



The Road to Xanadu - A Study in the Ways of the Imagination

John Livingstone Lowes

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THE ROAD TO XANADU. PREFACE: THE story which this book essays to tell was not of the tellers choosing. It simply came, with supreme indifference to other plans, and autocratically demanded right of way. A glittering eye and a skinny hand and a long gray beard could not have done more summary execution, nor, for that matter, could the Wedding-Guest himself who also had other fish to fry have been, at the outset, a more reluctant auditor. But the reluctance swiftly passed into absorbing interest, as the meaning of the chance glimpse which did the business was disclosed. For the agency which cast the spell was not, as it happened, a pair of marvellous fairy-tales at all, nor even the provocative and baffling personality of their creator. It was the imaginative energy itself, surprised as it seemed to me at work behind these fabrics of its weaving. If I Gas right, and if I could make clear to others what I thought I saw myself, I had no alternative. That the aperpi, such as it was, should come through The Ancient Mariner, when I was intent at the moment upon Chaucers rich humanity, was, to be sure, more than a little disconcerting. It was so, however, that it chose to come, and Wyrld goeth as she will. Once started on, however, the story has been written in its present form I fear I. must confess quite frankly for the writers own enjoyment - in part for the sheer pleasure of following into unfamiliar regions an almost untrodden path not a little for that fearful joy one snatches from the effort to exhibit, with something that approaches clarity, the order which gives meaning to a chaos of details. It would have been easy in comparison to communicate, for the edification of a narrow circle only, a mass of observations to the pages of some learned journal, and let it go at that. But the subject in itself was far too interesting, and the light it seemed to throw upon a wider field far too significant, to warrant any but the broadest treatment I could give it. I am not sure, indeed, that one of the chief services which literary scholarship can render is not precisely the attempt, at least, to make its findings available and interesting, if that may be beyond the precincts of its own solemn troops and sweet societies. At all events, that is the adventurous enterprise of this volume. Its facts I think I can safely vouch for. As for the interpretation thereof, that is the core of the book...

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