

REVALUATIONS (XII):

THE POETRY OF COLERIDGE

OF the bulky volume of poetry which Coleridge has left behind there are only several poems which are of sufficient merit to attract our attention still ; but there is little poetry which one approaches critically with more hesitation than these. There is an understandable temptation to accept them at their popular value without making an effort to pass judgment on that evaluation. It is a matter neither for wonder nor censure that this should be so. The intimate familiarity that may be taken to exist between the ordinary reader of poetry and *The Ancient Mariner* or *Kubla Khan* is an added difficulty towards a critical consideration that would not, in any case, be easy. In *The Ancient Mariner* this difficulty exists in a suggestion of moral purpose—a suggestion so elusive that it is of no value, yet sufficiently present to implore our assent to pretensions that a more detailed examination must reject. There is, in short, an ambiguity of motive, of creative purpose in the poem which, even unconsciously, induces uncertainty in the mind of the reader and leads him to attribute unmerited magnitude to the poem. It is doubtful if Coleridge himself was aware, when he composed *The Ancient Mariner*, of movements sprung from any loftier creative impulse than that to which he later referred in the *Biographia Literaria*. Speaking of those poems dealing with the supernatural which he undertook for the *Lyrical Ballads* he there wrote, ‘ . . . the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them to be real.’ Such a motive, in the last analysis, was not substantially different from Mrs. Radcliffe’s or Monk Lewis’s.

One need not cavil at applying the term moralist to Coleridge. He was concerned with philosophy and religion and politics in a way that the merely frivolous can never be concerned with them, and particularly in establishing a vital relationship between them and the world. It would be remarkable if behind the explicit motive

of *The Ancient Mariner* it were not possible to catch glimpses of an ulterior and possibly more real impulse at work. Coleridge's poetry may be rated on too high a level, but to assume that he approached it as a pedestrian task not essentially different from ledger work would be to do him an injustice. For good or ill Coleridge could not help drawing in some measure from his full sensibility. The raconteur of supernatural tales is, in *The Ancient Mariner*, not quite free from the moralist. The moral element is forgotten, if indeed it was ever recognized as present ; it is changed, choked out by theatrical fripperies. All else is put aside in the fuller attention that is given to the merely dramatic motive. But although the moral motive is scotched, ineffectual fragments are still to be seen in odd corners of the poem as indications of that ambiguity that in the beginning was not absent from Coleridge's mind, and which still tends to make one slightly puzzled in reading *The Ancient Mariner*.

I have suggested that this ambiguity is, then, a dispute between the dramatic and the moral motives in composition, and that from the beginning Coleridge exerted his full force on behalf of the first ; that he succeeded in what he wished, but was only not sufficiently neat in disposing of the remains of the latter. The ineffective moral motive of *The Ancient Mariner* is a Christian one. It stresses the necessity of supernatural love as the order in creation. It is degraded and like an appendage when at last it comes to a head in the last stanza but two of the poem :

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

But disguised and unsatisfactory as its expression is, it is still the central idea of the whole poem, the core around which the action is developed, and without which the sequence of events would be meaningless. In tracing the play of this stunted moral motive, so much thrust into the background, against the length of the poem, a certain roughness of handling is necessitated. But if the interpretation seems arbitrary it is not meant to mark the boundaries of the motive with any precision, but only to point to its existence in the poem.

The transgression of the Ancient Mariner in killing the Albatross is a violation of that supernatural charity which should rule throughout creation. The sanctions which are imposed for the death of the Albatross do not seem remarkable when one reflects that the extraordinariness of the bird does not exist in its own right. It is necessary to bear in mind the stanza :

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

In these lines the Albatross becomes, in effect, a person. It is given a kind of inviolability. It has been deliberately placed by the Ancient Mariner on the same plane of creation which he himself occupies, and the full play of the will to which this deliberation gives scope brings to the Ancient Mariner's act of violence a special guilt.

The punishment which the Ancient Mariner undergoes begins to abate when he is able to generate stirrings of love in the soul once again for created things. One can place this moral motive of the poem locally very well in the last two stanzas of Part IV. Speaking of the water snakes the Ancient Mariner says :

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

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

The moral motive is almost explicit at this point. It is at the beginning of Part V that this moral becomes operative in the positive sense. Up to this point the Ancient Mariner has been the active agent, but his will has not worked in harmony with the divine goodness which now, through the operation of a supernatural

mechanism, begins the work of regeneration in his soul. There follows quickly that passage in which the seraph band enters the bodies of the crew. It is one of the most dramatic passages in the poem. Bearing with it reminiscences of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, it is but a further insistence on the controlling principle of love which springs from God.

This interpretation, though it is obvious enough, is not the one most immediate and apparent. Indeed, it lies far back in the poem. We are likely to overlook it entirely, despite the kind of obviousness which it can claim, and it would make little difference but for the moral overtone which it strikes, and which reaches our ears like a faint echo suggesting a more considerable substance than search is likely to verify. The reader more probably assumes, for example, that the Albatross is a bird of sinister significance whose death liberates inexplicable threads of mystery to wave in the atmosphere. The sequence of action is, as a result, microscoped to a moral inconsequentiality from this point onwards. It was what Coleridge wanted. He even assists the reader to this interpretation by his marginal note referring to the bird of good omen. As the poem stands it is indeed the interpretation that should be made ; but the moral motive which was sketched in above, ignored and distorted, hovers in the background and implies a moral integrity which does not exist.

The dramatic purpose of the poem is realized by means of the supernatural mechanism. But as this mechanism is a means to the dramatic fulfilment of the poem, it works also towards the failure of the moral motive. Still, the function which the machinery performs it performs well, and it is one which necessitated a mechanism of this order. The peculiar quality of the supernatural machinery consists in its being localized ; one might almost say, *essentially* localized. If the supernatural is to be treated at all it is inevitable that it should be given extension, and to do this is to tie it down to a particular place. Yet it is not impossible that these necessary materializations should appeal to the reader only as inevitable symbols of states of being that cannot otherwise be expressed. Dante achieved this. But Coleridge places his supernatural beings against the geography of an unknown world in such a manner that their respective mysteries enforce each other. This means that while the mystery of the world is increased, that of

the supernatural not only decreases but changes in character. There is little that more readily appeals to the imagination than the mysteries of unexplored realms. To-day when the mystery has been largely swept off the earth those who still feel the appetite have to be satisfied with the somewhat prepared mystery of Sir James Jeans and the scientific popularizers of the last unexplored frontiers. But it isn't quite the same. The achievement of Coleridge is that he succeeds in recreating an atmosphere of mystery that a long line of explorers from Vasco da Gama to Byrd have been at some effort to take from us.

This air of mystery is created by direct statement and by playing the supernatural against a terrestrial background. It is stated directly, for example, in lines such as,

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Coleridge's process of building up this air of mystery, inasmuch as it concerns itself with descriptions of 'ice as green as emerald,' the relative position of the sun, the rather weird effect of personifying and capitalizing 'the STORM-BLAST,' the suitably dramatic choice of the South Pole and then the Line as the course of the ship's voyage, and particularly the skeleton ship with its crew, Death and Life-in-Death, is sometimes theatrical, but it is innocent always. It is indeed this innocence that keeps the whole machinery at times from creaking. By innocence here I mean that accomplished lack of sophistication which is sometimes so characteristic of Coleridge. By felicitous touches Coleridge tapped forgotten emotional connotations. He is able to suggest fabulous mediæval sea monsters with some subtlety:

Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

But this direct statement of the geographical mystery is intensified by the familiar movements of the dæmons of the middle air through their element, by the skeleton ship which, with its plunging and tacking and veering gives the impression of being a constant inhabitant of the Pacific, by the Polar Spirit—in short, by that sense of supernatural population which seems to be a part of the background against which it moves. The atmosphere of *The Ancient*

Mariner is heavily charged. The earth is a mysterious place, but its mystery is not, strictly speaking, the mystery of rocks and stones and trees. It is in good part the mystery of the spiritual beings who reside in them and whose identities are, for the poem's purposes, not clearly distinct.

To have succeeded in recreating this air of mystery, or more correctly, in creating this new air of mystery, is not after all a major achievement. It is comparatively trivial. Yet if we search for a more substantial value in *The Ancient Mariner* the search will not be fruitful. The moral value of the poem is sacrificed to the attainment of a somewhat frivolous distinction. The texture of the poetry itself is never inadequate to its purpose, but it is not, for the most part, interesting. It is inflexible because it is manufactured to compass a certain preconceived effect, and one that, from Coleridge's own words which were quoted above, is scarcely closed to suspicion. It is not likely that words of such impersonal calculation should have led on to poetic attempts whose roots were buried deep in the essential impulses of the man. The chief objection must be, I think, that *The Ancient Mariner* brings into play a machinery that is by its nature moral, but caricatures and deflects that machinery from its true purpose, that a smaller satisfaction may be realized. It is trivial, but it is not honestly so. Its pretentiousness is of a type that for a small effect debases a universe, and this is a charge of some gravity. It has lost its moral bearing and stands at the summit of a declivity at whose foot is *The Blessed Damozel*.

Kubla Khan is a poem of less worth than *The Ancient Mariner*, but the praise which it has received has been comparatively more excessive. There is in addition to the exaggeratedly laudatory attention which *Kubla Khan* has received a tendency, on the other hand, to consider it as a kind of psychological backwash from *The Ancient Mariner*. Whatever truth might possibly be in this attitude, the poem certainly has a quality peculiarly its own. Nevertheless Coleridge's judgment on it, that it was primarily a psychological curiosity, is not without its justness. Although it is only a fragment it is difficult to imagine that its completion would have brought to that portion which has been given us any new character or quality in which it may now seem to be lacking, and there is, in fact, some reason to rejoice for its not having been completed.

It is easy to believe the correctness of Coleridge's account

of its inception. The imagery, if indeed some such term as *visuality* is not more appropriate, is of the fluid, indistinct type that naturally evokes a landscape seen in a dream. According to Coleridge the lines in *Purchas's Pilgrimage* on which his eyes were resting when he fell into his sleep, and which may be considered as the seed from which the poem as a whole sprang, were these: 'Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall.' The first verse of the poem, which comprises the first eleven lines, contains Coleridge's poetic creation of these two sentences, and beyond a natural enlargement nothing else. As poetry the first verse is much the best of the three. The rhythm is more searching, the lines more sensitive to the experience which they express. There is a vividness which begins to fade as the picture is expanded in the thirty-five lines of the second verse. Matter that seems foreign to the original inspiration is brought in. Thus we get a rather stock Coleridgean image in these lines:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover!

The natural Coleridge, the one of *Christabel*, has not been quite able to subdue some rather worn feelings of his to the particular impulse of the new poem. Shortly after these lines follows this one:

As if the earth in fast thick pants were breathing.

Yes; one now feels justified in assuming that the white intensity of inspiration under which Coleridge is supposed to have written *Kubla Khan* before the person from Porlock turned up is beginning to wane at line eighteen. Most of the remaining lines of this verse are echoes of the first eleven. The third verse, except for several lines, has no real connection with the first two verses at all, and it is easily the worst of the three. The alliteration of the first line of the verse,

A damsel with a dulcimer,

is almost vulgar with its blatant, unmeaning emphasis, and the verse fails to achieve any greater distinction than what one would expect from the tone which has been set by that line.

One may examine this decline in poetic intensity in *Kubla Khan* by directing one's attention in particular to the rhythms in the three verses. In the first it is adequate to the vision it is trying to convey. In the second verse, as Coleridge becomes more expansive and verbose, the rhythm carries on in a fatigued, halting fashion, insensitive to variations of feeling and tone. In the third verse the rhythm is metallic and sing-song. From this one is led to lament with decreased regret the intrusion of that much-maligned person from Porlock. It is possible that he really did Coleridge some service; because while the charm of the first verse of *Kubla Khan* is sufficient to dull one's senses to the fact that the two following verses are singularly devoid of anything like a comparable quality, it is doubtful if those first eleven lines could have extended their empire over poetic wastes of much vaster extent. If one is inclined, he may join in the general chorus of lament that Coleridge's masterpiece was not finished. The impulse may be generous, but it is unwise to tempt charity.

In speaking of the first verse of *Kubla Khan* I have suggested that the word image is perhaps too concrete to describe accurately the pictorial effect of these lines, and that some less definitive word such as *visuality* would be preferable. But it is necessary to look at the lines themselves:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

If one, being ignorant of the poem, yet with some familiarity of literature, were to read the lines for the first time he might possibly place it correctly. But there is a faint Miltonic cadence, and it would be understandable were he to place it earlier. Certainly, there is no stereotyped Romanticism about these lines. There are none of the

stock expressions one might fear, and, in fact, it is even difficult to point to places where the imagery comes to a concentrated head. The distinctive quality of the verse is that it is without key-words. There is rather a thin, shining wash of imagery, and the nouns and adjectives are rich but indefinite in meaning. It is a verse with much connotation but no denotation. Consider in particular the last six lines of the verse. Even the number ten is diffused; it becomes twice five. The adjectives are all general: 'fertile,' 'bright,' 'sinuous,' 'incense-bearing,' 'ancient,' 'sunny.' By considering this list of adjectives it becomes apparent that there is a kind of emotional common denominator between that can only be fully defined by considering the combined meanings of all the adjectives together. This is to say more than might at first seem apparent, and it is to say a substantial thing in praise of the verse. It is to say that the creative impulse is fully expressed with perfect economy and fine precision. It is the first adjective, fertile, that is perhaps most suggestive, and the last line is the appropriate conclusion with its emphasis on greenery.

But this picture of brightness and sun is played off against the more solemn tone of mystery in the first five lines. The sonorous roll of proper names in the first line establishes this tone, and it is important to bear in mind that it is a *tone* and not a concrete picture or the logical play of an idea that gives the verse any intrinsic merit to which it may lay claim. The verse as a whole is visual, but it is a suggestion of visuality rather than a representation of the vision itself. It is genuine poetry after its kind, but its kind is not the highest. It is poetry of the incantatory variety, and it is likely to induce a drugged assent in the reader. It is because the assent which the reader gives to *Kubla Khan* is almost invariably of this kind that the influence of these first lines can make itself felt at such a distance as the third verse. The mind is too much lulled by the incantation to be minutely aware of the gradual decline in poetic power. To say, then, that the first verse of *Kubla Khan* is genuine poetry and that it successfully records an experience that has been felt, and now is realized in the verse, is not to say that the poetic roots are deep, or even in healthy soil.

There is a prevalent quality in Coleridge's poetry which would seem to take its character from that attraction which he felt towards childhood and infancy. The attraction becomes explicit in some of

his least happy poems, but indirectly it affects most of his poetry by a personal fairy vision, and a loosening of that close integration which should exist between the emotions and the intellect. Innocence is one of the positives most frequently invoked. In *The Ancient Mariner* there was a studied and direct simplicity of statement which endowed the supernatural machinery with an effective honesty. In referring to that quality earlier in the paper I applied the term innocent to it, and I would not like to confuse that use of the term with the strained and unsatisfactory ingenuousness to which I refer now. It is this attempt to remove the feelings and thoughts of maturity from their natural context of properly proportioned sophistication, to feel the mature emotions with the simplicity of a child, that leads Coleridge, except in several poems, to feel nothing with precision, and seldom to penetrate beyond the commonplace in experience. His poem called *Dejection: An Ode* is Coleridge's most complete triumph over that emotional flaccidity which his more habitual modes of feeling had engendered. But before considering it, in order to appreciate the triumph more fully, it would perhaps be prudent to examine briefly a typical specimen in Coleridge's more ordinary style. The following passage is from a poem called *The Keepsake*. It has been selected almost at random, and contains the usual Coleridgean elements:

In the cool morning twilight, early waked
By her full bosom's joyous restlessness,
Softly she rose, and lightly stole along,
Down the slope coppice to the woodbine bower,
Whose rich flowers, swinging in the morning breeze,
Over their dim fast-moving shadows hung,
Making a quiet image of disquiet
In the smooth, scarcely moving river-pool.
There, in that bower where first she owned her love,
And let me kiss my own warm tear of joy
From off her glowing cheek she sate and stretched
The silk upon the frame, and worked her name
Between the Moss-Rose and Forget-me-not—
Her own dear name, with her own auburn hair!

This passage, especially the first sentence, is better than much of Coleridge, so there is no danger of doing him an injustice. A

detailed analysis would be superfluous. One may point, however, to the enchanted atmosphere that is being built up in the first sentence by means of 'the cool morning twilight' and 'the woodbine bower' and such hushed adjectives as 'dim' and 'quiet.' There is a decadent note in the use of the adjective 'rich' to describe flowers, and a suggestion of liturgicism in the phrase 'swinging in the morning breeze' that calls censers to mind and points ahead to the religious-esthetic tradition. It is the fairy vision at work. Such an artificial vision could not but circumscribe the emotions which are worked out against its background. In the second sentence how restricted and falsified the human emotion necessarily becomes is so apparent that it is difficult not to blush for Coleridge. The tear drop is so far from being unusual with Coleridge that one might almost call it inevitable. A few lines beyond the passage which I have quoted above, he returns to the theme with renewed vigour,

Her voice (that even in her mirthful mood
Has made me wish to steal away and weep).

The climax of such emotion will always tend to be the bathetic sentimentality that Coleridge arrives at in the last three lines of the quotation. I have devoted this much space to a consideration of *The Keepsake*, not, indeed, believing it to merit prolonged attention—what has been said has been obvious—but to recall to mind the general level of Coleridge's poetry that the nature of his success in the *Dejection Ode* may become more clear.

The imagery of the *Dejection Ode* is taken from Coleridge's familiar flow of experience. In this connection one cannot help recalling I. A. Richard's remark: 'When a writer has found a theme or image which fixes a point of relative stability in the drift of experience, it is not to be expected that he will avoid it. Such themes are a means of orientation.' The situation in the opening of the poem is one which is common to Coleridge's experience. He is considering the night, the moon, the unsettled weather with a contemplative eye. How often these same considerations had led to feelings of indulgence and to emotional perceptions of an uninteresting and indiscriminate kind a cursory survey of the poetry is sufficient to establish. But something new occurs in this poem. The emotional perceptions are refined. Coleridge ceases to

be the passive crucible of pleasure-giving thoughts and reminiscences. A new energy is generated in which the emotions are controlled by the intellect, and both are fused into a poetic whole. It is the creative impulse itself that has been metamorphosed, and which has led to these good results. Coleridge has acquired a mature self-consciousness that, under the circumstances of the poem, ineluctably leads to an exercise of the critical faculty.

The creative impulse, I suggested, was metamorphosed. It became, not the acceptance of feelings that brought pleasure and delight in their train, feelings of etherialized sensuousness, but regret that indulgence in those feelings was no longer possible. There is some analogy between the *Dejection Ode* and Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. This feeling of regret which is generated for the first time is a more natural and valid experience than the lush and suspicious emotion from whose loss the newer emotion claims its existence. It is an emotion that, while it may not set the nerves aquiver or the soul afire, springs from the deeper wells of feeling, and is accompanied by a free and searching play of the intellect. Coleridge resorts to his familiar images, the moon and stars, but they are no longer stimulations to excess, for now he must say :

I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are !

The material of his poetry is forced to submit itself to the discipline of his faculties, and those faculties have been chastened by what he believes to be sterility—a sterility brought on by prolonged excursions into regions of speculative reasoning.

The development of the poem is masterly. In the first verse the old situation is set—that meeting of physical and spiritual realities that in the past had set off so often facile emotions and created a poem. But in the signs of the coming storm there is a dull ominousness that corresponds to Coleridge's emotional state.

Well ! If the Bard was weather-wise who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes

Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,
 Which better far were mute.
 For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
 And overspread with phantom light,
 (With swimming phantom light o'erspread
 But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
 I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
 The coming on of rain and squally blast.
 And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
 These sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
 And sent my soul abroad,
 Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
 Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

From the effective colloquialism of the first line, there is a slow retarded movement that suggests the torpor with which Coleridge struggles. The two parenthetical lines that glibly repeat the matter of the two preceding lines are effective because they emphasize the air of general, almost irresponsible listlessness. But at line fifteen there comes a sharper desire to experience emotions again with the old intensity. The desire becomes coupled with the approaching violence of the storm. There is, for a moment, a note of decisiveness;

And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!

The refreshing effect of 'the slant night-shower' carries a suggestion of hope, but the verse subsides almost at once to the same nerveless movement. The last line contains the first direct statement of the difficulty.

The second verse contains a further description of this 'dull pain,' and in this condition Coleridge helplessly surveys the landscape filled with those beauties to which in the past he had responded in a different key. He surveys them, noting the minute variations from which he had been so long accustomed to draw pleasure,

All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
 Have I been gazing on the western sky,
 And its peculiar tint of yellow green.

This exact particularity of observation, when followed by the next line of self-confessed emptiness,

And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye,

generates an emotion of its own. It is that consciousness of loss that follows on an intellectual recognition that a thing which one's capacities are incapable of embracing, is yet good and to be desired. In Coleridge's case it is intensified by the memory of experience, and it is the tension set up between the memory and the recognition of present incapacity from which the poetry of the *Dejection Ode* springs. Such poetry is necessarily dependent on the intellect which measures the past with the present and recognizes the discrepancy. Because the tragic stirrings of feelings are subdued, the baroque gesture unnatural, the emotion is far from being less real. It is informed by a consciousness that is in the last analysis, intellectual, and which controls the quality of the emotion itself.

The third verse is short. After the expanded description of the difficulty with which the second verse occupied itself, Coleridge confesses his inability to throw off this general debility of feeling, and begins to examine the cause more carefully in the last two lines:

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

The intellect now assumes a more explicit rôle in the fourth verse, and from the analysis of his own state of being Coleridge begins to evolve a kind of philosophy. The verse leaps forward with a new vitality—the vitality of the intellectual explorer. From apparent loss Coleridge has not only created poetry of a high order, but he begins to draw out a kind of wisdom as well. The fourth, fifth and sixth verses are concerned with the exposition of this wisdom. The movement is impersonally alive, and Coleridge speaks with a larger voice than he has ever known before. I have already suggested the analogy that might be drawn between this poem and Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. The similarity is difficult to localize, but it is strikingly present. One might, for example, compare the sixth verse of Coleridge's *Dejection Ode* with the first, and in less degree, the sixth verses of the *Immortality Ode*. I abstain from doing so here for it is difficult to see what purpose it could possibly

serve in understanding Coleridge's poetry, however interesting it might be as an exercise. In fairness to Coleridge it should be mentioned that his *Dejection Ode* was composed first.

The seventh verse is not as good as the others, and the poem would be better if it were omitted. The poem which began with an examination of self, by the eighth and final verse has been reorientated, and the wisdom which Coleridge has unfolded is deflected from a purely personal application by these concluding lines to the friend to whom the poem in its entirety is addressed.

I have tried not to enlarge upon this poem to the point of tediousness, yet it is, I think, the most important poem that Coleridge has left behind. I have tried to explain why it is his most mature and accomplished production. *The Ancient Mariner* has usurped too large a portion of renown. English literature would be poorer if it had not been written, but its excellence is of that type which, to gain a world is willing to sell its soul. *Kubla Khan* may be dismissed with a friendly nod to the first eleven lines. What else remains? *Christabel* is less excellent than *The Ancient Mariner*. *Lewti* is a pleasant poem. It perhaps deserves more than *Kubla Khan*, but the most generous criticism could not conscientiously say that it was more than a pleasing trifle. *Frost at Midnight* begins to move in the direction of the *Dejection Ode*, but in comparison with it *Frost at Midnight* is not a success. One may in addition sometimes find little poems like *Work Without Hope* whose first four lines are unexpectedly pleasant:

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!

But one should not expect more from Coleridge. At the same time we should be grateful for his best poem, and even for *The Ancient Mariner*, and avoid patronizing. It is the exaggerated praise that has been given him, through no fault of his, which invites censure.

EUGENE MARIUS BEWLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors of *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

From your last number it seems that the word 'liberal' is in danger of discription. Two parties drag at it simultaneously and in opposite directions; unless you, Sirs, take preventive measures it hardly seems likely that the word will survive.

Mr. Harding, I see, spells it both with a capital and with a small 'l.' I suggest he confines himself to one of these, preferably the capital. Then he will have a word of his own which he can drag off where he will.

For I don't know that the proprietors of this spelling are sufficiently perspicacious, or if perspicacious sufficiently alert to exercise control over him. They are the descendants of those who, about the second quarter of last century, arrogated to themselves and to their notions, their arts, that title which had hitherto been accorded to all arts and notions not servile. Henceforward only the Liberals were to be liberal, the rest of the world mechanics. Thereby they proved, as it had not been proved before, how *illiberal* human nature might be.

And also, perhaps, how humourless. The words 'Liberales' and 'Libéraux' were first imported from France and Spain to suggest that, however improbable to a sober islander, there were elsewhere groups of people claiming a monopoly in wisdom. 'But so do we,' put in the English Liberals, Anglicizing the opprobrious term.

That they could do so is to be explained only by a double ignorance, not always involuntary. First there was the ignorance which any claim to encyclopædism implies; and secondly that, of a different kind, which rendered such a claim possible. It might also be called innocence or lack of experience. By unfortunate chance or diabolic prevision the Liberals had escaped, and by sluggishness of imagination were unable to conceive, the distresses which provoke knowledge.

From such people, I have suggested, Mr. Harding need fear no exacting supervision. But from time to time, I must confess, the