

**BIOGRAPHIA EPISTOLARIS: BEING  
THE BIOGRAPHICAL SUPPLEMENT  
OF COLERIDGE'S BIOGRAPHIA  
LITERARIA; WITH ADDITIONAL  
LETTERS, ETC., VOL. I**

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Biographia Epistolaris: Being the Biographical Supplement of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria;  
With Additional Letters, Etc., Vol. I by A. Turnbull

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**A. TURNBULL**

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"On the whole this was surely the mightiest genius since Milton. In poetry there is not his like, when he rose to his full power; he was a philosopher, the immensity of whose mind cannot be gauged by anything he has left behind; a critic, the subtlest and most profound of his time. Yet these vast and varied powers flowed away in the shifting sands of talk; and what remains is but what the few land-locked pools are to the receding ocean which has left them casually behind without sensible diminution of its waters."—*Academy*, 3rd October, 1903.

# BIOGRAPHIA EPISTOLARIS

BEING

THE BIOGRAPHICAL SUPPLEMENT OF  
COLERIDGE'S BIOGRAPHIA

LITERARIA

WITH ADDITIONAL LETTERS, ETC., EDITED BY  
A. TURNBULL

VOL. I



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## PREFACE

THE work known as the *Biographical Supplement* of the *Biographia Literaria* of S. T. Coleridge, and published with the latter in 1847, was begun by Henry Nelson Coleridge, and finished after his death by his widow, Sara Coleridge. The first part, concluding with a letter dated 5th November 1796, is the more valuable portion of the *Biographical Supplement*. What follows, written by Sara Coleridge, is more controversial than biographical and does not continue, like the first part, to make Coleridge tell his own life by inserting letters in the narrative. Of 33 letters quoted in the whole work, 30 are contained in the section written by Henry Nelson Coleridge. Of these 11 were drawn from Cottle's *Early Recollections*, seven being letters to Josiah Wade, four to Joseph Cottle, and the remainder are sixteen letters to Poole, one to Benjamin Flower, one to Charles Heath, and one to Henry Martin.

From this I think it is evident that Henry Nelson Coleridge intended what was published as a Supplement to the *Biographia Literaria* to be a Life of Coleridge, either supplementary to the *Biographia Literaria* or as an independent narrative, in which most of the letters published by Cottle in 1837 and unpublished letters to Poole and other correspondents were to form the chief material. Sara Coleridge, in finishing the fragment, did not attempt to carry out the original intention of her husband. A few letters in Cottle were perhaps not acceptable to her taste, and in rejecting them she perhaps resolved to reject all remaining



letters in Cottle. She thus finished the fragmentary Life of Coleridge left by her husband in her own way.

But Henry Nelson Coleridge had begun to build on another plan. His intention was simply to string all Coleridge's letters available on a slim biographical thread and thus produce a work in which the poet would have been made to tell his own life. His beginning with the five Biographical Letters to Thomas Poole is a proof of this. He took these as his starting point; and, as far as he went, his "Life of Coleridge" thus constructed is the most reliable of all the early biographies of Coleridge.

This edition of the *Biographical Supplement* is meant to carry out as far as possible the original project of its author. The whole of his narrative has been retained, and also what Sara Coleridge added to his writing; and all the non-copyright letters of Coleridge available from other sources have been inserted into the narrative, and additional biographical matter, explanatory of the letters, has been given.<sup>1</sup> By this retention of authentic sources I have produced as faithful a picture of the Poet-Philosopher Coleridge as can be got anywhere, for Coleridge always paints his own character in his letters. Those desirous of a fuller picture may peruse, along with this work, the letters published in the Collection of 1895, the place of which in the narrative is indicated in footnotes.

The letters are drawn from the following sources:

<i>Biographical Supplement</i> , 1847 . . . . .	33
Cottle's <i>Reminiscences</i> , 1847 . . . . .	78
The original <i>Friend</i> , 1809 . . . . .	5
<i>The Watchman</i> , 1796 . . . . .	1
Gillman's <i>Life of Coleridge</i> , 1838 . . . . .	7
Allsop's <i>Letters, Conversations, etc., of S. T. C.</i> , 1836 (1864)	45
<i>Essays on his Own Times</i> , 1850 . . . . .	1

[<sup>1</sup> What has been added is enclosed in square brackets.]

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<i>Life and Correspondence of R. Southey, 1850</i> . . . . .	7
Editorials of Poems, etc. . . . .	8
<i>Literary Remains of S. T. C., 1836, etc.</i> . . . . .	3
<i>Blackwood's Magazine, October, 1821</i> . . . . .	1
<i>Fragmentary Remains of Humphry Davy, 1858</i> . . . . .	15
<i>Macmillan's Magazine, 1864 (Letters to W. Godwin)</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Southey's Life of Andrew Bell, 3 vols., 1844</i> . . . . .	2
<i>Charles Lamb and the Lloyds, by E. V. Lucas</i> . . . . .	3
<i>Anima Poetae, by E. H. Coleridge, 1895</i> . . . . .	1

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The letters of Coleridge have slowly come to light. Coleridge was always fond of letter-writing, and at several periods of his career he was more active in letter-writing than at others. He commenced the publication of his letters himself. The epistolary form was as dear to him in prose as the ballad or odic form in verse. From his earliest publications we can see he loved to launch a poem with "A letter to the Editor," or to the recipient, as preface. The *Mathematical Problem*, one of his juvenile facetiae in rhyme, was thus heralded with a letter addressed to his brother George explaining the import of the doggerel. His first printed poem, *To Fortune* (Dykes Campbell's Edition of the *Poems*, p. 27), was also prefaced by a short letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*. Among Coleridge's letters are several of this sort, and each affords a glimpse into his character. Those with the *Raven* and *Talleyrand to Lord Grenville* are characteristic specimens of his drollery and irony.

Coleridge's greatest triumphs in letter-writing were gained in the field of politics. His two letters to Fox, his letters on the Spaniards, and those to Judge Fletcher, are his highest specimens of epistolary eloquence, and constitute him the rival of Rousseau as an advocate of some great truth in a letter addressed to a public personage. In clearness of thought and virile precision of language they surpass the

most of anything that Coleridge has written. They never wander from the point at issue; the evolution of their ideas is perfect, their idiom the purest mother-English written since the refined vocabulary of Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and Harrington was coined.

Besides the political letters, Coleridge published during his lifetime four important letters of great length written during his sojourn in Germany. Three of these appeared in the *Friend* of 1809, and indeed were the finest part of that periodical; and one was first made public in the *Amulet* of 1829. Six letters published in *Blackwood's Magazine* of 1820-21, and a few others of less importance, brought up the number of letters published by Coleridge to 46. The following is a list of them:

7th Nov. 1793, <i>To Fortune</i> , Ed. <i>Morning Chronicle</i> . . . . .	1
22nd Sept. 1794, Dedication to <i>Robespierre</i> , to H. Martin . . . . .	1
1st April 1796, Letter to "Caius Gracchus," <i>The Watchman</i> . . . . .	1
26th Dec. 1796, Dedication to the <i>Ode to the Departing Year</i> , to T. Poole . . . . .	1
1798, Ed. <i>Monthly Magazine</i> , re <i>Monody on Chatterton</i> . . . . .	1
1799, Ed. <i>Morning Post</i> , with the <i>Raven</i> . . . . .	1
21 Dec. 1799, Ed. <i>Morning Post</i> , with <i>Love</i> . . . . .	1
10th Jan. 1800, Ed. <i>Morning Post</i> , <i>Talleyrand to Lord Grenville</i> . . . . .	1
18th Nov. 1800, <i>Monthly Review</i> , on <i>Wallenstein</i> . . . . .	1
1834, To George Coleridge, with <i>Mathematical Problem</i> . . . . .	1
Political Letters to the <i>Morning Post</i> and <i>Courier</i> . . . . .	21
1809, Letters of Satyrane, etc., in the <i>Friend</i> . . . . .	8
1820-21, Letters to <i>Blackwood's Magazine</i> . . . . .	6
1829, <i>The Amulet</i> , "Over the Brocken" . . . . .	1
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The <i>Literary Remains</i> , published in 1836, added . . . . .	4