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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—WHAT THE PREACHER MAY GAIN FROM A STUDY OF COLERIDGE.

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AMONG the books which should be found in the library of every minister may be named, with some decisiveness, the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It is a large debt which the Christian ministry owes to Dr. Shedd for his writings. And it admits of little question that the edition of Coleridge's complete works,\* published under his editorial care, with an introductory essay from his pen, and Dr. Marsh's preliminary essay to "Aids to Reflection," makes a very considerable part of that obligation. Coleridge will never be introduced to the public under better auspices. This edition appeared in 1856. The influence of Coleridge upon American thought is perhaps less today than it was a generation since. The same may be true of England. The best authors fluctuate in their hold on the public mind. But there are some signs that interest in the writings of this remarkable man is far from extinct. Such essays as that of James Martineau, "Personal Influences on Present Theology: J. H. Newman, S. T. Coleridge, T. Carlyle;" or that of Professor Shairp, in his "Studies in Poetry and Philosophy," on Coleridge; "The Life of Coleridge," in the "English Men of Letters Series," by Mr. H. D. Traill, clearly evince that he has not yet passed to the limbo of neglected or forgotten authors. As I write these lines, there comes into my hands a little volume of "Selections from Coleridge's Prose Writings," by Professor Beers of Yale University, in a series of "Readings for Students."

But whether or no Coleridge holds the influential place in English and American thought he once held, it is certain that both in England and America he has powerfully molded the thinking of some of our ablest divines. I am well aware that in some quarters there has existed, and does still exist, distrust of his methods and of his influence. The epithet "Coleridgian" carried with it a suspicious sound.

\* Coleridge's Complete Works. Edited by Professor Shedd. In seven volumes: Harper & Brothers.

That he exerted a profound influence on Maurice is doubtless true; but it is certainly fair to question whether Maurice's vagueness and indetermination were not in spite of, rather than because of, Coleridge. And it cannot be forgotten that he was the formative influence in the making of that remarkable scholar, Julius Hare, whose "Mission of the Comforter," with its magnificent defense of Martin Luther, is a classic in evangelical theology. If the school of transcendental thought in New England is thought to be a progeny of his philosophizing, let it be remembered that Christian scholars like Dr. Marsh and Dr. Shedd may be the legitimate offspring, and that New England transcendentalism (whatever that may mean) may after all be only a hybrid product.

A general reason for making the intimate acquaintance of Coleridge's writings lies in the fact that he is in touch with so many sides of life. He belongs to the class of "myriad-minded" men—poet, metaphysician, theologian, political philosopher, editorial contributor to the *London Courier*, one of the three or four conversationalists who have left enduring contributions to English literature—this fact of his many-sided genius creates an interest in knowing something of such a man. His "Table Talk" is one of those suggestive books which can be taken in hand at odd moments, and which is always sure to start valuable trains of thought. Coleridge was fond of the aphorism. The aphoristic vein in him was rich, and many of its choice nuggets could be found in his "Table Talk." Open it at random, and they will appear. His "Miscellanea" in the "Friend" and the "Biographia Literaria" are discussions in philosophy and literature and human affairs which are fragmentary; but notwithstanding their fragmentary character, mentally stimulating. His "Literary Remains" is a body of literary criticism which is the best text-book extant on that subject—all the better for its purpose that it is in structure so different from the ordinary text-book. If literary taste in poetry or prose is anything worth cultivating, it is well worth the while of every clergyman to master its secret as Coleridge has unveiled it. Indeed, one of the great services he rendered the world of English-speaking people was the begetting a style of criticism remarkable at once for "fineness of insight and breadth of comprehension." Any preacher will read his Shakespeare to far better purpose, with higher discernment for the elements of dramatic power, who has made himself familiar with Coleridge's way of looking at the drama, and at the drama as embodied in Shakespeare. In fact, his comments on nearly every writer of note in English literature will be found to have in them a germ of true critical perception.

On his poetry, as a field for clerical study, we must dwell more at length. "The same spirit," says Professor Shairp,\* "which pervaded the philosophy and theology of that era (eighteenth century) is appar-

\* *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy.* Coleridge, p. 92.

ent not less in its poetry and literature." Coleridge is a reaction from and protest against this spirit of hard, dry, cold understanding, both in philosophy, theology, and literature. He struck, together with Wordsworth, the deeper, because the spiritual, note in our poetry. If for no other reason, for this alone Coleridge's poetry should interest the religious thinker. He abandoned early—too early indeed—the cultivation of the Muse for the pursuit of philosophy. For the last thirty years of his life he was wholly absorbed in problems of theology and philosophy. There is, therefore, no very large outcome of his poetry which is worthy of study. Of the seven volumes of his works, one contains his poems of every kind. His daughter marks off four epochs in his poetic production—youth, early manhood, middle, and declining life. All his best poetry lies in one of these, that of early manhood.

I may be allowed to select a number of poems from this period which it will repay any minister to read and reread for the spiritual element in them, as contrasted with the dominant note in the poetry of Pope, *et id omne genus*. I need scarcely mention his "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni." But the following poems, less known, are vital with the finer and deeper breath of the new poetry: "Fears in Solitude," "The Eolian Harp," "The Nightingale," "Frost at Midnight," "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," "France: an Ode," "Dejection: an Ode," "Work without Hope," "Complaint and Reproof." They belong to a species of poetry which either elevates the soul to nobler moods, or subdues it from restlessness and turmoil into tranquillity, and in either case fulfils the higher poetic office. If there is in English poetry a gentler and sweeter note than is struck in the closing lines of "Fears in Solitude," I do not know where to find it, and one must read long in the poetry before he will come upon a more lofty and impassioned strain than in the "Ode to France." Throughout his poems, indeed, we find couplets and quatrains, and sometimes entire miniature poems, which are full of the breath and finer spirit of all wisdom. In the third and fourth periods of his poetic career, as Professor Shairp has truly noted, his poetry is mainly gnomic in character, "in which, if the visionary has disappeared, the wisdom wrought by time and experience is excellently condensed." Such lines as those in "Humility the Mother of Charity," or "Love, Hope, and Patience in Education," which contain the whole secret of moral pedagogy, the twin poems, "Complaint and Reproof," are illustrations of this gnomic poetry. I cannot forbear quoting the last named:

COMPLAINT.

How seldom, friend! a good great man inherits  
Honor or wealth, with all his worth and pains!  
It sounds like stories from the land of Spirits,  
If any man obtains that which he merits  
Or any merit that which he obtains.

## REPROOF.

For shame, dear friend! renounce thy canting strain!  
 What wouldst thou have a good great man obtain?  
 Place—titles—salary—a gilded chain—  
 Or throne of corpses which his sword hath slain?  
 Greatness and goodness are not means, but ends!  
 Hath he not always treasures, always friends,  
 The good great man?—three treasures, love and light,  
 And calm thoughts, regular as infant's breath;—  
 And three firm friends, more sure than day and night—  
 Himself, His Maker, and the Angel Death.

The "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" stand in a class by themselves. They deserve to be studied, as is finely shown by Mrs. Olyphant in her "Literary History of the Nineteenth Century," as illustrations of the fact that a supernatural element in poetry is essential to its deepest mood.\* Too few readers of the "Ancient Mariner" have noticed the remarkable quotation with which it is prefaced. It is taken from the works of the ingenious and eloquent Thomas Burnet, author of the "Sacred History of the Earth." "*Facile credo, plures esse Naturæ invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universilate sed horum omnium familiam quis nobis enarrabit, et graduo et cognationes et discrimina et singulosum numera? Quid agunt? Quæ loca habitant? Harum rerum notitium,*" etc., etc.

It is quite hopeless to argue with the men who are always insisting that poetry must prove something. The "Ancient Mariner" is vague, mystical, full of a weird supernaturalism and as a study for the imagination not easily surpassed. What imagery!

Or wedding guests! this soul hath been  
 Alone on a wide, wide sea;  
 So lonely 'twas that God Himself  
 Scarce seemed then to be.

And no one can appreciate the divine ending of the poem in the following lines who has not again and again steeped himself in its spirit:

"He prayeth well, who loveth well  
 Both man and bird and beast.  
 He prayeth best, who loveth best  
 All things both great and small;  
 For the dear God, who loveth us,  
 He made and loveth all."

"Christabel," says Mrs. Olyphant, "is a romance of Christianity—a legend of the saints." It is a presentation of the never-ending conflict between good and evil, innocence and moral foulness, perfect purity and contagious vice, when Christabel, the impersonation of heavenly-mindedness, is all unaware of what evil pain is in Geraldine, the first witch. "Never," to quote again from Mrs. Olyphant, "was there a higher or more beautiful conception." It is a companion to

\* Vol. 1, pp. 243, et seq.

the "Ancient Mariner" in its poetic use of supernaturalism. As such, both poems are inviting studies for the preacher.

He will also find in Coleridge a profitable study as regards some prevalent errors in doctrine and morals. The errors of his time are largely the error of our age, only in intenser degree or different form. The error which he combated most stoutly was Pantheism, all the more stoutly, indeed, that, as there is good reason to believe, he himself was at one time more or less entangled in its meshes. In his introductory essay, Dr. Shedd says, "This author (Coleridge) is to be recommended and confided in as the foremost and ablest English opponent of Pantheism." The reader of this luminous and cogent essay will find that Dr. Shedd has clearly traced the growth and the processes of Coleridge's strenuous argumentation, pointing out the different features of his works in which it is brought out. Dr. Shedd has shown how Coleridge successfully assaulted and carried the Pantheistic doubts. It was not by a simple destructive process. It was rather the opposite. Coleridge was compelled to construct a profoundly theistic system of philosophy.

Pantheism in America has never gained any large or lasting foothold among the common people, however it may be in Germany. The system is too abstruse, too metaphysical for this. Hence the preacher will have small occasion to preach against pantheistic notions. The larger part of his audience would not know what he was driving at or talking about. He would seem to them as "one that beateth the air." One does occasionally hear a sermon in which the preacher strikes out vigorously against pantheistic views—but, it seems, no real foe is assailed—a shadowy form, which practical people knew very little about. But agnosticism is a very different sort of matter. It is much more insidious, much more prevalent. To say, "We don't know," "We can't know" anything about God and immortality, "they are not verifiable by any processes of human logic," seems a very simple and very plausible philosophy. And the agnosticism of to-day has bound many an unlettered man in its toils.

A study of Coleridge will form a source of strength in combating agnostic as well as pantheistic error. The preacher will greatly find his account in an acquaintance with the stalwart theism on which Coleridge built up his doctrinal belief. And when we see that "the doctrine of responsible self-determination and not of *irresponsible natural development* is the doctrine by which [he] constructs [his] systems of philosophy and religion,"\* we can see how vital this knowledge of Coleridge's method may become to a preacher in his effort to proclaim and send home to the conscience the dread fact of human responsibility. A true ethics, as well as a true theology, is in danger to-day; indeed the peril is greater on the side of ethics than theology. It is well known to every well-furnished clergyman that the

\* Shedd's Introductory Essay, p. 86. The italics are ours.

effort to construct ethical systems on a naturalistic basis has been in the past thirty years incessant and able. A vast amount of ingenuity has been exerted to account for the ethical principle in man on a basis of naturalistic evolution. Herbert Spencer's philosophy here has been widely accepted. The nexus between morality and religion has been cut asunder. The discussion has taken a wide variety of form. If any one cares to see over how large a field the discussion has ranged, he can do so by looking through Martineau's "Types of Ethical Theory." That the foundations of morality have been somewhat loosened in the process, there can be very little doubt. At least no one will be much inclined to doubt it who has read an article in *The Quarterly Review* for January, 1891, entitled the "Ethics of Today."

And what is significant as to all these reconstructions of ethics on a basis entirely independent of revealed religion, is that they all involve, as the root, utilitarian ends. This is their common vinculum. Moreover if any one will be at pains to sound the opinions of common men—the rank and file—as to the foundations of morality—as to why this or that thing is wrong—in half the cases the answer will show that some doctrine of utility is at the bottom of these ethical theories—so far as they happen to have any. And moral heresies are the worst of all heresies.

Now, in his resolute and trenchant onset upon the Paleyan doctrine of ethics—that virtue was "the doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God and for the sake of everlasting happiness;" or, as stated in another form, "We are obliged to do nothing but what we ourselves are to gain or lose something by, for nothing else can be a violent motive" \*—Coleridge has furnished the modern pulpit with abundant weapons for vindicating the old and true position, that morality must find its roots in religion: Let any one turn to that chapter in the "Friend" (second section) in which Coleridge takes to pieces the utilitarian theory of morals, and he will find a rich store of keen and sound argumentation. And throughout his writings he is at pains to expose the shallowness of a prudential morality. To him the "Lockean metaphysics and Paleyan ethics" were alike harmful, the one landing us in atheism or pantheism, and the other in a paralysis of conscience, denied to it the true education by a false doctrine of morality. It would be interesting to trace Coleridge's method of defense for Christianity. It was his weariness of the eighteenth century methods of apologetic reasoning which led him to say: "Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word. Make a man feel the want of it; rouse him, if you can, to the self-knowledge of the need of it, and you may safely trust it to its own evidence, remembering always the express declaration of Christ himself, 'No man cometh to Me unless the Father leadeth him.'" In other words, Coleridge laid the

\* Quoted by Professor Shairp. *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy*, p. 176.

emphasis on internal rather than external evidence. He did a much needed work here. The stress had been too much laid on the external evidence of miracle and prophecy by eighteenth century writers. Christian apologetics need not, can not, dispense with either type of testimony. Each has its province. Both together make the entire chain of proof. But when it comes to preaching it will be found that internal evidences lend themselves most readily to pulpit uses. External evidences seem most naturally in place in the theological lecture-room or in the reasoned treatise. The preacher can bend his energies to rousing in the human soul the sense of need and then do his best to show how fully and how immediately Christianity meets all that need. The "Aids to Reflection" will, in all this work of handling the internal evidences of Christianity, be found an invaluable handbook. For profound and glowing presentation of this style of Christian apologetics, the writings of all theologians in any century, seventeenth, eighteenth or other, can furnish no parallel. Its very want of system has its advantages. The preacher need not demand a forenoon or evening of uninterrupted study as he takes the "Aids" in hand. A spare hour or half-hour can be profitably passed with Coleridge. The plan of the book, with its aphorisms and comments, is precisely adapted to this fragmentary use of time. And what is there for all our possessions more than time, to which the divine teaching more closely applies, "Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost?" Readers of Charnock's sermons will recall his method of concluding his discourses with several uses of the truth discussed. There are two of these uses to be specified in connection with a study of Coleridge. First, a use of mental discipline. Coleridge is not always easy reading. We grow a bit weary of his digressions, and sometimes find his style exceeding dry. Again, however, we are charmed with his force of statement and by his effective marshaling of words in sentences full of eloquence. There are passages in Coleridge's writings not easily surpassed by any writers of English prose. Still it is eminently true that Coleridge will set his readers thinking. Beyond most writers on such subjects, he has the gift of stimulating inquiry. The mental discipline to be gained from acquaintance with such a writer is great. Mr. Traill, in his "Life of Coleridge," characterizes him as a "writer of the most penetrating glance into divine mysteries, and writing always from a soul all tremulous, as it were, with religious sensibility." The judgment is a just one, and every preacher who deals much with him will find his mental processes quickened and perhaps clarified also. The second *use* is of warning; warning against desultoriness. For among the bad habits some very good preachers may acquire are desultory habits of reading, of thinking, and of writing too. This was Coleridge's besetting mental sin. He lacked continuity of mental effort. He brought no plan fully to completion. "I have laid too many eggs," he said, "in the hot sands of the wilderness, the world,

with ostrich carelessness and ostrich oblivion." But his example is a warning to many men far inferior to him in intellectual gifts, to avoid these shoals and quicksands of desultory intellectual habits. In spite of his wonderful genius, this mental vice robbed Coleridge of more than half his power for good among men. The sin of desultoriness will play fearful havoc with men of average capacities. They need all their powers focused upon an effort. They cannot afford to scatter their mental energies. They may read Coleridge and take warning.

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## II.—THE FOUR GOSPELS AND THE FAITH OF CHRISTENDOM.

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*(Continued from page 297.)*

The canon of the New Testament fixed itself before ecclesiastical authority sat upon it. "It did not meddle with the canon until that question had pretty well settled itself" (Salmon). Sooner or later, the original documents of Christianity would become matter for conciliar discussion and action. But instead of weakening the authority of the four Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament, it must be considered of the highest apologetic importance that they found their own way, and were accepted by general consent long before any Council enumerated the sacred books. When the Council spoke, the faith of the Church was already fixed. All conciliar declarations are vain concerning the Scriptures, unless there be the living faith in Christians, moved thereunto by the Holy Spirit. Luther found out that Church Councils also could err when he was exercised with the case of John Huss. His statement of the doctrine of Inspiration in the first edition of his German New Testament is liable to abuse, but it is far-reaching. "That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, though Peter and Paul should teach it; and again, whatsoever teaches Christ is apostolic, though Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod should teach it." Church assemblies have claims upon our regard only in proportion as the men constituting them were men of piety and full of wisdom. A Synod of Ephesus (431) gets the notoriety of the Robber Synod, in spite of its being composed of ecclesiastics. The opinion of a single individual like Augustin, Bernard, or Fenelon may be of more value than the decisions of all the Councils of Toulouse or Toledo. There is no virtue in the decision of a Council of itself. The Gospels will not stand by the counsel of man. They came into recognition by their merits, as the diamond among other white crystal organisms. The canon was settled before the Synod of Laodicea (363) convened, or Eusebius made the distinction between Homologoumena and Antilegomena on the one hand, and spurious and heretical books on the other.