

## OFTEN DOWN, BUT NEVER OUT SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1834)



In his quest for a livelihood, in his family life, and in his response to the Enlightenment, the poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the contrary of the lesser writer Sydney Smith. His giant weeping willow overshadows Smith's modest hawthorn, and his letters, unlike Smith's, are the letters of an unhappy man.

Coleridge's troubles begin in childhood. In 1781, on the threshold of his ninth year, the death of his father, the Vicar of Ottery in Devon, leaves him in the charge of his brother George. After being schooled at Christ's Hospital, he goes up to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he distinguishes himself as a scholar; falls in love with Mary Evans, whose mother tends him with maternal affection when he is ill; and indulges in enough wayward behaviour to pile up debts he cannot pay. During a three-year period beginning when he is eighteen, he lapses from chastity in his association with loose women. In despair and shame, resisting the temptation of suicide, he enlists in the dragoons, or light cavalry, under the name Silas Tomkyn Comberbache. His friends and family succeed in tracing him, and after much difficulty his brothers George and James procure his discharge, ostensibly on the grounds of his insanity.

Soon after returning to Cambridge, Coleridge meets Robert Southey, and the two young poets, both radicals, concoct a scheme only a little less hare-brained than the flight into the military. With other enthusiasts, they will found a Utopian colony in the United States of America to practise pantisocracy (the rule of all as equals) and aspheterism (commonality of property). Southey has visions of cutting down trees while talking philosophy and of discussing poetry while hunting buffaloes. The dream of pantisocracy, however, leads to the first of the two great tragedies of Coleridge's life. In 1795, Coleridge and Southey wed two sisters in order to have both men and women in their colony. However, friction erupts between the two newly wed men, and they never leave for America. At the

end of 1796, Coleridge rents a cottage in Somerset beside the home of his friend Thomas Poole, who shares his very liberal political views. During the next two years, he composes his greatest poems: "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and "Kubla Khan."

Poetry, however, does not provide a livelihood. Coleridge, having jettisoned his family's Anglicanism, has won popularity as a Unitarian preacher and is about to accept the offer of a ministry at Shrewsbury when the porcelain manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood and his brother Thomas grant him an annuity to enable him to devote himself to literature.

Coleridge's great poems are written while he enjoys an intense friendship with the siblings William and Dorothy Wordsworth and falls in love with their native landscape in the English Lake District. The publication in 1798 of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's joint collection *Lyrical Ballads* ushers in the Romantic Revival thereby marking a turning point in English literature. In the year of this publication, Coleridge visits Germany in the company of the Wordsworths, but soon leaves them to concentrate on mastering the German language and to study at the University of Göttingen.

About 1801, Coleridge suffers the second great tragedy of his life: he becomes enslaved to opium. Henceforward he has great difficulty in supporting himself, his wife, and their three children.

Besides his addiction, Coleridge suffers from the notorious English winter, and in April 1804 sails for Malta, where he remains till September 1805. Back in England in 1806, having nearly been trapped in Italy by Napoleon's army, he works as a journalist writing topical articles for Daniel Stuart's paper, the *Courier*, and begins a long career of intermittent public lecturing on literature and philosophy. His place of residence varies, and he sometimes has his son Hartley with him. In 1810, he moves to London and quarrels with Wordsworth, after his friend Basil Montagu tells him the Wordsworth family have complained of him as an "absolute nuisance" in the house. Next year Josiah Wedgwood, faced by the collapse of his business, withdraws his half of the poet's annuity. Dogged for years by financial exigency, Coleridge has a happy but brief change of fortune in 1813 when his verse play *Remorse*, supported by a strong cast and ingenious visual effects, becomes a hit on the London stage. However, good luck seldom comes Coleridge's way. From 1810 to 1816, he usually forms part of the household of his admirer John Morgan, and when Morgan loses his fortune, Coleridge feels bound to use what he has earned in the theatre to see his friend through his crisis.

In 1816, Coleridge finds a new family to adopt him: Dr. James Gillman, his wife, Ann, and their children, James and Henry, live at Highgate on the outskirts of London. In his later years, the poet, known as "the sage

of Highgate," holds weekly conversation evenings for invited guests. He continues to suffer from appalling health, though it is slightly alleviated by seaside holidays at Ramsgate with members of his host family.

Worldly prosperity still eludes Coleridge. The Gillmans, themselves not well off, shoulder his expenses beyond what he can pay, and he has to rely on relatives and friends to fund his sons' university education.

The quarrel with Wordsworth in 1810, bitter as it is, is not irreparable. As late as 1828, the two poets, together with Wordsworth's daughter Dora, tour the Rhineland for six weeks. This is to be a last foreign excursion before Coleridge becomes a prisoner of his broken health. In 1834, still living in the Gillmans' house, he dies.

Coleridge does not season his letters with gossip, and he gives only scattered snapshots of the society in which he lives. Against a swirling background of family quarrels, travels, business tangles and medical ordeals, he unwittingly builds up a self-portrait of a man struggling, like Dr. Johnson, against obstacles external and internal. He is not among the very few addicts saved from the worst effects of opium by exceptional willpower—addicts like the poet George Crabbe, who, introduced to the drug by a misguided physician about 1789, manages to pass the more than four decades remaining to him with only a very slight increase in his dose. By 1814, Coleridge is writing to his friend and early publisher Joseph Cottle of an account in a medical journal of how laudanum (opium in wine) cured knees as crippled as his then were. In his case, the remedy proves temporary and the effects life destroying. To Southey he declares in 1803:

I am tolerably well, meaning the day. My last night was not such a noisy night of horrors as three nights out of four are with me. O God! when a man blesses the loud screams of agony that awake him night after night, night after night, and when a man's repeated night screams have made him a nuisance in his own house, it is better to die than to live.

Visiting Eton in 1825, he wakes sleepers in other rooms with screams of which he has no recollection in the morning. "While I am awake and retain my reasoning powers, the pang is gnawing," he confides to his much cherished young friend Thomas Allsop, "but I am, except for a fitful moment or two, tranquil; it is the howling wilderness of sleep that I dread." To communicate the nature of his sufferings, he sometimes quotes to his correspondents his own poem "The Pains of Sleep."

Physical pain, Coleridge finds, he can bear "like an Indian," but opium, while leaving his intellect untouched, saps his will, and "in all things that affect my moral feelings," he confesses to Josiah Wedgwood, "I have

sunk under such a strange cowardice of Pain that I have not unfrequently kept Letters from persons dear to me for weeks together unopened." Coleridge frequently apologises to his correspondents for his belated replies. His addiction fills him with a torturing guilt for this and greater vices. He admits to Joseph Cottle: "I have prayed, with drops of agony on my brow, trembling not only before the justice of my Maker, but even before the mercy of my Redeemer. 'I gave thee so many talents, what hast thou done with them?'" To his Bristol friend Josiah Wade, he imparts a broader self-accusation: "In the one crime of OPIUM, what crime have I not made myself guilty of! — Ingratitude to my Maker! and to my benefactors — injustice! and *unnatural cruelty to my poor children!* — self-contempt for my repeated promise-breach, nay, too often, actual falsehood!"

Disabling as his addiction is, Coleridge never ceases to exercise his linguistic gift. After mastering German, he goes on to study Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Hebrew. Nor does his suffering prevent him from occasionally intervening in public life. In a lecture on 3 May 1808, he defends Andrew Bell's educational programme against Joseph Lancaster's. Bell advocates state education, while Lancaster not only favours independent schools but also supports humiliating punishments like tying a boy's leg to a log. Three days later, Coleridge writes to his wife of a dinner party at which he has received the worst insult of his life from a titled admirer of Lancaster. So deep is his esteem for his hero, that he refers to Bell as "the man who beyond all competition is entitled to the name of the greatest Benefactor of the Race of all now living Individuals."

Equally concerned when the Government introduces in 1815 a Corn Bill to prohibit the importation of wheat till the price rises to eighty shillings a quarter, Coleridge reports that he is loudly cheered when he attacks this assault on the poor at a public meeting in the market at Calne in Wiltshire. "You cannot conceive," he writes to a friend, "how this Corn Bill haunts me, and so it would you, if you had seen the pale faces and heard the conversation of the hundred poor creatures that came to sign the petition." The Bill becomes law later in the year.

In 1818, Sir Robert Peel, father of the future Prime Minister of the same name, introduces a Bill in Parliament to improve the conditions of child workers in the cotton factories. Coleridge tries to publish an article in its support, and when it passes in the Commons but is threatened in the Lords, he raises the question of "Whether some half-score of rich capitalists are to be prevented from suborning suicide and perpetuating infanticide and soul-murder." Seeking help in the cause from his friend the lawyer and diarist Henry Crabb Robinson, he declares, "Though Heaven knows that I am seriously hurting myself by devoting my days daily in this my best harvest-tide as a lecture-monger ... I should have bid farewell to all ease of

conscience if I had returned an excuse to the request made for my humble assistance." On 7 May, he writes that, in order to support this Bill, he has spent a night away from home for the first time in over two years. Passed in 1819, the Act prohibits the employment of children under nine and limits the working day to twelve hours.

In 1821, Coleridge's emotions are caught up in a local quarrel over an Elizabethan charitable foundation. The Governors of Highgate Free Grammar School want to use the funds of the chapel trust to pull down the old school chapel and build a larger one which will serve the whole neighbourhood; this requires an Act of Parliament. "Highgate," Coleridge writes to Thomas Allsop, "is in high feuds with the factious stir against the governors of the chapel." The feud is to last nine years. Coleridge is convinced that Highgate needs the chapel and is indignant that opponents want a more prestigious school than one that educates supposedly unkempt poor boys. He tries in 1830 to channel accurate information to the main parliamentary opponent. The necessary Act is passed in the same year.

Although Coleridge never allows his sufferings from his addiction and his intermittent agonising ailments to blunt his deep-seated compassion, they necessarily impinge on his career, resulting in postponed lectures and missed deadlines. Moreover, his gift is for writing, not business. He belongs to the class of persons who perform excellently in their chosen field but who should work for an employer. His residence at Malta constitutes a happy interlude in his troubled career. Here the Governor, Sir Alexander Ball, quickly discovers his talent for pouring out the riches of his mind in his talk as well as his potential as an administrator. Ball appoints him first as his Confidential Secretary and then as Acting Public Secretary. His health improves, and, in spite of his grumbling, he appears to thrive with regular employment and the companionship of the admiring Governor. This happy isolation contrasts with his plight when he attempts from 1809 to 1810 to support himself by publishing his periodical essay *The Friend*. His clumsiness in such matters as buying the necessary paper, arranging its distribution, dealing with the tax, and collecting payment figures largely in his letters. Similarly, he writes of his difficulty in hiring suitable lecture rooms in acceptable neighbourhoods at rates that will leave him with a profit. By 1819, he confesses that he is "utterly unfit to arrange any pecuniary matters." His constant remedy for want of money is to borrow, and he is not shy about admitting his embarrassment at asking for loans. He will borrow from one friend to repay another. From 1824 to 1834, he writes a series of letters to Thomas H. Dunn, the Highgate pharmacist who supplies him with opium, explaining why he needs a little longer to settle his bill. When he applies to his brother George for a loan to buy paper to continue publishing *The Friend* till it is time for the subscribers to pay, he receives

an indignant refusal. It is not difficult to sympathize with both parties, but how can Coleridge maintain in his reply that he has never been in debt?

There is little change through the years. Coleridge remains a sponger, even though there is some truth in his claim to the author William Sotheby that his friends benefit from his writings and conversation. Like a gambler looking for a big win, he thinks his next venture will succeed. At Malta, while he is working successfully for Sir Alexander Ball, he writes to Southey, "I live in a perfect palace and have all my meals with the Governor; but my profits will be much less than if I had employed my time and efforts in my own literary pursuits." He will not stray, he insists, from his great task, which is no less, as will become clear, than to reverse the course of the Enlightenment, nor will he stoop to cater to the depraved taste of the contemporary reader.

Early in his life, it is otherwise. Coleridge remembers how, to entertain Dorothy Wordsworth, he read aloud a slashing review he had composed and elicited a response very different from the applause he expected. He rapidly came to consider the whole business of reviewing in periodicals as immoral. The business is, he assures the political thinker William Godwin, "unjust to the author of the books reviewed, injurious in its effects on the public taste and morality, and still more injurious in its influences on the head and heart of the reviewer himself." What Coleridge is condemning are bad reviews. There seems no reason why he should not write informative and just reviews, and review essays, and use them to promulgate his own values. Many of Sydney Smith's long review articles remain well worth reading today. In 1820 Coleridge declines to compose a commentary to prints illustrating Goethe's *Faust* and mentions that he has recently refused two requests for remunerative work in the form of critical essays on works of his own choosing. In the same year, he complains to Allsop, "I must abrogate the name of philosopher and poet, and scribble as fast as I can, and with as little thought as I can for Blackwood's Magazine." He publishes one article in *Blackwood's*.

A source of income which Coleridge taps for many years is newspaper journalism. While he often finds it irksome, he consoles himself with the thought that what he writes at midnight will have thousands of readers in the morning and that in discussing the momentous events of the Napoleonic age, he can relate them to universal principles. His profile in 1800 of Prime Minister William Pitt is, to his great delight, hailed as masterly, but it is characteristic of him that he never writes the profile of Bonaparte that he promises will follow. By 1811, however, he informs his friend and admirer the art collector Sir George Beaumont:

I have not been at the *Courier* office for some months past. I detest writing politics, even on the right side, and when I discovered that the *Courier* was not the independent paper I had been led to believe, and had myself over and over again asserted, I wrote no more for it.

Four years later, he complains to its former editor Daniel Stuart:

since the *Courier* is so entirely devoted to the Government for the time being there is no Paper in which I could write without offence to my own mind; in other words, there does not exist a single London Paper conducted on determined principles, or that would admit a series of articles conducted on principles.

Next to the fulfilment of what he considers his great duty—to overthrow the dominant philosophy of the Enlightenment and defend Trinitarian Christianity—Coleridge worries most about the support of his family. While he is issuing *The Watchman*, he writes to Poole:

I am perfectly callous to disapprobation, except when it tends to lessen profit. Then indeed I am all one tremble of sensibility, marriage having taught me the wonderful uses of that vulgar commodity, yclept Bread.

From the beginning, Coleridge's family life is ill-omened. Sara Fricker, whom Southey induces him to court for the sake of their pantisocracy, rejects two other suitors, one wealthy, in favour of the young idealist. When Coleridge realises that his real passion is still for Mary Evans, with whom he fell in love in his student days, he nevertheless feels honour-bound to marry Sara. He writes to Southey, grieving that Mary Evans is now engaged to another:

To lose her! I can rise above that selfish pang. But to marry another. O Southey! bear with my weakness. Love makes all things pure and heavenly like itself,—but to marry a woman whom I do *not* love, to degrade her whom I call my wife by making her the instrument of low desire, and on the removal of a desultory appetite to be perhaps not displeased with her absence! Enough! These refinements are the wildering fires that lead me into vice. Mark you, Southey! *I will do my duty.*

Despite this ill start, the newly wedded couple appear to settle down happily. During his residence in Germany, Coleridge sends affectionate letters

to his wife sharing his experiences, noting that Wordsworth “seems to have employed more time in writing English than in studying German,” and being unafraid to mention that Countess Kilmansig, a beautiful lady with two small children, is much taken with him. He can write intimately to his spouse of how longing for his family affects his mind:

I have thought and thought of you, and pictured you and the little ones so often and so often that my imagination is tired down, flat and powerless, and I languish after home for hours together in vacancy, my feelings almost wholly unqualified by thoughts.

However, two months after his return to England, signs of friction start to appear in his letters. He writes to Southey:

the wife of a man of genius who sympathises effectively with her husband in his habits and feelings is a *rara avis* [rare bird] with me; though a vast majority of her own sex and too many of ours will scout her for a *rara piscis* [odd fish].

Two years later, in October 1801, he tells the same confidant that he is convinced marriage is indissoluble and that he will try to overcome their incompatibility, but if the attempt fails it will be best for them to separate and for him to strive mightily to save his wife from want or discomfort. “For what is life,” he asks Southey soon after, “gangrened, as it is with me, in its very vitals, domestic tranquillity?” From his letters, a picture emerges of an introverted husband who pays little attention to appearances and is disrespectful to his wife, both in private and before others, and of an extraverted wife who screams at her husband, makes his friends unwelcome, and is psychologically dependent on what people think of her. Yet it is hard to see how he can blame her for her jealousy when he is so close to William and Dorothy Wordsworth that he is later able to write to Godwin, “for though we were three persons, there was but one God.” This is also the case when he attempts to persuade her and himself that his passion for Sara Hutchinson is no more than one of many ardent friendships. To the latter he sends an early version of the poem “Dejection: an Ode,” in which he expresses his misery, and which he quotes in subsequent letters to communicate his mental state.

The couple reconcile, but the arrangement proves to be only a truce. Although they separate, Coleridge usually recognizes his wife’s estimable qualities as well as her faults; in moments of exasperation, however, he calls her unfeeling, lacking in womanly sympathy, and ungrateful for his

efforts, despite his ill health, to support her. “Mrs. Coleridge’s mind,” he observes to Southey,

has very little that is *bad* in it; it is an innocent mind; but it is light and *unimpressible*, warm in anger, cold in sympathy, and in all disputes uniformly *projects itself forth* to recriminate, instead of turning itself inward with a silent self-questioning.

In 1803, Coleridge takes out a life insurance policy for £1,000 and appoints Thomas Poole as the trustee; henceforward he always ensures the premium is paid, and likes to reassure his wife of the fact. In the years to come, he writes to several young people, including his son Derwent, warning about the importance of taking great care in choosing one’s partner in life.

Coleridge is devoted to his children. He asserts, “Next to the Bible, Shakespeare, and Milton, *they* are the three books from which I have learned the most, and the most important and with the greatest delight.” Portraits of Hartley and Derwent appear in his letters. Hartley is a boisterous and fanciful boy, who can see a cloud cover first the moon and then some stars and exclaim, “Pretty creatures! they are going to see after their mother moon.” “That child,” Coleridge writes to Southey, “is a poet, spite of the forehead, ‘villainously *low*,’ which his mother smuggled into his face.” Hartley takes after his father, perhaps too much, as the latter realises when he sends the ten-year-old boy a kindly but solemn warning:

mere natural qualities, however pleasing and delightful, must not be deemed virtues until they are broken in and yoked to the plough of *Reason*. Now to apply this to your own case—I could equally apply it to myself.... Nothing that gives you pain dwells long enough upon your mind to do you any good, just as in some diseases the medicines pass so quickly through the stomach and bowels as to be able to exert none of their healing qualities. In like manner, this power which you possess of shoving aside all disagreeable reflections, or losing them in a labyrinth of daydreams, which saves you from some present pain, has, on the other hand, interwoven with your nature habits of procrastination, which, unless you correct them in time (and it will require all your best exertions to do it effectually), must lead you into lasting unhappiness.

Derwent, whose qualities are characteristic of the highly successful members of the Coleridge family, recognizes how different his brother is. In a letter to John Morgan, his father reports that he

has complained to me (having no other possible grievance) 'that Mr. Dawes does not *love* him, because he can't help crying when he is scolded, and because he ain't such a genius as Hartley – and that though Hartley should have done the same thing, yet all the others are punished, and Mr. Dawes only *looks* at Hartley and never scolds *him*, and that *all* the boys think it very unfair – he *is* a genius.'

Hartley grows into a fine scholar but an eccentric and improvident man, who forfeits his Fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford, for unseemly behaviour. With difficulty, Coleridge obtains a teaching post for him at Ambleside, in the Lake District, but though he functions well, the school folds. Hartley falls back on the world of letters, but is never able to support himself.

Derwent arrives at Cambridge as a competent student but soon strays into the frivolity of trying to shine as a beau. Coleridge points to the shallowness of seeking distinction from the fineness of one's dress and laments his son's neglect of his studies. Even more distressful to his father is Derwent's lapse into atheism under the influence of his fellow students Charles Austin, a future lawyer of some fame, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, the budding essayist and historian. In discussion with him, Coleridge finds that he cannot define the philosophical terms he bandies about. Neglecting his studies, Derwent earns only a pass degree, but he soon returns to the Church and takes holy orders.

When his daughter, Sara, is eleven months old, Coleridge writes, "Our girl is a darling little thing, with large blue eyes, a quiet creature that, as I have often said, seems to bask in a sunshine as mild as moonlight, of her own happiness." Visiting Keswick in 1812, when she is nine, he finds that

little Sara does honour to her mother's anxieties, reads French tolerably, and Italian fluently, and I was astonished at her acquaintance with her native language ... she is such a sweet-tempered, meek, blue-eyed fairy and so affectionate, trustworthy, and really serviceable!

While Hartley and Derwent visit their father from time to time, Sara remains at Keswick, though Coleridge longs to see her. He writes of how, when the artist Charles Leslie, who has never met Sara, shows him a portrait in 1818, he is confident he has never seen the subject but thinks her just such a young woman as his daughter might have become. Leslie then reveals that not he himself but William Collins is the painter and the subject is indeed the poet's daughter.

It is not till 1823 that Mrs. Coleridge brings their daughter to see her father. The precociously clever, charming little girl he knew is now a young scholar whose only weakness is her uncertain health. She has had her translation of a Latin book published by John Murray, and her beauty is a magnet for young men. Among these is her cousin and fellow scholar Henry Nelson Coleridge, a son of the poet's brother Colonel James Coleridge. When her father discovers to his surprise that the attachment is serious, he worries about a marriage between first cousins and writes to ask Daniel Stuart's and Mrs. Stuart's opinion of such unions. He is unwilling, however, to visit heartbreak on an "only Daughter — & *such* a daughter." Colonel Coleridge, on his part, regards the improvident drug addict as a family disgrace. It takes Henry more than six years to establish himself in the legal profession and to overcome the Colonel's objections, but in 1829 the couple marry and are content to live frugally for a time. On 9 August 1832, the ailing Coleridge stands beside his estranged wife at the christening of their daughter's baby.

Coleridge's unhappy experiences leave him with a craving for family affection. Often he looks on young men as his sons and women as his sisters. To young men, he can be an intellectual guide. The letters about how and what to study that he writes to children and youths such as the junior James Gillman, his host's son, and his own Derwent suggest that he is a born teacher. He sends six-year-old Derwent a beginner's lesson in Greek and details of the common metrical feet; is ready to give Daniel Stuart an assessment of his son's academic standing and potential; and counsels the young James Gillman on the best ways to translate between English and Latin. He impresses on James the importance of mastering principles as well as memorising facts, but takes a balanced view: when the youth, fresh at university, wants to explore metaphysical questions, he cautions him that a good grounding in the chronology of ancient history and the social and legal practices of the ancient world (such as Coleridge and his fellows acquired at Christ's Hospital) should precede metaphysical enquiries; if, however, he persists in looking into them now, he could turn to the essays on Method in *The Friend* and the Appendix to *The Statesman's Manual*. He reluctantly transcribes a passage from one of his notebooks that young Gillman asks for, even as he emphasises the great importance of lucidity and orderliness in his studies.

Long before the younger James Gillman enters the University, Coleridge has switched his main interest from poetry to metaphysics. Insofar as he has any regret for this, feeling as he sometimes does that his inspiration has deserted him, he is inclined to suspect that his marital unhappiness and devastating ill health have driven him to philosophy, which

has suppressed his poetic inspiration. In 1802, he explains to William Sotheby why he undertook to translate Gesner's poem *Erste Schiffer*:

I wished to force myself out of metaphysical trains of thought, which, when I wished to write a poem, beat up game of far other kind. Instead of a covey of poetic partridges with whirring wings of music, or wild ducks *shaping* their rapid flight in forms always regular (a still better image of verse), up came a metaphysical bustard, urging its slow, heavy, laborious, earth-skimming flight over dreary and level wastes.

His especial concern is with metaphysics as a firm foundation for Protestant Trinitarian Christianity.

At the beginning of his career, Coleridge is a Unitarian denying the divinity of Christ, a determinist holding that external circumstances determine mental processes, and a follower of the eighteenth century Christian necessitarian David Hartley. This thinker maintains that the way an idea in the consciousness calls up another idea that has become associated with it (as a thought of the sea might call up a thought about swimming) can be used in education to lead the mind upwards; starting with sensory experience, the ascent should culminate in the love of God and the acquisition of a moral sense. His admiration for Hartley is such that, in September 1796 Coleridge gives that philosopher's name to his firstborn son, observing to Poole, "I hope that ere he be a man, if God destines him for continuance in this life, his head will be convinced of, and his heart saturated with, the truths so ably supported by that great master of *Christian Philosophy*."

Slowly Coleridge weans himself away from this position. The turning point is recorded in two letters. On 3 February 1801, he writes to his friend the scientist Humphry Davy:

I have been *thinking* vigorously during my illness, so that I cannot say that my long, long wakeful nights have been all lost to me. The subject of my meditations has been the relations of thoughts to things; in the language of Hume, of ideas to impressions.

His reveals his conclusions to Thomas Poole in a letter of 16 March:

The interval since my last letter has been filled up by me in the most intense study. If I do not greatly delude myself, I have not only *completely extricated the notions of time and space*, but have overthrown the doctrine of association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern infidels—especially the doctrine of necessity. This 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, that is, to deduce them from one sense, and to state their growth and the causes of their difference, and in this evolvment to solve the process of life and consciousness.

Coleridge goes on to announce:

My German Book I have suffered to remain suspended chiefly because the thoughts which had employed my sleepless nights during my illness were imperious over me; and though poverty was staring me in the face, yet I dared behold my image miniatured in the pupil of her hollow eye, so steadily did I look her in the face; for it seemed to me a suicide of my very soul to divert my attention from truths so important, which came to me almost as a revelation.

In place of the travel book he intended to write, Coleridge now plans “a work on the originality and merits of Locke, Hobbes, and Hume,” which will prepare for the reception of his “greater work.” He adds, “I am confident that I can prove that the reputation of these three men has been wholly unmerited.” A week later, he stigmatizes Newton, despite “the beauty and neatness of his experiments” and his powers of deduction, as a materialist, in whose system “*Mind ... is always passive.*”

Coleridge is here making the first sortie in his long war to overthrow the values of the Enlightenment and replace its rational, scientific approach to the natural world and society with a philosophy that combines elements from ancients like Heraclitus and Plato, sixteenth century thinkers like Giordano Bruno and Jakob Boehme, and modern Germans like Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schelling. Most of the abstruse letters he writes on this topic are addressed to the surgeon Joseph Henry Green and the Swedenborgian Charles Augustus Tulk. In this correspondence, he refers to his defence against one of the several charges of plagiarism made against him, but his defence has not been found convincing. As ardent a modern admirer as Owen Barfield writes, “there is not much doubt that, as the law now stands, Schelling could have sued Coleridge in respect of one or two pages in the *Biographia Literaria.*”

Central to Coleridge’s outlook is his lack of interest in facts unless they contribute to a large picture or conception, an attitude that can be traced back to his early years. In one of several letters to Poole about his childhood, the poet recollects:

from my early reading of fairy tales and genii, etc., etc., my mind has been habituated *to the Vast*, and I never regarded *my senses*

in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my *sight*, even at that age. Should children be permitted to read romances, and relations of giants and magicians and genii? I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. I know no other way of giving the mind a love of the Great and the Whole.

By the time he launches his assault on the Enlightenment, Coleridge has come to believe that the universe is governed by the law of polarity, or interaction between opposites, rather than by the cause and effect of the natural and social sciences. A pair of opposites may be in conflict or in balance or move towards a synthesis. The product of this synthesis will enter into a polar relation with another opposite. In his essay "The Theory of Life," Coleridge includes among opposites Time and Space; their synthesis makes existence possible. When Time predominates, the product is Line; when Space predominates, the product is Surface. The synthesis of Line and Surface is the Circle.

Coleridge informs Tulk that Creation begins with the emergence of the opposites Light and Gravitation, Gravitation being the "darkness" of the second verse of Genesis. These opposites interact, he tells the German man of letters Ludwig Tieck, to produce sound when the predominant partner is Gravitation, colour when it is Light. To Coleridge, the world is an organism, not a machine. The corpuscular or atomic theory is, in his eyes, a mischievous error, which can be disproved by logic, and he scathingly dismisses the achievements of John Dalton, who calculates the relative weight of atoms of different elements. To Dr. Green, he expresses his hope of finding evidence for the principle of polarity in current studies of the formation of minerals. He informs Tulk that carbon, azote (nitrogen), oxygen and hydrogen correspond to the classical four elements — earth, air, fire, and water, and in a long missive to him lays out what amounts to a theory of the material world and its generation, a theory full of correspondences such as are found in the mediaeval and Hindu world-pictures: thus, sensibility, irritability, and reproduction are parallel to magnetism, electricity and galvanism, these to attraction, repulsion and gravitation, and these in turn to length, breadth and depth.

In Coleridge's opinion, the moderns with whom he contends confound reason with understanding. The latter is the faculty that draws conclusions from what the senses perceive; the former is the higher faculty that applies universal truths embedded in the mind independently of anything perceived by the senses. Understanding enables Newton to draw accurate conclusions from his experimental findings; Reason is responsible

for Euclid's laying out the universal laws of mathematics and for the moral truths of Scripture.

It is difficult to believe that the faculty with which Euclid deduces the properties of geometrical figures is different in kind from the faculty with which Newton makes scientific deductions. An odious consequence of this obscurantism is the opposition which Coleridge displays to Lord Erskine's Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; this, he says, is "extending PERSONALITY to *things*," probably because, as he maintains in *Aids to Reflection*, beasts can have understanding but not reason.

Discussing the question of the human soul's immortality in a letter to Sir George Beaumont, Coleridge asks, "Are we not a union of reason, understanding, and sense [i.e. the senses]?" and adds that these need respectively principles, rules, and perceptions. "It is a whim of modern date," he continues, "to consider Christianity as a mere code of ethics. It is an offer of redemption from moral evil and its consequences, with a declaration of the conditions of acceptance." It has taken time for him to come to this position.

In his Unitarian phase, Coleridge explains to his anti-Christian friend the radical John Thelwall:

the religion which Christ taught is simply, first, that there is an omnipresent Father of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, in whom we all of us move and have our being; and, secondly, that when we appear to men to die we do not utterly perish, but after this life shall continue to enjoy or suffer the consequences and natural effects of the habits we have formed here, whether good or evil. This is the Christian *religion*, and all of the Christian *religion*.

When Coleridge repudiates Locke and Hartley, he turns to a more inward faith. He becomes convinced, partly by his close study of the Greek text of the New Testament, that the Unitarians have adopted an impossible position by denying Christ's divinity and regarding him simply as the supreme moral teacher. This view the Unitarians inherit from the Socinians of the sixteenth century, and henceforward Coleridge abominates Socinianism with all but inquisitorial zeal. Now convinced that a propensity to evil is one element in human nature (and what thoughtful person can deny this?), he is satisfied that redemption from its consequences comes in some way he does not understand, but feels in the depths of his spiritual need, from the Crucifixion. His sense of guilt floods into some passages of his letters. To Joseph Cottle, he exclaims:

if to feel how infinitely worthless I am, how poor a wretch, with just free-will enough to be deserving of wrath, and of my own contempt, and of none to merit a moment's peace, can make a part of a Christian's creed; so far I am a Christian.

Coleridge has now returned to the Church of his family, the Church of England, and as one who relies on inner experience as the foundation of his faith, he identifies with its Evangelical wing. However, he laments to his friend Dr. Brabant that the institution is full of "sober-in-the-way-of-preferment churchmen, who hold the doctrines of Athanasius in the spirit of Socinus," while "the Evangelical clergy, who are really saving the Church, are too generally deficient in learning, both historical and metaphysical."

Metaphysical learning is of great concern to Coleridge. As a sinner who throws himself on Christ's mercy, he broods over the way in which, through the Trinity, the Infinite and Eternal communicates with mortals. He cautions Joseph Cottle that human understanding of the Trinity is limited, but observes that the Father and Son can be compared to two bodies governed by a single mind and jointly emanating the Holy Spirit: the Trinity, he insists, is "the foundation of the whole Christian system."

Coleridge insists on historical as well as metaphysical knowledge, for he holds that, while they are subsidiary, biblical narrative and ecclesiastical history are a necessary complement to personal religious experience. However, exclusive or primary reliance on these—and especially on reports of miracles—he regards as likely to lead to unbelief.

For all his evangelical fervour, Coleridge steers clear of moral tyranny. He is no killjoy. When his brother-in-law George Fricker has scruples about spending a Sunday evening with him, he replies that he can find no biblical prohibition against "cheerful and innocent social intercourse on the Lord's Day." Indeed he deplores a gloomy, puritanical Christianity and declares:

a numerous and stirring faction there is, in the so called Religious Public, whose actual and activating principles, with whatever vehemence they may disclaim it in words, is ... that instead of the Apostolic command, *Rejoice, and again I say unto you, rejoice;* baptized Christians are to be put on sackcloth and ashes, and try, by torturing themselves and others, to procure a rescue from the devil.

He can recognise good qualities in people with conspicuous vices. At Portsmouth, when he is about to sail to Malta, he finds himself

among men, kind-hearted indeed, and absolutely eager to serve me, and to express a liking to me that from such men quite astonished me; but among loose livers and loose talkers, with oaths and dirt rattling about my ears, like grape-shot, and whistling by me like so many perforated bullets. For at Portsmouth all are mock tars.

While he deplores the common adulteries of husbands and wives that he encounters in Germany, he feels that women whose chastity is limited to their bodies have no business casting aspersions on the memory of Mary Robinson, the actress and poet who was once the mistress of the Prince of Wales but whose later life was unstained.

Coleridge continues to fear he himself is the object of divine wrath for wasting his intellectual gift. Doubting his Unitarian friend Dr. Estlin's doctrine that God's punishment is always remedial, he declares, "I believe, that punishment is essentially *vindictive*, i.e. expressive of abhorrence of sin for its own exceeding sinfulness," and therefore, "without a miraculous intervention of Omnipotence the Punishment must continue as long as the soul, which I believe imperishable. God has promised no such miracle.... It *may* be so, but wo to me! if I presume on it."

Although Coleridge's Christianity is usually liberal, it is sometimes stained by outbursts of bigotry. Idolising Luther, whom he never tires of praising, he accuses the Roman Catholic Church of polytheism and, defending the Crusades, denounces Islam to the young James Gillman as a violent, fanatical and barbarous creed. In view of his low opinion of Hinduism—he refers in *Aids to Reflection* to "the tyranny of Papal or Brahmin superstition"—it is surprising that in the same book Coleridge enthusiastically welcomes a report that a man is striving to be "the Luther of Brahminism." (An obvious candidate is Raja Rammohun Roy.)

Much better disposed towards Judaism, Coleridge successfully recommends that his orthodox Jewish friend, the scholar Hyman Hurwitz, be appointed as the first Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature at the new University of London, though he tries to persuade him that the Talmud is to the Hebrew Bible as a candle is to the sun. He argues that the only essential—though admittedly important—difference between Judaism and Christianity is that the latter teaches that a first coming of the Messiah has already occurred, and informs Cary, the translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, that Hurwitz is a Christian "of the Jewish Persuasion."

It is pleasing that Coleridge, like his correspondent Joseph Blanco White, a Spanish convert from Catholicism to Protestantism, can see through the "current illiberal dogma, that infidelity always arises from vice or corrupt affections." Far better than Unitarianism, he feels, are some

forms of atheism, and to the mathematician William Rowan Hamilton he speaks gently of “the Atheism of Spinoza – whose pure spirit may it be my lot to meet, with St. John and St. Paul smiling on him and loving him.” In the same letter, he makes it clear that his disdain for some creeds does not extend to their adherents.

Familiar with German investigations of the different strands that have gone to the composition of certain books of the Bible, Coleridge is modern in his approach to Scripture. He carefully distinguishes between divine inspiration and divine dictation, expressing some contempt for the idea of a prophet being reduced to an automaton. An attempt to coordinate the findings of geology with the account of creation in Genesis he regards as misguided, since the Bible’s truths are moral and spiritual. Pointing out to Cary that scientific laws make infallible predictions possible, he asserts that the prophecies of Scripture are always conditional. He wrestles with certain doubts about the sacred canon, and anxiously asks Tulk whether he thinks all its books are equally inspired. The Apocalypse (Revelation) makes him uneasy: he finds it uncertain whether its prophecies refer to past or future events and in 1826 writes to Basil Montagu, “for myself I am not ashamed to say that a single chapter of St. Paul’s Epistles or St. John’s Gospel is of more value to me in light and in life, in love and in comfort, than the books of the Apocalypse, Daniel, and Zachariah, all put together.”

With his Protestant enthusiasm for the Bible and his antipathy to Catholicism, Coleridge long dreads Catholic Emancipation, fearing Roman infiltration into the Church of England. Rather than acceding to it to pacify Ireland, he would let Ireland secede. But when the Emancipation Bill, which is passed in 1829, is brought before Parliament, he finds it much better drafted than earlier bills and experiences limited relief.

Coleridge seems to return to his country’s national Church as a result of thoughts prompted by his revulsion from Napoleon’s Concordat with Pope Pius VII in 1801. After the French Revolution collapses into a fever of bloodshed, he loses all sympathy with it, though as late as 1817, he assures Daniel Stuart that he still thinks Britain’s early war against Revolutionary France was an error. Jacobinism, however, never has his endorsement, and he acutely comes to perceive that it combines “abstract reason” with “bestial passion.” In 1798, looking back on his former sympathy with the Revolution, he confesses to his clerical brother, “I have snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of sedition, and the fragments lie scattered in the lumber-room of penitence. I wish to be a good man and a Christian, but I am no Whig, no Reformist, no Republican.”

Coleridge attributes much of the evil behaviour of the French to their attachment to what he calls the modern “Psalosophy” – the Greek roots give the meaning “slender wisdom.” This consists of the Enlightenment

world-view embracing Locke's doctrine that our knowledge of reality derives ultimately from sense perception, the investigation of nature by scientific method, and the undermining of reliance on inner spiritual experience. In a long letter to the Prime Minister Lord Liverpool, he claims that the effects of this outlook, which "degrades the Deity into a blank hypothesis, and that the hypothesis of a clockwork-maker," have pervaded and corrupted society, and he associates the supposed equality of atoms with the political egalitarianism of the French Revolution and of English radicals like Thomas Paine.

The conservatism of the older Coleridge extends beyond ecclesiastical matters to the class structure of society. America, he tells Stuart, needs a gentry and a learned class, and he insists, in his letter to Lord Liverpool, that as long as these classes in Britain "are grounded in a false philosophy, which retains but the name of logic, and has succeeded in rendering metaphysics a term of opprobrium," the corruption will percolate down to the lower strata of society.

At the same time, Coleridge believes that an untrammelled as distinct from a healthy commercial spirit is corroding British society, and he makes this the theme of his second *Lay Sermon* (1817). In 1801, he writes to Poole, "it is our pestilent commerce, our unnatural crowding together of men in cities, and our government by rich men, that are bringing about the manifestations of offended Deity." Twenty years later, he longingly describes to the publisher William Blackwood what he thinks of as the happier age of Elizabeth Tudor, "when trade, the nurse of freedom, was the enlivening counterpoise of agriculture, not its alien and usurping spirit." What would he say about today's international corporations and factory farms?

Coleridge sees no hope in recent developments in what is now called economics, and he indignantly dismisses the work of Adam Smith, Daniel Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus. "I dare affirm," he protests, "that few superstitions in religion have been so extensively pernicious to the intellectual and moral sanity of this country and France, as those of (so called) Political Economy."

While Coleridge would banish this new science from the parliamentary arena, his fundamental complaint about public affairs is that decisions are not made on the basis of principles. This criticism is of a piece with his lack of interest in facts for their own sake. He complains to Tulk, who is a Member of Parliament that in public life decisions are made with a view to "their next consequences or immediate occasions."

In 1806, during his service in Malta, Coleridge writes to Daniel Stuart, "I have learnt the INSIDE character of many eminent living men, and know by heart the awkward and wicked machinery, by which all our affairs *abroad* are carried on." In the coming decades, back in England, he can re-

spect neither Government nor Opposition. Referring to the radical William Cobbett, he laments to young Thomas Allsop:

One deep, most deep, impression of melancholy, did Cobbett's letter to Lord Liverpool leave on my mind, — the conviction that, wretch as he is, he is an overmatch in intellect for those, in whose hands Providence, in its retributive justice, seems to place the destinies of our country; and who yet rise into respectability, when we compare them with their parliamentary opponents.

Like a liberal, Coleridge abominates the prospect of ministers becoming "absolute menials of the Royal *Person*"; at his most conservative, he asserts that if government is not in the hands of an aristocracy, it will be in the hands of fools and knaves. Yet facing the hungry opponents of the Corn Bill, which, for the benefit of landowners will restrict the import of grain, he slightly modifies his opposition to the "so-called Parliament Reformers." He explains to Dr. Brabant:

I have not altered my principles, yet now I must join in pleading for Reform. I assumed as the ideal of a legislature that in which all the great component interests of the State are adequately represented, so that no one should have the power of oppressing the others ... I now see that this is not the case.

The reform that Coleridge wants—or will tolerate—is very limited. He is utterly hostile to the Reform Bill of 1832 that extends the franchise to the middle class, dubbing it "Catilinarian" (Catiline attempted to overthrow the constitution of the ancient Roman Republic). To Dr. Green, he declares that Lord Grey and his allies, as despoilers of the Church, belong in Hell.

Coleridge says much in his letters about the series of prose works from *The Friend* to *On the Constitution of Church and State* in which he labours to bring the nation's life back to a foundation of sound principles. The charges of obscurity that he meets with lead him to condemn the taste of "the present illogical age, which has, in imitation of the French, rejected all the *cements* of language." He writes to Poole:

Of parentheses I may be too fond, and will be on my guard in this respect. But I am certain that no work of impassioned and eloquent reasoning ever did or could subsist without them. They are the *drama* of reason and present the thought growing, instead of a mere *Hortus siccus* [dry garden]. The aversion to them is one of the numberless symptoms of a feeble Frenchified Public.

Unappreciative of French clarity and its English admirers, and deploring the public's craze for personalities, what is now called the cult of celebrity, he baits his demanding exposition of his literary principles with chunks of autobiography to produce *Biographia Literaria*, which will come to be his best known book. He regards it as a prelude to the six-part work of Christian philosophy, which is to be his greatest achievement. This work he never completes, but he believes that most of its content already exists in scattered fragments in his notebooks and marginalia.

As a judge of contemporary literature, Coleridge performs unevenly. He reads and even rereads Scott's novels but comments to Allsop that they "amuse without requiring any effort of thought, and without exciting any deep emotion," whereas in the previous century popular fiction by Richardson, Fielding, Sterne and Smollett required a "higher degree of intellectual activity" for its appreciation. His contemporary poetic idol is Wordsworth, for whose work he is a brilliant advocate, and he secures the republication of Cary's translation, long a classic, of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but is satisfied that *Madoc* will bring Southey enduring fame, though he recognizes that poet's undue facility. In the early days of their friendship, his letters to Southey include detailed critiques of the latter's poems, and in later years he gives similar treatment to others' published and unpublished works, sometimes earnestly advising against reliance on literature for a livelihood. The virtually unknown William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* fascinates him, but he can hail William Sotheby's *Saul* as needing only a few revisions to become "the best epic poem in our language," and he tells Charles Lamb that he *knows* that *Odes and Addresses to Great People* is his, when none of the poems in it are by Lamb.

Coleridge's letters say much about his affections and resentments, his ill health and ill usage, and his intellectual adventures in philosophy, religion, politics and literature, but they also contain many memorable examples of what George Saintsbury calls "letter stuff" (which is also found in novels): descriptions of places and experiences, accounts of the writer's daily life, lively dialogue, and silhouettes of characters.

Oddly, Coleridge writes to his wife from Germany that he will do his best to give her an idea of what he sees at Ratzeburg, but that he is "a wretched describer." This is as much a delusion as his notion that he could earn more with his pen in England than he is paid for his work at Malta. He can render the scene of the German town's lake with something of a painter's eye:

when first the ice fell on the lake, and the whole lake was frozen  
 one large piece of thick transparent glass—O my God! what  
 sublime scenery I have beheld. Of a morning I have seen the little

lake covered with mist; when the sun peeped over the hills the mist broke in the middle, and at last stood as the waters of the Red Sea are said to have done when the Israelites passed; and between these two walls of mist the sunlight burst upon the ice in a straight road of golden fire.

Observing the cruel persecution of Jews in Germany, which he never forgets, Coleridge tells how he and his companion are led into a dark room at an inn near Einbeck:

At length and suddenly the lamp came, and we saw ourselves in a room thirteen strides in length, strew'd with straw, and lying by the side of each other on the straw twelve Jews. I assure you it was curious. Their dogs lay at their feet. There was one very beautiful boy among them, fast asleep, with the softest conceivable opening of the mouth, with the white beard of his grandfather upon his cheek – a fair, rosy cheek.

A formidable climber, Coleridge can recapture the experience of being caught in a storm in the English Lake District:

I am no novice in mountain mischiefs, but such a storm as this was I never witnessed.... The raindrops were pelted or, rather, slung against my face by the gusts, just like splinters of flint, and I felt as if every drop *cut* my flesh. My hands were all shrivelled up like a washerwoman's, and so benumbed that I was obliged to carry my stick under my arm.

We learn of the lifestyles that Coleridge falls into at different periods. In 1797, he writes to John Estlin of what he finds at Nether Stowey when he takes his family and his pupil Charles Lloyd to live beside Thomas Poole's residence:

Our house is better than we expected – there is a comfortable bedroom and sitting-room for C. Lloyd, and another for us, a room for Nanny, a kitchen, and outhouse. Before our door a clear brook runs of very soft water; and in the back yard is a nice *well* of fine spring water. We have a very pretty garden, and large enough to find us vegetables and employment, and I am already an expert gardener, and both my hands can exhibit a callum as testimonials of their industry.

His life in Malta, as he describes it to Southey in 1805, is very different:

I awoke some half hour ago from so vivid a dream that the work of sleep had completely destroyed all sleepiness. I got up, went to my office-room, rekindled the wood-fire for the purpose of writing to you, having been so employed from morn till eve in writing public letters, some as long as memorials, from the hour that this opportunity was first announced to me, that for once in my life, at least, I can with strict truth affirm that I have had *no time* to write to you, if by time be understood the moments of life in which our powers are alive.

In September 1814, after grievous illness, Coleridge tells Daniel Stuart that he and John Morgan are joint tenants of a country cottage:

I breakfast every morning before nine; work till one, and walk or read till three. Thence, till tea-time, chat or read some lounge book, or correct what I have written. From six to eight work again; from eight till bed-time, play whist, or the little mock billiard called bagatelle, and then sup, and go to bed.

When he wishes, Coleridge can record or reproduce the spoken word. He describes what he hears from the lower class patrons when he enters a public house just after the assassination of the repressive Prime Minister Spencer Percival in 1812. (The talkers refer to Sir Francis Burdett, a Radical Member of Parliament.)

It was really shocking, nothing but exultation! Burdett's health drunk with a clatter of pots and a sentiment given to at least fifty men and women — "May Burdett soon be the man to have sway over us!" These were the very words. "This is but the beginning." "More of these damned scoundrels must go the same way, and then poor people may live." "Every man might maintain his family decent and comfortable, if the money were not picked out of our pockets by these damned placemen." "God is above the devil, I say, and down to Hell with him and all his brood, the Ministers, men of Parliament fellows." "They won't hear Burdett; no! he is a Christian man and speaks for the poor."

Although one should not come to Coleridge's letters expecting a gallery of characters such as one finds in those of Dorothy Osborne and Horace Walpole, occasionally a picture worthy of a novelist springs up amidst matter of a different kind. Of outstanding interest is William Wordsworth, whose taciturn figure stalks through the pages. When they are touring in Scotland in 1803, together with William's sister Dorothy, Coleridge observes to his wife, "Wordsworth's hypochondriacal feelings keep him si-

lent and self-centred," but only a few months later he comments to the banker Richard Sharp, "In spite of Wordsworth's occasional fits of hypochondriacal uncomfortableness ... his is the happiest family I ever saw." In view of his friend's austere nature, it is not entirely surprising that Coleridge should compare Wordsworth with Milton and his fine pamphlet *The Convention of Cintra*, which assails the British Government for deserting Britain's ally Portugal, with Milton's Latin *Defence of the English People*.

Coleridge has a special love for Charles Lamb and his much cherished sister Mary. Writing to Charles, he speaks of "some evening when we are quite comfortable at your fire-side—and oh! where shall I ever be, if I am not so there." Mary, in a fit of insanity years before, fatally stabbed her mother and was committed to an asylum. Having recovered, she is able to live with her brother, but whenever a relapse is imminent, she has to return to confinement till the attack is over. Coleridge gives an account of such an occasion:

The Thursday before last she met at Rickman's a Mr. Babb, an old friend and admirer of her mother. The next day she *smiled* in an ominous way; on Sunday she told her brother that she was getting bad, with great agony. On Tuesday morning she laid hold of me with violent agitation and talked wildly about George Dyer. I told Charles there was not a moment to lose; and I did not lose a moment, but went for a hackney-coach and took her to the private madhouse at Hugsden. She was quite calm, and said it was the best to do so. But she wept bitterly two or three times, yet all in a calm way.

Charles Lamb's fellow essayist William Hazlitt appears in the letters as a young man with an original mind and unpleasant manners who visits Wordsworth and Coleridge in the Lake District, and whose sexual proclivities are such that Coleridge and Southey find themselves rescuing him from a possible lynching and a criminal charge. Subsequently Coleridge protests to several correspondents at the ingratitude with which Hazlitt attacks him in print. A third essayist, Thomas De Quincey, two years after he has anonymously given the struggling Coleridge three hundred pounds, supervises the printing of *The Convention of Cintra* for Wordsworth. Coleridge writes to Daniel Stuart:

I both respect and have an affection for Mr. De Quincey; but saw too much of his turn of mind, anxious yet dilatory, confused from over accuracy, and at once systematic and labyrinthine, not fully to understand how great a plague he might easily be to a London

Printer; his natural tediousness made yet greater by his zeal and fear of not discharging his trust.

Not all the remarkable characters who appear in the letters are authors. Dr. Green is treated to an account of one of Coleridge's dinner guests:

Mr. Thomas Hill, quondam drysalter of Thames Street, whom I remember twenty-five years ago with exactly the same look, person, and manners as now. Mathews calls him the Immutable. He is a seemingly always good-natured fellow who knows nothing and about everything, no person, and about and all about everybody – a complete parasite, in the old sense of a dinner-hunter, at the tables of all who entertain public men, authors, players, fiddlers, booksellers, etc., for more than thirty years.

Hill's antithesis, a young Calvinist clergyman whom Coleridge and Green encounter on a country visit, will read only the Bible. "On being invited to dine with us," Coleridge informs Mrs. Gillman, "the sad and modest youth returned for answer, that if Mr. Green and I should be here when he visited the house, he should have no objection to enter into the state of our souls with us."

One of the most memorable characters in the correspondence is a boy. Coleridge makes some repayment to his hosts James and Ann Gillman by helping them deal with their son Henry. In letters to his nephew Edward, an assistant master at Eton College, and in letters written from Ramsgate and Eton to his desperately anxious parents, readers can follow Coleridge as he tutors the boy in Greek grammar and the composition of Latin verses, escorts him to Eton, worries over his poor performance there, and, subsequent to much heart-searching on his own part and the Gillmans', oversees his withdrawal. After a local headmaster rejects him lest his pupils be corrupted by a boy from Eton, he obtains a place in the Free Grammar School at Shrewsbury, but only after a certificate arrives from Eton testifying that he has not been expelled. A picture emerges of an intelligent, sensitive, and honest but rather thoughtless boy, who lacks the concern for his future his parents want him to have and whose health suffers from his grief at being removed from Eton. If a book entertains him, he reads it fast and remembers what he has read, but he is an idle student with a great interest in shells and minerals and very little in Latin and Greek.

Working through the six fat volumes of Coleridge's collected letters, one realises the rightness of George Saintsbury's warning to editors that for the general reader "a certain amount of selection is not only justifiable but almost imperative." Reading page after page on the illnesses that prostrate

Coleridge is rather like eating a great deal of food that lies heavy on the stomach.

It is easy to have mixed feelings about this poet, scholar, religious thinker, and social critic. William Blake's crisp and forthright denunciations of major features of the Enlightenment, denunciations untainted by reactionary politics, contrast with the less pleasant polemics of Coleridge. The latter's arguments are apt to slither along in sentences oozing prejudice, though his prejudices coexist with humane concerns. Coleridge is an obscurantist, but an enlightened and rational interpreter of the Bible; a scholar blind to the cultural and moral riches of Roman Catholicism, rabbinic Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and the Enlightenment, but a European as opposed to an insular man of letters; an opponent of a Bill to reduce the suffering of animals and a reactionary fearful of power in the hands of the lower classes, but a supporter of the Factory Bill, an opponent of the Corn Law, and an enemy of conscienceless commercialism.