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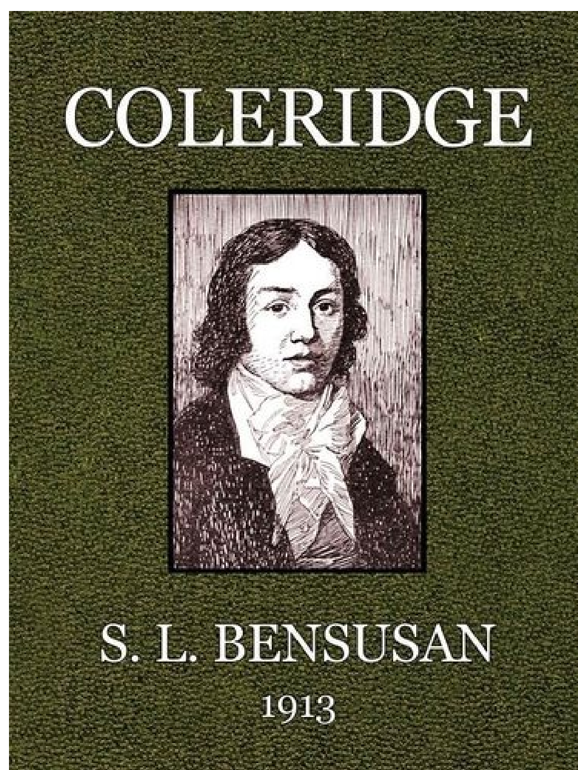

COLERIDGE

By S. L. BENSUSAN

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COLDERIDGE

INTRODUCTION

Among the great writers whose activity is associated with the closing years of the eighteenth and the opening of the nineteenth centuries, are several who claim more respect than popularity. If they were poets, their works find a place in a thousand libraries, but the dust gathers upon covers long unopened, and only the stray enthusiast removes it. Southey, Cowper, and Coleridge, for example, are authors of well-nigh universal acceptance, but who, outside the ranks of professed students of poetry, could claim an intimate acquaintance with their work? In *An Anthology of Longer Poems* published at Oxford two years ago and prepared by two Professors of English Literature, Southey, for all his great gifts, is not represented at all, and William Cowper is responsible for nothing more than the familiar lines to his mother's picture.

Dryden and Alexander Pope, Goldsmith, Gray, Crabbe, and Thomson are little more than names to the most of the generation that has just entered upon its inheritance. Perhaps, if the truth be told, the [Pg 8] present-day reading public cannot keep pace with its ever-growing task, and satisfies its conscience by paying to the worthy dead the sacrifice of a small expenditure. In the old time it was hard to gather a modest library, to-day the difficulty lies in selection. The best efforts of a thousand years clamour for a place on our shelves, the material for reading has been multiplied, the capacity for reading remains where it was, if indeed the wonderful growth of claims upon our attention, the quickening of the pace of life, has not reduced our leisure time at the expense of books. Little wonder, then, that in the struggle for a sustained reputation many sound writers fail to hold their own. It is only when we choose one of the poets just named for a course of steady reading and turn to his pages with some knowledge of the life and times which gave them birth, that the dead man becomes a living force, and we find how far his claim to recognition lies outside the scope of a mere convention. Even then the inequalities of thought and style will be painfully apparent. We shall read much that would not have been preserved had the poet written in an age when self-criticism was as strong a force as it is to-day, but there will be no waste of labour if the full extent of his gifts as well as his limitations can be grasped. It is not safe to accept the "selected works" of any man of mark; a selection can never be quite fair to an author.

Of all the men whose work was completed between the middle of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are few, if any, whose life is of more interest to the psychologist, the student of [Pg 9] transcendentalism, and the lover of fine thought, than that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the subject of this brief study. He was compact of remarkable strength and fatal weakness, of rare attainments and incomplete achievement, of courage and cowardice, of energy and laziness, of reason and unreason, of airy wit and solid wisdom. Look upon one side of his life and accomplishment and you are lost in wonder and admiration, look upon the other and there is food for little but pity and regret. Modern teaching has revealed the narrowness of the boundary between genius and insanity, and, in the light of this knowledge, we see that Coleridge was neither wholly a genius nor wholly sane, though he approached either condition very nearly at different periods of his troubled life. We would hesitate to-day to condemn him with the severity and fluency shown by his contemporaries—by Thomas de Quincey and William Hazlitt, for example. Perhaps the first thought to which a study of his life and work gives birth is the nearest to the truth, the thought that he was singularly unfitted to cope with life as he found it, that he was essentially a man of thought rather than of action. He was never strong enough to bear the thousand ills that writing man is heir to. He lacked courage, method, order; one might add that he lacked diligence, but for the knowledge that no man can move in advance of his inspiration if he would be just to himself. Even though his pen was idle his brain was ever active; his failure lay in lack of will-power to do full justice to its activity.

[Pg 10] Wordsworth, his contemporary and friend, had far better fortune; life offered his notable virtues every assistance. An early legacy, a small patrimony that arrived late, but not too late, appointment to one or two posts hardly to be regarded as anything other than

sinecures, a government pension in his closing years, a splendid constitution, a fortunate marriage, colossal strength of purpose: all these gifts smoothed the rugged road of the greater man; to Coleridge the fates were adverse. He had at best a great but ill-balanced mind, to which philosophy made the first appeal. A shrewd practical man with half his attainments could have turned them to better advantage. His health was never really robust, and he suffered from the fatal sickness of self-pity. He accepted the charity of friends and asked for more; though he seems to have had few personal extravagances, the income that kept his friends, William, Mary, and Dorothy Wordsworth, free from financial strain, would not have been enough for his support. None of his biographers has discovered what he did with his money on the rare occasions when it was plentiful; there is ample reason to believe that he would have been equally puzzled to make out a balance-sheet. But, while his private life was beset by all manner of difficulties, while his private letters reveal too frequently an utter absence of personal dignity, his public utterances and the "table-talk" recorded by his nephew stand on a very high plane. Every class of cultivated man and woman was content to be silent when Coleridge was speaking; there was seemingly but one matter that the keen clear brain could neither grapple with nor control, and this was the conduct of his own life. Where he himself was not concerned, his wisdom and insight were remarkable, his natural gifts, splendidly cultivated in youth, had been reinforced by prolonged study as a man. His table-talk was fuller than most men's laboured essays, his lectures, even if delivered extempore, could charm an audience of scholars, and his published work, whether in prose or verse, is an enduring monument, not likely to be hard worn by the attentions of the multitude. Had his lines been cast in more pleasant places, had he married a woman strong enough to direct and guide him, had he been spared his pains and the unfortunate remedy by which he sought to lull them, there seems to be no height to which he might not have risen, no goal to which he might not have attained. We may not judge him save in all charity and kindness, for we know that his faults brought their own punishment in full measure and, apart from this, the lines he wrote a few years before he died seem to arrest the fault finder.

"Frail creatures are we all! To be the best,
Is but the fewest faults to have.—
Look Thou then to thyself, and leave the rest
To God, thy conscience, and the grave."

Few of his contemporaries spoke or wrote harshly of Coleridge. Lamb and Wordsworth loved him, despite occasional and regrettable misunderstandings. He collaborated with Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads* and with Southey in *The Fall of Robespierre*, a three-act drama of which the last-named poet wrote the second act. There were few who were not happy in his brief fortunes or without sympathy in the long-drawn period of his trouble and pain, while all who came within the charmed circle of his personality delighted in his company and sought it eagerly. Judged by ordinary standards, his life-work would provide a monument for any man whose attainments fall short of absolute genius, and perhaps they have been most severe who realise how nothing more than order and self-control kept Coleridge from the very highest rank. They are jealous for his gifts, they feel that he hid his light under a bushel. For the most of us it will suffice that the poet's utterances are melodious, inspiring, and finely wrought, that he himself was a greatly suffering man who fought desperately and at last successfully against his own worst failings. Even as he arrests our imagination he claims our sympathy, which we give the more gladly because he would have welcomed it. Not only did he ask for merciful judgment while he was alive, but appealed for it when life should have passed. Few who have read even a tithe of what he wrote will grudge a little tribute to his memory, while those who study Coleridge become his debtors, and realise that he played no insignificant part in moulding some aspects of nineteenth-century thought and faith.

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the youngest of the nine sons of the Rev. John Coleridge, Vicar of Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire and Chaplain-Priest as well as Master of King's School, a Free Grammar School founded by King Henry VIII, who suppressed and replaced a long-standing monastic institution in the town. The Rev. John Coleridge, who was twice married, was the father of three daughters by his first wife and ten children by the second. He was the son of a trader in woollen goods who suffered serious financial losses when John was a boy, and the lad owed his Cambridge education to the generosity of a friend of the family. He married young, and kept a school at Southampton until his first wife died and he had married again. Then he obtained the living and mastership at Ottery St. Mary. Of his nine sons the youngest was destined to be the most distinguished, but James, who was born twelve years before Samuel Taylor, became the father of one Judge of the High Court, the grandfather of Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, and great-grandfather of the present Judge. The Vicar was a man of letters, who published several long-forgotten books by subscription, and was noted, to quote his youngest son's description, for "learning, good-heartedness, absentness of mind, and excessive ignorance of the world." It would not be hard to find all these qualities reproduced in the poet himself; they are of the kind that need a country school-house or vicarage for their home if they are not to be the cause of grave trouble to their possessor. From the very early days Sam, as his family called the future poet and philosopher, was a strange, precocious and unhappy child. Perhaps our modern ideas are shocked at the thought that he was sent to school at the age of three years. Should the twentieth-century theories be correct, such a brain as his would have been far healthier if the stage of happy ignorance had been extended until he was at least twice as old. Spoiled by his parents, the share of attentions he received from them provoked, naturally enough, the jealousy and resentment of his brothers and sisters, while his strange ways made him the unhappy butt of his school-fellows. Small wonder if, when he described his early childhood in the latter days, he had but a sorry tale to tell. Compared with his friends Charles Lamb and William Wordsworth, Coleridge was an unhappy boy.

Nervous, self-conscious, and irritable, he took no pleasure in outdoor games, and at the earliest possible age was busy with books. With their aid he lived in a world of his own, a world peopled with the heroes and heroines who dwell between book covers. By the time he was six years of age he had read the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, and though it was certainly an abridged version in a single volume, there is no doubt that it must have provided a powerful and unhealthy stimulant to an imagination already far too active. Happily his father found that these books were dangerous to his youngest born, and destroyed them.

The boy entered the grammar school, where he speedily passed all the other lads of his age. For the next three years the life at Ottery St. Mary continued in the seemingly peaceful fashion that was in reality so harmful. The little lad was disliked by his school-fellows and flattered and petted by his elders. His father took him seriously enough to pave the way, by a series of discourses, for the service of the Church. His mother's friends delighted in exhibitions of his precocity. His temper, sometimes sullen and perverse, showed itself disastrously on one occasion, when he ran away from home to avoid some punishment, doubtless well earned, and slept all night by the banks of the river that gives its name to his home. He woke so exhausted that his rescuer was obliged to carry him home. To this escapade he attributed the fits of ague to which he was subject for many following years.

It is worth remarking in this place that for all the boy's undoubted precocity, the beauty of the scenes in which the first decade of his life was set seem to have left little or no impression. Had Coleridge been a lover of the country for its own sake, he must have been at least as deeply impressed by the all-pervading charm of Ottery St. Mary as his friend Wordsworth was by Hawkshead. For Ottery has beauty and history in plenty with which to reward the visitor or

resident; its romance travels far away into the first twilight of legendry. In later years, of which the historical record is safe, the Manor of Ottery was granted by King Edward the Confessor to the Cathedral Church of Rouen. The poet might have seen as a child the royal arms of England and France on the stone scutcheons above the church altar, with the armorial bearings of several distinguished Devon families to bear them company. In the reign of Edward III, the head of one of these families, John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, bought the manor and advowson of Ottery and established there the college of Monks. This was dissolved by Henry VIII, who made the college over to a corporation of four governors, and established the "King's New Grammar School," a building whose irregular roof is still a feature of the landscape. Here the Rev. John Coleridge was master and his son pupil. At Hayes Farm, close by, Sir Walter Raleigh was born; the family pew is to be seen in the parish church of East Budleigh.

When Coleridge was a young man, the house of Raleigh in Ottery St. Mary was still standing; it was burnt down in the year of Trafalgar. He does not mention it, he does not even tell us of the wonderful orchards in the valley of the Otter, perhaps the most outstanding feature of the country in which his earliest years were passed. They say that these orchards are the more remarkable because mistletoe will not grow round the trees, the Druids having laid all Devonshire under a ban! The Valley of the Otter is a district no country lover could forget. The river, swift, though narrow, runs sparkling over many-coloured soil—Coleridge recalls this single feature in his Sonnet on the Otter. It separates the chalk flint and red marls of Ottery East Hill from the heather-clad black earth of West Hill, and makes a clean division between the plant growths on one side of its banks and those on the other. The high peaks of Dartmoor can be seen from either hill. In the valleys, while summer lasts, the red Devon kine stand amid luxuriant grasses which rise to their dewlaps. We are told that the transceptal towers of St. Mary's Church at Ottery inspired Bishop Quivil when he planned Exeter Cathedral. St. Mary's dominates the little town and adds to the perennial air of peace and seclusion that breathes over it. Coleridge might have made Ottery St. Mary immortal, but he did little more than write his well-remembered sonnet and a short ode inspired by the "Pixies' Parlour," a cave in the red sandstone cliffs below the town. The curious may still find "S.T.C. 1789" carved on the soft stones. If the valley of the Otter was not able to impress the early years of the poet, it is hardly surprising that neither Somersetshire nor Westmorland should succeed where Devonshire failed. The failure adds to the clear proof that Coleridge was at heart a philosopher, a student of life, faith, reason, and the immortality of the soul, but withal a man who was seldom or never on intimate terms with his immediate surroundings.

The Rev. John Coleridge passed away, beloved by his pupils and parishioners, when his son Samuel Taylor was but nine years old, and within a year the efforts of friends had resulted in obtaining for the lad a presentation to Christ's Hospital.

His period in the junior school in Hertfordshire was brief, and apparently quite uneventful. Before he was ten years old "the poor friendless boy" of Elia's famous essay was "in the great city pent, mid cloisters dim," and his apprenticeship to learning in the famous foundation that has now been removed from Newgate Street to the beautiful Sussex country near Horsham lasted for nine years, in the first seven of which he seems to have seen nothing of his Devonshire home.

One would hesitate to say, despite the hardships of boarding-school life a century or more ago, that the poet would have been better off anywhere else. He recognised in later years the advantages of his training. Firmly, even brutally disciplined, his master in the upper school was Boyer, of whose severity Lamb and others have written unsparingly. Coleridge was thoroughly well grounded; he mastered the elementary rules of poetic expression, his eccentricities were repressed, his departures from law, order, and rule firmly punished. For one whose mind was ill-governed, in whom the newest idea found an immediate and devoted adherent, strong rule was the first essential of development. He passed through many phases; cobbling, medicine, and metaphysics attracted him in turn, and Boyer gladly provided an effective antidote for the virus of each. Lamb bears generous witness to his companion's budding talent,

and we know that he made and kept friends, that there was something about his personality that was eminently attractive and led people to pardon in him what they would have condemned in others. A foolish escapade on the New River resulted in nearly a year's illness, and left him very weak, indeed throughout life he was never robust, but the troubles that affected his body did nothing to stunt his intellectual growth. The poet in him awoke, perhaps called to life by Mary Evans, eldest sister of a school-fellow whom he had befriended and who gratefully introduced him to his family. Mary Evans undoubtedly inspired much of his earliest, and comparatively feeble, verse. The sonnets of Bowles, who then had a following and a reputation, were another force in the making of the Coleridge we love and admire. Reading the detailed story of his life, we may note that, in the brief and simple relations with Mary Evans, Coleridge acted as though he had no definite control over his own impulses. Some of the correspondence has been preserved, and it is hard to escape the impression that while the poet was quite serious in his protestations, he exaggerated with true poetic licence the depth and permanency of his regard.

In January 1791, the Almoners of Christ's Hospital appointed Coleridge to an Exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge, with the idea that the school's promising pupil would pass from the University to the Church. He left Newgate Street in the September following, and entered the University a month later, intervening weeks being spent, in all probability, in Devonshire.

 We find him now at the parting of the ways, the wholesome bonds of discipline relaxing, a measure of liberty before him of a kind to which he had been a stranger hitherto, and one is inclined to think that he was absolutely unfitted to stand alone or to be his own master, even within the limits imposed upon the Cambridge undergraduate. His brilliant intellect was not associated with sound common sense, the conventions and restriction of normal life were things he would not trouble about, his mind, daring and speculative, was never at rest, he stood desperately in need of some steadying influence of a kind that never came to him. The newest thought could carry him away, he cared not whither. Like many another brilliant man, Coleridge needed direction and discipline long after the time when the convention of the world seeks to enforce either. We cannot see whence the force was to come, but we must realise how greatly it was needed. Coleridge was too clever for the ranks to which he was accredited; his gifts were of the uneasy kind that can find no rest. Some men of similar temperament can settle down after a brief struggle; they bridle themselves, hide their light, bow to the world above them, and prosper. To Coleridge such a method of living would have seemed immoral, far more immoral than his own shifting, haphazard and unhappy career. He was always the slave of his own moral ideas, his weaknesses were a tribute to the sick and ailing body; to his judgment, his moral consciousness, he acted with most rigorous honesty, even to his own detriment.

When Coleridge went to Jesus College, the month was October; he became a pensioner in November, and matriculated in the following month. From 1792 he would have been in receipt of £40 per annum from his old school, and between 1792-4 he held one of the Rustat scholarships belonging to Jesus College and given only to sons of clergymen. In the year last named he became a Foundation scholar. For the first twelve months, while the recollection of Christ's Hospital discipline was perhaps still keen within him, and his friend Middleton was at Pembroke College, he worked diligently and gained his first award, the Browne Gold Medal. He competed for the Craven Scholarship, which fell to Samuel Butler, afterwards Bishop of Lichfield. By the following year Middleton had left the University and Coleridge was beginning to lose his head and find his powers. He associated himself with the most progressive and radical spirits in his College, and the authorities looked askance at him. But he paid little heed to such a trifle as the dissatisfaction of tutors. The centre of a large and admiring circle that clamoured to hear his political opinions, his latest poem, or his favourite recitation, he seemed to realise that he could hold an audience and lead opinion. Debts began to accumulate; he was indeed destined for the greater part of his life to owe more than he could pay. His suit with Mary Evans was not prospering; he tried to set himself right financially by speculating in a lottery, and, when that failed him, left Cambridge, the first of the long series of sudden departures from accustomed

haunts that was to be a prominent feature in his career. A fortnight later he had become Silas Tomkyn Comberbach of the King's Light Dragoons. The new and popular recruit, who repaid his companions for doing his share of the common drudgery by writing their love-letters for them, soon found that under the most favourable conditions soldiering was not to his taste. He could not sit a horse, he could not even groom one, and it was not very long before his identity was revealed to an officer through the medium of some lines in Latin written in chalk on a wall. His elder brother, Captain James Coleridge, procured his discharge in the following April, when the Master and Fellows of Jesus readmitted him, much to the surprise of his friends. That the authorities were ready and willing to give him every chance is sufficient proof that his capacities and his personality alike pleaded powerfully in his defence.

A few months later he was on a visit to Oxford, where he met Robert Southey, his future brother-in-law, and they talked of Pantisocracy. In his *Christian Life*, Peter Bayne speaks of the days "when Coleridge and Southey were building, of cloud and moonbeam, their notable fabric of Pantisocracy, the government of all by all." The idea was just suited to the hare-brained poets. Twelve men, each armed with £125, were to leave England in the company of twelve women, for one of the back settlements of America, there to establish a Utopia of their own. A few hours' work a day from each would suffice, they thought, for the needs of all. Political and religious opinions were to be free, and the question of the validity of the marriage contract was left open. Needless perhaps to add that neither the industrious Southey nor his erratic friend had £125, but the former hoped to raise the amount from the sale of *Joan of Arc* and other of his early work, while Coleridge proposed to publish by subscription a volume of *Imitations from the Modern Latin Poets*. Like so many of the volumes he intended to write, this one was never written, though he had all the scholarship necessary to bring a venture of the kind to a successful issue. Southey and Coleridge met a little later in Bristol and went into Somersetshire, where they were joined by Burnett and Thomas Poole. Of these two men the latter was to play an important part in the life-story of Coleridge.

A little later the young poet had recovered sufficiently from his overmastering attachment to Mary Evans to become engaged to Sarah Fricker, Southey's sister-in-law. He collaborated with the future laureate in a rapidly written dramatic poem, *The Fall of Robespierre*, which he dedicated to Mr. Martin of Jesus College, without any reference to Southey's considerable part in it. The enthusiasm for Pantisocracy was short-lived; in a few months its originators had dropped the scheme, though it was to be revived later. Coleridge went back to Cambridge, and left suddenly in the December of 1794 without taking his degree. The reasons for this step have never been revealed; some think that he left on account of debt, others think the cause must have been some further breach of discipline. His career at Jesus had been brief and unsatisfactory, and he was soon dropped by the College authorities and the Committee of Christ's Hospital. Whatever their private views of his ability, they could no longer remain indifferent to his irregular life, his inability to settle down and work, the dangerous results of too much tolerance in an institution that must control its scholars or cease to exist. On the other hand, Coleridge could not respond to order and discipline. He was not like other men; of him it might be truly said in the words of the Patriarch, "unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." The period of wandering trouble and unrest had begun; it was to continue until, the greater part of his life and life's-work accomplished, he found a hospitable asylum at Highgate. It cannot be supposed that Cambridge was in any degree responsible for what happened within the walls of Jesus College or in the world beyond. The erratic disposition was with Coleridge as a little boy. Christ's Hospital subdued but did not eradicate it, Jesus College gave it an atmosphere of limited freedom in which to blossom and bud until the college boundaries were no longer wide enough to contain such an errant spirit.

CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH OF THE IDEAL

When Coleridge left the University he had entered his twenty-third year; he had rather more than forty before him, but, as the two preceding years had been, so were the most of those that followed. Trouble, largely if not altogether of his own making, anxiety, comparative poverty, ill-health, these were the shadows that darkened his days. For him life was a problem with which he could not grapple; although he had a giant's strength he did not know how to use it. He was master of a rare and exquisite gift, but it did not avail him. Other men, with a tithe of his talent and the full capacity for living a well-ordered life, could earn a comfortable competence, acquire honour and command respect, while Coleridge, who was in so many respects their master, drifted across the wide waters of life, a ship without a rudder. We need not criticise, we can better pity a man who, greatly gifted, could not raise his head among his contemporaries. Had some stern disciplinarian stood behind him at Cambridge he might have achieved distinction; had he married a strong resolute woman she might have taught him regular industry and self-respect. But in all the important actions of his life the mood of the moment was the deciding factor, so that, despite the number of his friends, there was none to help. Coleridge was almost a genius, and quite a law to himself. Such happiness as came to him was found chiefly in intercourse with kindred spirits, in grappling with metaphysical problems, in refuting the current errors of philosophy, and above all in the kindness and generosity of friends. Woe to the man who accepts help from others! Once he has done this he stands for ever on a lower plane, his life is no longer his own, he can no longer say, "I am the Captain of my fate, I am the Master of my soul." It was the misfortune of Coleridge to receive assistance in those critical hours when a man must stand alone, though it be but in a garret with no more food and clothing than will serve for the necessities of life. There are few brilliant exceptions to the sweeping rule that forbids self-respecting men to receive doles. Horace and Virgil are notable among them, but the rule stands, even while we remember that both Martial and Juvenal declared that the protection of prince or patron offers the only chance to poetry. With Coleridge there was less excuse than the poet may claim, for he could always command a living wage in journalism. The trouble with him was not to get money for his work, but to give work in return for other people's money.

From Cambridge the poet drifted to London, journalism, and the delightful company of Charles Lamb. He wrote sonnets for the *Morning Chronicle*, and took his glass and pipe with Elia in long-forgotten taverns until Southey hunted him up and carried him back to Bristol and Sarah Fricker, to Pantisocracy and lecturing and the company of Burnett, with whom both Coleridge and Southey lived in College Street. In 1796 Cottle, the Bristol publisher, paid Coleridge thirty guineas for poems, including the "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" and "Religious Musings." Southey lost faith in Pantisocracy and went to live with his mother. Coleridge lost faith in Southey, the friends quarrelled, and for some time were not on speaking or writing terms. Cottle, who had a sure eye for promising work, offered to buy all the verse Coleridge could write at the price of one and a half guineas per hundred lines, and on the strength of this, Coleridge married Sarah Fricker in October 1795, and settled in a little cottage at Clevedon near Bristol, in company with Burnett and another of Sarah's sisters. The men shared in the labour of the house, but it was too far from town to serve for purposes of work in days when the circulating library was still unknown, and, early in their married life, Mr. and Mrs. Coleridge moved to Redcliffe Hill. There Coleridge decided to start a paper called *The Watchman*, to be published on every eighth day, and he has left on record an account of his northern pilgrimage in search of subscribers. He found enough to justify publication; the paper lived to reach its tenth number, when it departed from life, leaving its editor-proprietor stranded, though his *Poems on Various Subjects*, with additions by Charles Lamb, Robert Southey, and Mr. Favell, had been published in March by Cottle, and had been favourably received. Thomas Poole, as good a friend as ever poet had, came to the rescue with forty pounds, and Coleridge spent a happy fortnight

at Nether Stowey; with him, as soon as a trouble was over it could be forgotten. But something had to be done; negotiations for the post of co-editor of the *Morning Chronicle* were opened, and fell through. Following this came another plan, to educate the children of a wealthy Derbyshire lady, who changed her mind at the eleventh hour, giving the poet £95, and his wife a welcome gift of baby linen instead. In the meantime the prodigal son had visited Ottery St. Mary and been reconciled to his family. Proposals to establish a school in Derby came to nothing, and there is matter for regret here, for the poet would have made an admirable schoolmaster. In September his responsibilities were increased by the arrival of David Hartley Coleridge, born while the poet was on a visit to the Lloyds. Charles Lloyd, an epilept, was anxious to live with him, and Coleridge wished to rent a house near Nether Stowey that he might be near his friend Poole. After much search a cottage was found.

By this time, the poet had begun to suffer from severe neuralgia, and had started to dose himself with laudanum for its cure. With his usual optimism in hours of change, the future was clear to him. "My farm will be a garden of an acre and a half," he writes to "Citizen" Thelwall, "in which I intend to raise vegetables and corn for my wife, and feed a couple of grunting and snouted cousins from the refuse. My evenings I shall devote to literature, and by reviews in the *Monthly Magazine* and other shilling scavengering, shall probably gain £40 a year—which economy and self-denial, gold beaters, shall hammer till it covers my annual expenses." Well might Lamb write—"What does your worship know about farming?" More than a hundred years have passed since Coleridge took the little cottage of which the garden met Poole's, but successive generations of literary men and poets have shared his strange belief that anybody can go on the land and make it yield its fruits in due season. That farming demands a strenuous apprenticeship and sound judgment, if it is not to fail altogether to yield any harvest save debt, that appreciation of country life does not carry knowledge with it, these are truths which the majority of men of letters decline to admit.

A second edition of his poems, with additions by Charles Lloyd as well as Lamb, produced twenty guineas from Cottle, and the poet settled to learn the rudiments of agriculture from Thomas Poole, and to train Charles Lloyd in the way he should go. Then he went on a visit to the Wordsworths, who were first at Racedown and later at Alfoxden House. An offer from Sheridan to consider a play for Drury Lane led to the writing of *Osorio*. Charles Lamb came to Nether Stowey, and so too did William and Dorothy Wordsworth and "Citizen" John Thelwall, with whom Coleridge kept up such a lively correspondence. This visit brought about the Wordsworths' departure from Alfoxden House, for the "Citizen," rather an undesirable person at best, was a political suspect, and a nervous government sent a spy down to Nether Stowey to find what company he kept. But in spite of "those gold beaters, economy and self-denial," the poet's poor exchequer was by no means equal to the demands made upon it by his unsettled mode of living. He received a fresh subscription from friends, urged to contribute by Thomas Poole, and declared that this would be the last subsidy he would be free to accept. Doubtless he thought so; at no period of his life had Coleridge the slightest idea of the value of money, the expense of living, or the probable fate of his own best intentions. One traces in him a faint likeness to Wilkins Micawber. With the later months of 1797, he visited Bowles, whose sonnets had appealed so greatly to him, and learned that Sheridan had rejected *Osorio*. Relations with Charles Lloyd no longer remained as they had been, and it may be that his contribution to the family exchequer at Nether Stowey was not maintained. But for all the troubles and trials of the year it is a notable one in the annals of British poetry, for on November 13 Coleridge set out with William and Dorothy Wordsworth on a walking tour of which the expense was to be defrayed by a joint composition. Wordsworth for once was not equal to the task, and Coleridge began the poem by which he is best known, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." His own description of it as "inimitable" does not seem extravagant. Begun in the course of the memorable walk, it was finished in the following March, though there were further alterations as subsequent editions of collected poems appeared. The beginning of "Christabel" belongs apparently to 1797.

The opening of 1798 brought some good fortune in its train.

Coleridge had been about to accept a call to the Unitarian Chapel at Shrewsbury, and had already given a taste of his quality in the pulpit, when Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood, sons of the famous potter, sought to keep him from burying his gifts. They understood that the need of cash rather than the claims of faith were responsible for his new departure. A present for his immediate needs the poet returned, and then came a remarkable letter from Josiah Wedgwood offering in his own and his brother's name to pay Coleridge £150 a year, the amount of his promised stipend from the Chapel, if he would turn from the work of the preacher and devote himself to poetry and philosophy. No further conditions were attached to this munificent offer, which was to last for life and to be independent of everything but the wreck of the brothers' fortunes. Coleridge was staying with William Hazlitt, at the house of the latter's father near Shrewsbury, when the letter from Josiah Wedgwood was received, and the essayist has set down the story in one of his papers. The poet accepted the offer, a very fortunate one, considering the ever-changing nature of his faith, and Unitarianism found some other advocate. About the same time came an invitation from the *Morning Post*, which would have brought in another fifty pounds a year, so that, had Coleridge been able to take the fullest advantage of his opportunities, financial anxieties might have come to an end. Doubtless his good fortune inspired him to some fine efforts in 1798, but he was nervous and hyper-sensitive, his quarrel with Charles Lloyd had affected his spirits, he retired to a Devonshire farm-house to indulge in seclusion and opium and write the fragmentary "Kubla Khan." Through Charles Lloyd came a misunderstanding, happily brief, with Charles Lamb. Other happenings in 1798 were the birth of a second son, the short-lived Berkeley Coleridge; the publication, anonymously, of *Lyrical Ballads with a few other Poems*, joint effort of Wordsworth and Coleridge; and the trip with William and Mary Wordsworth and a friend from Stowey (John Chester by name) to Germany, a journey described in part by Coleridge in *Satyrane's Letters*.

Coleridge left the Wordsworths after a brief stay, and went to Ratzburg with Chester, while the brother and sister went to Goslar. From Ratzburg, Coleridge went to Göttingen, where he matriculated and collected material for a *Life of Lessing*. He seems to have worked hard in Germany, where his taste for abstruse metaphysical speculation was greatly strengthened.

Before he left Göttingen for London, he had learned the sad news of the death of his youngest child, and with the return to the metropolis, we come to another chapter in the poet's life. It will be seen that the generosity of the brothers Wedgwood had stimulated him to an increased effort, though at the moment when he might have pulled himself together and was honestly trying to do so, the opium habit began to hold him. The current of his life could not run smoothly; he at least was "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." The best that can be said is that the visit to Germany, and the brief period of honest study, did much to develop the poet's mind, opening to it unknown fields of German thought, and filling him with dreams of great works that were to unite German and British philosophers. Needless to say that, though mountains were expected to arise, little more than a molehill was forthcoming.

CHAPTER III

IN THE LAKE COUNTRY AND AT MALTA

A reconciliation between Southey and Coleridge marked the return of the latter to Stowey, where Mr. and Mrs. Southey came on a visit of some weeks. Following this Coleridge took his wife to Ottery St. Mary and joined the family circle for a month. In October he stayed with the Wordsworths at Sockburn-on-Tees, in the house of Mrs. Wordsworth's parents, and was with John and William Wordsworth when they lighted on the old inn that was to become Dove Cottage, the home of William Wordsworth during the period of his most fruitful labours, and in these latter days a centre of pilgrimage. By the end of the year Coleridge was in London again, living at 21 Buckingham Street in the Strand, and writing for the *Morning Post*. The association was a lengthy one, but it was not always pleasant, and it gave rise to controversy during the poet's life and when he was dead. Coleridge said in after years that Stuart had offered him a partnership and that he had declined it on the ground that any income in excess of five pounds a week was an evil. Coleridge may have said this, and doubtless believed what he said; we have seen that he was quite unable to deal authoritatively with financial matters. It is fair to say that the poet had few if any of the qualities that are demanded for daily journalism, in which a man must be safe and reliable. If he be brilliant, so much the better for those who employ him, but brilliance is not to be compared with punctuality in a newspaper office. Coleridge declared that he "wasted the prime and manhood of his intellect" on the *Morning Post* and the *Courier*; but latter-day judgment, while acknowledging the high quality of some of his journalistic work, cannot accept the statement, which is yet another example of poetic licence. Modern Fleet Street does not treat erratic contributors as patiently or liberally as Stuart treated Coleridge; the rapid march of events and the stress of competition alike forbid.

When he gave up his regular work on the papers he stayed for some weeks with Lamb at Pentonville, then went to Stowey, and from there to Dove Cottage. The translation from Schiller, on which he had been engaged, was now finished. From Dove Cottage he moved to Greta Hall, near Keswick, a semi-detached house some twelve miles or so from the Wordsworths. His landlord, who lived next door, was the possessor of a good library. Neighbours called upon the new-comer and offered hospitality, for his work had already attracted some attention. "Christabel" was finished, but when the two volumes of *Lyrical Ballads* were published in January 1801, Coleridge had not fulfilled his promise in regard to them. He was busy promising volumes, still unwritten, to publishers, he was anticipating his allowance from the Wedgwoods, and nursing an attack of rheumatic fever. With the road clear before him, with a certain market for his work, he was paying tribute to "the thief of time." If at length he wrote, his writing took the form of long and brilliant letters to private friends. For relief from physical pain he was indulging in opium. The year 1801 is full of complaints and of direct or indirect appeals for money. In April 1802 came the famous "Ode to Dejection"; if space permitted it should be quoted here, for, in a couple of hundred lines, Coleridge has penned a picture of his own mental state that none can pass by with indifference, or without compassion. Not only were there monetary worries and the trouble of a mind diseased at this early period of the poet's uneasy life; there was also domestic unhappiness. The breach between the poet and his wife, already of long standing, was now serious, and he sought solace from his troubles not at Greta Hall but at Grasmere; his harmless devotion to Dorothy Wordsworth giving offence, not unnaturally, to his wife. The following year was uneventful. Coleridge was intensely unhappy at Keswick, though he had the pleasure of a visit from Charles and Mary Lamb in August. Later, he went on a tour with his patrons, the Wedgwoods, and stayed with them for a time in their country house, sending a few papers to the patient Stuart the while. Thomas Wedgwood was inclined to trifle with drugs, so he was at best a dangerous companion for Coleridge.

In 1803, when bad health was the chief source of trouble, a volume of the earlier poems was reprinted with the editorial aid of Lamb. In 1804, Coleridge joined William and Mary Wordsworth on their Scottish tour, but did not remain with them for long. He left them

for a solitary walking tour in the Highlands, apparently seeking in vain to tire himself so completely that drugs should cease to be a necessity. There is unfortunately no reason to believe that the device was successful. By mid-September he was back at Greta Hall, where Robert Southey and his wife were now installed. Southey, methodical, hard-working and temperate, was not likely to side with his brother of the pen in the controversies that made the household unhappy. Further residence in that house, the home that had so many outside attractions, was becoming impossible, and Coleridge started for the south, only to fall ill at Dove Cottage, where he stopped on the way. Recovered, he went for a while to London, thence to the Beaumonts' place at Dunmow in Essex. In town again, he sat for his portrait to Northcote, one that seems to present an accurate picture enough of his strength and weakness, "the heaven-eyes and flabby irresoluteness of mien." In April left England for Malta armed with letters to the Civil Commissioner, Vice-Admiral Ball, and, *mirabile dictu*, a pocket full of money. He had £100 lent by his patient and admiring friend William Wordsworth, whose position had improved by the return of the money borrowed from his father, in years long past, by the head of the Lonsdale family, and he had prevailed upon his conscience to accept a gift of £100 from Sir George Beaumont. His fellow-passengers on board the *Speedwell* were but two, one of them the "unconscionably fat woman who would have wanted elbow-room on Salisbury Plain." Mrs. Coleridge remained at Greta Hall in the company of her sister and brother-in-law, dependent for her support upon the continued charity of the Wedgwoods, but it may be noticed that her husband corresponded with her while he was abroad. When the ill-matched pair were not under the same roof they could be good friends.

The years so briefly summarised here show Coleridge at his best as a poet and at his worst as a man, sometimes kindled by the fire of genius, sometimes so degraded that he is dangerously near the ranks of the begging-letter writer. He is only saved from the contempt of his critics because he was at least sincere in his belief that the lack of pence alone stood between him and the mental tranquillity that would enable him to enrich the world with a masterpiece.

There is a passage in Lucretius, in which the poet speaks of the wealthy senator, no longer able to endure the turmoil of the capital, galloping away as hard as his chariot can carry him to his country villa, only to find that change cannot cure his unrest, and to come thundering back to Rome. It is of himself that he is tired, and from himself there is no escape. So it has been with men of uneven mind for all time, so it was with Coleridge, so it will ever be with those to whom the secret of rational living is "a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed."

For rather more than two years he left England behind him, but his letters, or those that remain to us, would suggest that he was no happier out of England than he was at home. At first the change stimulated his sick mind, he enjoyed his stay in Gibraltar, even while he complained that the lack of exercise on board affected his health and spirits. At Valetta, he became first the guest and then the private secretary of the Civil Commissioner, in whose service he describes himself rather complacently as "a sort of diplomatic understrapper." In August he left Malta for Sicily, to draw up a report of the island's possibilities. Sir Alexander Ball had a firm belief that Sicily should be taken over by Great Britain to keep it from falling into Napoleon's hands. Nothing came of the proposal, and by the beginning of the winter Coleridge was back in Malta, to find himself formally installed as the Commissioner's private secretary. The Public Secretary of Malta died soon afterward, and, while his successor was absent from the island, Coleridge was appointed to the temporary charge of the department at a salary of £600, no bad allowance for the man who could assure his friends that he had refused to accept a share in the *Morning Post* because he thought that £250 per annum was enough for anybody, the man whose wife and children were being supported in his absence from England by the charity of friends. But the work at Malta was regular, and demanded constant attention; there was no leisure for dreaming of what was to be accomplished some day, so the position was bound to prove irksome to Coleridge, who was soon full of bitter complaints. The official salary attaching to the post was £1200 per annum; Coleridge, as a temporary substitute for the

gentleman appointed, a Mr. Chapman, was paid half, and this inequality of reward provided ground for a considerable grievance. But the real trouble lay more in the work than in the pay, for at the end of April we find him greatly distressed by the news that Mr. Chapman could not arrive before July. Even that month brought no Secretary; he did not reach Malta until September, and then Coleridge went in company with a friend to Rome and Naples. Of his stay in Italy his own accounts are vague and unsatisfactory, but he claims to have obtained a better knowledge of the Fine Arts in three months spent at Rome than he could have gained in his own country in twenty years. Doubtless his health was bad; the Roman winter in 1805-6 was not as healthy as it is to-day; it may be, too, that the poet was particularly susceptible to low fever and ague, and that he cured his attacks, or sought to cure them, with the aid of drugs. He reached London in the middle of August 1806, and described his forlorn state in a letter written long after to Josiah Wedgwood, whose brother Thomas had died in the previous year. He said he had reached England, "ill, penniless, and worse than homeless." That he was ill is undoubted; that he was homeless is a figure of speech that will pass, though it should be remembered that Greta Hall was still open to him; but inasmuch as he had been the Civil Commissioner's private secretary, had earned over four hundred pounds as Public Secretary, and had gone to Italy at the expense of his travelling companion, the financial straits are more than ever inexplicable and unsatisfactory. Stuart was still willing and anxious to publish and pay for his erratic contributor's work; travel had increased its value. There can be no doubt but that Coleridge's will-power and self-respect were both at the lowest ebb at this period, all had gone save the love of friends and the admiration of those with whom he came in contact. He could still hold an audience silent, still prove to his immediate circle that his intellect was of the keenest and highest order. But the world, which demands from all poor men a definite expression of their rights to live, was far too strong for him, nor could any of the chances that came his way, and they were many, give to his strange character the strength it needed. He seemed to have inherited the curse of Cain—"a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be on the earth." So with a sick mind and an ailing body he cast about once more for the means to live in some position which should meet his own undefined requirements.

CHAPTER IV

TROUBLED YEARS

For a while Coleridge stayed with the Lambs, to whom his company was ever welcome, and then took up work in the office of the *Courier*, where he found a room. By the end of September he was at Greta Hall, where his relations with his wife, doubtless made more difficult by the undiplomatic but strenuous and honest Southey, must have gone from bad to worse, for by December the two had decided to separate, Coleridge being allowed to take the boys, Hartley and Derwent, on the understanding that they spent their holidays with their mother. He passed Christmas at Coleorton, lent by Sir George Beaumont to the Wordsworths, and it may be that the relief of the proposed separation accounted for better spirits, better health, and inclination to work. He was still far from well, no day seems to have passed without bringing some hours of pain and unrest, but there was some change, and it was for the better. Wordsworth's dedication of *The Prelude* may have given him a much-needed stimulus. In the early summer of 1807, Coleridge joined his wife for a time at Nether Stowey, where kindly Thomas Poole managed to patch up the differences between husband and wife, and brought Coleridge and Josiah Wedgwood together again. [Pg 42] The poet had refused to answer his patron's letters or to supply promised material for a life of Thomas Wedgwood. In his letter to Josiah Wedgwood he declared that the contribution to the story of Thomas Wedgwood's life had been detained at Malta together with "many important papers," and that he had several works on the eve of publication. The measure of foundation upon which these statements stood was hardly sufficient to support them even in the pages of a letter to a fairly credulous patron. Soon the "penniless and friendless" man was to find another supporter, Thomas de Quincey, who, after meeting the poet and spending one evening in his company, supplied him anonymously, through Cottle the publisher, with a loan of three hundred pounds, without any conditions, in order that his financial troubles might be ended.

Here we have another proof of the extraordinary personal magnetism of Coleridge. However badly he might behave, his friends forgave him and continued to love him, strangers helped to smooth the rough road over which his follies drew him—all in vain. Coleridge accepted the gift from an unknown sympathiser without compunction—he was quite reconciled to doles—merely remarking that he hoped in twelve months to ask the name of his benefactor in order to show him the results of his gift. Towards the end of an unsatisfactory year, Coleridge returned to his room and his work in the office of the *Courier*, and set himself to prepare some long-promised lectures to be delivered at the Royal Institution. The first were heard in February 1808, and others followed in the spring; [Pg 43] they seem to have attracted considerable attention and to have been representative of the lecturer's considerable gifts. This work over, he went to stay at Bury St. Edmunds with his friend Mrs. Clarkson, whose influence was wholly good, and helped in no small measure to restore his health and peace of mind. From there he went to visit the Wordsworths at Allan Bank, and the improvement in health was maintained. He was now separated from Mrs. Coleridge; they met as friends, united to some extent by a genuine interest in their children's welfare. The year 1809 saw the birth of a paper called *The Friend*, described as "a Literary, Moral, and Political Weekly Paper, excluding Personal and Party Politics and Events of the Day. Conducted by S. T. Coleridge of Grasmere, Westmorland." This was another ill-planned venture, foredoomed to failure from the start. It contrived to appear at regular intervals on twenty-seven occasions, and considering the enormous difficulties associated with its production, this was a remarkable achievement enough. Needless to say helpers came forward with hard work and advances of money. Wordsworth wrote much for the columns of his friend's venture, but success and Coleridge never could run in double harness.

By March 1810, after involving in endless trouble all who helped the editor, *The Friend* was numbered among the things that had been, and until October the poet lingered on in the Lake Country, apparently at his wits' ends once more. He took his latest failure very much to heart.

[Pg 44] In October Coleridge accepted at short notice an invitation from

Basil Montague, who was passing to London through Keswick, to stay with him in Soho, and this unfortunate journey led to a break in the very amicable relations that had existed so long between Coleridge and Wordsworth, and had been a source of great comfort to the less fortunate man. The author of *The Prelude* warned Montague that his friend's habits were not satisfactory, and that he had but little hope of their permanent improvement, and Montague, translating Wordsworth's tempered note of advice into harshest terms, gave Coleridge his own crude version of it. The breach was not mended for two years, and even then the marks of it made the old happy relations between two great poets, who were intellectually brothers, though morally as far as the poles asunder, impossible. Stricken to the heart, Coleridge left Frith Street at once and went to Hammersmith on what was practically a six years' visit to some Bristol friends, the Morgans, who had settled in the western suburb. He had the Lambs to turn to as well, and in their company met Henry Crabb Robinson, to whose voluminous diary students of the poet are so deeply indebted. He completely ignored his relatives and friends in the Lake Country, though their anxiety about him was unfeigned. In 1811 he worked on the *Courier* until the autumn, when he turned again to the lecture platform, which he could always adorn, for it was possible for Coleridge to speak without notes on almost any subject and to treat it luminously. These lectures, delivered in the rooms of the London Philosophical Society [Pg 45] in Crane Court, Fetter Lane, were eminently successful, taking into consideration the conditions of their delivery. They were devoted to examination and criticism of the work of Shakespeare, Milton, and living poets, a study that Coleridge had made his own. The spring of 1812 was at hand before the series was completed, and at its conclusion the poet, who had delighted some of the sanest critics in London, set out for Greta Hall. While he was there—it was destined to be his last visit to the Lake Country—he was on the best of terms with his wife, but kept away from the Wordsworths because William had refused to apologise. It required the persistent efforts of Crabb Robinson to bring the two men together in May of 1812. One Brown, printer of *The Friend*, had left Penrith owing Coleridge money, so the poet went to his office to investigate the matter, and remained in Penrith for a month, without communicating with any of his anxious friends! Then he returned to the Morgans, who had left Hammersmith for the neighbourhood of Oxford Street, and issued a prospectus for a series of lectures designed to deal with the drama. He delivered about half a dozen, and arranged for a winter series to be given at the Surrey Institution. It was a period of renewed literary activity; he had re-written his play *Osorio*, now called *Remorse*, and it had been accepted for Drury Lane; he was working again for Stuart. The winter lectures opened badly and closed brilliantly; the poet was happy in having sympathetic audiences. Then came rehearsals of *Remorse*, which proved remarkably tedious to the gifted author, who for once in his life found a substantial [Pg 46] reward for his work. *Remorse* appealed sufficiently to the patrons of Drury Lane to yield over four hundred pounds to Coleridge in acting and publishing rights. The money came at an opportune moment, for Josiah Wedgwood had reduced his pension to the poet by one half. He has been very freely blamed for this, but who can say that Coleridge had kept to his promise to devote himself to poetry and philosophy or that he had justified to any reasonable extent the hopes that prompted the generous gift? Naturally, he resented the reduction of his allowance, but it did not stir him to any further effort. On the proceeds of his play he would seem to have lived in comparative idleness until the autumn of the year, when, finding the financial strain no longer bearable, he set out in October for Bristol, to deliver an extended series of lectures. The summer had been spent in formulating good resolutions and talking of the books he proposed to write as soon as his mind was sufficiently tranquil and he had no more worries. On the whole, the Bristol lectures were a great success. It may be said with all respect that Coleridge was always lecturing; even in private life, he had succeeded in keeping the brilliant Madame de Stäel a contented listener by the hour, and it was quite an easy matter for him to stand on a platform and discuss any matter in which he was interested, in a fashion safe to hold an educated audience. There is evidence that while Coleridge was at Bristol doing good work in a desultory fashion he was indulging immoderately in opium. Cottle, his old publisher, [Pg 47] remonstrated with him, and some effort was made to raise the money to put him in a doctor's home; but Southey, who was

approached, opposed the suggestion firmly and, with a certain brutal frankness that is not hard to condone, declared that nothing but a return to Greta Hall and hard, regular work, would minister effectively to his brother-in-law's complaint. This of course availed to keep Coleridge from the Lake Country, and still further to embitter his relations with the family at Keswick.

In September 1814 he joined the Morgans in a cottage at Ashley, on the Bath Road, and planned the creation of some literary monuments, that when they came to be completed were of comparatively small account. He wrote some papers for the *Courier*, and towards the end of the year went with the Morgans to Calne in Wiltshire. There he wrote begging-letters, visited the leading representatives of the county and enjoyed the entertainment he received, ignored letters from his family, and wasted his great gifts by devoting them to consideration of local questions of small importance. By the kindness of friends, Hartley had been sent to Oxford, so doubtless his father thought he had done well for one of his family.

The year 1815 passed, finding him more concerned with promises than with the performance of work, but in March 1816 he returned to town with the MS. of a new play—*Zapolya*. He stayed for a while with his faithful friends, Charles and Mary Lamb, and then took the strongest and wisest decision of his life by putting himself in the hands of Mr. Gillman of Highgate, with whom his life was so closely associated down to the end. He took this step, after much self-searching, and on the advice of a physician, Dr. Adams of Hatton Garden, to whom he told frankly and fully the story of his case. A few days after his arrival at Highgate the "Christabel," "Kubla Khan," and "Pains of Sleep" were published by John Murray, to whom Coleridge appears to have been introduced by Lord Byron. Murray also accepted *Zapolya*, but parted with it to another publisher.

In the summer of 1816, Coleridge took a holiday at Muddiford, near Christchurch in Hampshire. Back in Highgate, he projected more work, and being in better health, carried on brisk quarrels with publishers. Under Gillman's care he was becoming more temperate, but his system was suffering from lack of its accustomed stimulant. By the spring of 1817, the *Metropolitan Encyclopædia* was projected, and Coleridge was to be a liberal contributor as well as assistant editor in return for £500 a year, but he wanted so much down on account that the publishers, who probably knew their man, broke off negotiations, and Coleridge wrote nothing but his well-known paper, "Preliminary Treatise on Method," for which he received sixty guineas. In March 1817, the publication of the *Biographia Literaria*, a glorified scrap-book, full of profound thoughts that dazzled many a thinking man, led to bitter criticism in the *Edinburgh* and *Blackwood's*. The philosophical prose of Coleridge is of importance, but no attempt will be made to deal with it here, in a sketch that has no other aim than to present a great figure in our literary history to those who need such an introduction. The *Biographia Literaria* and the *Æsthetical Essays* have been published as recently as 1907 by the Oxford University Press. They supply a complete reprint of the 1817 edition, and have been edited with a masterly introduction by Mr. J. Shawcross.

In this year (1817) Coleridge renewed his work in the *Courier* and upheld Southey's reputation in connection with the pirated publication of that poet's twenty-five-year-old indiscretion, "Wat Tyler." This was generous vindication of a severe critic. In the same year he started his stimulating friendship with Joseph Henry Green, philosopher and surgeon. In the autumn he again sought the sea, going this time to Littlehampton in Sussex, where he met the Rev. H. F. Cary, translator of *Dante*, and Charles Augustus Tulk, afterwards member for Sudbury. It is to the efforts of Coleridge that Mr. Cary owed the first acceptance of his remarkable work. *Zapolya* sold well towards the close of this year, and the sale helped to stimulate the author. It would seem that residence at Highgate was doing something at last to build up the poet's shattered nervous system, that the bonds of opium were being loosened, that self-respect was coming, however late, into his life. Lectures on Shakespeare and Poetical Literature delivered at Flower-de-Luce Court in Fetter Lane occupied the opening months of the new year, and while engaged on these addresses, Coleridge made a new and valued friend, Thomas Allsop, with whom he maintained for several

years an important correspondence. A further course of lectures was delivered in the last weeks of 1818 and for some months in the following year, but although they were doubtless remarkably good, there was no money in them. The year 1819 was a disastrous one financially. Not only was little profit forthcoming from work, but, to make matters worse, Fenner, the poet's publisher, became bankrupt, and the unfortunate Coleridge was compelled to buy back his own books and copyrights, at least he wrote to that effect to Allsop, though one cannot take all these statements *au pied de la lettre*. In 1820, fortune had still more blows in store. Hartley Coleridge, who to his father's great delight had gained a Fellowship at Oriel, was deprived of it on account of his intemperance, nor could all the influence of friends or of the sorely stricken parent avail to move the Provost of Oriel to reconsider his judgment, though a sum of £300 was paid to Hartley by way of compensation later in the year. The career of Hartley Coleridge, the "little Hartley," beloved of the Lakemen, who, it will be remembered, preferred both his verse and his company to those of the self-centred Wordsworth, is no less sad than that of his father, and was far less brilliant. He inherited all the curses that made the career of Samuel Taylor Coleridge so disastrous, he was constitutionally unable to settle down to hard work, he was weak, and prone to give way to temptation on the least provocation. A great part of his life was passed in the Lake Country, where William and Mary and Dorothy Wordsworth were his staunch friends, loving him perhaps as much for his father's sake as for his own. He died shortly before William Wordsworth, and the graves of the two men, so remote from each other in all things save affection, may be seen side by side in Keswick churchyard. Coleridge was soon reconciled to his erring son, but the blow was the more severe because he could see that he was the father of the lad's faults and failings.

In 1821 we find him turning to Allsop for pecuniary aid; self-respect must be laid aside in the face of financial straits. The excuse is the old one that age cannot wither nor custom stale. He is in sore distress, reduced to writing for Blackwood (who had been to Highgate bearing the olive branch, nearly two years before). He is even writing sermons for illiterate clergymen, he has four books well-nigh ready for press, he wishes to bring about a revolution in the world of French and English metaphysics through the medium of a work of far-reaching importance, still, of course, to be written. What remains, then, at a time when he is being pressed for money for the necessities of life, but an appeal to a few admirers who "think respectfully" of his gifts to subscribe an annuity of about £200 a year for three or four years? Nearly £100 has been promised by young friends whom he is engaged in teaching. Perhaps Allsop will suggest how, without loss of dignity, the appeal may be circulated in the proper quarters. Those of us who admire the work with which Coleridge has enriched his country may be pardoned if they regret the fact that this appeal ever saw the light. It had not even the negative virtue of success. The much-maligned Blackwood came to the rescue with an advance on account of work, and with the amount prepaid Coleridge went to Ramsgate for two months with the Gillmans, where he met Cowden Clarke, and derived benefit from the sea air and ample exercise.

The next plan that came to the fertile brain was an extension of the informal class in philosophy that he held at Gillman's, and something, but not much, was done in this direction. A long visit from Mrs. Coleridge and their daughter Sara marked the comparatively cheerful close of the year 1822. Henry Nelson Coleridge, the poet's nephew, son of Colonel James Coleridge and afterwards Sara's husband, was of the party; his *Table Talk*, in which Coleridge shows something of his conversational quality, may still be read with interest. These visits and the poet's fast-widening social sphere suggest that the opium habit was being conquered at last, that the closing years of a strangely troubled life were bringing with them some measure of tranquillity. There is yet another indication of improvement; the fire of poetic inspiration flared up for a little while in the fall of 1823, and "Youth and Age," was the result. *Aids to Reflection* was in the making in these days too, though it was not given to the world until the early summer of 1825, and then in a very slovenly form, which did little or nothing to diminish its value to thinking men and women. While the reception was a mixed one, there was a fairly substantial reward. The Royal Society of Literature gave him an Associateship carrying with it the welcome

annuity of 100 guineas; there was balm in Gilead at last. In return for the honour, the poet read a paper on the "Prometheus of Æschylus" before the R.S.L. (May 1825). In addition to some definite relief from financial stress, Coleridge was entering upon a mental phase of infinite comfort to his remaining years. The transcendentalist became suddenly convinced of the efficacy of prayer, of the existence of a personal God, and of other tenets peculiar to Christianity. We cannot indicate the gradual processes by which the brilliant mind reached harbour in the last days. It may be that the futility of his own struggles was becoming apparent, that his reasoning faculties, strengthened by relief from drugs, reverted to the faith of earlier times at Ottery St. Mary when, a little boy with the page of his life fair and unstained, he listened to the teachings of his father, a man of godly ways and simple belief. It may have been the final sense of defeat in the long struggle to realise ambitions, to justify the hopes of friends, and to silence those whose doubts were openly expressed. Whatever the cause, the result was eminently satisfactory; the last years saw the poet baffled and beaten by the world, but for once strong in failure, full of a conviction that there lay beyond the grave that which should atone for unsuccess. There is more dignity and less querulousness in the years that followed publication of *Aids to Reflection* than in almost any of those that had passed since Coleridge left Cambridge; and for this spell of comparative tranquillity his latter-day admirers must needs be grateful.

There would be interesting matter for speculation, if we had any data to assist us, how far the late-found faith of Coleridge enabled him to atone to his conscience for what seem to us the least reputable incidents of his career, and many remain to be explained away. He was too shrewd a critic, too sound a judge of life and character, to have overlooked his own failings, above all he must have been haunted by fear of his son Hartley's future and known that his own lack of self-discipline had, in all human probability, set yet another soul wandering along the paths of trouble. Perhaps we should be careful to remember, in considering the life of Coleridge, that all his faults were open to the eye. His friends discussed them with the greatest freedom and even set them down in cold print. History has turned a far more careful eye to the blemishes in a strange character than to the virtues that must have been present by their side. The worst foes of Coleridge have never denied the extraordinary influence he spread around him, or doubted that it was for good. They bear witness to the intense theoretical devotion to unattainable ideals, the respect for virtue, even in hours of backsliding, the belief in his own ability ultimately to overcome the faults that beset him and to rebuild the shattered fabric of personal honour. He was ever fighting against his own little company of devils, for ever being worsted, and yet it would be wrong to say that he abandoned the struggle for long. Doubtless, when he looked closely into his own past, he was less conscious of his faults than were his biographers; by him they were regarded as the outcome of forces he could not control. Had he pleaded his own case at the bar of public opinion, and some of his utterances come very near to constitute a plea, he could doubtless have done so with sincerity and conviction. He was at least nearer to the springs of action than were those who judged him by normal standards, forgetting that whether for good or for evil the man of genius is a law to himself, and that genius is at once a disease and a misfortune, which no sane man need covet. Certainly if Coleridge could forgive himself, we of another generation, who have had nothing but the fine fruits of his intellect for our portion, who bear no share of the burden of his weakness, are not called upon to judge him harshly, and only the fact that his life is one long record of faults and failings excuses any reference to them in a brief biography.

The tragedy of the life we have watched for a moment at Highgate now loses something of its intensity. It gains a tranquillity we have learned to associate with evening twilight. The sudden recovery of faith calls for more than a passing word; it must have gladdened the heart not only of Coleridge, but of many of the devout admirers who have succeeded him. The thoughtful readers of our own generation can hardly turn to the life or works of Coleridge to-day without feelings of infinite pity for a man in whom the body and the spirit waged such long and uneven combat. We may remember, too, that his own generation had no perspective by which to judge him; it was unaware of his greatness, and ignored or misjudged him as it

ignored Wordsworth and Elia until they had passed beyond the reach of praise or censure. Had it recognised the presence of a great force there might have been more happiness for the author of *Aids to Reflection*. But we can see, or think we see, that though help came to him in no small measure, there was little understanding save by the few, and in the long run the assistance he received was futile. Like every man born of woman, Coleridge had to seek and find his own salvation; it was his own effort that triumphed in the end.

To the life-long list of disappointments another was added in 1827, when the post of Paymaster of the Gentlemen Pensioners, a sinecure long since abolished, became vacant by the death of William Gifford. A big effort was made by Hookham Frere to obtain this office for Coleridge, but it was not to be. The industrious, steady, resolute Wordsworth had his sinecure, and it seems a little hard, if such things were to exist, that poor Coleridge, whose necessities were not inconsiderable and whose means of satisfying them were so scanty, should have failed to gain one. Happily he still had his pension of one hundred guineas from the Royal Society of Literature, and in 1828 an edition of three hundred copies of his poems was published in three volumes and sold out. William Pickering of London was the publisher, and the preface, with a few unimportant alterations, is a reprint of the one attached to the edition of 1803, published by Longman and Rees, which in its turn was taken from the edition of 1797. Another edition with some added verses was published in 1829. When the volumes of the 1828 edition had been passed for press, Coleridge joined William Wordsworth and his favourite child, Dora, who married Mr. Quillinan and predeceased her father, and the three went to Belgium and Germany. The journey lasted six weeks, and at Bonn the travellers met some of the leading writers of Germany, including Schlegel and Niebuhr. The German visit is recorded by Thomas Colley Grattan, the author of *Beaten Paths*, and by Julian Young, son of Charles Mayne Young, the actor. Although the warmth of attachment between Wordsworth and Coleridge had undoubtedly suffered since the days when the former wrote his ill-advised letter to Basil Montague, nearly twenty years before, the admiration of the one poet for the other was quite unfeigned. Wordsworth's delight in a great intellect had never faltered; he could always distinguish between a man's gifts and weaknesses, admiring the one while he condemned or regretted the other. The journey refreshed Coleridge in body and mind. He was in high spirits, and the point of his pen was still very keen; witness his lines to Cologne, written when he and his fellow-travellers had passed through that malodorous city in July:

"In Koln, a town of monks and bones
And pavements fang'd with murderous stones,
And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches;
I counted two and seventy stenches,
All well defined, and several stinks!
Ye Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and sinks,
The river Rhine, it is well known
Doth wash your city of Cologne;
But tell me, Nymphs! what power divine
Shall henceforth wash the river Rhine?"

These lines are worth quoting merely as a definite indication of the change in spirits that had come over the poet. Doubtless, for all the angry de Quincey has written to the contrary, Coleridge was in a comparatively healthy condition both mentally and physically in these closing years, nor could he have made the favourable impression upon the *illuminati* of Bonn had he been still addicted to excess of opium. An easier mind prompted him to take further holiday during the year, for we have a record of a week with Charles and Mary Lamb, who were then at Enfield Chase, and a month at Ramsgate towards the beginning of the winter. In the following year his well-beloved daughter Sara married her cousin Henry Nelson Coleridge, who, in the spring of 1830, resumed the *Table Talk* records that do so much to show us the extent, variety, and penetration of the poet's comments upon men and things. In this year Coleridge published, through the London firm of Hurst, Chance & Co., his remarkable essay "On the Constitution of the Church and State, according to the idea of each," a publication said to have been the foundation of the famous Oxford Movement.

This year saw the death of George IV, and of the pensions of the Associates of the Royal Literary Society. King William IV pleaded that his very reduced income made it impossible for him to continue the grants of his predecessor, but a strong private representation to Lord Brougham led to the offer of a private grant of £200 to Coleridge, who declined to receive it. Hookham Frere undertook to pay the pension annually as long as Coleridge lived, and the Treasury compounded with King William's conscience by paying a sum of £300 in settlement of further liabilities.

It is well that there were friends at hand in these latter days, for the star of Coleridge had set; he was to publish nothing more. His mind retained its pristine vigour, but his body was failing fast. Wordsworth, Lamb, Crabb Robinson, Walter Savage Landor, Harriet Martineau, Emerson and Poole were among the visitors to Highgate, where the poet, now seldom able to leave the house, waited with patience and resignation for the hour to come when "the dust returns to earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it." He rallied sufficiently to attend the baptism of his granddaughter Edith, and in 1833 he went to the meeting of the British Association at Cambridge, the return to his old haunts being the occasion of great emotion. Too weak to rise betimes, he received old friend and new in his bedchamber. Then he returned to Highgate, never again to leave the Gillmans' hospitable house. In May 1834 his old and faithful comrade Thomas Poole, the man our memory loves to dwell upon, visited him, and Coleridge remarked that all the incidents of his life were now seen by him in a clear light "reconciled and harmonised." A bad attack of weakness in the last days of July was the signal of the end. In his last hours he communicated to his pupil J. H. Green a statement of his religious philosophy, and tired by the supreme effort passed peacefully from the lesser to the greater sleep. He was buried on August 2, in the Churchyard at Highgate. He had written his own epitaph not a year before he died, and no excuse is needed for its quotation here. There are several versions, differing but slightly from each other:

"Stop, Christian Passer-by! Stop, Child of God!
And read with gentle heart. Beneath this sod
There lies a Poet: or what once was He,
O lift thy soul in prayer for S. T. C.
That He who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death.
Mercy for praise, to be forgiven for fame
He ask'd, and hoped thro' Christ. Do thou the same."

CHAPTER V

COLERIDGE AS AN OBSERVER OF NATURE

The author of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in which the observation of natural phenomena is extraordinary, was never the child of his environment in the same degree as his friends William Wordsworth and Charles Lamb, though a great part of his life was passed in the surroundings they knew best. Wordsworth is the true offspring of the Lake Country; he carried to Racedown Lodge and Alfoxton House rich memories of the sterner north, and his genius matured at Dove Cottage. Lamb was a Londoner all the days of his life; the nearer to the metropolis, the higher were his spirits, the more brilliant his pen. Take London from Lamb and the Lakeside from Wordsworth and it is difficult to say what would remain. Coleridge, on the other hand, must have expressed himself anywhere, nor does it seem likely that the quality of his utterances would have suffered from their place of birth. While he was young and vigorous he found it hard to stay for any length of time in one district, but wherever he went he seems to have felt at home. Such complaints as Wordsworth could utter at Goslar, or Lamb at Enfield, find no place that I can trace in the poems, essays, or correspondence of Coleridge. [Pg 62] He took no overwhelming delight in populous cities or in the open spaces of the country. If he sojourned at Keswick, it was to be near Wordsworth, and the only noticeable influence his work owes to the Lake Country is to be found in "Christabel." If he came to London it was to be within touch of work that was immediately remunerative. The one remaining force that could decide the question of a district's quality was proximity to a good library. His imagination, when the spirit moved him, annihilated distance and ignored immediate surroundings, his muse in its rare working hours knew no fetters of time or place. Friends were more necessary to him than either to Wordsworth or to Lamb, for these had a beloved sister for constant companion, and while Lamb, the most hospitable of men, could console himself for the absence of his friends with the aid of his folios, and a generous measure of beer, Wordsworth had the additional gift of loving wife and children. Then again Lamb worked for a great part of his life in the office of the East India Company, while Wordsworth was supremely conscious of the call of duty, and was anxious to read the lesson of the simple life to a generation given over to the unavailing pursuit of happiness. Of the three, only Coleridge was condemned to live in a condition of perennial anxiety for the future, an anxiety not a little due to his lack of capacity for steady work, the curse of a vagrant disposition, and a fatal surrender to self-indulgence of a peculiarly dangerous kind. The moods in which Coleridge could turn for relief to Nature and scenes of natural beauty were rare, and [Pg 63] consequently the utterances thus directly inspired are few and far between. He had but a passing regard for flowers and birds, no marked preference for mountain, river, or plain, no very ready response to changing seasons. In a collected edition of his poetical works, the student will find less than thirty poems that seem to be suggested by Nature.

He knew the north, the west, and the south of England, but there is nothing in his work to indicate that one was more to him than the other. His genius was subjective rather than objective, and though he was a great poet he was a still greater scholar and philosopher, with more of the fruits of deep reading in his capacious brain than Wordsworth and Lamb (each a scholar) could boast between them. To the full extent that his infirmities and overmastering vice permitted, he was a man of the world, at home in any company, able to discourse *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*, and so overflowing with ideas that he could carry on a monologue in the company of the most brilliant conversationalists and leave them well content for once to be silent. It will be seen, then, that in the case of Samuel Taylor Coleridge the question of residence, although of admitted interest, is of relatively small importance, since each might have been altered without affecting the volume, trend, or quality of his output.

Ottery St. Mary has already been described at sufficient length for the purposes of this brief essay. For all the beauty that belongs of [Pg 64] right to Devonshire it left no lasting impression upon his mind, and though he quitted the home of his family at a tender age, we might

have looked for some definite utterances, because the early years of a poet are frequently associated with very lasting impressions. Wordsworth remembered his schooldays and Dame Tyson's cottage even in old age. Christ's Hospital—by the way, does not de Quincey tell us that it should be called Christ Hospital?—was the scene of Coleridge's earliest poetic effort, and a sonnet to the autumnal moon is dated 1788, at a time when, it is generally understood, he had not returned to his mother's house. There is no direct inspiration from Nature here. He compares the appearance of the moon coming from a cloud to Hope, now brightening the eye, now hidden behind "dragon-winged Despair," and finally shining like a meteor over the "sorrow-clouded breast of Care." The lines are fluent but superficial. It may be that owing to long residence in Newgate Street with the terror of Boyer's discipline upon him the young "Grecian" had little chance to respond to such glimpses of Nature as his brief holiday rambles afforded. A year later, in some verses called "Life" he makes a passing reference to Otter's "scanty stream," and in 1790 writes some weak verses condemning the bad Devonshire roads. His "Absence," a farewell ode on quitting school for Cambridge, and "The Raven," belonging to the same year, show no influence of Nature, but in 1793, in the brave year when he was twenty-one, there are verses that show at last an awakening appreciation. The "Songs of the Pixies," the Sonnet to the River Otter, the lines "To a Beautiful Spring in a Village," and "On an Autumnal Evening" exhibit the mood of a young man to whom Nature is beginning to reveal some of the secrets of her immortal charm, but there are none of the distinctive thoughts that a Keats or a Wordsworth would have given us under the stress of similar emotion, so we may presume that neither half-remembered Ottery St. Mary, nor Christ's Hospital, nor even Jesus College, Cambridge, had served to string the poet's lyre. Out of the superabundant gift of expression and the long course of varied reading, certain emotions had proceeded, but they are never the emotions of a poet of Nature. The early verses that Coleridge contributed to the *Morning Post* include adaptations from the classics. The "Lines to a Nightingale" (1795) are inspired by Sarah Fricker, and she too comes into the far better compositions of the same year, "Lines composed while climbing the left ascent of Brackley Coomb, Somersetshire," written when Coleridge was dallying with Pantisocracy in company with Burnett and Southey. The maythorn, yew, and elm are the only trees he notices, and cuckoo the only bird. The "Æolian Harp," written in the same year, is inspired too by Sarah Fricker, and it must be remembered that Coleridge was then twenty-three, when the best and worst men are guilty of writing verse in which the inspiration felt is quite out of proportion to the thought expressed. Perhaps "Reflection on having left a Place of Retirement" strikes the pastoral and rural note most clearly. The "place of retirement" was the little cottage at Clevedon he found after marriage. The lines seem to be a record of the honeymoon. They are happy and speak of a certain resolution that had yet to be undermined:

> "Ah! quiet dell! dear cot, and mount sublime!
> I was constrained to quit you. Was it right
> While my unnumbered brethren toiled and bled,
> That I should dream away the entrusted hours
> On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart
> With feelings all too delicate for use?
>
> I therefore go, and join head, heart, and hand
> Active and firm, to fight the bloodless fight
> Of science, freedom, and the truth in Christ."

The lines, of which the above are a part, are important in so far as they show that even on his honeymoon and in the most delightful country Coleridge was not yet on intimate terms with natural objects. He writes of rose and myrtle and jasmine and "the bare bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep." He knew neither the small nor the great on terms of intimacy, and here again we have further proof that there is nothing local about his genius, and that his homes and haunts did little more than influence his health upon occasions; they never stirred his pen or turned him to seek nature knowledge. Doubtless, had he been left to spend his boyhood by the Otter's banks, he would have gathered some small lore of tree, and bird, and plant, but London, though it did much for him, left him quite ill-equipped. The Clevedon cottage where he spent his honeymoon is still to be seen by the tourist and lover of the poet,

who may well pause to wonder how Wordsworth would have sung such a peaceful and yet stimulating spot. In the February of 1796 come lines "On observing a blossom on the first of February," and this will make the most modest botanist smile, for by the first of February the winter jasmine, the Christmas rose, and the winter aconite, to name but three flowers at random, have been blossoming for some time, and so, too, has many a pleasant weed. Later in the same year the first primrose of the season tempted him to some charming lines, of which four may be quoted:

[Pg 67]

"But, tender blossom, why so pale,
Dost hear stern winter in the gale?
And didst thou tempt the ungentle sky
To catch one vernal glance and die?"

This is very pretty and naïve, but quite childish, and the lines are prefaced by a quotation from Ovid. In June 1797, at Nether Stowey, Coleridge wrote the exquisite poem, "This Lime Tree Bower my Prison." It was addressed to Charles Lamb, and on a copy of this poem, thirty-seven years later, he wrote his last words, "Charles and Mary Lamb, dear to my heart, yea, as it were, my heart." Here for once the spirit of Nature descends for a moment upon him. He sees his surroundings with what Sir Joshua would have called "a dilated eye." There are lines in it with which memory loves to dwell; they bring Coleridge nearer to some of us than many of the poems upon which his reputation stands secure:

". . . .In this bower,
This little lime tree bower, have I not marked
Much that has soothed me? Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage, and I watched
Some broad and sunny leaf and stem above
Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut tree
Was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
Through the late twilight, and though now the bat
Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,
Yet still the solitary humble bee
Sings in the bean flower!"

[Pg 68]

The recurrence of the word "and" in four consecutive lines is perhaps the most noticeable blemish here.

It is at Nether Stowey when Coleridge was five-and-twenty years old that we find the first utterance which seems to treat Nature as the theme and not merely as a subsidiary aid to the expression of certain thoughts. "Frost at Midnight," belonging to 1798, has some fine lines addressed to little Hartley:

"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."

This is full of promise, and so too is the "Conversation Poem" called "The Nightingale," written in April of that year, in which Coleridge shows the true instinct by rejecting the suggestion that the bird's notes are sad:

". . . .'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music."

[Pg 69]

If the presence of Lamb inspired the "Lime Tree Bower" music, it is undoubtedly to the happy association at Alfoxden with the Wordsworths that we owe the "Nightingale" song, though the image of his child, presumably little Berkeley, the short-lived second-born, runs sparkling through the closing lines.

Some years pass now before Coleridge responds again to Nature, this time in his magnificent "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni." This is as stately an invocation as ever the poet penned, and to the same year belongs the well-known "Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath." After this date one will look in vain to Coleridge for a direct response to Nature or for any prolonged utterance founded upon the beauty of earth, sea, or sky. The year 1802, in which this side of the poet's work seems to fail, is the date of the "Ode to Dejection," a twelvemonth before the visit to Scotland and two years before the visit to Malta and Italy. Is it unreasonable, then, to suggest that the Nature love and study that the poems of Coleridge reveal are associated only with the early years of courtship and marriage, and the first long association with the Wordsworths in and around Nether Stowey and Alfoxden? [Pg 70] We know that by the time "Kubla Khan" was written (1798) Coleridge was already beginning to surrender himself to opium, and a very few years of close devotion to this drug would have served to deprive him, not only of the spring joy of life, but of response to Nature. He was not a Nature lover at heart, and consequently there was little to be rooted out. Courtship and the birth of children kindled some light that the drug was to quench effectually, and after 1802, Coleridge turned but seldom to Nature even for pictorial imagery. His mind wandered farther and farther into fields of abstruse and difficult speculation, the poet in him mingled with the scholar, and in the later years his essays were, from the standpoint of fine thought, expressed in terse, vigorous English that lacked neither wit nor humour upon occasion, far more important than his poetry. Lamb's essays breathe the spirit of a poet; much of Coleridge's later work, whether dramatic or lyrical, is in the first place the effort of an accomplished man of letters and philosopher. This brings me back to the first statement of the chapter; Coleridge was not influenced by residence, but by the circumstances of his life, by his failure to earn sufficient money, a failure due in its turn to his besetting weakness. We cannot name any place of the poet's uneasy sojourn and say the district exercised an abiding influence upon his poetry.

Here we have material for a very painful reflection. We know how largely some of the saddest lives in literature have been soothed or brightened by close communion with what we call common things, [Pg 71] because they are within reach of all. Had Coleridge been able to take comfort in them, had he possessed, with William and Dorothy Wordsworth, the "inward eye that is the bliss of solitude," his life would have been immeasurably happier, long periods of keen distress would have been spared him. No man stands so much alone as he who, having no home-life to which he can turn for comfort, is unable to find any abiding happiness in contemplation of the life the seasons show. To make matters worse, we can see Coleridge was profoundly conscious that such a healing power existed. Surely nobody who was in Wordsworth's company, or even in Robert Southey's, could have failed to realise this. Coleridge and Southey lived together, and Southey, though he walked book in hand, tells us of the sights that delighted him on his rambles, and how on winter mornings he would take his little ones to the hill-tops "for the sake of getting the first sunshine on the mountains." But Coleridge could not grasp this gift, so keenly appreciated by the two future Poets Laureate, any more than he could grasp the opportunities extended to him on every side by men who realised at once the extent of his troubles and his gifts. To him the sources of most human consolations "were barr'd and bann'd, forbidden fare." If only for this, his harshest critic who can see his life in true perspective must respond to the appeal of the epitaph the poet wrote for himself when he saw the end of a weary pilgrimage in sight. Never did man so richly blessed with friends and well-wishers travel along a more lonely road, [Pg 72] and when we consider the conditions under which the most of his work was written, the comparatively few hours in which he was the master of his own soul, we are left with a feeling of surprise at the quantity and quality of his accomplishment. Coleridge will receive from most kindly human judges the mercy and forgiveness for which he pleads, but at the same time the fame remains, nor can the praise be withheld.

But by reason of his close association with Wordsworth, and his considerable sojourn by the Lakes and in Somersetshire, Coleridge is often considered in his relations to Nature, and a few selected poems from which free quotation has been made here, are brought forward to suggest that he too was in his turn a Nature poet. It has

been shown that such an opinion is hard to justify; it would be more fair to say that as far as the introduction of the imagery of nature is concerned, Coleridge bears the same relation to Wordsworth that Horace bears to Virgil. Horace used nature to illustrate his philosophy, to clothe or adorn his imagery dealing with matters outside the countryside; Coleridge did the same, but not so well, for he lacked the Horatian humour. The second epode of Horace explodes for all time in its closing lines the theory that Horace has the country man's love for the country. It suggests that the Augustan age had its cry of "back to the land," and that the cry was insincere. Horace turned it to good account, though doubtless the little estate among the Sabine hills near Roccagiavone and the Licenza valley that he owed to the kindness of Mæcenas was a source of infinite delight to him. But the pleasure came from the opportunity it afforded of quiet and uninterrupted work when Rome was too hot to be pleasant and all the interesting people had left the city. One can imagine that Coleridge would have looked with much the same regard upon a country-house that cost him nothing and gave complete assurance of privacy. With Virgil, as with Wordsworth, the case was different. The Mantuan loved the country as Wordsworth loved it, and, for his time, with a much more studied appreciation. Virgil and Wordsworth hold the ear and stimulate the mind when they write of rural life and scenery. Horace and Coleridge, for all their exquisite facility, fail to utter the litany to which the heart of the country lover responds. The comparison between the Mantuan peasant and the son of a slave on the one hand, and two eighteenth-century poets who had their education rounded off by the University on the other, may seem at first a little strained, but if it were possible to pursue it here we might find many points that, *mutatis mutandis*, connect Coleridge with Horace and Wordsworth with Virgil in the relation of the poets to the country and the country life. Moreover, each of the latter-day poets was indebted to patrons, as were their great prototypes, if such a word be permissible. There is something in the Bucolics and Georgics which connects Virgil with the best period of Wordsworth, if we will remember that the men saw life in a different age, under different skies, and in the light of different faiths. Even those who will not admit as much will acknowledge that Virgil and Wordsworth ring true to the country man, while neither Horace nor Coleridge, though they call the country to their aid for an illustration, or a moral or philosophical lesson, could have written:

> "O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint Agricolas!"

But it is time to turn from a general survey of Coleridge's work to a more detailed consideration of certain examples.

CHAPTER VI

COLERIDGE AS POET AND CRITIC

Before entering upon any attempt, however brief and inadequate it be, to estimate the multiform genius of Coleridge, it is well to remember that its permanent expression was, at least, three-sided. To-day he is regarded chiefly as a poet; for a dozen who know something of his poetry, there is hardly one who troubles to read his prose. The *Biographia Literaria*, for example, attracts few students; the *Table Talk* recorded by his nephew, and Thomas Allsop's *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*, passed out of fashion about the middle of the Victorian Era. His *Aids to Reflection* is only now returning to public notice after long neglect. The book enjoyed about twenty years' popularity in England and America, and then seemed to pass from the service of readers. But it is clear that quite apart from his poetry and prose, Coleridge's gifts found complete expression not only in lectures and letters, but in those casual discourses which held complete strangers entranced. He has been described as the finest conversationalist since Samuel Johnson. The printed work that bears his name falls far short of doing him justice. It suffers on the prose side from the modern lack of interest in his precise attitude towards the metaphysical speculations that meant so much to him and his times. On the side of poetry it suffers from the widening of the boundaries that then marked the confines of legitimate poetic expression, and from the unfortunate truth that the poet in him died young. Coleridge the poet employed a very limited palette, not because he had no more colours, but because their use was discountenanced by his own early training and by the canons of contemporary criticism. To estimate the tradition that went to the making of the poet, and the long road he had to follow before he could find himself, turn to his Sonnet to the Evening Star, written when he was eighteen. It opens:

"O meek attendant of Sol's setting blaze
I hail, sweet star, thy chaste efulgent glow."

And it closes:

"Her spirit in thy kindred orb, O star benign."

Though it is generally unfair to divorce lines from their context, it is permissible here, just to show what passed current as legitimate poetic expression, and we have to remember that within ten years of the writing of the sonnet, the poet in Coleridge had given place to the critic, after enriching poetry with many immortal lines. Clearly one may not hope, save in certain inspired moments, for much in the way of beauty of untrammelled form; the thought must be sought beneath the cumbrous wrapping, and modern readers have less leisure for this than was granted to Coleridge's contemporaries. The "Lines on an Autumnal Evening," written perhaps three years later than the sonnet, show a marked improvement: the poet is beginning to prove stronger than the formal limitations that beset him, but the spirit of the time is displayed through a curious incident. The poem was first printed in the little volume offered to the public in 1796, and is accompanied by an apology for printing such "intolerable stuff" as lines 57-70. At the same time he declares that he has not imitated Rogers' "Pleasure of Memory" in certain other lines (27-36), and suggests that Rogers himself had borrowed his story from "Lochleven," a poem by Michael Bruce. In a second edition Coleridge gives reasons for "reprieving his own poem from immediate oblivion," and proceeds to apologise to Rogers in terms of which the following are part: "No one can see more clearly the *littleness* and futility of imagining plagiarisms in the works of men of genius; but *nemo omnibus horis sapit*; and my mind at the time of writing that note was sick and sore with anxiety and weakened through much suffering. I have not the most distant knowledge of Mr. Rogers save as a correct and elegant poet. If any of my readers should know him personally, they would oblige me by informing him that I have expiated a sentence of unfounded detraction by an unsolicited and self-originating apology."

One can hardly resist the temptation of applying to the youthful writer of such stuff as this his own opening line of the address "To a Young Ass," written one year after the lines to the Autumnal Evening, and three years earlier than the above apology:

"Poor little foal of an oppressed race."

It is in his "Ode on the Departing Year" (1796) that Coleridge seems for the first time to discover his own full power, but the classical top-hamper accompanying it shows that the limitations upon freedom of expression are still there. The poem is preceded by a quotation from the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus, and when published in a small quarto pamphlet held dedicatory letter to Tom Poole, into which a long quotation from Statius forces unwelcome way. Capital letters, quotations, italics, notes of exclamation were ever to the fore in the early days of the nineteenth century. But 1797-8 brought some of the finest lines the poet has given us. "The Three Graves" has much that one is pleased to remember, and the lines addressed to Charles Lamb—"This Lime Tree Bower my Prison," and referred to with a quotation in a previous chapter, show keen appreciation of Nature and natural beauty. Reference has been made elsewhere in this little paper to the limited response that Coleridge shows to his surroundings, but this poem shows that he was not quite oblivious of them. One cannot help feeling that the inspiration came suddenly and unexpectedly, born of compulsory solitude and the fine June evening; the limited appeal of Nature to the poet is shown by the fact that the poem was omitted from the 1803 edition of his work, and that, in the lines near the end, "My Sarah and my friends" was substituted for "My gentle-hearted Charles," rather to Elia's annoyance.

Of the famous "Kubla Khan" fragment, written in a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire, it has been pointed out that opium was in all probability the source of inspiration. The poet had been reading a passage from *Purchas his Pilgrimage*—it runs as follows:

> "In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground within a wall wherein are fertile Meadowes, pleasant Springs, delightfull Streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the middle thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure."

Coleridge used to recite his strange fragment to Lamb, who told Wordsworth that it brought Heaven and Elysian bowers into his parlour, but added in the same letter his fear lest in the light of cold print it should appear "no better than nonsense."

There is a clear suggestion of transient force behind the lines. For example, we read in the beginning (lines 3-5):

"Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea."

And in line 18:

"A mighty fountain momently was forced."

Then in line 27 the poet harks back to an earlier image:

"Then reached the caverns measureless to man";

while earlier in line 24 he reverts to the ill-conditioned adverb of his 18th line:

"It flung up momently the sacred river."

But, as was suggested earlier, the explanation of "Kubla Khan" may be found in its last two lines:

"For he on honey dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

Next in order of composition comes "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the poem which is the most widely read of any that Coleridge wrote, though it may be doubted whether the full extent of the poet's achievement is grasped by more than a minority of those who know it. The "Ancient Mariner" has many merits; it is one of the greatest ballads in English poetry. The sheer music of the lines, the romance they enshrine, the sense they convey of a vivid description of things actually seen, have given an abridged version of the poem a place in schoolbooks without number, and will probably continue to do so for generations to come, so that "The Mariner" is the first figure of his kind to touch the youthful imagination. Wordsworth has told us how the poem came to be written, when he, his sister Dorothy, and Coleridge had left Stowey

to visit the Valley of Rocks, near Linton, on a November day in 1797. They had planned an excursion, and proposed to pay for it out of the proceeds of some poetry then to be written. In the course of the walk Coleridge discussed the poem with his two friends; he was founding it upon the dream of Mr. Cruickshank, a friend of his. [Pg 81] Wordsworth, who had been reading a book of travels dealing with a journey round Cape Horn (Shelvocke's *Voyage Round the World*), suggested the incident of the albatross and the navigation of the ship by dead men. On the same evening the work started, Wordsworth contributing a few lines—less than a dozen at most. A great deal has been written about the Wordsworth contribution, which, upon his own showing, was quite slight in substance, though it was valuable in suggestion. Shelvocke's story of the doubling of Cape Horn and the meeting with albatrosses prompted Wordsworth, and Coleridge may have derived some of his details from a book by Captain Thomas James, published in 1633, and dealing with the "intended discovery of a North-West Passage in to the South Sea." But we are less concerned with this than with the implicit logic that Coleridge has packed into his poem. His vivid imagination traced the whole course of the Ancient Mariner's journey in fashion that demands and will repay the closest observation.

For example, turn to the sixth stanza:

"Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top";

and it will be realised that here we have the natural order of the disappearance of objects seen by a vessel leaving the shore. The position stands reversed in the passage describing the Mariner's return. In the opening line of Part II we read:

"The sun now rose upon the right."

This is, because they have doubled Cape Horn.

[Pg 82] These instances of close observation of natural phenomena could be multiplied did space permit, the poem is full of them, only in the line "the furrow followed free" may he be held to have fallen into error. Yet this excellence has, after all, but a small concern with the poetic worth of the work, and it is astonishing to find that its music rang harshly in the ears of contemporary criticism, though its awesome and fantastic beauty moves the English-speaking world to this day. One lady (Mrs. Barbauld) told Coleridge that, while she liked the "Ancient Mariner," she had to find two faults. In the first place, the story was improbable, and secondly, it had no moral! Wordsworth himself had his doubts about it, and Southey somewhat obscurely called it "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity," for which quintessential criticism Charles Lamb took him to task.

Looking back upon the life and work of Coleridge, we know that his "Ancient Mariner" reaches the high-water mark of his poetic achievement in narrative verse, and that it will endure when the greater part of his writing, whether in verse or prose, has been forgotten—remembered not only on account of its beauty as a complete work of art, but on account of the irresistible music of many of the stanzas. It stands for the fruit of the supremely inspired hours of a greatly gifted man.

"Christabel," another poem that has gained Coleridge a host of admirers, is, unfortunately, incomplete. In the ponderous preface to the first edition (John Murray, 1816), Coleridge explains that he [Pg 83] wrote the first part at Nether Stowey in 1797, and the second part at Keswick three years later. "Since then his powers have been in a state of suspended animation, but he hopes to embody in verse the three parts yet to come in the course of the present year." Twelve or thirteen years later, Coleridge was still full of the thought of completion, but he omits the pious hope from the preface to the 1834 edition—he knew by then that inspiration had long been dead. Yet the failure to complete galled him through many years after the poem was laid aside. We find him writing to Allsop in 1821: "Of my poetic works, I would fain finish 'Christabel.'" In later years, when he was living with Gillman, he described the story as it was to have been told in verse, but Wordsworth told the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge that he did not know anything about the plan of completion, and does not think Coleridge had one. In his *Table Talk* Coleridge himself remarks that the presence of worries and the absence of good music kept him from completing "Christabel," which was received with marked favour by the limited public of its

day, three editions being called for in one year. He did not realise, when he spoke to his nephew, that his gifts had passed from one form of expression to another.

Hazlitt is suspect, on insufficient evidence, of having reviewed "Christabel" harshly in the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Examiner*; but the *Quarterly Review* found that its success in dealing with "witchery by daylight" is complete. It is a matter for regret that the interest taken in the "Ancient Mariner" and in fragments like "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" has been at the expense of poems like the "Ode to Dejection" and smaller pieces, gems of poetic thought, finely expressed. As time wore on, the realities of life divorced the poet's muse, now quite a minor quantity, from its union with classicism, to the great advantage of his work, and though he cannot be said to have fulfilled the promise of his best years, he wrote much that his admirers will not willingly let die. One would perhaps hesitate to call it poetry—the work he wrote between his twenty-third and twenty-seventh years was poetry in the fullest sense of the term—it is rather philosophy expressed in set forms with a measure of charm that can never be absent long from any utterance of Coleridge.

It may perhaps be suggested that the poetic genius in Coleridge needed nursing, and failed to get what it required; to a certain extent such a theory is permissible. We have to remember, in the first place, that his health was bad from youth. He was very susceptible to rheumatism; before middle age he was a martyr to gout; he could not endure extreme cold; and yet he elected to go and live at Greta Hall, in the Vale of Derwentwater, where the rain it raineth nearly every day, and strong harsh winds are the rule rather than the exception. These surroundings confirmed and strengthened the opium habit. To make matters worse, his home life was not of the kind that makes for poetry. Mrs. Coleridge was in many respects a deserving and worthy lady, but she had grave limitations. With things of the intellect she was not on any terms, however remote, and she had a weakness that is said to extend to others of her sex—she worried incessantly about trifles. Reading closely the history of the unhappy married life that involved husband and wife in so much trouble, the mistake of marrying the wrong woman may be condoned. To the overstrung "philosopher in a mist," as he describes himself in one of his earliest letters from Greta Hall, a querulous wife who found small grievances everywhere, who judged her husband's talent from the standpoint of what it brought in from the publishers, must have been a sore trial. In the same way, for the sake of justice, let us admit that the man who was always ready to undertake work that he could never be prevailed upon to begin, who was erratic, intemperate, and wholly unreliable, must have been a sore trouble to any woman who could not appreciate his gifts, and could discern nothing in the future save an increasing family and a diminishing income. But whatever the proper apportionment of praise or blame, one fact remains. At Greta Hall the fine flame of poetic inspiration burned low, and never afterwards recovered its pristine radiance. Professor Alois Brandl does not go too far when he says that at the age of thirty, that is by the year 1802, Coleridge was a broken man; and it was this failure of his health, this prolonged suffering from rheumatism and gout, which he sought so foolishly and so vainly to cure by the aid of opium, that turned him from poetry to the study of philosophy in order to find relief. He sought, as he says in that fine but mournful "Ode to Dejection,"

"By abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man."

And at this point of his life, we find him turning away from the muse, to which nearly all his lasting contribution has long been made, and venturing into a field wherein he was destined to achieve considerable success. Criticism and metaphysics occupied him in turn. The period of study was a very long one; he was forty-four years of age when his *Lay Sermons* was published, in the wake of much journalism and some desultory and miscellaneous work. Needless to say, he had many brilliant intentions that were never carried out. One of them, a book to supersede all dogmatic philosophy, was designed to fill six hundred pages with "A collection of all possible modes of true, probable, and false reasonings, with a strict analysis of their origin and operation."

But if he did not write the books—and he once declared that the mere titles of those he had projected would fill a volume—Coleridge accomplished a very considerable amount of work. Much of it must be lost. He was an omnivorous reader, and his clear mind could detect flaws in any reasoning that was not sound. He studied Berkeley, Fichte, Hartley, Hegel, Herder, Hume, Kant, Lessing, Maass, Schelling, and Spinoza, studied them with complete understanding, and luminous criticism, and could discourse upon them brilliantly. It needed a well-equipped intelligence to follow him; few could, and the majority thought he talked brilliantly but irrelevantly. We know that this was not the case, the truth being that he was too big for the most of his audience.

He passed through a very considerable number of religious phases. His earlier Pantheism gave way to Rationalism and Unitarianism, and he arrived by way of the German transcendental philosophers to his ultimate reconciliation with the doctrines of Christianity. In the years in which he lived this ultimate orthodoxy was good alike for his reputation and his circulation. His influence affected profoundly great thinkers like F. D. Maurice and John Sterling, and it may be doubted whether cheap reprints of certain of his prose writings would not find a considerable measure of success to-day, for it is impossible to deny his gift of style, his capacity to reason closely and clearly, or the intense earnestness and conviction that vitalise his message. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that his most popular work as a poet has kept him from receiving due recognition first as a critic and then as a philosopher, and that his work as a philosopher has been clouded by his unfortunate inability to rule his own life on philosophic lines.

In the order of publication, his prose works are the *Lay Sermons*, to which reference has been made; the *Sibylline Leaves* (a revised edition of his poems); the *Biographia Literaria* (full of valuable criticism badly arranged); the *Aids to Reflection* (1824); *Church and State* (1830); and two posthumous works, the *Confessions of an Enquiring Mind* (1840), and *Literary Remains*. The *Satyrane's Letters* was republished in the *Biographia Literaria*.

It is due probably to his troubled health, that he frequently incorporated the reflections of other men among his own, and accusations of plagiarism were not lacking. Among those who attacked him on this ground were Thomas de Quincey, who led the assault in *Tait's Magazine*, three months after his sometime friend was dead; Professor Ferrier, some years later; and Sir William Hamilton, this last a singularly bitter critic of little judgment. The charge against Coleridge is one that should not have been made, even though it may be sustained to the complete satisfaction of those who like to belittle great minds.

"I regard truth as a Divine ventriloquist, and care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words be audible and intelligible." In this passage Coleridge summed up an attitude that will satisfy all who can take a sane and dispassionate view of his life, and weigh its accomplishments and vicissitudes. Certain thoughts are the children of every era, and will reach more than one thinker at a time; they belong to the man who can make noblest use of them.

It is impossible to deny that for all his shortcomings Coleridge did more for his countrymen than his countrymen did for him, and harsh criticism is unbecoming the present generation, which enjoys the full benefit of his work, and has not suffered any of the disappointments that he inflicted upon his contemporaries. Let us remember, too, that he was a simple and modest man, and nowhere claims to be a distinguished poet or a great philosopher. He knew that he had more than the average mental gift, but instead of pride in his possession we find him regretting deeply his inability to justify it. Indeed, he goes further than this, for he says in one of his letters that Wordsworth taught him to recognise some of his limitations. The letter is written to Godwin when Coleridge was in his thirty-first year, and in it he says that Wordsworth, by showing him what true poetry was, made him know that he himself was no poet.

Coleridge had a very highly developed critical faculty, and exercised it brilliantly in his writings on Shakespeare. His criticisms sparkle with intelligence; terse and virile, they leave the reader regretting that they were not extended. He speaks of Polonius, "a statesman somewhat past his faculties"; of Lear as "the ample and open

playground of Nature's passions."

Whether as poet, critic, or metaphysician, Coleridge was a progressive thinker, and broke away slowly but deliberately from the fetters of form that cripple his earliest utterances; nor were the flights of his thought less remarkable than his experiments in method.

Whatever his acts, his intentions were of the highest. He sought to do good, and he placed at the service of his countrymen the best that he had to offer. One can only speculate upon the extent of the loss that his chronic ill-health inflicted upon his own and succeeding generations. His were the instincts of the schoolmaster, but of the schoolmaster who takes all his fellow-countrymen for pupils. His discourses on poetry, founded so largely upon prolonged and intimate study of Wordsworth, stand to-day one of the finest examinations of the range and proper limitation of poetic expression.

Coleridge was destined to be overshadowed in his own time, and in the critical years immediately following his death, by more powerful personalities—men whose appeal to the public was more immediate and better sustained; but much that he wrote a hundred years ago is of importance to us to-day, and modern criticism, detached, impersonal, and with a true perspective, can hardly fail to do him justice in any of the departments of his life-work.

How did he appeal to his contemporaries? Criticism was generally undiscerning and hostile, but those who came within the charmed circle were, with rare exception, delighted. The secret of his appeal passed with him; there are still some who wonder how it has come about that, the limits of ordered achievement being so marked, Coleridge stands where he does. Poet, critic, and metaphysician, in each capacity he had attracted the interest and retained the regard of a great majority of his most notable contemporaries. His inspiration came by fits and starts, but, when it did come, would find expression in felicitous phrases revealing some aspects of truth that captured the imagination. At the end of a long unhappy and often ill-spent life, he could command the unstinted admiration of such a sour-tongued old critic as Thomas Carlyle. Hear him in his *Life of Sterling*:

> "Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill in those years looking down on London and its smoke tumult like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle, attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there.... A sublime man, who alone in those dark days had saved his crown of spiritual manhood, escaping from the black materialism and revolutionary deluges with 'God, Freedom, Immortality' still his; a king of men."

And later he describes him with the true Carlyle touch as that "heavy laden, high aspiring, and surely much suffering man." Wordsworth said that Coleridge was the only wonderful man he had ever met; Nelson Coleridge said that a day spent with Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a "sabbath past expression, deep, tranquil, and serene."

Find him at the right time and in happy mood, he was capable of great feats. For example, he was invited one morning to lecture before the London Philosophical Society. He went with Gillman to the secretary to inquire the subject chosen, but the secretary was out. In the evening Coleridge and Gillman went to the Society's rooms, and heard the announcement made that Mr. Coleridge would deliver an address on "The Growth of the Individual Mind." He spoke extempore for over an hour and a half, holding a critical audience enthralled.

Joseph Henry Green, whose two posthumous volumes entitled *Spiritual Philosophy*, founded upon the teaching of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, were published in 1865, was sufficiently under the spell to devote a whole life-work to his master's teaching.

With Coleridge, the metaphysician, it is impossible to deal here. Dr. Traill summed up his teaching very concisely in the following sentences:

> "There is indeed no moral theory of life, there are no maxims of conduct, such as youth above all things craves for, in Coleridge's teaching. Apart from the intrinsic difficulties of the task to which he invites his disciples, it labours under a primary and essential disadvantage of postponing moral to intellectual liberation.

> Contrive somehow or other to attain to just ideas as to the capacities and limitations of the human consciousness, considered especially in relation to its two important and eternally distinct functions, the Reason and the Understanding: and peace of mind shall in due time be added unto you. That is in effect Coleridge's answer to the inquirer who consults him; and if the distinction between the Reason and the Understanding were as obvious as it is obscure to the average unmetaphysical mind, and of a value as assured for the purpose to which Coleridge applies it as it is uncertain, the answer would nevertheless send many a would-be disciple sorrowful away."

It is not necessary to pursue the subject. Between the reader and the metaphysician stands the poet and the critic, and for the greater part of the present and future generations these will suffice.

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The transcriber made these changes to the text to correct obvious errors:

1. p. 75, stangers --> strangers
2. p. 81, reserved --> reversed
3. p. 92, suffiee --> suffice

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