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reads
Coleridge Sauce
(Coleridge Memorial Project, 2011)
edited by Chris Wakefield

ANTHOLOGIES PROVIDING 'BEAUTIES OF' AN AUTHOR were anathema to Coleridge's sense of organic form, and he would probably have had no sympathy for a book such as Leigh Hunt's *Wit and Humour*. Nevertheless, Coleridge was (and remains) a self-anthologising writer, encouraging his nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge to record his table-talk for posterity, and in many cases expecting others to redeem the 'ostrich carelessness and ostrich oblivion' (*Coleridge Sauce* 33) with which he cast forth the productions of his own pen. Modern editors have eagerly taken up the challenge. Their efforts have resulted in an abundance not only of selections from Coleridge's entire oeuvre and from particular sources (whether the Poetical Works, Notebooks, Marginalia or Letters), but also thematic anthologies that offer the 'best of' his commentaries on topics such as the seventeenth century, the Bible and religion, Shakespeare, language, the sublime, humanity—the list goes on.

Had anyone asked me a couple of months ago, I would probably have suggested that the only major gap in this thematic market was the topic of philosophy (any takers for that?). But *Coleridge Sauce* answers a need that readers of Coleridge perhaps never suspected they had: it presents his lighter side, in extracts arranged under enticing headings such as 'Wildlife', 'Critics & Subscribers', 'Food and Drink', 'Gaffes, Apologies & Excuses', 'Pens, Paper and Ink' (yes, ink, which figures in a surprising number of extracts), 'One-liners', and 'Silly Verses'. The result is a happy miscellany in which Coleridge's aphoristic wit and wisdom ('[There are] few moments in life so interesting as those of an affectionate reception from those who have heard of you yet are strangers to your person', 49), and sometimes just plain frivolity, alternate with his clumsier or more self-deprecating moments (when, muse dampened, he could 'feel all over me like a bird whose plumage is beclammied and wings glued to it's body with Bird-lime', 14). 'There was no man in the regiment who met with so many falls from his horse, as Silas Tomkin Comberbatch', records Joseph Cottle (15) of STC the runaway student's hectic interlude in the army—an anecdote ingeniously allocated here to the section 'Wildlife'.

'Coleridge's humour is invariably cerebral—he is not a natural comedian', as Chris Wakefield observes in the introduction. Indeed, what emerges most prominently in these pages is Coleridge's love of punning and wordplay—a characteristic that probably owed much to his close association with Charles Lamb in the mid-1790s, yet seems even to have increased during the apparently sober years of philosophical system-building in Highgate. A rueful fragment from a letter of 1827: 'in some one of my Manifold Many-Scraps on Many Scrips in my own Manuscript, alias Manuscrawl, there are sundry

additamenta…' (38). Such wordplay is easily overlooked, in part because it is an aspect of language that dates easily. So much the better that this collection serves up plenty of examples.

The book is fortunately on the lighter side than all previous Coleridgean anthologies in material respects as well. As a 56-page paperback costing £7 (available from the admirable Coleridge Memorial Project website, http://www.coleridgememorial.org.uk/coleridge-sauce/) it weighs considerably less on the pocket than the various scholarly tomes mentioned above. A seasoned reader of Coleridge who takes it for companionship on a train journey is sure both to be reminded of some favourite quotations and to discover some never seen before. And what better bill of fare to convince a not-yet-Coleridgean to add some main courses to the *Sauce*?

In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge recorded an unconscious joke at his expense: 'Of the unsaleable nature of my writings, I had an amusing memento one morning from our own servant girl. For happening to arise at an earlier hour than usual, I observed an extravagant quantity of paper in the grate in order to light the fire, and mildly checked her for her wastefulness. "La, Sir!" (replied poor Nanny) "why, it is only Watchmen"' (qtd. 23). One trusts that *Coleridge Sauce* will meet with a more appreciative readership. But why this title, you may be wondering? You will find out when you buy your copy!