique

Just as he really promised something great;"

and when he declared,

"'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle

Should let itself be snuffed out by one article."²

The review is throughout satirical and stinging in tone. Opening with a sarcastic statement of the utter impossibility of reading the poem under discussion, the article proceeds to a scathing denunciation of Keats as a disciple of the Cockney School of poetry, "which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language." The abusive language of the review may be illustrated by passages such as the following. "The author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt, but he is more unintelligible,

¹ Walker, *English Essays and Essayists*, ed. cit., P. 208.

² Quoted from *Famous Reviews*, ed. cit., P. 139.

almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd.-----Mr. Keats had advanced no dogmas which he was bound to support by examples, his nonsense therefore is quite gratuitous; he writes it for its own sake, but being bitten by Mr. Leigh Hunt's insane criticism, more than rivals the insanity of his poetry." Incidentally the passage reveals the utter worthlessness of Gifford's decisions, for whatever be the faults of Keats's poetry, it can hardly be called "rugged." The remainder of the review is devoted to ridicule of irregularities in rhyme or metre, without any attempt whatever to appreciate the beauties which abound in the poem. The raillery in which Gifford takes such delight finds its climax in the closing paragraph. "If anyone should be bold enough to purchase this 'Poetic Romance,' and so much more patient than ourselves, as to get beyond the first book, and so much more fortunate as to find a meaning, we entreat him to make us acquainted with his success; we shall then return to the task which we now abandon in despair, and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers."¹

Such is Gifford's work at its worst. His best was done in editing the Elizabethan dramatists. In 1805 his edition of Massinger appeared, to be followed in 1816 by a Ben Jonson, and in 1827 by an edition of Ford's works. Here he did some really useful work. Even Hazlitt, whose essay on Gifford in *The Spirit of the Age*, is a notorious instance of its writer's spiteful prejudice, recognized the value of this phase of his opponent's work, and admitted that "as an editor of old authors Mr. Gifford is entitled to considerable praise for the pains he has taken in revising the text, and for some improvements he has introduced into it."² But even here Gifford

¹ Gifford, On Keats, from *The Quarterly Review*, April, 1818
Famous Reviews, ed. cit., P. 150.

² Hazlitt, *Spirit of the Age*, ed. cit., P. 291.

displayed his usual nature. He quarreled with the dead as he had done with the living, and hurled his invectives at former editors long in their graves.

John Wilson, better known by his pen-name of Christopher North, was considered in his day as a prince of critics. In October, 1817, he became joint editor, with Lockhart, of the new Blackwood's Magazine. Prior to this time he had spent some years in the Lake District and had associated closely with Wordsworth and Coleridge and the other literary figures of the neighborhood. His intimate knowledge of many of his outstanding contemporaries united with an enthusiastic love of literature and a comparatively wide knowledge of it to fit him for his task as a critic. When Lockhart gradually withdrew from his interest in Blackwood's Gifford assumed full control of the Magazine, and from 1825 to 1852 it may be said to have been his periodical.

As a man, Wilson seems to have been good-natured and jovial, a lover of sport, and a good mixer. Judged by his criticism alone, he would be put down as utterly disagreeable and cantankerous. Like Gifford, he was capable of the worst kind of critical incivility and of violent prejudices, political or personal. When unbiased by any such prejudice, he was capable of exercising a real capacity of judgment. On the whole, however, his criticism tended to consist of very positive verdicts, often without any apparent underlying principle. His basis for judgment seems to have been his own likes and dislikes, and the resulting criticism is frequently capricious and arbitrary. Indeed, Wilson is not even consistent. He knew and admired the Lake Poets, and yet in the opening number of Blackwood's subjected Coleridge to almost violent abuse, and failed to appreciate in the smallest degree the great central principles of criticism

there set forth. Wilson had many of the qualities of a first class critic, but his work lacked the central purpose necessary to great criticism. As Hugh Walker puts it, "he had fervid imagination, an irresistible flow of spirits, abundant intellect, but no back-bone of intellectual principle. To the day of his death, he was a boy of genius."¹

In his style, Wilson was decidedly conversational, and the chief merit of his work is its ready wit and easy flow of ideas. Practically all the criticism of the period is marked by this conversational manner, but no one of the personal essayists of the period carried this style to the point reached by Wilson, who is colloquial to the last degree. While in one sense, this is a merit, it is also a besetting fault, for in both style and matter Wilson suffers from over-haste and lack of reflection.

Much of the best of Wilson's criticism is to be found, not in the reviews, most of which are of historical interest only, but in incidental comment scattered here and there throughout his miscellaneous writings. Wilson is at his best when he simply gossips and chats in an informal way. A great deal of criticism of this type is to be found in the papers known as "Noctes Ambrosianae." Originally they were a series of articles which appeared in Blackwood's, and which purported to report the conversation of a group of Blackwood men as they gathered for an occasional evening in Ambrose's, a well known Edinburgh tavern. About 1825 Wilson himself undertook to write the series, and soon made them the subject of much of his best work. He reduced the characters to three: Christopher North, Tickler, and Ettrick

¹ Walker, Op. cit., P. 224.

Shepherd. Christopher North, represented Wilson himself, Tickler an uncle of Wilson's, and Shepherd, James Hogg, a contributor to Blackwood's. Wilson allowed these three to carry on conversations upon all manner of subjects during the intervals between eating and drinking. In this way much delightfully informal literary criticism found expression, for the views of all three speakers were in truth those of John Wilson in different moods. The following extract from the Noctes of April, 1827, will illustrate the general style of the series.

"North--James, you don't know S. T. Coleridge, do you? He writes but indifferent books, begging his pardon: witness his 'Friend,' his 'Lay Sermons,' and, latterly his 'Aids to Reflection;' but he becomes inspired by the sound of his own silver voice, and pours out wisdom like a sea.-----

Tickler--Mr. Coleridge does not seem to be aware that he cannot write a book, but opines that he absolutely has written several, and set many questions at rest. There's a want of some kind or another in his mind; but perhaps when he awakes out of his dream, he may get rational and sober-witted, like other men, who are not always asleep.

Shepherd--The author o' 'Christabel,' and 'The Ancient Mariner,' had better just continue to see visions, and dream dreams--for he's no fit for the wakin' world."¹

Closely associated with Christopher North in Blackwood's, and later with The Quarterly, was John Gibson Lockhart. In the early years of Blackwood's Magazine he shared with Wilson in the management of that periodical, and soon made a reputation for

¹ Quoted from Famous Reviews, ed. cit., P. 401.

himself as one of the foremost critics of the day. A man of clear, strong intellect, and of wide education, he voiced his criticism in a style which commanded the interest and attention of the reader, and which, when employed for purposes of the sharp abuse of which he was capable, left behind it a real sting. From about 1820, following his marriage to the daughter of Sir Walter Scott, Lockhart became gradually less interested in Blackwood's and was more and more attracted to The Quarterly, to which Scott was a frequent contributor. Finally, in 1825, he took up residence in London and succeeded Gifford as editor of The Quarterly Review. This position he held until 1853, the year before his death.

Most of Lockhart's work which appeared in the periodicals which he edited was of temporary interest only, and like that of Gifford and Wilson is of interest today only as a sign of the times, and as a reflection of the attitude taken by contemporaries to what are today recognized as works of supreme genius. On the other hand Lockhart has given us work of permanent value, which, if it does not truly belong to the department of criticism, is at least closely associated with it. As a biographer, Lockhart holds a place in the first ranks, second to perhaps none but Boswell. His "Life of Burns" is a splendid piece of work, and it is far surpassed by the "Life of Scott" which is a masterpiece. Judging by these permanent possessions of our literature, a reader would find it difficult to believe that Lockhart was so intimately connected with the virulent personal abuse of Blackwood's and the black record of the Quarterly Review.

For the anonymous reviews on the Cockney School which appeared in Blackwood's in 1817 and 1818, Wilson and Lockhart must share

the responsibility.¹ Here again we have an instance of the depths of unprincipled personal slander which disgraced the pages of nineteenth century Reviews and Magazines, as a result of political and literary partisanship. In the first of the series of reviews mentioned above, Leigh Hunt, the founder of the school of poetry which is here christened as the "Cockney School," is denounced as an utter profligate, and "a man of exquisitely bad taste, and extremely vulgar modes of thinking and manners in all respects." He is derided for his low birth and lack of education, and is accused of the most extreme moral depravity. The third number of the series continued this strain in a scathing denunciation of the indecency and immorality of Leigh Hunt's "Rimini." The climax is reached in the review of Keats's *Endymion*, a review generally credited to Lockhart. As a protégé of Leigh Hunt, Keats was the object of scorn. As Jeffrey had pointed out, the poem was full of youthful exuberance and might be made the mark of the stinging barbs of a malicious critic. The somewhat excessive praise of the volume in *The Examiner* left it all the more open to derision. The *Blackwood Review* is written in a tone of the most cuttingly sarcastic raillery, which finds its culmination in the closing jibe: "It is a better and wiser thing to be a starving apothecary than a starved poet, so back to the shop Mr. John, back to plasters, pills, ointment boxes, etc. But, for heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry." Before such uncivility, the modern reader, used to the sympathetic attempt at appreciation of the Impressionist critics, stands amazed.

¹ Anonymous Reviews on the Cockney School, *Now*, 1, 111, 1v., *Blackwood's Magazine*. Famous Reviews, ed. cit., P. 427-445.

Chronological Survey of the Period.

- 1800 - Publication of Wordsworth's Preface to the 2nd edition of Lyrical Ballads.
- 1802 - October--Founding at Edinburgh of The Edinburgh Review by Francis Jeffrey, Lord Brougham and Sidney Smith.
- 1807 - Publication of Tales from Shakespeare, by Charles and Mary Lamb.
- 1808 - Publication of Lamb's Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare.
 - Founding of The Examiner, by Leigh Hunt.
- 1809 - February--Establishment in London of The Quarterly Review with William Gifford as editor--a Tory counter-balance to the Whig Edinburgh.
- 1811 -- Founding of Hunt's journal, The Reflector, in which appeared, in the same year, Lamb's Tragedies of Shakespeare considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation.
- 1811-12 - Coleridge's 1st series of Lectures on Shakespeare, delivered in London.
- 1813-14 - Coleridge delivered a series of Lectures in Bristol.
- 1814 - New Monthly Magazine founded, under the editorship of Campbell.
- 1817 - Publication of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria.
 - October--Establishment in Edinburgh of Blackwood's Magazine, under John Wilson and John Lockhart.
- 1817-18 - Publication of Hazlitt's Characters from Shakespeare's Plays.

Chronological Survey, Continued.

- 1818 - Coleridge's 2nd series of Lectures on Shakespeare, delivered in London.
- Shelley's Preface to the Revolt of Islam published.
- Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Poets, delivered in London, and published in the same year.
- 1819 - Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Comic Writers.
- 1820 - Hazlitt's Lectures on Dramatic Literature in the Age of Elizabeth.
- 1821 - Founding of The London Magazine.
- Shelley's Defence of Poetry published.
- 1823 - Publication of De Quincey's essay, On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth.
- 1824 - Establishment of Fraser's Magazine and of The Westminster Review.
- 1825 - Hazlitt's Spirit of the Age, published anonymously.

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96

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