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THE ANCIENT MARINER

AND THE

AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

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THE ANCIENT MARINER

AND THE

AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

BY

BERNARD MARTIN

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
MELBOURNE :: LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED **1949**

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE WINDMILL PRESS
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

To

FREDERICK WILLIAM BULL, F.S.A.,

great-great-grandson of The Revd William Bull
(the friend of William Cowper and John Newton),

who generously allowed me the use
of unpublished letters, diaries, and
other material for a biography of
John Newton

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THE ANCIENT **MARINER**

I

Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, in an introduction to *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* wrote of *The Ancient Mariner:*

> We can ignore the time and circumstance of its birth, ignore the theorisings out of which it sprang, ignore Wordsworth and his prefaces . . . and still *The Ancient Mariner* is the wild thing of wonder, the captured star. . . . Not in the whole range of English poetry—not in Shakespeare himself—has the lyrical genius of our language spoken with such a note.[1]

The publication of the poem, one hundred and fifty years ago, in Lyrical Ballads, has been described as "the most remarkable instance on record of a volume of poems remaining for so long a time almost totally neglected and afterwards acquiring, and that almost rapidly, so much deserved popularity."[2]

It is unnecessary to point out that a vast number of articles and books have been written about Coleridge's work, and about this particular poem. Every word has been examined, every phrase turned over and over in the hope that it may reveal a hint of origin, or some clue to the powerful imagination of the unhappy poet who "in some sort" resembled the character he created.[8]

The purpose of this study is not so much to add to this mass of expert literary criticism as to draw attention to a parallel between *The Ancient Mariner* and part of John Newton's *Authentic Narrative,* and to suggest an influence the latter may have had on Coleridge.

[1] For the numbered references, see pp. 45-4

2

C, E. Vaughan writing of Coleridge and *'The Ancient Mariner* said:

> We have an ordered story which moves on unchecked, doubtless through a world of wonder, from mysterious preface to inevitable close. Each incident stands out clear-cut and vivid; each corresponding change in the soul of the mariner is registered, no less distinctly, as upon the plate of an enchanted dial. That is one side of the matter . . . On the other hand, each incident … is presented not with the shorthand brevity which suits the needs of daily life, but in the successive images, distinct and single, which struck the eye of the mariner at the moment; and this with a persistency which is clearly intentional, and which it would be hard to parallel from any other poem … the story, as a mere story, is amongst the most thrilling ever told.[4]

Coleridge declared that he was less concerned with these vivid incidents or images than with their influence on the soul of the mariner; or, as C. E. Vaughan put it:

> It is, no doubt, still more surprising that, when all is said, these things should be no more than an element in a larger whole; that, side by side with these outward incidents and images, we should have to reckon, and reckon at least as largely, with their reflection in the soul of the man who saw and suffered from them; that, from beginning to end, we should see them through his eyes and feel them through his spirit. But this is the miracle of Coleridge. And it is a poor tribute to his genius if we insist upon isolating one element and asserting that it is all he had to give. It is only by taking both elements together and giving full allowance to both that we do justice to the unique quality of this "miraculous" poem.[5]

My hypothesis is not concerned with the "mere" story, though I should agree that the story is one of the supreme achievements of the human mind. I am concerned with the "reflection in the soul" of the Ancient Mariner of those outward incidents and images which make up the mere story. But it is necessary

first to recall some of the circumstances of the actual composition of the poem, apart, that is, from the general influences which made the mind of Samuel Taylor Coleridge what it was between the i3th of November 1797, when the poem was conceived, and the 23rd of March 1798, when it was born. For this purpose we must take the original text, without the prose gloss added in 1817, and without the quotation from T. Burnet *ArchaeoL PhiLy* p. 68, which prefaced the poem in some later editions.*

Wordsworth's account of the conception, though inaccurate in date, is more detailed than Coleridge's. Indeed, Coleridge was singularly reticent about this particular poem, though he had a good deal to say about his other works. *The Ancient Mariner* is mentioned only once in his many published letters.[6] On the 13th November 1797, Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge were on a walking tour, Wordsworth described what happened thus:

> In the course of this walk was planned the poem of the 'Ancient Mariner', founded on a dream, as Mr. Coleridge said, of his friend Mr. Cruickshank. Much the greatest part of the story was Mr. Coleridge's invention; but certain parts I myself suggested; for example, some crime to be committed which would bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke's *Voyages,* a day or two before, that, while doubling Cape Horn, they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. "Suppose," said I, "you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime?" The incident was thought fit for the purpose and adopted accordingly.[7]

* The original text of *The Rime of the Ancyent Mariner* is given on pp. 47 to 68.

De Quincey, who said that the reading of *The Ancient Mariner* was the greatest event in the unfolding of his mind[8], wrote of Coleridge's borrowings from other writers and declared that he asked Coleridge about the Shelvocke source and that Coleridge denied it. Wordsworth told De Quincey he could not understand Coleridge's denial, "the fact being notorious".[9]

The first edition of *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* is prefaced with this Argument:

> How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

This was certainly the course of Shelvocke (and of other early voyagers); and here is Shelvocke's passage about the albatross:

> We all observed that we had not had the sight of one fish of any kind since we were come to the Southward of the Straits of Le Mais; nor one sea-bird excepting a disconsolate black albatross, who accompanied us for several days, hovering about us as if he had lost himself, till Hatley (my second Captain) observing, in one of his melancholy fits, that this bird was always hovering near us, imagined, from his colour, that it might be some ill omen. That which, I suppose, induced him the more to encourage his superstition, was the continued series of contrary tempestuous winds, which had oppressed us ever since we had got into this sea. But be that as it would, he, after some fruitless attempts, at length shot the albatross, not doubting (perhaps) that we should have a fair wind after that.[10]

So much for what De Quincey accurately called "the original hint for the action of the poem." Let us return to Wordsworth's account, part of which has been quoted already:

> We began the composition together. ... As we endeavoured to proceed conjointly (I speak of the same evening) our respective

manners proved so widely different, that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog. We returned after a few days from a delightful tour. . . . *The Ancient Mariner* grew and grew till it became too important for our first object...[11]

So Wordsworth, after supplying "the original hint", dropped out; but it is relevant to ask what he was doing during those few months while *The Ancient Mariner* grew and grew and became important, for Coleridge later said of this time of companionship with Wordsworth and his sister, "though we were three persons, there was but one God.'[12] The influence of one young poet on the other, increased catalytically by Dorothy Wordsworth, is too well-known to need emphasis, but attention has been called to a reference in Dorothy's *Journal* dated the 2ist of March 1798, a few days before *The Ancient Mariner*'was finished, which makes it clear that Dorothy, if not her brother, heard passages of the poem before it was completed, and it is inconceivable that Coleridge did not know something of what his two friends were writing and reading at this time.[13] From the Alfoxden Notebook, which begins with a few lines of Dorothy's *Journal* and then contains draft passages of poems in Wordsworth's writing, we know that he was engaged between the 20th of January and the5th of March 1798 on verse which was later incorporated in Book I of *The Excursion;* and, some of it, adapted to *The Prelude.*[14]

3

Although my hypothesis is not concerned with the mere story of *The Ancient Mariner* it is desirable to mention briefly the way in which the story seems to have

been put together, after the first Shelvocke hint.

If we omit the supernatural occurrences—those strange events which have what Coleridge called "a semblance of truth sufficient to procure . . . that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith",[16] we find a number of strictly nautical phenomena. In one of his letters, Coleridge writes amusingly of how he for the first time, "beheld my native land retiring from me."[16] That was after *The Ancient Mariner* was published, so the nautical images in the poem were not stimulated by personal experience.

Many books and articles have been written dealing with this subject and suggesting various sources. It cannot be doubted that Coleridge relied almost entirely on images recollected from his omnivorous reading. "I have read almost everything," he said a year before he wrote *The Ancient Mariner,* and it has been observed by John Livingston Lowes that "he who sets out to track Coleridge through his reading, leaves unread at his peril anything readable whatsoever that was extant in Coleridge's day."[17] Professor Lowes has himself followed the poet painstakingly all the way down the road to Xanadu and I imagine his work leaves little to be done in the way of textual examination of the poem. A single stanza will illustrate this point—and let us take one which Coleridge later improved, for interesting and valuable as it may be to shred a masterpiece we cannot do it without hurting someone:

Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,
And it grew wond'rous cauld;
And Ice mast-high came floating by
As green as Emerauld.

Professor Lowes shows that Frederick Martens in his *Voyage into Spitzbergen and Greenland* (1694) wrote "whereupon followed mist and snow," and, "the Ice came a floating down apace . . . and it was very cold."

And in *like Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Captain Thowas James* (1633) there are four references to the ice being "as high as our Top-mast head", and once, "full halfe mast high." Several early travel books emphasise the green colour of the ice and Frederick Martens, in the book already named, describes ice "as green as an Emerald." Oddly enough the phrase "green as an emerald" occurs as a quotation in one of Dorothy Wordsworth's letters dated as early as 1792.[18] Of course, there is nothing unique in knowing that ice looks sometimes emerald green, and there is not any other way of describing the height of an iceberg than by comparison with the ship's mast, but in *The Raad to Xanadu* Professor Lowes shows beyond doubt that the nautical images in *The Ancient Mariner* came, for the most part, from recognisable sources. Possibly they arose unbidden in the mind that had read "almost everything", but it is not out of place to quote a letter Wordsworth wrote to a friend at this very time, showing how he, at any rate, made conscious use of travel literature: "If you could collect for me any books of travels, you would render me an essential service, as without much of such reading my present labours cannot be brought to a conclusion."[19]

So we may say the mere story of *The Ancient Mariner* grew from shelvocke's albatross and from Cruickshank's dream, and, to quote Professor Lowes again, "owes its key of words in large measure to the voyagers." But these are "the outward incidents and images". My hypothesis relates to the "reflection in the

soul of the man who saw and suffered from them".

If Coleridge drew so freely from the records of the voyagers for his outward incidents and images, did he then find his own way, unaided, through the complex psychology of the Old Navigator's reactions? It is significant that soon *after* composing *The Ancient Mariner* he wrote to a friend:

> It is easy to clothe imaginary beings with our own thoughts and feelings; but to send ourselves out of ourselves, to *think* ourselves into the thoughts and feelings of beings in circumstances wholly and strangely different from our own, *hie labor hoc opus;* and who has achieved it? Perhaps only Shakespeare.[20]

Was there some true story, some authentic narrative, which Coleridge read about this time, and which gave him not a mere "key of words" but the insight necessary to turn the mere story into something that "grew and grew and became important'?

4

There is an amusing story of a man who wanted to be introduced to Coleridge but said he was afraid Coleridge might be offended because he had written "a confounded severe epigram" on *The Ancient Mariner*. When the poet asked to hear the epigram it proved to be one of his own composition which he had inserted in *The Morning Post*. It was entitled, *To the author of The Ancient Mariner* and ran:

> *Your poem must eternal be,*
> *Dear Sir I it cannot fail,*
> *For 'tis incomprehensible*
> *And without head or tail.*[21]

But not all critics realised the profundity of the poem. Stopford A. Brooke, Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria, whose literary criticism is recognised with nearly thirty quotations in *The -Cambridge History of English Literature,* wrote:

> The poem illustrates . . . the simple religion of Coleridge. . . . Its religion is all contained in the phrase *Heprayethwell who loveth well both man and bird and beast.* . . . The main thought and its details have their own beauty, and they illustrate the new love of animals in English poetry, but there is an often-noticed absurdity which injures the sense of art in the mass of machinery which is used to impress so simple a thought. It is like making use of a calculating machine to add two and two together.[22]

Incidentally this unfortunate critic had sufficient acumen to realise that the most important line in the poem—though, to be sure, there is hardly a line that could be omitted—is the one which changes the whole course of the Old Navigator's life, "and I bless'd them unaware". Even so the poem was wasted on Stopford Augustus Brooke.

A contemporary critic, whose work Coleridge much admired, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, complained that *The Ancient Mariner* lacked a moral, to which Coleridge replied that the poem's chief fault was "the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle, or cause of action."[23] It is irrelevant to cite Charles Lamb's entertaining opinion of Mrs. Barbauld[24], or the later theories of Coleridge as to the place of a moral in a poem—what matters is Coleridge's opinion on this subject between the i3th of November 1797 and the 23rd of March 1798, and there is no doubt he then intended his poem to be something more than a mere story. "I cannot write without *body* of *thought"* he said in a letter to Southey.[26]

In short, "the mass of machinery", the supernatural incidents and some of the most memorable images in English poetry were evoked with a larger purpose than "the prevention of cruelty to albatrosses",[26] and what we know of Coleridge's erudition suggests that his religion was not quite so elementary as was supposed by Queen Victoria's chaplain.

5

In that rare and interesting little book *The Source of the Ancient Mariner,* Ivor James suggested that the mariner's character is based on that of Thomas James, captain of *The Henrietta Maria;* "a bold, resolute, fearless sailor, yet full of tenderness, sympathy, and love".[27] These characteristics are too general, surely, to support the claim; though there is little doubt that Coleridge drew on James' log for some nautical images.

Professor Lowes offers substantial evidence that Coleridge may have had in mind the Wandering Jew, "into the shadowy outline that was soon to be the Ancient Mariner, melted, as in a dream, the wraith of the Wandering Jew".[28] He stakes a claim also on behalf of Cain, "who can doubt that from its old haunt ... the shade of Cain the Wanderer beckoned to one of three".[29] And he, and other commentators, point to "an oral tradition of the Netherlands" concerning one Falkenberg who murdered his brother and was thereafter doomed to wander on the sea while two spectral forms play at dice for the wanderer's soul: "with the traits of the Jew and Cain there blended the appurtenances of still another fated wanderer—a wanderer for whose soul two unearthly shapes

on a spectre-bark played dice.,'[80] Professor Lowes is careful to insist that the Ancient Mariner "is no more Falkenberg than he is the Wandering Jew or Cain," but he claims "all three figures are indissolubly merged in the conception."[31] One needs to read the whole of Professor Lowes' arguments to do justice to his theory.

I have five observations to make before passing to my own hypothesis:

(1) Coleridge evidently borrowed from the Falkenberg legend to supplement Cruickshank's dream (which was of a spectre-bark manned by a crew of ghosts), but there is no evidence that he thought of Falkenberg apart from the dice players and the hermit to whom the murderer confessed.

(2) Nothing in the stories of the Wandering Jew, Cain or Falkenberg has any significant bearing on the psychology of the Ancient Mariner. Any resemblance in the Ancient Mariner to these persons is superficial.

(3) Wordsworth tells us Coleridge delighted to call the Ancient Mariner "the Old Navigator".[32] There is no reason to think of Falkenberg as a navigator—indeed, the record says categorically that his ship sailed "without either helm or helmsman"[33]—and certainly the term cannot be applied to either Cain or the Wandering Jew. The point is not important, *unless we find another claimant who really was an old navigator.*

(4) There is some insistence, in Professor Lowes' version, on the idea of a "wanderer". Coleridge talked of "The Ancient Mariner", "The Old Navi-

gator" and "The Old Seafaring Man", but I cannot trace that he ever called the Ancient Mariner a "wanderer". On the other hand, we know from the Alfoxden Note-book that he must have heard a good deal, during the first three months of 1798, of Wordsworth's Wanderer, "a man of reverend age", who at that time was making his way into Book I of *The Excursion*—and this wanderer *is* concerned, indirectly, with my hypothesis.

(5) Even supposing Coleridge had in mind the Wandering Jew, Cain and Falkenberg, it is still possible a fourth figure was there—one who was far more important than the other three, in that he could supply those "reflections in the soul" that came from an actual experience in some ways comparable with that of the Ancient Mariner.

AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

1

I SUGGEST that when Coleridge was writing *The Ancient Mariner* he had in mind, consciously or sub-consciously (and only a rash man would attempt to differentiate, where Coleridge is concerned), the story of John Newton. Moreover, I believe that Coleridge had read Newton's *Authentic Narrative,* and, probably, read it about the time he wrote *The Ancient Mariner.* As the poem "grew and grew and became important" the character of John Newton and, especially, the record of how that character changed during a sea experience overshadowed the jumble of images in the poet's mind—the albatross of Shelvocke, the dream of Cruickshank, the dice-players of Falkenberg, the Wandering Jew and Cain—and provided the moral which was hidden from "the cursed Barbauld crew",[84] and from the critic who talked lightly of a new love of animals in English poetry.

2

It is time to turn to the *Authentic Narrative.** An entry in Newton's unpublished diary on the 28th of September 1762 reads:

> finished to-day the brief account of the Lord's gracious dealings with me. ... I pray God this little sketch may animate those who shall peruse it to praise the exceeding riches of His goodness to an unworthy wretch.

*** Copies of *Authentic Narrative* are not easily obtained, so extracts of the relevant letters are printed as an appendix, pages 69 to 79.**

The "brief account" was written in the form of eight letters addressed to a friend, who passed them on to the Rev. Thomas Haweis. Early in 1763 Haweis asked Newton to enlarge the narrative with more details. This was done, the eight letters becoming fourteen. Lord Dartmouth (who shortly afterwards became President of the Board of Trade) heard of the letters and asked for copies. In 1764 they appeared in book form.

The narrative has no supernatural element. Stripped of the moralising and pious sentiment common to such work at that time, it is a robust and truthful account of events, and of the reflection of those events in the soul of John Newton.

The early part of the *Authentic Narrative* tells of Newton's apostasy. Letters seven and eight describe the homeward passage of *The Greyhound,* early in the year 1748, after almost eighteen months' trading along the African coast in equatorial waters. At the time, Newton was only twenty-three years old, but he had been at sea a dozen years—in merchant ships trading to the Mediterranean, in the Royal Navy, and in a Slave ship. He was a kind of supercargo in *The Greyhound,* or to be precise, "volunteer and Captain's commander"; with the privileges of the Captain's cabin but no duties.

3

I hope I have made it clear that my hypothesis does not relate to the outward incidents and images of the poem, nevertheless it is desirable to mention some incidents in the voyage of *The Greyhound,* and we may as well point at the same time to images in the poem which

illustrate aptly Newton's narrative. Obviously some of these lines from *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* will illustrate other sea records, though I doubt if any other sea-story—fact or fiction—of comparable length with the *Authentic Narrative,* could be illustrated by Coleridge's poem so often and so suitably. Perhaps the nearest is *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Captain Thomas James,* which amounts to one hundred and forty pages.

(1) The *Narrative* says: "We sailed . . . to the banks of Newfoundland with the usual variations of wind and weather. . . . We left the banks with a hard gale of wind westerly, which pushed us fast homewards."

> *'Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,*
> *A Wind and Tempest strong!*
> *For days and weeks it play'd us freaks,*
> *Like Chaff we drove along.*

(2) *The Greyhound* nearly foundered, being "greatly out of repair, and very unfit to support stormy weather; the sails and cordage were likewise very much worn out."

> *The planks look warped, and see those sails,*
> *How thin they are and sere!*

(3) After the first violence of the storm "the wind abated" (a word Newton uses twice within half a dozen lines), "but the sails were mostly blown away so that we advanced but slowly even while the wind was fair."

> *For slow and slow that ship will go*
> *When the Marineris trance is abated.*

(4) No-one knew how far the ship was from land, and food was scarce. After several anxious days, "we were awakened by the joyful shouts of the watch proclaiming the sight of land. We were all soon raised at the sound. . . ."

> I *bit my arm and suck'd the blood*
> *And cry'd, A sail! a sail!*

5) Newton's comrades thought they saw some small islands but, "our fancied islands began to grow red from the approach of the sun, which soon rose just under it."

> *Ne dim ne red, like God's own head,*
> *The glorious Sun uprist:*

(6) "Though we could not see the land yet, we should soon, the wind hitherto continuing fair. But, alas! we were deprived of this hope likewise—that very day our fair wind subsided."

> *Down dropt the breeze, the Sails dropt down,*
> *Twos sad as sad could be;*

(7) "Our fair wind subsided into a calm." *The Greyhound* was:

> *As idle as a painted Ship*
> *Upon a painted Ocean.*

(8 But soon a contrary wind arose and drove the ship away from the land to a remote part of the sea off the Outer Hebrides. "It may indeed be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean. . . ."

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent Sea.

(9) The only food aboard *The Greyhound* was some salted cod-fish, uneatable unless taken with copious draughts of water. "We supposed we had six large butts of water ... we discovered that five were empty." It was almost a case of:

Water', water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Ne any drop to drink.

Four weeks after the ship was damaged in the great storm she got back to her own country—which incident ends letter eight of the *Authentic Narrative.* This is all we need recall of the outward events of *The Greyhound's* voyage. Let us turn to the far more important matter of what might be called the psychological fundamentals of the poem and the narrative.

CRIME AND REPENTANCE

I

THE story of the Ancient Mariner is of one who committed a crime, suffered as a result of his wickedness, repented and reformed. That is the main story, and my hypothesis is concerned with *(a)* the nature of the crime, *(b)* the attitude of the crew to the crime, *(c)* the repentance and *(d)* the effects of the repentance.

(a) The nature of the crime.

When Wordsworth and Coleridge were discussing the poem, they wanted a crime, and it was Wordsworth who recalled Shelvocke's account of how Captain Hatley shot "a disconsolate black albatross." The creature was of "the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet." It is amusing to find experts discussing if the Ancient Mariner shot a bird of the species *Diomedea Exulans* or if it was *Phoebetria Palpebrata Antarctica,* and, if the former, how the carcass could have been hung around the Mariner's neck.[35] Coleridge, of course, was not worrying about ornithology. He was concerned with the moral and spiritual meaning of his "mere" story, but it is worth noting that Hatley's albatross was a bird of ill-omen. It was Wordsworth who proposed that the killing of the bird should be avenged by "the tutelary spirits" of the South Seas. It has been suggested that Coleridge saw in Wordsworth's tutelary spirits something akin to neoplatonic daemons—creatures intermediate between gods and men, not ill disposed towards men.[88] He certainly had such daemons in mind

later in the poem when he wanted a supernatural agency to move the ship although "never a breeze did breathe"; and he put a spirit "under the keel nine fathom deep" to do the job—but for the crime he went rather beyond Wordsworth's animism. Coleridge's albatross was more than a bird of good omen, he brought immediate relief —the ice split, the helmsman steered successfully through, and a good wind sprang up. Moreover the bird was recognised by everyone as something more sacred than a neoplatonic daemon;

And an it were a Christian Soul,
We haird it in God's name.

Not in the name of Josephus or Michael Psellus, but in God's name. So the Ancient Mariner's crime was nothing less than the wilful destruction of a messenger from God. It was a crucifying of Christ; or at least something akin to Blasphemy as understood in Dr. Johnson's time—Johnson's Dictionary quotes Ayliffe thus: "*Blasphemy,* strictly and properly, is an offering of some indignity, or injury, unto God himself", and we know Coleridge liked to cite Johnson's definitions.[37] This is surely the significance of the lines:

Instead of the Cross the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

And the modern reader must remember how very real was the crime of blasphemy in the eighteenth century. Fielding placed this "detestable crime" before offences against the person of the King, "which person the law wisely holds to be sacred."[38]

In John Newton's *Authentic Narrative* there are many

passages relating to Newton's constant blasphemy in the Johnsonian sense. It would need several quotations to show adequately how the point is driven home again and again. A passage in Letter 7, relating to the months that Newton was aboard *The Greyhound,* will suffice:

> My whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer: not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reproved by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all circumspect in his expressions.

It will be seen, then, that there is a parallel between the crime of the Ancient Mariner and the crime of Newton. Incidentally if, as I suggest, Coleridge read the *Authentic Narrative,* the story of the boy Newton calling himself an infidel must have reminded him of his own school-days. Coleridge tells how, when he was thirteen, he told his Headmaster he did not want to be a clergyman "because to tell you the truth, sir, I am an infidel. For this he flogged me wisely, as I think—soundly, as I know."[39]

(b) The attitude of the crew to the crime.

In both the poem and the narrative the respective crews applaud the crime when all goes well but condemn it when their ship gets into difficulties.

The Ancient Marinei's shipmates first condemned:

> *And I had done an hellish thing*
> *And it would work 'em woe;*
> *For all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird*
> *That made the Breeze to blow.*

but when the fog cleared:

Then all averred, I had kill'd the Bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twos right, said they, such birds to slay
That bring the fog and mist.

In one of the early letters of the *Authentic Narrative,* Newton tells how his blasphemy made him a leader of the crew of the ship in which he served, and in Letter 7, just before the description of the storm, there are two anecdotes in which Newton is the accepted ringleader—the inference being that he was a leader because the men admired his daring blasphemy. But when *The Greyhound* was in distress, then Newton was blamed as a kind of Jonah:

> The Captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching me as the sole cause of the calamity and was confident, that if I was thrown overboard, they should be preserved from death ... the continual repetition of this in my ears gave me much uneasiness.

Ah! Wel-a-dayl what evil looks
Had I from old andyoung!

We cannot, however, ignore the suggestion that Captain James of *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Captain Thomas James* (London, 1633), looked upon himself as the cause of all the miseries his crew were enduring, and that his record may have influenced Coleridge.[40]

(c) The repentance.

What might be called the incident of repentance is the turning point of the Mariner's story, as it is of Newton's narrative. When the Mariner's shipmates lie dead upon the rotting deck, he suffers from loneliness:

Alone, alone, all all alone,
Alone on the wide wide Sea
And Christ would take no pity on
My soul in agony.

Christ, be it noted, for in later editions it was changed to "never a saint". In this Christ-forsaken state the Mariner "despiseth the creatures of the calm", to quote the later gloss:

The many men, so beautiful,
And they all dead did lie!
And, a million million slimy things
Liv'd on—and so did I.

He wanted to pray:

/ looked to Heaven, and try'd to pray;

but was prevented from doing so:

But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came and made
My heart as dry as dust.

So leading up to the actual moment of repentance we find first a sense of being Christ-forsaken, then a desire to pray, and, thirdly, an inability to do so.

There is nothing of this in Shelvocke. Captain Hatley suffered no remorse after killing his albatross. But the same sequence comes in the *Authentic Narrative.*

First, the Christ-forsaken state of mind. There were few books aboard *The Greyhound,* but one was Thomas a Kempis *On the Imitation of Christ.* "The day before our catastrophe," says the narrative, "I felt a thought pass through my mind, which I had long been a stranger to." Newton began to read *On the Imitation of Christ* "as I had

often done before, to pass away the time; but I had still read it with the same indifference as if it was entirely a romance," Then came the desire to pray, "While I was reading this time, an involuntary suggestion arose in my mind. What if these things should be true? I could not bear the force of the inference as it related to myself, and therefore shut the book presently. My conscience witnessed against me once more." But, thirdly, conscience was set aside by a wicked whisper, "I put an abrupt end to these reflections by joining in some vain conversation or other that came in the way."

The actual moment of repentance, the climax of the poem and the turning point in Newton's life, came unexpectedly. To the Ancient Mariner it came during a calm, to Newton it came at the height of the storm.

The Ancient Mariner is watching the water-snakes:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gusht from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware!

It was an *involuntary* prayer—if theologians will allow such a phrase.

When *The Greyhound* was almost overwhelmed by the storm-blast, Newton says, "the conviction I was so unwilling to receive was deeply impressed upon me." The narrative, having made clear the Christ-forsaken state of Newton's mind, his desire for repentance (i.e. his having *wanted to* pray) and his deflection by "vain conversation", comes to the climax:

About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labour, I went to speak with the captain, who was busied elsewhere; and just as I was returning from him, I said, almost without meaning:

"If this will not do, the Lord have mercy on us." This (though spoken with little reflection) was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for the space of many years.

The first desire—the first prayer—for mercy was for Newton's shipmates as well as for himself (though the narrative is concerned with a personal experience) and that it was as involuntary as the Ancient Mariner's blessing of the water-snakes is clear from the phrase, "I said almost without meaning", and by the sentence that comes immediately afterwards, "I was instantly struck with my own words."

It is significant, too, that Newton emphasised, by repetition, the involuntary nature of his prayer—"I said almost without meaning" is followed by "though spoken with little reflection". Coleridge does exactly the same thing. He emphasises by repetition the involuntary nature of the Ancient Mariner's prayer:

> *A spring of love gusht from my heart,*
> *And I bless'd them unawarel*

is repeated:

> *Sure my kind saint took pity on me,*
> *And I blessed them unaware.*

Before leaving this turning point in the poem a reference must be made to another of Coleridge's works, *The Wanderings of Cain.* Coleridge explained that he and Wordsworth were to write this poem jointly and that when collaboration failed, *"The Ancient Mariner* was written instead."[41] it is difficult to see any connection between the two works except in the incidents of repentance. -Cain says to the ghost of Abel, "Abel, my brother, I would lament for thee, but that the spirit

within me is withered, and burnt up with extreme agony. ... I have prayed, and have not been heard; and how can I be afflicted more than I already am?" And the ghost of Abel replies, "O that thou hadst had pity on me as I will have pity on thee."

Unlike the Ancient Mariner and John Newton, Cain *can* pray, but his prayer is ineffective because his spirit is withered by extreme agony. He is thinking all the time of his own affliction. This is some way from the involuntary prayer of *The Ancient Mariner*', but it is just the sort of basic idea which, under the influence of the story of Newton, might have blossomed into the far more profound notion of that poem.

(d) The effects of repentance.

The effects of repentance were fourfold:

(i) instantaneous, (2) those following hard upon the instantaneous, (3) the medium-term and, (4) the long-term. This division applies both to the poem and to the narrative, though the first two are not so sharply divided in the narrative.

(1) The instantaneous effect of the Ancient Mariner's benediction was, "the self-same moment I could pray". And Newton's account of his involuntary cry for mercy is followed with, "I was instantly struck with my own words. ... I purposed an immediate reformation".

(2) The Mariner's prayer is followed quickly with:

Andfrom my neck so free
The Albatrossfell off, and sank
like lead into the sea.

He is relieved, at once, of the outward symbol of his crime. Without any further effort on his part the dead Albatross falls off, not merely on to the deck, but is completely and finally removed, where it can never trouble him again. The *Authentic Narrative* makes it very clear that this incident of repentance was the turning point in Newton's life, "a day much to be remembered by me", but that his reformation was far from complete. What was so striking, however, was that immediately:

> I was quite freed from the habit of swearing which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man. . . . From this period I could no more make a mock at bin or jest with holy things.

His swearing—the outward expression of his blasphemy—was sloughed completely and finally. It left never a trace

(3) The medium-term effect on the Ancient Mariner is told in the lines:

> 0 *sweeter than the Marriage-feast,*
> *'Tis sweeter far to me,*
> *To walk together to the Kirk*
> *With a goodly company.*
>
> *To walk together to the Kirk,*
> *And all together pray. . . .*

And John Newton, when *The Greyhound* came safely to land, did the same. The narrative says, "While the ship was refitting . . . I went twice-a-day to the prayers at church."

(4) The long-term effect on the Ancient Mariner was life-long penance by confessing his crime:

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale
And then it left me free. . , .

He was compelled to tell the tale of his crime and teach by his own example:

Since then at an uncertain hour,
Now oftimes and now fewer,
That anguish comes and makes me tell
My ghastly aventure,

When *The Ancient Mariner* was published, John Newton was the much respected vicar of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City of London. He was widely known in religious and literary circles and many knew the story of his early apostacy. When he was more than eighty years old, someone tactfully suggested he should give up public preaching. "I cannot stop," he replied. "What! shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"[42] This remark (made after *The Ancient Mariner* was published) is characteristic of the man's longpenance of public confession from the time of his experience aboard *The Greyhound;* but let us consider only the evidence of the *Authentic Narrative*. First, it is clear that the narrative itself is a confession which is meant to teach by example. It is prefaced with words from a psalm, "I am as a wonder unto many", and in Letter I another psalm is quoted, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God and 1 will declare what he hath done for my soul."

These words are the invitation to the reader to

hear what was truly as ghastly an "aventure" as you can imagine without supernatural dice-playing daemons:

> *The wedding-guest sate on a stone,*
> *He cannot chase but hear:*
> *And thus spake on that ancyent man,*
> *The bright-eyed Marinere.*

In Letter 13 of the narrative there is the story of Job Lewis, a former shipmate whom Newton had "infected with libertine principles." The narrative says:

> I was very desirous to repair the mischief I had done him. I gave him a plain account of the manner and reason of my change … he would remind me that I was the very first person who had given him an idea of his liberty. This occasioned me many mournful reflections.

Newton, who was then in command of a ship, actually took Lewis with him to sea,

> not so much as to serve him in his business, as to have an opportunity of debating the point with him at leisure; and I hoped, in the course of my voyage, my arguments, example and prayers, might have some good effect on him.

Indeed the words Coleridge used in the gloss to his poem fit Newton's case very closely, "And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony coastraineth him to travel from land to land"-[1]—in the case of the old African Blasphemer, 'from pulpit to pulpit all over England'—"and to teach by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth."

2

When Coleridge was writing *Aids to Reflection* he talked of calling it "Extracts from Bishop Leighton," and Charles Lamb observed: "I am confident there will be plenty of good notes in it—more of Bishop Coleridge than Leighton, I hope."[43] Perhaps in the character of the Ancient Mariner there is more of Coleridge than John Newton, for a few weeks after the poem was finished Coleridge wrote, "prayer and distinct confession I find most serviceable to my spiritual health."[44] Nor can we overlook the obvious psychological development in all such stories—after crime, repentance; after repentance, restitution. Nevertheless the parallel of the poem and the narrative is so close as to be capable of expression in tabular form, thus:

The Ancient Mariner	*Authentic Narrative*
THE CRIME	
Wilful destruction of albatross—who has been hail'd in God's name as a Christian Soul.	Blasphemy—an indignity, or injury, unto God himself,
THE ATTITUDE OF THE CREW	
1. Denounced the mariner for killing the bird that brought them favour-wind.	i. Accepted Newton as leader.
2. Approved the crime when the fog cleared.	2. Denounced Newton as a Jonah—the cause of their troubles.

LEADING UP TO REPENTANCE

(a) *Sense of being Christ-forsaken*

(a) *Sense of being Christ-forsaken*

no pity on my soul in agony."

Christ as if entirely a romance.

(b) *A desire to pray*

2. "I look'd to Heaven, and try'd to pray."

2. "An involuntary suggestion arose in my mind 'What if these things should be true?' "

(c) *Inability to pray*

3. "A wicked whisper."

3. "Some vain conversetion."

THE MOMENT OF REPENTANCE

1. "I bless'd them unaware."
2. Emphasised by repetition: "Sure my kind Saint took pity on me, And I bless'd them unaware."

i. "I said, almost without meaning, the Lord have mercy on us."
2. Emphasised by repetition: "though spoken with little reflection."

EFFECTS OF REPENTANCE

(a) *Instantaneous*

"The self-same moment I could pray."

"I proposed an immediate reformation."

(b) *Following bard upon the instantaneous*

The albatross (symbol of the crime) fell off and sank into the sea.

Freed at once and for ever from deep-rooted habit of swearing — the outward expression of his blasphemy.

(c) *Medium-term effect*

"To walk together to the Kirk."

"I went twice a day to the prayers at church."

(d) *Long-term effect*

Throughout his life constrained to teach *by his own example,* by telling "my ghastly aventure."

Throughout his life taught by public confession as in the *Authentic Narrative.*

I am aware that other stories of sinners who became saints may be analysed to show close resemblance in some points; for example the case of John Newton and *Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of the Honourable Col. James Gardiner:,* but is there another that comes so near *The Ancient Mariner?* If so it would be interesting to see the comparison in detail.

COLERIDGE AND JOHN NEWTON

I

LET us now consider if it is probable that Coleridge had any knowledge of John Newton and his story, ou had read the *Authentic Narrative* before the 23rd of March 1798, when his poem was finished. In the first place it is difficult to imagine that Coleridge could have *not* known of Newton; but, since it is essential to my hypothesis that he should have known the story of Newton's early life in some detail, it is not irrelevant to mention points of common interest:

(a) Hannah More held Newton in high regard. She said of his *Cardiphonia,* "I like it prodigiously."[45] One of Newton's unpublished note-books records a visit to Cowslip Green in 1791. We know that Coleridge intended to dedicate one of his first works, *The Fall of Robespierre,* written in 1794, to Hannah More.[46]

(b) In the year 1766 Newton wrote to a Norfolk clergyman, named Bowman, praising enthusiastically the works of Archbishop Leighton. This letter was published in 1780 in the popular volume of Newton's letters, entitled *Cardiphonia.* Amongst other points mentioned by Newton were the following: (I) an opinion of Burnet on Leighton's work; (2) the importance of Leighton's commentary on St. Peter's epistles; (3) Newton's opinion that Leighton "United simplicity . . . with all the captivating beauties of style and language"; (4) the following reference to *Praelectiones Theologiae,* "I believe this book is scarce; I set the highest value on it. … I could wish it translated to preserve the beauty and spirit of the original." Many years later Coleridge wrote

to John Murray[47], praising Leighton's works and mentioning (i) Burnet's opinion; (2) the importance of Leighton's commentary on St. Peter's epistles; (3) his own opinion that "Leighton's happiest ornaments of style are made to appear as efforts on the part of the author to express himself *less* ornamentally, more plainly. . . ." (4) a proposal that he should translate a selection of Leighton's work. This was done, and was published as *Aids to Reflection.* It is not suggested that Coleridge's good opinion of Leighton came from Newton, though it is quite possible that Coleridge read *Cardiphonia* and nodded acquiescence. It is, however, evidence of another common interest.

(C) In 1788 Newton published *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade,* an indictment of slavery which attracted wide notice because of its restrained argument and first-hand evidence. Incidentally, in this admirable pamphlet what' may be called the Ancient-Mariner-strain in Newton comes out: "If my testimony should not be necessary or serviceable," he writes, "yet, perhaps, I am bound in conscience to take shame to myself by a public confession.[48] Coleridge was especially interested in the Abolition movement. In 1792 he wrote a Greek prize ode on the Slave Trade. In 1795 he lectured in Bristol "by particular desire" on "the Slave Trade and the duties that result from its continuance.[49]" In 1796 he had a long article in *The Watchman* No. IV, which shows his familiarity with the arguments for and against slavery and with the evidence delivered before the House of Commons. In the same issue there is a report of a parliamentary debate in which there was a majority of four *against* Abolition, to Coleridge's evident disgust. The next issue of *The Watchman* begins with an anti-slavery

letter from Thomas Poole, dated from Stowey, In *Religious Musings,* written three years before *The Ancient Mariner,* Coleridge condemns the Slave Trade thus:

> *. . . where more hideous Trade*
> *Loud-laughing packs his bales of human anguish.*

During 1795 Coleridge borrowed from the Bristol library Clarkson's Essay on *Impolity of African Slave Trade.*™ He surely knew of the work of The Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, founded by Clarkson and Wilberforce in 1787, and of the influence Newton had over Wilberforce in this matter.[51]

There is a remote possibility that Coleridge knew Newton's *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* but did not recognise it as the work of the author of the *Authentic Narrative,* for the first edition of the latter was published as *An Authentic Narrative of some Remarkable and Interesting Particulars in the Life of——————————, communicated in a Series of Letters to The Reverend Mr. Haweis.* But by the last decade of the century the authorship was very widely known.

(d) In December 1796, Coleridge wrote John Thelwall about "the divine chit-chat of Cowper."[52] Coleridge certainly knew some of Cowper's poems by this time; he quoted *The Task* in a letter to his brother George a few days after finishing *The Ancient Mariner.*™ He must have seen Newton's introduction to Cowper's earlier poems with its Ancient Mariner-like confessions, "we must lose the remembrance of what we once were. . . . This we know for it has been our own state, and therefore we know how to commiserate it in others'[54] It is unlikely Coleridge did not know of the long Cowpef-Newton friendship.

the Crypt at Supper tonight. If I can I will bring a copy of my histo-
rical letters down with me, but am not sure. I believe notwithstand-
ing all my reluctance & gainsaying my friends will prevail to have
them in print soon after I am in Priests orders, I have nobody that in
any measure joyns on my side to prevent their publication but Lady
Dartmouth, & she seems to be giving ground already to yield the point, she
has not yet read those I wrote to Mr Haweis, when she has I expect she
will be of the mind with the rest. Mr Brewer tho you know him to be
cautious & prudent is very warm for it. After all as you are the Heroine
of the Tragedy it is but right you should have a share in the consultati-
on. I hope we shall soon have an opportunity of talking that & other mat-
ters over. Haweis says the letters are wrote wonderfully well, not inferior
in language & manner to the Spectators, & I verily believe they would sell
as well as Lady Mary Wortleys the story is so romantic & uncommon & at
the same time so interesting & instructive

As to our goods Mr Browns advice is to send no more than we shall
immediately & absolutely want. He says there are many & frequent Sales in
the Neighbourhood where we might supply ourselves by degrees to greater
advantage. But more of this hereafter —

It is now midnight I will therefore put up my pen, breathe out a
short prayer for you, & try to dream of you. Good night my dearest The Lord
guard you while asleep & guide you when awake, & lead & feed &
keep you every moment. My love to Sammy Nelly & all friends

I am most affectionately
Your obliged husband
John Newton

just 12 a clock
St. James Street

PART OF A LETTER FROM JOHN NEWTON TO HIS WIFE ("DEAREST CHARMING POLLY") about the possible publication of his "historical letters", afterwards known as the Authentic Narrative.

2

The Cambridge History of English Literature does not even mention the *Authentic Narrative.* Lord David Cecil described it as "a fusty, forbidding little book more than half of it pious platitude."[65] But he added, "it enshrines within its stilted sentences one of the most fantastic fairy tales that was ever the true story of a human being." Coleridge was quite accustomed to dull theology and piety and would have seen beyond the fustiness some vigorous English and an Odyssey of his own century. However that may be, and however "forbidding" the *Authentic Narrative* is to modern readers, there can be no doubt that it was read by Coleridge's contemporaries. Newton, writing to his wife before the *Authentic Narrative* was published, told her that Haweis considered, "the Letters are wrote wonderfully well, not inferior in Language or manner to the Spectators," and he added his own opinion, "I verily believe they would sell as well as Lady Mary Wortley's, the story is so romantic and uncommon and at the same time so interesting and instructive."[56] Nor was this merely the optimism that is so necessary to an author. *Letters of the Rt. Hon. Lady M.. y W. .y M. . . . e written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa to persons of distinction,* published a year before Newton's book, was, indeed, very successful and justify their author's "niche in the house of fame,"[67] but in his own day Newton's *Authentic Narrative* was as popular. A reprint was called for at once, and a third edition in the following year. By the time *The Ancient Mariner* appeared, the *Authentic Narrative* had gone into eight English editions. Newton's works had been pub-

lished also in New York, Burlington, U.S.A., Dublin and Germany—and, very likely, elsewhere. "I have read almost everything," said Coleridge in 1797; it is hard to believe that such a popular book as the *Authentic Narrative* had not come his way.

THE WORDSWORTHS AND THE *AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE*

But we can cap all conjectures with evidence which suggests strongly that Coleridge read Newton's narrative, or had it brought to his notice by William or Dorothy Wordsworth, between the i3th of November 1797 and the 23rd of March 1798.

When Professor E. de Selincourt was preparing his great work on Wordsworth's *Prelude* he came across a passage in one of Dorothy Wordsworth's early notebooks which he took to be a transcription of one of her brother's poems. Against the passage was a name in poor writing, which de Selincourt read as Nelson—a likely reading since the passage related to seafaring. A few years afterwards, the late Dr. W. T. Cairns was struck with an incident recorded in Letter 5 of the *Authentic Narrative.* It relates to the time when Newton was virtually the slave of a man named Clow who lived on the Guinea Coast with an African woman, known in Newton's unpublished journal as P.I. This woman, in the absence of Clow, ill-treated Newton so that he nearly starved. The paragraph which interested Cairns reads thus:

> Though destitute of food and clothing, depressed to a degree beyond common wretchedness, I could sometimes collect my mind to mathematical studies. I had bought Barrow's Euclid at Plymouth; it was the only volume I brought on shore; it was always with me, and I used to take it to remote corners of the island by the seaside, and draw my *diagrams* with a long stick upon the sand. Thus I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feeling; —and thus, without any other assistance, I made myself in a good measure master of the first six books of Euclid.

Dr. John W. Oliver hearing Cairns quote this passage from the *Authentic Narrative* drew his attention to the following passage in the *Prelude*[58]
followingpassageinthe*Prelude*[58]*AndasIhavereadofonebyshipwreckthrown*

> *With fellow Sufferers whom the waves had spared*
> *Upon a region uninhabited*
> *An island of the Deep., who having brought*
> *To land a single Volume and no more,*
> *A treatise of Geometry, was used,*
> *Although of food and clothing destitute,*
> *And beyond common wretchedness depressed,*
> *To part from company and take this book,*
> *Then first a self-taught pupil in those truths,*
> *To spots remote and corners of the Isle*
> *By the sea side, and draw his diagrams*
> *With a long stick upon the sand, and thus*
> *Did oft beguile his sorrow, and almost*
> *Forget his feeling.*[58]

The name scribbled by Dorothy Wordsworth to look like "Nelson" is, obviously, "Newton".[69]

This Cairns-Oliver observation seems to have been made independently by Professor R. D. Havens in his study of The Prelude, *The Mind of a Poet,* published at Baltimore in 1941. He points out "two slight mistakes" made by Wordsworth—Newton had not been shipwrecked and had no fellow-sufferers. Seeing how closely Wordsworth's poetry follows Newton's prose, we could perhaps allow him these "mistakes" as poetic licence, but Professor Havens is no doubt correct in thinking that Wordsworth "followed an extract" made by Dorothy, at an earlier date, without realising that it was a verbatim copy from the *Authentic Narrative:*

"Wordsworth would hardly have taken some seven and a half lines of *The Prelude* almost word for word from another work, consciously and without acknowledgments."[60]

If we accept Professor Havens' suggestion, it is evident that the extract from the *Authentic Narrative* was first made some considerable time before the version read to Coleridge on his return from Malta during the winter of 1806-7;at least long enough for Wordsworth and Dorothy to have so far forgotten the original as not to notice the verbal similarity. But Havens calls attention also to a similar thought in *The Excursion.*[61]

In describing the early life of The Wanderer, Wordsworth refers to:

books that explain
The purer elements of truth involved
In lines and numbers, and, by charm severe,
preserve the mind
Busy in solitude and poverty [62]

(The Excursion, Book I, lines 252-7.)

As already mentioned, we know the Alfoxden Notebook, belonging to the period between the 20th of January and the 5th of March 1798, contains: "drafts of passages for *The Old Cumberland Beggar,* a version of Prelude IV 450-70, and lines descriptive of the Wanderer, some of them afterwards incorporated in *Excursion I*, others adapted to *The Prelude*"[63] Also, *The Prelude* absorbed some material which had been intended for *The Recluse,* a poem on which Wordsworth was working between January and June 1798 and which later became *The Excursion*[64]

From these facts it is reasonable, surely, to suppose that Wordsworth, amongst the travel books he found "essential" for "present Labours", came across Newton's *Authentic Narrative*', was struck with the passage in which the old sailor described his solitude and poverty and how he could collect his mind to mathematical studies, and got Dorothy to copy it into one of her note-books. While the passage was still fresh in his mind he used it to describe his Wanderer. The phrase, "preserve the mind in solitude and poverty," is just sufficiently different from Newton's actual words to confirm the source to those who already suspect it, without there being the slightest need for any general acknowledgement. Later, but not much later, when Wordsworth was working on *The Prelude,* book VI, he came across the whole passage in Dorothy's note-book, remembered the incident in Newton's narrative, but not having the original at hand assumed—as Professor Havens suggests—that it was his own early version of Newton's experience. It is relevant to note that the authorised text of *The Prelude* of 1850, is substantially the same as the earlier version I have quoted, but improved by minor changes, such as "staff" for "stick" (which was Newton's word), and the "island of the Deep" (which was, in fact, the largest of the three Plantane Islands) has become "a desert coast".

2

So while *The Ancient Mariner* was being written, Wordsworth was actually making use of Newton's *Authentic Narrative* and Dorothy was copying the para-

graph from Letter 5 which he found so striking. We know, too, that Coleridge was reading what Wordsworth was writing, for in a letter to Joseph Cottle, dated the 8th of March 1798, he says, "The Giant Wordsworth—God love him! . . . has written more than 1,200 lines of a blank verse, superior, I hesitate not to aver, to anything in our language which any way resembles it."[66] Writing of this time Walter Pater says, "Coleridge's philosophical speculations do really turn on the ideas which underlay Wordsworth's poetical practice . . . that friendship with Wordsworth . . . comprehended a very close intellectual sympathy."[66]

The Ancient Mariner "grew and grew and became important", and all the time the two young poets were discussing theories of poetry and everything connected with their art; and Dorothy was taking long walks with "Mr. Coleridge", and he was reciting to her lines from his unfinished masterpiece. "Though we were three persons," said Coleridge, his mind running on Unitarianism, "there was but one God"; and I find it hard to believe that one member of the trinity did not know of the narrative which so much interested the other two.

3

In conclusion, it is relevant to ask how anything significant can have been overlooked so long, where so many critics have searched diligently. I should explain, therefore, that for several years I have been at work on a biography of John Newton, having at my disposal diaries, journals and many letters that have not

been published. None of this new material is, of itself, germane to my hypothesis, but it was while I was immersed in Newton's story and character that Coleridge's Ancient Mariner pushed himself forward, so to speak; and obliged me to set aside the biography until I had made this short study.

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THE RIME

OF THE

ANCYENT MARINERE

IN

SEVEN PARTS

ARGUMENT

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

I

It is an ancient Marinere,
And he stoppeth one of three:
"By thy long grey beard and thy glittering eye
"Now wherefore stoppest me?

"The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide
"And I am next of kin;
"The Guests are met, the Feast is set,—
"May'st hear the merry din."

But still he holds the wedding-guest—
There was a Ship, quoth he—
"Nay, if thou'st got a laughsome tale,
"Marinere! come with me."

He holds him with his skinny hand,
Quoth he, there was a Ship—
"Now get thee hence, thou grey-beard Loon)
"Or my Staff shall make thee skip."

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The wedding-guest stood still
And listens like a three year's-child;
The Marinere hath his will.

The wedding-guest sate on a stone,
He cannot chuse but hear:
And thus spake on that ancyent man,
The bright-eyed Marinere.

The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd—
Merrily did we drop
Below the Kirk, below the Hill,
Below the Light-house top.

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the Sea came he:
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the Sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon—
The wedding-guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The Bride hath pac'd into the Hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry Minstralsy.

The wedding-guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot chuse but hear:
And thus spake on that ancyent Man,
The bright-eyed Marinere.

Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,
A Wind and Tempest strong!
For days and weeks it play'd us freaks—
Like Chaff we drove along.

Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,
And it grew wond'rous cauld:
And Ice mast-high came floating by
As green as Emerauld.

And thro' the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen;
Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken—
The Ice was all between.

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,
The Ice was all around:
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—
Like noises of a swound.

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the Fog it came;
And an it were a Christian Soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

The Marineres gave it biscuit-worms,
And round and round it flew:
The Ice did split with a Thunder-fit;
The Helmsman steer'd us thro'.

And a good south wind sprung up behind,
The Albatross did follow;
And every day for food or play
Came to the Marinere's hollo!

In mist or cloud on mast or shroud
It perch'd for vespers nine,
Whiles all the night thro' fog-smoke white
Glimmer'd the white moon-shine.

"God save thee, ancyent Marinere!
"From the fiends that plague thee thus—•
"Why look'st thou so?"—with my Cross-bow
I shot the Albatross.

The Sun came up upon the right,
Out of the Sea came he;
And broad as a weft upon the left
Went down into the Sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet Bird did follow
Ne any day for food or play
Came to the Marinere's hollo!

And I had done an hellish thing
    And it would work 'em woe:
For all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird
    That made the Breeze to blow.

Ne dim ne red, like God's own head,
    The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird
    That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay
    That bring the fog and mist.

The breezes blew, the white foam flew,
    The furrow follow'd free:
We were the first that ever burst
    Into that silent Sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the Sails dropt down,
    'Twas sad as sad could be
And we did speak only to break
    The silence of the Sea.

All in a hot and copper sky
    The bloody sun at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
    No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,
    We stuck, ne breath ne motion,
As idle as a painted Ship
    Upon a painted Ocean.

Water, water, every where
    And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
    Ne any drop to drink.

The very deeps did rot: O Christl
That ever this should be!
Yes, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy Sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The Death-fires danc'd at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green and blue and white.

And some in dreams assured were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the Land of Mist and Snow.

And every tongue thro' utter drouth
Was wither'd at the root;
We could not speak no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah wel-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young;
Instead of the Cross the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

III

I saw a something in the Sky
No bigger than my fist;
At first it seem'd a little speck
And then it seem'd a mist:
It mov'd and mov'd, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it ner'd and ner'd;
And, an it dodg'd a water-sprite,
It plung'd and tack'd and veer'd.

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd
      Ne could we laugh, ne wail:
Then while thro' drouth all dumb they stood
I bit my arm and suck'd the blood
      And cry'd, A sail! a sail!

With throat unslak'd, with black lips bak'd
      Agape they hear'd me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin
And all at once their breath drew in
      As they were drinking all.

She doth not tack from side to side—
      Hither to work us weal
Withouten wind, withouten tide
      She steddies with upright keel.

The western wave was all a flame,
      The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
      Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
      Betwixt us and the Sun.

And strait the Sun was fleck'd with bars
      (Heaven's mother send us grace)
As if thro' a dungeon grate he peer'd
      With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
      How fast she neres and neres!
Are those *her* Sails that glance in the Sun
      Like restless gossameres?

Are those *her* naked ribs, which fleck'd
      The sun that did behind them peer?
And are those two, all the crew,
      That woman and her fleshless Pheere?

His bones were black with many a crack,
All black and bare, I ween;
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust
Of mouldy damps and charnel crust
They're patch'd with purple and green.

Her lips are red, *her* looks are free,
Her locks are yellow as gold:
Her skin is as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
Her flesh makes the still air cold.

The naked Hulk alongside came
And the Twain were playing dice;
"The Game is done! I've won, I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistled thrice.

A gust of wind sterte up behind
And whistled thro' his bones;
Thro' the holes of his eyes and the hole of his mouth
Half-whistles and half-groans.

With never a whisper in the Sea
Off darts the Spectre-ship;
While clombe above the Eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright Star
Almost atween the tips.

One after one by the horned Moon
(Listen O Stranger! to me)
Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang
And curs'd me with his ee.

Four times fifty living men,
With never a sigh or groan.
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump
They dropp'd down one by one.

Their souls did from their bodies fly,—
They fled to bliss or woe;
And every soul it pass'd me by,
Like the whiz of my Cross-bow.

IV

"I fear thee Ancyent Marinere!
"I fear thy skinny hand;
"And thou are long and lank and brown
"As is the ribb'd Sea-sand.

"I fear thee and they glittering eye
"And thy skinny hand so brown—"
Fear not, fear not, thou wedding guest!
This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all all alone
Alone on the wide wide Sea;
And Christ would take no pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men so beautiful,
And they all dead did lie!
And a million million slimy things
Liv'd on—and so did I.

I look'd upon the rotting Sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I look'd upon the eldritch deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I look'd to Heaven, and try'd to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came and made
My heart as dry as dust.

I clos'd my lids and kept them close,
    Till the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
    And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
    Ne rot, ne reek did they;
The look with which they look'd on me,
    Had never pass'd away.

An orphan's curse would drag to Hell
    A spirit from on high:
But O! more horrible than that
    Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights I saw that curse,
    And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky
    And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up
    And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemock'd the sultry main
    Like morning frosts spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway
    A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship
    I watch'd the water-snakes:
They mov'd in tracks of shining white;
And when they rear'd, the elfish light
    Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
    I watch'd their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black
They coil'd and swam; and every track
    Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gusht from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I bless'd them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

V

0 sleep, it is a gentle thing,
Belov'd from pole to pole!
To Mary-queen the praise be yeven
She sent the gentle sleep from heaven
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck
That had so long remain'd,
1 dreamt that they were fill'd with dew
And when I awoke it rain'd.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams
And still my body drank.

I mov'd and could not feel my limbs,
I was so light, almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessed Ghost.

The roaring wind! it roar'd far off,
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air bursts into life,
    And a hundred fire-flags sheen
To and fro they are hurried about;
And to and fro and in and out
    The stars dance on between.

The coming wind doth roar more loud;
    The sails do sigh, like sedge:
The rain pours down from one black cloud
    And the Moon is at its edge.

Hark! Hark! the thick black cloud is cleft,
    And the Moon is at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning falls with never a jag
    A river steep and wide.

The strong wind reach'd the ship: it roar'd
    And dropp'd down, like a stone!
Beneath the lightning and the moon
    The dead men gave a groan.

They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,
    Ne spake, ne mov'd their eyes:
It had been strange, even in a dream
    To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steerd, the ship mov'd on;
    Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The Marineres all 'gan work the ropes,
    Where they were wont to do:
They rais'd their limbs like lifeless tools—
    We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son
    Stood by me knee to knee:
The body and I pull'd at one rope,
    But he said nought to me—
And I quak'd to think of my own voice
    How frightful it would be!

The day-light dawn'd—they dropped their arms,
And cluster'd round the mast:
Sweet sounds rose slowly thro' their mouths
And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the sun:
Slowly the sounds came back again
Now mix'd, now one by one.

Sometimes a dropping from the sky
I heard the Lavrock sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are
How they seem'd to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning,

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceas'd: yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Listen, O listen, thou Wedding-guest!
"Marinere! thou hast thy will:
"For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make
"My body and soul to be still."

Never sadder tale was told
To a man of woman born:
Sadder and wiser thou wedding-guestl
Thou'lt rise to-morrow morn.

Never sadder tale was heard
By a man of woman born:
The Marineres all return'd to work
As silent as beforne.

The Marineres all 'gan pull the ropes,
But look at me they n'old:
Thought I, I am as thin as air—
They cannot me behold.

Till noon we silently sail'd on
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
Slowly and smoothly went the ship
Mov'd onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep
From the land of mist and snow
The spirit slid: and it was He
That made the Ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune
And the Ship stood still also.

The sun right up above the mast
Had fix'd her to the ocean:
But in a minute she 'gan stir
With a short uneasy motion—
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

Then, like a pawing horse let go, .
She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell into a swound.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
But ere my living life return'd,
I heard and in my soul discern'd
Two voices in the air,

"Is it he?" quoth one, "Is this the man?
"By him who died on cross,
"With his cruel bow he lay'd full low
"The harmless Albatross.

"The spirit who 'bideth by himself
"In the land of mist and snow,
"He lov'd the bird that lov'd the man
"Who shot him with his bow."

The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honey-dew:
Quoth he "the man hath penance done,
And penance more will do."

VI

First Voice

"But tell me, tell me! speak again,
"Thy soft response renewing—
"What makes that ship drive on so fast?
"What is the Ocean doing?"

Second Voice

"Still as a Slave before his Lord,
"The Ocean hath no blast:
"His great bright eye most silently
"Up to the moon is cast—

"If he may know which way to go,
"For she guides him smooth or grim.
"See, brother, see! how graciously
"She looketh down on him,"

First Voice

"But why drives on that ship so fast
"Withouten wave or wind?"

Second Voice

"The air is cut away before,
    "And closes from behind.

"Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high,
    "Or we shall be belated:
"For slow and slow that ship will go,
    "When the Marinere's trance is abated."

I woke, and we were sailing on
    As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;
    The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,
    For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fix'd on me their stony eyes
    That in the moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
    Had never pass'd away:
I could not draw my een from theirs
    Ne turn them up to pray.

And in its time the spell was snapt,
    And I could move my een:
I look'd far-forth, but little saw
    Of what might else be seen.

Like one, that on a lonely road
    Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turn'd round, walks on
    And turns no more his head:
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
    Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breath'd a wind on me,
    Ne sound ne motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea
    In ripple or in shade.

It rais'd my hair, it fann'd my cheek,
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sail'd softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

0 dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the Hill? Is this the Kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the Harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
"O let me be awake, my God!
"Or let me sleep alway!"

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay
And the shadow of the moon.

The moonlight bay was white all o'er
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
Like as of torches came.

A little distance from the prow
Those dark-red shadows were;
But soon I saw that my own flesh
Was red as in a glare.

I turn'd my head in fear and dread,
And by the Holy rood,
The bodies had advanc'd, and now
Before the mast they stood.

They lifted up their stiff right arms,
    They held them strait and tight;
And each right arm burnt like a torch,
    A torch that's borne upright.
Their stony eye-balls glitter'd on
    In the red and smoky light.

I pray'd and turn'd my head away
    Forth looking as before.
There was no breeze upon the bay,
    No wave against the shore.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less
    That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steep'd in silentness
    The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,
    Till rising from the same
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
    In crimson colours came.

A little distance from the prow
    Those crimson shadows were:
I turn'd my eyes upon the deck—
    O Christ! what saw I there?

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat;
    And by the Holy rood
A man all light, a seraph-man,
    On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each wav'd his hand:
    It was a heavenly sight:
They stood as signals to the land,
    Every one a lovely light:

This seraph-band, each wav'd his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but O! the silence sank,
Like music on my heart.

Eftsones I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the pilot's cheer:
My head was turn'd perforce away
And I saw a boat appear.

Then vanish'd all the lovely lights;
The bodies rose anew:
With silent pace, each to his place,
Came back the ghastly crew.
The wind, that shade nor motion made,
On me alone it blew.

The pilot, and the pilot's boy
I heard them coming fast:
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy,
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

VII

This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the Sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears
He loves to talk with Marineres
That come from a far Countree.

He kneels at morn and noon and eve—
He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss, that wholly hides
The rotted old Oak-stump.

The Skiff-boat ne'rd: I heard them talk,
"Why, this is strange, I trow!
" Where are those lights so many and fair
"That signal made but now?

"Strange, by my faith!" the Hermit said—
"And they answer'd not our cheer.
"The planks look warp'd, and see those sails
"How thin they are and sere!
"I never saw aught like to them
Unless perchance it were

"The skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest brook along:
"When the Ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
"And the Owlet whoops to the wolf below
"That eats the she-wolf's young."

"Dear Lord! it has a fiendish look—"
(The Pilot made reply)
"I am a-fear'd."—"Push on, push onl"
Said the Hermit cheerily.

The Boat came closer to the Ship,
But I ne spake ne stirr'd!
The Boat came close beneath the Ship,
And strait a sound was heard!

Under the water it rumbled on,
Still louder and more dread:
It reach'd the Ship, it split the bay;
The Ship went down like lead.

Stunn'd by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote:
Like one that had been seven days drown'd
My body lay afloat:
But, swift as dreams, myself I found
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the Ship,
The boat spun round and round:
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

I mov'd my lips: the Pilot shriek'd
And fell down in a fit.
The Holy Hermit rais'd his eyes
And pray'd where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laugh'd loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro,
"Ha! ha!" quoth he—"full plain I see,
"The devil knows how to row."

And now all in mine own Countree
I stood on the firm land!
The Hermit stepp'd forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy Man!"
The Hermit cross'd his brow—
"Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say
"What manner of man art thou?"

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd
With a woeful agony,
Which forc'd me to begin my tale
And then it left me free.

Since then at an uncertain hour,
    Now oftimes and now fewer,
That anguish comes and makes me tell
    My ghastly adventure.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
    I have strange power of speech;
The moment that his face I see
I know the man that must hear me;
    To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!
    The Wedding-guests are there;
But in the Garden-bower the Bride
    And Bride-maids singing are:
And hark the little Vesper-bell
    Which biddeth me to prayer.

O Wedding-guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.

O sweeter than the Marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the Kirk
With a goodly company.

To walk together to the Kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
and Youths, and Maidens gay.

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou wedding-guest!
He prayeth well who loveth well,
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The Marinere, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone; and now the wedding-guest
Turn'd from the bridegroom's door.

He went, like one that hath been stunn'd
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man
He rose the morrow morn.

EXTRACTS from
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

Newton explains how the Narrative came to be written

letter i.

... I never gave any succinct account in writing, of the Lord's dealing with me, till very lately; for I was deterred, on the one hand, by the great difficulty of writing properly where self is concerned; on the other, by the ill use which persons of corrupt and perverse minds are often known to make of such instances. The Psalmist reminds us that a reserve in these things is proper, when he says, "Come unto me, all you that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul"; . . . . . . but, a few weeks since, I yielded to the judgment and request of a much respected friend, and sent him a relation at large, in a series of eight letters. The event has been, what I little expected; I wrote to one person, but my letters have fallen into many hands: amongst others, I find they have reached your notice; and instead of blaming me for being too tedious and circumstantial, which was the fault I feared I had committed, you are pleased to desire a still more distinct detail. . . . . . though you have signified your intentions of communicating what I send you to others, I must not, on this account, affect a conciseness and correctness which is not my natural talent, lest the whole should appear dry and constrained. I shall therefore (if possible) think only of you, and write with that confidence and freedom which your friendship and candour deserve. . . . . .

... I entreat the assistance of your prayers, that in this, and all my poor attempts, I may have a single eye to his glory, who was pleased to call me out of horrid darkness, into the marvellous light of the gospel.

Newton tells of his ill-behaviour after leaving H.M.S. Harwich, *and bow he became a leader of the ship's company.*

Letter 4.

. . . On board the *Harwich,* though my principles were totally corrupted, yet, as upon my first going there I was in some degree staid and serious, the remembrance of this made me ashamed of breaking out in that notorious manner I could otherwise have indulged. But now, entering amongst strangers, I could appear without disguise; and I well remember, that while I was passing from the one ship to the other, this was one reason why I rejoiced in the exchange, and one reflection I made upon the occasion, viz. that I now might be as abandoned as I pleased, without any controul: and, from this time, I was exceedingly vile indeed. . . . .

. . . I not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion. . . . . One natural consequence of this carriage was, a loss of the favour of my new captain; not that he was at all religious, or disliked my wickedness, any further than it affected his interest; but I became careless and disobedient: I did not please him, because I did not intend it. . . . . Besides, I had a little of that unlucky wit, which can do little more than multiply troubles and enemies to its possessor; and upon some imagined affront, I made a song, in which I ridiculed his ship, his designs, and his person, and soon taught it to the whole ship's company.

Newton is aboard The Greyhound.

Letter 7.

The ship I was now on board as a passenger, was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, dyers wood, and bees wax. It requires much longer time to collect a cargo of this sort than of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa, and continued there a year, or thereabouts, after I was with him; in which time we ranged the whole coast, as far as Cape Lopez, which lies about

a degree south of the Equinoctial, and more than a thousand miles farther from England than the place where I embarked. I have little to offer worthy your notice, in the course of this tedious voyage. I had no business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics: excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer: not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reproved by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all circumspect in his expressions. From the relation I at times made him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me that, to his great grief he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage, were owing to his having taken me into the vessel. . . . . .

... At length, our business finished, we left Cape Lopez, and after a few days stay at the island of Annabona, to lay in provisions, we sailed homeward about the beginning of January 1748. From Annabona to England, without touching at any intermediate port, is a very long navigation, perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if we include the circuits necessary to be made on account of the trade-winds. We sailed first westward, till near the coast of Brazil, then northward, to the banks of Newfoundland, with the usual variations of wind and weather, and without meeting any thing extraordinary. On these banks we stopped half a day to fish for cod; this was then chiefly for diversion; we had provisions enough, and little expected those fish (as it afterwards proved) would be all we should have to subsist on. We left the banks on the first of March, with a hard gale of wind, westerly, which pushed us fast homewards. I should here observe, that, with the length of this voyage, in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to support stormy weather; the sails and cordage were likewise very much worn out, and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed more dangerous. I think it was on the ninth of March, the

day before our catastrophe, that I felt a thought pass through my mind, which I had long been a stranger to. Among the few books we had on board, one was Stanhope's *Thomas d Kempis;* I carelessly took it up, as I had often done before, to pass away the time; but I had still read it with the same indifference as if it was entirely a romance. However, while I was reading this time, an involuntary suggestion arose in my mind: What if these things should be true? I could not bear the force of the inference, as it related to myself: and therefore shut the book presently. My conscience witnessed against me once more, and I concluded that, true or false, I must abide the consequences of my own choice. I put an abrupt end to these reflections, by joining in with some vain conversation or other that came in my way.

But now the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive, was deeply impressed upon me by an awful dispensation. I went to bed that night in my usual security and indifference, but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea which broke on board us; so much of it came down below as filled the cabin I lay in with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was going down or sinking. As soon as I could recover myself, I essayed to go upon deck; but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired me to bring a knife with me. While I returned for the knife, another person went up in my room, who was instantly washed overboard. We had no leisure to lament him, nor did we expect to survive him long; for we soon found the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made a mere wreck in a few minutes. I shall not affect to describe this disaster in the marine dialect, which would be understood by few; and therefore I can give you but a very inadequate idea of it. Taking in all circumstances, it was astonishing, and almost miraculous, that any of us survived to relate the story. We had immediate recourse to the pumps; but the water increased against our efforts. Some of us were set to baling in another part of the vessel; that is, to lade it out with buckets and pails. We had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service; and, notwithstanding all

we could do, she was full, or very near it: and then, with a common cargo, she must have sunk of course; but we had a great quantity of bees-wax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than the water; and as it pleased God that we received this shock in the very crisis of the gale, towards morning we were enabled to employ some means for our safety, which succeeded beyond hope. In about an hour's time, the day began to break, and the wind abated. We expended most of our clothes and bedding to stop the leaks (though the weather was exceedingly cold, especially to us, who had so lately left a hot climate); over these we nailed pieces of boards, and at last perceived the water abate. At the beginning of this hurry, I was little affected. I pumped hard, and endeavoured to animate myself and companions: I told one of them, that in a few days this distress would serve us to talk of over a glass of wine; but he being a less hardened sinner than myself, replied, with tears, "No; it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labour, I went to speak with the captain, who was busied elsewhere, and just as I was returning from him, I said, almost without any meaning, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us." This (though spoken with little reflection) was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for the space of many years. I was instantly struck with my own words; and, as Jehu said once, "What hast thou to do with peace?" so it directly occurred, "What mercy can there be for me?" I was obliged to return to the pump, and there I continued till noon, almost every passing wave breaking over my head; but we made ourselves fast with ropes, that we might not be washed away. Indeed, I expected that every time the vessel descended in the sea, she would rise no more; and though I dreaded death now, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were indeed true; yet still I was but half convinced, and remained for a space of time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. I thought, if the Christian religion was true, I could not be forgiven; and was, therefore, expecting, and almost at times wishing, to know the worst of it.

Letter 8.

... I continued at the pump from three in the morning till near noon, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain, and almost indifferent, whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called, and not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions; the extraordinary turns in my life; the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with; the licentious course of my conversation, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the gospel history (which I could not now be sure was false, though I was not yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. . . . . . When I saw, beyond all probability, there was still hope of respite, and heard, about six in the evening, that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour; I began to pray; I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him father: my prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided . . . . . .though I could not say from my heart, that I believed the gospel, yet I would, for the present, take it for granted; and that, by studying it in this light, I should be more and more confirmed in it. If what I am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say (for I too well know their manner), that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was, and so would they be, if the Lord should shew them, as he was pleased to shew me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul. Upon the gospel scheme I saw, at least, a peradventure of hope, but on every other side I was surrounded with black unfathomable despair.

The wind was now moderate, but continued fair, and we were still drawing nearer to our port. We began to'recover from our consternation, though we were greatly alarmed by our circumstances. We found that the water having floated

all our moveables in the hold, all the casks of provision had been beaten to pieces by the violent motion of the ship: on the other hand, our live stock, such as pigs, sheep, and poultry, had been washed overboard in the storm. In effect, all the provisions we saved, except the fish I mentioned, and some food of the pulse kind, which used to be given to the hogs (and there was but little of this left), all our other provisions would have subsisted us but a week, at scanty allowance. The sails, too, were mostly blown away, so that we advanced but slowly, even while the wind was fair. We imagined ourselves about a hundred leagues from the land, but were in reality much further. Thus we proceeded with an alternate prevalence of hope and fear. My leisure time was chiefly employed in reading and meditating on the scriptures, and praying to the Lord for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for four or five days, or perhaps longer, till we were awakened one morning, by the joyful shouts of the watch upon deck, proclaiming the sight of land. We were all soon raised at the sound. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful, and the light (just strong enough to discover distant objects) presented us with a gladdening prospect: it seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles from us, terminating in a cape or point, and a little farther, two or three small islands, or hummocks, as if just rising out of the water; the appearance and position seemed exactly answerable to our hopes, resembling the north-west extremity of Ireland, which we were steering for. We sincerely congratulated each other, making no doubt, but that if the wind continued, we should be in safety and plenty the next day. The small remainder of our brandy (which was reduced to little more than a pint) was, by the captain's orders, distributed amongst us; he adding at the same time, "We shall soon have brandy enough." We likewise eat up the residue of our bread for joy of this welcome sight, and were in the condition of men suddenly reprieved from death. While we were thus alert, the mate, with a graver tone than the rest, sunk our spirits by saying, that, "he wished it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, I know not but the rest would have beat him for raising such an unreasonable

doubt. It brought on, however, warm debates and disputes whether it was land or no; but the case was soon unanswerably decided; for the day was advancing fast, and in a little time, one of our fancied islands began to grow red, from the approach of the sun, which soon arose just under it. In a word, we had been prodigal of our bread and brandy too hastily; our land was literally *in nubibus,* nothing but clouds, and in half an hour more the whole appearance was dissipated. Seamen have often known deceptions of this sort, but in our extremity we were loath to be undeceived. However, we comforted ourselves, that though we could not see the land, yet we should soon, the wind hitherto continuing fair; but, alas! we were deprived of this hope likewise. That very day our fair wind subsided into a calm, and the next morning the gales sprung up from the south-east, directly against us, and continued so for more than a fortnight afterwards. The ship was so wrecked, that we were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, unless the weather was quite moderate: thus we were driven, by the wind fixing in that quarter, still further from our port, to the northward of all Ireland, as far as the Lewis or western islands of Scotland, but a long way to the westward. In a word, our station was such as deprived us of any hope of being relieved by other vessels: it may, indeed, be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean, at the same season of the year.

Provisions now began to grow very short; the half of a salted cod was a day's subsistence for twelve people; we had plenty of fresh water, but not a drop of stronger liquor; no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. We had incessant labour with the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labour and little food wasted us fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet our sufferings were light in comparison of our just fears; we could not afford this bare allowance much longer, but had a terrible prospect of being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another. Our expectations grew darker every day, and I had a further trouble peculiar to myself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching me (as I formerly observed) as the sole cause of the calamity, and was

confident that if I was thrown overboard, and not otherwise, they should be preserved from death. He did not intend to make the experiment, but continual repetition of this in my ears gave me much uneasiness, especially as my conscience seconded his words. I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account. I was, at last, found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast. However, proceeding in the method I have described, we began to conceive hopes greater than all our fears, especially, when at the time we were ready to give up all for lost, and despair was taking place in every countenance, we saw the wind come about to the very point we wished it, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship which must be kept out of the water, and to blow so gently as our few remaining sails could bear; and thus it continued without any observable alteration or increase, though at an unsettled time of the year, till we once more were called up to see the land, and were convinced that it was land indeed. We saw the island Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly, in Ireland; this was the eighth of April, just four weeks after the damage was sustained from the sea. When we came into this port our very last victuals was boiling in the pot; and before we had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till we were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence, so that if we had continued at sea that night in our shattered, enfeebled condition, we must, in all human appearance, have gone to the bottom.

Letter 9.

… I have told you that, in the time of our distress, we had fresh water in abundance; this was a considerable relief to us, especially as our spare diet was mostly salt fish, without bread. We drank plentifully, and were not afraid of wanting water; yet our stock of this likewise was much nearer to an end than we expected; we supposed that we had six large butts of water on board, and it was well that we were safe arrived in Ireland, before we discovered that five of them were empty, having been removed out of their places and stove by the violent agitation, when the ship was full of water. If we had found

this out while we were at sea, it would have greatly heightened our distress, as we must have drank more sparingly.

Newton describes how the experience affected him.

letter 9.

... I had many outward hardships to struggle with. The straits of hunger, cold, weariness, and the fears of sinking, and starving, I shared in common with others; but besides these, I felt a heart-bitterness, which was properly my own. . . . . . .My companions in danger were either quite unaffected, or soon forgot it all, but it was not so with me: not that I was any wiser or better than they, but because the Lord was pleased to vouchsafe me peculiar mercy, otherwise I was the most unlikely person in the ship to receive an impression, having been often before quite stupid and hardened in the very face of great dangers, and always to this time had hardened my neck still more and more after every reproof. I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy,. . . . . .unless it was to show, by one astonishing instance, that with him "nothing is impossible". . . . . .I continued much in prayer; I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more. The outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him, who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die, even for want of food, so I might but die a believer. . . . . . .Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvellous thing: I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and I had taken up some right notions, was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my mis-spent life, and purposed an immediate reformation: I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me, as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man. . . . . . .From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me;

but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards. . . . .

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, I repaired to Londonderry. . . . . . I was now a serious professor, went twice a day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the next opportunity. A few days before, I signified my intention to the minister, as the rubric directs; but I found this practice was grown obsolete. At length the day came; I arose very early, was very particular and earnest in my private devotion; and with the greatest solemnity, engaged myself to be the Lord's for ever, and only his.

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