Introduction

THERE was a period following his death in 1834, during which more attention was paid to Coleridge as a thinker than to Coleridge as a poet and critic. This was the time of which an observer who weighed his words as carefully as John Stuart Mill could write: "Bentham excepted, no Englishman of recent date has left his impress so deeply on the opinions and mental tendencies of those among us who attempt to enlighten their practice by philosophical meditation." It was followed by a much longer period of almost exclusive interest in the poet and critic. In the last few decades, beginning perhaps with the publication in 1930 of J. M. Muirhead's *Coleridge as Philosopher,* the pendulum has on the whole been swinging back again. Prose works long out of print are again becoming available; unpublished prose is being published. A full edition both of the *Letters* and the *Notebooks* is gradually coming from the press; the *Collected Coleridge,* under the general editorship of Kathleen Coburn, gave birth to the first two of its sixteen projected volumes while this book was being written; there has been a steadily increasing flow of books and articles on what Coleridge thought about other things as well as literature and the drama.

I do not know how many people will have read all these books and all these articles, which of course differ widely from each other. I certainly cannot claim to have done so. But I have read a good many, and if I were asked whether, in spite of their generous variety, and in addition to the high quality of the scholarship many of them display, there are any leading characteristics common to practically all of them, my answer would be: Yes, there are two—the predominance firstly of what I would call the biographical/comparative approach and secondly of the biographical/psychological approach; and I should hope that the terms I was using were reasonably self-explanatory. One good reason for this—though not, I think, the only one—is that the best known of

Coleridge's prose works is his *Biographia Literaria.* It is indeed the only one, apart from the *Lectures on Shakespeare,* that is at all widely known; and it is the only one that has even remained in print uninterruptedly since it first appeared. It has much to say about the various philosophies with which he came into intellectual contact during his life; so much so that *Biographia Philosophica* would have been an equally, if not more, accurate title. From Coleridge himself, then, we first *learn* of his philosophy through his biography, and we first learn of its relation to other philosophies to the accompaniment of an historical, and sometimes anecdotal, account of his personal encounters with them.

But whatever the reason, the comparative approach has its disadvantages. A student, for instance, who picks up a contemporary book on Coleridge, in order to find out what he thought about things, is likely to find himself involved in a complex and allusive web of comparative philosophy, which is certainly not, to begin with, what he needs. But that is not all. There are inherent disadvantages in the comparative approach not only for the readers of such a book, but for its writer also. It keeps him too much outside the intellectual content with which he is dealing. J. A. Appleyard, who has employed the biographical/comparative approach so instructively and so well in his *Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature,* came to feel, in doing so, that a different approach altogether was also needed. For he wrote in his Introduction:

> What is wanting in the sizable bibliography of literature on Coleridge is a full-scale study of the development of his philosophy which will consider him on his own terms and not as a representative of something else, whether it be German idealism, English Platonism, pantheistic mysticism, semantic analysis, or depth psychology. The idea or organizing insight ought to be internal to his thought, so as to see what that thought is and not merely what it is like or unlike.

When, in 1966, I first came upon these words, I had already begun assembling the material for the present volume. They at once struck me—indeed they rather leaped from the page—as a fair description of what I myself should actually be trying to do. And I venture to quote them as the best and shortest statement I can imagine of the general aim of the book, some such statement being perhaps required to justify its rather unusual form. It may serve for instance to explain why in Chapter 1 the reader is plunged so unceremoniously into philosophy, while the more

familiar territory of Coleridge on imagination is not reached until Chapter 6.

Professor Appleyard, it is true, supposes a study of the "development" of Coleridge's philosophy and in that respect I cannot claim to be even trying to meet his requirements. That he did develop it during his life is of course not in doubt and he said so himself in his *Table Talk*. Moreover the nature of this development and the extent to which it involved substantial changes are disputed questions which have received a good deal of attention. I have not made it my concern, nor stressed (though I have occasionally indicated) the dates of the quotations I have used. My own opinion is that the development was so consistent or, if it is preferred, "organic," that later views are for the most part implicit in the earlier. They are at all events not contrary, so that what is explicitly stated in, say, 1830, may (to borrow a neat phrase from Professor J. R. de J. Jackson) be "relevant as a foreseen conclusion" to a passage from 1816 or earlier. This is in fact my opinion, but I do not assume that the reader will necessarily agree with it. If not, perhaps instead of laying down the book in disgust at this point, he will mentally substitute for the title it bears some such alternative title as: "What Coleridge Thought towards the End of his Life."

That there was a unity in this; that in his own mind his "system" was indeed a coherent system and not a hodge podge of "inspired fragments"; that he had a muddled life, but not a muddled mind—all this is by now widely, though not universally, accepted: ". . . fragmentary, 'atomic' as Thelwall calls it, is just what Coleridge's thought is not," wrote Kathleen Coburn in her Introduction to the *Philosophical Lectures,* and other contemporaries could be quoted to the same effect. The fact remains of course that, although the reverse of fragmentary in his own mind, its elaboration *is* fragmentary on paper. The *Letters,* the *Notebooks* and the *Marginalia* are of inestimable value. But, if my own experience is any guide, they are not indispensable for an understanding of the system or philosophy itself. For it happens that my own study of Coleridge's prose, conducted unsystematically and at intervals over a long period of years, was limited to the five published works, *Biographia Literaria,* the *Friend,* the *Statesman's Manual* (with the *Theory of Life* scheduled to it), *Aids to Reflection* and *Church and State,* together with some part of the *Treatise on Logic,* which, though hitherto unpublished, is far from being a fragment. It was only much later that I began on the 'fragments'; and it will be seen that I have made a fairly exten-

sive use of them for the purpose of exposition. Here, if not indispensable, they are to say the least of it welcome. The condensed argument of, for instance, much of Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria* is made easiest to understand by seeing it expanded, exemplified, applied in one direction and another and, where Coleridge himself has done this, it is his voice we want to hear and not his exponent's. For one thing he is likely to have done it better.

Another issue that has been frequently, and sometimes hotly, debated in connection with Coleridge's thought is the old charge of plagiarism, which began during his lifetime and was answered by Coleridge himself on more than one occasion. Here too, although it still forms the staple of many specialised articles, the general opinion has been moving against it. Since I have largely ignored the issue in what follows, I venture a few observations here. Verbal plagiarism, as a labour-saving breach of the law of copyright, is a matter of determinable fact, and there is not much doubt that, as the law now stands, Schelling could have sued Coleridge in respect of one or two pages in the *Biographia Literaria*. Psychological plagiarism, or "borrowing," on the other hand, depends on a number of imponderables such as the way a man reads, the way he thinks and, in the last resort, on your view of the nature of mind. Coleridge himself in a letter of 1811 divided human heads into two types, the *tanks* and the *springs*. It is only the tanks who may be accurately said to *borrow* the thoughts, together or not with the words, of others. The spring adopts them. To quote Miss Coburn's admirable Introduction once more, Coleridge "borrows only when his own thinking has reached almost the same point as his creditor's." He remarks in another letter that he "read for truth, and not to make a book," and it is really obvious that in saying so he was *speaking* the truth. He was not interested in "originality," if the word is taken to mean novelty. For the principles advanced in his Essays on Method he claimed "no other merit, than that of having drawn them from the purest sources of Philosophy, ancient and modern." He would whole-heartedly have accepted James Russell Lowell's definition in his essay on *Thoreau*: "Originality consists in the power of digesting and assimilating thoughts, so that they become part of our life and substance."

If, as I hope, the thought here attributed to Coleridge is in the main that which had become part of his life and substance, the issue of borrowing is irrelevant. And in this connection it is significant that, in order to preserve it as a reproach, he has to be accused, as he not infre-

quently is, of confused and inconsistent borrowings. Such accusations assume in advance that he was a tank and not a spring; for a spring must continue to give in the act of receiving. "Rarely," and I again venture to quote Appleyard, "was he much concerned with the precise and actual meaning an idea had for another writer; almost always it was its interaction with his own thinking that mattered most to him." The word *interaction* is important. The ground is cut from beneath a good deal of what has been written about Coleridge and Kant for instance by a simple observation of Professor McFarland's in his *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*: "Kant provided Coleridge with instruments, not with a philosophical orientation." That did not prevent him from revering Kant as "a very *very* great man."

There is a right as well as a wrong use of the comparative approach or method. The tragedy of the wrong one—which Carlyle once disparaged as "view-hunting"—and of its wide prevalence is that, without more, it actually hinders people from reading Coleridge in the only way he wanted to be read; which is a way more in accord with his own habit of reading—and "borrowing." "What are my metaphysics?" he asks in the *Friend*—"merely the referring the mind to its own consciousness for truths indispensable to its own happiness." He desired, as he says Plato desired, "to excite the germinal power that craves no knowledge but what it can take up into itself." His object was not to indoctrinate; but neither was it to become one more appetising quarry for the view-hunter. It was to goad his readers into thinking for themselves. In the *Friend* and the *Aids to Reflection* "the aim of every sentence is to solicit, nay tease the reader to ask himself whether he actually does, or does not, understand distinctly."

Now this is exactly what a predominantly comparative, or biological/comparative, approach prevents a reader from doing. Its learned debates have something in common with the waters of Lethe. To become immersed in them is to risk forgetting that one at least of the interesting questions about almost any thought is the question whether it is sound or unsound, valid or invalid, true or untrue. If I find it depressing when a distinguished literary critic complains that "Coleridge has little insight into the incompatibility of different trends of thought," it is because this seems to me to betray a deplorable inability to distinguish between philosophy and talking about philosophy. Philosophy is, to my mind, not much concerned with "trends" of thought. It is concerned with thought. Is it seriously suggested that Coleridge was incapable of detecting the

incompatibility of one *thought* with another? Or with proven fact? If so, let us first be shown the point or points at which this occurred. Time enough then to start investigating the confused borrowings, or the unconscious motivation, that seduced him to it.

A fairly extended perusal of comment on Coleridge's prose works reveals the existence of what I have come to call the "somehow" convention. According to the somehow convention, instead of burrowing into Coleridge's thought to see what it looks like from inside, you stand *be*side it, equipped with three or four prefabricated frames or grids (for instance, subjective idealism, Neoplatonism, Christian Theology) and proceed to superimpose them one after another. You then read off from each grid in succession what it allows to appear and finally remark with surprise, or perhaps with a twinkle of amusement *de haut en bas,* that Coleridge "somehow" managed to keep them all going at the same time.

This is apt to lead fairly quickly into the still more limiting superficialities of the biological/psychological approach, when "somehow" turns out to have meant his emotional needs or unconscious motivation or something of the sort. As an example of this, it is frequently affirmed in parenthesis, that Coleridge's philosophy was really determined by his emotional need for the Christian faith. I say in parenthesis because, although it has for many years been constantly repeated, I have never seen it satisfactorily demonstrated. I myself have found virtually no evidence for it and I am now convinced that, from actual *study* of Coleridge's philosophy, it is a conclusion impossible to reach without the help of a prescinding aversion from Christianity, or at the least from the Christian Church. Without that overriding persuasion it is not, even on its own personalist grounds, convincing. For after all what kind of a man was Coleridge? He was almost the discoverer of the unconscious mind and one who was constantly and penetratingly pondering his own. Moreover his cardinal sin was indolence, and his besetting weakness a pitiful dependence on the approbation of others and the affection of those around him. He was constitutionally *dependent* and he abhorred having to exert his will. But what kind of Christianity was it that he argued? Read the *Theory of Life* and, along with it, the *Essay on Faith.* It was a Christianity of *energy,* or, if it is preferred, of the *energeia* of the Pauline Epistles; a doctrine of the sovereign independence and initiative of the human spirit. *Porphyrogeniti sumus,* he proclaims: we are born in the purple; and his evolutionary theory of life culminates in the claim on behalf of man: "Henceforward, he is referred to himself,

delivered up to his own charge; and he who stands the most on himself, and stands the firmest, is the truest, because the most individual, Man." It is true that humility is also demanded of him. "The intensities must be at once opposite and equal. As the liberty, so must be the reverence for law. As the independence, so must be the service and submission to the Supreme Will." He is never to forget his coronation oath, but neither dare he abdicate and relax before Omnipotence operating *ab extra.* Life itself, when it has reached its apex in Man, is to say, with Racine's Emperor Titus:

> Mais il ne s'agit plus de vivre, il faut regner.

Now Coleridge had, if anything, *less* inclination for reigning in sovereign independence over either himself or others than Racine's Titus. In the depths of his soul, if not in those ultimate depths of his spirit, which he conceived himself to share with mankind as a whole, he was all for life with Berenice. He knew it, as he knew most things about himself. When he said in a letter that he had a "passion for Christianity," he at once went on to admit, or bemoan, that it was "an intellectual passion"; and there is a more poignant admission to the same effect in the *Notes on Leighton.* A man who loathes getting up early and frequently fails to do so, may nevertheless be convinced that early-rising is the one indispensable virtue; and, if he is a writer, he may proclaim his conviction far and wide, meekly enduring the inevitable reproach of hypocrisy. But he is hardly likely to rig the evidence in order to become convinced in the first place. Would not the wishful-thinking recipe be not less, but a good deal more, available to us, if, instead of an intellectual passion for Christian *energeia,* Coleridge had succeeded in developing quite a different metaphysic—a "black" one for instance, to assure himself that because life has no meaning, it calls for no moral exertion?

That, for what it may be worth, is my contribution to the corpus of personalist interpretation. It is not important. Because, as far as Coleridge's *thought* is concerned, the real objection to personalist exegesis is, not that it is liable to stop short at hasty conclusions and get stuck in them, but that it would be irrelevant even if it were profound. If a train of thought has been biassed and thus flawed by unconscious drives, it is the flaws that need pointing to first, not the drives. Are you telling me that the steering-column was out of order? I will join you in taking it to pieces after you have shown me the marks on the road, where the car

swerved because of it. Without some such *prima facie* evidence of aberration we should be wasting our time. And you have produced none.

What is the relevance of Coleridge to our own time, and what chance has the *Collected Coleridge,* as it progressively sees the light, of being read at all widely? The answer to the second question seems to me to depend on the ability and the willingness of the rising generation to distinguish between what is significant and what is merely trivial in their own immediate reaction to what is put before them. His style in general, the sometimes inordinate length of his sentences, for example, and his addiction to parenthesis, are decidedly repugnant to contemporary taste. Much will depend on whether the worship of contemporary taste simply because it is contemporary continues to prevail so strongly that it prevents people from accepting even the *necessary* discrepancies between his characteristic utterance and our own. Partly his style is expendable; he himself for instance commented on the way it had been influenced by his extensive reading in leisurely and prolix seventeenth century writers. Partly on the other hand, it is inextricable from the radical difference between the *quality* of his thought and that of nearly all his own contemporaries, let alone ours. Long sentences may sometimes be required to penetrate to the sap of a topic and flow with that into its exterior and delicate ramifications. Again it is arguable, and Coleridge himself argued, that only shallow thinking can dispense with parentheses in writing.

But literary style is of course not the only impediment. There is an area that lies somewhere between style and personality, for which "attitude" is perhaps the only word. Here again there are elements in Coleridge's that are distasteful to a good many of us. I will confine myself to the single example of his highly developed bump of reverence. It is difficult not to feel that he protests too much. With the assistance of his penchant for slipping easily into apostrophe, he too often *obtrudes* his reverence on us. He seems at such times to have forgotten that the twin-brother of reverence is reticence; and that is something we are not likely to forget today, as we watch them both disappearing hand in hand. Here again it is a question of ability to distinguish the expendable from the essential. The obtrusion is expendable, but the reverence itself is not; since reverence is not simply a virtue for which we may expect full marks in heaven, or a device for bolstering up the social establishment. It is an organ of perception for a whole range of qualities that are as imperceptible without it as another whole range is imperceptible with-

out an ear for music. And Coleridge's aim, it must be remembered, was precisely to supplement the current metaphysic, and the current science, of quantities with a metaphysic and a science of qualities.

This brings me to the other question: that of his actual relevance to our time, whether it should be recognised or not. It is one on which it is better to leave the reader to make up his own mind than for me to argue it. Indeed the principal object of the book is to assist him in doing so. I have however occasionally commented in detail from that point of view, mainly in the Notes. And Chapter 11 considers at some length the relevance of Coleridge's thought to one particular aspect of modern life, a very important one, namely natural science and physics in particular. Beyond that—he was so seminal a thinker that his insights and *aperçus* tend to "sprout in the brains" with a fertility that is positively dangerous. I have generally resisted the temptation to detect exciting links with up-to-date, and perhaps ephemeral, developments such as generative grammar, structuralism and so forth. At one point even Gödel's theorem (which I understand to be an undermining critique of all "closed systems" of thought) beckoned to me for mention in connection with Coleridge on the understanding, but I resolutely looked the other way. So too with another exciting link. I mean that vast and unwieldy body of speculation concerning the unconscious mind, betokening (as I feel) the shadowy appearance there during the last few decades—at the opposite pole from the physical world, where their appearance has been far from shadowy—of those "lost Dynameis," those conflicting but productively conflicting forces, on which Coleridge's entire system was based. I feel the Jungians, the Yin and Yang votaries and others will easily perceive the link for themselves. And I believe this will also be the case, only more so, with the small but growing number who have come to acknowledge the pre-eminence of Rudolf Steiner, to whom however I have expressly referred in a note to Chapter 11 and again in Chapter 13.

It will become apparent to anyone who has the patience to reach the end of this book that I find the relevance of Coleridge's thought to our time where he himself located its relevance to his own. It resides, above all else, in his radical critique of one or two major presuppositions, upon which the immediate thinking, and as a result the whole cultural and social structure of this "epoch of the understanding and the senses" (including supposedly radical revolts against it) is so firmly—or is it now infirmly?—established. As long as this is ignored,

I doubt if he has much to say to us, whether as a philosopher or as a sociologist. It is partly for that reason, but partly also because my book is already, if anything, too long for its main purpose, that I have touched on his political theory only very briefly in the latter part of the last chapter. I notice that David Calleo found it necessary to include an early chapter on "The Philosophical Underpinnings" in his excellent book on *Coleridge and the Idea of the Modern State;* and I feel sure that that chapter is the golden bridge on the crossing whereof by his readers the persuasiveness of the rest depends. If then I should have made it a little easier for any puzzled mind to cross that bridge, I may perhaps claim to have done something at least for Coleridge's contribution to sociology.

A final word is needed concerning the Appendix on "polar logic." I have been suggesting that there is something to be said for the practice of ascertaining what Coleridge thought before beginning to discuss when, or why, or in what company he thought it. This means that, while we are still examining the what, it is better to withdraw our attention from the why and the when and the with whom; and that is the general principle I have sought to follow.

In the book itself references to other philosophers are made either because Coleridge himself expressly referred to them, or because they seemed to help in elucidating Coleridge's own meaning, or occasionally in order to remove a current misconception. But this restraint was not occasioned by lack of interest. On the contrary the relation of his philosophy to others like and unlike it, and to historical trends of thought—in short, the comparative approach—is a matter that I have found of absorbing interest. Very much here, as I have already said, has been done by others; and I am deeply indebted to more than one of them: but a remark of Coleridge's in the *Biographia Literaria* concerning his indebtedness to "the polar logic of Giordano Bruno" does not seem to have attracted the attention it deserved. I have therefore attempted to investigate its significance, confining my view-hunting and source-hunting to an Appendix, which I offer as my own small and very imperfect contribution to the study of Coleridge's philosophy by the comparative method.