

**COLERIDGE'S: THE  
RIME OF THE  
ANCIENT MARINER**

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Coleridge's: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by M. A. Eaton

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**M. A. EATON**

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Ab! well a-day! what  
evil looks

Had I from old and young!  
Instead of the crosses the  
Albatross

About my neck was bung.

o

COLERIDGE'S

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT  
MARINER

EDITED  
WITH NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY  
M. A. EATON, A. B.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### THE AUTHOR.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in the village of Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire, in the year 1772. His father was rector of the little parish and had a large family, of whom Samuel was the youngest. He lived here until he was nine years old when, unfortunately for him, his father died.

As he was without money or friends, he was sent to the great London Charity School, Christ's Hospital, which Lamb has described so vividly in "Elia."

Here his life was by no means an easy one. Once, indeed, he tried to escape, and became the apprentice of a shoe-maker, but he was forced to go back to school again. Coleridge, however, had an unfailing refuge from all the ills that afflicted him. This was the dream world in which from his earliest years he lived much of the time. This "shaping spirit of imagination," he says, "Nature gave



me at my birth." In school at London he would lie for hours on the roof gazing after the drifting clouds and trying to fathom the blue of the sky.

Once this too vivid imagination very nearly involved him in grave difficulties. He was walking along the Strand on a busy day, swinging his arms and fancying himself swimming in an imaginary sea. Suddenly his hand came in contact with the pocket of one of the passers-by. It was promptly grasped by the outraged stranger, who exclaimed, "What, so young and so wicked!" "But I'm not wicked nor a pickpocket, sir," remonstrated Coleridge; "I thought I was Leander swimming the Hellespont." The gentleman was so impressed with the incident that it is said he obtained membership for the youth in a circulating library.

Coleridge was not a mere dreamer, however. He became the first student in the school and, as a result, was transferred at nineteen to Cambridge University. Here he might have distinguished himself had it not *been* for his erratic temperament. Debts *drove him to London*, where he enlisted in the *Dragoons*, and, although he subsequently re-

turned to college, he soon left again without taking a degree.

He made one friend at this time, who had a good deal of influence upon his life. This was the poet, Robert Southey, who was just then under the influence of the socialistic ideas of the French Revolution. The two young men decided to establish an ideal community in the wilds of America, in which the citizens were to work at farming two hours of the day and develop their souls the rest of the time.

Unfortunately, however, their ideas outstripped their pocketbooks, and while they were still dreaming at Southey's home in Bristol, their plans were forever checked. The two poets fell in love with two sisters and were soon after married.

Coleridge lived at Clevedon, near Bristol, with his wife, Sara Fricker, for two years.

His life here was a struggle. He had married, with his usual carelessness in such matters, on practically no income at all. His health was poor, he was quite unable to do any good work except when the spirit moved him, and his wife did not prove to be of a sympathetic temperament. His work at this

period, therefore, is of little moment, and it was not until he met the poet Wordsworth in 1797 that his real power began to awaken.

In this year Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey, in the English lake region, Wordsworth's home, and their famous intimacy began. Wordsworth was then full of the idea that poetry should deal with the simple emotions and events of daily life and express them in simple language, not in the artificial diction of the eighteenth century poets.

These theories, which were destined to have a profound influence upon English poetry, bore immediate fruit in a joint volume called "Lyrical Ballads," to which Coleridge contributed "The Ancient Mariner" and a few other poems.

The book did not make a great impression at the time and Coleridge left Nether Stowey soon after. For two years he travelled in Germany with the Wordsworths, where he translated Schiller's drama, "Wallenstein," and became profoundly interested in German philosophy.

In 1800 he returned to England and settled *in Keswick with Wordsworth*. The poetic *muse, however, seemed to have abandoned*