CASSELL'S NATIONAL LIBRARY. COLLOQUIES ON SOCIETY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649552122

Cassell's National Library. Colloquies on Society by Robert Southey

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ROBERT SOUTHEY

CASSELL'S NATIONAL LIBRARY. COLLOQUIES ON SOCIETY

Trieste

COLLOQUIES ON SOCIETY

IN WEEKLY VOLUMES, *price* 3d.; *or in Cloth*, 6d.

CASSELL'S NATIONAL LIBRARY.

The following are amongst the books already published.

Lives of Pyrrhus, Camillus, &c.	PLUTARCH.
Rosalind	THOMAS LODGE.
Isaac Bickerstaff	STEELE AND ADDISON.
Pepys's Diary (1664—1665).	
Gebir and Count Julian	W. S. LANDOR.
Discovery of Guiana	SIR WALTER RALEIGH.
Lives of Nicias, Crassus, &c.	PLUTARCH.
Trips to the Moon	LUCIAN.
Essay on Man	POPE.
A Tour in Ireland, 1776—1779	ARTHUR YOUNG.
Pepys's Diary (Jan.—Oct., 1666).	
The Banquet of Plato	SHELLEY.
A Voyage to Lisbon	FIELDING.
Travels in Africa (Vols. I. & II.)	MUNGO PARK.
The Temple	GEORGE HERBERT.
Lives of Numa, Sertorius, &c.	PLUTARCH.
Endymion and other Poems	KEATS.
A Voyage to Abyssinia	LOBO.
Pepys's Diary (Nov., 1666—May, 1667).	
Human Nature and other Sermons	JOSEPH BUTLER.
History of the Caliph Vathek	WILLIAM BECKFORD.
Poems	DRYDEN.
Colloquies on Society	SOUTHEY.

The next Volume will be

Table Talk. By JOHN SELDEN.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED, *Ludgate Hill, London.*

CASSELL'S NATIONAL LIBRARY

COLLOQUIES ON SOCIETY

BY

ROBERT SOUTHEY

CASSELL & COMPANY LIMITED
LONDON PARIS & MELBOURNE
1894

INTRODUCTION.

It was in 1824 that Robert Southey, then fifty years old, published "Sir Thomas More, or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society," a book in two octavo volumes with plates illustrating lake scenery. There were later editions of the book in 1829, and in 1831, and there was an edition in one volume in 1837, at the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria.

These dialogues with a meditative and patriotic ghost form separate dissertations upon various questions that concern the progress of society. Omitting a few dissertations that have lost the interest they had when the subjects they discussed were burning questions of the time, this volume retains the whole machinery of Southey's book. It gives unabridged the Colloquies that deal with the main principles of social life as Southey saw them in his latter days; and it includes, of course, the pleasant Colloquy that presents to us Southey himself, happy in his library, descanting on the course of time as illustrated by the bodies and the souls of books. As this volume does not reproduce all the Colloquies arranged by Southey under the main title of "Sir Thomas More," it avoids use of the main title, and ventures only to describe itself as "Colloquies on Society, by Robert Southey."

They are of great interest, for they present to us the

31X685

form and character of the conservative reaction in a mind that was in youth impatient for reform. In Southey, as in Wordsworth, the reaction followed on experience of failure in the way taken by the revolutionists of France, with whose aims for the regeneration of Europe they had been in warmest accord. Neither Wordsworth nor Southey ever lowered the ideal of a higher life for man on earth. Southey retains it in these Colloquies, although he balances his own hope with the questionings of the ghost, and if he does look for a crowning race, regards it, with Tennyson, as a

> "*far off* divine event
> To which the whole Creation moves."

The conviction brought to men like Wordsworth and Southey by the failure of the French Revolution to attain its aim in the sudden elevation of society was not of vanity in the aim, but of vanity in any hope of its immediate attainment by main force. Southey makes More say to himself upon this question (page 37), "I admit that such an improved condition of society as you contemplate is possible, and that it ought always to be kept in view; but the error of supposing it too near, of fancying that there is a short road to it, is, of all the errors of these times, the most pernicious, because it seduces the young and generous, and betrays them imperceptibly into an alliance with whatever is flagitious and detestable." All strong reaction of mind tends towards excess in the opposite direction. Southey's detestation of the excesses of vile men that brought shame upon a revolutionary

movement to which some of the purest hopes of earnest youth had given impulse, drove him, as it drove Wordsworth, into dread of everything that sought with passionate energy immediate change of evil into good. But in his own way no man ever strove more patiently than Southey to make evil good; and in his own home and his own life he gave good reason to one to whom he was as a father, and who knew his daily thoughts and deeds, to speak of him as "upon the whole the best man I have ever known."

In the days when this book was written, Southey lived at Greta Hall, by Keswick, and had gathered a large library about him. He was Poet Laureate. He had a pension from the Civil List, worth less than £200 a year, and he was living at peace upon a little income enlarged by his yearly earnings as a writer. In 1818 his whole private fortune was £400 in consols. In 1821 he had added to that some savings, and gave all to a ruined friend who had been good to him in former years. Yet in those days he refused an offer of £2,000 a year to come to London and write for the *Times*. He was happiest in his home by Skiddaw, with his books about him and his wife about him.

Ten years after the publishing of these Colloquies, Southey's wife, who had been, as Southey said, "for forty years the life of his life," had to be placed in a lunatic asylum. She returned to him to die, and then his gentleness became still gentler as his own mind failed. He died in 1843. Three years before his death his friend Wordsworth visited him at Keswick, and was not recognised. But when Southey was told who

it was, "then," Wordsworth wrote, "his eyes flashed for a moment with their former brightness, but he sank into the state in which I had found him, patting with both his hands his books affectionately, like a child."

Sir Thomas More, whose ghost communicates with Robert Southey, was born in 1478, and at the age of fifty-seven was beheaded for fidelity to conscience, on the 6th of July, 1535. He was, like Southey, a man of purest character, and in 1516, when his age was thirty-eight, there was published at Louvain his "Utopia," which sketched wittily an ideal commonwealth that was based on practical and earnest thought upon what constitutes a state, and in what direction to look for amendment of ills. More also withdrew from his most advanced post of opinion. When he wrote "Utopia" he advocated absolute freedom of opinion in matters of religion; in after years he believed it necessary to enforce conformity. King Henry VIII., stiff in his own opinions, had always believed that; and because More would not say that he was of one mind with him in the matter of the divorce of Katherine he sent him to the scaffold.

H. M.