

**COLERIDGE'S PRINCIPLES
OF CRITICISM: CHAPTERS
I., III., IV., XIV.-XXII OF
"BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA"**

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Coleridge's principles of criticism: chapters I., III., IV., XIV.-XXII of "Biographia literaria" by Andrew J. George

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ANDREW J. GEORGE

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Heath's English Classics

COLERIDGE'S
PRINCIPLES OF CRITICISM

CHAPTERS I., III., IV., XIV.-XXII.

OF

"BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA"

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

ANDREW J. GEORGE, M.A.

"The thirst to know and understand—
A large and liberal discontent;
These are the goods in life's rich hand,
The things that are more excellent."

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MAY 20 1956

TO
PHILIP STAFFORD MOXOM
IN MEMORY OF PLEASANT ASSOCIATIONS
IN A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD

OUI yet a few short years of useful life,
 And all will be complete, thy race be run,
 Thy monument of glory will be raised;
 Then, though (too weak to tread the ways of truth)
 This age fall back to old idolatry,
 Though men return to servitude as fast
 As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame
 By nations sink together, we shall still
 Find solace - knowing what we have learnt to know,
 Rich in true happiness if allowed to be
 Faithful alike in forwarding a day
 Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work
 (Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)
 Of their deliverance surely yet to come.
 Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting inspiration, sanctified
 By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
 Others will love, and we will teach them how;
 Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this frame of things
 (Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of quality and fabric more divine.

PREFACE.

THE contributions which Coleridge made to modern thought, rich, ample, and suggestive as they are, have all the characteristics of his varied and eventful life. In Poetry, Criticism, and Philosophy he drove the shaft deep and gave us samples of the wealth of ore lying in their confines. Although he worked these mines only at irregular intervals and passed rapidly from one to the other, yet, by stimulating and quickening activity in his associates and followers, he caused the entire territory to be explored as it never was before in English history. If it cannot be said of him that he left us a rounded and complete system, yet it can be said — and it is a far nobler tribute — that he made it possible for us to grasp those principles which underlie all systems. His contribution to the literature of power is certainly unsurpassed by that of any writer of modern times. Mr. Arnold says: "That which will stand of Coleridge is this: the stimulus of his continual effort, crowned often with rich success, to get at and to lay bare the real truth of his matter in hand, whether that matter were literary, or philosophical, or political, or religious; and this in a country where at that moment such an effort was almost unknown. Coleridge's great usefulness lay in his supplying in England, for many years and under critical circumstances, by the spectacle of this effort of his, a stimulus to all minds

capable of profiting by it, in the generation which grew up around him."¹

Coleridge was indeed, like Goethe, a valiant soldier in the "Liberation War of Humanity." Any attempt to give an adequate reason for the character of his work would necessitate a thorough study of all the forces which worked upon and through him, — hereditary influences, environment, and that most baffling and mysterious of all powers, his own capacious soul. Nothing is more unsatisfactory than many of the attempts which have been made to pluck out the heart of his mystery. And one is often disposed to repeat to these unsympathetic monitors the warning of Tennyson :

"Dark-brow'd sophist, come not anear;
All the place is holy ground;
Hollow smile and frozen sneer
Come not here."²

Or, again, that sympathetic and catholic stanza of Wordsworth to Burns's critics :

"Enough of sorrow, wreck and blight;
Think rather of those moments bright
When to the consciousness of right
His course was true,
When wisdom prospered in his sight
And virtue grew."³

Surely the man who could gather about him such choice spirits as Wordsworth, Scott, and Lamb; Southey, Wilson, and De Quincey; Byron, Hazlitt, and Sterling, had a nature too rich and royal, too suggestive and germinative, to be compassed by those —

¹ *Essays in Criticism*, p. 274.

² *The Poet's Mind*.

³ *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland*.

" Who hate each other for a song
 And do their little best to bite
 And pinch their brethren in the throng
 And scratch the very dead for spite." ¹

The surest road to a right position for judging Coleridge, is that by which we reach a right condition of mind — a sympathetic reading of his work in poetry, criticism, and philosophy. It is in this trinity of powers that we see the unity of soul which constitutes Coleridge's personality. To come into vital relations with the artist through the medium of his works ; to become his friend, to whom he may reveal the secrets of his mind and heart ; to become quickened by his spirit and receptive to his ideals, as the waters are to the sky's influence, — this is to gain the central motive of a great life, and is the end of all true literary interpretation. It is to furnish the means of access to the second of these departments of Coleridge's work that the following critical chapters from the *Biographia Literaria* are published.

It is natural and inevitable to associate Coleridge and Wordsworth together in this "Liberation War of Humanity." The history of literature gives us no more interesting or suggestive picture than that of the friendship of these two men. A study of the means by which this love was fostered and sustained, and in consequence of which each attained heights from which is shed ever-enduring radiance, cannot fail to be rewarding. The fact that the main impulse to that poetry, and criticism, which has been the most stimulating and productive "in its application of ideas to life, in its natural magic and moral profundity," was the creation of this friendship, is a sufficient

¹ Tennyson, *Literary Squabbles*.