COLERIDGE SAMUEL TAYLOR

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

In one of Rossetti's invaluable notes on poetry, he tells us that to him "the leading point about Coleridge's work is its human love." We may remember Coleridge's own words:

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

Yet love, though it is the word which he uses of himself, is not really what he himself meant when using it, but rather an affectionate sympathy, in which there seems to have been little element of passion. Writing to his wife, during that first absence in Germany, whose solitude tried him so much, he laments that there is "no one to love." "Love is the vital air of my genius," he tells her, and adds: "I am deeply convinced that if I were to remain a few years among objects for whom I had no affection, I should wholly lose the powers of intellect."

With this incessant, passionless sensibility, it was not unnatural that his thirst for friendship was stronger than his need of love; that to him friendship was hardly distinguishable from

love. Throughout all his letters there is a series of causeless explosions of emotion, which it is hardly possible to take seriously, but which, far from being insincere, is really, no doubt, the dribbling overflow of choked-up feelings, a sort of moral leakage. It might be said of Coleridge, in the phrase which he used of Nelson, that he was "heart-starved." Tied for life to a woman with whom he had not one essential sympathy, the whole of his nature was put out of focus; and perhaps nothing but "the joy of grief," and the terrible and fettering power of luxuriating over his own sorrows, and tracing them to first principles, outside himself or in the depths of his sub- consciousness, gave him the courage to support that long, everpresent divorce.

Both for his good and evil, he had never been able to endure emotion without either diluting or intensifying it with thought, and with always self-conscious thought. He uses identically the same words in writing his last, deeply moved letter to Mary Evans, and in relating the matter to Southey. He cannot get away from words; coming as near to sincerity as he can, words are always between him and his emotion. Hence his over-emphasis, his rhetoric of humility. In 1794 he writes to his brother George: "Mine eyes gush out with tears, my heart is sick and languid with the weight of unmerited kindness." Nine days later he writes to his brother James: "My conduct towards you, and towards my other brothers, has displayed a strange combination of madness, ingratitude, and dishonesty. But you forgive me. May my Maker forgive me! May the time arrive when I shall have

forgiven myself!" Here we see both what he calls his "gangrened sensibility" and a complete abandonment to the feelings of the moment. It is always a self- conscious abandonment, during which he watches himself with approval, and seems to be saying: "Now that is truly 'feeling'!" He can never concentrate himself on any emotion; he swims about in floods of his own tears. With so little sense of reality in anything, he has no sense of the reality of direct emotion, but is preoccupied, from the moment of the first shock, in exploring it for its universal principle, and then nourishes it almost in triumph at what he has discovered. This is not insincerity; it is the metaphysical, analytical, and parenthetic mind in action. "I have endeavoured to feel what I ought to feel," he once significantly writes.

Coleridge had many friends, to some of whom, as to Lamb, his friendship was the most priceless thing in life; but the friendship which meant most to him, not only as a man, but as a poet, was the friendship with Wordsworth and with Dorothy Wordsworth. "There is a sense of the word Love," he wrote to Wordsworth in 1812, "in which I never felt it but to you and one of your household." After his quarrel in that year he has "an agony of weeping." "After fifteen years of such religious, almost superstitious idolatry and self-sacrifice!" he laments. Now it was during his first, daily companionship with the Wordsworths that he wrote almost all his greatest work. "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" were both written in a kind of rivalry with Wordsworth; and the "Ode on Dejection" was written after four

months' absence from him, in the first glow and encouragement of a return to that one inspiring comradeship. Wordsworth was the only poet among his friends whom he wholly admired, and Wordsworth was more exclusively a poet, more wholly absorbed in thinking poetry and thinking about poetry, and in a thoroughly practical way, than almost any poet who has ever lived. It was not only for his solace in life that Coleridge required sympathy; he needed the galvanizing of continual intercourse with a poet, and with one to whom poetry was the only thing of importance. Coleridge, when he was by himself, was never sure of this; there was his *magnum opus*, the revelation of all philosophy; and he sometimes has doubts of the worth of his own poetry. Had Coleridge been able to live uninterruptedly in the company of the Wordsworths, even with the unsympathetic wife at home, the opium in the cupboard, and the *magnum opus* on the desk, I am convinced that we should have had for our reading to-day all those poems which went down with him into silence.

What Coleridge lacked was what theologians call a "saving belief" in Christianity, or else a strenuous intellectual immorality. He imagined himself to believe in Christianity, but his belief never realized itself in effective action, either in the mind or in conduct, while it frequently clogged his energies by weak scruples and restrictions which were but so many internal irritations. He calls upon the religion which he has never firmly apprehended to support him under some misfortune of his own making; it does not support him, but he finds excuses for his

weakness in what seem to him its promises of help. Coleridge was not strong enough to be a Christian, and he was not strong enough to rely on the impulses of his own nature, and to turn his failings into a very actual kind of success. When Blake said, "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise," he expressed a profound truth which Nietzsche and others have done little more than amplify. There is nothing so hopeless as inert or inactive virtue: it is a form of life grown putrid, and it turns into poisonous, decaying matter in the soul. If Coleridge had been more callous towards what he felt to be his duties, if he had not merely neglected them, as he did, but justified himself for neglecting them, on any ground of intellectual or physical necessity, or if he had merely let them slide without thought or regret, he would have been more complete, more effectual, as a man, and he might have achieved more finished work as an artist.

To Coleridge there was as much difficulty in belief as in action, for belief is itself an action of the mind. He was always anxious to believe anything that would carry him beyond the limits of time and space, but it was not often that he could give more than a speculative assent to even the most improbable of creeds. Always seeking fixity, his mind was too fluid for any anchor to hold in it. He drifted from speculation to speculation, often seeming to forget his aim by the way, in almost the collector's delight over the curiosities he had found in passing. On one page of his letters he writes earnestly to the atheist Thelwall in defence of Christianity; on another page we find him saying,

"My Spinosism (if Spinosism it be, and i' faith 'tis very like it)"; and then comes the solemn assurance: "I am a Berkleyan." Southey, in his rough, uncomprehending way, writes: "Hartley was ousted by Berkeley, Berkeley by Spinoza, and Spinoza by Plato; when last I saw him Jacob Behmen had some chance of coming in. The truth is that he plays with systems"; so it seemed to Southey, who could see no better. To Coleridge all systems were of importance, because in every system there was its own measure of truth. He was always setting his mind to think about itself, and felt that he worked both hard and well if he had gained a clearer glimpse into that dark cavern. "Yet I have not been altogether idle," he writes in December, 180O, "having in my own conceit gained great light into several parts of the human mind which have hitherto remained either wholly unexplained or most falsely explained." In March, 1801, he declares that he has "completely extricated the notions of time and space." "This," he says, "I have *done*; but I trust that I am about to do more—namely, that I shall be able to evolve all the five senses, and to state their growth and the causes of their difference, and in this evolvement to solve the process of life and consciousness." He hopes that before his thirtieth year he will "thoroughly understand the whole of Nature's works." "My opinion is this," he says, defining one part at least of his way of approach to truth, "that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling, and that all truth is a species of revelation." On the other hand, he assures us, speaking of that *magnum opus*

which weighed upon him and supported him to the end of his life, "the very object throughout from the first page to the last [is] to reconcile the dictates of common sense with the conclusions of scientific reasoning."

This *magnum opus*, "a work which should contain all knowledge and proclaim all philosophy, had," says Mr. Ernest Coleridge, "been Coleridge's dream from the beginning." Only a few months before his death, we find him writing to John Sterling: "Many a fond dream have I amused myself with, of your residing near me, or in the same house, and of preparing, with your and Mr. Green's assistance, my whole system for the press, as far as it exists in any *systematic* form; that is, beginning with the Propyleum, On the Power and Use of Words, comprising Logic, as the Canons of *Conclusion*, as the criterion of *Premises*, and lastly as the discipline and evolution of Ideas (and then the Methodus et Epochee, or the Disquisition on God, Nature, and Man), the two first grand divisions of which, from the Ens super Ens to the *Fall*, or from God to Hades, and then from Chaos to the commencement of living organization, containing the whole of the Dynamic Philosophy, and the deduction of the Powers and Forces, are complete." Twenty years earlier, he had written to Daniel Stuart that he was keeping his morning hours sacred to his "most important Work, which is printing at Bristol," as he imagined. It was then to be called "Christianity, the one true Philosophy, or Five Treatises on the Logos, or Communicative Intelligence, natural, human, and divine." Of this vast work only

fragments remain, mostly unpublished: two large quarto volumes on logic, a volume intended as an introduction, a commentary on the Gospels and some of the Epistles, together with "innumerable fragments of metaphysical and theological speculation." But out of those fragments no system was ever to be constructed, though a fervent disciple, J. H. Green, devoted twenty-eight years to the attempt. "Christabel" unfinished, the *magnum opus* unachieved: both were but parallel symptoms of a mind "thought-bewildered" to the end, and bewildered by excess of light and by crowding energies always in conflict, always in escape.

Coleridge's search, throughout his life, was after the absolute, an absolute not only in thought but in all human relations, in love, friendship, faith in man, faith in God, faith in beauty; and while it was this profound dissatisfaction with less than the perfect form of every art, passion, thought, or circumstance, that set him adrift in life, making him seem untrue to duty, conviction, and himself, it was this also that formed in him the double existence of the poet and the philosopher, each supplementing and interpenetrating the other. The poet and the philosopher are but two aspects of one reality; or rather, the poetic and the philosophic attitudes are but two ways of seeing. The poet who is not also a philosopher is like a flower without a root. Both seek the same infinitude; one apprehending the idea, the other the image. One seeks truth for its beauty; the other finds beauty, an abstract, intellectual beauty, in the innermost home of truth. Poetry and metaphysics are alike a disengaging, for different

ends, of the absolute element in things.

In Coleridge, metaphysics joined with an unbounded imagination, in equal flight from reality, from the notions of time and space. Each was an equal denial of the reality of what we call real things; the one experimental, searching, reasoning; the other a "shaping spirit of imagination," an embodying force. His sight was always straining into the darkness; and he has himself noted that from earliest childhood his "mind was habituated to the Vast." "I never regarded my senses," he says, "as the criteria of my belief"; and "those who have been led to the same truths step by step, through the constant testimony of their senses, seem to want a sense which I possess." To Coleridge only mind existed, an eternal and an eternally active thought; and it was as a corollary to his philosophical conception of the universe that he set his mind to a conscious rebuilding of the world in space. His magic, that which makes his poetry, was but the final release in art of a winged thought fluttering helplessly among speculations and theories; it was the song of release.

De Quincey has said of Coleridge: "I believe it to be notorious that he first began the use of opium, not as a relief from any bodily pains or nervous irritations—for his constitution was strong and excellent—but as a source of luxurious sensations." Hartley Coleridge, in the biographical supplement to the "Biographia Literaria," replies with what we now know to be truth: "If my Father sought more from opium than the mere absence of pain, I feel assured that it was not

luxurious sensations or the glowing phantasmagoria of passive dreams; but that the power of the medicine might keep down the agitations of his nervous system, like a strong hand grasping the strings of some shattered lyre." In 1795. that is, at the age of twenty-three, we find him taking laudanum; in 1796, he is taking it in large doses; by the late spring of 1801 he is under the "fearful slavery," as he was to call it, of opium. "My sole sensuality," he says of this time, "was not to be in pain." In a terrible letter addressed to Joseph Cottle in 1814 he declares that he was "seduced to the *accursed* habit ignorantly"; and he describes "the direful moment, when my pulse began to fluctuate, my heart to palpitate, and such a dreadful falling abroad, as it were, of my whole frame, such intolerable restlessness, and incipient bewilderment … for my case is a species of madness, only that it is a derangement, an utter impotence of the volition, and not of the intellectual faculties." And, throughout, it is always the pains, never the pleasures, of opium that he registers.

Opium took hold of him by what was inert in his animal nature, and not by any active sensuality. His imagination required no wings, but rather fetters; and it is evident that opium was more often a sedative than a spur to his senses.

The effect of opium on the normal man is to bring him into something like the state in which Coleridge habitually lived. The world was always a sufficiently unreal thing to him, facts more than remote enough, consequences unrelated to their causes; he lived in a mist, and opium thickened the mist to a dense yellow

fog. Opium might have helped to make Southey a poet; it left Coleridge the prisoner of a cobweb-net of dreams. What he wanted was some astringent force in things, to tighten, not to loosen, the always expanding and uncontrollable limits of his mind. Opium did but confirm what the natural habits of his constitution had bred in him: an overwhelming indolence, out of which the energies that still arose intermittently were no longer flames, but the escaping ghosts of flame, mere black smoke.

At twenty-four, in a disinterested description of himself for the benefit of a friend whom he had not yet met, he declares, "the walk of the whole man indicates *indolence capable of energies*." It was that walk which Carlyle afterwards described, unable to keep to either side of the garden- path. "The moral obligation is to me so very strong a stimulant," Coleridge writes to Crabb Robinson, "that in nine cases out of ten it acts as a narcotic. The blow that should rouse, *stuns* me." He plays another variation on the ingenious theme in a letter to his brother: "Anxieties that stimulate others infuse an additional narcotic into my mind…. Like some poor labourer, whose night's sleep has but imperfectly refreshed his overwearied frame, I have sate in drowsy uneasiness, and doing nothing have thought what a deal I have to do." His ideal, which he expressed in 1797 in a letter to Thelwall, and, in 1813, almost word for word, in a poem called" The Night-Scene," was, "like the Indian Vishnu, to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotus, and wake once in a million years for a few minutes just to know

that I was going to sleep a million years more." Observe the effect of the desire for the absolute, reinforced by constitutional indolence, and only waiting for the illuminating excuse of opium.

From these languors, and from their consequences, Coleridge found relief in conversation, for which he was always ready, while he was far from always ready for the more precise mental exertion of writing. "Oh, how I wish to be talking, not writing," he cries in a letter to Southey in 1803, "for my mind is so full, that my thoughts stifle and jam each other." And, in 1816, in his first letter to Gillman, he writes, more significantly, "The stimulus of conversation suspends the terror that haunts my mind; but when I am alone, the horrors that I have suffered from laudanum, the degradation, the blighted utility, almost overwhelm me." It was along one avenue of this continual escape from himself that Coleridge found himself driven (anywhere, away from action) towards what grew to be the main waste of his life. Hartley Coleridge, in the preface to "Table-Talk," has told us eloquently how, "throughout a long-drawn summer's day, would this man talk to you in low, equable, but clear and musical tones, concerning things human and divine"; we know that Carlyle found him "unprofitable, even tedious," and wished "to worship him, and toss him in a blanket"; and we have the vivid reporting of Keats, who tells us that, on his one meeting with Coleridge, "I walked with him, at his alderman-after-dinner pace, for near two miles, I suppose. In those two miles he broached a thousand things. Let me see if I can give you a list

—nightingales—poetry—on poetical sensation—metaphysics—different genera and species of dreams— nightmare—a dream accompanied with a sense of touch—single and double touch—a dream related—first and second consciousness—the difference explained between will and volition—so say metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness—monsters—the Kraken—mermaids—Southey believes in them—Southey's belief too much diluted—a ghost story—Good- morning—I heard his voice as he came towards me—I heard it as he moved away—I had heard it all the interval—if it may be called so." It may be that we have had no more wonderful talker, and, no doubt, the talk had its reverential listeners, its disciples; but to cultivate or permit disciples is itself a kind of waste, a kind of weakness; it requires a very fixed and energetic indolence to become, as Coleridge became, a vocal utterance, talking for talking's sake.

But beside talking, there was lecturing, with Coleridge a scarcely different form of talk; and it is to this consequence of a readiness to speak and a reluctance to write that we owe much of his finest criticism, in the imperfectly recorded "Lectures on Shakespeare." Coleridge as a critic is not easily to be summed up. What may first surprise us, when we begin to look into his critical opinions, is the uncertainty of his judgments in regard to his own work, and to the work of his friends; the curious bias which a feeling or an idea, affection or a philosophical theory, could give to his mind. His admiration for Southey, his consideration

for Sotheby, perhaps in a less degree his unconquerable esteem for Bowles, together with something very like adulation of Wordsworth, are all instances of a certain loss of the sense of proportion. He has left us no penetrating criticisms of Byron, of Shelley, or of Keats; and in a very interesting letter about Blake, written in 1818, he is unable to take the poems merely as poems, and chooses among them with a scrupulous care "not for the want of innocence in the poem, but from the too probable want of it in many readers."

Lamb, concerned only with individual things, looks straight at them, not through them, seeing them implacably. His notes to the selections from the Elizabethan dramatists are the surest criticisms that we have in English; they go to the roots. Coleridge's critical power was wholly exercised upon elements and first principles; Lamb showed an infinitely keener sense of detail, of the parts of the whole. Lamb was unerring on definite points, and could lay his finger on flaws in Coleridge's work that were invisible to Coleridge; who, however, was unerring in his broad distinctions, in the philosophy of his art.

"The ultimate end of criticism," said Coleridge, "is much more to establish the principles of writing than to furnish rules how to pass judgment on what has been written by others." And for this task he had an incomparable foundation: imagination, insight, logic, learning, almost every critical quality united in one; and he was a poet who allowed himself to be a critic. Those pages of the "Biographia Literaria," in which he defines and

distinguishes between imagination and fancy, the researches into the abstract entities of poetry in the course of an examination of Wordsworth's theories and of the popular objections to them, all that we have of the lectures on Shakespeare, into which he put an illuminating idolatry, together with notes and jottings preserved in the "Table-Talk," "Anima Poetæ," the "Literary Remains," and on the margins of countless books, contain the most fundamental criticism of literature that has ever been attempted, fragmentary as the attempt remains. "There is not a man in England," said Coleridge, with truth, "whose thoughts, images, words, and erudition have been published in larger quantities than *mine*; though I must admit, not *by*, nor *for*, myself." He claimed, and rightly, as his invention, a "science of reasoning and judging concerning the productions of literature, the characters and measures of public men, and the events of nations, by a systematic subsumption of them, under principles deduced from the nature of man," which, as he says, was unknown before the year 1795. He is the one philosophical critic who is also a poet, and thus he is the one critic who instinctively knows his way through all the intricacies of the creative mind.

Most of his best criticism circles around Shakespeare; and he took Shakespeare almost frankly in the place of Nature, or of poetry. He affirms, "Shakespeare knew the human mind, and its most minute and intimate workings, and he never introduces a word, or a thought, in vain or out of place." This granted (and to Coleridge it is essential that it should be granted, for in less than

the infinite he cannot find space in which to use his wings freely) he has only to choose and define, to discover and to illuminate. In the "myriad-minded man," in his "oceanic mind," he finds all the material that he needs for the making of a complete aesthetics. Nothing with Coleridge ever came to completion; but we have only to turn over the pages about Shakespeare, to come upon fragments worth more than anyone else's finished work. I find the whole secret of Shakespeare's way of writing in these sentences: "Shakespeare's intellectual action is wholly unlike that of Ben Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher. The latter see the totality of a sentence or passage, and then project it entire. Shakespeare goes on creating, and evolving B out of A, and C out of B, and so on, just as a serpent moves, which makes a fulcrum of its own body, and seems forever twisting and untwisting its own strength. "And here are a few axioms: 'The grandest efforts of poetry are where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind'; or, in other words, "The power of poetry is, by a single word perhaps, to instill that energy into the mind which compels the imagination to produce the picture." "Poetry is the identity of all other knowledges," "the blossom and fragrance of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." "Verse is in itself a music, and the natural symbol of that union of passion with thought and pleasure, which constitutes the essence of all poetry "; "a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order," as he has elsewhere defined it. And, in one of his spoken counsels, he

says: "I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is, prose— words in their best order; poetry—the best words in the best order."

Unlike most creative critics, or most critics who were creative artists in another medium, Coleridge, when he was writing criticism, wrote it wholly for its own sake, almost as if it were a science. His prose is rarely of the finest quality as prose writing. Here and there he can strike out a phrase at red-heat, as when he christens Shakespeare "the one Proteus of the fire and flood"; or he can elaborate subtly, as when he notes the judgment of Shakespeare, observable in every scene of the "Tempest," "still preparing, still inviting, and still gratifying, like a finished piece of music"; or he can strike us with the wit of the pure intellect, as when he condemns certain work for being "as trivial in thought and yet enigmatic in expression, as if Echo and the Sphinx had laid their heads together to construct it." But for the most part it is a kind of thinking aloud, and the form is wholly lost in the pursuit of ideas. With his love for the absolute, why is it that he does not seek after an absolute in words considered as style, as well as in words considered as the expression of thought? In his finest verse Coleridge has the finest style perhaps in English; but his prose is never quite reduced to order from its tumultuous amplitude or its snake-like involution. Is it that he values it only as a medium, not as an art? His art is verse, and this he dreads, because of its too mortal closeness to his heart; the prose is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The poetry of Coleridge, though it is closely interwoven with the circumstances of his life, is rarely made directly out of those circumstances. To some extent this is no doubt explained by a fact to which he often refers in his letters, and which, in his own opinion, hindered him not only from writing about himself in verse, but from writing verse at all. "As to myself," he writes in 1802, "all my poetic genius … is gone," and he attributes it "to my long and exceedingly severe metaphysical investigations, and these partly to ill-health, and partly to private afflictions which rendered any subjects, immediately connected with feeling, a source of pain and disquiet to me." In 1818 he writes: "Poetry is out of the question. The attempt would only hurry me into that sphere of acute feelings from which abstruse research, the mother of self-oblivion, presents an asylum." But theory worked with a natural tendency in keeping him for the most part away from any attempt to put his personal emotions into verse. "A sound promise of genius," he considered, "is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself." With only a few exceptions, the wholly personal poems, those actually written under a shock of emotion, are vague, generalized, turned into a kind of literature. The success of such a poem as the almost distressingly personal "Ode on Dejection" comes from the fact that Coleridge has been able to project his personal feeling into an outward image, which becomes to him the type of dejection; he can look at it as at one of his dreams which become things; he can sympathize with

it as he could never sympathize with his own undeserving self. And thus one stanza, perhaps the finest as poetry, becomes the biography of his soul:

> "There was a time when, though my path was rough,
> This joy within me dallied with distress,
> And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
> Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
> For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
> And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine
> But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
> Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
> But oh! each visitation
> Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
> My shaping spirit of Imagination.
> For not to think of what I needs must feel,
> But to be still and patient all I can,
> And haply by abstruse research to steal
> From my own nature all the natural man—
> This was my sole resource, my only plan:
> Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
> And now is almost grown the habit of my soul."

Elsewhere, in personal poems like "Frost at Midnight," and "Fears in Solitude," all the value of the poem comes from the delicate sensations of natural things which mean so much more to us, whether or not they did to him, than the strictly personal part of the matter. You feel that there he is only using the quite awake

part of himself, which is not the essential one. He requires, first of all, to be disinterested, or at least not overcome by emotion; to be without passion but that of abstract beauty, in Nature, or in idea; and then to sink into a quiet lucid sleep, in which his genius came to him like some attendant spirit.

In the life and art of Coleridge, the hours of sleep seem to have been almost more important than the waking hours. "My dreams became the substance of my life," he writes, just after the composition of that terrible poem on "The Pains of Sleep," which is at once an outcry of agony, and a yet more disturbing vision of the sufferer with his fingers on his own pulse, his eyes fixed on his own hardly awakened eyes in the mirror. In an earlier letter, written at a time when he is trying to solve the problem of the five senses, he notes: "The sleep which I have is made up of ideas so connected, and so little different from the operations of reason, that it does not afford me the due refreshment." To Coleridge, with the help of opium, hardly required, indeed, there was no conscious division between day and night, between not only dreams and intuitions, but dreams and pure reason. And we find him, in almost all his great poems, frankly taking not only his substance but his manner from dreams, as he dramatizes them after a logic and a passion of their own. His technique is the transposition into his waking hours of the unconscious technique of dreams. It is a kind of verified inspiration, something which came and went, and was as little to be relied upon as the inspiration itself. On one side it was an exact science, but on the

other a heavenly visitation. Count and balance syllables, work out an addition of the feet in the verse by the foot-rule, and you will seem to have traced every miracle back to its root in a natural product. Only, something, that is, everything, will have escaped you. As well dissect a corpse to find out the principle of life. That elusive something, that spirit, will be what distinguishes Coleridge's finest verse from the verse of, well, perhaps of every conscious artist in our language. For it is not, as in Blake, literally unconscious, and wavering on every breath of that unseen wind on which it floats to us; it is faultless; it is itself the wind which directs it, it steers its way on the wind, like a seagull poised between sky and sea, and turning on its wings as upon shifted sails.

This inspiration comes upon Coleridge suddenly, without warning, in the first uncertain sketch of "Lewti," written at twenty-two; and then it leaves him, without warning, until the great year 1797, three years later, when "Christabel" and "The Ancient Mariner" are begun. Before and after, Coleridge is seen trying to write like Bowles, like Wordsworth, like Southey, perhaps, to attain "that impetuosity of transition and that precipitancy of fancy and feeling, which are the *essential* qualities of the sublimer Ode," and which he fondly fancies that he has attained in the "Ode on the Departing Year," with its one good line, taken out of his note-book. But here, in "Lewti," he has his style, his lucid and liquid melody, his imagery of moving light and the faintly veiled transparency of air, his

vague, wildly romantic subject matter, coming from no one knows where, meaning one hardly knows what; but already a magic, an incantation. "Lewti" is a sort of preliminary study for "Kubla Khan"; it, too, has all the imagery of a dream, with a breathlessness and awed hush, as of one not yet accustomed to be at home in dreams.

"Kubla Khan," which was literally composed in sleep, comes nearer than any other existing poem to that ideal of lyric poetry which has only lately been systematized by theorists like Mallarmé. It has just enough meaning to give it bodily existence; otherwise it would be disembodied music. It seems to hover in the air, like one of the island enchantments of Prospero. It is music not made with hands, and the words seem, as they literally were, remembered. "All the images," said Coleridge, "rose up before me as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions." Lamb, who tells us how Coleridge repeated it "so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and elysian bowers into my parlour when he says or sings it to me," doubted whether it would "bear daylight." It seemed to him that such witchcraft could hardly outlast the night. It has outlasted the century, and may still be used as a touchstone; it will determine the poetic value of any lyric poem which you place beside it. Take as many poems as you please, and let them have all the merits you please, their ultimate merit as poetry will lie in the degree of their approach to the exact, unconscious, inevitable balance of qualities in the poetic art of "Kubla Khan."

In "The Ancient Mariner," which it seems probable was composed before, and not after "Kubla Khan," as Coleridge's date would have us suppose, a new supernaturalism comes into poetry, which, for the first time, accepted the whole responsibility of dreams. The impossible, frankly accepted, with its own strict, inverted logic; the creation of a new atmosphere, outside the known world, which becomes as real as the air about us, and yet never loses its strangeness; the shiver that comes to us, as it came to the wedding- guest, from the simple good faith of the teller; here is a whole new creation, in subject, mood, and technique. Here, as in "Kubla Khan," Coleridge saw the images "as *things*"; only a mind so overshadowed by dreams, and so easily able to carry on his sleep awake, could have done so; and, with such a mind, "that willing suspension of disbelief for a moment, which constitutes poetic faith," was literally forced upon him. "The excellence aimed at," says Coleridge, "was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations," those produced by supernatural agency, "supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever sense of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency." To Coleridge, whatever appealed vitally to his imagination was real; and he defended his belief philosophically, disbelieving from conviction in that sharp marking off of real from imaginary which is part of the ordinary attitude of man in the presence of mystery.

It must not be forgotten that Coleridge is never fantastic. The fantastic is a playing with the imagination, and Coleridge respects it. His intellect goes always easily as far as his imagination will carry it, and does not stop by the way to play tricks upon its bearer. Hence the conviction which he brings with him when he tells us the impossible. And then his style, in its ardent and luminous simplicity, flexible to every bend of the spirit which it clothes with flesh, helps him in the idiomatic translation of dreams. The visions of Swedenborg are literal translations of the imagination, and need to be retranslated. Coleridge is equally faithful to the thing seen and to the laws of that new world into which he has transposed it.

"The Ancient Mariner" is the most sustained piece of imagination in the whole of English poetry; and it has almost every definable merit of imaginative narrative. It is the only poem I know which is all point and yet all poetry; because, I suppose, the point is really a point of mystery. It is full of simple, daily emotion, transported, by an awful power of sight, to which the limits of reality are no barrier, into an unknown sea and air; it is realized throughout the whole of its ghastly and marvellous happenings; and there is in the narrative an ease, a buoyancy almost, which I can only compare with the music of Mozart, extracting its sweetness from the stuff of tragedy; it presents to us the utmost physical and spiritual horror, not only without disgust, but with an alluring beauty. But in "Christabel," in the first part especially, we find a quality which goes almost beyond

these definable merits. There is in it a literal spell, not acting along any logical lines, not attacking the nerves, not terrifying, not intoxicating, but like a slow, enveloping mist, which blots out the real world, and leaves us unchilled by any "airs from heaven or blasts from hell," but in the native air of some middle region. In these two or three brief hours of his power out of a lifetime, Coleridge is literally a wizard. People have wanted to know what "Christabel" means, and how it was to have ended, and whether Geraldine was a vampire (as I am inclined to think) or had eyes in her breasts (as Shelley thought). They have wondered that a poem so transparent in every line should be, as a whole, the most enigmatical in English. But does it matter very much whether "Christabel" means this or that, and whether Coleridge himself knew, as he said, how it was to end, or whether, as Wordsworth declared, he had never decided? It seems to me that Coleridge was fundamentally right when he said of the "Ancient Mariner," "It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Nights' tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, because one of the date-shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son." The "Ancient Mariner," if we take its moral meaning too seriously, comes near to being an allegory. "Christabel," as it stands, is a piece of pure witchcraft, needing no further explanation than the fact of its existence.

Rossetti called Coleridge the Turner of poets, and indeed

there is in Coleridge an aërial glitter which we find in no other poet, and in Turner only among painters. With him colour is always melted in atmosphere, which it shines through like fire within a crystal. It is liquid colour, the dew on flowers, or a mist of rain in bright sunshine. His images are for the most part derived from water, sky, the changes of weather, shadows of things rather than things themselves, and usually mental reflections of them. "A poet ought not to pick Nature's pocket," he said, and it is for colour and sound, in their most delicate forms, that he goes to natural things. He hears

"the merry nightingale That crowds and hurries and precipitates With fast thick warble his delicious notes;"

and an ecstasy comes to him out of that natural music which is almost like that of his own imagination. Only music or strange effects of light can carry him swiftly enough out of himself, in the presence of visible or audible things, for that really poetic ecstasy. Then all his languor drops off from him, like a clogging garment.

The first personal merit which appears in his almost wholly valueless early work is a sense of colour. In a poem written at twenty-one he sees Fancy

> "Bathed in rich amber-glowing floods of light,"

and next year the same colour reappears, more expressively, in a cloud,

"wholly bright,
With a rich and amber light."

The two women in "The Two Graves," during a momentous pause, are found discussing whether the rays of the sun are green or amber; a valley is

"Tinged yellow with the rich departing light;"

seen through corn at evening,

"The level sunshine glimmers with green light;"

and there is the carefully observed

"western sky And its peculiar tint of yellow green."

"The Ancient Mariner" is full of images of light and luminous colour in sky and sea; Glycine's song in "Zapolya" is the most glittering poem in our language, with a soft glitter like that of light seen through water. And he is continually endeavouring, as later poets have done on a more deliberate theory, to suffuse sound with colour or make colours literally a form of music; as in an early poem

"Where melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,

Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing."

With him, as with some of them, there is something pathological in this sensitiveness, and in a letter written in 180O he says: "For the last month I have been trembling on through sands and swamps of evil and bodily grievance. My eyes have been inflamed to a degree that rendered reading scarcely possible; and, strange as it seems, the act of mere composition, as I lay in bed, perceptibly affected them, and my voluntary ideas were every minute passing, more or less transformed into vivid spectra."

Side by side with this sensitiveness to colour, or interfused with it, we find a similar, or perhaps a greater, sensitiveness to sound, Coleridge shows a greater sensitiveness to music than any English poet except Milton. The sonnet to Linley records his ecstatic responsiveness to music; Purcell's music, too, which he names with Palestrina's ("some madrigals which he heard at Rome") in the "Table-Talk." "I have the intensest delight in music," he says there, "and can detect good from bad"; a rare thing among poets. In one of his letters he notes: "I hear in my brain … sensations … of various degrees of pain, even to a strange sort of uneasy pleasure…. I hear in my brain, and still more in my stomach." There we get the morbid physical basis of a sensitiveness to music which came to mean much to him. In a note referring to "Christabel," and to the reasons why it had never been finished, he says: "I could write as good verse now

as ever I did, if I were perfectly free from vexations, and were in the *ad libitum* hearing of fine music, which has a sensible effect in harmonizing my thoughts, and in animating and, as it were, lubricating my inventive faculty." "Christabel," more than anything of Coleridge, is composed like music; you might set at the side of each section, especially of the opening, *largo, vivacissimo*, and, as the general expression signature, *tempo rubato*. I know no other verse in which the effects of music are so precisely copied in metre. Shelley, you feel, sings like a bird; Blake, like a child or an angel; but Coleridge certainly writes music.

The metre of the "Ancient Mariner" is a re-reading of the familiar ballad- metre, in which nothing of the original force, swiftness or directness is lost, while a new subtlety, a wholly new music, has come into it. The metre of "Christabel" is even more of an invention, and it had more immediate consequences. The poem was begun in 1797, and not published till 1816; but in 1801 Scott heard it recited, and in 1805 reproduced what he could of it in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" and the other metrical romances which, in their turn, led the way to Byron, who himself heard "Christabel" recited in 1811. But the secret of Coleridge's instinct of melody and science of harmony was not discovered. Such ecstasy and such collectedness, a way of writing which seems to aim at nothing but the most precisely expressive simplicity, and yet sets the whole brain dancing to its tune, can hardly be indicated more exactly than in Coleridge's

own words in reference to the Italian lyrists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They, attained their aim, he says, "by the avoidance of every word which a gentleman would not use in dignified conversation, and of every word and phrase which none but a learned man would use; by the studied position of words and phrases, so that not only each part should be melodious in itself, but contribute to the harmony of the whole, each note referring and conducing to the melody of all the foregoing and following words of the same period or stanza; and, lastly, with equal labour, the greater because unbetrayed, by the variation and various harmonies of their metrical movement." These qualities we may indeed find in many of Coleridge's songs, part Elizabethan, part eighteenth century, in some of his infantile jingles, his exuberant comic verse (in which, however, there are many words "which a gentleman would not use"), and in a poem like "Love," which has suffered as much indiscriminate praise as Raphael's Madonnas, which it resembles in technique and sentiment, and in its exquisite perfection of commonplace, its _tour de force _of an almost flawless girlishness. But in "Christabel" the technique has an incomparable substance to work upon; substance at once simple and abnormal, which Coleridge required, in order to be at his best.

It has been pointed out by the profoundest poetical critic of our time that the perfection of Coleridge's style in poetry comes from an equal balance of the clear, somewhat matter-of-fact qualities of the eighteenth century with the remote,

imaginative qualities of the nineteenth century. "To please me," said Coleridge in "Table-Talk," "a poem must be either music or sense." The eighteenth-century manner, with its sense only just coupled with a kind of tame and wingless music, may be seen quite by itself in the early song from "Robespierre":

> "Tell me, on what holy ground
> May domestic peace be found?"

Here there is both matter and manner, of a kind; in "The Kiss" of the same year, with its one exquisite line,

> "The gentle violence of joy,"

there is only the liquid glitter of manner. We get the ultimate union of eighteenth and nineteenth century qualities in "Work without Hope," and in "Youth and Age," which took nine years to bring into its faultless ultimate form. There is always a tendency in Coleridge to fall back on the eighteenth-century manner, with its scrupulous exterior neatness, and its comfortable sense of something definite said definitely, whenever the double inspiration flags, and matter and manner do not come together. "I cannot write without a *body of thought*," he said at a time before he had found himself or his style; and he added: "Hence my poetry is crowded and sweats beneath a heavy burden of ideas and imagery! It has seldom ease." It was an unparalleled ease in the conveying of a "body of thought" that he was finally to

attain. In "Youth and Age," think how much is actually said, and with a brevity impossible in prose; things, too, far from easy for poetry to say gracefully, such as the image of the steamer, or the frank reference to "this altered size"; and then see with what an art, as of the very breathing of syllables, it passes into the most flowing of lyric forms. Besides these few miracles of his later years, there are many poems, such as the Flaxman group of "Love, Hope, and Patience supporting Education," in which we get all that can be poetic in the epigram softened by imagination, all that can be given by an ecstatic plain thinking. The rarest magic has gone, and he knows it; philosophy remains, and out of that resisting material he is able, now and again, to weave, in his deftest manner, a few garlands.

ARTHUR SYMONS.

SELECTIONS FROM THE POEMS OF COLERIDGE

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

IN SEVEN PARTS

Facile credo, plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universitate. Sed horum omnium familiam quis nobis enarrabit? et gradus et cognationes et discrimina et singulorum munera? Quid agunt? quæ loca habitant? Harum rerum notitiam semper ambivit ingenium humanum, nunquam attigit. Juvat, interea, non diffiteor, quandoque in animo, tanquam in tabulâ, majoris et melioris mundi imaginem contemplari: ne mens assuefacta hodiernæ vitæ minutiis se contrahat nimis, et tota subsidat in pusillas cogitationes. Sed veritati interea invigilandum est, modusque servandus, ut certa ab incertis, diem a nocte, distinguamus.—T. BURNET, *Archæol. Phil*. p. 68.

ARGUMENT

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

"The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din."

He holds him with his skinny hand,
"There was a ship," quoth he.
"Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!"
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye

The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

The sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon—"
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"And now the Storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:

It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

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

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

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white moon-shine."

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?"—With my cross-bow
I shot the Albatross.

* * * * *

PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor, dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.

'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!

That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

And some in dreams assured were ,
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

PART III

There passed a weary time. Each throat

Was parched, and glazed each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye,
When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged and tacked and veered.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!

Hither to work us weal;
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

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

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

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

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

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:

Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

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

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

We listened and looked sideways up!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seemed to sip!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.

Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

The souls did from their bodies fly,—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

PART IV

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand.[1]

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown."—
Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

[1] For the last two lines of this stanza, I am indebted to Mr. Wordsworth. It was on a delightful walk from Nether Stowey to Dulverton, with him and his sister, in the autumn of 1797, that this poem was planned, and in part composed. [Note of S. T. C., first printed in *Sibylline Leaves*.]

Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is a curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

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

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

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

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

Was a flash of golden fire.

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

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

PART V

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep;
And was a blessed ghost.

And soon I heard a roaring wind:
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,

The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan.

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,!
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up blew;
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
The body and I pulled at one rope
But he said nought to me.

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!"
Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!
'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corses came again,

But a troop of spirits blest:

For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,
And clustered round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the sky-lark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
Moved onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,
From the land of mist and snow,
The spirit slid: and it was he
That made the ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the ship stood still also.

The Sun, right up above the mast,
Had fixed her to the ocean:
But in a minute she 'gan stir,
With a short uneasy motion—
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,
She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swound.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
But ere my living life returned,
I heard and in my soul discerned

Two voices in the air.

"Is it he?" quoth one, "Is this the man?
By him who died on cross,
With his cruel bow he laid full low
The harmless Albatross.

The spirit who bideth by himself
In the land of mist and snow,
He loved the bird that loved the man
Who shot him with his bow."

The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honey-dew:
Quoth he, "The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do."

PART VI

FIRST VOICE

"But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing—
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the ocean doing?"

SECOND VOICE

"Still as a slave before his lord,
The ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.
See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him."

FIRST VOICE

"But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?"

SECOND VOICE

"The air is cut away before,

And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!
Or we shall be belated:
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Mariner's trance is abated."

I woke, and we were sailing on
As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high,
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away:
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
Nor turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapt: once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
Of what had else been seen—

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,

And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway.

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colours came.

A little distance from the prow
Those crimson shadows were:
I turned my eyes upon the deck—
Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,

Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but oh! the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the Pilot's cheer;
My head was turned perforce away,
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,
I heard them coming fast:
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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