

*Coleridge's Notebooks:
The Second Instalment*

*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor
Coleridge*, edited by Kathleen Coburn.
Volume 2, 1804-1808, Text and Notes.
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THIS SUPERBLY EDITED and produced "duumvirate" volume contains some sixteen extant notebooks and Miss Coburn's notes on them. Coleridge spent more than two years of the period covered abroad, mainly at Malta. Having also journeyed through Sicily and Italy, he returns home in the summer of 1806 in no better shape than he departed. "Far art Thou wander'd now in search of health/And milder breezes," is Wordsworth's farewell to him in the sixth book of the "Poem . . . Addressed to S. T. Coleridge." "O! wrap him in your Shades, ye Giant Woods/On Etna's side" is the sanative hope he sends to Coleridge in the

tenth book of the same poem. But how is Coleridge faring during his friend's strongest creative years, in which the *Prelude*, of which he has taken the first part with him, is finished? Thoughts of suicide amass; his despair is so black that he fears to open any letters that might come, and only the thought of his children and of the Wordsworths (whose names he puts talismanically on the corners of his notebook pages, in a set with his own) seems to keep him in life, though not exactly alive. Neither his opium taking, which he calls clairvoyantly "usury against myself," nor his bad health, nor his nightmares, have decreased: he comes back still hopelessly alienated from one Sarah (his wife) and attached to another (Sara Hutchinson), and so a very incarnation of the Romantic exile: "A Man by thought and pain compelled to live/Yet loathing life . . ."

Conceived in pain, and perhaps against pain, his intellectual inquiry continues. As in the previous notebooks the foremost theme is that of unity. Divided though he is, Coleridge refuses to project his suffering. He considers himself the "sole scabbed sheep" of the blessed flock. The joy and unity of others are now (as in the *Dejection Ode*) all that matter to him; and the greater world must also be kept pure of his infection. He becomes a witness against himself, and for the *whole* or the *one*. "Wonderful, perplexing divisibility of Life/it is related by D. Unzer, an authority wholly to be relied on, that an Ohrwurm (Earwig?) cut in half eat its own hinder half. . . . A Turtle has lived six months with his Head off—& wandered about/yea, six hours after its heart & bowels (all but the Lungs) were taken out—How shall we think of this compatible with the *monad* soul?" If this is faintly ridiculous, other thoughts might have come from Valéry's *carnets*, and show Coleridge as a natural phenomenologist. For his curiosity about

earwig and turtle is part of a larger relentless search for essences, and ultimately for the indivisible unity of things. Distinctions yes, divisions no. On a moony night, somewhere between Kant and Husserl, Coleridge "extricates" the notion of Space ("Space," he claims, "is one of the Hebrew names for God"): "This Evening . . . was the most perfect & the brightest Halo circling the roundest and brightest moon I ever beheld—so bright was the Halo, so compact, so entire a circle, that it gave the whole of its area, the moon itself included, the appearance of a solid opaque body—an enormous Planet . . . thence I have found occasion to meditate on the nature of the sense of magnitude; its absolute dependence on the idea of *Substance*; the consequent difference between *magnitude* and *Spaciousness*; the dependence of the idea of substance on double-touch . . ."

Perhaps there is too much pronouncement and too little extrication in this. Many years later, as Keats reveals, Coleridge is still discoursing on "double-touch." His thought, always in bond, seems never to mature. Had he been less solitary it might have been different. This man, one feels, is on the brink of madness, of not controlling the streamy nature of consciousness. "A speck of blood in the mouth, and immediately a long dream of Blood, wounds flowing—torrents of Blood—" The external world will not give him the right kind of love-resistance. But perhaps this is the general doom of the "subjective thinker" who, as Yeats says, is forced to spin ideas out of his guts, like a spider. Coleridge at one point uses a similar image. Disgusted at the Germanico-metaphysical part of his mind, which has just performed a mocking deduction of one word ("Thing? id est, thinking or think'd. Think, Thank, Tank = Reservoir of what has been thinged—Denken, Danken—I forget the German for Tank/The, Them, This, These, Thence,

Thick, Think, Thong, Thou . . .") he breaks into: "O Lord! What thousands of Threads in how large a Web may not a Metaphysical Spider spin out of the Dirt of his own Guts/but alas! it is a net for his own superingenious Spidership alone!"

The great project of publishing the notebooks in full brings us nearer to that spectral possibility, the definitive biographer. In the meantime we must content ourselves with the raggedy riches of the individual Journals. One of the few entries Miss Coburn leaves uncommented expresses either an alchemist's faith in the world, that it can yield a golden unity, or a man's bitter judgment on the notebook before him: "A Treasure of Trash!"

Reviewed by GEOFFREY H. HARTMAN

Moral Evaluation: Old and Not-so-new Reflections

Conditions of Rational Inquiry: A Study in the Philosophy of Value,
by David Pole. London: the Athlone Press, 1961. 226 pp.

IT IS REFRESHING to read any contemporary British philosopher who does not