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"*Toujours Gai*": MRS SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, "A MOST EXTRAORDINARY CHARACTER", REVIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF HER LETTERS

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Mrs Samuel Taylor's letters to Thomas Poole were published by the Nonesuch Press in 1934; *Minnow Among Tritons*, edited by Stephen Potter. They were intended to mark the centenary of Coleridge's death and were printed from one of the Thomas Poole MS volumes in the British Museum (Add. 35, 344). There were forty-two letters, covering a period from February 1799 until November 1834, four months after Coleridge's death.

Her unpublished letters, which I am at present editing at the request of Mr A H B Coleridge, consist of a stated one hundred and fifty (but in fact it seems to be a little under) from the Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. They are mostly to family, including four to S T C. Permission to quote from them in this paper has been given me generously by Mr A H B Coleridge.

( 1 )

Mrs Samuel Taylor Coleridge remains the most shadowy and least explored of all the members of the Wordsworth circle. Indeed she is virtually dismissed from the scene, apart from cursory mention of her bad temper, cold nature and general inadequacy of psyche as contributory factors in Coleridge's tragic failure to realise his full potential as a genius. The time has now come to give her closer scrutiny.

It was Coleridge himself who sedulously cultivated the theme that his wife's explosive irritability and total lack of sympathy with him in his habits and feelings as a man of genius drove him to opium and thus brought about his downfall. His drug bondage and consequent miseries were due to "my marriage - constant dread in my mind respecting Mrs Coleridge's Temper",<sup>1</sup> and "Inveterate habits of ... Thwarting & ... Dispathy".<sup>2</sup> "Discord between me and Mrs Coleridge ... quite incapacitated me for any worthy exertion of my faculties".<sup>3</sup> The only heat that she engendered was the heat of bad temper; otherwise she was a creature of the "frozen Poles";<sup>4</sup> suffering from "paralysis in all *tangible* ideas & sensations ... all that forms *real* self".<sup>5</sup>

Lack of knowledge and understanding of drug addiction has led not only to much misreading, in the past, of Coleridge's character and behaviour but also to a thoroughly distorted and unjust view of Mrs Coleridge. Today's extended comprehension of the drug scene helps to throw new light on the Coleridge dilemma and makes us more chary of accepting Coleridge's morphine inspired portrait of his wife.

Dorothy Wordsworth and the Hutchinson sisters, into whose sympathetic ears he chiefly poured his woes, knew nothing of the effects and characteristics of morphine addiction. They accepted as truth every word Coleridge told them. Moreover, in conversation with, and letters to, their friends the

sorry tale of Coleridge and his wretched marriage was disclosed: Grasmere gossip spread abroad.

Until Coleridge's death in 1834 it remained mere gossip, but following his death journalism fell upon the subject with gusto, with De Quincey leading the way and lesser scribes following eagerly. De Quincey, of course, was in a position to be particularly damaging, for he had intimately known all the parties concerned, having been one of the Allan Bank household at Grasmere.

The material that De Quincey thus gleaned resulted in the famous article in *Tait's Magazine*, commencing only weeks after Coleridge's death; unpardonably malicious (albeit sensationally good journalism) they were shafted as much against Mrs Coleridge as against her deceased husband, but whereas distinguished men were ready to rally to Coleridge's defence, the insults to Mrs Coleridge were left un rebutted, though her family displayed strong private indignation. Sara Coleridge, Mrs S T C's daughter and namesake, commented sharply, "The impression which the /De Quincey/ account of my mother would have is that she is a mean-minded unamiable woman with some respectable qualities and that my father married from opportunity rather than much attraction of her's. My mother's respectability it did not rest with him to establish; her attractions he greatly under-rates and the better points of her temper and understanding are not apparent in his partial sketch."<sup>6</sup>

In 1836 Thomas Allsop, one of S T C's less worthy young Highgate disciples, leaped upon the De Quincey bandwagon with *Letters, Conversations and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*. Allsop, a young man of wealth, mediocre mind and outstanding vulgarity, had gained S T C's good graces by lavishing flattery, gifts of game and even money upon him. S T C was never able to withstand flattery and instant apparent affection, and he was happy to be able to pass the game on to the Gillmans (his devoted host and hostess whom he could never hope, even less afford, to reward in full for their generous hospitality): the money, which of course he said he must regard as a loan, went to pay pressing debts.

Allsop's intimacy with Coleridge unfortunately coincided with his elder son Hartley's loss of his Oriel Fellowship through over indulgence in wine and with his younger son Derwent's undergraduate phases of atheism, dandyism and debts. Under these stresses S T C relapsed back into his old habits of opium and, as always when in an opium trough, turned to pour out his woes and complaints, both real and imaginary, into the ears of some sympathetic outsider (it had always to be an outsider from his family circle because it had to be somebody who did not know enough about the true facts of Coleridge's private life to be able to confront him with the charge that he was indulging in travesties).

Complaints about his sons, about his treatment at the hands of Southey and Wordsworth coupled with resentful libels upon their characters, and spiteful allusions to his Coleridge nephews (from whom S T C was now imagining that he had received snubs) were made freely to Allsop. S T C also regaled Allsop with some of his most ferocious tirades against Mrs Coleridge. All of this went into Allsop's book.

The entire Coleridge family was aghast and outraged, not to mention the Robert Southey's and the Wordsworths. Explosions of fury came from Hartley in the Lake Country, "I owe Master Allsop a licking. To be sure he has the excuse of idiocy, which De Q. could not plead. How could /my father/ unbosom himself to such a man?" "I do sweat and roar to think, dear Mother,

that you and Sara...should be tormented by this evocation of evil spirits by D.Q., Cottle, Allsop and Co".<sup>7</sup>

The family looked to Hartley to reply to these publications and he promised to do so in an essay on his father, to be used as an introduction to the projected new edition of "Biographia Literaria". But this essay Hartley never produced. It fell to his sister and her husband and first cousin, Henry Nelson Coleridge, to write the supplement to the *Biographia Literaria*.

Their paramount concern was, of course, the reputation of S T C; Mrs Coleridge, too, was far more concerned with his good name than with hers. In her opinion the world would soon forget what had been said about her; it was what the world thought and said about Samuel Taylor Coleridge that mattered.

The greatest damage done by Allsop was through his scurrilous misuse of Coleridge's letters. The family, as a result, decided that all surviving letters must be destroyed, lest they should fall into the hands of other De Quinceys, Allsops and Cottles.

In April 1831 Mrs S T C wrote to her Cornish friend, Miss Emily Trevenen, who had asked for autographs, "I have nothing very fit of S T C's though I have loads of his writing to me." Within the space of a few years all these "loads" of letters had been burned. Not only letters from Coleridge, or from herself to Coleridge, had been destroyed; all intimate letters that had any bearing on the Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth families (for the Wordsworths had come to be regarded virtually as family) were sent to the holocaust; "sackfuls and sackfuls", we are told.

It was done, chiefly, that Coleridge himself might thereby be protected. As it turned out, the family had no chance of preventing the world from learning the most intimate truths about him. There were many revealing letters written by him to persons other than his wife. The six volume *Collected Letters* give us a portrait of Coleridge which is indeed full-dimensional, while publication of his notebooks has exposed what might be described as his entire cerebral and visceral contents, not to mention the very essence of his Esteesian spirit. With such material as this at our disposal the destruction of his letters to his wife can scarcely have afforded him more than the skeleton of a figleaf, if that, in the way of protection.

But, by destroying his correspondence to her, Sara Coleridge robbed herself of evidence which might well have entirely altered the way in which posterity has viewed her.

A handful of his letters to her, and fragments of letters from him to her, have survived and not one of them is written in the spirit of bitter complaint, burning resentment and downright overt detestation that imbues the letters written about her, by him, to his various friends and confidants. It is true that among these letters are those of the reconciliation of 1802 and in these he refers to their homelife at Greta Hall as having been a "Cat-hole", but he immediately goes on to speak of his hopes of converting it into a "Dove's nest".

Nobody is suggesting that, had we Mrs Coleridge's part of the correspondence (many of the letters that were burned were, we are told, from her to him, being equally as revealing as his), we should discover that the celebrated quarrels were, in fact, non-existent. But we should almost certainly, indeed without doubt, find that Mrs S T C, far from being

frozen and "heart wasting", responded with warmth and eagerness.

In a letter written during a tour with Tom Wedgwood in Wales, in November 1802, S T C told Sara that he could neither retain his happiness, nor his faculties, "unless I move, live, & love in perfect Freedom, limited by my own purity and self-respect... That we can love but one person, is a miserable mistake, & the cause of abundant unhappiness. I can & I do love many people, dearly - so dearly, that I really scarcely know, which I love the best... Would any good & wise man, any warm & wide hearted man marry at all, if it were part of the Contract - Henceforth this Woman is your only friend, your sole beloved! all the rest of mankind, however amiable and akin to you, must be only your *acquaintance*! - ? ... I have a *right* to expect & demand, that you should to a certain degree love, & act kindly to, those whom I deem worthy of my Love".<sup>8</sup>

It surely took a wife of deep understanding and generosity of spirit to respond with real warmth to this (especially when she had abundant evidence that he was distinctly amiable and akin, at that time, to Miss Sara Hutchinson). How her reply actually read we do not know; her letter has gone; but even without it, we can be certain that it did both her heart and head much credit, for we have S T C's ecstatic response, written the very same night that her reply reached him:

"My dearest Love... I was affected by your Letter with such Joy & anxious Love... God love you & have you in his keeping, my blessed Sara! - & speedily restore me to you. - I have a faith, a heavenly Faith, that our future Days will be Days of Peace, & affectionate Happiness. - ... my dearest dearest Sara! my wife & my Love, & indeed my very Hope / May God preserve you!"<sup>9</sup>

Sara, reading this, must have been filled with a shared faith in their future happiness. Certainly she tried her best (and this in his saner moods he would admit) but opium put their happiness out of the question.

It may well be argued by some readers that Sara Coleridge would not have preserved letters in which he spoke to her as contemptuously and unkindly as he spoke of her. This may be so; but knowing S T C's remarkable and complex psychology as we now do (thanks to collected letters and notebooks) and knowing the behaviour patterns of morphine addicts as we now do, it is really exceedingly unlikely. "Impetuous and bitter censure"<sup>10</sup> (such as we know he hurled at her in person) perhaps. Contempt, yes; we find him writing, "Permit me, my dear Sara! ... to say -- that in sex, acquirements, and in the quantity and quality of natural endowments whether of feeling, or of Intellect, you are the Inferior".<sup>11</sup> (Speaking of his father in later years Hartley was to recall, "Contempt was his besetting sin".) He became, in his opium rantings, highly contemptuous of Mrs Coleridge (yet in his better moments he would assure her, "I greatly esteem & honour you!"<sup>12</sup>

The surviving opium rantings, that is the opium rantings in letters, are all, as aforesaid, made to persons outside Coleridge's family, and intimate, circle; partly because his lack of regard for truth required the ears of strangers, and also because, when he was in an opium trough, he did not open letters from his wife, or any of those close to him, let alone write letters to them. Therefore his letters to Sara would all have been written in more rational moods, and therefore in kinder moods; the letters from him to her that have survived may be regarded as being, in every likelihood, representative.

The complaints and laments about his marriage which Coleridge allowed

himself to make to the Wordsworths were unlikely to meet with indignant repudiation on her behalf because the Wordsworths had not known the Coleridges during the first, few, genuinely happy years. It should be noted that Coleridge never risked wailing and complaining about Sara to Thomas Poole. Nor did he indulge in it to any extent to Robert Southey.

In view of Coleridge's extreme misery with Mrs Coleridge (or so he alleged it to be) the Wordsworths finally advised him to separate from her. On the face of it this appeared to be sound and sensible advice. His dilemma was that he did not want to hurt Mrs Coleridge: he remained very fond of her. Indeed, though he no longer wished to live with her full time he certainly did not want to give her up altogether. Dorothy put this awkward dilemma in a nutshell when she told a friend that Coleridge was anxious to part from his wife "for ever" but that at the same time it was his wish that "she should be in such a state of mind as to be able to visit her in a friendly way".<sup>13</sup>

Not only was he still deeply attached to her; she remained deeply attached to him; by now they had realised, however, the depth and extent of their tragedy: opium had destroyed all hope of their chance of continued happiness together, or, to put it differently (for they scarcely spoke any of this explicitly to one another, but expressed it in half sighed regrets and broken hopes) Samuel's *health* destroyed all chance of continued happiness together. Opium resulted in physical misery, benumbing him and deadening him: "Body and mind, habit of bedrugging the feelings".<sup>14</sup> The essence of the tragedy of S T C and Sara lies in this fragment of an otherwise lost or destroyed letter, "... known any woman for whom I had an equal personal fondness, that till the very latest period, when my health & spirits rendered me dead to everything, I had a PRIDE in you, & that I never saw you at the top of our Hill, when I returned from a Walk, without a pleasurable Feeling of Sight ... some little akin to the delight in a beautiful Flower joined with the consciousness - 'And it is in *my* garden.'<sup>15</sup>

Sara sighed to friends and relatives about the health of "my poor Samuel". We do not know, of course, what she said or wrote to him. What we do know is that when he left for Malta he was fully prepared to die there from his opium, or attempts to give up opium, and Sara was resigned to the fact that even if he did return (and her natural optimism prompted her to believe that he would return) his health would never again be fully recovered. They would have to content themselves with, as it were, a lower rung on the ladder of marital happiness.

Letters that have survived for this period are chiefly from Mrs S T C to her sister-in-law, Mrs George Coleridge. One written on September 1 1804 is highly typical of Mrs S T C: "I believe I told you in my last that we had all /received/ letters from Gibraltar; that he was in tolerable health and spirits and would write to *all* his connections immediately on his arrival at the Island /Malta/... I ardently pray it may be soon, for I am now very impatient and cannot help feeling the time long... With respect to his length of stay abroad, I cannot tell until I get a letter, but I should suppose he would undoubtedly continue a year. In any case I shall not expect him until next summer - and I think it is possible not until the summer after! ... I shall most likely be in London, and Bristol, in the spring of next year, as my mother wishes much to see me, and the journey is too fatiguing for one in her miserable state of health to undertake, a journey into Cumberland. *The Post!!!*

"I was most pleasantly interrupted by the Post, bringing me the *long-expected letter!* and was too much agitated by its contents to finish this last night - he has written to no one but me at present - because a gentleman is coming to England shortly and will bring letters with him free of expense."

Although S T C, in letters home to Sara, spoke of his improved health (as she happily wrote to Mrs George Coleridge) the truth was that in Malta his subjugation to morphine became decisively hopeless. He had left England in an apparent state of indecision about Sara; even if he survived his sojourn abroad and returned to England, would he want to return to their conjugal roof? But, deep within himself, he wished to return to her. A notebook entry of March 21, 1805, describes, in anguish, how he dreamed of her: the "pleasurable body" sensation of being in bed, a husband with his wife, "O best reward of Virtue! to feel pleasure made more pleasurable...all in deep quiet, a fountain with unwrinkled surface yet still the living motion at the bottom, that 'with soft and even pulse' keeps it full - & yet to know that pleasure so impleasured is making us more good..."

"But I, Sara! But I am not worthy of you / I shall perish! - I have not goodness enough to hope enough... O me / let me return! - Awake! Awake!"<sup>16</sup>

When he did at last arrive back in the Lake District, in the late autumn of 1806, he was in an infinitely worse condition than when he had left. From London he had written affectionate letters to Sara, expressing his eagerness to be with her and the children; but the Wordsworths, who before he had left for Malta had understood that he would separate from Mrs Coleridge upon his return and who, learning that he had not been able to break his "opium habit" while he was away but was in fact worse than ever, decided to mount a determined rescue operation. "If he is not inclined to manage himself, *we* can manage him!"<sup>17</sup> They propelled him into a demand to his wife that there should be a separation; she exploded; then agreed.

Shortly afterwards Dorothy, who was happy that the separation had at last been decided, received a letter from Mrs S T C that was mightily perplexing. It contained not a word about separation, "She wrote just as if all things were going on as usual!"<sup>18</sup>

Mrs S T C undoubtedly knew her Samuel better than others knew him. Everything did go on just the same as usual. The Wordsworths believed, and lamented the fact, that he lacked the resolution to clinch the separation. They tried to tackle Mrs S T C on the subject; S T C was now back in London, she was at Greta Hall in her customary state of grass widowhood; would he be returning? What was he saying about separation?

In point of fact he was now saying nothing more about separation. Sara, however, refused to discuss the situation with the Wordsworths. She retorted, in her lightest manner, "Well, he may stay away if he likes. I care nothing about it if he will not talk about it".<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that she had now got the measure of Samuel. She knew that he would never give her up, and she knew that, equally, he would never again be her husband in the way that the world understood. According to S T C, in a letter to the Morgans, written during this period of time, he had sent her three letters, "The last of them, almost a farewell to her & to my Children - written with great effort during Pain and desperate weakness, in which I assured her of my forgiveness & begged her's in return for whatever pain I had wilfully caused her - in short, I will venture to say, that that letter would draw Tears down the face of your Servant - this day I received

the answer ... 'Lord, how often you are ill! You must be MORE careful about Colds!'"<sup>20</sup>

As we would say in modern parlance, he had asked for it.

On September 1, 1808, Coleridge took up residence with the Wordsworths in their new home, Allan Bank, Grasmere. They knew now that they could not "manage him" and that he would be a disruptive presence in their house, but as they had promised him a home if and when he separated from Mrs S T C they felt themselves in honour bound to have him. He remained an "on and off" member of their household (seeing something of Greta Hall and Mrs Coleridge betwixt and between whiles) until the spring of 1810 when his rupture with Sara Hutchinson and the imminence of a new child for the Wordsworths sent him back to Greta Hall. Here he remained for five months. His relationship with Wordsworth was already badly eroded and when, on October 18, Coleridge called at Allan Bank en route for London, Wordsworth unwittingly said something which mortally affronted Coleridge and the famous friendship was severed at one stroke.

Fifteen months elapsed before he visited Keswick again; he spent some six weeks at Greta Hall in February and March of 1812. Mrs Coleridge wrote to Poole that, "He was cheerful & good natured & full of fair promises - he talked of our settling finally in London, that is, when he had gone on for a year or so giving me, and all his friends satisfaction as to the possibility of making a livelihood by his writing so as to enable us to live in great credit there - I listened, I own, with incredulous ears, while he was building these "airy castles" and calmly told him that I thought it was much better that I and the children should remain in the country until the Boys had finished their School-education and then, if he found himself in circumstances that would admit of it, & would engage not to leave us alone in that wide city, I would cheerfully take leave of *dear Keswick*, and follow his amended fortunes; he agreed to this, & in the meantime, a regular correspondence was to be kept up between himself, and me, and the children ... his promises, poor fellow, are like his Castles, - airy nothings! ..."<sup>21</sup>

Coleridge returned to London and his friends the Morgans; letters from Mrs S T C, to the Morgans, written in a strain of carefully controlled anxiety, exist for a period covering January 1811 to February 1817. Coleridge, during this period, was in the nadir of his opium; he did not open letters, let alone answer them. It must be remembered that the only income that she received was S T C's Wedgwood annuity of a hundred and fifty pounds and at the close of 1812 Josiah Wedgwood withdrew his half of the sum; the other half had been settled upon Coleridge for life by Thomas Wedgwood in his will of 1805, this could not be withdrawn. After income tax had been paid it amounted to sixty-five pounds ten shillings. This was all that Mrs S T C received to support herself, her daughter, and two boys at school. The money barely paid for expenses for the boys (and they received their actual tuition free from Mr Dawes, the Ambleside schoolmaster). Southey subsidised Mrs S T C and her daughter, at Greta Hall. Furthermore the time was now approaching when Hartley and Derwent would need to have future plans mapped out for them. Both were clever; Hartley brilliant. Both had ambitions to go to University, but how was this to be done? Mrs S T C's anxieties became acute.

Friends and relatives came to the rescue of the boys, but Coleridge remained virtually dead to the concerns of his wife and children. A letter from Mrs

S T C to Mrs Mary Morgan of January 2nd-1813 speaks volumes:

"I sincerely wish I could devise any method to induce Mr Coleridge to answer my letters without so frequently troubling you and good Mr Morgan. On hearing the contents of his letter to Mr Wordsworth, I wrote to him through Mr Bedford, which letter he must have received about the 23rd or 24th of the last month.

The letter alluded to above is not merely on the subject of money but contains many things concerning the children which it is proper for him to be acquainted with; nothing indeed of *very* great moment; nothing *at all* to alarm or distress him - but the thing immediately to be answered was namely, *whether* I may draw on the bank for half the usual sum *immediately*, and when I am to expect the /? money/ he mentioned from the Surrey Institution; for my anxieties about money are *now* doubled; and *before*, they were almost more than I could bear.

Do, dear Mrs M., *intreat* him to write; it is 10 months since I have seen his handwriting".

It was on March 26, 1812, that S T C left Greta Hall full of "airy promises"; he did not set eyes upon his wife and young daughter, Sara, until they visited him at Highgate on January 3, 1823 (and it was not until the following year that he was re-united with Derwent). In 1816 S T C had placed himself under Dr Gillman's care at Highgate; the happiest arrangement that could possibly have been hoped for, as Mrs S T C readily admitted. "Our separation has, on the whole, been for the best, you will easily see why," she wrote philosophically to Poole in 1819. But, "I grieve on the children's account, poor things".<sup>22</sup>

A pen-friendly relationship was established between herself and Mrs Gillman, though they did not meet in person for another four years. Then came the visit to Highgate; it was happily "productive of the greatest satisfaction to all parties".<sup>23</sup>

In September 1830 Mrs S T C settled in Hampstead with her daughter and son-in-law. S T C was now a reputable, albeit still penniless figure: the Grand Old Man of English letters. To his wife, however, he was "poor father", or "poor C." He was a close neighbour and visits were made to Highgate when his health permitted; he saw considerably more of Henry Nelson Coleridge than of his wife and daughter; however, when he did meet his wife all was amicable, in a kind of muted sunset glow. Time had, to quote S T C, mellowed all things:

"I believe I told you in my last letter we had gone in a fly to Highgate and that Mr Coleridge was a little better from the use of the sulphur bath," we find Mrs S T C writing to Miss Trevenen, on April 27, 1831. "Henry was there last Sunday and found him very infirm; he asked him to come to dinner to meet Wordsworth, and he said he should like to do it, if possible; however, the Wordsworths all came early on Tuesday and took a hasty leave as Dr Wordsworth's carriage was waiting to carry them to Cambridge, whence they will proceed home on the Office account; still we hope to see S T C and the Gillmans to dine with us, but it will depend on poor C.'s health."

There was now a grandson, Herbert, to delight all hearts. "Strangers stop the nurse to ask whose fine baby he is!" the proud grandmother informed Miss Trevenen, in the letter quoted above. In one of five months later, again to Miss Trevenen (on the envelope of which is scrawled the directive that it



is to be "burnt" - fortunately it escaped the flames) Mrs S T C wrote, "The dear child has been quite well...God grant he may continue so... His poor grandpapa Coleridge has been a great sufferer lately... He is now better and well enough to take his little grandson in his arms when, with Nurse and Mary /a maidservant/ he was carried to Highgate to see them. Herbert was in raptures the whole time he stayed, raving at the pictures /in S T C's attic bedroom-study/... S T C laughed heartily at his funniness and hoped to see him again soon".

In July 1812 a sister arrived for Herbert. Her christening took place on August 9. S T C, after having had a serious relapse in health, was now better again and announced his intention of attending the christening. He, and Mrs S T C, have each left an account of the occasion. We will give ear to Mrs S T C first, leaving her husband to have the last word.

To Poole, on August 16, Mrs S T C wrote, "On Thursday last she /Sara/, with a small party, took her babe to Church, where it received the name of Edith; and, what will perhaps greatly surprise you as it did all his friends, the grandfather came from Highgate to be present, and to pass the rest of the day here! ... His power of continuous talking seems unabated, for he talked incessantly for full 5 hours to the great entertainment of Mrs May and a few other friends who were present, and did not leave us till 10".<sup>24</sup>

S T C, for his part, explained to his friend, J H Green, the distinguished anatomist, that his determination to be present at the baptism had been fired by the wish "to stand beside Mrs Coleridge at this second birth of our common Offspring - in proof that the lack of Oil or Anti-friction Powder in our Conjugal Carriage-wheels did not extend to our parental relations - (and in fact, bating living in the same house with her there are few women, that I have a greater respect & *ratherish* liking for, than Mrs C----)".<sup>25</sup>

( 2 )

As I have already pointed out in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* (but must point out again here, because it is so very important within the context of Mrs Coleridge's alleged frightful temper and unsympathetic and tormenting behaviour) it is never the morphine addict's own fault that he has become addicted. The classic excuse of the morphine victim is to blame his addiction upon those nearest to him; lack of love and understanding being the stock cry, couched in terms of guilty virulence. In this the Coleridge marital disaster is medical text book material. The pattern of collapse of the marriage and the behaviour of the two partners runs true to form all the way. Coleridge's repeated return to the home and the partner that he so reviled to others, ("To Keswick? The sight of that Woman would destroy me!")<sup>26</sup> is classic. So are the letters of granted and begged for forgiveness - and so is Mrs S T C's at last apparently uncaring response, "Lord, how often you are ill!" She has had more than she can cope with emotionally; she assumes a totally negligent attitude. And, true to form, he is presently back with her, "full of fair promises".

Where the story does not run true to form is in the, relatively speaking, happy ending. Not all opium addicts were fortunate enough to find friends who were willing to support them and give them a good home, with skilled medical attention included (the case of the wretched George Burnett, who died a pauper, is an instance in point) and not all addicts had wives who, despite years of silence and neglect, were still willing to take part in smiling reunions at the end of the day.

Of course it would be foolish to contend that, if there had been no opium as an ingredient in the Coleridge marriage, there would have been no friction whatsoever. There were strong disparities between the two personalities and moreover Coleridge would never have been a propitious draw in the marriage lottery. Even Dorothy Wordsworth was generous enough to say that Mrs Coleridge would have made a very good wife to many another man.<sup>27</sup>

And this, we may well think, was true. Any normal man, wedded to Sara, would have congratulated himself for being an extremely lucky fellow.

Pretty, presentable, well-spoken, articulate, intelligent (but not intellectual); a first-rate household manager with a clear head for domestic finance; deeply attached to her family; a skilled and devoted nurse to her children and with a great fondness of all young people; sociable, affectionate in general disposition; a most pleasant hostess; good with servants; blessed with a keen sense of humour as well as a disposition for "innocent fun"; energetic, hardworking, healthy, determined, with wonderful powers of resilience and, above all, fortitude, and never bearing grudges: these manifold virtues emerge clearly from her letters.

(The letters to Poole perhaps reveal her least, because, though an old friend, he was not family, and moreover he was a *man* and with men she was always somewhat restrained in tone because, "*entre nous*", as she would say, she thought men rather silly. Only one man held her unadulterated admiration and that was Robert Southey; although, in his old age, "The Poet" came a close runner up; "our dear, good old friend Mr Wordsworth". Only one man, apart from her sons, had ever held her whole heart; the youthful Samuel Taylor Coleridge.)

Her faults (or, more correctly, what S T C came to see as her faults) also emerge from her letters. S T C outlined her salient failings most succinctly in a letter to an unidentified correspondent (probably a young friend seeking advice about marriage) in January 1819. Temper, interestingly, was dismissed by S T C as the least important blemish: "Temper...may disturb and interrupt, but it will not be likely to *subvert* the happiness of domestic life." By 1819 he had decided that the true threat to married happiness arose from the wretched business of falling in love! Together, he went on to add, with certain flaws of personality in the woman such as indocility and a mind of her own. "Does she sincerely adopt my opinions on all important subjects? Has she at least that known *docility* of nature which, uniting with true wifely love, will dispose her so to do?" he suggested were questions that the intending husband should ask himself.

"Do her notions of happiness point to the same sources as mine - or do Dress, Equipage, Visiting, a fine House &c? Am I sure that I really *love* her? ... My experience as well as my insight into human Nature... authorizes, *compels* me to hold it not merely possible but highly probable that the sexual impulse, acting not openly in the excitement of conscious desire...but acting covertly and unconsciously in the imagination, and in that form contracting a temporary alliance with the best moral Feelings, may assume and counterfeit the appearance of exclusive *Love*... How else could it be that what are called Love-matches are so proverbially unhappy ...and the consequent disappointment acute & alienating in exact proportion to the degree in which the self-deluded Husband is by nature & education susceptible of domestic Bliss, if only he had chosen *wisely* and with his eyes free from Film and Fever? ..."28

This is a particularly interesting statement in view of the fact that S T C usually maintained that he had made a loveless match; forced into it by Robert Southey "in compliment to the merest phantom of overstrained Honour!"<sup>29</sup> It is, in fact, the generally held view, even today, that his marriage failed chiefly because he was never in love with his bride, Sara, née Fricker.

The truth is that Sara was both fallen in love with and chosen, though scarcely chosen with eyes free from Film and Fever. Pantisocratic fever had S T C in its grip when he had first met Miss Fricker and his eye was filmed with heady visions of

"a brighter day  
Than e'er saw Albion in her happiest times ...30  
Content and Bliss on Transatlantic shore."

The Pantisocratic scheme, it will be remembered, was basically that twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles were to cross the Atlantic at a not too distant date in time (April 1800 was envisaged), there to found a progressive experimental community. Each gentleman was to "select a highly accomplished woman".<sup>31</sup> No romantic considerations of falling in love were to deflect the gentlemen into taking unsuitable partners!

Robert Lovell, one of the intending members of the company, was all right; he was already married to a beautiful and cultivated young actress, Mary, the second daughter of a Bristol widow of good background, Mrs Martha Fricker. Robert Southey, with Coleridge a founding father of Pantisocracy, was courting the third of the Fricker girls, Edith, with whom he had fallen in love. His mother wondered that he had not chosen Sarah, the eldest of the five Fricker sisters; by common consent Sarah was "prettier and cleverer" than Edith. Perhaps Southey had sensed that the far from unanimated little Sarah would prove too much of a handful; whatever the reason, he had settled for Edith. But he remained attached to Sarah and continued to admire her, so that when the time came to muse upon the selection of a highly accomplished companion for Coleridge in the North American "back settlements" Southey instantly thought of Sarah Fricker ("Christ! what a name for Coleridge to be transferred to!" was the bellow of ultimate Coleridge disenchantment; however, in 1794 it belonged to a kind of fascinating evocative litany, "America! Southey! Miss Fricker!").<sup>32</sup> It was true that, before coming to Bristol, Coleridge had confided to Southey that he was passionately in love with a certain Mary Evans; but then came the news that Miss Evans had become betrothed to another. It did not seem such a thoroughly unreasonable idea, therefore, to produce Sarah Fricker.

The first meeting between S T C and Sarah (a name that he always insisted should be deprived of the *h*) was described by her, half a century later, when she came to gather together some of her early memories of Robert Southey, following his death in 1843. A *Life and Letters* was in hand and Southey's close friend, Henry Taylor, was at this point in time responsible for the work (Cuthbert Southey subsequently became the author). Taylor had asked the young Sara Coleridge to help him with the gathering of material and she had applied to her mother for information about Southey's early youth; Mrs S T C having known Southey since "he was four years old, a little boy in frocks". She dictated her memories to Sara *fille* who transcribed them

into reported speech as she took the dictation: these memories, entitled "Mrs Codian's Remembrances" are among the material with which the present author is dealing, from the University of Texas at Austin.

It is clear, from Sara *fille's* hand, that she had to scrawl at breathless speed to take her mother's dictation; as a result the MS reads disjointedly, rising to a staccato crescendo with the appearance of S T C upon the scene:

/S.T.C.'s first acquaintance with R.S./ "was at Oxford: he had heard of R.S. and went to see him and became acquainted with him and Burnett. After his visit S.T.C. took his Welsh tour. On his return from that tour he came to Bristol; mama first saw him at R/obert/ L/ovell/'s; he spent the evening there. He was brown as a berry. R.L. said, 'He can have prog here - but he must sleep elsewhere.' Mama thought him plain, but eloquent and clever. His clothes were worn out; his hair wanted cutting. He was a dreadful figure. Mama remarked this to R.S., who said, 'Yes; he is a diamond set in lead.' R.S. was very neat, gay and smart.

"R.S. was then courting Aunt S. /Edith Fricker/ but not making much way apparently. S.T.C. got righted up a little in Bristol and then was taken by R.S. to Bath to be introduced to Mrs Southey. ... After he had been there a few days Mrs Southey begged her son to write to mama to come over to spend a week or fortnight with her, to talk over the American affair.

"Mama went over. There was a great deal of conversation about the Pantisocratic scheme... After a few days (mama cannot recollect the exact length of time) S.T.C. said he must soon return to Cambridge and asked mama if she would write to him. This brought on a proposal of marriage. He asked if mama would accompany him to America. The match was agreed on and they were to correspond and he was, after his time at Cambridge, to come to Bath again.

"He wrote from Cambridge; but at last ceased writing, being very unhappy about his debts. On this account he left Cambridge, went to London and there stayed, unknown to anyone. Time went on; they heard nothing from him. R.S.'s letters /went/ unanswered. At last R.S. said, 'I *must* go to London to look after him.'

"Then, after writing and writing a long time, he went to London and found S.T.C. in the Cat and Salutation (in some lane) - just sitting down to his supper with a welch rabbit and a can of beer beside him. He was astonished and glad at seeing Southey; he could not get away because he owed money at the public house. Mama thinks that Uncle Southey paid his bill. He brought him away".

That Coleridge was astonished at seeing Southey we may easily believe; that he was gladdened by the sight is distinctly doubtful. And the "could not get away because he owed money at the public house" sounds like one of his celebrated excuses. He was in fact in hiding from falling victim to that hitherto seductive trio, "America! Southey! Miss Fricker!" Now here was Southey come to haul him back to Miss Fricker, with America and communal life as a backwoodsman and carpenter staring him in the face.

There is no doubt that Coleridge had proposed to Sarah Fricker in a moment of giddy euphoria, mistaking "the ebullience of *schematism* for affection"<sup>33</sup> (as he had written to Southey some time in early December when cold feet about Miss Fricker had sunk to a temperature approaching frost bite). His psychology too had disposed him to rush into the engagement; Lovell and Southey had already chosen Fricker brides; George Burnett proposed to the

fourth sister, Martha (albeit he was refused). With all this Fricker wooing in the air S T C felt impelled to follow suit: "The lamentable difficulty I have always experienced in ... abstaining from what people around me were doing".<sup>34</sup>

Sara, poor young woman, had genuinely fallen in love with S T C. During his absence she had turned down two suitors in his favour; one of them rich. Learning this, upon his return to Bristol, S T C was completely bowled over; he renewed his courtship with revived fervour and was soon informing the world in clarion tones, "I love and I am beloved, and I am happy!"<sup>35</sup>

They were married at Bristol on Sunday, October 4, 1795 and none of their friends and acquaintances of that time entertained the slightest doubt that it was a marriage for love; a highly romantic match.

"A man who marries for love," S T C was to confide to his notebook, a decade later, "is like a frog who leaps into a well. He has plenty of water but then he cannot get out."<sup>36</sup>

Mrs Coleridge, for her part, whenever she heard in later years of any young couple venturing upon the married state, always hastened to offer her condolences rather than congratulations. Invariably she voiced anxieties and warnings about the pitfalls of marriage upon an insufficient income and she always concluded by hoping, with touching earnestness, that the happiness of the young pair would *last*.

That the first years of the marriage were happy ones is established beyond doubt by the later letters of both parties lamenting what they had lost. "What we have been to each other, our understandings will not permit our Hearts to forget!" S T C wrote to her in 1803,<sup>37</sup> when happiness was gone and he was leaving for Malta.

1798 may be seen as the year of watershed for the Coleridges. In that year had come their first parting of any length: in the autumn of that year Coleridge had left with the Wordsworths to study in Germany for six or seven months, leaving Sara and the two children (their second child, Berkeley, a most remarkably beautiful infant, had arrived in May of that year) at Nether Stowey, with friend and neighbour Tom Poole to keep an eye on them. At first it had been intended that wife and babies should accompany "papa", but the idea was dropped as impracticable.

Within weeks of Coleridge's departure little Berkeley became mortally ill; first with small-pox as a result of a miscarried inoculation given against the disease, and then, while he was recovering from the small-pox, with a flaring pulmonary tuberculosis contracted from Nanny, the nursemaid.

Sara's letters to Samuel describing the illness, sufferings and death of "sweet Berkeley" and her own sufferings and illness consequent upon his were preserved at the request of Coleridge himself. Even today, at this distance in time, they make singularly harrowing and moving reading. Sara's distraught anxieties for her two tiny children (at one point she feared lest she might lose them both), her dedicated nursing and anguished struggle to save the expiring Berkeley, her tender concern lest the tragic news should *disarrange* the highly strung Samuel, together with her inability to conceal from him her desperate longing for, and need of, her husband during such a time of trial - all this, expressed in artless and spontaneous language, spilling out of her in spite of her attempts to bear in mind Poole's admonitions that "Col" must not be upset, leaves the reader convinced beyond any possible doubt of the total fallacy of Coleridge's subsequent

allegations that Mrs Coleridge had no real feelings.

Samuel's replies to her letters during this period match hers in emotion: "When I read of the danger and the agony - My dear Sara! - my love! my Wife! - God bless you & preserve us...believe and know that I pant to be home with you."<sup>38</sup>

But when at last he returned home in July 1799 he was not the same Coleridge who had said good-bye to his Sally Pally nine months earlier. Opium addiction had been stalking him before he left England; in Germany, dejected by his absence from Sara ("How intensely I long for you! My Sara - O my dear Love!")<sup>39</sup> and then flung into profoundest misery by the news of Berkeley's death, he solaced himself with increasing opium. The drug wrought its inevitable changes; his health deteriorated, and he began to quarrel. Before he had been back long in Stowey he had fallen out seriously with Poole and was fleeing from Sara to the Wordsworths in County Durham, where the sisters, Mary and Sara Hutchinson, came upon the scene.

It was unfortunate for Mrs S T C that she could now be compared, in her sensibilities and understanding (of which S T C had hitherto not complained, indeed he had boasted of these qualities in her) with Dorothy Wordsworth. And his wife's somewhat aggressive independence of mind and spirit could be compared with the sweet pliancy of Mary Wordsworth. What happened is best expressed by Sara *fille*, writing about her mother:

"The sort of wife to have lived harmoniously with my father need not have possessed high intellect or a perfect temper - but greater enthusiasm of temperament than my mother possessed. She never admires anything she doesn't understand. Some women, like...Mrs Wordsworth, see the skirts of a golden cloud - they have unmeasured faith in a sun of glory and a sublime region stretching out far beyond their ken, and proud and happy to think that it belongs to them are ready to give all they have to give in return. This faith, this docility, is quite alien to the Fricker temperament ... They are too literal ... And then my mother's very honesty stood in the way - unless at the same time she had possessed that meekness and forbearance which softens everything and can be conciliating by utter silence on all unpeaceful topics and the constant recurrence to soothing cheering themes. Neither had my mother that dexterity in managing the temper of others which is often a substitute for an even temper in the possessor ... Though her talents are above mediocrity and her understanding clear and good on its own range /here we may suspect that Sara *fille*, one of the most brilliant women of her day, was revealing a slight tinge of her father's besetting sin of contempt/ she has no taste whatever for abstractions and formerly had less toleration for what she did not relish than now. But to say broadly or to imply unreservedly that she is harsh-tempered or narrow-minded (that is, of an ungenerous spirit) or more unintellectual than many women who have pleased my father is to misrepresent the subject".<sup>40</sup>

In reading the unpublished letters we discover two outstanding attributes of Mrs S T C, one of which is unexpected, the second of which is not. She possessed an acute and constant sense of humour, seeing the funny side of life in the most unlikely situations; she laughed at the world around her, she laughed at herself. It was a blessing for her that it was so, for otherwise she must surely have sunk beneath the mammoth-heavy afflictions that fell upon her. But in relation to those around her, the tritons in her life (as Potter so aptly put it) humour was an unfortunate trait. S T C was

firmly convinced that women do not possess a sense of humour, and there is evidence that Sara's laughter was a thorn in his flesh, rather than otherwise. Certain it is that *her* sense of humour was not *his* sense of humour. And with the Wordsworths Sara was in an equally unfortunate situation, because Dorothy and Mary Wordsworth did not realise, not only that Mrs S T C was laughing, or that there was indeed anything to laugh at, but that laughter in her predicament was a form of release to her and essential for her survival. Thus she was regarded not only with suspicion, but with downright disapprobation. "Mrs Coleridge is a most extraordinary character - she is the lightest weakest silliest woman!"<sup>41</sup> Thus Dorothy.

Lightheartedness was seen as coldheartedness, or indeed lack of heart; lightness of touch and tongue as stupidity; a determination to keep her spirits and pecker up (as the Cockneys say) in the face of fearful odds (a form of high courage) as an inability to perceive that the skies were dark. Mrs Coleridge's strength and fortitude (her second great attribute, and one of no mean order) was concealed by a desire to be always in trim and what might be termed socially chirpy. However dire things became, it was your duty to keep your colours nailed to the mast and meet it all with a breezy flourish - a form of personal gallantry. Her letters abound in family disasters; S T C's tragedy; Hartley's tragedy; daughter Sara's nervous prostration and calamitous succession of stillbirths and miscarriages; daughter-in-law's similar sad history of terminated pregnancies and lost infants (a tremendous blow to Mrs S T C who adored babies), son-in-law's spinal paralysis and agonized death; Dora Wordsworth's tuberculosis (the Wordsworths had become family, to all intents and purposes); Dorothy's madness; the final sharp deterioration of her own health.

The letters themselves are written with very real feeling and loving anxiety; interest, affection, concern, practical suggestions, delphic observations, and occasionally permitted exclamations of affliction. Her frugality prompted her to use random scraps of paper; she became famous for her hastily scrawled missives on any odd piece of paper that came to hand; milliner's bills and charity appeal brochures, shopping-lists and memory-reminder jottings, paper bags, the backs of old envelopes: unless she was writing a formal letter in her most elegant drawing room style (which she could, and would do, when occasion demanded) she saw no sense in buying special writing paper when there was blank paper in profusion, in all shapes and sizes, lying about the house for free and only waiting to be converted into correspondence. "Mrs Coleridge's *Sybellines*, as we...call her flying letters written on scraps of paper,"<sup>42</sup> was Sara Hutchinson's apt observation.

So the *Sybellines* fly: sometimes witty, sometimes downright comic; newsy; to her sons at times nagging, to her friends chatty; and all too often heavy with dark tidings. But what-ever their contents we find them sealed (not invariably, for she enjoyed a choice of seals, but often enough to show that it was her favourite) with an elegant little seal depicting a chirpy little cricket and bearing the motto, "*Toujours gai*".

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#### COLEBROOK COTTAGE

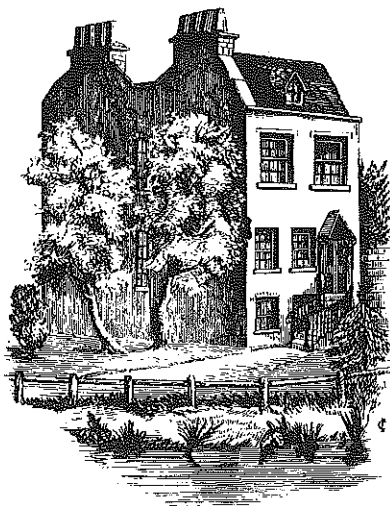
I feel like a great Lord, never having had a house before -

Charles Lamb 1823

"I suppose Charles Lamb's dead now, isn't he?" said 'the cheerful young labourer digging at No. 64 Duncan Terrace, Islington, shortly after we took it over in 1970. Other Islington residents have (surveying its LCC plaque) asked what the word "essayist" means, who *was* Charles Lamb anyway, and in slightly more enlightened words hoped we were looking after Charley's garden.

Now there are signs that in Islington perhaps, and in some other parts of the world certainly, Charles and Mary Lamb are not dead after all. On summer days there are often groups of 30-40 tourists standing outside while





Colebrooke Cottage.

a guide seeks to explain the cottage to them; other times there are individuals photographing it, or themselves being photographed before its green front. They are mostly American or Japanese, we have found, and some notable members of the Charles Lamb Society have joined it after simply arriving here to see for themselves.

Colebrook Cottage: the spelling is Lamb's own though the opposite side of this same road is Colebrooke Row. Sometimes it seems that the exact changes since Charles and Mary left the house in 1827 will never be sorted out now. One thing is certain - the house was "detach'd" as Charles described it in his letter to Bernard Barton, for the windows on both sides still remain though now blocked off by buildings which have since been joined to it. The front door, of which Charles himself wrote to Thomas Hood "'twas with some pains that we were evulsed from Colebrook. You may find some of our flesh sticking to the door-posts", is sturdy enough, and with heavy enough fittings, to have been the same as in the famous Shephard drawing of George Dyer being readmitted after his tipsy plunge into the New River; and that same drawing, lent to the house by the late H G Smith, former editor of the *Bulletin*, hangs inside.

Other scholars have helped in the effort to trace its progress from 1827 to 1970. A letter written in 1968 by Miss Phyllis Mann to Florence Reeves thoroughly examines all the possibilities of alteration and rebuilding between the two dates and refers especially to B E Martin's book *In the Footsteps of Charles Lamb* - but our copy of that book depicts the cottage in 1891 as having the same front elevation as now - no more than two windows on any floor. Only in a very old print, a facsimile from the *Illustrated London News*, 1849, do we find the "three good windows" Lamb himself mentioned as belonging to his "lightsome drawing-room."

And where exactly was the "cheerful dining-room" which Lamb said you

entered without passage? That strong front door opens on to a passage now, and to its left is the room we must picture as Lamb's beloved dining-room. Now again it is "studded all over" not only with books but with prints, British Museum facsimiles of Lamb's writing from this house, a fine pencil drawing of E V Lucas lent by Sidney Hall, a picture of Button Snap and other items from the late Ernest Crowsley's collection and everything else that, with love and loving help, we could amass about Charles and Mary. Also on one wall hangs the menu of the Society's bicentenary luncheon, 1975, with signatures of all those who were present including a Wordsworth, a Coleridge and - alas, not the last remaining Southey who had emigrated a week previously.

On that same floor is a large and rather elegant drawing-room - ceiling mouldings, a fine marble-surrounded fireplace and a general air of luxury that fits uneasily with the idea of its ever having been used as a bedroom. Probably it was enlarged, and even its ceiling raised, for the benefit of Mr John Webb, of Webb's Mineral Waters, who subsequently occupied the house while conducting his business with the benefit of local well water. Incidentally Mr Webb gave the Society the only known piece of Lamb's own furniture, a sturdy chair now resting here.

The real ground floor (actually a few inches below pavement level) had to be much reorganised in 1970, but basically might easily have been the servant's quarters of the old house, for at the front was a bedroom and at the back a cosy old kitchen with a coal-fired range. Perhaps those quarters once housed the redoubtable Becky? Perhaps from there Emma Isola took Hood's dog Dash for runs around the garden in which Lamb (at first) professed to spend so much time pruning? The garden is small now, but at least green and a sanctuary for the town birds which still turn up occasional mementoes of oyster shells and broken clay pipes.

We cannot solve all the mysteries of Colebrook Cottage but still enjoy trying. The London Tourist Board suggested, last summer, that we might receive small parties of Lamb enthusiasts on perhaps one afternoon a week, but nothing has so far materialised of this plan. Meanwhile we are delighted if any members of the Society still wishing to see it will telephone us (01-226 9914). Equally if overseas members who may be visiting London would care to spend a night or two in our top-floor flat - largely unoccupied - we shall be pleased to consider what arrangements could be made.

A G and M Cheyne

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Kathleen Coburn: *Inquiring Spirit, A New Presentation of Coleridge*  
*University of Toronto Press, 1979. 445pp. \$8.50 paper; \$25.00 cloth.*

The "New Presentation" is really a reprinting of an old friend. Kathleen Coburn has described how, *In Pursuit of Coleridge*, at that exciting time when she was busy getting the Ottery Collection of S T C's notebooks to the British Museum, she had the idea of a book of selections from his prose "to show his relevance to modern thinking." With the help of Geoffrey Grigson the book was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, and it has been a rare treasure to come across in bookshops ever since. (My own copy, of the original 1951 printing, had stood on Blackwell's shelves for ten years when I found it: with appropriate prodigality it was still priced at its 1951

value, too!)

Since 1951 the relevance of Coleridge to modern thinking has been more widely understood, largely as a result of the monumental work of scholarship undertaken by Miss Coburn, Professor George Whalley, and others. But the contents of *Inquiring Spirit*, and not least the enthusiastic but perceptively balanced introduction of Miss Coburn herself, remain valuable to novices and hardened Coleridgean addicts alike. Printed largely by offset, this edition contains a few corrections of early mistakes in transcription and typographical errors. It will fill a gap in many good libraries. I hope it will also add to the enjoyment of those readers who, like Charles Lamb, are happy to take mental journeys along a rolling English road that sometimes chooses to go to Paradise by way of Highgate Hill. Item 171 of Miss Coburn's anthology will give an inkling of what I mean:

"A blessing, I say, on the inventors of Notes! You have only to imagine the lines between the ( ) to be printed in smaller type at the bottom of the page - and the Writer may digress, like Harris, the Historian, from Dan to Beersheba and from Beersheba in hunt after the last Comet, without any breach of continuity.

Digress? or not digress? That's now no question  
Do it? Yet do it not! See note\* below.

Well! to proceed..."

C R Watters

Ruth I Aldrich: John Galt: *Twayne's English Authors Series*; TEAS 231, Boston, 1978. 8vo. pp.172. Cloth bound

Readers of *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* may already be familiar with Twayne's English Authors Series from reading our Vice President, Professor G L Barnett's *Charles Lamb*, which forms one of its volumes. The red and gold Twayne guides now fill two or three shelves in the average university library, and they form the largest series of studies of individual British (as well as American) writers to have appeared since the English Men of Letters volumes long, long ago. Like that venerable series they aim to give an account of each author's life which is basically chronological: the publications are set within the framework of events in the writer's private and public life, movements of thought and taste, and the context of contemporary critical reception.

The Twayne's English Authors Series certainly aims at comprehensiveness: the inclusion of both 'Macaulay, Thomas Babington' and 'Macaulay, Rose' in its list of subjects is representative of its range and style. In the grand manner of those American series which got under way when the horizons were seemingly boundless in the 1960s it frequently offers a chance to the enthusiast who wishes to revive interest in a little-read or wholly forgotten writer. Whether Twayne's will be able to afford such largesse for much longer may be doubted, so it is good to see that Professor Ruth I Aldrich of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has managed to complete her researches into the novels, tales and miscellaneous publications of John Galt in time to offer fresh hope of reviving interest in that generally unlucky author before, with typical Galtean irony, the state of the market forbids the continued publication of such labours of love.

There are good reasons for loving Galt. At his best, as in *Annals of the*

*Parish* (which is transmuted into *Anals* in the Selected Bibliography on page 165: Galt's luck still running true to form) or *The Entail*, or long stretches of *The Provost* and *The Ayrshire Legatees*, he has a dry, pawky wit, a sense of how life's comedy can be extracted with infinite slyness from the oblivious, self-confident musings of the self-important, and a tireless, quick eye for significant detail which would surely have met with Lamb's approval if Galt's stories had ever got past his fixed indifference to contemporary fiction.

Like most of the Blackwood group who wrote for a living, Galt had a large share of talent. But he fell foul of the prejudices of Blackwood's most trusted advisers, John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart, his material was often cavalierly treated before publication, and he was generally driven to overproduce. He led a wandering life and he wrote on a large variety of subjects in a wide variety of forms. Professor Aldrich patiently leads the reader through the mazes of Galt's career, explains how and when works came into being, spotting self-borrowings and reworkings and bringing together a large number of contemporary and modern critical reactions. But there are, one feels, two potential dangers in her way of proceeding. The first, probably imposed by the methods of the series, is that when every work, from early, long-forgotten poem to the life of Byron (whom Galt knew in the Levant in about 1810-11), the great novels and the late, interesting but often muddled memoirs and short stories is given its due meed of attention, the reader is sometimes hard pressed to see the living trees among the dead wood. The other difficulty is probably Professor Aldrich's own responsibility. She tends to list critical responses without indicating where the lines between Romantic, Victorian and modern critics need to be drawn. Most of us can tell our Francis Jeffreys from our David Craigs, but with Ian Gordon writing in 1972 and R K Gordon in 1920 (and Galt's critics reflecting the views of their periods as clearly as any others) there can be some tricky moments, and the whole method of presentation must be full of problems for the beginners in Scottish or early nineteenth century fiction to whom, after all, the book is in many respects addressed.

In her criticism of Galt's novels Professor Aldrich sometimes seems too busy hunting out sources and tracing contemporary opinions to do justice to her very real awareness that Galt was an experimental novelist whose capacity to discover new ways of perceiving and dramatising the workings of the Scottish provincial mind shows a real power to surprise and delight us right up till the end of his career. Her comments tend to be a shade too bald and brief: but her instincts are sound and her opinions sensible. On the main novels she expands and does herself something more like justice. She is at her strongest in discussing *The Provost*, an underrated and delightful book.

The reader who wishes to understand the circumstances which led Galt to turn this way and that as a writer, and to learn how roughly his work was treated by his publishers and early editors, must turn to *John Galt* by Professor I A Gordon (Edinburgh, 1972), where Galt's whole career is given a greater sense of shape and direction than in Professor Aldrich's narrative (Professor Gordon has also edited several of Galt's novels in recent years, with interesting introductions). But Professor Gordon's book does purchase emphasis at the expense of comprehensiveness: a good deal of Galt's minor, but still interesting writing is necessarily ignored in his study. Without Professor Aldrich's book, for example, the student of Lamb would probably miss the possibilities for illuminating comparisons to be made between Lamb

and Galt as editors and critics of Elizabethan drama. There is, in short, room for both volumes: they complement one another very usefully.

It should, perhaps, be added for the benefit of users of Professor Aldrich's Select Bibliography that several of the recent works which she instances in American or Canadian editions have also been published by British (generally Scottish) presses.

William Ruddick

#### THE CHARLES LAMB BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

At the Birthday Luncheon, held on 9 February 1980 at the Ivanhoe Hotel, Bloomsbury Street, nearly a hundred members and guests gathered to celebrate in Elian fellowship.

We were privileged to have with us as our Guest of Honour this year Dr John Beer, who proposed the toast to the Immortal Memory of Charles Lamb. Starting from Blake's cutting remark that "since the French Revolution Englishmen are all intermeasurable by one another: certainly a happy state of agreement, in which I for one do not agree", Dr Beer went on to demonstrate how this was clearly not true of Charles Lamb, as one meets him either in his own writings or moving in and out of the lives of Coleridge and Wordsworth. With a wit and delicate humour, which it is impossible to reproduce in a mere report, John Beer spoke of the inter-relationships between these three very "unintermeasurable" characters.

As Lamb's letters make apparent, the seeds from which many of the essays grow were sown long before and in most of them, apart from the obvious examples, the mind of Coleridge, remembered as he *was*, makes itself felt in frequent "hinted presences". For his part, Lamb at one stage provided Coleridge with "an unthanked counterweight to Wordsworth's influence", yet both needed Coleridge, responding in their different ways to his delight in energy and illumination, in nature and in human beings.

Dr Beer went on to talk of the love of books as "a kind of neutral ground where they could all three meet in agreement" and led us with much delight *via* "The Two Races of Men" to annotations, general and particular, learned and iconoclastic. The annotations to a copy of Sir Thomas Browne which Lamb bought for Coleridge seem to "demonstrate the Lamb-Coleridge relationship at its best". In Coleridge's description of Browne as a kindred spirit, "active in inquiry, and yet with an appetite to believe - in short an affectionate visionary!" he is also pointing us "to the ground which Coleridge and Lamb had in common - that combination of sympathy and imagination which they both admired...in others and tried to cultivate themselves". Dr Beer quoted Coleridge's comment to Sara Hutchinson, in that same volume, on the end of *The Garden of Cyrus*:

Think you, my dear Friend, that there ever was such a reason given for going to bed at midnight; - to wit, that if we did not, we should be acting the part of our Antipodes! And then 'the huntsmen are up in America' - what life, what fancy!

and compared Coleridge's praise of Browne:

...so completely does he see every thing in a light of his own, reading nature neither by sun, moon nor candlelight, but by the light of the faery glory around his own head; so that you might say that nature had granted to him in perpetuity a patent and monopoly for all his thoughts..

to what he said about Lamb contrasted with "men of *mere* Talents":

Lamb every now & then *eradiates*, & the beam, tho' single & fine as a hair, yet is rich with colours, & I both see & feel it.

If, for twentieth century readers to think ourselves back into the central concerns of the romantic poets is to "act the part of our Antipodes", said Dr Beer, yet this can be a salutary process. "If it brings us into contact with a mind such as Coleridge's, 'active in inquiry and yet with an appetite to believe', we may be left reflecting that that can be as good a habit of mind in the twentieth century as in the nineteenth. If we find ourselves taking such romantic themes too seriously we can always turn to Lamb - and if Lamb then surprises us by eradiating, that will be yet another reminder that the most unintermeasurable of men can sometimes speak to what is most universal."

Thanks for the address were offered by our Chairman, Dr Wilson, who also paid tribute to Professor Ian Jack, who to our great regret is to retire as from the next Annual General Meeting as our President, so that this will be his last Birthday Luncheon in that office, though not we hope as honoured guest. Our thanks and appreciation will be offered at more length in a future Bulletin but we would wish to take this opportunity of expressing our gratitude and affection and wishing him all that is good in his forthcoming stay in the United States.

The toast to Provincial and Overseas Members was proposed, with a very pretty wit, by Dr Rich and responded to in kind by Mr John MacInerney, whose home is "across the water" - in Ireland. Adrian J Biddell and Anthony R Ashton, Senior Grecians of Christ's Hospital, said Grace "before and after meat".

#### OBITUARY

Another true Elian has passed away. Alexander Mackenzie Davidson died on Christmas Day. A Scottish member whom we had never seen, he endeared himself to us, due chiefly to some delightful contributions to the Bulletin, and to me with his letters. He joined the Society in 1964 and in his Bulletin articles we soon realised that here was someone genuinely interested in Lamb. Under the name of "Old Scrivener" he gave us "Visions in the Firelight - three Elian Fantasies" dealing with Charles and Mary Lamb with tender affection. In Bulletin No.8 (New Series) he showed how his love of Lamb began and how it was fostered by the Charles Lamb Society. Right up to the end of his life he kept this interest, as can be seen in the January Bulletin.

I have a special link with him, for he sent me songs with words and music composed by himself. They are delightful and were much admired when I sang them.

He was an honest and outspoken critic, and his letters to me were always full of interest. We shall miss him - there will be no more "Old Scrivener" contributions from "The Scottish Elian".

To Mrs Davidson we send our sincere condolences.

F S R

News of the death of another long-standing member was received recently. Mr E J Finneron, a member since 1947, died suddenly on January 17th. We extend

our sincere sympathy to his family.

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Charles Lamb Society will take place on Saturday, 3 May 1980 at the Mary Ward Centre, 9 Tavistock Place, London WC1 at 2.45 pm. Nominations are invited for the vacancies on the Council arising from those members retiring in accordance with the Society's rules. Nominations should be sent to the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible, after ensuring that the nominees are prepared to stand.

#### MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY

On 12 January, 1980, Mr Alan Wilson, himself an actor and producer, gave us a fascinating talk, illustrated with slides, about Fanny Kelly, of whose life and work he has made a special study. We hope to see his book on her in print before too long.

As reported in the last Bulletin our December meeting was addressed by Miss Molly Lefebure, who spoke to us about Mrs Coleridge, and we are happy to be able to include in this number an article on the same subject. Miss Lefebure is editing the letters of Mrs S T Coleridge at the request of her great-great-great-grandson and it is hoped that they will be published in the not too distant future.

#### NEWS

With effect from 1st October 1979, our member, Mr D E Wickham MA, was appointed and promoted Archivist, Librarian, Court Clerk and General Superintendence Committee Clerk of The Clothworkers' Company at Clothworkers' Hall in the City of London.

The Senior Alderman, Sir Bernard Waley-Cohen, and the present Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Sir Peter Gadsden, are both Members of The Clothworkers' Company, one of the City's "Great Twelve" Livery Companies.

Members may be interested to know that the David Garrick exhibition, at the British Museum until 11 May, includes a selection of the Garrick Plays used by Charles Lamb, a copy (Exhibit 145) of his "Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets" and (Exhibit 144) a reader's application ticket for one of the plays used by him and with his signature. Exhibit 116, a silver medal of Garrick, also has Elian associations, since it concerns one of the Old Actors.

#### JUNE, GLORIOUS JUNE

What better month to visit "Happy, homely Hertfordshire"? It is many years since the Society paid a visit to "Button Snap" at Cherry Green near Buntingford - the only landed property ever possessed by Charles Lamb (or by the Society).

By kind permission of our tenant, Mrs June Tickle, a visit has been arranged for

Saturday 28 June 1980

We shall visit the cottage and garden in the afternoon, followed by tea in nearby Buntingford.

Would members who would like to join this visit please notify the Secretary (Madeline Huxstep, 9 Baronsmead Road, SW13 9RR - telephone 01-748 5461) as soon as possible, and say

- a) whether you will be going to Button Snap by your own transport?
- b) if so, can you offer a seat to one or more other members/friends?
- c) whether you require transport, either by hired coach or in other members' cars.

If there is sufficient demand a coach will be hired but we need to know approximate numbers *SOON*.

#### BOOK MARKET

As a FREE service to our book collecting/selling members we are starting a Book Market. How it will work is this:

1. A member seeking or selling a book (books) sends to the Editor of the Bulletin a concise note of particulars (Title, Author, Publisher, Date, approx. Price and your name / address / telephone number). Your advertisement will appear in the next available number of the Bulletin.
2. It will be for buyers/sellers to contact each other *direct* and agree a price.
3. The Society makes no charge for this service but we suggest that successful buyers/sellers should *each* agree to donate 25p or 10 per cent. of the price (whichever is greater) to C L S funds.

EXAMPLES (genuine!)

#### FOR SALE

*Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding. Folio Society 1973 (illus. / slipcase) £6 o.n.o.  
M R Huxstep 01-748 5461.

#### WANTED

*Coleridge Notebooks* Vol.II. Text and Notes Ed. Coburn. Your Editor has been trying for years to get this. As if to add insult to injury a recent advertisement from Routledge included it as being in print at £27 but attempts to order it are met with "unobtainable". Can anyone put me in touch with a copy?

#### NEW MEMBERS

We apologise to Mr H M S Man for welcoming him into our Society by spelling his name wrongly in our January Bulletin. He refers us, more in sorrow than in anger, to Henry Man of The South-Sea House! Please forgive us, Mr Man.

Miss A F Korval, 491 East 17th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11226, U S A  
Dr Vasanti Ram, M.187 Greater Kailash 2, New Delhi 110048, India.