THE BACKGROUND OF CARLYLE'S PORTRAIT OF
COLERIDGE IN THE LIFE OF JOHN STERLING

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IT is generally assumed that one of the most important and
interesting relationships between British literary men in the
nineteenth century was that between Coleridge and Carlyle and
that one of the most brilliant and memorable verbal portraits of a
contemporary produced by a Victorian writer is that of Coleridge
in Carlyle's Sterling. The component elements in Carlyle's
conception of Coleridge were complex and the texture of his
portrait of Coleridge is correspondingly rich, variegated, and
consistent with the Boswellian formula which demands that in
biography there should always be an interplay between the
shadow and the light.

In the chapter on Carlyle in my book Coleridge and the Broad
Church Movement (1942) I studied the relation of the two men to
one another and attempted to trace the origin of the component
elements in Carlyle's portrait of Coleridge and to explain his
attitudes and motivation in terms of his personal relation to
Coleridge, his reading of Coleridge's works, and his relation to
other persons who had known Coleridge. Since I wrote the
book, however, so much new material bearing on the subject has
been found that it now appears to me necessary to re-write the
part of the chapter dealing with the portrait of Coleridge in order
to approximate the completeness which the complex subject
demands and to include the new material, much of it from
manuscript sources, now available.

In my earlier treatment of the subject I wrote:

Behind the luminous but not altogether complimentary picture of Coleridge in
Carlyle's Life of John Sterling is a curiously mixed attitude. J. C. Hare's Memoir
of John Sterling (1848) had accorded Coleridge almost unreserved praise.
Coleridge was a major issue to Carlyle when in 1851 he set about writing a life of
Sterling which he hoped would correct what he considered some of the wrong
impressions of Sterling created by Hare's biography. Although Carlyle was
himself "an unconscious continuator of Wordsworth and Coleridge" in more

1 (Durham, N.C.). Hereafter Coleridge and the Broad Church.

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than one respect and although he owed something to Coleridge's influence, he was extremely reluctant to admit the indebtedness. His strong antipathy for Coleridge as a man, a poet, and a philosopher—an antipathy which made him unwilling to concede that Coleridge could contribute much of value to him, to Sterling, or to anyone else, and which made him scornful of the Coleridgeans of his generation—arose from some of his most deep-seated instincts, feelings, and convictions, which were frequently powerful enough to conquer him in spite of his own resolution to see justice done. The antipathy for Coleridge was, furthermore, an old one, born in him when he was still a young man and expressed in various forms throughout the years. The treatment of Coleridge in Sterling is really the culmination of a series of judgments on him stretching out over a period of about thirty years in which Carlyle struggled sometimes more and sometimes less to master his natural antipathy.

At least as early as 1816 Edward Irving, a Coleridge enthusiast, urged upon Carlyle the importance of reading Coleridge and of heeding Coleridge's advice to study the English writers of the seventeenth century as models of the best prose. Although Carlyle responded to Irving's enthusiasm and read both Coleridge and the seventeenth-century writers, he tells us later that he had some misgivings: "We were all taught by Coleridge, etc., that the old English dramatists, divines, philosophers, judicious Hooker, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, were the genuine exemplars; which I always tried to believe, but never rightly could as a whole." Yet the rhythm of the prose style which he developed, as individual as it is, suggests that he may have learned something from reading these writers. "For all the jaggedness and incoherence of the new idiom he had evolved, echoes of the fullness of their cadence and reminiscences of their splendor of phrase remain." It seems clear, however, that in these early years, as well as later, he read both the seventeenth-century writers and Coleridge with considerable discrimination. He praised Coleridge in a letter to Jane Welsh in May, 1822, in which he said, "Coleridge is not more celebrated for anything he has done than for his version of Wallenstein." But an entry in his notebook made in March, 1823, reads: "The distinction of Coleridge's, which he may have borrowed from Woltmann, about talent and genius is complete blarney—futile, very futile."

Here ends the long quotation from my earlier treatment of the subject and with the introduction of fresh material which follows immediately I shall refrain from the practice of labelling what I use as old or new but instead attempt to blend the component elements and achieve chronological continuity and development.

1 Emery Neff, Carlyle (New York, 1932), p. 34.
2 Thomas Carlyle, Reminiscences, ed. C. E. Norton (London and New York, 1887), ii. 41.
3 Cazamian, p. 132.
5 Coleridge and the Broad Church, pp. 147–9; D. A. Wilson, Carlyle (London and New York, 1923–34), i. 278; Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle, ed. C. E. Norton (New York, 1898), pp. 46–7.
On 22 October 1823 Carlyle wrote to Jane Welsh:

He [Irving] figured out purposes of unspeakable profit to me, which when strictly examined melted into empty air. He seemed to think that if set down on London streets some strange development of genius would take place in me, that by conversing with Coleridge and the Opium eater, I should find out new channels for speculation, and soon learn to speak with tongues. There is but a small degree of truth in all this. Of genius (bless the mark!) I never imagined in the most lofty humours that I possessed beyond the smallest perceptible fraction; and this fraction be it little or less can only be turned to account by rigid and stern perseverance thro' long years of labour, in London or any other spot in the universe.

On 11 November following he gave his brother John, then a student at the University of Edinburgh, a long list of authors to read which included Coleridge, described as "very great but rather mystical, sometimes absurd". In his letter to Jane of 13 November the comment on Coleridge is more favourable and suggests some influence, however slight. "Your very diffidence is to me fresh evidence of the generous power that lies in the faculties of your heart and head. 'Genius', says Schiller, 'is ever a secret to itself.' So it is, if my experience of men has taught me anything. Coleridge says he never knew a youth of real talents that did not labour under bashfulness and disbelief in his own ability. I could prove all this to you, if I had room; but it is not necessary."

When Carlyle made his first visit to London in 1824-5, Irving and Mrs. Basil Montagu lost little time after his arrival in arranging for him to get his first glimpse of Coleridge and to hear him talk. Carlyle, no doubt, was very curious about him and was particularly eager to learn from him something about Kant. The resulting visit to Highgate, made in June 1824, was far from satisfying to him. Many years later, in his Reminiscences, he recorded his memory of it:

1 De Quincey.
2 A rather remarkable anticipation of the way in which Irving's London disciples carried "speaking with tongues" to sensational and extravagant lengths.
3 Collected Letters, ii. 459-60.
4 Ibid. p. 468.
5 Ibid. p. 472. The quotation from Coleridge has not been traced precisely, but Carlyle appears to be referring rather loosely to several passages in the Biographia Literaria.
On one of the first fine mornings, Mrs. Montagu, along with Irving, took me out to see Coleridge at Highgate. My impressions of the man and of the place are conveyed, faithfully enough, in the Life of Sterling; that first interview in particular, of which I had expected very little, was idle and unsatisfactory, and yielded me nothing.—Coleridge, a puffy, anxious, obstructed-looking, fattish old man, hobbled about with us, talking with a kind of solemn emphasis on matters which were of no interest (and even reading pieces in proof of his opinions thereon); I had him to myself once or twice, in narrow parts of the garden-walks; and tried hard to get something about Kant and Co. from him, about "reason" versus "Understanding," and the like; but in vain: nothing came from him that was of use to me, that day, or in fact any day. The sight and sound of a sage who was so venerated by those about me, and whom I too would willingly have venerated, but could not,—this was all. Several times afterward, Montagu, on Coleridge's "Thursday Evening," carried Irving and me out, and returned blessing Heaven (I not) for what we had received; Irving and I walked out more than once on mornings, too; and found the Dodona Oracle humanely ready to act,—but never (to me, nor to Irving either I suspect) explanatory of the question put. Good Irving strove always to think that he was getting priceless wisdom out of this great man; but must have had his misgivings. Except by the Montagu-Irving channel, I at no time communicated with Coleridge: I had never, on my own strength, had much esteem for him; and found slowly, in spite of myself, that I was getting to have less and less. Early in 1825 was my last sight of him.... On my second visit to London (autumn 1831), Irving and I had appointed a day for pilgrimage to Highgate; but the day was one rain-deluge, and we couldn't even try.¹

This memory of the first impression made upon him by Coleridge was, in spite of the intervening years, remarkably similar to the record which he made at the time of the visit in a letter to his brother John, dated 24 June 1824. Froude calls this record the "original sketch" of the portrait of Coleridge in Carlyle's Sterling:

Besides Irving I have seen many other curiosities. Not the least of these I reckon Coleridge, the Kantean metaphysician and quondam Lake poet. I will tell you all about our interview when we meet. Figure a fat flabby incurated personage, at once short, rotund and relaxed, with a watery mouth, a snuffy nose, a pair of strange brown timid yet earnest looking eyes, a high tapering brow, and a great bush of grey hair—you will have some faint idea of Coleridge. He is a kind, good soul, full of religion and affection, and poetry and animal magnetism. His cardinal sin is that he wants will; he has no resolution, he shrinks from pain or labour in any of its shapes. His very attitude bespeaks this: he never straightens his knee joints, he stoops with his fat ill shapen shoulders, and in walking he does not tread but shovel and slide—my father would call it skluiffing.² He is also always busied to keep by strong and frequent inhalations the water of his mouth from overflowing; and his eyes have a look of anxious impotence; he would do with

¹ ii. 130-2.
² Scots skluife or skloof: "to trail the feet along the ground in walking."
all his heart, but he knows he dare not. The conversation of the man is much as I anticipated. A forest of thoughts; some true, many false, most part dubious, all of them ingenious in some degree, often in a high degree. But there is no method in his talk; he wanders like a man sailing among many currents, whithersoever his lazy mind directs him—; and what is more unpleasant he preaches, or rather soliloquizes: he cannot speak; he can only "talk" (so he names it). Hence I found him unprofitable, even tedious: but we parted very good friends I promising to go back and see him some other evening—a promise I fully intend to keep. I sent him a copy of Meister about which we had some friendly talk. I reckon him a man of great and useless genius—a strange not at all a great man.¹

Writing to Jane Welsh the day before he wrote this letter, Carlyle had said near the end of his long letter, "Of Coleridge, and all the other originals I will not say a word at present: you are sated and more."²

It is well to note that Carlyle, in spite of his great curiosity about Coleridge, was sceptical about him before he met him, that he found in him, according to his own statement, about what he expected to find. There is no disillusionment in these visits to Coleridge. Making up Carlyle’s impression of Coleridge here were component elements which would determine his attitude to the end: a thrifty, tidy-minded Scot’s strong, instinctive feeling of repulsion at Coleridge’s personal appearance and habits; a

¹ Collected Letters, iii. 90-91. Coleridge’s known references to Carlyle are scanty but not without significance. In the opening letter of Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, intended to be included in Aids to Reflection (1825) although not published until 1840, Coleridge wrote: “I employed the compelling and most unwelcome leisure of severe indisposition in reading The Confessions of a Fair Saint in Mr. Carlyle’s recent translation of the Wilhelm Meister [Apprenticeship, Book VI], which might, I think, have been better rendered literally, The Confessions of a Beautiful Soul. This, acting in conjunction with the concluding sentences of your Letter, threw my thoughts inward on my own religious experience, and gave the immediate occasion to the following Confessions.” Earl Leslie Griggs believes that Coleridge is referring to Carlyle’s “Schiller’s Life and Writings,” London Magazine (Oct. 1823–Sept. 1824), rather than to a contribution to Blackwood’s, when he speaks in a letter to Gioacchino de’ Prati of 8[9] May 1826 of his “ vexation, namely, that you should have chosen a subject which had been so recently and in different forms, Magazines, Reviews, and one separate work either published or announced for publication, forestalled with the Public—and I had well nigh said, hackneyed. And this was more unfortunate, that a Life of Schiller had already appeared in Blackwood’s Magazine, the only Publisher, that I possess the least influence” (Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1956–71), V, 435; vi. 578).

² Ibid. p. 85.
conviction that Coleridge could not be a great man and at the same time be so conspicuously lacking in self-discipline; the restlessness of one who liked to talk, and who himself had great genius for talking, at being subjected to a flood of seemingly unmethodical words which one had no opportunity to answer and which were spoken in accents that grated on Scottish ears; but at the same time a nervous, tantalizing feeling that the man Coleridge was not altogether bad or lacking in wisdom and that there was much in his teaching which one could not afford to ignore.

Other letters written during Carlyle's first visit to London reveal very much the same attitude. In a letter of 5 July 1824 to George Boyd of the Edinburgh publishing firm of Oliver and Boyd in which he proposed to produce a translation of Goethe's autobiography which would be greatly superior to that which Henry Colburn, the London publisher, had brought out, he said: "As to the Life [of Goethe] I confess my feeling that were it shorter it might please me (as well as the public) very much. I could also command notes to it from Coleridge if necessary; and from another gentleman personally known to Goethe [probably Henry Crabb Robinson], and familiar with all the late literary history of Germany as of England." Although Carlyle clearly had established his relation to Coleridge on a satisfactory footing, it is certainly dubious whether he could have "commanded" notes on Goethe or on any other subject from him, since he did not respond very readily to commands from the high or the low. Nevertheless, such a translation by Carlyle with notes by Coleridge and Crabb Robinson would have been a thing to see, and we can only regret that it did not come into being.

The mixed attitude toward Coleridge continues to be apparent in other letters written during the first visit to London. On 24 August 1824 he wrote to Thomas Murray, one of his earliest friends and a fellow student at Edinburgh:

Coleridge is a steam-engine of a hundred horse power—with the boiler burst. His talk is resplendent with imagery and the shows of thought; you listen as to an oracle, and find yourself no jot the wiser. He is without beginning or middle or end. A round fat oily yet impatient little man, his mind seems totally beyond his own control; he speaks incessantly, not thinking or imagining or remembering, but combining all these processes into one; as a rich and lazy housewife might mingle

1 Ibid. p. 103.
her soup and fish and beef and custard into one unspeakable mass and present it
trueheartedly to her astonished guests.¹

In a letter to Jane of 15 November Carlyle wrote: "A man that is
not standing on his own feet in regard to economical affairs, soon
ceases to be a man at all. Poor Coleridge is like the hulk of a
huge ship; his mast and sails and rudders have rotted quite
away."² Again on 4 December Carlyle wrote Jane that there
was "no truly intellectual person" on Irving's list and that "any
thing resembling a 'great man', a man exercised with sublime
thoughts and emotions, able even to participate in such, and throw
any light on them, is a treasure I have yet to meet with"; and in
replying on 19 December Jane wrote somewhat mockingly:
"There is no intellectual person you say on the Orator's list!
Why, what has befallen his acquaintance? Where are all the
eminent personages, the very salt of the earth[,] whom you and he
told me of?" Then she named about half a dozen of the
"eminent personages", including Coleridge, "the first of
Talkers".³ On 20 December Carlyle wrote Jane: "Coleridge is
sunk inextricably in the depths of putrescent indolence".⁴ On
22 January 1825, weary of London and pessimistic about what it
could offer him, he wrote to his brother John: "That I shall
return to Scotland pretty soon is I think the only point entirely
decided. Here is nothing adequate to induce my continuance.
The people are stupid, and noisy; and I live at the easy rate of
five-and-forty shillings per week! I say the people are stupid,
not altogether unadvisedly; in point of either intellectual or
moral culture, they are some degrees below even the inhabitants
of the "Modern Athens" [Edinburgh]. I have met no man of a
true head and heart among them. Coleridge is a mass of richest
spices, putrified into a dunghill: I never hear him tawlk, without
feeling ready to worship him and toss him in a blanket".⁵ In a
letter to Jane of 31 January he again expressed his low opinion of
those poets in London who were seeking literary fame:

¹ Fame! "The very sound of it is distressing to my ears. Oh that I could show
you the worshippers of it whom I have met with here! To see how the shallow

² Ibid. p. 199.
³ Ibid. pp. 215-16, 228.
⁴ Ibid. pp. 233.
⁵ Ibid. pp. 260-1.
spirits of these scribes are eaten up by this mean selfish passion; how their whole blood seems to be changed by it into gall, and they stand hissing like as many rattle-snakes each over his small very small lot of that commodity! I swear to you I had rather be a substantial peasant that eat my bread in peace, and loved my fellow mortals, tho’ I scarcely knew that my own parish was not all the universe, than one of these same miserable metre-ballad-mongers, whose heart is dead or worse, for whom creation is but a mirror to reflect the image of his own sorry self and still sorrier doings! An hour with Coleridge or Procter would do more for you, than a month of my talking. You would forswear fame forever and a day.¹

In the same vein he wrote to his brother John on 10 February: "I saw Coleridge for the last time yesterday: he is an inspired ass";² and again wrote to him on 7 March: "I heard Coleridge tawlking one night a fortnight since. He took an ounce of snuff, speculated in half intelligible Kantism, and vilipended universal nature, in all her productions, but himself. I will tell thee when me meet ".³

After he had returned to Scotland, he wrote to Mrs. Basil Montagu on 18 July 1825: "Has Coleridge published his book,⁴ or is he still merely tawlking, and taking snuff? Unhappy Coleridge! A seventy-four-gun ship, but water-logged, dismasted, cannot set a thread of sail! "⁵ Yet when Carlyle’s The Life of Friedrich Schiller came out in book form in March of this same year, it carried words of hope and even praise concerning Coleridge. At one place in its text he declares: "The philosophy of Kant is probably combined with errors to its very core; but perhaps also, this ponderous unmanageable dross may bear in it the everlasting gold of truth! Mighty spirits have already laboured in refining it; is it wise in us to take up with the base pewter of Utility, and renounce such projects altogether? We trust, not ". For this passage he provides a footnote: "Are our hopes from Mr. Coleridge always to be fruitless? Sneers at the common-sense philosophy of the Scotch are of little use: it is a poor philosophy, perhaps; but not so poor as none at all, which seems to be the state of matters here at present ".⁶ And in another passage in the book he again praises Coleridge’s translation of Wallenstein:

² Ibid. p. 280.
³ Ibid. p. 300.
⁴ Aids to Reflection.
Wallenstein has been translated into French by M. Benjamin Constant; and the last two parts of it have been faithfully rendered into English by Mr. Coleridge. As to the French version, we know nothing, save that it is an improved one; but that little is enough: Schiller, as a dramatist, improved by M. Constant, is a spectacle we feel no wish to witness. Mr. Coleridge's translation is also, as a whole, unknown to us: but judging from many large specimens, we should pronounce it, excepting Sotheby's Oberon, to be the best, indeed the only sufferable, translation from the German with which our literature has been enriched. ¹

There is further evidence that in spite of the strength of Carlyle's dislike of Coleridge at the end of his first visit to London he did not then or later entirely abandon him. In a postscript to a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson of 25 April 1826, he wrote: "What has become of Coleridge and his book of Aids? Where loiter the sweet singers of England, that no twang of a melodious string is heard throughout the Isle, nothing but the chink of yellow bullion? Alas! we are all Philistines together. But veniet dies!" ²

It appears also that in 1826 in deference to Coleridge he again began to read the old English writers. ³ Moreover, he did not totally ignore Coleridge's philosophy at this time but wrote in his journal on 3 December 1826: "Coleridge says, 'Many men live all their days without ever having an idea; and some of them with thousands of things they call ideas; but an Idea is not a Perception or Image, it cannot be painted, it is infinite'. Such was his meaning (not his words): I half or three-fourths seem to understand him." ⁴ In 1827 Carlyle began the novel Wotton Reinfred (of which he completed only seven chapters and which was not published until 1892). In this novel Dalbrook, identified with Coleridge, is a mystic philosopher and champion of transcendentalism, an "ardent seeker of truth and a worshipper of the invisible", who nevertheless is "incapable of action and without unity in himself". ⁵ In July of the same year, after an evening spent with John Wilson, an evening on which Wilson found great amusement in indulging in satire at Coleridge's

¹ Ibid. p. 151 n.
² Collected Letters, iv. 82-83.
³ Wilson, Carlyle, ii. 5.
⁴ Two Note Books, p. 78.
expense, Carlyle recorded his delight in hearing Wilson’s talk and his decided preference for it as compared with Coleridge’s.¹

Two articles published in 1827 and 1829 reveal the persistence of Carlyle’s mixed attitude. In the first, the essay on “German Literature” published in the Edinburgh Review, Carlyle prefaced his somewhat detailed exposition of Kant’s philosophy with statements which by implication denied Coleridge’s right to be considered a metaphysical philosopher. The first step toward understanding Kant, Carlyle said, was to distinguish his teaching from all other teachings known to the British, particularly from metaphysical philosophy as taught in Britain, “or rather, what was taught; for, on looking around, we see not there is any such philosophy in existence at the present day”; philosophy in England had perished at the death of Dugald Stewart.² In the second article, “Novalis”, published in the Foreign Review, he again said that Great Britain had had no philosophy since the passing of Dugald Stewart: “Now Philosophy is at a stand among us, or rather there is now no Philosophy visible in these Islands”. In the same article, however, after declaring Coleridge to be neither so unintelligible nor so profound as Novalis, Carlyle said that the English reading public did not do justice to Coleridge’s books such as The Friend and the Biographia Literaria. He even attempted to justify Coleridge’s obscurity:

It is admitted, too, on all hands, that Mr. Coleridge is a man of “genius”, that is, a man having more intellectual insight than other men; and strangely enough, it is taken for granted, at the same time, that he has less intellectual insight than any other. For why else are his doctrines to be thrown out of doors, without examination, as false and worthless, simply because they are obscure? . . .

Never yet has it been our fortune to fall in with any man of genius, whose conclusions did not correspond better with his premises, and not worse, than those of other men; whose genius, when once it came to be understood, did not manifest itself in a deeper, fuller, truer view of all things human and divine, than the clearest of your so laudable “practical men” had claim to.³

Here again Carlyle was caught between a sincere desire to be fair to Coleridge and strong forces in his nature motivated by personal antipathy and considerable scepticism concerning Coleridge’s mind.

¹ Wilson, Carlyle, ii. 25–26.
² Works, xxvi. 79. Cf. a passage in “Signs of the Times”, Works, xxvii. 63, where Carlyle says very much the same thing. ³ Ibid. pp. 3–4, 38.
Carlyle must have been considerably impressed by a statement made to him in a letter of 17 May 1830 by his brother John, educated to be a doctor, a brother whose mind and opinions were highly respected by Carlyle. Now in London, John wrote: "Coleridge has been unwell of late, but is now getting better. I saw him yesterday for the second time. I believe there is no man in the island puts more thought through himself".\(^1\) Coleridge was certainly in the background of Carlyle’s mind when he wrote "Characteristics", published in *Edinburgh Review* for December 1831. In writing to Macvey Napier, editor of this review, on 8 October, just a few weeks before publication, Carlyle said of the article: "Coleridge has lately set forth a fragmentary Philosophy of Life; and I read a very strange one by Friedrich Schlegel, which he died while completing. It struck me that by grouping two or three of these together [he also mentions Thomas Hope’s *Essay on Man* and William Godwin’s *Thoughts on Man*], contrasting their several tendencies, and endeavouring, as is the Reviewer’s task, to stand peaceably in the middle of them all, something fit and useful might be done".\(^2\)

Coleridge died on 25 July 1834. Four days later Carlyle, now living in London, commented as follows in a letter to John Bradfute, an old friend in Edinburgh:

Poor Coleridge, as you may have seen, died on Friday last: he had been sick and decaying for years; was well waited on, and one may hope prepared to die. Carriages in long files, as I hear, were rushing all round Highgate when the old man lay near to die. Foolish carriages! Not one of them would roll near him (except to splash him with their mud) while he lived; had it not been for the noble-mindedness of Gilman the Highgate Apothecary, he might have died twenty years ago in a hospital or in a ditch. To complete the Farce-Tragedy, they have only to bury him in Westminster-Abbey.\(^3\)

A fairer and less cynical obituary is to be found in a letter to his mother of 5 August. In its simplicity, its rejection of rhetorical

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\(^1\) National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), MS. 1775A. 60.

\(^2\) British Museum, Add. MS. 34, 615, fol. 206. Carlyle probably refers to Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection* (1825, 1831), as well as to Friedrich Schlegel’s *Philosophie des Lebens* (1828) and *Philosophische Vorlesungen* (1830), Thomas Hope’s *An Essay on the Origins and Prospects of Man* (1831), and William Godwin’s *Thoughts on Man* (1831).

flourish and over-emphasis, its balance, and its motivating spirit of sincerity and honesty, it is one of Carlyle's best pronouncements on Coleridge.

Coleridge, a very noted Literary man here, of whom you may have heard me speak, died about a week ago, at the age of 62. An Apothecary had supported him for many years: his wife and children shifted elsewhere as they could. He could earn no money, could set himself steadfastly to no painful task; took to opium and poetic and philosophical dreaming. A better faculty has not been often worse wasted. Yet withal he was a devout man, and did something, both by writing and speech. Among the London Literaries he has not left his like or second. Peace be with him!  

To Emerson he wrote on 12 August: "Coleridge, as you doubtless hear, is gone. How great a Possibility, how small a realized Result. They are delivering Orations about him, and emitting other kinds of froth, *ut mos est.* What hurt can it do?"  

In spite of the desire to be fair reflected in his letter to his mother, the torrent of praise of Coleridge now being forced upon his attention intensified Carlyle's antipathy for the man. Not only in the letter to Emerson just quoted, but in more than one place elsewhere he reveals that he found what he considered the overpraise of Coleridge very distasteful. The attitude expressed in the following entry in his journal, 26 May 1835, is representative:

Coleridge's 'Table Talk'... insignificant for most part: a helpless Psyche, overspun with Church-of-England cobwebs; a weak, diffusive, weltering, ineffectual man. The *Nunc Domines* I hear chaunted about these two persons [Wordsworth and Coleridge] had better provoke no reply from me: what is false in them passes; what is true deserves acceptance, speaks at least for a sense on their part.—. . .

Coleridge's *Table Talk*: insignificant; yet expressive of Coleridge. A great Possibility—that has not realised itself. Never did I see such apparatus got ready for thinking, and so little thought. He mounts scaffolding, pullies and tackle, gathers all the tools in the neighbourhood, with labour, with noise, demonstration, precept, abuse,—and sets three bricks. I do *not* honour the man; I pity him (with the opposite of contempt); see in him one glorious up-struggling ray (as it were), which perished, all but ineffectual, in a lax, languid, impotent *character* (*gemuth*): this is my theory of Coleridge,—very different from that of his admirers here. Nothing I find confuses me more than the admiration (the kind of man admired) I see current here. So measurable these infinite men do seem; so un-

1 NLS. MS. 520.31.
edifying the doxologies chaunted to them. Yet in that also there is something; which I really do try to profit by. The man that lives has a real way of living, built on thought of one or the other sort: he is a fact; consider him; draw knowledge from him.¹

Coleridge's championing of the Church of England, in which Carlyle had very little faith, was a very real issue between the two. Other issues, particularly those which Carlyle raised in connection with Coleridge's philosophical ideas and distinctions, were more assumed than real, since they involved much that Coleridge and Carlyle held in common.

The Church of England question and the value of Coleridge's teachings in general became very much an issue, however, soon after Carlyle met John Sterling at John Stuart Mill's office in the India House in February 1835. For years before, Sterling, like his old teacher of Plato at Cambridge, Julius Charles Hare, had been an enthusiastic admirer and champion of Coleridge. In his first letter to Carlyle, 29 May 1835, he praised Coleridge, who, he said, "by sending from his solitude the voice of earnest Spiritual Instruction came to be beloved studied & mourned for by no small or careless school of disciples".² Henceforth until the death of Sterling in 1844 there was to be a kind of tug-of-war between the influence of Coleridge and that of Carlyle, with the mind and soul of John Sterling as the prize in the middle. Although critical of much that he found in Sterling, Carlyle yet found much to admire in him and soon developed a deep affection for him. In a letter of 27–30 November 1835 to his brother John, Carlyle said: "Of all the people I see here John Sterling (the young Clergyman) is the one I love most, different as our tempers and life-theories are in all points. He is a frank brotherly all-hoping, most childlike mortal, of very considerable genius; one feels as if he were ' too good to live '; which indeed his bodily constitn makes one anxious about. He has fixed himself at Bayswater and comes often down to me."³ It is clear, however, that Sterling, even though Carlyle spoke of him as childlike and even though he reciprocated Carlyle's admiration and affection,

² Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, ed. C. F. Harrold (New York, 1937), p. 308. (Referred to hereafter as Harrold's Sartor.)
³ NLS. MS. 523.35.
never became servile as a disciple of Carlyle or allowed him to undermine completely his faith in Coleridge. "To Coleridge", he wrote Hare in 1836, "I owe education. He taught me to believe that an empirical philosophy is none, that Faith is the highest Reason, that all criticism, whether of literature, laws, or manners, is blind, without the power of discerning the organic unity of the object." It is clear, too, that Sterling had courage and would at times challenge Carlyle in debate. The following entry in Carlyle's journal for 15 May 1838 is significant:

Dull dinner the day before yesterday—indeed, hinc illae lacrymae, for I had a cup of green tea too—at the Wilson’s; Spedding, Maurice, John Sterling, and women. Ah me! Sterling particularly argumentative, babblative, and on the whole unpleasant and unprofitable to me. Memorandum not to dine where he is soon, without cause. He is much spoiled since last year by really no great quantity of praise and flattery; restless as a whirling tormentum; superficial ingenious, of endless semifrothy utterance and argument. Keep out of his way till he mend a little. A finer heart was seldom seen than dwells in Sterling, but, alas! under what conditions? Ego et Rex meus. That is the tune we all sing. Down with ego! 2

The presence of Frederick Denison Maurice, who married the sister of Sterling’s wife and who for years had been a militant champion of Coleridge, at this dinner must have been particularly irritating to Carlyle. In The Life of John Sterling he wrote: "Of Coleridge there was little said. Coleridge was now dead, not long since; nor was his name henceforth much heard in Sterling’s circle; though on occasion, for a year or two to come, he would still assert his transcendent admiration, especially if Maurice were by to help". 3

We may be sure, on the other side, that Sterling’s "transcendent admiration" of Coleridge did not cause Carlyle to change his mind about the Highgate philosopher to the slightest degree. He was very much pleased when his brother John wrote

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1 John Sterling, Essays and Tales, ed. J. C. Hare (London, 1848), i. p. xv.
2 Froude, Carlyle, iii. 138–9.
3 Works, xi. 129. For a somewhat detailed discussion of Maurice in his relation to Coleridge, Carlyle, and Sterling, see Coleridge and the Broad Church, pp. 157–9 n. On 30 June 1839 Sterling wrote to Carlyle: "I have also looked through Michelet’s Luther with great delight & have read the 4th vol of Coleridge’s literary remains in which there are things that would interest you. He has a great hankering after Cromwell—and explicitly defends the execution of Charles" (MS. in possession of Professor Frederick W. Hilles).
him from the Continent that someone there had applied the phrase *krankhafte Dunkelheit* to Coleridge. "Krankhafte Dunkelheit [morbid gloom]," he wrote back on 2 July 1835, "was of all words the very word for Coleridge. I have amused several with it, to whom also it is *treffend* [a direct hit]. Mystic is *krankhafe* always."  

Writing to the same brother again on 23 February 1836, he said: "On the whole, I often meditate on Christian things; but find as good as no profit in talking of them here. Most so-called Christians . . . treat me instead with jargon of metaphysic formulas, or perhaps shovelhatted Coleridgean moonshine. I admire greatly that of old Marquis Mirabeau (tho he meant it not for admiration): *Il a humé toutes les formules!* A man should 'swallow' innumerable 'formulas' in these days; and endeavour above all things to look with eyes."  

When John Stuart Mill’s well-known essay on Coleridge appeared in the *London and Westminster Review* in 1840, Carlyle felt that it reflected far too much credit on Coleridge. He wrote to his brother John on 17 March: "Mill has an Article on Coleridge in the last Review which some admire much. It is admirably expressed; but with that my admiration of it stops short."  

Certain passages in Carlyle’s lectures on *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, given in 1840 and first published in 1841, show, however, a definite and acknowledged influence of some of Coleridge’s doctrines on Carlyle’s thought. In "The Hero as Priest" he quotes with approval Coleridge on the subject of religious faith: "Souls are no longer filled with their Fetish; but only pretend to

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1 NLS. MS. 523.31.


3 NLS. MS., 523.78. John Sterling’s article "On the Writings of Thomas Carlyle", in the *London and Westminster Review* (1839) and reprinted in Sterling’s *Essays and Tales*, i. 252–381, though it contained much praise of Carlyle, did not altogether please him. Harriet Martineau wrote in her journal in December 1839: "Striking review of Carlyle by Sterling in the London and Westminster. Carlyle writes to me that it is like the Brocken Spectre—a very large likeness and not very correct" (*Autobiography* (Boston and New York, 1877), ii. 345).
be filled, and would fain make themselves feel that they are filled. 'You do not believe,' said Coleridge, 'you only believe that you believe.' It is the final scene in all kinds of Worship and Symbolism; the sure symptom that death is now nigh."  

In "The Hero as King" he approves Coleridge's doctrine of individual fulfilment: "The meaning of life here on earth might be defined as consisting in this: To unfold your self, to work what thing you have the faculty for. It is a necessity for the human being, the first law of our existence. Coleridge beautifully remarks that the infant learns to speak by this necessity it feels."  

Even more important is a passage in his treatment of Dante in which he gives Coleridge due credit for the central thought in one of his own favourite doctrines concerning the relation of profound meaning to music and the precise way in which music is a component of great poetry, rather scarce in his time because of the failure of those who were trying to write it to grasp Coleridge's basic concept:

See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it.

Coleridge remarks very pertinently somewhere, that wherever you find a sentence musically worded, of true rhythm and melody in the words, there is some good in the meaning too. For body and soul, word and idea, go strangely together here as everywhere. Song: we said before, it was the Heroic of Speech! All old Poems, Homer's and the rest, are authentically Songs. I would say in strictness, that all right Poems are; that whatsoever is not sung is properly no Poem, but a piece of Prose cramped into jingling lines,—to the great injury of the grammar, to the great grief of the reader, for the most part! What we want to get at is the thought the man had, if he had any: why should he twist it into jingle, if he could speak it out plainly? It is only when the heart of him is rapt into true passion of melody, and the very tones of him, according to Coleridge's remark, become musical by the greatness, depth, and music of his thoughts, that we can give him right to rhyme and sing; that we call him a Poet, and listen to him as the Heroic of Speakers,—whose speech is Song. Pretenders to this are many; and to an earnest reader, I doubt, it is for the most part a very melancholy, not to say an insupportable business, that of reading rhyme! Rhyme that had no inward necessity to be rhymed:—it ought to have told us plainly, without any jingle, what it was aiming at.

In Past and Present (1843) Carlyle attacked again the shallow, artificial aestheticism and conception of poetic genius which he

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1 Works, v. 122.  
2 Ibid. p. 225.  
3 Ibid. pp. 84, 90-91.
felt was prevalent in his age. Moreover, in also attacking the idleness of the aristocracy, he used a metaphor drawn from his reading of *The Ancient Mariner*: "Idleness? The awakened soul of man, all but the asphyxied soul of man, turns from it as from worse than death. It is the life-in-death of Poet Coleridge."  

Yet the antipathy for Coleridge persisted in expressing itself, spasmodically but vigorously. It appeared as Carlyle was recording his impressions of a visit to Bruges in 1842: "Bruges in the thirteenth century had become the 'Venice of the North', had its ships on every sea; the most important city in these latitudes was founded in a soil which, as Coleridge with a poor sneer declares, was not of God's making, but of man's. All the more credit to man, Mr. Samuel Taylor!" Francis Espinasse reports that in the summer of 1843 he heard Carlyle repeat "with a certain glee" Hazlitt's verdict on Coleridge as a reasoner, "No premises, sir, and no conclusions." Espinasse also relates a story which he had heard Carlyle tell at the expense of Coleridge and Coleridge's disciple John A. Heraud. Carlyle, it seems, was one of the audience to whom Heraud delivered a very eulogistic and rather high-flown funeral oration on Coleridge. He sat beside an obese, rubicund city man, who, when Heraud had ended turned to Carlyle, and giving "a great guff of port-wine" in his face, said, with due solemnity: "Sir, one drop of the blood of Christ is worth it all!" Also in the 1840s he found all efforts of Coleridge's son Derwent and daughter Sara to be friendly with him decidedly distasteful and resisted them when he could. The following sentence from a letter to his brother John of 16 July 1844 is characteristic: "I am bound at present to a Tea with a certain stupid Derwent Coleridge here—ah me!" In the summer of 1849, when Carlyle was touring Ireland with C. G. Duffy as his guide much of the time, he told Duffy that Coleridge had brought "the great ocean of German speculation" over into Great Britain and that Coleridge and Wordsworth had translated Teutonic thought into a "poor, disjointed, whitey-brown sort of

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1 *Works*, x. 292-3.  
2 Ibid. p. 285.  
3 Wilson, *Carlyle*, iii. 176.  
4 *Literary Recollections and Sketches* (New York, 1893), pp. 67-68.  
5 NLS. MS. 524.51. Similar expressions are in Carlyle's letters to his wife, 11 and 16 July, NLS. MSS. 611.175, 611.179.
English, and that was nearly all.

When the subject of Browning arose in Duffy's conversations with Carlyle and Duffy maintained that Browning owed something to Coleridge, Carlyle argued with some heat that he did not:

Browning was the stronger man of the two, and had no need to go marauding in that quarter... Whatever Coleridge had written was vague and purposeless, and... intrinsically cowardly, and for the most part was quite forgotten in these times. He had reconciled himself to believe in the Church of England long after it had become a dream to him. For his part he had gone to hear Coleridge when he first came to London with a certain sort of interest, and he talked an entire evening, or lectured, for it was not talk, on whatever came uppermost in his mind. There were a number of ingenious flashes and pleasant illustrations in his discourse, but it led nowhere, and was essentially barren. When all was said, Coleridge was a poor greedy, sensual creature, who could not keep from his laudanum bottle though he knew it would destroy him... .

There were bits of Coleridge fanciful and musical enough, but the theory and practice of his life as he lived it, and his doctrines as he practiced them, was a result not pleasant to contemplate.

When Carlyle set about writing The Life of John Sterling in 1851, more than one force operated to compel him to exercise restraint in his representation of Coleridge and to evaluate his influence with unusual carefulness and discrimination. The maturity, effectiveness, and balance of the resulting portrait owe much to these forces. Although he actually wrote the biography very rapidly, after Bishop Connop Thirlwall and he had engaged in a theological wrangle which had provided the final impulse, he may have entertained the notion of writing the life as early as 1844, shortly after Sterling's death; and then, after he and Hare,

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3 Sir Leslie Stephen, 'Carlyle', DNB.
4 F. D. Maurice wrote to Hare, in a letter dated 18 November 1844, to inform him that Carlyle was interested in Sterling's papers. "When you pass through London, Carlyle wishes very much to see you, and to have some conversation with you about John's papers. Will you let me know beforehand how this may be arranged, either by his meeting you here or by your going to him at his house?" (Sir John Frederick Maurice, The Life of F. D. Maurice, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters, 3rd edn. (London, 1884), i. 387). Carlyle wrote to his mother on 12 February 1848: "A Book consisting of my poor friend John Sterling's scattered writings has just come out; edited by one Julius Hare (an Archdeacon, soon to be a Bishop they say, a good man but rather a weak one);—with a Life of Sterling, which by no means contents me altogether. I think I shall send a copy of the Book up to you, by and by; probably one of my first tasks will be something in
co-literary executors designated in Sterling’s will, had agreed that Hare was to write the life, he had given up the idea for some years. Certainly the work which Carlyle finally wrote was one into which he poured experiences, impressions, and ideas which had been ripening in his mind over a period of years. Yet very few if any fundamental changes in Carlyle’s attitude toward Coleridge and his influence took place through the years. The difference between the impression of Coleridge conveyed by Carlyle’s *Sterling* and the earlier impressions which he recorded is a difference, almost altogether, of shaping, style, and scope, not a difference involving anything essential in Carlyle’s judgement.

At his disposal when he wrote the *Sterling* Carlyle had the letters and papers which Hare had used before him, together with his own considerable correspondence with Sterling, on which he draws largely. He had also read and annotated two copies of Hare’s two-volume edition of Sterling’s *Essays and Tales*. The first copy he seems to have read and annotated very thoroughly, both Hare’s memoir and Sterling’s writings, soon after it was published in 1848. In his marginalia here he comments on various things, including Sterling’s portrait of Carlyle himself in his story “The Onyx Ring”, beside which he writes an amusing “Moi!” But his most significant comments are on Coleridge.

reference to this Work of poor Sterling’s,—for he left it in charge to me too, and I surrendered my share of the task to the Archdeacon, being so busy with *Cromwell* at the time; but I am bound by very sacred considerations to keep a sharp eye over it, too; and will consider what can now be done” (NLS. MS. 521.66).

1 The Carlyle-Sterling correspondence is surprisingly extensive in the light of the fact that it covers a period of friendship of less than ten years. It contains 55 letters from Carlyle to Sterling, 30 letters from Sterling to Carlyle, 14 letters from Jane Carlyle to Sterling, and 2 from Sterling to Jane. After John Sterling’s death the Carlyles, particularly Jane, continued to correspond with his children. Many of the manuscript letters from Sterling to Carlyle, together with Carlyle’s annotations, are now in the collection of Professor Frederick W. Hilles. In the biography Carlyle draws on a few of the letters in his correspondence with Sterling and a considerable number of Sterling’s letters to members of his own family.

2 This copy is now in the Widener Memorial Collection of the Harvard Library. Miss Anne K. Tuell recorded and studied Carlyle’s annotations in it in her article “Carlyle’s Marginalia in Sterling’s *Essays and Tales*” (*PMLA*, liv (September, 1939), 815–24). See also Miss Tuell’s book *John Sterling: A Representative Victorian* (New York, 1941).

3 Moncure D. Conway wrote of his conversations with Carlyle: “At every moment I was impressed by the truth of John Sterling’s characterization of
When Sterling writes that the talk of Dr. Johnson was inferior to that of Coleridge, Carlyle declares, "Superior you mean". Many of his objections relate to quotations from Coleridge dealing with religious or theological matters. For instance, when Coleridge is quoted as saying that Christendom is obviously superior to the rest of the world in everything, Carlyle replies, "But there is much else here than 'Christendom'". When Coleridge is quoted as saying that the Pelew Islanders possessed superstition rather than religion since they were ignorant of the personality of the Deity, Carlyle quotes Goethe in the margin, "Wer darf Ihn nennen!" When Hare writes in the memoir, "At that time it was coming to be acknowledged by more than a few that Coleridge is the true sovereign of modern English thought", Carlyle exclaims in the margin, "Alas, alas." Hare's statement that Sterling owed more to F. D. Maurice than to any other man except Coleridge is scoffed at with a "Hoohoo" in the margin. Hare publishes, with some textual errors, Sterling's brilliant account of Coleridge's talk on his first visit to Highgate in 1827. To this also Carlyle took exception, correcting Sterling: "Stoops much, shuffles in walking, does not seem to know exactly whence or whitherward in any respect. He always 'preaches' in a kind of melancholy, snuffling recitative."

Carlyle seems to have annotated the second copy of Sterling's Essays and Tales shortly before he wrote his own biography of Carlyle in "The Onyx Ring", where as Collins he figures along with Goethe (Walsingham). I had read the story in my youth, and although in later years I do not accept the censorious estimates of Goethe, John Sterling's Carlyle has appeared to me as profound as Carlyle's Sterling" (Autobiography (London, Paris, and Melbourne, 1904), i. 355).

1 "Who dare NAME Him?" Cf. Harrold's Sartor, p. 317.

2 The manuscript of this is preserved, with a short notation in Carlyle's hand, in NLS. MS. 1765.62. Appended to it is a note, also in Sterling's hand: "I am very anxious that the following notes should not be lent or copied. They are in themselves of little importance,—& no one who rates Coleridge at his just value will ever think of making any unfair use of this very imperfect copy from his hasty sketches. But so much melancholy injustice has befallen the renown of great men from the circulation of similar slight records, that I should bitterly repent having ever written these minutes if I believed they could get beyond a few safe hands—or be exposed to the malignant stupidity of the mob. J. S. Sept. 17—1827."
Sterling. Most of the notes in it deal with Hare’s memoir.¹ Here he scolds Hare for not giving the dates when Sterling wrote his account of Coleridge’s talk—23 August–17 September, 1827—clearly given by Sterling himself on the manuscript, dates which might suggest that the description was written early by Sterling in his first burst of enthusiasm concerning Coleridge, not by the later Sterling in whom the influence of Coleridge had waned considerably. “Poor Coleridge,” Carlyle writes in the margin, “I have heard his ‘monologues’ too, but found them very empty of nourishment to me; more elaborate futility tongue never spake in my hearing!”

When we consider the complexity of the materials and experiences which went into the making of the portrait of Coleridge in Carlyle’s *Sterling*, we are certain to be greatly impressed by the degree to which imaginative synthesis or fusion based on heterogeneous, realistic materials has produced a work of art which richly deserves the high praise bestowed upon it through the years since 1851. Not merely restraint and balance, the Boswellian combination of light and shadow which Carlyle admired much in other biographers and in the great portrait painters, but moderation of tone and the introduction of atmosphere serve him well here. The beginning, which sets the key and the mood, is one of the finest passages of prose in Victorian literature:

Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill, in those years, looking down on London and its smoke-tumult, like a sage escaped from the inanity of life’s battle; attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there. His express contributions to poetry, philosophy, or any specific province of human literature or enlightenment, had been small and sadly intermittent; but he had, especially among young inquiring men, a higher than literary, a kind of prophetic or magician character. He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing by “the reason” what “the understanding” had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian, and say and print to the Church of England, with its singular old rubrics and surplices at Allhallowtide, *Esto perpetua*. A sublime man; who, alone in those dark days had saved his crown of

¹ This copy with Carlyle’s annotations is preserved in the Duke University Library. Professor William Blackburn in “Carlyle and the Composition of The Life of John Sterling” (*Studies in Philology*, xliv (October, 1947), 672–87) has recorded its marginalia and studied it in relation to Miss Tuell’s work.
spiritual manhood; escaping from the black materialisms, and revolutionary deluges, with “God, Freedom, Immortality” still his: a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer: but to the rising spirits of the young generation he had this dusky sublime character; and sat there as a kind of Magus, girt in mystery and enigma; his Dodona oak-grove (Mr. Gill\[l\]man's house at Highgate) whispering strange things, uncertain whether oracles or jargon.

The critical spirit is fully alive in this passage but so is an understanding of the magnetism through which Coleridge drew young men like Sterling to him and exerted influence on them. The whole picture, furthermore is wrapped in a softening haze of art, which gains much from the description of the Gillman's garden which soon follows it:

A really charming outlook, in fine weather. Close at hand, wide sweep of flowery leafy gardens, their few houses mostly hidden, the very chimney-pots veiled under blossomy umbrage, flowed gloriously down hill, gloriously issuing in wide-tufted undulating plain-country, rich in all charms of field and town. Waving blooming country of the brightest green; dotted all over with handsome villas, handsome groves; crossed by roads and human traffic, here inaudible or heard only as a musical hum: and behind all swam, under olive-tinted haze, the illimitable limitary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul's and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all. Nowhere, of its kind, could you see a grander prospect on a bright summer day, with the set of the air going southward.

Thus Carlyle provides a frame for his picture and through the use of physical perspective suggests psychological perspective and proper focus.

The whole treatment of Coleridge in this chapter is of very much the same quality and texture. None of his faults is spared: his attitude of bewilderment, his flabby and irresolute body, his shuffling walk, his lapses into floods of unintelligible talk, his addiction to monologue, his logical hocus-pocus, his queer nasal pronunciations, his inability to laugh heartily, his want of practicality and economic self-sufficiency, and, to Carlyle, his unreasonable defence of the Church of England. The strong effort to be fair to Coleridge is here too, and Carlyle writes of his talk: "Glorious islets, too, I have seen rise out of the haze; but they were few, and soon swallowed in the general element again. Balmy sunny islets, islets of the blest and the intelligible:—on which occasions those secondary humming groups would all cease humming, and hang breathless upon the eloquent words."
In a similar vein Carlyle writes, "Let me not be unjust to this memorable man. Surely there was here, in his pious, ever-labouring, subtle mind, a precious truth, or prefigurement of truth; and yet a fatal delusion withal. . . . What the light of your mind, which is the direct inspiration of the Almighty, pronounces incredible,—that, in God's name, leave uncredited; at your peril do not try believing that." Likewise, Carlyle speaks thus of Coleridge's natural gifts: "To the man himself Nature had given, in high measure, the seeds of a noble endowment; and to unfold it had been forbidden him. A subtle lynx-eyed intellect, tremulous pious sensibility to all good and all beautiful; truly a ray of empyrean light;—but imbedded in such weak laxity of character, in such indolences and esuriences as had made strange work with it. Once more, the tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will."

It would certainly be an error to conclude that Carlyle, however hard he may have tried, succeeded in being fair to Coleridge in his biography of Sterling. The roots of his preconceptions and prejudices ran too deep for him to be able to remove them by mere act of will. He did succeed in producing impressive art, but it was also highly subjective art. Not merely John Sterling, F. D. Maurice, J. C. Hare, and others, but he himself had been considerably influenced, sometimes unconsciously, by Coleridge. Moreover, the personality and mind of Coleridge held a strange fascination for him, reflected to some degree in Coleridge's portrait in Sterling, but also manifesting itself many times throughout the years, after he had written Sterling as well as before. He could never surrender completely to the spell of Coleridge; but neither could he leave him alone. In writing his Reminiscences soon after the death of his wife in 1866, he recorded recollections of Coleridge which, as we have seen, indicated hardly any change in his impressions of Coleridge throughout the years; and here also he expressed satisfaction with his treatment of Coleridge in

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1 Works, xi. 52-54, 56-57, 60-61.
2 Cazamian (Carlyle, pp. 257-8), in writing on Carlyle's attitude toward Coleridge, speaks of an "egocentric feeling" which he says is "an element of the greatest importance in Carlyle's personality: it decides for his thought and teaching at what point the bold sincerity of his mind gives place to the subtle spell of his instincts".
When Carlyle called upon Tieck in Germany on 7 October 1852 and Tieck began talking about Coleridge, Carlyle "broke into uncontrollable laughter". Tieck asked Carlyle to tell him why he laughed, and Carlyle stopped laughing and said, "I know quite well that about Coleridge much is to be said seriously." "Then why did you laugh?" demanded Tieck; but Carlyle gave him no further answer. On 8 October 1867 Carlyle wrote to James Hutchinson Stirling that he had read his article "De Quincey and Coleridge upon Kant" in the current issue of the *Fortnightly Review* and agreed entirely with its conclusion that "neither De Quincey nor Coleridge had read anything considerable of Kant, or really knew anything about him at all". Carlyle also wrote to his brother John on 20 November 1875: "I have also two altogether paltry French letters, one of them from a young man just coming out of the school & all aflame to write a book on Coleridge, as the Lamp of England & Trismegistus of Men,—but wishing greatly withal, that I would set him on his way. Which you may judge how altogether likely I am to do.... O Curas hominum!" But, as we have said, the fascination which Coleridge had for Carlyle lingered on too. D. A. Wilson records a rather charming story of a visit which Carlyle made to Highgate in his old age. One day in the 1870s, when he and the historian Lecky were taking one of their delightful walks together, and after what seemed to Lecky much aimless strolling, Carlyle suddenly said: "What brought me here today was a desire to see Coleridge's house once more. In old times I went there to see him on several occasions, but I can't remember the house." Although Lecky was pessimistic about finding the house, Carlyle was confident that he was in the right neighbourhood and persisted in looking for it. On discovering an old lady approaching, he spoke to her, "took off his hat, and with great politeness" asked: "Can you be so good as to inform me, madam, which house hereabout was once inhabited by the poet

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1 See especially pp. 282–3, where Carlyle quotes DeQuincey as saying in his articles in *Tait's Magazine* both that "Coleridge had the greatest intellect perhaps ever given to man" and that he lacked common honesty in applying it, which to Carlyle appeared to be "a miserable contradiction in terms".


3 Ibid. vi. 142.

4 NLS. MS. 528.44.
Coleridge?" A look of pleasure spread over the old lady's face, and she answered readily, "Certainly I can, sir. I can point out the very house to you. There it is." She turned and indicated it with the stick upon which she had been leaning. "It belonged to my brother, and Coleridge was his tenant. I am a sister of Dr. Gillman."¹

Actually, we know that the ideas of Coleridge and Carlyle, both great readers of German literature and philosophy, have much in common.² But because personality meant much to Carlyle, even more than ideas, he could rarely apprehend Coleridge's ideas except as they filtered to him through his intervening impression of Coleridge's personality and through the very powerful emotions associated in him with that impression. Accordingly, he more than once failed to recognize in Coleridge some reflections of himself. And he proved once more, as had often been proved before, that out of strange mixtures of the elements of human life and human relations great art can be born. Although it deals with a minor literary figure of the nineteenth century, certainly not a Carlylean hero, Carlyle's Sterling is perhaps the best one-volume biography written in England in its century; and it clearly demonstrates that the dynamics of conflict, both external and internal, in biography as well as in drama, can serve the writer well.

¹ Carlyle, vi. 314.
² For comparative studies of Coleridge's and Carlyle's ideas, see Osbert Burdet, The Two Carlyles (Boston and New York, 1931), pp. 136-7 and passim; Cazamian, passim; C. F. Harrold, Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834 (New Haven, 1934), pp. 50-54; and Coleridge and the Broad Church, pp. 163-76.