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T H O M A S C H A T T E R T O N
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G E N I U S O R I M P O S T O R

I N T R O D U C T I O N

"Be theirs who desecrate his name,
A lasting heritage of shame!"
- Anonymous

With the death, over a hundred and seventy-five years ago, of Thomas Chatterton, the Mad Genius of Bristol, there arose world-wide controversies concerning the works of this youthful writer. Critics, during the past years, are wont to consider him an impostor of the first degree, giving very little of their attention to the substance of his works. This thesis is written with the aim of proving that this youth, Thomas Chatterton, is fundamentally a genius and that his forgery was brought about by circumstances which a boy of his age and environment could hardly be expected to surmount.

It is with this aim in mind that I will present his life and works in order to demonstrate how from every

angle he was beset with hardship and misfortune out of which forgery was but a logical result, and yet through this cloak of fraudulency his genius shone forth as a rare but brilliant light at times overshadowing his contemporaries and beckoning to the forerunners in the literary field as a ray of hope to all who would climb the ladder of fame.

It is stated in Farrer's "Literary Forgeries" that in the study of forgery nowhere else is required a nicer balancing of opposed arguments; greater need of accuracy of fact; or a more cautious arrival at conclusions. Yet, notwithstanding this, many outstanding personages were firm believers in the authenticity of the Rowley poems.

In the city of Bristol, in the year 1465, the parish priest at St. John's was Thomas Rowley, a native of Somersetshire. At the same time, the greatest merchant of the century, with ships and merchandise on every sea, was William Canynge. He was a notable man of his age, not only as a merchant, but as a philanthropist and politician. Five times he was mayor of Bristol and the citizens of this ancient city even sent him to Parliament as their representative. Tradition has it that Rowley and Canynge were intimate friends; and that when Canynge inherited the great wealth of his father, Rowley, his former school-mate, took Holy Orders and was made his confessor. From then on these two friends worked together not only

in spiritual affairs but also in the literary realm. When Canynge's wife, Johanna, died, he devoted himself even more diligently to the arts and letters. Now, Canynge, the wealthiest man in Bristol, resided at the Red Lodge on the outskirts of the city. This was where "Aella", according to Chatterton, was performed by Rowley and his Carmelite Brothers.

The former Canynge had started to rebuild the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe (the church having fallen into decay through disuse) and his son continued this noble work and lived to see Redcliffe Church again completed. This church, even today, is reputed to be of the finest architectural structure and the most beautiful in all England. The noblest part of the church is the North Porch which is crowned by a tower. In this tower, in Canynge's time, there was a room, leading up from a spiral staircase, and in this room there were locked coffers in which all the documents pertaining to the church were kept. This was the Muniment Room. From these coffers our poet obtained what little information there was after many years of pilfering; from this information, enhanced by the old sexton's tales, Chatterton wrote his famous Rowley poems.

On Canynge's return to his birthplace after serving in Parliament, the King, then Edward IV, decided to marry a

noble lady of the court to his favoured Canynge. The wealthy merchant and politician refused his offer and to escape the wrath of the King he took refuge in Holy Orders. For the remaining years of his life he carried out his duties as such. He died in 1474.

That William Canynge really existed and was a prominent figure in history there is no doubt. That Rowley lived during his time there is also no doubt. Where the doubt exists is in whether Rowley was Canynge's confidant, only a priest in the city or perhaps only an ordinary citizen of Bristol. The fact remains that Chatterton did not invent Canynge or Rowley; with his strong imagination he wove a history around them that, although distorted and exaggerated in many respects, is nevertheless filled with romance and intrigue which cannot fail to arouse our fancy and our interest. Not only must he be judged on his antique poems but also on his Acknowledged Poems for in these too you will find his versatility and exceptional talent.

It is necessary to describe his life in detail because his life and work are so closely linked that it is impossible to speak of one without the other.

His works must be given in detail for here again you find his whole life shadowing his prose and verse from his great Rowley Antiques to his smallest love ditty written for a friend. Consider a posthumously born youth ushered into a home surround-

ed by misunderstanding relatives, unsympathetic friends, without a guiding father, without a sustaining hand, faced with misfortune and penury, and yet capable of giving the world the small gift he could donate - his rare genius. Is there any wonder that this prodigy took his own life - for only the truly great have the power to overcome their environment, and it certainly cannot be expected that this boy of seventeen would have the desire, much less the power to consider life worth living at any cost.

The ~~third~~ chapter is an appreciation of Chatterton and his influence on succeeding writers. Although his influence is not what one might call great, still we must consider that had Pope, Dryden, Gray or Johnson left this world at the tender age of seventeen, they most certainly would not have left their mark on literature. The fact remains that they would have left us nothing of literary value. Russell states in his biography of Chatterton "The world cherished stories of precocious achievements by many of its accepted favourites, by Pope, Macaulay, Keats, Bryant, Shelley; among them all is no fellow to this." Yet this Mad Genius of Bristol leaves us a host of antique poems, a myriad of miscellaneous selections, political letters and not a few prose compositions.

C H A P T E R O N E

L I F E O F C H A T T E R T O N

"Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collid night."
- Wilson

In the shadow of the Church of Saint Mary Redcliffe in the ancient city of Bristol, on November 20th, 1752, a young widow gave birth to a son and he was christened Thomas. Thus began the short life of a boy whose works were to cause untold controversy in the literary world....THOMAS CHATTERTON.

During the first six and a half years of this boy's life he was regarded as deficient in intellect. He was brought up in an atmosphere far from conducive to the understanding of the dormant faculties of this child. The young mother was discouraged with her son because he seemed to be "so dull in learning, not knowing many letters at four years old"¹ It was by a happy turn of fate that Thomas first seemed to take an interest in learning. He was first attracted by the illuminated capitals on the cover of an old musical folio. Thenceforth he took a keen interest in reading which gradually increased until in pursuit of knowledge he would neglect both food and sleep.

Before his admittance to Colston's Hospital at the age

1. Daniel Wilson, Chatterton, A Biographical Study, p. 10.

of seven he became closely associated, through Richard Phillips, the sexton at St. Mary Redcliffe, with the ancient personages of Bristol. He lived this part of his life so vividly that soon the ancient Canynges and their more ancient friends became realities to him - soon Thomas Rowley was added to this long list. For fame was a strong power within him even as a child and Rowley was his ideal as the Bristol poet of Canynge's time. Besides the visible proof, in the church itself, of the existence of this old generation, he had access to the actual records and parchments written by the artists of the fifteenth century.

With the destruction or removal of the beautiful old cross from the grounds of St. Mary Redcliffe there appeared, anonymously, in Felix Farley's Journal, the weekly Bristol newspaper, a satirical poem about the parish vandal. Now this poem, by Chatterton, is not important in itself but it does show us where his mind and heart lay - in the love of antiquities. This love of things ancient was brought about indirectly by the poet's father. Years before, the elder Thomas Chatterton had rifled the Church Muniment Room of all its old parchments and documents to replenish his supply of covers for the copy books of his pupils. In this way even-

tually many reached his home and from these Thomas Chatterton first learned his letters - thus from infancy he was familiar with medieval paleography. It was from these romantic sources that an inherent desire developed within him even before Thomas Rowley made his appearance on the stage of this young dreamer's life as the supposed author of his works.

Colston's Hospital was hardly the place for a boy imbued with the love of poetry, but this atmosphere of meagre culture did not deter the young genius from his writings. He thirsted after knowledge and spent his pocket money luring books from a lending library. This was when he was but ten years old. On his half-holiday from school he hurried home to his attic room which contained parchments, documents and other materials which were now in use in the embryonic stage of what would be later known as the Rowley Poems. He would emerge from this room soiled with ochre and crayons which caused much anxiety to his mother who still did not realise her son's great talent. "But it has been too hastily assumed that the boy was systematically engaged in the conversion of modern parchments into spurious antiques. His antique poems became, ere long, voluminous enough; but as to the spurious parchments, all he ever produced could have been manufactured in a few days."¹

1. Daniel Wilson, op. cit., p. 32.

In his eleventh year it seems that Chatterton started writing verse and "On the Last Epiphany: or Christ's Coming to Judgment" was his first published poem. This poem was written on the occasion of his confirmation. This acclamation of his poem, when he saw it in print, brought about a change in him. He seemed to discover his vocation and this knowledge brightened his life to a considerable extent.

"Apostate Will" was his next poem published. This was a satirical sketch and points out clearly the satirical bent of the mind of this young genius. From this time onward Chatterton started to study industriously and read avidly.

Thistlethwaite, a pupil at Colston's at the same time as Thomas Chatterton, stated that in an accidental encounter with Chatterton, the boy mentioned that he was in possession of some old manuscripts which he had found in a chest in Redcliffe Church and that he had lent some to his schoolmaster Philipps. When Thistlethwaite met Thomas Philipps, he showed him a manuscript which the former was sure was "Elinoure and Juga" - later published in the Town and Country Magazine.

Thomas Philipps did a great deal for this young boy. His position as teacher led Chatterton to look up to him in confidence and did much to bring him forward. His elegy on Philipps' death pointed out the relation between these two and the desired sympathy he received from Philipps. It was

to this man, this "great master of the boundless lyre" that Chatterton first attempted to pass off his own work as the work of a poet of the fifteenth century. How much Philipps encouraged him is not known.

At this time we should look to the developing character of this young Bristolian. He appeared at this stage of life to be leading a dual role: one as the moody, reticent poet, living in the world of his ancestors; and as the satirical and clever boy looking with contempt on both civic and ecclesiastical dignitaries. Even at this early age you find that he had a keen sense and acute discrimination of people's character. This, as he continued along his short road of life, developed to an even greater extent, and in his famous "Kew Gardens" and many of his political letters you find many sagacious characterizations.

It was also at this time that Chatterton made the acquaintance of Mr. William Barrett, F.S.A., surgeon, the future historian of Bristol. It was he who came to know the boy as no one else knew him; it was to him that Chatterton gave a great deal of his ancient documents, which Barrett turned to his own account. He knew Chatterton the best, yet he did the least for him. It was Barrett himself who refused to believe that Chatterton was the author of the Rowley poems; this fact must always be borne in mind.

"As an original poet, the boy was slighted, suspected, discredited; but as a provider of materials for the forthcoming civic history, he could not labour too sedulously alike in prose and verse."¹

It was to Mr. George Catcott that Chatterton gave most of his "Rowley Poems". "In fact, Catcott remained an obstinate Rowleyan to the last; evidently thinking that to himself, rather than Chatterton, the world owed the recovery of the long lost literary treasures."²

When Thomas Chatterton left the Bluecoat School he became apprentice to Mr. John Lambert, a Bristol attorney, in order to learn the art of a scrivener. Here, during hours in which he did not work, he found himself in congenial surroundings to continue his work on the Rowley Poems.

During his period of stay at the attorney's office he renewed his friendship with Thistlethwaite and read to him many selections from the famous poems; but Thistlethwaite had no idea of the genius of this youth. He also refused to believe that Chatterton was the author of the Rowley Poems, and merely placed Chatterton's con-

1. Daniel Wilson, op. cit., p. 77.

2. Ibid., p. 86.

fession that they were his own work as "vanity and an inordinate thirst for praise". His closest friend, Mr. William Smith, with whom Chatterton walked in the precincts of Redcliffe Church, and to whom he read the Rowley poems, said: "He wrote Rowley? No! No! No! I knew him well. He was a clever fellow, but he could not write Rowley. There was a mystery about the poems beyond me; but Tom no more wrote them than I did. He could not!" His mother and sister did not understand him either - Chatterton had no one who would believe in him, no one to recognize his genius. If he could have found just one person who would have had faith in him, what heights he could have reached, what a brilliant career might have been his! Mr. John Rudhall and Mr. Thomas Cary, two in whom he confided, both believed him incapable of writing in the Rowley vein.

Chatterton, now but fifteen years of age, found that no one would believe that he was the author of these exceptional poems. It was far easier for his so-called friends to believe him to be a liar than to believe him to be a rare genius with strange creative powers; and he soon learned to keep these works to himself and showed his local satires only to his acquaintances.

Chatterton had another friend, Mr. Michael Clayfield, whom he met through Barrett, and whom he mentioned in one of his writings. On leaving Bristol he left him

the sincerest thanks his gratitude could give.

Mr. Lambert, his employer, also induced the boy to secretiveness for he resented Thomas writing during office hours. Although Lambert could not accuse him of negligence in his work (for he was prompt and hard-working) he would destroy his poetic works whenever he found them. This caused Chatterton more grief than can be imagined, and embittered his life, but was referred to only in tears, for the boy did not seem to have lampooned Lambert, at any time, with his satiric pen.

In 1768 there appeared in the Bristol Weekly Journal a description of the Mayor's first passing over the Old Bridge by "Dunhelmus Bristoliensis". This appeared in the Journal at the time when a new Bridge had been erected and just opened to the public. Now this D.B. whom we shall encounter again in the London Town and Country Magazine was none other than Thomas Chatterton. Here began the actual career of this Bristol boy. When Farley, editor of the Bristol Weekly Journal, asked for further documents on the Old Bridge, Chatterton knew only too well how they would laugh him to scorn if he were to admit that they were his own (his experience with his friends proved this). Consequently he then began earnestly to use the coffers in the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliffe as the explanation of

this lyrical description of the first opening of the ancient Bristol Bridge.

Before his fateful journey to London he wrote not only his Rowley Poems, Burgum Pedigree, and the Passage of the Bridge, but also many satiric verses in the vein of the day directed against many public figures whom he despised.

While employed at Mr. Lambert's, Chatterton became very dissatisfied - dissatisfaction brought on solely by Lambert's treatment. Here, in the latter's employ, we find that suicide had been considered by him before his tragic end. Not long before leaving the lawyer's office, Lambert, while looking through the poet's writings, discovered a letter written to Calyfield saying that he (Chatterton) would be no more when the addressee received his missive. Lambert took this letter to Mr. Barrett, whereupon the historian lectured the poet on the horror of self-murder.

On April 14, 1770, Mr. Lambert found upon Chatterton's desk a copybook containing his will - probably left there purposely in order to catch his eye. Overlooking the satire, humour and irony it contained, it served its purpose for Lambert, thinking it was a suicide's last farewell to the world, relieved Chatterton of his duties and within six days Thomas was writing his first London letter home.

Within a week he bade farewell to his Mother and

sister who were much aggrieved at this parting, and with a purse, collected by his friends (more money than he had ever possessed) and a bundle of precious parchments, with which he hoped to make his fame and fortune, he set forth with a light heart at seventeen years of age to conquer the London literary world.

Thomas Chatterton arrived in the town of London on the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth of April, 1770, at five in the evening. He immediately took up residence with some relations and set about his literary career without delay.

"The literary patrons on whom he chiefly relied for a start in his career were Hamilton, the proprietor of the Town and Country Magazine, Edmunds, the editor of the Middlesex Journal - to both of whom he was well-known by name - Fell, the editor and printer of the Freeholder's Magazine, and Dodsley, the publisher in Pall Mall, with whom, it will be remembered, he had already had some correspondence about the publication of Aella."¹

Fell, Edmunds and Hamilton readily accepted his articles but Dodsley does not appear to have made any arrangements with Thomas Chatterton.

At this point in the life of the Mad Genius of Bristol it would be well to review the historical background of London at that time.

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton, Vol. I, p. lxxxiv.

In 1760 George III ascended the throne of England, having for his Tory Prime Minister, Lord North, with Lord Chatham as the leader of the opposition; Edmund Burke was publishing pamphlets and trying to construct, under the auspices of the Marquis of Rockingham, a new Whig party. Out of Parliament the notabilities were Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, Garrick, and the author of the famous letters of Junius; but the hero of the hour was John Wilkes and it was to this star that Chatterton hitched his wagon. "Wilkes and Liberty" was the theme of the day.

Now Fell and Edmunds were the two editors in whom he placed the most confidence for the success of his literary career, but more than all he wished to be introduced to Wilkes for he believed that if this could be accomplished his fortune would be made; and Fell promised to arrange this for him; whether Fell earnestly intended to do this for Chatterton was never known, for when the time came for the introduction, he had been laid up in the King's Bench for debt, and Edmunds at the same time was thrown into Newgate as a warning to "patriotic" publishers.

The loss of these two friends when he expected so much from them did not deter Chatterton from working. The Middlesex Journal was taken over by Hamilton for whom he continued to write diligently.

Disappointed when he was not introduced to Wilkes, he did not stop at this, but sought to bring himself into contact with even a greater hero of the day - Lord Mayor Beckford. He wrote a letter to him praising his lordship's defence of the City of London against the Government. When two or three days had elapsed he paid a personal visit to the Lord Mayor and was, according to Chatterton, received very politely and consented to have another public letter addressed to him. This Chatterton did and arranged to have it appear in the North Briton. This periodical was edited by William Bingley, and to have his letter published in this paper - in fact forming one entire number, - was a decided step upward in his literary career. Chatterton was greatly elated by this progress but his elation was short-lived for on the 21st of June, 1770, Beckford died. Thus faded another of Chatterton's dreams. After his first frantic outburst that he was ruined, he seemed to recover from this second great disappointment. Nevertheless he learned from this last misfortune that political writing was not profitable. After the City Remonstrance in the latter part of May, the Ministers started a crusade against the opposition press. Soon Chatterton found it impossible to get his articles published in any periodical. Nevertheless, during the first two months of Chatterton's stay in London he wrote for count-

less periodicals, not only political, but many other literary articles.

Chatterton, the never ending genius, also wrote a Burletta entitled "The Revenge" and other songs which give us an idea of his versatility. His Burletta was performed at Marylebone Gardens.

It will be observed that as yet Thomas Chatterton had not tried to publish his famous Rowley Poems. Did he think of making his fame and fortune first before giving the London public the rare gift of his genius - or was he discerning enough to know that it was easier to fool the Bristol minds than the London antiquarians?

Around the end of June or the beginning of July Chatterton changed his lodgings to 39 Brooke Street and rented a room in the attic of Mrs. Angell's rooming house. At this time the youthful genius was not in want of money, but he was extremely generous to his mother and sister, and throughout his sojourn in London he was ever mindful of them. He was very anxious that they should know that he was well and in happy circumstances. Nevertheless, the presents he sent to his family must have been a strain on the small purse of Thomas. When reviewing succeeding letters to mother and sister he appeared to lose some of his sanguinistic spirit and by the end of July it was evident

that he was without work of any kind. July and August were dull in London with all the Ministers gone to the seashore to escape the heat, the theatres closed and the newspapers and periodicals inert. July dragged into August with Chatterton living on in the little Brooke Street attic gradually starving to death.

During his last few days he conceived the idea of obtaining a position as surgeon's mate on a ship to Africa. This did not require an extensive knowledge of medicine and Chatterton had at one time studied it while in Bristol. With this idea in mind he wrote to Catcott on August 12th, saying:

"I intend going abroad as a surgeon. Mr. Barrett has it in his power to assist me greatly, by his giving me a physical character. I hope he will. I trouble you with a copy of an essay I intend publishing....."¹

He wrote a somewhat similar letter to Barrett and on August 18th he received Barrett's refusal. Thus the man who owed a great deal of his "History" and fame to this marvellous boy refused to give him as little as a recommendation. It was so little to ask of this "great"

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

man, but he proved himself smaller than the eventual fame of his History. Men with less medical knowledge than Chatterton were serving as surgeon's mates - and Chatterton's last ray of hope, last friend, last dream of surviving in the unfriendly world he entered, faded on the horizon, his money vanished, food he had none - not for several days, although meals were offered him by Mrs. Angell. Yet his pride remained with him unto the bitter end.

On a sultry evening, August 24th, 1770, at the age of seventeen years and nine months, at 39 Brooke Street, Holborn, London, amid the torn fragments of his manuscripts, destroyed by his own hand (arsenic and water) this "Mad Genius of Bristol" passed on to meet his Judge.

Although Chatterton was condemned to the Potter's Field, his mother obtained possession of her son's body and during the night had him buried in consecrated ground.

Today there stands a monument to his memory in the grounds of St. Mary Redcliffe, his first love, with an epitaph from his own pen:

"To the Memory of

THOMAS CHATTERTON

Reader! Judge not. If thou art a Christian, believe that he shall be judged by a Superior Power. To that Power only is he now answerable."¹

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 272.

C H A P T E R T W O

C H A T T E R T O N

Genius - Impostor

"He lived a mystery, died; here, reader, pause:
Let God be judge, and mercy plead the cause."

At all times, while studying the works of Thomas Chatterton, we must never forget the boy's youthfulness; before reviewing his works we should recall the characteristics of the literary age into which he was born.

This boy genius was ushered into a period of English literature which was rapidly changing, for with the appearance of Thomson's "The Seasons" in 1730 a new romantic movement quietly made its appearance. This romantic movement was simply the expression of life as seen by imagination, rather than by prosaic common sense. It had six prominent characteristics - it was marked by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom; Romanticism returned to nature and to plain humanity for its material; this revival was also marked by renewed interest in medieval ideals and literature; Romanticism was marked by intense human sympathy and by a consequent understanding of the human heart; the romantic movement was the expression of the individual genius rather than of established rules. In consequence, the

literature of the revival was as varied as the characters and moods of the different writers - in the work of the best romanticists there is endless variety; the last characteristic of the movement was the return to Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and the Elizabethans for literary models.

Let us apply these characteristics to the work of Thomas Chatterton. Strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom - Upon close examination of his works we find that he is not a slave to any style or versification. His first published poems when he was eleven are much alike, abounding with the couplet, but after his first attempts his field broadens and his work becomes more varied. His first known poem "On the Last Epiphany, or Christ Coming to Judgment", written when he was just a few months past ten years of age, is written in rhymed couplets; "Apostate Will", one of his first satires, is written in the same style. Although this poem is not extraordinary in the strict sense of the word, yet when we consider Chatterton's parentage and education we cannot fail to be impressed by this eleven year old's sparkling wit and satire. If we pass on to the works published in his last year we find many varied selections, including a Burletta, an Elegy and the heroic poem, the "Consuliad", which all display his versatility in rhyme and metre.

The third characteristic of this new romantic move-

ment is marked by renewed interest in medieval ideals and literature. Surely Chatterton's Rowley Poems are an excellent example of this characteristic. His interest in medieval ideals and literature is also shown in his "Description of the Mayor's First Passing over the Old Bridge at Bristol", "The Ryse of Peyncteyne in Englande" and the "Account of the Family of the DeBerghams". Ever since the child was four years old, his main interest in life seemed to be his other world of make-believe in which he communed with the ancient Canynges and their illustrious friends of the fifteenth century.

The fifth characteristic is the expression of individual genius rather than of established rules. Now Chatterton's greatest talent was his originality and his varied works from biting satire, through his love poems (written for a friend) and political letters to the Rowley Poems, are ample proof that he trod along the new romantic literary pathway.

The last characteristic of this movement gives Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton as the inspiration of this revival. The Rowley Poems are written in a ten-line stanza: the "Rowley Stanza" is in reality the Spenserian stanza with a slight change. In this way he follows Spenser. In his "Aella" are many imitations of Shakespeare.

Now let us consider the works of Chatterton, his "Acknowledged Writings" as they are called, i.e. his works apart from the Rowley Poems.

At the tender age of ten the marvellous boy was confirmed by the Bishop of Bristol and it was this event which occasioned him to write his impressions in verse. He wrote "On the Last Epiphany; or Christ's Coming to Judgment!" So pleased was the youth at this first attempt that he submitted it to the Weekly Journal and was thrilled to see his own work in print. No sooner had Chatterton set out upon his fateful career than he immediately turned to satire as the expression of his poetical genius. The earliest satirical work is his "Apostate Will"

"In days of old, when Wesley's power
Gathered new strength by every hour;
Apostate Will, just sunk in trade,
Resolved his bargain should be made;
Then straight to Wesley he repairs,
And puts on grave and solemn airs;
Then thus the pious man address'd:
'Good sir, I think your doctrine best;
Your servant will a Wesley be,
Therefore the principles teach me."¹

Then Chatterton goes on to describe how Will changes from Wesleyan to Methodist or to any other religious sect just as it suits him best. He was eleven years and five months when he wrote this poem, and while, as mentioned above, it

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 7.

is not the most brilliant of satirical poems, it may be said to be so when Chatterton's environment and education are taken into consideration. Sir Herbert Croft states "when we read the ode which Pope wrote at twelve, and another by Cowley at thirteen, we are apt to suspect a parent friend, or tutor, of an amiable dishonesty, of which we feel, perhaps, that we should be guilty. Suspicions of this nature touch not Chatterton. He knew no tutor, no friend, no parent - at least no parent who could correct or assist him".¹

Now Chatterton, while at Colston's Hospital, had become friendly with a Mr. Baker who had emigrated to South Carolina. In 1768 Thomas received a letter from him stating that he had fallen in love with a fair lady, Miss Eleanor Hoyland, and knowing Chatterton's ability in writing verse, asked him to write a few verses in order that he (Baker) might impress the young lady. On March 6th, 1768, Chatterton answered Baker enclosing in his letter several poems addressed to Miss Hoyland. In all, he wrote ten poems for Miss Hoyland. These simple love poems show Chatterton's versatility as a poet, his charming rhythmical verses - for example the following lines:

"Sweet are thy charming smiles, my lovely main
Sweet as the flowers in bloom of spring arrayed;

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit. pp. 7, 8.

Those charming smiles thy beauteous face adorn,
As May's white blossoms gaily deck the thorn." ¹

In October, 1769, Chatterton wrote the first of his Elegies entitled "On the Death of Mr. J. Tandy"; then he wrote sometime later during the same year another elegy on the death of Mr. Philipps. This last elegy he wrote twice, not being satisfied with his first attempt. Mr. Philipps was an usher at Colston's and Chatterton had been his pupil. A second poem is also written on the occasion of Philipps' death. The latter is not as good as the first one. The first is written in quatrains and in it he exalts Philipps to a high degree. Many times Chatterton and he had taken long walks in the evening and discussed the arts and sciences; even in this elegy he mentions their walks and conversations, as he states:

"Then would we wander through this darkened vale,
In converse such as heavenly spirits use,
And borne upon the pinions of the gale,
Hymn the Creator, and exert the Muse." ²

He wrote six other elegies, one of which was written after the manner of Gray; one to an unknown Maria; one besieging all Nature to mourn the death of Lady Betty's tabby cat; one on unrequited love; another written on the death of William Beckford, while Chatterton was in London, brought him

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 55.

some monetary recompense; his last elegy was written on the death of Mr. William Smith - it should have been for Mr. Peter Smith, a mistake on Chatterton's part, not known until after the poem was finished.

During the year 1769 and the early part of 1770, before his departure for London, Chatterton wrote many miscellaneous poems. Many of them are of little significance and are far from his best works although all of them exhibit the ease and flow of rhythm that is characteristic of this wondrous boy. During this period he was busy working on his Rowley Poems and these lesser works were a mere interlude while he was writing of his true love - Rowley. Some of the best of these lesser works are (1) "Epistle to the Reverend Mr. Catcott" - although not "the" best of his satirical works it is excellently written. It is not easily understood if one does not realise the story behind it. Chatterton was quite friendly with the Reverend Alexander Catcott who believed, firmly, in the literal interpretation of the "Deluge". In this, of course, Chatterton disagreed, for he had his own thoughts on religion which, not in the least, coincided with those of Reverend Catcott. In this epistle Chatterton constantly refers to the Reverend's dogma concerning Noah's Flood. It is one of his longer poems and satirizes the vicar in some very cutting verses. Later Chatterton apologized for

his vitriolic humour, saying that "when the fit is on me, I spare neither friend or foe".¹ (2) Another of his outstanding poems in this period is "Hecar and Gaira". This poem is an African Eclogue and is the tale of two braves seeking vengeance. It is dramatically written and vividly painted; Chatterton had the marvellous gift of transporting the reader to the scene of the story; along with this the lines are in couplets and are rhythmic, each line seeming to flow freely into the next with an ease that is seldom found in works of this nature. Perhaps the greatest of his poems before he went to London are his "Consuliad" and "Resignation". These poems are both political satires. Dr. Gregory says of the former "The Consuliad, a political piece, is in the highest strain of party scurrility". This poem first appeared in the Freeholder's Magazine and Chatterton received 10s. 6d. for his efforts. The "Consuliad" tells of an allegorical political banquet and is an example of his most biting wit. His "Resignation" was occasioned by the resignation from the premiership, of the Duke of Grafton. It is the longest of his poems other than "Kew Gardens" and ranks high among his satirical works. Here his wit and satire are at their best. He lists all Grafton's failings, all his crimes against the people, all his

1. Charles Edward Russell, Thomas Chatterton, The Marvellous Boy, p. 129.

party interests, his colleagues and foes and many of the politicians and courtiers who appeared with him during his premiership. So vitriolic is his wit that he even asks of Satire to aid him in his revilement of the former premier:

"Come, Satire, aid me to display the first
Of every honest Englishman accursed."¹

The longest of all his poems is "Kew Gardens" and for a long time was not available in its entirety. It was printed in its entire form in 1837. In this poem he satirizes a great many of his Bristol acquaintances along with many of the political notabilities of the day.

Now many of his political satires were accepted and printed in the Freeholder's Magazine - a democratic periodical. This boy, with wit both biting and severe, and satire searing and forceful, was accepted by this newspaper and placed before the public as one of the champions of freedom - this Bristolian writer with the pen as his sword. Little did the editor know that this poet was a young boy of fifteen or sixteen - no doubt little of his work would they have printed had they been aware of the age of this precocious writer. Must this not be considered proof enough that his satire was as good, if not better than, Churchill's. An unknown writer admitted to the London public as easily as if he had been well

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 116.

established in the ranks of literary satire. Must not his satire have been of a high degree, at least must it not have possessed a rare quality with which, thought the lovers of freedom, he might sway the populace. Think! the boy was but sixteen! Is there a poet living, was there every a poet who could make that boast at such an age? What would the future have held for him if but one outstretched hand had aided him along the road of life - just one?

On April 23rd, 1770, Chatterton landed in London to launch himself on his career as a writer. On May 2nd he wrote another African Eclogue entitled "Narva and Mored". In a letter to his friend Cary, written on June 29th or July 1st, Chatterton told him "in the last London magazine, and the magazine coming out tomorrow, are the only two pieces I have the vanity to call poetry". These two pieces, which he mentioned, are his African Eclogues - the other entitled "The Death of Nicou". This marvellous boy certainly was correct in assuming that these eclogues were poetry. None of his works has the easy flow, the musical rhythm; none displays a more vivid picturization or more beautiful scenery - here Chatterton is a painter using words with which to paint the scenes. The following lines are taken from "The Death of Nicou":

"On Tiber's banks, where scarlet jasmines bloom,
And purple aloes shed a rich perfume;

Where, when the sun is melting in his heat,
The reeking tigers find a cool retreat,
Bask in the sedtes, lose the sultry beam,
And wanton with their shadows in the stream."¹

Throughout his works, in some form or other, we find here and there his philosophy of life. In his poem "Happiness" we find him saying:

"Then, friend, let inclination be thy guide,
Nor be by superstition led aside,
The saint and sinner, fool and wise attain
An equal share of easiness and pain."²

Most critics seem to have overlooked his poem "Prophecy". It certainly is not one of his best works but it is evidence that Chatterton was only too well aware of the state of the country and especially familiar with its leaders. In seventeen stanzas he prophesies that all the evils shall be righted and that Briton shall stand free. In the eighteenth stanza he sums up the poem as follows:

"Then is your time to strike the blow,
And let the slaves of Mammon know
Briton's true sons a bribe can scorn,
And die as free as they were born.
Virtue again shall take her seat,
And your redemption stand complete."³

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1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 201.
 2. Ibid., p. 190.
 3. Ibid., p. 197.

His knowledge of the times make it possible for him, not only in a literary but also in a "manner of the Day" way, to write his satirical and political letters. His literary ability alone could not have earned for him the recognition he received at the hands of the editors of so many of the London magazines.

Chatterton's versatility extended even to the field of music. He had a delicate ear for music, well brought out in some beautiful lines of his poetry. He wrote an oratoria, a few Burlettas and some songs for Ranelagh Gardens. In a letter to his mother on May 14th he recounts the following incident: "Last week, being in the pit of Drurylane Theatre, I contracted an immediate acquaintance with a young gentleman in Cheapside; partner in a music-shop, the greatest in the city. Hearing I could write, he desired me to write a few songs for him: this I did the same night, and conveyed them to him the next morning. These he showed to a Doctor in Music, and I am invited to treat with this Doctor, on the footing of a composer, for Ranelagh and the Gardens."¹ The two Burlettas which he wrote are entitled the "Revenge" and the "Woman of Spirit". The latter is an unfinished work. Unfortunately, Chatterton did not live to see his "Revenge" produced. It is a burlesque in two acts, presenting the characters, Juno, Jupiter,

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., pp. 342, 343.

Bacchus and Cupid. It was one of the better burlesques of the day and if the music were as good as the words written by Chatterton, it should have been popular with the patrons of Marylebone Gardens. The words of this burletta are very well suited and adapted for music - his usual easy flow of rhythm predominating.

In his crowded seventeen years Chatterton even found time to translate a few of the works of Horace. We must remember here that Thomas Chatterton was a self-taught Latin pupil. Although his translations are not literal, yet they exhibit the Chatterton characteristics. A few lines will serve to show the apparent ease with which he translated this difficult language:

"Though soft the beams of thy delusive eyes -
As the smooth surface of the untroubled stream;
Yet ah! too soon th' ecstatic vision flies -
Flies like the fairy paintings of a dream".¹

A great part of Chatterton's income while he was in London was derived from the political letters he wrote for the many periodicals of the day.

The "Town and Country Magazine" was a monthly periodical appearing on the last day of every month and sold for one shilling. Chatterton was a constant contributor since its second number in 1769 and considered it a

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 255.

great monetary source when he arrived in London. The proprietor, Hamilton, must have been surprised to meet his contributor in person and find him to be but a youth, but nevertheless he continued to accept Chatterton's work for his paper. Another of his favourite periodicals was the "Freeholder's Magazine". This also appeared on the last day of the month and sold for sixpence. Chatterton was familiar with this magazine before he left Bristol; it was a political periodical with Mr. Fell as the editor. With Mr. Fell's imprisonment Chatterton ceased, or so it seems from his letters home, to write for it. Another shilling monthly was the "London Museum" which achieved a greater importance in the life of Thomas Chatterton. Then came the "Political Register", "The Court and City Magazine", the "North Briton", the "Middlesex Journal", "The London", "The Christian" and the "Gospel Magazine", to all of which he contributed; other periodicals to which he contributed were the "Lady's Magazine", the "Annual Register" and, of course, Felix Farley's "Bristol Journal".

The first of Thomas Chatterton's political letters, printed in the Middlesex Journal, February 24th, 1770, was written in Bristol on February 16th of the same year. This letter was addressed to the Duke of Grafton, and was occasioned by the resignation of the Duke from the premiership

on January 28th. The letter consists of the criticism of his term of office and the last paragraph gives an outline of what went before:

"I shall conclude with observing, that your whole administration has been derogatory to the honour and dignity of the Crown, for the honour of the Crown is the liberty of the subject."¹

All of Chatterton's political letters, except his last, addressed to Lord North in August, 1770, were written under the nom de plume of Decimus or Probus. The latter he used only twice.

His second letter, printed in the Middlesex Journal on April 17, 1770, was addressed to the Princess of Gotham, i.e. the Princess Dowager of Wales, Mother of George III. The Princess Dowager was grossly accused by the freedom lovers as ruling the King to the exclusion of everyone. In this letter he flails her with his caustic pen; he levels her with ridicule and accuses her of every crime against the Crown - "ridiculous vanity in assuming the statesman", "by you, every measure of oppression is ushered into the world".² This letter was written in Bristol also and was preparing the way for Chatterton among the periodicals in London. True

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 288.

2. Ibid., p. 290.

enough what he wrote of the Princess Dowager was written in the manner of the day, with as much verve and with as much directness and bitterness as Junius.

The last of his letters written in Bristol, on April 27th, was addressed to the Earl of Hillsborough and was printed in the Middlesex Journal on May 10th, 1770. Lord Hillsborough was appointed third secretary of state for the conduct of American affairs. Chatterton denounces him in regard to the massacre at Boston (March 5th) and says "Think of the recent murders at Boston. O my Lord! however you may force a smile into your countenance, however you may trifle in the train of dissipation, your conscience must raise a hell within."¹ With these letters Chatterton hoped to make a name for himself in the big city, a name which would act as a pass for him in the literary circles, and which would enable him to begin a career as a famous writer not only of satire and politics but, perhaps, in the recesses of his mind, he hoped to introduce, through his own name, Thomas Rowley and his antiques to the public of England.

The first of Chatterton's political letters written in London on May 10th and printed in the Middlesex Journal of May 15th, was addressed to the Princess Dowager of Wales. This was one of his longer letters and once again

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 293.

the Queen Mother became the butt of his satire. Throughout the letter Chatterton stresses the difference between the Queen's filial duty to her son and her duty to him as a subject; he points out "though as a mother you might be commendable, yet as a subject you are highly blameable".¹ Now the King was opposed by a group of so-called patriots, radicals, freedom lovers or what you will. The leader of this movement was John Wilkes. When Chatterton came to London Wilkes was the hero of the hour, and needless to say, Chatterton, inflamed by the ardour and glory of the day, was all for "Wilkes and Liberty". In the letter mentioned above he speaks of Wilkes and perhaps the quotation of the passage will serve to show how strongly in favour of Wilkes he was, how he considered him a champion of freedom, striving towards the ever pertinent ideals of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité: "Mr. Wilkes stands now at the head of this opposition: in him you find an ényemy, as long as you are an enemy to the constitution of this country; his enmity extends no further; it has nothing meanly personal, as he fights in a glorious cause, he scorns to debase that cause, by copying the littleness which characterized your resentment against him."² Then Chatterton goes on to praise Wilkes and recount his deeds of glory and patriotism. He

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 296.

2. Ibid., p. 298.

terminates his dissertation in saying to the Dowager Queen "May you be taught what your birth and royal alliances required; and make a better use of the gifts which fortune has so blindly lavished upon you".¹

His fifth letter was written on May 15, 1770, appeared in the Middlesex Journal on May 22nd, and was addressed to the Prime Minister, Lord North. Chatterton, in opening his letter, states that he realizes Lord North is but following the dictates of a high power and points out to him that he is in a position to avert the disasters that are befalling not only London but the whole country. He implores him to seek the council and tell them justice is at the door, "tell them whilst the spirit of English freedom exists, vengeance has also an existence."²

In the Middlesex Journal on May 26th, written on May 17th, another of Chatterton's letters appeared. This was not a political one, but rather contained criticisms on an exhibition of sign-paintings. The letter contains twenty-five criticisms but is merely a miscellaneous work and not of very much value.

Chatterton's letter to the Freeholders of the City of Bristol was printed in the Middlesex Journal on

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeats op. cit., p. 300.

2. Ibid., p. 304.

May 31st and was written in London on May 21st, 1770. He besieges the Bristolians to rise up against the members of the Corporation of the City "ruffians of state" as he calls them. He asks them to follow in the footsteps of the London rebels - "Be it your task to take off the load of shame, which your superiors in command throw upon the city".¹ Chatterton refers to Canynge (a slight reference to his never-to-be-forgotten Rowley) and his glorious loyalty to his country even surmounting his loyalty and love for his family.

His longest political letter, under the pen-name Probus, appeared in the Political Register in June, 1770, addressed to the Lord Mayor, William Beckford. Beckford died almost at the time of publication of this letter. Now the Mayor was a prominent supporter of John Wilkes and presented an address to George III complaining of the false return in a Middlesex election (John Wilkes was one of the candidates). The King's reply was unsympathetic and Beckford, to the extreme surprise of the court, delivered a forcible extempore speech in answer to it. Chatterton stated on May 30th, 1770, in a letter to his sister that he was present with the Lord Mayor on this occasion. Of course in this letter he praises Beckford to the skies

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 312.

for his course of action during the prevailing crises. Chatterton, using his slight friendship as a stepping-stone, hoped to win his fame and fortune through Beckford. It was a heavy blow to the youthful genius when his god proved only too mortal and died soon after this letter. This seemed to be a turning point in the boy's life for, as he tells us in one of his personal letters to his sister, he realized that he was not getting very far writing for the opposition; perhaps they only too freely accepted his work but they were not so free in paying him for his endeavours; he ventured to say in the aforementioned letter "but he is a poor author, who cannot write on both sides".¹ After he recovered from the shock of the Lord Mayor's demise he tried to turn his misfortune to good fortune in stating that he received more money writing elegies on Beckford's death than writing for him and his cause during the latter's life.

It was at this time that Chatterton decided, according to his policy of writing for both sides, to mitigate his letters to the public.

A letter written to the Right Honourable the Earl of Dartmouth, and signed by Probus, according to Dix's Life of Chatterton, appeared in the Political Register. Dr. Wal-

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 348.

ter Skeat does not believe this letter to be one of Chatterton's but it is my opinion that this is one of his letters in his new, less severe vein. In this letter you seem to feel that he holds himself in check; his policy is pacific. He congratulates the Earl of Dartmouth on his recent appointment to the "important charge of conducting the affairs of the British colonies".¹ He suggests certain measures to be taken in the future and assures the Earl that he is the most suitable person for the office.

His last letter appeared in the August issue of the Freeholder's Magazine and is addressed to Lord North. This is mild satire on the premier comparing him with Chatterton's favourite prince, Caligula. This emperor, according to Chatterton, had a faultless administration and by the negation of faults he satirizes the administration of North.

Now Chatterton's aim was to use these political letters as a passport to his future fame - fame achieved by his presentation to the world of the poems and works of one "Thomas Rowley". Having made a name for himself as a champion of freedom, of "Wilkes and Liberty", he hoped to have gained a sufficient reputation in order that he might present to the public his works of antiquity. Nevertheless, this was not to be for the champions of freedom, in whose footsteps he fol-

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., p. 320.

lowed, were arrested and had to flee the country in order to escape with their lives. Had this boy but had the help of some loyal friend, had, perhaps, a little less of his fearful pride and a little more encouragement, a little less criticism and little more guidance, there is little doubt that he would have reached the goal which he desired.

In these political letters he shows the keen satire of a Dryden, the manners of a Churchill, and the invective of a Junius. For a boy, so young, to follow in the footsteps of these most famous men, is certainly close to that of a genius - a boy so young to have the courage of his convictions, to take, along with Wilkes and his party, the troubles and perhaps the consequences of the radicals upon his still small but eager shoulders, willing to accept the cares of all the world for a chance to make for himself a name - a chance to conquer the world by his genius. None of his great contemporaries can boast of such an achievement.

His personal letters have been published but these serve only to implement his life story and are of no literary value. The majority of these letters are written to his mother and sister; one is written to his friend Mr. T. Cary, and another to Mr. Catcott. Another must have been written to Mr. Barrett but there is no record of this letter.

Now we shall consider the antique works of Thomas

Chatterton. First we shall consider those lying outside the authorship of Rowley. The first of these to come to the author's notice is the DeBergham Pedigree.

While an inmate of Colston's Hospital, Thomas Chatterton became acquainted with Mr. Henry Burgum who was partner to Mr. George Catcott in his trade as pewterer. He was a self-taught man having risen from a lowly state in life to one of Bristol's worthies. He was a patron of art and letters and was wont to boast of his ancestry. Chatterton with his keen discrimination of character soon realized just what would please him best. Therefore, one day in the spring of 1767 he delighted the pewterer with the fact that he had found, among the parchments of St. Mary Redcliffe, the DeBergham arms, and also proof that he (Burgum) was descended from one of the noblest families in England. Upon the request that he would like to see it, Chatterton presented Burgum with an old piece of parchment eight inches square and for this he received the fabulous sum of five shillings. The boy had lately been studying Latin, the lack of which knowledge he sadly regretted, and the pedigree abounded with bits of heraldic Latin. They were borrowed from "Cato's Distichs" and "Sentences of Publius Syrius" which books were often used by beginners in Latin grammar. Although at the time Chatterton thought himself well paid

for his labours, he later, realizing the value of money, appended to his "Will" the following lines:

"Gods, what would Burgum give to get a name,
And snatch his blundering dialect from shame!
What would he give to hand his memory down
To time's remotest boundary? A crown!"¹

Another of his early antique lays is the "Passing of the Bridge". A new bridge was opened in Bristol in September, 1768, and soon after this work was published in Felix Farley's Bristol Journal. This was another of Chatterton's discoveries. Under the pen-name of "Dunhelmus Bristoliensis" he added this forenote "the following Description of the Mayor's first passing over the Old Bridge, taken from an old Manuscript may not be unacceptable to the Generality of your Readers".² Then followed the description of this event. He uses antique phraseology but the description is strangely picturesque. This attracted some notice when it appeared in the Journal and especially that of Dr. Barrett who was engaged, at that time, in writing a History of Bristol. The Bristol Journal did not know the author, explaining that a stranger had handed it in at the office of the Journal. Chatterton's age and appearance belied his being the author. Under coercion he stated that

1. Daniel Wilson, op. cit., p. 59.

2. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 279.

this was one of the many manuscripts his father had obtained from the muniment room of Redcliffe Church. However, it must be remembered that Chatterton had his friends and soon after the publication of this work he told Mr. John Rudhall that he was the author of it. Now it is apparent from the start that Chatterton admitted the authorship of these "discoveries". Perhaps not to the publishers or to the public in general - for would they not have laughed him to scorn? There is no doubt that Chatterton realized with whom he had to deal. He knew only too well that they would never accept him as the author of these antique works. If he were to reach the height of fame to which he aspired he must travel under false pretenses, not only on account of his youthfulness, but because of his environment and supposed lack of knowledge and ability. Chatterton possessed an acute discrimination of character along with sagacity, which faculty aided him in his contact with such men as Barrett and Catcott and perhaps Felix Farley himself.

Enclosed in a letter to Horace Walpole on March 25, 1768, was a manuscript entitled "The Ryse of Peyncteyne in England" written by Thomas Rowley, 1469, for Mr. Canynge. Also enclosed was a fragment entitled "Historie of Peynters yn Englande". In Barrett's History of Bristol you will find another work "Of the Auntiaunte Forme of Monies". We also find two works, one "Proclamation", and the other "Deed of a

Foundation of an Additional College at Wesburg" which were not written in the Old English form as were the other selections. These were, no doubt, in their original form and had not as yet been translated into his Rowleyan English. A "Fragment of a Sermon", by Rowley, appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine in April, 1782. All these selections are prose and are not by far the best of his works. There are many other prose compositions appearing in the third volume of the editions of Chatterton's works by Southey and Cottle. These are of inferior worth but many of these MSS are in the British Museum.

Chatterton was a tireless worker, working day and night, not only in writing but in making many of his works take on the appearance of ancient documents. Many a time did his mother and sister see him come from his attic study covered with charcoal and crayon. A mere list of all his works would be ample proof that he was an indefatigable worker; he wrote over one hundred and seventy-five major works, both prose and poetry, in the short space of seven years, during which time he was a full-time pupil at Colston's Hospital, and an attorney's apprentice for some time after that. He wrote well into the night every night, for it is a well-known fact that Chatterton could suffice with but a few hours sleep and a little food. His aunt in London always complained of his lack of appetite, and his cousin, with whom he slept, of

the little time he devoted to sleep.

Before passing on to his famous Rowley Poems I wish to mention here that in the British Museum there is to be found a manuscript in Chatterton's handwriting, embodying some extracts from Chaucer. These I mention because it is evidence of his knowledge of Speght and Chaucer. These were, doubtless, kept by Thomas Chatterton for reference purposes while writing his Rowley works.

The first of the Rowley Poems was the "Bristowe Tragedie; or the Dethe of Syr Charles Bawdin". This consists of ninety-eight stanzas of four lines each. It is, as the title indicates, the story of the death of Sir Charles Bawdin. Chatterton describes the cause of his death, his friend's intercession on his behalf to the King, his wife's parting and the long march to the beheading block. It is vividly descriptive and is characterized by its easy flow and heroic nature.

Perhaps the greatest of all his works is "Aella - a tragycal enterlude, or discoorseynge tragedie, wrotenn bie Thomas Rowlie; plaiedd before Mastre Canynge, atte hys howse nempte the Rodde Lodge; alsoe before the Duke of Norfolck, Johan Howard". In a letter to Dodsley, the bookseller, Chatterton gives his own appreciation of this play: "It is a perfect Tragedy; the plot clear, the language spirited, and the Songs (interspersed in it) are flowing, poetical, and

elegantly simple; the similes judiciously applied, and though wrote in the reign of Henry VI, not inferior to many of the present age."¹ Truly, albeit Chatterton's own appreciation, it is an excellent one.

Two poems, "Epistle to Mastre Canynge on Aella", "Letter to Dygne Mastre Canynge" and an "Entroductione" precede the opening of the play. These but serve to introduce Aella to the reader.

"Aella" is the story of warrior brave who, on the night of his marriage to Bertha, is called into battle against the Danes. In his absence, Celmonde tells Bertha that Aella is in danger and that he will take her to him. In the forest, through which they must pass, Celmonde declares his love to Bertha; she is saved by the Danes and taken to their camp - Celmonde is killed in defending himself. On his return Aella finds Bertha gone, the maid-servant having told him that she left with a stranger. In despair Aella stabs himself and is dying when Bertha returns and recounts her adventure to him. Aella is assured of her loyalty to him but dies of his wound; in desperation Bertha dies by her husband's side.

Another of his tragedies is entitled "Goddwyn" but it is not as excellent as Aella, except for the Ode to Liberty which is the finest martial lyric in our language. This fiery description of Freedom can best be admired by a quotation from

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 20.

the Chorus of this tragedy. In this ode he personifies Freedom, pale-eyed Affright, and Power, and the poem comes to a climax in the following verse:

"Hard as the thunder doth she drive it on,
Wit, closely wimpled, guides it to his crown;
His long sharp spear, his spreading shield is gone,
He falls, and falling, rolleth thousands down.
War, gore-faced War, by Envy armed, arist,
His fiery helmet nodding to the air,
Ten bloody arrows in his straining fist - 1

One of his excellent poems is the "Balade of Charitie" - written by Thomas Rowley, 1464. It consists of thirteen verses and the rhyming is a b a b b c c - an original versification by Chatterton. His next important work is the poem entitled "The Tournament". It is in the form of a play and is a tragedy. Another form of rhyming is used here, viz., a b a b b c b c d d. These are definitely original and it is apparent throughout his works that he is not a slave to one form or style. His versatility in this regard is really remarkable.

"The Battle of Hastings", supposedly written by Turgot consists of two parts. The first containing fifty-seven verses and the second seventy-two verses. It is truly a great epic, but it is unfortunate that the poem ends abruptly being no nearer to the termination of the battle than

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 102, 103.

at the beginning of the second part. It would seem that Chatterton could write on endlessly - no doubt his death of Harold would have been extremely well developed. The beauty of Harold's Saxon bride is set forth in the most poetic language of the time or even the time to come:

"White as the chalky cliffs of Britain's isle,
Red as the highest coloured Gallic wine,
Gay as all nature at the morning smile,
Those hues with pleasaunce on her lips combine;
Her lips more red than summer-evening skyen,
Or Phoebus rising in a frosty morn;

Grey as the morn before the ruddy flame
Of Phoebus chariot rolling through the sky;
Grey as the steel-horn'd goats Conyan made tame,
So grey appeared her featly sparkling eye;¹

A more musical setting or description in English literature cannot be found, I am sure. This poem sparkles with beautiful lines and sings itself smoothly along.

He wrote three Eclogues which are on a par with his African Eclogues. They are heroic in nature and the verses are wonderful for their vivid picturization.

One of his first antique works was "Elinoure and Juga" which is the tale of two maids lamenting over their two departed lovers. It is one of the best of his shorter poems.

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 175, 176.

In a twenty-five verse poem Chatterton gives an account of "The Storie of William Canynge". To this is added a prose account of Canynge written by Thomas Rowle in 1460. This was printed in the Town and Country Magazine in November, 1775, and also in the Gentleman's Magazine of September, 1777. Chatterton has written an Interlude, as he calls it, entitled "The Parliament of Sprites". He stated that this was played by the Carmelite Friars at Master Canynge's great house, before Master Canynge and Bishop Carpenter on dedicating the Church of our Lady of Redcleft. It was supposedly written by T. Rowle and J. Iscamme. It consists of thirty-six verses but does not possess the same verve and liveliness as his other poems.

There are many miscellaneous antique poems which Chatterton wrote but none are of as fine a craftsmanship as those mentioned above. One of these poems, "The Unknown Knight or the Tournament", consists of one canto (Chatterton stated that there were two additional ones). The one canto is composed of fifteen stanzas. In it he uses an unusual rhyme seldom found in any of his works - a a b b b a c c. Some of the passages are fair but none compare with his greater works.

He wrote two songs both of them addressed to Saints, "Syncte Baldwynne" and "Seyncte Warburgh". He also wrote

three poems "On Happinesse", "The Gouler's Requiem" and "Onn John A Dalbenie" supposedly written by William Canynge. These are of an inferior quality but nevertheless they show us the many forms to which he could apply his talent. Two poems, both entitled "Fragment of a poem by Rowley" supposedly translations by two bishops, are better in that they are much more musical; nevertheless these poems may be found in Chatterton's "Historie of Peyncters in Englande" - the bishops to whom he ascribes the authorship are but imaginary personages.

As referred to in the previous chapter, these spurious writings were found in the Muniment Room of the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, by Chatterton's father. Chatterton, brought up among the memories of this church - memories only too well enhanced by the old sexton, with whom Tom as a boy took daily walks, soon began to live in a world of antiquity. There certainly is not only a possibility, but a probability that Chatterton found some documents in this room, perhaps a few ancient names, a few dates or even some old parchments of little historical or literary value. However, today there is little doubt that Chatterton wrote the famous Rowley Poems. The muniment room had been exposed to indiscriminate pilfering for at least fifteen years before Chatterton's birth. If there had been anything

of value there it would most assuredly have been removed. Again it must be pointed out that Thomas Chatterton knew exactly with whom he was dealing when he handed some of his "manufactured" antiques to Mr. William Barrett - the future historian of Bristol. Barrett was working on this history when Thomas knew him and he placed much store in this achievement. Naturally the more antique documents he could obtain, the more authentic would his history seem. If there were any genuine parchments, and if so they must have been very few indeed, he must have given them to Mr. Barrett, and when these failed, Chatterton probably resorted to the production of his own antiques. The original ones, if any, were no doubt extremely indistinct, necessitating Chatterton's translation. So gullible, so anxious for additional material was Barrett that he did not strive too earnestly to decipher the old English calligraphy, allowing the boy to do this in his spare time. Assuming that Chatterton had a few original manuscripts, which were soon exhausted by Barrett's eager demands, it is certainly feasible to believe that the historian paid him a small pittance for the precious documents. When the supply became depleted, Chatterton saw his few cents depleted as well - these few cents were a fortune to the boy since they procured for him his most priceless possession, the reading material for which

he avidly yearned - and he decided to produce the antiques himself. It must be remembered, again, that Chatterton, upon being questioned by Barrett as to the authorship of the antique document admitted that he was the author. Barrett refused to believe him. Now for anyone as learned as Barrett not to detect a flaw in Chatterton's productions, how well they must have been produced. It has been stated, in Russell's biography of Chatterton, that the discrepancies could be easily seen by even an amateur; but consider for a moment that Barrett must have been a connoisseur of antiques if he were endeavouring to write the History of Bristol. He had in his possession hundreds of antique documents, yet he did not question the authorship of these poems. Upon enquiring into Chatterton's life, after his death, Barrett was said to have absolutely refused to believe that this boy could be the author of these antique poems. He thought Chatterton incapable of writing the Rowley Poems. Perhaps it is found to be amazing why Barrett sought Chatterton's company, for it has been told of the historian that he often invited the boy to his study to argue with him just to see his grey eyes gleam. But the relationship was not a personal one, for Barrett saw in Chatterton a source of supply for antique parchments and documents to enhance his history. Little wonder he took an interest in the Blue Coat Boy for he could

obtain these envied works for a mere volume or a few cents. For one whose fame depended greatly on the success of the History of Bristol, Barrett was not likely to accept any manuscripts which were too obviously fraudulent. Doubtless Barrett did not realise that Chatterton was educating himself at the historian's own expense. It must have given this youthful lad some inherent satisfaction, only natural to a boy of his age, that he was duping one of the master minds of Bristol.

Easy as it would seem to be for Chatterton to mislead Barrett, it was not as easily accomplished with Horace Walpole. Horace Walpole (1717-97) was the author of the "Castle of Otranto" (1764) which is said to have inaugurated a romantic revival in English Literature. Now the Castle of Otranto was presented to the public under the guise of a translation by Walpole himself; but when this poem proved successful he offered this explanation to the public: "It is fit that he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. As diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt were the sole inducements to assume that disguise, he flatters himself he shall appear excusable".¹ If Chatterton had been successful in having his antique poems published, could he not as easily have begged pardon of the

1. J. A. Farrer, Literary Forgeries, p. 148.

public for having written under the name of Rowley? Chatterton was twelve years of age when the *Castle of Otranto* was published, at which time he was deeply engrossed in the Rowley romance.

To achieve the fame which he so dearly wished, he must needs have his "Aella" published. He tried Dodsley, the famous publisher, but he turned a deaf ear to the plea of this talented boy for recognition. Failing this, to whom should he write for a sympathetic hearing but to Horace Walpole, the author of the renowned Italian poem. He wrote, on March 25, 1769, to Walpole, enclosing some of Rowley's poems as an example. Walpole answered on the 28th, stating that the specimens enclosed were "wonderful for their harmony and spirit".¹ He even mentioned that he would "not be sorry to print them or at least a specimen of them".² Chatterton once more sent other verses, but this time the work was suspected and Walpole wrote to Chatterton advising him to remain at his own trade as a lawyer's apprentice. Chatterton answered this "fatherly" letter, stating that he would never lift his pen in works of that nature again. Most likely Chatterton intended to follow Walpole's advice. Failing to

1. J. A. Farrer, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

2. *Ibid.*

get his precious manuscripts back, Chatterton wrote to Walpole insisting on their return and even offering them to him as long as he would publish them; but Walpole did not appreciate this inference to his publishing spurious works. Walpole was leaving for Paris at that time and unfortunately overlooked returning the manuscripts. This led to another letter by Chatterton which clearly showed his irritation at Walpole's lack of consideration.

Walpole has been severely reprimanded by many critics for his refusal to help Chatterton in the publication of the Rowley Poems. Perhaps, in this case, they have been too harsh in their criticisms, but for the cowardly way in which he viciously defamated the character of Chatterton in his "Vindication" he cannot expect to receive the sympathy of any of his readers. He cannot be blamed for not publishing spurious documents, once he had succeeded himself, but he did not wish to strain the humour of his public too much, but for the cruel manner in which he reviled this boy no word can palliate his course of action.

After Chatterton's death Walpole attributed the idea of the Rowley Poems to the success of the Ossian Poems whose author was MacPherson. However, this is not true, for Chatterton's "Elinoure and Juga" appeared some time before

the Ossian Poems were published. It would seem more and more certain that Chatterton depended wholly on Walpole's assistance in bringing him the good fortune he desired; for from August, 1769, until his death a year hence, Thomas Chatterton expends his energetic talents on modern compositions without any reference to his antique lays. So bitter was his disappointment at Walpole's lack of aid, that he penned these lines (additional proof that Rowley depended very closely on the Castle of Otranto and its author):

"Walpole, I thought not I should ever see
So mean a heart as thine has proved to be.
Thou who, in luxury nurst, behold'st with scorn
The boy, who friendless, fatherless, forlorn,
Asks thy high favour - thou mayst call me cheat -
Say, didst thou never practise such deceit?
Who wrote Otranto, but I will not chide;
Scorn I'll repay with scorn, and pride with pride.

.....

Had I the gifts of wealth and luxury shared,
Not poor and mean, Walpole, thou hadst not dared
Thus to insult. But I shall live and stand
By Rowley's side, when thou art dead and damned."¹

Barrett might have been the dupe of Chatterton, Walpole the butt of his sarcastic wit and the man on whom he depended to usher him into the realms of the literary intelligentsia, but it was to Mr. George Catcott that he gave his most famous antique poems. Catcott was the younger

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 32, 33

son of Reverend Alexander Catcott, master of the City Grammar School. He, doubtless, had educational advantages, this fact being only too evident from his manner. Dr. Wilson states that when the boy was about fifteen years of age Catcott received from him a gift of the "Bristowe Tragedie", the "Epitaph on Robert Canynge", "Aella", "Battle of Hastings" and some other smaller pieces. Now Chatterton at the age of fifteen "displayed a power of self-command and thought even above the average"¹ His great desire was to maintain the secrecy of his authorship of these Rowley Poems until the appropriate time, He knew Catcott for the pedant he was and soon realized that with him his poems would remain perfectly safe. For a person of the manners and character of Catcott would certainly never believe that a boy of fifteen would be the author of such outstanding works. Till his dying day Catcott was a firm believer in the authenticity of the Rowley Poems. In fact Catcott soon came to believe that it was he who gave Rowley to the world and not Chatterton. Chatterton received scanty pocket money for these manuscripts and yet felt well rewarded, realizing how safe his precious poems were with Catcott. After the youth's death the pewterer was only interested in them as far as monetary value was concerned, having no desire to keep them as a patron of the arts.

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. I, p. xcvi.

It is said that at one time he refused two hundred pounds for the whole collection; later we find him selling them for fifty pounds and not giving one thought to the poor widow mother of this unfortunate boy.

Of course, Catcott and Barrett were not the only ones who believed in the Rowley poems, but many of his more intimate friends were of the same opinion. William Smith of whom he said in an elegy

"I loved him with a brother's ardent love
Beyond the love which tenderest brothers bear."

is said to have always believed that "Tom no more wrote the Rowley Poems than he did".¹

In his last will and testament, written while he was an attorney's apprentice he bequeathed "all my vigour and fire of youth to Mr. George Catcott being sensible he is most in want of it"²; this being Catcott's reward for keeping his ancient parchments. After this episode (writing of the will) Chatterton soon left for London and his subsequent suicide.

Perhaps it would be well to give, at this time, a description of the manner in which he developed his Rowley Poems. In the ruins of the muniment room there is little doubt that the parchments found there provided him with some

1. Daniel Wilson, op. cit., p. 234.

2. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 273.

details, some names, a few dates, upon which his imagination worked and schemed and eventually produced the famous and much disputed Rowley Poems.

Besides his instruments by which he antiquated his works - crayon and charcoal - he possessed a dictionary of antique words which was his greatest aid in their production. It might be well to mention that, not long before his death, he asked his sister to forward to him, in London, this dictionary. Could it have been that Chatterton had found the time propitious for the publication of his much treasured lays. It was Kersey's and Bailey's Dictionaries that he used but the little book for which he asked was self-made. He had reversed the order of their dictionary and in his own placed the English word first and then the Old English word, e.g. "Comfort, cherisaunei" etc. The only way Chatterton ran afoul was that Kersey and Bailey were not always infallible and comparing their mistakes with those of Rowley's you will find similar errors. "But meagre as was Chatterton's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon, he had to deal with those who knew still less about it. He even seems to have thought this himself, as he gives explanations of nearly all the words which he quotes."¹

It will be necessary to point out some of his mis-

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. I, p. xxvii.

takes but this will not depreciate his work; the fact is that the tools with which he worked were not the best and they naturally led him into error. It must be noted that, although these sources were not good, they were considered an excellent source in Chatterton's day. Perhaps this will only go to prove that, despite his old and incorrect tools, he is even a greater genius than one is first led to believe. Now, it is fairly reasonable to imagine that Chatterton never laid eyes on any fifteenth century literature; yet here we find a boy between the ages of twelve and sixteen producing an Old English language, a language which he came to use with almost as great skill and dexterity as the modern English he used daily and which succeeded in deluding a great majority of the critics at that time.

The ten-line stanza, which I mentioned previously while discussing his works, is really the Rowleyan stanza. It is seen in most of his antique works and derives itself originally from the Spenserian stanza and rimes a b a b b c b c c but the Rowleyan stanza is expressed a b a b b c b c d d. There is no doubt that this stanza is original for you will find it nowhere else.

In criticizing Chatterton's works you must always remember his environment, his schooling and lack of guidance. His education certainly was not in the least exceptional and

we must take this into consideration when his method of rhyming is discussed. He took a great deal of poetical licence and to him the following words rhymed very nicely: now, go, trow. You will find many of these discrepancies. His syllabic formations do not consist of many errors. Although he was a reader of Chaucer you will not find in Chatterton's works the habit of "e" final forming a syllable as is sometimes seen in some Chaucerian works. He preferred to use the "ed" to form an additional syllable as "cursèd". But Chatterton owed his work to no author, neither to Chaucer nor to Spenser; he owed the antiquity of his poems only to his ingeniousness and to Kersey's and Bailey's Dictionaries.

Rev. W. K. Skeat states that Chatterton had four methods of forming words:

- "(a) He copies from Kersey or Bailey employing them with the meaning which those writers assign.
- (b) He takes the groundwork of his word from Kersey, but alters the termination.
- (c) He alters the spelling of word capriciously, e.g. anere for another.
- (d) He coins words at pleasure; either from some intelligible root or from pure imagination."¹

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. xxxv, xxxvi.

Take away these apparent errors and the remaining substance of his works is the material upon which we prove him to be the genius he was. This matter, stripped of its faults, stands out as a monument to the originality, although at times immature, of this marvellous boy. He succeeded, where so many have failed, in putting to account everything he learned in his brief but brilliant span of life. The main reason believers in Rowley give for their creed is that the works are of such a high degree of excellence that Chatterton was incapable of writing them. Some of his poetry is of a higher degree of excellence than others but, just as stars shine most in deeper tints of blue, so his genius shines through with a brilliance seldom seen during the decade or two Chatterton spent in this world.

In judging his forgeries it cannot be stressed too often that on admitting his authorship of the "Battle of Hastings" when pressed for more stanzas, Barrett refused to believe him. To whom then can the blame be attached for the production of these spurious documents - to the boy who in vain wished for recognition - or to the historian who blindly refused to believe in the genius of this youth. After this futile attempt to gain the confidence and help of the antiquarian he realised that he would never be recognized as the author of these antiques and that his fame lay along the road

of forgery - for only as professed antiques would the authorities accept them. Therefore, on whose shoulders must this deception rest - certainly not wholly on those of this marvellous boy. His environment was not one conducive to this youth's clear thinking - ignorance of how to deal with him was but too evident at home for neither mother nor sister understood Tom's mind or his proposed or already accomplished achievements. Certainly the blame cannot be placed on their shoulders because their ignorance alone leaves them free from all charges. Then it must fall a great deal upon the shoulders of the "greater than they", the "holier than thou", as Barrett, Catcott, Walpole - men who could have directed this boy's precocious mentality along the proper path. For is there one among us who would or could have acted differently under similar circumstances, without guidance, kindness or a helping hand?

In the summing up of all his works Masson expresses his literary abilities admirably "In the element of the antique Chatterton moves like a master; in his modern effusions he is but a clever boy beginning to handle with some effect the language of Pope and Dryden."¹ There is not one doubt that the greater works of Chatterton are the work of a genius - the Mad Genius of Bristol - a posthumous born boy of a very

1. David Masson, Chatterton, A Biography, p. 53.

mediocre school teacher brought up among disinterested friends and misunderstanding relatives, possessor of very little education, yet able to give to the world, at the tender age of 14 and 15 years, the marvellous antiques of Rowley and at the age of 16 and 17 to give us a concrete example of the wit and satire of his caustic pen, imitating the masters of satire and emulating the greatest writers of the day.

-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

C H A P T E R T H R E E

J U D G M E N T O F P O S T E R I T Y

"Have mercy, Heaven! when here I cease to live,
And this last act of wretchedness forgive."
- T.C.

One must, as stated previously, in appreciating Chatterton always remember and above all consider his youthfulness.

As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so the proof of Chatterton's genius is in the reading of his Rowley Poems. They stand alone as testimonials of his literary talent and ability. In appraising these poems one must lay aside the taint of forgery which has been with them since they were first heralded into the world. When this has been removed and they have been translated into modern English you will find remarkable poems, remarkable not only for the selections themselves, but remarkable that such a genius should come forth from an environment wholly unsuited, from an atmosphere definitely averse to such an achievement.

If we consider his Acknowledged Writings, in prose and poetry, we find here, also, a spark of genius which, had he but lived his full span of life, would have

developed into a definitely formed style and would have obtained for him some measure of the fame he desired.

Nor is it easy to set aside what has been said by many of the foremost writers of that day. Samuel Johnson is said to have remarked "This is the most extraordinary man that has encountered my knowledge, it is wonderful how the whelp has written such things."¹ Sir Herbert Croft declared that "no such human being, at any period of life, has ever been known or possibly will be known."² Now this was stated by one who had made extensive enquiries into Chatterton's life. Although this statement seems extravagant, if all his achievements are taken into consideration you will find it a quite reasonable assertion.

After Chatterton's sudden death, the first one to take some notice of the incident was his friend Mr. Thomas Cary. An elegy of his appeared in the October issue of the Town and Country Magazine. But, the fact remains that neither Barrett nor Catcott took any notice of the youth's demise. Only when Catcott realized that his manuscripts were worth money did he come to life and present his documents. Barrett, the one person who knew

1. Charles Edward Russell, op. cit., p. 227.

2. Ibid., p. 232.

Chatterton better than any other, the one who refused to stretch forth his hand to save this pitiful soul, the one who owed much of his "History" to this Bristol boy, failed to even bow his head in memory of this young genius.

Some seven years later, 1777, after a great demand for the publication of his Rowley Poems, there appeared an edition of his works printed by Tyrwhitt. In 1803 Robert Southey and Joseph Cottle edited and published the best edition of Chatterton's works, and they gave the proceeds to Mary, Chatterton's sister.

Much has been said by his critics of Chatterton's character; in this way they hoped to disprove the theory that he was the author of the Rowley works. They referred to him as a dissipated, dissolute, depraved youth. They fail to consider that he had little time for dissipation when all his works are accounted for. Because he was on the side of John Wilkes they considered him a radical; because he flailed many a politician with his pen he was a ne'er-do-well. What of Junius, Churchill? What of the Lord Mayor Beckford, a believer in Wilkes and Liberty? The one word that has been his downfall down the ages is the word "forger". Well might Chatterton have asked "Who wrote Otranto?" Might not Walpole be tarred with the same brush as this boy? Professor Wilson states "If literary forgery

were the capital offense, the same gallows should have sufficed for Walpole and Chatterton."¹ It was Walpole that began the tales of Chatterton being a forger. "All the house of forgery are relations"² he said. Was he not condemning himself as well with these words? He does not seem to think so, yet it is only too evident that his own case can be referred to in the same terms. The critics ranked him along with MacPherson and his Ossian Poems. In fact they criticize Chatterton a great deal more than MacPherson. How could they compare this Bristol dreamer, a charity boy, with the mature MacPherson? The critics stated that he was doing it all for recompense, yet Chatterton received hardly a few pounds for his efforts - MacPherson goes scott free in their castigation of forgers while this Blue Coat Boy's reputation is impaired beyond redemption. To compare Chatterton and MacPherson is wholly unfair to the Bristol boy. In 1760 the author of the "Ossian Poems" published his "Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland". These poems were so sensational that the Edinburgh Faculty of Advocates provided MacPherson with the necessary funds to continue his research for additional material in this regard. If this had been his own research work he

1. Charles Edward Russell, op. cit., p. 243.

2. John H. Ingram, The True Chatterton, p. 174.

could have easily returned empty-handed, but considering the money expended on his behalf he must needs give some proof of his literary investigations. Consequently he published, in 1762, his "Fingal, an Epic Poem, in Six Books" and in 1763 "Temora, an Epic in Eight Books", along with other miscellaneous poems. Now can this deliberate attempt in a mature man, to deceive the literary minds of Edinburgh be compared with the vain attempts of this youth to attain some degree of fame. Here was a boy whose childhood was spent in the precincts of Redcliffe Church to such an extent that he almost lived the lives of the ancient Canynge and Rowley. Yet here was a mature man setting out with every intent to deceive, even from the initial stages of his adventure in the literary field. No comparison is just. Nor can he be compared with White (the forged letters of Byron and Shelley) or with Ireland (Shakespeare's supposed play "Vortigern and Rowena").

Nevertheless perhaps this is a clue to the age in which Chatterton lived. This boy was not the only figure to which the stigma of forgery could be attached. Not only MacPherson but the great Walpole himself can also be similarly accused. Could not this be a characteristic of the age into which literature was passing? One of its characteristics was the return to medieval subject matter. This was the ger-

mination of this feature of early Romanticism; not being antiquarians themselves, the forgers did the next best thing and presented to the public, not as their own work, being fearful lest they would be ridiculed, spurious works bred from their own imagination.

Chatterton's contemporaries, Johnson, Goldsmith, Cowper, belonged to the age of Classicism with its artificiality, precise rules, lack of fine feeling, elegant formalism and with its tendency to emphasize intellect rather than the imagination, the form rather than the content. Although this style brought forth the great essays of Addison and the terse satire of Swift, there arose a revolt against the bondage of rules and with Thomson's "The Seasons" in 1730, there appeared a new romantic revival. This was but the beginning. Goldsmith and Cowper who followed, still possessed many classical characteristics, their poetry was still cold, and nature to them did not hold the same beauty, nor did poetry hold the melody which was rightfully its own. Compare even Thomson's

"When Autumn's yellow lustre gilds the world,
And tempts the sickled swain into the field,
Seized by the general joy, his heart distends,
With gentle throes;"¹

1. James Thomson, The Seasons, T. Nelson and Sons, p. 148.

with Chatterton's

"With rustling sound the yellow foliage flies,
And wantons with the wind in rapid whirls;
The gurgling rivulet to the valley hies,
And lost to sight, in dying murmurs curls."¹

Thus it was that Chatterton was the one to follow this romantic revival along with Thomson until it reached its height in the works of Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats. Much more than with Thomson or his followers, did Chatterton begin to travel along the new romantic highway. In his poems you will find melody such as had never been found in previous years of literature, vivid picturization seldom seen in the days of yore. Chatterton proved that the iambic pentameter could be used for other than sententious poems. He used the heroic couplet a great deal, especially in his earlier days of writing, and showed that it could be turned to nearly every form or style of poetry. He broke away from the precise rules that dominated the age of classicism and the variety of measures in his works are proof enough of this. There are over fifty measures in the Rowley Poems alone.

The pre-romantic period is said to have begun in 1770 and spread through the years to 1798 and the romantic period from 1798 until 1832. Yet this youthful genius, whose death marked the year of the romantic revival, displayed the

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. I, p.

foremost characteristics of this new literary age. Unwittingly, or intentionally, he set the stage for the Lake Poets, Byron, Shelley and Keats.

I do not wish to state that all Chatterton's works are free from error; one can detect inequalities and imperfections in many of his antique poems, but nevertheless his works are a complete whole and his genius stands out for all to see. His imperfections are only due to immaturity and if he had lived longer there can be little doubt that he would have risen to be, not only a great writer, but a greater influence in the literary field than many of his contemporaries. Warton exclaims "Chatterton was a prodigy of genius, and would have proved the first of English poets, had he reached a mature age."¹ Charles Russell has said of this youth "All in all this was certainly the most wonderful intellect that the English-speaking race has ever produced with the one exception of Shakespeare."²

While in London, especially while writing his political letters, Chatterton imitated the style of the letters of Junius. When the latter thought the Duke of Grafton material for his caustic pen, so did Chatterton.

1. Thomas Warton, History of English Poetry from the Eleventh to the Seventeenth Century, p. 419.

2. Charles Edward Russell, op. cit., p. 232.

Churchill was his favourite model as a satirist. That he was familiar with many renowned poets such as Milton, Gray, Cowper, Dryden and Pope is only too well illustrated by his writings. When Fell and Hamilton accepted the works of Chatterton even after discovering that he was only a lad of seventeen, his letters certainly must have had the necessary literary vigour and been of a suitable character in order to be published in the most popular periodicals of the day. To have his letters accepted along with Churchill's and Junius' was no mean accomplishment for a boy of his age.

If Chatterton had little to give to posterity, he would not have been remembered so favourably by his contemporaries and successors. Southey, Coleridge, Lamb, Byron, Crabbe, Scott, Keats and Wordsworth have all mentioned the Bristol poet in their writings.

In Coleridge's "On Observing a Blossom on the First of February, 1796" he wrote:

"Bristowa's bard, the wondrous boy!
An amaranth, which earth scarce seem'd to own,
Till disappointment came, and pelting wrong
Beat it to earth!"¹

Dante Gabriel Rossetti in his "Five English Poets" stated:

"Thy nested home-loves, noble Chatterton,
The angel-trodden stair thy soul could trace

1. The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by Derwent and Sara Coleridge, p. 235.

Up Redcliffe's spire; and in the world's armed space
Thy gallant sword-play: these to many an one
Are sweet forever; as thy grave unknown
And love-dream of thine unrecorded face."¹

Shelley in his elegy "Adonais" wrote:

"The inheritors of an unfulfilled renown
Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,
Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton
Rose pale, - the solemn agony had not
Yet faded from him;"²

Nor did Keats forget Chatterton:

"How soon that voice, majestic and elate,
Melted in dying number! Oh! how nigh
War night to thy fair morning. Thou didst die
A half-blown floweret which cold blasts amate.
But this is past: thou art among the stars
Of highest heaven."

Chatterton's fame travelled even to France where
de Vign's drama brought the name of this boy to the fore.
Thierry states "Il posséd la plupart des dons qui font les
grandes lyriques; richness de l'imagination, virtuosité du
rythme, abondance et facilité des images."³

Chatterton had many critics but by those in his
own field he was well remembered and appreciated. He was
the butt of every critic nor was he insensible to this fact
because he wrote in 1769 in his "Defence":

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1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Five English Poets, edited by William Michael Rossetti, p. 295.
 2. The Harvard Classics, English Poetry, Collins to Fitzgerald, Vol. 41, p. 890.
 3. Augustin Thierry, Les Grandes Mystifications Littéraires, p.59.

"But why must Chatterton selected sit
The butt of every critic's little wit?
Am I alone forever in a crime,
Nonsense in prose, or blasphemy in rhyme."¹

Nevertheless these criticisms did not deter Chatterton from writing in his own satiric vein, lampooning many of the notabilities with his vitriolic pen.

Now to mention a little of the religious side of Chatterton. After his confirmation at the age of ten he was very devout and, as I have mentioned before, gave his feelings expression in his first poem "On the Last Epiphany or Christ Coming to Judgment". After the first emotions wore away he did not remain as fervent, but some time before he left for London he listed the "Articles of the Belief of Me, Thomas Chatterton":

"That God being incomprehensible it is not required of us to know the mystery of the Trinity, etc.

That it matters not whether a Man is a Pagan, Turk, Jew or Christian, if he acts according to the Religion he professes.

That if a man leads a good moral Life, he is a Christian.

That the Stage is the best School of Morality; and

That the Church of Rome is certainly the true Church."²

1. Rev. Walter W. Skeat, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 80.

2. Ibid., p. 276.

It would have been well for those critics who accused him of being immoral and dissipated had they read these articles of his belief.

Let us along with all great poets consider this boy and his contribution to literature as the corner stone of the new era of Romanticism. He prepared the way and laid the foundation for one of the most productive ages of literary history.

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C H A P T E R F O U R

C O N C L U S I O N

"I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride."
- William Wordsworth.

The writer has tried, in the preceeding chapters, to prove that Thomas Chatterton was a marvellous boy, which name has been applied to him by so many of his biographers, in the true sense of the word. His uncommon ardour in the pursuit of knowledge, his prematurity of abilities, his acquisition of a store of knowledge which far exceed his years, his high degree of studiousness, his rare mind and understanding are conclusive evidence that this Mad Genius of Bristol merits a very high place in our histories of English Literature.

We have discussed his works in detail and criticized his best writings in the Rowley vein, yet his most astonishing poem is his own life.

Perhaps you have wondered why and in what way it was possible for this Blue Coat boy, educated at a charity school where literature was not taught to any great extent, to write such excellent poetry and prose. Thomas Warton gives an interesting reply to this query: "In the same gen-

eral way of putting a question, it may be asked, how could that idle and illiterate Shakespeare, who was driven out of Warwickshire for deer-stealing, write the tragedy of Othello? I give as general an answer, that the powers of unconquerable mind outgo plans of education and conditions of life. The enthusiasm of intellectual energy surmounts every impediment to a career that is pressing forward to futurity".¹

Fundamentally his genius, his literary ability, his metrical inventiveness, his musical rhythm, can only be explained by the fact that his highly developed intellect was but a gift of God. Only God can endow a human being with this faculty; it cannot be developed without His Grace nor can it exist without His Will. Only this supernatural explanation can be given for no earthly concrete one can be satisfactorily supplied.

In the unfolding of his genius the supreme factor to be considered is Chatterton's youthfulness. Also to be taken into account is the scanty education he received as a charity student; the ignorance of his mother and sister of the dormant faculties he possessed; his uncommon desire for recognition; his rare thirst for knowledge; his lack of fatherly advice. Take this boy, four

1. Thomas Warton, An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Attributed to Thomas Rowley in which the arguments of the Dean of Exeter and Mr. Bryant are examined, pp. 102, 103.

years of age, with no brother or sister of his own age, who spent all his leisure hours with the sexton of St. Mary Redcliffe's Church. Chatterton's relatives had for generations been sextons at this beautiful church; nor was anyone better versed in the ancient history of Bristol than Richard Phillips, son-in-law of John Chatterton, the last sexton in the Chatterton line, and uncle of the poet. Many hours in his uncle's company were spent relating the ancient happenings of the noble city, tales of Canynge, and perhaps Rowley, of the church, and who can deny that he might even have been told of the ancient passing of the bridge. Soon Chatterton began to dream and live again those old romantic days, building an empire in his imagination until all his days and nights were filled with fanciful dreams of pageantry and drama. He was a dreamer, all his biographers admit, so much so that for days he would speak to no one, not even answering his mother when she addressed him. How could this poor woman, struggling to make ends meet, understand, let alone aid, her son in his strange ways. Thus he was left to himself and became more and more morose. Nevertheless he was not lacking in love for his mother and sister and it is a well known fact that, in journeying to London, one of his reasons was to help financially at home. Out of his meagre funds

received in London he sent home gifts for his family.

He had school friends but they were few and while the other boys played games at recess Chatterton remained indoors to read and study. His studiousness and avid desire for knowledge was remarkable in so young a lad for this was when he was between the ages of seven and fourteen. Nursed in the lore of Canynge and Rowley, fed by books of learning far advanced beyond his years, reared in an atmosphere where he was misunderstood and ridiculed, what should be his refuge but the realm of literature. In this field of activity he could project himself into another sphere and make his dreams a reality. With an inherent knowledge that they were good he realized only too well that his works would not be received, as his own, by the literary minds of Bristol. So what should he do now but retire to his attic room, firmly bar the door, and begin to give his works the appearance of ancient documents. The problem, at first, was to see who would accept these spurious parchments; being a friend of the future historian of Bristol to whom should he turn but to Dr. Barrett. The latter, a noted antiquarian, accepted the works without a question. What joy must have been Chatterton's at that hour. The first hurdle had been taken. Without a restraining hand to point out his error his natural

response was to produce more of his parchments for Barrett.

When he had learned all that was possible for him to learn at the expense of Barrett and had safely tucked away his precious Rowley Poems with Catcott, he realized that there was no future for him among these gullible and narrow-minded citizens of Bristol. Hence he set forth for London, with a light heart and a lighter purse, to conquer the world.

Launching his career in London was not as difficult as one would expect for his way had been prepared by his satiric political letters which had preceded him. But his career did not pay. He had chosen the wrong side of the second hurdle and failed to take the required jump. Had he possessed the strength and fortitude of mind necessary in this case there is little doubt that he would have reached the heights he desired to attain. In the end his noble heart could no longer fight the long battle, a battle, it seemed to this frail boy, so long ago. Circumstances alter cases and surely the circumstances which surrounded his career should mitigate the immorality of his last act.

Herein Fortune did not prove as kind as is her custom, for at the same time as Chatterton was perishing by his own hand, Dr. Fry, of Oxford, the only man who had come to realize the worth of the Rowley Poems was preparing

to visit Bristol and give a helping hand to this great genius. Remember well for this was the only hand that was outstretched on his behalf and Chatterton had left this vale of tears before he could use it as his sole source of release from the grave of despondency.

There is hardly one among us who could have surmounted the difficulties with which he was oppressed. Yet, this marvellous boy, in spite of the misfortune of forgery and suicide, has left us a heritage of ancient literature, unsurpassed down through the ages, and the memory of a boy whose life story is his greatest work.

"Be theirs who desecrate his name,
A lasting heritage of 'shame!'"

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