

S. T. Coleridge and his poetical works

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Page _____

S. T. Coleridge was one of the brightest pearl in the poetical ocean of Romantic period. He was born on Oct. 21, 1772 in Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire. His father, John Coleridge was a learned but unworldly schoolmaster. His mother fortunately was more active and she took great care of her sensitive son. His parents showered great affection on him but he bitterly resented the family nurse and even at a young age sought escape in reading tales of adventure and romance. According to his own account, when he was hardly eight, he left home after a quarrel with his brother and spent the night on the bank of a stream. This was the beginning of his continuous ill-health in his later life.

After his father's death in 1781, Coleridge was sent to the Christ's Hospital, where he remained till 1782. In 1791, he joined Jesus College, Cambridge as a charity student. For a while, he worked passionately at studies but displayed greater interest in propagating Republicanism and revelling in wine parties. He left Cambridge in 1794 without taking a degree. However, by this time he had met Robert Southey at Oxford, and together the two engaged themselves in an idealistic but unpracticable scheme called Pantisocracy with the aim of reforming the human race. They decided that twelve gentlemen of

Coleridge married Sarah Fricker, the sister of Southey's fiancée, a lady who neither emotionally nor intellectually was a suitable partner for him. It was really a strange motive to get married in the interest of Pantisocracy and Coleridge soon realised its ridiculousness. He was still attached to Mary Evans and he made a passionate appeal to her for marriage but all that the lady was prepared to offer was sisterly affection. He tried to convince Southey that his engagement with Sarah, so rashly made, should not

be taken seriously and he should be allowed to break off but Southey, out of regard for his future sister-in-law prevailed on him to abide by his word. Coleridge did keep his word and married Sarah but he had to repent for it throughout his life.

Coleridge started his literary career in Somerset. Here Coleridge pursued his literary studies, wrote a few poems, and undertook the publication of a political and literary periodical 'The Watchman', which ran till ten numbers. In 1796, he brought out the first collection of his verse under the title 'Poems on Various Subjects'.

He had met Wordsworth in 1795 and the two had felt attracted to each other by a common interest in political idealism and poetry. The two poets were temperamentally different but they had great regards for each other's talent and each stimulated the other. Coleridge was brilliant and commanded a vast range of ideas while Wordsworth was morally profound. Coleridge was fitful and restless, while Wordsworth possessed great emotional stability.

← Poetical works of Coleridge

Coleridge wrote very little, most of it fragmentary. His reputation as a poet rests on four to five great poems composed within a short period of six years when, in the inspiring company of Wordsworth and Dorothy, his creative impulse found a sudden release and he wrote poems like 'The Ancient Mariner', 'Christabel', 'Kubla Khan', 'Frost at Midnight' etc.

'Frost at Midnight' belongs to personal poem group of Coleridge which pay a touching tribute to the days of hope and joy experienced by the poet in the company of Wordsworth. It depicts the poet's thoughts on a lonely,

frosty night with his little son Hartley sleeping close to him. Most Wordsworthian in nature, this poem strikes a pantheistic note and subscribes to the theory of the presence of a divine spirit in nature.

Coleridge's reputation as a poet rests on three of his great romantic poems: The Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan and Christabel. All the three evoke a magical and mysterious mood. The Ancient Mariner is the only long poem the poet completed. It is written in a modified form of the ballad stanza and is memorable for its skilful unity, vivid phrases and 'shadows of imagination' made real. A simple tale of crime and punishment, it embodies the central thought that the real prayer of God consists in the love of God's creation. Kubla Khan was the result of a vision seen by Coleridge in an opium dream. It fuses in it a number of ideas and images taken from his wide reading. It takes for its theme the concept of poetic creation. Christabel is a story of witchcraft in which the serpent-woman Geraldine weaves a spell on the lovely and innocent Christabel.

Apart from it other notable poems of Coleridge are 'The Nightingale', 'The Lime-Tree Bower my Prison', 'The Eolian Harp', 'Hymn Before Sunrise', 'Youth and Age', 'Work without Hope and Dejection: An ode'. 'Dejection: An ode' is the last great poem written by Coleridge, bewails the loss of creative powers.

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