

Life and Works of S.T. Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire, where his father was vicar, and was educated at Christ's Hospital and Jesus College, Cambridge. From the latter he ran away for a time, and enlisted in the Dragoons, but he was discharged and returned to college. He formed a close friendship with Robert Southey he entered in to what was to be the first of many abortive schemes. Coleridge had already begun to publish verse, some of it in collaboration with Southey. But the real turning point in his career came when, in 1797, he met Wordsworth at Nether Stowey in Somerset. The two poets planned together 'the Lyrical Ballads' which appeared in the following year. This poem collection of poems, together with its preface, is a landmark in the history of the Romantic movement in English poetry. Coleridge's principal contribution to the volume was 'The Ancient Mariner' which was written in 1797. This year has often been termed Coleridge's "annus mirabilis", for it also saw the composition of 'Kubla Khan' and of the first part of 'Christabel'. These three poems represent the fullest expression of Coleridge's peculiar visionary imagination.

The poetic career of Coleridge can be divided in to four periods. The early period extends from 1794 to 1796 and includes such works as 'The Song of the Pixies' (1793), 'Lines on an Autumn Evening; Lewti' (1794), 'Religious Musings' (1794-96). The Second period extending from (1797-98) is the blossoming period of the poet's life. During this period he produced a few poems of loveliness and charm. The chief of the works of this period are 'Ode to the Departing Year', 'Ode to France', 'The Line Tree Bower', 'Frost at Midnight', 'Fears in Solitude'. The third period extends from 1798 to 1800. It has been regarded as the period where his genius was at its height. It represents the flowering of his genius at his best. It is during this period that Coleridge

produced "Ancient Mariner", "Christabel", and "Kubla Khan". Of these poems, "Kubla Khan" is only an exquisite dream fragment. The other two poems exhibit the highest power of Coleridge as a poet; and Coleridge at his highest has no rival even among his great contemporaries. To have written one of these poems alone would have made Coleridge immortal among the supreme makers of verse.

The last period was a period of decline in Coleridge's poetic genius and the poetic flowers of this period are "Ode to Dejection", "Love and Hope".

Major Poems of S.T. Coleridge

Kubla Khan - Kubla Khan is a dream fragment. It is an emanation from a 'dream foaked' imagination, vision drunk mind completely free from the domination of the rational element. The whole poem was composed in a state of torpor. After taking a dose of opium, Coleridge fell asleep in a chair while reading a passage in 'Purchas Pilgrimage'. - Under the influence of drug, he fell asleep and during the three hours that he slept, he saw a vision of rare beauty and charm. Everything that he had witnessed in the dream was so vividly imprinted on his mind that when he woke, he immediately started reproducing his vision in black and white. Unfortunately he was soon interrupted by a person on business from Porlock. Coleridge was detained by him for an hour, and in the meantime the entire vision melted in to the thin air leaving only some eight or ten scattered lines of images. Bemoaning the loss of vision, the poet later on stated, "all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream in to which a stone has been cast out, alas! without the after restoration of the latter."

Coleridge composed the poem, but perhaps what he had originally seen in the vision could not be presented by him in the poem. The result is that 'Kubla Khan' stands as a fragment.

• The Rime of Ancient Mariner :-

'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is one of the finest and best poems in English narrative poetry and marks the consummation of Coleridge's poetic career. It is the greatest single and complete achievement of Coleridge. The poet takes us from this world of sordid realities to a voyage on distant seas on the wings of imagination. Supernatural and mysterious atmosphere is woven all round and by the power of his genius for creating belief in an unbelievable atmosphere, the poet produces an unique poem in which the magic of poetry imparts an air of reality to the supernatural. The poem is in the form of a ballad and the tale is narrated by the Ancient Mariner and is quite entertaining and delightful.

• Christabel — Christabel is another famous poem that Coleridge wrote. The poem is in two parts. The first was intended for publication in Lyrical Ballads (1798), but it was not finished in time. The poem is narrative in character and tells the story of Christabel who was visited by a demon, Geraldine, in the shape of a beautiful lady. Ultimately Christabel recovers from the power of Geraldine under the benign influence of her mother. It is a tale of mystery and evokes a weird sensation in the mind of the reader. The atmosphere of mystery is woven all over the story and the suggestion of supernaturalism is given out at every step in the poem. Christabel has been regarded by some as an allegory. It represents the element of good in this world, and Geraldine that of evil.