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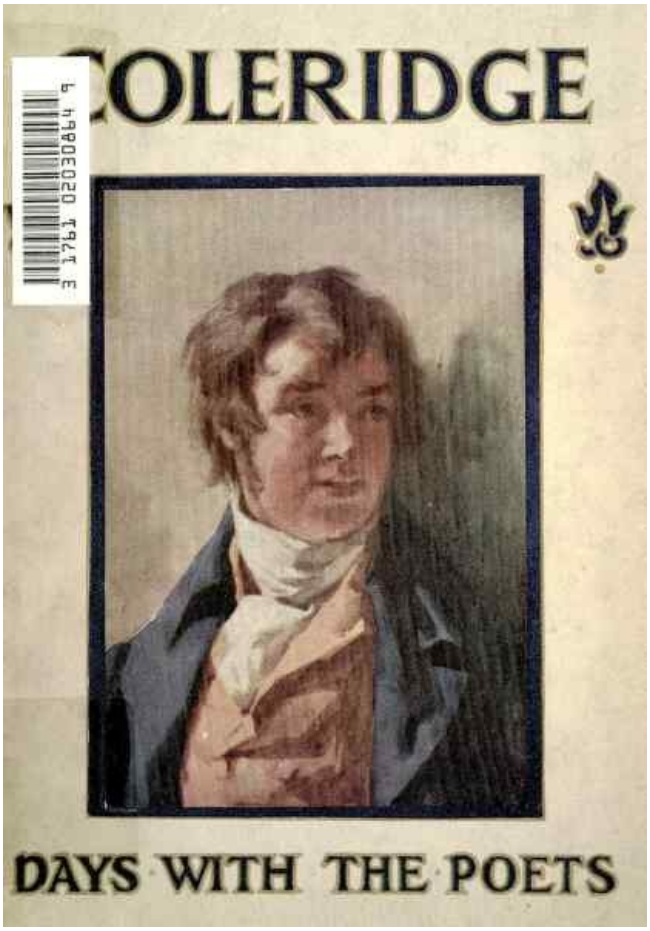

THE CREW OF THE SKELETON SHIP.

"Are those *her* ribs through which the
Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?

"*Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy....

The naked hulk alongside came,

And the twain were casting dice."
(*The Ancient Mariner*).

A DAY WITH SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

BY MAY BYRON

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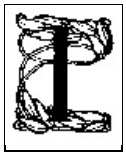
A DAY WITH COLERIDGE.



IN a beautiful part of beautiful Somerset, where the "soft orchard and cottage scenery" is dimpled between blue hillslopes, where meadows and woods and translucent streams compete with each other in charm,—in the lovely region of the Quantock hills, lies the quiet little market-village of Nether Stowey. About sunrise on a May morning of 1790, a young man awoke in a little wayside cottage there: and, resolutely thrusting back his natural inclination to indolence, rose and dressed, and set himself to the performance of such humble duties as devolve upon a very poor householder with a wife and child.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was in his twenty-sixth year: pale, stoutish, black-haired: not an immediately attractive man. His face, according to himself, bore evidence of "great sloth and great, indeed almost idiotic, good nature: ... a mere carcase of a face; fat, flabby, and expressive chiefly of inexpressions," with a wide, thick-lipped, always-open mouth, and small feeble nose. Yet it was capable of being roused, on occasion, to something akin to nobility and beauty, and redeemed by the animation of his full, grey eyes. It was a face, in short, to match his general appearance, which he dismissed as that of "indolence capable of energies," and Carlyle characterised as "weakness under possibility of strength."

For this was a man who was consistent in his faults as in his virtues: "always conscious of power, but also conscious of want of will to use his power." And it was therefore with re-doubled vigour, this particular morning, that he put on a spurt, and threw unusual force into his chopping of firewood,—his somewhat clumsy attempts to clean up the cottage, with its poor accommodation and few utensils,—and his valiant if ineffectual endeavours to have the fire lighted and the modest meal *en route*, whilst his wife, up the ladder stairs, attended to herself and the baby.

Between-whiles he cast admiring glances of the most ardent delight at his garden of an acre and a half, and its glowing mass of apple-bloom,—and at all the luscious greeneries of the May world without. These glimpses into "opening Paradise" went far to compensate him for his determination to keep no servant, but to be maid-of-all-work, and nurse if need be, himself. They ministered to that spirit of contemplation which was the ruling spirit of his life: they were the very texture of dreams....

Soon Sara Coleridge descended and took her share in the domestic preparations. She found fault, after a quick vivacious fashion, with her husband's futile efforts and perplexities. She was the typical incompatible wife for a poet: not only, socially speaking, his inferior, but naturally incapable of sharing his dreams or sympathising with his studies. Yet she was an honest and good-hearted woman; and perhaps, now and then, she felt a certain lack of human warmth in the warmest of human relationships. For there was a tepid quality about Coleridge's affections and his expression of them: fire and fervour were utterly unknown to his pensive, tender, gentle methods. He had no intensity or passion, either in love or friendship: his feelings were steadfast and of an unblemished purity, yet the very fact that they knew neither ebb nor flow, but were always maintained at a calm level, might jar upon the inscrutable mind of a woman. One might almost imagine, as Sara bustled to and fro and scolded her husband with the volubility of a squirrel, that she was anxious to urge him, if but for one moment, out of his invariable *laisser faire* of amiability.... But no: he remained as placid, as good tempered, as cheerful as ever.

Presently another member of the household appeared, Coleridge's pupil and paying-guest,—worth a precious £70 a year to the lean exchequer,—one Charles Lloyd. He was a young bank-clerk who had poetry on the brain, and found himself ill-attuned to the drudgery of keeping his father's ledgers. He was also subject to epileptic fits, which did not conduce either to poetizing or banking with success. What he expected to learn from Coleridge, it is hard to say: certainly his curriculum included a good many hardships, makeshifts and *contretemps* to which he had never looked forward. His instructor, however, had not deceived him as to the hybrid nature of his present occupation. Coleridge had deliberately set himself down at Nether Stowey to be near his friend Tom Poole, and to support himself by "a mixture of literature and husbandry." He proposed to make some £60 per annum by reviewing and magazine work: he had an offer from Cottle, the Bristol publisher, for as much verse as he chose to write, at terms working out somewhere near fourpence a line,—and for the rest, "I would rather," he declared, "be an expert self-maintaining gardener than a Milton, for I could not unite both. I mean to raise the vegetables for myself and wife, and feed a couple of snouted and grunting cousins from the refuse. My evenings I shall devote to literature."—"And what," enquired Charles Lamb after hearing of this desperate undertaking, "what does your worship know about farming?" But Coleridge was not to be discouraged. He allowed his natural unfitness for the task—"I am, and ever have been, a great reader, and have read almost everything.... I am *deep* in all out-of-the-way books, whether of the monkish times or of the Puritanical era. I have read and digested most of the historic writers, but I do not *like* history. Metaphysics and poetry and 'facts of the mind' (*i.e.*, accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers, from Thoth, the Egyptian, to Taylor, the English pagan) are my darling studies. In short, I seldom read except to amuse myself, and I am almost always reading. Of useful knowledge,—I am a so-so chemist, and I love chemistry—all else is blank—but I will be (please God) a horticulturist and farmer."

What is to be done against such impregnable obstinacy? Coleridge's friends let him "gang his ain gait": and when *mauvais quarts d'heure* threatened to drive him to despair, they came to the rescue with timely cheques: meanwhile, Tom Poole strove hard to educate him in potato culture, and Charles Lloyd paid down his twenty-five shillings a week.

But to-day Charles Lloyd was looking ill-at-ease and sulky. He threw out hints about the general discomfort of things,—vague allusions to other people being made much of and himself contemned. He was in a disagreeable mood, and evidently dying to pick a quarrel. Half through breakfast, he took umbrage at some inoffensive jest, and flung himself out of the room.

"What can ail the lad?" asked Coleridge, in amazement.

"I suppose he has another fit coming on," observed the practical Sara.

"I don't like sour looks and bitter words in our peaceful home," said the poet, rumpling his heavy black locks with a distracted air.

"God forbid that he should take it into his head to go away," said Sara: and she got up with a very grave face and proceeded to clear the breakfast table. Coleridge betook himself to the garden and called over the back hedge to the neighbour for whose companionship he

had taken this inefficient little cottage. Thomas Poole, his friend and benefactor, was a well-to-do tanner, well-educated and a devout student of literature: he discerned the potentialities of great things in Coleridge, and felt honoured by his acquaintanceship. For the poet had something of that peculiar fascination for more prosaic men, that magnetic charm of personality, which atones for so many minor defects,—which obviates weakness and ill-balance of mind,—which even endears him who is "impossible" from a worldly standpoint, to those of saner and robuster calibre. Coleridge could never be without a friend, without a listener: and a listener was a desideratum to him. This "noticeable man with large grey eyes" undoubtedly attracted to himself all that was best in other people: his culture allured them, his eloquence held them spell-bound, and his voice—that wonderful voice which was to Hazlitt "as a stream of rich distilled perfumes"—sank into every fibre of their being.

So you cannot be surprised that the faithful, kindly Thomas Poole, already busy in his tan-yard, hearing Coleridge calling at the hedge, instantly forsook his proper tasks and hurried to salute his comrade. When he heard of Charles Lloyd's tendency towards mutiny, "Oh," says Poole with a great laugh, "don't let that discompose you. The young man is consumed by a very common malady,—jealousy. And indeed I think he has some cause."

"Jealousy!" repeated Coleridge, rolling his fine eyes wildly. It was a word which had little or no meaning for him. "Jealousy of whom? about whom?—I do not understand you in the least."

"Why, your fine friends the Wordsworths, of course," Poole told him. "Here have you been gadding about with them the whole of this last twelve-month, trapesing the hills night and day and leaving your pupil, forsooth, to sit at home with Madam and Master Baby, a-twiddling his thumbs and scribbling schoolboy verse. You have taken precious little notice of him,—and as for your friends, they think him but a poor thing not worth mention. I say he is a lad of spirit to kick up his heels at last."

"True, true,—I may have neglected him to some extent," murmured Coleridge with a pained air, "but indeed, my good Poole, if you knew what the Wordsworths have been to me! Manna in the desert—water in the wilderness—happiness like the alighting of a paradise-bird—"

"Quite so, my dear fellow," interrupted the unemotional Poole, "but you are not now in the pulpit. Bring yourself down to earth for a moment, for I have but little time to spare this morning,—and let us see what are the most crying needs of to-day in your garden."

There is enough to do in a May garden to occupy the most diligent: and as Coleridge raked and hoed and thinned out and weeded his vegetable beds, with blistered hands and a back that longed for a hinge in it, he was inclined to wish that Lloyd had come as an agricultural rather than a poetical pupil. From time to time he rested on his tool and assimilated with rapt eye the innumerable surrounding touches of simple beauty. He was a man who, like Wordsworth, interested himself in every little trifle. The delicate details of sight and sound were very dear to him; they had enabled him to "become one with Nature" in an almost literal sense, as he observed, with a calm but intense enjoyment, such side-issues as:

> The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky;

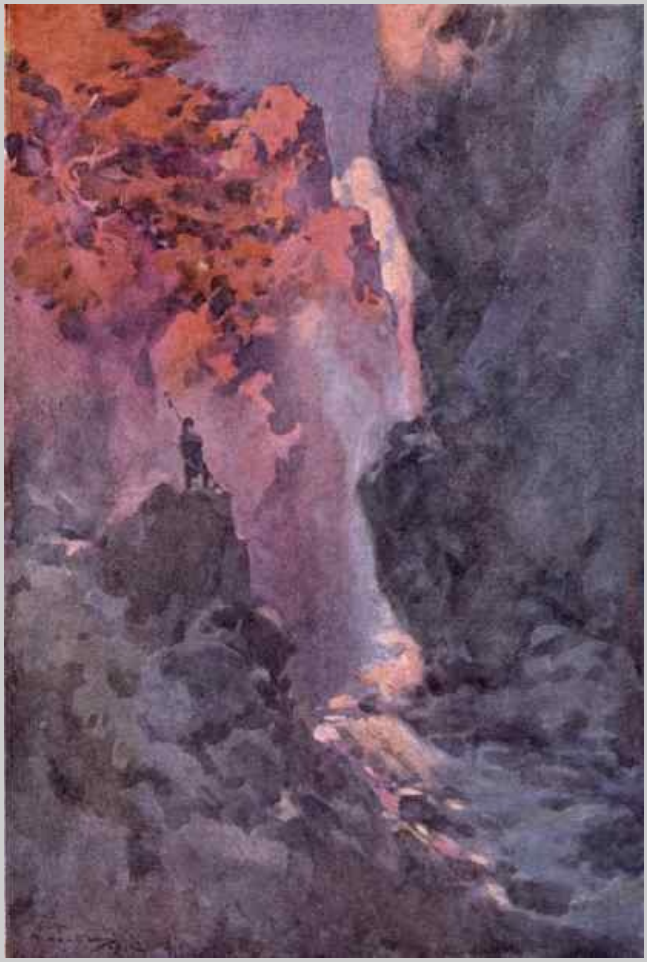
or—

> The unripe flax,
> When through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,
> The level sunshine glitters with green light;

or—

> The hornéd Moon, with one bright star
> Within the nether tip.

And, indeed, Coleridge was aware himself of the extraordinary power which was exercised upon him by external and visible things,—especially by the magic of scenery. He wrote:



THE CHASM IN XANADU.

"But oh! that deep romantic chasm
which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn
cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was
haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!"
(*Kubla Khan*).

> I never find myself alone within the embracement of rocks and hills ... but my spirit careers, drives and eddies like a leaf in autumn; a wild activity of thoughts, imaginations, feelings and impulses of motion rises up within me.... The further I ascend from animated nature ... the greater in me becomes the intensity of the feeling of life. Life seems to me then a universal spirit, that neither has nor can have an opposite. God is everywhere, and where is there room for death?

And he determinedly developed in his theory of poetry, his sense of the depths that lie below nature's more superficial aspects. He had accorded to his sleeping babe, a few short months before, that tenderest of all benedictions, that gift of untarnishable joy:

> Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
> Whether the summer clothe the general earth
> With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
> Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
> Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
> Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
> Heard only in the trances of the blast,
> Or if the secret ministry of frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
> Quietly shining to the quiet Moon:

and he had conversed at great length and frequency with Wordsworth, on what he termed "the two cardinal points of poetry—the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The sudden charm which accidents of light and

shade, which moonlight or sunset diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature." He had no greater pleasure possible than to steep himself in "the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us: an inexhaustible treasure," he proclaimed, "but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not and hearts that neither feel nor understand." And when his imagination craved some wilder and more romantic outlook than the peaceful village where,

> beside one friend,
> Beneath the impervious covert of one oak,
> I've raised a lowly shed, and know the names
> Of Husband and of Father,—

that imagination could at will supply its wants. His eyes could "make pictures when they are shut," and could carry him momentarily, as on some magic carpet, to a dreamland beyond the limitations of mortal experience. The same exquisite and meticulous perception which enabled Coleridge to realize and remember the double sound of rain, the "quiet sounds from hidden rills," among the heather, the slanting shower of blossoms on the "faint gale of departing May,"—revealed to him how

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure-dome decree:
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man
> Down to a sunless sea.
> So twice five miles of fertile ground
> With walls and towers were girdled round:
> And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
> And here were forests ancient as the hills,
> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.
> But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
> Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
> A savage place! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
> . . . . . .
> Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
> Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
> Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
> And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
>
> And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
> Ancestral voices prophesying war!

Such, in fact, was the dual capacity of Coleridge's mind,—such its ability to commingle the actual and the imaginary, that whilst he could at one moment paint the gentle English landscape in which he dwelt,—

> Low was our pretty Cot; our tallest Rose
> Peeped at the chamber-window. We could hear
> At silent noon, and eve, and early morn,
> The Sea's faint murmur. In the open air
> Our Myrtles blossom'd; and across the Porch
> Thick Jasmins twin'd: the little landscape round,
> Was green and woody, and refresh'd the eye.
> It was a spot which you might aptly call
> The Valley of Seclusion!

he was enabled to describe, with the verisimilitude of perfect memory, the dim sea-reaches where,—

> ... Now there came both mist and snow,
> And it grew wondrous cold:
> And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
> As green as emerald.
>
> And through the drifts the snowy clifts
> Did send a dismal sheen:
> Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
> The ice was all between.
>
> The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around:
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,—
Through the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

But now, while the sun poured down hotter and still hotter rays upon the unaccustomed back of Coleridge, he heard the hearty voice of Tom Poole, summoning him to the bark-built arbour under the big elm-trees. A jug of egg-flip and a delightful chat were awaiting him: the bees were humming round in the "lime-tree bower" of the garden: and the deep, vibrating voice of the poet, roused to unwonted exhilaration, was presently moved to declaim one of his own magnificent imitations from Schiller, *The Visit of the Gods*. His recitation rose like a chant in its music and sonority.

Never, believe me,
Appear the Immortals,
Never alone:
Scarce had I welcomed the Sorrow-beguiler,
Iacchus! but in came Boy Cupid the Smiler;
Lo! Phoebus the Glorious descends from his Throne!
They advance, they float in, the Olympians all!
With Divinities fills my
Terrestrial Hall!

How shall I yield you
Due entertainment,
Celestial Quire?
Me rather, bright guests! with your wings of upbuoyance
Bear aloft to your homes, to your banquets of joyance,
That the roofs of Olympus may echo my lyre!
Ha! we mount! on their pinions they waft up my soul!
O give me the Nectar!
O fill me the Bowl!

THE ALBATROSS BREAKS THE ICE-SPELL.

"At length did cross an Albatross,—
Through the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name."
(*The Ancient Mariner*).

"Indeed, one might easily forget all mundane matters upon a day like this," mused the poet as he became rested and refreshed. "It is not a day for doing, Poole,—for digging and forking and stooping,—it was meant for dreaming, for endless reveries of eternal beauty."

"That is not likely ever to be my lot," said the matter-of-fact Poole, "Too much to see after."

"It might be mine, perhaps, did I choose...." observed Coleridge, with the abstracted air of one talking in his sleep, "Have I ever told you, Poole, of the offer I have had from the Wedgwood brothers?"

"The china-man's sons?" Poole queried.

"The same," said Coleridge. "They have offered me an annuity for life, of £140 a year, to prevent my being obliged to abandon poetry and philosophy, as I must do if I take up preaching professionally."

"It is a vastly fine offer!" exclaimed the astonished Poole.

"On the other hand," continued his friend, "the Unitarian Chapel people at Shrewsbury will pay me £120 a year to become their preacher: and that means that I give up literary work. I cannot combine both. Hitherto, as you know, I have refused to accept any remuneration for my sermons: to be a hireling is against my principles: when I go to Taunton or Bridgewater, I do it freely. But here are these two proposals, and I know not which to accept. I freely confess to you, Poole, what you probably know already,—that I am very seriously worried over money matters, and that I perceive I can never support my family by manual labour. My play *Osorio*, which Sheridan requested me to write for Drury Lane, has been rejected: I have no talent, I fear, for the drama. I am too tired after work in an evening to do any reviewing or writing. And now I am threatened by the prospect of Lloyd leaving us—that means the loss of our main income. A sort of calm hopelessness diffuses itself over my heart. Indeed, every mode of life which promised me bread and cheese has been torn away from me: but God remains."

This long speech was not without effect upon the kind-hearted Poole. Pocketing certain twinges of what in Charles Lloyd he had defined as jealousy, he asked, "And what does your friend Mr. Wordsworth say? You are so constantly in his company, that I should suppose he would be a very fit judge of the best course for you to take."

"Oh, Wordsworth,—well, need you ask? Of course he urges me to accept the Wedgwoods' generosity, and devote myself to poetical work alone. But my mind misgives me, lest in doing that I should be turning my back upon the service of God. Am I not more efficacious for good as a preacher than as a versifier?"

"We-ell, I don't know," muttered Poole, "We can all read your poems, you see, but we can't all follow you about the west-country to listen to you,—we can't track you to chapels at Taunton, or Bridgewater, or Shrewsbury, however eloquent you may be. Not but what," he added with a sly twinkle, "you do a pretty fairish deal of preaching in private."

"That's what Lamb said," remarked Coleridge, "I asked him if he had ever heard me preach, and he said, 'M-my d-dear f-fellow, I n-n-never heard you do anything else!' A trifle flippant at times, is our good Lamb.... But who's this?"—and he sprang from his seat with unwonted energy.

"Oh, it's your friends from Alfoxden," said Poole: and, with the resigned expression of one relegated to a back seat, he picked up the empty flip-jug and glasses, and returned to his own domain.

Two people were coming down Coleridge's garden,—a "gaunt and Don-Quixote-like" man in striped pantaloons and a brown fustian jacket, and a slender, pleasing, dark-haired woman in her early twenties. They were William and Dorothy Wordsworth: names dearer than any to the contemplative heart of Coleridge. For nearly a year they had been tenants of Alfoxden Manor-house, about a mile away among the hills: for nearly a year they had been his constant companions, his solace, his inspiration. To their example and society he owed, as he allowed, the awakening and consummation of his genius: for although the "magic and melody" of his verse were all his own,—that magic unsurpassed and unsurpassable, "altogether beyond price," and that melody,

Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy Land,
Where melodies round heavy-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,

Nor pause, nor push, hovering on untam'd wing!
(*The Eolian Harp*)

yet it was Wordsworth who had helped him to "find himself," and it was Dorothy whose influence on both men called out their best and deepest. "Three people but one soul," Coleridge had called this ideally-united trio of himself and his friends; and as "three people with one soul," they "walked on seaward Quantock's heathy hills," and had every thought in common.

"We are off for a long walk this lovely noon," explained Dorothy, "and taking our lunch with us: will you come, Mr. Coleridge?" A very hasty wash and brush, and a hurried goodbye to Sara, and the poet had forsaken a distasteful employment for a singularly congenial one. Over the hills and far away, he could postpone for the nonce every workaday question which troubled him, and, deep in the abstrusest consideration of poetry, or speculation of philosophy, could steep himself in the calm which was his ultimate desire.

He had a host of projects to discuss. He had planned, in collaboration with Wordsworth, a "great book of Man and Nature and Society, to be symbolized by a brook in its course from upland source to sea:" much on the lines of his own strophe from the German:

Unperishing youth!
Thou leapest from forth
The cell of thy hidden nativity;
Never mortal saw
The cradle of the strong one;
Never mortal heard
The gathering of his voices;
The deep-murmur'd charm of the son of the rock,
That is lisped evermore at his slumberless fountain.
There's a cloud at the portal, a spray-woven veil
At the shrine of his ceaseless renewing;
It embosoms the roses of dawn,
It entangles the shafts of the noon,
And into the bed of its stillness
The moonshine sinks down as in slumber,
That the son of the rock, that the nursling of heaven
May be born in a holy twilight!

He had begun the *Ancient Mariner* upon a previous walking-tour, also as a joint composition with the other poet, but had taken it into his own hands and finally completed it this spring. He had an immense proposal for an epic, which should take ten years for collecting material, five for writing and five for revising—nobody could accuse Coleridge of undue haste! He had undertaken a translation of Wieland's *Oberon*, which was likely to be more troublesome than remunerative. But most of all he desired to ascertain his friends' criticism on his newest fragment, *Christabel*: the bulk of his achievements were but fragmentary at the best.

GERALDINE IN THE FOREST.

"There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare.
. . . . . .
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair."
(*Christabel*).

Coleridge's mind was that extremely *rara avis in terra*, which combines the artistic with the philosophic temperament—two inherently-opposed qualities. His acute and sensitive perceptions of sound, sight, colour and romantic possibility did not in the least satisfy his heavy logical demands. Of art for art's sake he had the poorest opinion. He was of dual nature,—and where the philosopher, the metaphysician and the divine preponderated in him, they completely over-weighted the exquisite, ethereal imagination, which was so infinitely more precious, had he known it. And although in this golden year of his life, this *annus mirabilis* of his sojourn at Nether Stowey,—he was still allured to the marvellous, the strange and the supernatural, he sought to disguise his surrender to these phantasies, by clothing his desires in the garb of a severe philosophy of poetry. He decided, in concert with Wordsworth, that it would be well for him to undertake a series of poems in which, as he put it, "the incident and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural: and the excellence arrived at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency."

A cold and unproductive soil this, one would suppose, in which to grow the glowing flowers of *Christabel*, where night itself, peopled with occult alarms, cannot minimise the mingled horror and splendour of Geraldine's first appearance.

Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly, but not dark.
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full;
And yet she looks both small and dull.
The night is chill, the cloud is gray:

'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.
The lovely lady, Christabel,
Whom her father loves so well,
What makes her in the wood so late,
A furlong from the castle gate?
She had dreams all yesternight
Of her own betrothed knight;
And she in the midnight wood will pray
For the weal of her lover that's far away.

She stole along, she nothing spoke,
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,
And naught was green upon the oak,
But moss and rarest mistletoe:
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,
And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,
The lovely lady, Christabel!
It moaned as near, as near can be,
But what it is, she cannot tell.—
On the other side it seems to be,
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.
. . . . . .
There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair.
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she—
Beautiful exceedingly!

And a chilly basis, these solemnly-propounded theories, for the gorgeous fabric of *The Ancient Mariner*. Originally founded, as regards its main outlines, upon a dream which occurred to Cruikshank,—a dream of a skeleton ship with figures in it,—who could have anticipated such results as that unforgettable scene where "The Ancient Mariner beholdeth a sign in the element afar off"?—

The western wave was all a-flame;
The day was well nigh done;
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres!

Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

We listened, and looked sideways up!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seemed to sip!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;

From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The hornéd Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

Or who could have supposed that Wordsworth's subsequent suggestion for the plot of the poem, "Suppose you represent the Mariner as having killed an Albatross on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon themselves to avenge the crime," should develop into that magnificent defence of the animal right to live, which, in Coleridge's opinion, obtruded a moral sentiment too openly in a work of such pure imagination? The curse of remorse, throughout the whole story, hangs as heavy on the seaman's soul as does the dead weight of the Albatross around his neck: until that mystical moment when he blesses the beauty of the "happy living things" in the water, "God's creatures of the great calm,"

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside.

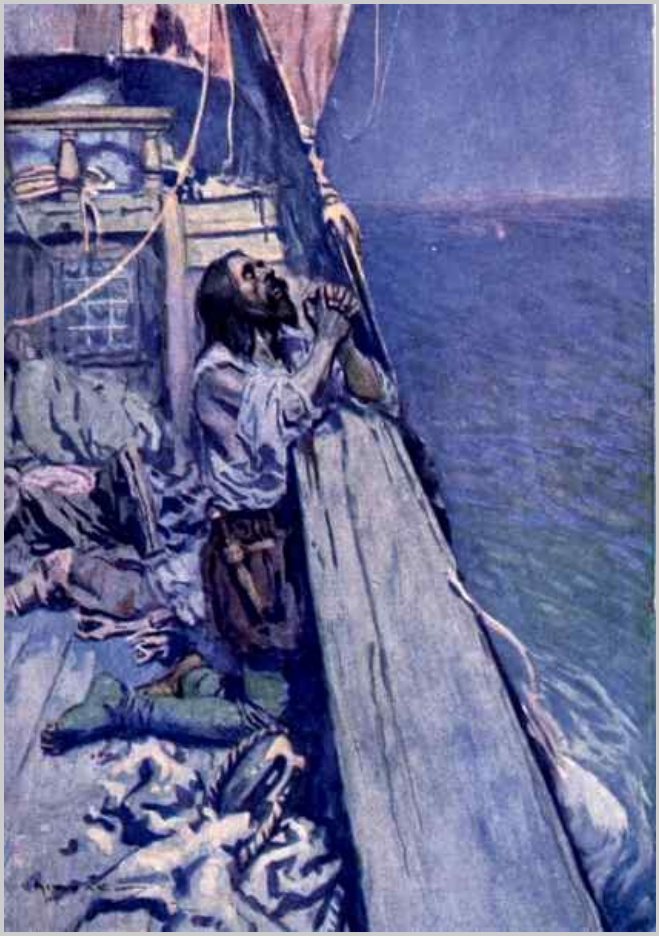
Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.



THE MARINER RECEIVES COMFORT IN PRAYER.

"The self-same moment I could pray:
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea."
(*The Ancient Mariner*).

... Side by side the three friends wandered over the May-sweet hillsides,—dipping into wooded combes, musical with the sound of streams,—climbing the heathery slopes, resting here and there upon some glorious crest to drink in all the joy and colour of the landscape, and to reflect, in Coleridge's own words, how—

Flowers are lovely; Love is flower-like;
Friendship is a sheltering tree.

Each of them young,—each of them passionate lovers of Nature,—each brimming with hopes, and equipped with commanding intellect,—they formed the three-fold chord, with its tonic, dominant and mediant, of which is born all music....

It was nearly eight o'clock when Coleridge parted from the Wordsworths at the gate of Alfoxden. They were happily tired after some nine hours' rambling, and a serene joy lit up their faces, as of those who have passed through some enchanting experience,—who have touched at some oasis of sheer delight. Coleridge tried to frame his thoughts into words, as he strode homeward with his loose shambling gait, continually shifting from one side of the path to the other after his notorious "corkscrew" habit. The notes of the nightingale, poignantly sweet, echoed to him out of the woods,—and he would gladly have lingered to listen; but, instead, he thought—

Farewell, O Warbler! till to-morrow eve,
And you, my friends! farewell, a short farewell!
We have been loitering long and pleasantly,
And now for our dear homes.—That strain again!
Full fain it would delay me! My dear babe,
Who, capable of no articulate sound,
Mars all things with his imitative lisp,
How he would place his hand beside his ear,
His little hand, the small forefinger up,
And bid us listen! And I deem it wise

To make him Nature's play-mate. He knows well
The evening star; and once, when he awoke
In most distressful mood (some inward pain
Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream)
I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,
And he beheld the Moon, and, hushed at once,
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes, that swam with un-dropped tears,
Did glitter in the yellow moonbeam! Well!—
It is a father's tale. But if that Heaven
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up
Familiar with these songs, that with the night
He may associate joy! Once more farewell,
Sweet Nightingale! Once more, my friends! farewell.

Sara met him in the road with a despondent air. "Lloyd has gone," said she.

"Gone! what, actually *gone*! Do you mean to say he has left us?" exclaimed Coleridge, horrorstruck.

"He packed up his things and took leave of me," she replied; "it seems he hired a conveyance from Bristol to fetch him home."

"Good Heavens!" cried her husband: and all the tranquil joy died out of his face; nothing but weariness, flabbiness and dejection remained. "Did he give no reason?"

"O, he said things about the Wordsworths," replied Sara. "He thinks you have neglected him shamefully. So do I." And she shut her mouth with a snap.

Coleridge, though so prolific a conversationalist, and so prone to speech, knew when there was a time to be silent. He attempted no defence or excuse. He simply went indoors, and sitting distastefully to an unprepossessing supper, let Sara say her say upon the subject of Lloyd: it was an extensive and a justifiable recrimination. Then—still in the same abstracted and monosyllabic state,—he helped to wash up, attended—better late than never—to the pigs and fowls, and sat before the fire, with a note-book in his hands and baby-clothes pinned to warm upon his knees, while Sara put the child to bed. He was working out with patient care those apparently unpremeditated effects which go to make up the haunting melody of *Christabel*. For, skilful and accomplished metrist as he was, it was only by dint of "repeated experiments and intense mental effort" that he achieved those results in which his art appears most artless. However, he was in no fit state, over-tired and distressed as he felt, for laborious efforts of this kind: and presently Nature took vengeance upon him in the form of intolerable toothache. A little while he bore it: then, moving tip-toe lest he should be heard in the upper room where Sara was soothing the little one to sleep, he stole to a corner cupboard and took out a bottle of laudanum. In this false friend and insidious comforter he had already found relief and repose from mental, as from physical troubles,—more and more frequently he had recourse to it. He knew its fatal tendency to undermine the will and debilitate the constitution, yet he could not deny himself an artificial peace which he described as "a spot of enchantment, a green spot of fountains and trees in the very heart of a waste of sand."

And immediately he began to view things *couleur de rose*. The sharp tongue and angry face of Sara became transmogrified into the gentle semblance of her anagram, the imaginary *Asra* of his poems,—

To be beloved is all I need,
And whom I love I love indeed.

. . . . . .

O ever—ever be thou blest!
For dearly, Asra! love I thee!
This brooding warmth across my breast,
This depth of tranquil bliss—ah, me!
Fount, tree and shed are gone, I know not whither,
But in one quiet room we three are still together.

The shadows dance upon the wall,
By the still dancing fire-flames made;
And now they slumber moveless all!
And now they melt to one deep shade!
But not from me shall this mild darkness steal thee:
I dream thee with mine eyes, and at my heart I feel thee!

The visions born of opium floated in vague, rich phantasmagoria across his slumbrous brain,

And so, his senses gradually wrapt
In a half-sleep, he dreams of better worlds,

—sitting in the failing firelight. With a great effort he roused himself to creep up the stair-ladder, and to lay his drugged limbs upon the hard straw bed. The child and Sara were already dreaming: he gazed at them with serene affection:

> Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
> Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
> Fill up the interspersed vacancies
> And momentary pauses of the thought!
> My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
> With tender gladness, thus to look at thee!

and lastly, with all the mental power yet left him, he committed himself to the God of whom he was so weak, so well-intentioned a worshipper:

> Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,
> It hath not been my use to pray
> With moving lips or bended knees;
> But silently, by slow degress,
> My spirit I to Love compose,
> In humble trust mine eye-lids close,
> With reverential resignation,
> No wish conceived, no thought expressed.
> Only a *sense* of supplication,—
> A sense o'er all my soul impressed
> That I am weak, yet not unblest,
> Since in me, round me, every where
> Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.

But now the stealthy narcotic utterly beclouded him: he sank away as through unfathomable gulfs of somnolence. Samuel Taylor Coleridge had closed another day.

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