

COLERIDGE

SAMUEL

TAYLOR

COLERIDGE'S ANCIENT
MARINER AND SELECT
POEMS

Samuel Coleridge

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Mariner and Select Poems**

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PREFATORY NOTE

The text of the poems in this volume is that of J. Dykes Campbell in the Globe edition of Coleridge's poems. For the introduction I have depended also largely upon his Memoir of Coleridge, and upon the two volumes of the "Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge," edited by the poet's grandson, Mr. E.H. Coleridge. In the Notes, as will be seen, I am indebted particularly to the general editor of this series, Dr. F.H. Sykes, to Dr. Lane Cooper of Cornell University, and again to Mr. Coleridge, through whose kindness I have been able to get a reproduction of the Marshmills crayon, undoubtedly the most satisfactory portrait of the poet in existence, for the frontispiece.

H.M.B.

INTRODUCTION

I. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

I. THE BEGINNINGS

Coleridge lived in what may safely be called the most momentous period of modern history. In the year following his birth Warren Hastings was appointed first governor-general of India, where he maintained English empire during years of war with rival nations, and where he committed those acts of cruelty and tyranny which called forth the greatest eloquence of the greatest of English orators, in the famous impeachment trial at Westminster, when Coleridge was a sixteen-year-old schoolboy in London. A few years before his birth the liberal philosophy of France had found a popular voice in the writings of Rousseau, which became the gospel of revolution throughout Europe in Coleridge's youth and early manhood. "The New Héloïse" in the field of sentiment and of the relation of the sexes, "The Social Contract" in political theory, and "Émile" in matters of education, were books whose influence upon Coleridge's generation it would be hard to estimate. When Coleridge was four years old the English colonies in America declared their independence and founded a new nation upon the natural rights of man,—a nation that has grown to be the mightiest and most beneficent on the globe. Coleridge was seventeen when the French Revolution broke out; he was forty-three when Napoleon was sent to St. Helena. He saw the whole career of the greatest political upheaval and of the greatest military genius of the modern world. Fox, Pitt, and Burke,—the greatest Liberal orator, the greatest Parliamentary leader, and the greatest philosophic statesman that England has produced—were at the height of their glory when Coleridge went up to Cambridge in 1791.

In literature—naturally, since literature is but an interpretation of life—the age was not less remarkable. Dr. Johnson was still alive when Coleridge came up to school at Christ's Hospital, Goldsmith had died eight years before. But a new spirit was abroad in the younger generation. Macpherson's "Fingal," alleged to be a translation from the ancient Gaelic poet Ossian, had appeared in 1760; Thomas Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry," a collection of folk-ballads and rude verse-romances such as the common people cherished but critics had long refused to consider as poetry, was published in 1765. These two books were of prime importance in fostering a new taste in literature,—a love of natural beauty, of simplicity, and of rude strength. The new taste hailed with delight the appearance of a native lyric genius in Burns, whose first volume of poems was printed in 1786. It welcomed also the homely, simple sweetness, what Coleridge and Lamb called the "divine chit-chat," of Cowper, whose "Task" appeared in the preceding year. But it was in Coleridge himself and his close contemporaries and followers that the splendor of the new poetry showed itself. He was two years younger than Wordsworth, a year younger than Scott; he was sixteen at the birth of Byron, twenty at that of Shelley, twenty-four at that of Keats; and he outlived all of them except Wordsworth. His genius blossomed early. "The Ancient Mariner," his greatest poem, was published some years before Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" was written, or Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel." He was in the prime of life, or what should have been the prime of life—forty years old—when Byron burst into sudden fame with the first two cantos of "Childe Harold" in 1812; he was forty-six when Keats published "Endymion"; he was fifty-one when Shelley was drowned. And of all this gifted company Coleridge, though not the strongest character or the most prolific poet, was the profoundest intellect and the *most originative poetic spirit*.

There was little hint, however, of future greatness or of fellowship with great names in his birth and early circumstances. His father was a country clergyman and schoolmaster in the village of Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire, a simple-hearted unworldly man, full of curious learning and not

very attentive to practical affairs. His mother managed the household and brought up the children. Both his parents were of simple West-country stock; but his father, having a natural turn for study and having done well in his early manhood as a schoolmaster, went at the age of thirty-one as a sizar, or poor student, to Sidney-Sussex College, Cambridge, took orders, and was afterwards given the living of Ottery St. Mary. Here he continued his beloved work of teaching, in addition to his pastoral duties, and by means of this combination won the humble livelihood which, through his wife's careful economy, sufficed for rearing his large family. Coleridge tells us that his father "had so little of parental ambition in him that he had destined his children to be blacksmiths, etc." (though he had "resolved that I should be a parson"), "and had accomplished his intention but for my mother's pride and spirit of aggrandizing her family." Several of the children rewarded their mother's care by distinguishing themselves in a modest way in the army or in the church, but the only one about whom the world is curious now was the youngest of the ten, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was born at Ottery St. Mary, October 21, 1772.

The essential traits of his later character appeared in his early childhood. Almost from infancy he lived in his imagination rather than in the world of reality. "The schoolboys drove me from play, and were always tormenting me, and hence I took no pleasure in boyish sports, but read incessantly.... I became a *dreamer*, and acquired an indisposition to all bodily activity; and I was fretful, and inordinately passionate." "Sensibility, imagination, vanity, sloth," were "prominent and manifest" in his character before he was eight years old. Such is his own account of his childhood, written to his friend Poole in 1797; and it is an accurate description, as far as it goes, of the grown man. But of the religious temper, too, the love of freedom and of virtue, the hatred of injustice, cruelty, and falsehood that guided his uneven steps through all the pitiful struggle of his middle life, of the conscience that made his weakness hell to him—of these, too, we may be sure that the beginnings were to be seen in the boy at Ottery St. Mary, as indeed they were before his eyes in the person of his father, who, if not a first-rate genius, was, says his son, "a first-rate Christian."

The good vicar died in 1781; and the next year, a "presentation" to Christ's Hospital having been secured for him, little Samuel, not yet eleven years old, went up to London to enter the famous old city school.

Here,
 "In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,"
 where he
 "Saw nought lovely but the sky and stars,"

one of some seven hundred Blue-Coat boys, Coleridge lived for nine years.

Most of the boys at Christ's Hospital, then as now, were given a "commercial" education (which none the less included a very thorough training in Latin); but a few of the most promising students were each year selected by the masters for a classical training in preparation for the universities, whence they were known as Grecians. Coleridge was elected a Grecian in 1788. The famous Boyer—famous for his enthusiasm alike in teaching the classics and in wielding the birch—laid the foundation of Coleridge's later scholarship. Here, too, Coleridge did a great amount of reading not laid down in the curriculum,—Latin and Greek poetry and philosophy, mediaeval science and metaphysics—and won the approval of his teachers by the excellence of his verses in Greek and Latin, such as boys at school and students at the universities were expected to write in those days. In the great city school, as in the Devonshire vicarage, he lived in the imagination, inert of body and rapacious of intellect; but he was solitary no longer, having found his tongue and among his more intellectual schoolfellows an interested audience. While yet a boy, he would hold an audience spellbound by his eloquent declamation or the fervor of his argument till, as Lamb, who was one of his hearers, tells us, "the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity boy!*" That is the way

his conversation,—or monologue, as it often was,—affected not boys only, but men, and especially young men, to his dying day. He cast a spell upon men by his speech; upon his schoolfellows, upon young men at the universities in the Pantisocracy days, upon Lloyd and Poole at Nether Stowey, upon earnest young thinkers in his last days at Highgate; so that even if he had never written "The Ancient Mariner" and the *Biographia Literaria* he would still be remembered for the inspiration of his talk.

Further details of the life at Christ's Hospital must be sought in Lamb's two essays, especially that on "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago." In 1791, having secured a Christ's Hospital "exhibition," he entered Jesus College, Cambridge.

His university life extended over three years, from October, 1791, to December, 1794. It was an unhappy time for him and an uneasy time for his respectable relatives, for reasons that were partly in his own nature and partly in the temper of the times.

Even Boyer's severe training, while it had made him a hard student and an unusual scholar for his years, had failed to give him what he most needed as a balance to his intellect and imagination, stability of character. There is evidence that after the first few months, during which the habits of his hard school life had not yet broken, the new liberty of university life led him into extravagance, if not dissipation. Work he doubtless did (he won the Browne medal for a Greek ode on the slave-trade in 1792), but fitfully, giving less and less attention to his regular studies and more to conviviality and, above all, to dreams of literary fame. He wrote verses after various models, sentimental, fanciful, or gallant; he was enthusiastic in praise of a contemporary sonneteer, the Rev. William Bowles, whose "divine sensibility" seemed to him the height of poetic feeling; and in connection with Wordsworth's younger brother Christopher, who entered Cambridge in 1793, he formed a literary society that discussed, among other things, Wordsworth's volume of early poetry, "Descriptive Sketches," published in that year. Wordsworth himself was a Cambridge man, but had taken his degree in 1791 and gone abroad, so that the two men whose personal friendship was to mean so much in English poetry did not meet until 1796. Already in 1793, however, Coleridge had developed political theories, or rather sympathies, which were preparing him for fellowship with Wordsworth.

The French Revolution, which, after years of preparation, took concrete shape in 1789, did not look to young Englishmen in 1791-4 as it looks to us now, nor even as it was to look to those same Englishmen in 1800. In those first years warm-hearted young enthusiasts at the universities saw in the violence of their fellow-men across the Channel only the struggles of the beautiful Spirit of Liberty bursting the chains of age-long tyranny and corruption and calling men up to the heights to breathe diviner air.

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven!"

wrote Wordsworth afterwards; and in the glow of his young idealism he had gone over to France in the autumn of 1791 and was on the point of throwing in his lot with the revolutionists, when his parents compelled his return by cutting off his supplies. And many who, like Coleridge, merely watched from afar shared his faith that a new order of things was to be established, wherein Love should be Law and man's inhumanity to man become but a memory of things outworn.

Less generous men, with a selfish interest in established privileges; timid men, who looked with terror upon any prospect of change; older and wiser men, who better understood the foundations of social order and the nature of man—all these looked with distrust upon the revolutionary idealism that was spreading from France through the younger generation of Englishmen. The new notions of liberty, it was felt, threatened not only the vested rights of property and the prescriptions of rank, but the Church, too, and religion. Some of the would-be reformers were avowed atheists; some (Coleridge and his friends, for instance, in the Pantisocracy period) were communists. In general, they ascribed all the evils of society to "institutions," and wanted them abolished.

Just how far Coleridge had gone in this direction by the autumn of 1793 we do not know; far enough at least to disturb his view of the future, to worry his elder brother George, a clergyman and school-teacher, who had in some measure filled a father's place to the young genius, and, most important of all, to alarm and distress a gentle girl in London. For before he left Christ's Hospital for Cambridge he had become intimate at the house of a Mrs. Evans, and most of the letters preserved from his first two years at the University were addressed to her or to one of her two daughters, Anne and Mary. With the latter Coleridge was in love; and that she had some regard for him is apparent from a letter she sent him in 1794. Before that, however, Coleridge had taken a step that seemed likely to close at once his college career and his prospects of literary fame. The reasons have not been recorded: probably pecuniary embarrassment, the yeasty state of his religious and political ideas, and impatience or despondency over his love-affair with Mary Evans, combined to precipitate his flight; what we know is that he ran away from Cambridge and in December, 1793, enlisted as a dragoon in the army.

Coleridge had hardly taken the step before he repented of it. His letters to his brother George, who with other friends bestirred himself for Coleridge's release as soon as his whereabouts was discovered, are rather distressing in their self-abasement. The efforts of his friends were successful and in April he returned to the University, where a public admonition was the extent of his punishment, and he continued in receipt of his Christ's Hospital exhibition.

But Coleridge's college days were practically over. He was now nearly twenty-two years old, and the revolutionary unrest which had doubtless contributed to his first escapade soon resulted in the formation of schemes that took him away from Cambridge for good and all. In June, 1794, he made a visit to an old schoolfellow at Oxford. Here he met Robert Southey of Balliol College. A friendship sprang up between them out of which, before the end of the summer, grew the Utopian scheme of Pantisocracy. A company of gentlemen and ladies were to emigrate to America, take up lands in the Susquehanna valley, and there establish an ideal community in which all should bear rule equally and find happiness in a life of justice, labor, and love. The education of the young in the principles of ideal humanity was an important part of the scheme. We are reminded of the Brook Farm experiment in New England a generation later, which bears a daughter's likeness to Pantisocracy, the chief difference being that the New England enthusiasts were mature men and women and really put the idea into practice, whereas the Pantisocrats were for the most part collegians and never got beyond the stage of talking and writing about their plans. The scheme was further elaborated at Bristol, where Coleridge, returning from a vacation tour in Wales, again met Southey, and at Bath, the home of Southey and of Southey's betrothed and her sister, Edith and Sarah Fricker—"two sisters, milliners of Bath," as Byron contemptuously called them.

To the other sister, Sarah, Coleridge rather precipitately engaged himself. His love for Mary Evans was not dead, but he seems to have despaired of winning her and to have determined, by uniting himself domestically with Southey and his friends, to make retreat from their communistic scheme impossible. A few weeks later he is back at Cambridge, tortured apparently between his old love and his new engagement. Mary Evans has written to him deploring his wild notions and the mad plan of Pantisocracy, yet confident that he has "too much sensibility to be an infidel." Southey has reproved him rather sharply for failing to write to his betrothed at Bath. Our next glimpse of him is at London, discussing poetry and philosophy with Lamb at the "Salutation and Cat" tavern and perhaps trying to get a sight of Mary Evans. In December he is again at Bristol, in lively correspondence with Southey about democracy, Pantisocracy, and poetry, but at the same time he addresses a last appeal to Miss Evans. Her answer is kind, but final; that chapter is closed, and Coleridge writes to Southey that he will "do his duty," by which he means apparently that he will be faithful to Pantisocracy and marry Sarah Fricker.

The Pantisocracy scheme could not in the nature of things be long-lived. As a matter of fact it lasted little more than a year, ending in a rupture between the two leading spirits just when they

became brothers-in-law. Coleridge spent the summer of 1795 in Bristol in company with Southey, writing and lecturing. In October he was married to Sarah Fricker in "St. Mary's Redcliff, poor Chatterton's church." In November Southey married Edith Fricker and set sail for Lisbon, where his uncle was the English chaplain; and Pantisocracy was dead.

The break with Southey was the natural result of attempting to force through a scheme impracticable in itself and doubly impracticable for the men who conceived it. Its collapse did not altogether sever their literary relations. The collaboration begun in "The Fall of Robespierre" (Cambridge, 1794) was continued in Southey's "Joan of Arc" (1796), to which Coleridge contributed the part afterwards printed (with some additions) as "The Destiny of Nations," and in Coleridge's first volume of "Poems" (Bristol, 1796). A more important contributor to this volume, however, was Charles Lamb, whose initials were appended to four of the pieces. A second edition appeared in June, 1797, with eleven additions from Coleridge besides verses by Lamb and Charles Lloyd, all under the title: "Poems by S.T. Coleridge. Second Edition. To which are added Poems by Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd." The publisher of both editions was Joseph Cottle, a bookseller of Bristol, who played the part of provincial Murray to the young poets in these years.

Meanwhile Coleridge, after a period of lecturing and projecting, had as we have seen married Sarah Fricker, with whom he was now very much in love, and had begun housekeeping in a cottage at Clevedon near the Bristol Channel. The beauty of the place and his happiness there are celebrated in "The Aeolian Harp" and "Reflections on Leaving a Place of Retirement" (better known by its opening words, "Low was our pretty cot"). His next residence was in Bristol—rather a base of operations than a home, for Coleridge was on the road much of the time, lecturing, preaching, soliciting subscriptions for his political and philosophical paper "The Watchman" (which ran from March to May, 1796), and trying in various other ways to provide for his family, which was increased by the birth of a son in September, 1796. At last in December he secured the little cottage at Nether Stowey in the Quantock Hills (south of the Bristol Channel, in Somerset), close to the house of his beloved friend, Thomas Poole, where he lived until his departure for Germany in September, 1798.

II. AT NETHER STOWEY

The Stowey period was the blossoming time of Coleridge's genius. All the poems in this volume except the last four, and besides these "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," and "Fears in Solitude"—the bulk of his achievement in poetry—were either written or begun in 1797 and 1798. It will be proper, then, to dwell a little on his circumstances, his friends, and his ideas during these two years.

The means of livelihood for himself and his family when he went to Stowey were a subscription of about £40 that Poole and some friends got together for him, £20 that Cottle paid for the second edition of the "Poems," the promise of £80 from the father of Charles Lloyd, who was to live with him and study under his direction, and such money as he could earn by reviews and magazine articles, which he estimated at £40 a year; not a munificent provision for a household of three adults and a child. But the theories of the simple life that had made Pantisocracy seem a feasible project still inspired him with confidence. "Sixteen shillings," he wrote to Poole, "would cover all the weekly expenses of my wife, infant, and myself. This I say from my wife's own calculations." Further, he will support himself by the labor of his hands. "If you can instruct me to manage an acre and a half of land, and to raise in it, with my own hands, all kinds of vegetables and grain, enough for myself and my wife and sufficient to feed a pig or two with the refuse, I hope that you will have served me *most* effectually by placing me out of the necessity of being served." This was in December, just before he moved to Stowey. In February he wrote from his new home to another friend: "From seven till half past eight I work in my garden; from breakfast till twelve I read and compose, then read again, feed the pigs, poultry, etc., till two o'clock; after dinner work again till tea; from tea till supper, *review*. So jogs the day, and I am happy.... I raise potatoes and all manner of vegetables, have an orchard, and shall raise corn with the spade, enough for my family. We have two pigs, and ducks and geese. A cow would not answer the keep: we have whatever milk we want from T. Poole."

There is a suspicious regularity about this schedule. Lamb wrote from London in January: "Is it a farm that you have got? And what does your worship know about farming?" His agricultural activity, in the month of February, must have been chiefly prospective; and we may safely assume that Poole supplied other things besides milk, and that the poet spent more time reading, dreaming, and talking than he did raising potatoes. A good deal of time must have been spent in the actual composition of his poetry, including his play "Osorio," which was written in 1797, and in studying the landscape beauties of the Quantocks. After the coming of the Wordsworths to Alfoxden he spent much of the time walking between Alfoxden and Stowey, or further afield with Wordsworth and his sister. "My walks," he wrote afterwards, "were almost daily on the top of Quantock, and among its sloping coombs. With my pencil and memorandum-book in my hand, I was making studies, as the artists call them, and often moulding them into verse with the objects and imagery immediately before my eyes." This does not sound much like "raising corn with the spade."

On Sundays he would sometimes preach before such Unitarian congregations, within walking distance, as cared to hear him. But as he would take no pay for his services his preaching contributed nothing toward the support of his family. Lloyd, who was epileptic and subject to moody variation in his attachments, was but an irregular housemate after the first few months, and his contribution to the household expenses was correspondingly uncertain. The future looked so dark in October, 1797, that in spite of misgivings and former scruples he had concluded that he "must become a Unitarian minister, as a less evil than starvation." Accordingly he was in Shrewsbury in January, 1798, preaching in the Unitarian church and on the point of accepting the pastorate at a salary of £150 a year, when the sky brightened in another quarter. Thomas and Josiah Wedgwood, sons of the famous potter and friends of Thomas Poole, offered him an equal sum annually as a free gift. They were wealthy men, well able to afford it; they attached no condition to the gift except that he should devote

himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy, which was precisely what he wanted to do; and he was not long in determining to accept the offer. "I accepted it," he wrote to Wordsworth while still at Shrewsbury, "on the presumption that I had talents, honesty, and propensities to perseverant effort." The propensities, alas, remained propensities, never acquiring the force of habit. The pension, however, continued to be paid in full until 1812, when Josiah Wedgwood withdrew his half of it. The other half, upon the death of Thomas Wedgwood in 1805, had been secured to Coleridge for life; and this annuity must have constituted the chief reliance of Mrs. Coleridge for many years.

If Coleridge did not prosper financially, he was at least fortunate in his friends; and a man's friends are after all the best testimony to the character of his mind and heart. When he went to Stowey in December, 1796, he was again on good terms with Southey, though the enthusiasm of their first fellowship was gone. The friendship with Lamb, begun in their school-days and renewed at the "Salutation and Cat" in 1794, was maintained by an eager correspondence and by Lamb's visit to Stowey in July, 1797; and although Lloyd's vagaries led to a coolness between the old friends in the following year, the breach was soon healed, and the friendship continued till death. Another with whom Coleridge maintained a voluminous correspondence in 1796-7 was John Thelwall, theoretical democrat, atheist, and admirer of Godwin, whose visit to Coleridge and Wordsworth in the summer of 1797 so shocked the good conservatives of the neighborhood that Wordsworth had to leave Alfoxden in consequence of it. But without doubt the dearest and most influential friend Coleridge had before the Wordsworths came into his life was Thomas Poole. It was in order to be in daily intercourse with Poole that he moved to Stowey; and Poole's hesitation about securing the cottage for him, arising, Coleridge seemed to fear, from imperfect confidence and friendship, was a source of agonized apprehension to the sensitive poet. When we consider that Poole was a self-educated man, a Somersetshire tanner with no claim to literary genius or philosophical acquirements, Coleridge's devotion to him and dependence on him bring out in a strong light the substantial, elemental character of the man. "O Poole!" Coleridge wrote to him from Germany afterwards, "you are a noble heart as ever God made!" Poole had indeed in a marked degree the genius for friendship. Strength of character, sympathy, and self-effacing devotion, combined with prudence and sincerity, made this man a tower of refuge for the unstable spirit of the poet.

No other single relation, however, can compare in importance, for Coleridge's poetic development, with that which sprang up in the summer of 1797 between him and William Wordsworth. Just when they first met is not recorded. We have seen that Coleridge was acquainted with Wordsworth's younger brother in his college days, and discussed with him Wordsworth's first published poems. In January, 1797, he told Cottle that he wished to submit his "Visions of the Maid of Arc" to Wordsworth for criticism. The earliest definite record of their personal acquaintance is a letter Coleridge wrote to Cottle while on a visit to Wordsworth at Racedown (just over the Somerset border in Dorsetshire) early in June. About the beginning of July he is again at Racedown; and when he returns he brings Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy with him for a visit. On the 7th Lamb arrived for his long-planned reunion with Coleridge. The second week of July, 1797, was thus a rich and long-remembered time for all of them, despite the fact that Mrs. Coleridge "accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk" on her husband's foot, which confined him "during the whole time of Charles Lamb's stay." The others took long walks in the neighborhood, amid such scenery as is described in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," a poem that admirably voices the happiness, of those days of spiritual fellowship. The Wordsworths did not return to Racedown. "By a combination of curious circumstances a gentleman's seat, with a park and woods, elegantly and completely furnished, . . . in the most beautiful and romantic situation by the seaside, four miles from Stowey—this we have got for Wordsworth at the *rent of twenty-three pounds a year, taxes included!*" Coleridge triumphantly announced to Southey; and in this house, the Manor of Alfoxden, the Wordsworths remained for a year, in daily companionship with Coleridge and surrounded by scenes of natural beauty that have left a lasting mark on the work of both poets.

What the friendship with Coleridge meant to Wordsworth may best be seen in "The Prelude: or, Growth of a Poet's Mind," Wordsworth's greatest long poem, written some years afterwards and addressed throughout to Coleridge.

"There is no grief, no sorrow, no despair,
No languor, no dejection, no dismay,
No absence scarcely can there be, for those
Who love as we do."

What Wordsworth was to Coleridge is more important for us here. The admiration which the brilliant child of genius felt for the great preacher-poet is chiefly, one feels, an admiration for his character. As a matter of fact, Wordsworth had written nothing, up to his coming to Alfoxden, that would have preserved his name as a poet, nothing so noteworthy or promising as what Coleridge had already written. But Coleridge felt in this lean and thoughtful young man a strength of mind, a depth and sureness of heart that compelled his allegiance and even imparted, for the time, some of that resolution in which he was by nature so sadly deficient. The character of their friendship is to be seen not only in the published work of the two poets from this time on (notably in "Dejection"), but perhaps even more clearly in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal and in Coleridge's letters. "I speak with heart-felt sincerity," he wrote to Cottle in June, 1797, "and (I think) unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel myself *a little man by his side*, and yet do not think myself the less man than I formerly thought myself.... T. Poole's opinion of Wordsworth is that he is the greatest man he ever knew; I coincide." Wordsworth's influence is evident in a letter from Coleridge to his brother George in April, 1798: "I love fields and woods and mountains with almost a visionary fondness. And because I have found benevolence and quietness growing within me as that fondness has increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others, and to destroy the bad passions not by combating them but by keeping them in inaction." Under the calming and clarifying influence of the stronger Northern spirit the fever of his revolutionary dreams abated, he found happiness in the conscious exercise of his poetic powers, and for one year in his troubled existence his genius showed itself in all its splendor.

The immediate poetic result of their friendship was the "Lyrical Ballads," published by Cottle in September, 1798. The origin of the work has been described both by Wordsworth (in a prefatory note to "We Are Seven") and by Coleridge (in the *Biographia Literaria*, chap. xiv.). At first, they were to collaborate in writing a poem the proceeds of which should pay the expenses of a little tour they were making when the plan was thought of, in November, 1797; and thus "The Ancient Mariner" was begun. As this poem grew under Coleridge's "shaping-spirit of imagination" Wordsworth saw that he "could only be a clog" upon its progress, and it was resigned to Coleridge. The plan was then enlarged to include a volume illustrating "two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination." Wordsworth was to illustrate the former principle, Coleridge the latter, and the proceeds of the book were to go toward the expenses of a trip to Germany, decided on in the spring of 1798. The bulk of the volume was Wordsworth's, and was typically Wordsworthian, ranging from such simple ballads of humble incident as "Goody Blake" and "The Idiot Boy" to the magnificent blank verse of "Tintern Abbey"; Coleridge's share consisted of a brief poem called "The Nightingale," two short extracts from "Osorio," and "The Rime of the Ancient Marinere."

Apart from the "Lyrical Ballads" Coleridge conceived and finished between June, 1797, and the departure for Germany in 1798, and published in the latter year, "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," "Frost at Midnight," "Fears in Solitude," and "France." He conceived and partly executed, but did not then publish, "Christabel," "Kubla Khan," "Love," "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie," and "The Three Graves." Thus, all Coleridge's best poetry, with the exception of those three saddest of voices out of a

broken life, "Dejection" (1802), the lines to Wordsworth on hearing him read "The Prelude" (1807), and "Youth and Age" (1823-32), belongs either wholly or in its inception to the year of his fellowship with the Wordsworths in the Quantock Hills.

Of his political, religious, and literary opinions at this time he has left a fairly adequate account in his published writings and his correspondence, especially in the *Biographia Literaria* and in the letter to the Rev. George Coleridge referred to above. The first year of his married life saw him still, in spite of the failure of Pantisocracy, an eager visionary reformer upborne by generous enthusiasm and ardent religious feeling. "O! never can I remember those days," he wrote in the *Biographia*, "with either shame or regret. For I was most sincere, most disinterested! My opinions were indeed in many and most important points erroneous; but my heart was single. Wealth, rank, life itself, then seemed cheap to me, compared with the interest of (what I believed to be) the truth, and the will of my Maker." However much he may have consorted with unbelievers like Thelwall and distressed his good brother George by his heterodoxy, he was by nature deeply religious. He tried in his letters to recover Thelwall from his "atheism," though he heartily approved a sentiment expressed by the latter: "He who thinks and *feels* will be virtuous; and he who is absorbed in self will be vicious, whatever may be his speculative opinions." Godwin's system of "Justice," with its soulless logic, he abhorred. He preached often in Unitarian churches. To young Hazlitt, who heard him preach in January, 1798, from the text "And He went up into the mountain to pray, *Himself, alone*," it seemed "as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe." In politics he was, when he went to Stowey, "almost equidistant from all the three prominent parties, the Pittites, the Foxites, and the Democrats"; he was "a vehement anti-ministerialist, but after the invasion of Switzerland, a more vehement anti-Gallican [see the last two stanzas of "France"], and still more intensely an anti-Jacobin." Under Wordsworth's influence his thoughts turned in great measure from contemporary politics to more fundamental matters. Always his poetry had been the utterance of his essential being. "I feel strongly and I think strongly," he wrote to Thelwall in 1796, "but I seldom feel without thinking or think without feeling. Hence, though my poetry has in general a hue of tenderness or passion over it, yet it seldom exhibits unmixed and simple tenderness and passion. My philosophical opinions are blended with or deduced from my feelings." Wordsworth gave his feelings a new object and his philosophy a higher aim. In April of the second year at Stowey, in the letter to his brother already quoted, Coleridge wrote: "I have for some time past withdrawn myself totally from the consideration of *immediate causes*, which are infinitely complex and uncertain, to muse on fundamental and general causes, the '*causae causarum*.' I devote myself to such works as encroach not on the anti-social passions—in poetry, to elevate the imagination and set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated as with a living soul by the presence of life—in prose—to the seeking with patience and a slow, very slow mind, '*Quid sumus, et quidnam victuri gignimus*,'—what our faculties are and what they are capable of becoming." This last sentence is a sort of half-prophetic summary of his life's work; but the poetry soon gave way to the prose, and he never again so nearly realized his poetical ideal as he had already done in "The Ancient Mariner."

Of his person and the impression he made upon people at this time there are various contemporary accounts. To Thelwall, in November, 1796, he sent the following description of himself: "... my face, unless when animated by immediate eloquence, expresses great sloth, and great, indeed almost idiotic good-nature. 'Tis a mere carcass of a face; fat, flabby, and expressive chiefly of inexpression. Yet I am told that my eyes, eyebrows, and forehead are physiognomically good; but of this the deponent knoweth not. As to my shape, 'tis a good shape enough if measured, but my gait is awkward, and the walk of the whole man indicates *indolence capable of energies*.... I cannot breathe through my nose, so my mouth, with sensual thick lips, is almost always open. In conversation I am impassioned, and oppose what I deem error with an eagerness which is often mistaken for personal asperity; but I am ever so swallowed up in the *thing* said that I forget my *opponent*. Such am I." The

Rev. Leapidge Smith, in his "Reminiscences of an Octogenarian," remembered him as "a tall, dark, handsome young man, with long, black, flowing hair; eyes not merely dark, but black, and keenly penetrating; a fine forehead, a deep-toned, harmonious voice; a manner never to be forgotten, full of life, vivacity, and kindness; dignified in person and, added to all these, exhibiting the elements of his future greatness."¹ Hazlitt, in "My First Acquaintance with Poets" (a paper that every student of Coleridge's life and poetry should read), describing him as he appeared on his visit to Hazlitt's father at Wem in 1798, says: "His complexion was at that time clear, and even bright. His forehead was broad and high, light as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes rolling beneath them like a sea with darkened lustre. . . . His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humored and round, but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done." And Dorothy Wordsworth (to close with a contemporary and sympathetic impression) set him down in her journal after their first meeting at Racedown thus: "He is a wonderful man. His conversation teems with soul, mind, and spirit. . . . At first I thought him very plain, that is for about three minutes: he is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half-curling, rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them. His eye is large and full, and not very dark, but grey²—such an eye as would receive from a heavy soul the dullest expression; but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind; it has more of 'the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling' than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark eyebrows, and an overhanging forehead." The friendly and keen-sighted woman gives a more sympathetic picture than the others; but there must have been truth, too, in the view of the equally keen-sighted and less friendly Hazlitt, whose description accords well with Coleridge's self-portraiture, and in the last sarcastic item, too well, with the remainder of the poet's career.

¹ "Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge," ed. by E.H. Coleridge, Vol. I., p. 180, note.

² The uncertainty as to the color of his eyes is a tribute to their expressiveness. Carlyle described him in 1824 as having "a pair of strange brown, timid, yet earnest-looking eyes." Emerson visited him in 1833 and found him "with bright blue eyes and fine clear complexion."

III. THE REST OF THE STORY

Coleridge lived for thirty-six years after he left Stowey for Germany in 1798. His fame as a poet grew as the world became acquainted with and learned to feel the peculiar charm of his poetry, and he was even more famous, for a while, as a literary critic and a moral philosopher. But they were years of weak-willed wandering, of vast hazy plans and feeble performance, lighted only here and there by glimpses of fragmentary accomplishment, and that seldom in poetry. Keats died at twenty-six, leaving behind him a body of poetry hardly less wonderful than Coleridge had fashioned at the same age; and another poet sang of him:

"The bloom, whose petals, nipt before they blew,
Died on the promise of the fruit, is waste."

In Coleridge the poet died at nearly the same age, almost as completely as if the man himself had passed "within the twilight chamber ... of white Death"; and "Dejection" is that poet's dirge. The remaining years need therefore but few words.

Coleridge had taken opium, perhaps as early as his school-days, for relief from neuralgia. He had recourse to it in March, 1796, for sleeplessness; in the following November, for relief from violent nervous pains; and near the close of the Stowey period, in May, 1798, when the vagaries of Lloyd, the estrangement from Lamb, domestic anxiety, and physical suffering had reduced him to a state of extreme nervous wretchedness, he again took refuge in opiates, of which "Kubla Khan" is partly the result. He returned from Germany in 1799, worked for a while on a newspaper in London and on a translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein," and in the summer of 1800 removed to Keswick in Cumberland, in the Lake Country, where the Wordsworths had already established themselves. Here, in the autumn of 1800, he strove to finish "Christabel," and did finish the second part. In the winter and spring he suffered from a complicated illness, in which he again had recourse to laudanum; and from the spring of 1801 he was confirmed in the opium habit, sinking often to pitiful depths of moral and physical misery. He was in the Mediterranean, chiefly at Malta, from 1804 to 1806. His wife and children remained at Keswick, where Southey and his family had become tenants with them of Greta Hall. Southey, it might almost be said, took care of Coleridge's family henceforth; for Coleridge had begun to find his own fireside an intolerable place as early as 1802, lived little at home, and made a formal separation from his wife in 1808,—though they saw each other occasionally after that and the Wedgwood annuity continued to be paid to Mrs. Coleridge. In 1809 he was living with the Wordsworths at Grasmere, where he wrote several numbers of a politico-philosophical paper called "The Friend." About the close of 1810 he was taken in hand by a Mr. and Mrs. Morgan of Hammersmith, near London, under whose care he kept the opium in check sufficiently to give his famous lectures on the "Principles of Poetry" in the winter of 1811-12, and another series in the early summer on Shakespeare. In the winter following, his play of "Remorse," a recast of the "Osorio" of 1797, was acted in London with some success. In the winter of 1813-14 he lectured, in a "conversational" fashion, at Bristol. He also wrote irregularly for the London papers during these years. But his studies, since his return from Germany, had been directed to metaphysics, and especially to the philosophical bases of poetry and theology; and the last twenty years of his life, at least, were occupied with plans for a great philosophical work covering these two fields of thought. One of the fragments of the great work that actually came to light, the *Biographia Literaria*, seems to have been sent to the printers in 1815. A collected edition of his poetry was also begun while he was under the Morgans' care.

From 1816 till his death in 1834 he lived in comparative peace, if not in happiness, with a Mr. Gilman of Highgate near London, an apothecary. Gilman and his wife were able so far to

wean him from the drug, or to regulate his use of it, that he brought to the birth something of his vast plans in criticism and philosophy, notably the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and the "Aids to Reflection" (1825). The beginning of his stay with Gilman was also marked by the publication of "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan" (1816), and of a collected edition of his other poems (including "The Ancient Mariner," considerably revised) under the title "Sibylline Leaves" (1817). But the poems that were not finished in the first great period at Stowey remained unfinished. He talked divinely ("an archangel a little damaged," Lamb said), and both by his talk and his metaphysical writings profoundly influenced the literature and philosophy of the century, both in England and America; but the poet in him was dead.

"Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;
And all which I had culled in woodwalks wild,
And all which patient toil had reared, and all

Commune with *thee* had opened out—but flowers

Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,
In the same coffin, for the self-same grave!"³

It would be a mistake to ascribe the paralysis of Coleridge's powers of constructive imagination exclusively to laudanum. Rather the resort to narcotics and the inability to control his creative faculty are alike symptoms of a temperamental malady which had its roots in his nature close to the seat of that special faculty. Under a favorable conjunction of outward circumstance and inward state, imagination came; it possessed him, and he labored in it, happily. Afterwards he could revise what he had shaped, analyze it philosophically, perfect some details of it, but he could not proceed in the creative act after the inspiration had left him. His own description of his nature—"indolence capable of energies"—is accurate as far as it goes. The opium, resorted to often, no doubt, to quicken the dreams in his brain as well as to relieve his bodily suffering, helped to enfeeble his will; but the "indolence" was in him before he became addicted to opium, and he was never "capable of energies" at the call of duty, but only at the call of his "shaping spirit," over whose coming and going he had no control.

Poetically it is perhaps as well. Had he been like his friend Wordsworth in strength and steadiness of purpose—which is to suppose him another nature than he was—his life would have been happier and more edifying, but he would hardly have given us anything better than "Christabel" and "The Ancient Mariner." Romantic poetry of the higher type is essentially the creature of mood. Even Wordsworth's long and conscientious labors produced but a small bulk of poetry of this character, amid dreary reaches of uninspired preaching. Coleridge waited—in despondency often, in self-upbraidings, in the temporary deception of opium dreams with their consequent misery—for the return of the spirit; and it did not come.

³ From the lines addressed to Wordsworth after hearing him read "The Prelude," in 1807.

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