

Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.'

He holds him with his skinny hand,
'There was a ship,' quoth he.
'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse 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 paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

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

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS.

PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariner's hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed 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, nor breath nor 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,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

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

And some in dreams assurèd 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, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

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

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *The Wanderings of Cain*

“A little further, O my father, yet a little further, and we shall come into the open moonlight.” Their road was through a forest of fir-trees; at its entrance the trees stood at distances from each other, and the path was broad, and the moonlight and the moonlight shadows reposed upon it, and appeared quietly to inhabit that solitude. But soon the path winded and became narrow; the sun at high noon sometimes speckled, but never illumined it, and now it was dark as a cavern.

“It is dark, O my father!” said Enos [Enoch?], “but the path under our feet is smooth and soft, and we shall soon come out into the open moonlight.”

“Lead on, my child!” said Cain: “guide me, little child!” And the innocent little child clasped a finger of the hand which had murdered the righteous Abel, and he guided his father. “The fir branches drip upon thee, my son.” “Yea, pleasantly, father, for I ran fast and eagerly to bring thee the pitcher and the cake, and my body is not yet cool. How happy the squirrels are that feed on these fir-trees! they leap from bough to bough, and the old squirrels play round their young ones in the nest. I clomb a tree yesterday at noon, O my father, that I might play with them, but they leaped away from the branches, even to the slender twigs did they leap, and in a moment I beheld them on another tree. Why, O my father, would they not play with me? I would be good to them as thou art good to me: and I groaned to them even as thou groanest when thou givest me to eat, and when thou coverest me at evening, and as often as I stand at thy knee and thine eyes look at me?” Then Cain stopped, and stifling his groans he sank to the earth, and the child Enos stood in the darkness beside him.

And Cain lifted up his voice and cried bitterly, and said, “The Mighty One that persecuteth me is on this side and on that; he pursueth my soul like the wind, like the sand-blast he passeth through me; he is around me even as the air! O that I might be utterly no more! I desire to die—yea, the things that never had life, neither move they upon the earth—behold! they seem precious to mine eyes. O that a man might live without the breath of his nostrils. So I might abide in darkness, and blackness, and an empty space! Yea, I would lie down, I would not rise, neither would I stir my limbs till I became as the rock in the den of the lion, on which the young lion resteth his head whilst he sleepeth. For the torrent that roareth far off hath a voice: and the clouds in heaven look terribly on me; the Mighty One who is against me speaketh in the wind of the cedar grove; and in silence am I dried up.” Then Enos spake to his father, “Arise, my father, arise, we are but a little way from the place where I found the cake and the pitcher.” And Cain said, “How knowest thou?” and the child answered—“Behold the bare rocks are a few of thy strides distant from the forest; and while even now thou wert lifting up thy voice, I heard the echo.” Then the child took hold of his father, as if he would raise him: and Cain being faint and feeble rose slowly on his knees and pressed himself against the trunk of a fir, and stood upright and followed the child.

.... But ere they had reached the rock they beheld a human shape: his back was towards them, and they were advancing unperceived, when they heard him smite his breast and cry aloud, “Woe is me! woe is me! I must never die again, and yet I am perishing with thirst and hunger.”

Pallid, as the reflection of the sheeted lightning on the heavy-sailing night-cloud, became the face of Cain; but the child Enos took hold of the shaggy skin, his father’s robe, and raised his eyes to his father, and listening whispered, “Ere yet I could speak, I am sure, O my father, that I heard that voice. Have not I often said that I remembered a sweet voice? O my father! this is it:” and Cain trembled exceedingly. The voice was sweet indeed, but it was thin and querulous, like that of a feeble slave in misery, who despairs altogether, yet can not refrain himself from weeping and lamentation. And, behold! Enos glided forward, and creeping softly round the base of the rock, stood before the stranger, and looked up into his face. And the Shape shrieked, and turned round, and Cain beheld him, that his limbs and his face were those of his brother Abel whom he had killed! And Cain stood like one who struggles in his sleep because of the exceeding terribleness of a dream.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Notebooks*

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It cannot be denied, that the foundation of Protestantism, the one intelligible First Position, common to all the Reformers, and separating the Faith of the Reformed Churches from the Tenets of the Romish Communion, is the Sufficiency of the Sacred Scriptures, as the ground and guide of Belief, Morals and Discipline in all points necessary to Salvation. As little can it be denied, that the Reformers, one and all, grounded this *sufficiency* on the hypothesis of the plenary inspiration of the Sacred Writers, in some sense of the word, inspiration, in which, whether from diversity of *kind* or from difference of degree equivalent for all practical purposes to a difference of kind, it could not be legitimately applied to any other writers or writings, however eminent the one or excellent the other – in such a sense, in short, as justifies Christians in considering the various canonical Books, collectively and in detail, as the works of one and the same Author – namely, of the Holy and Infallible Spirit of Truth, to whom all the ostensible authors, Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter &c were but Amanuenses. –

But while no competently informed and tolerably candid Scholar will refuse his full assent to the truth of this statement, in both instances – the position of the Sufficiency of Scripture, and of their inspiration as the ground and reason of their Sufficiency; this does not forbid us to see and point out the difference between the *fact* that the Reformers *did* so ground the great Tenet, on which they divided from the Papal Church, and the necessity in Reason and Scripture of so doing. It may well happen, that the first Position, which is absolutely essential to Protestantism, may stand firm by its own weight and breadth of Basis: even tho' the Hypothesis, or Sub-basis, supplied by the second Position, should be rejected, if not as false, yet as a doubtful, and unnecessary inference.

But least of all, ought it to be forgotten or overlooked, that this inference of the great Reformers was accompanied by and inseparably connected with, another position, which, even tho' the former were an error, must disarm it of all its injurious qualities – namely, the necessity of the same Spirit in the Readers of the Scriptures – so that in those parts only, in which the Spirit in the Letter revealed itself to the Spirit in the Heart, were guiding *Scriptures* for each Individual – and nothing more was imposed on him than the duty, which both Humility and Charity dictated, of presuming that all the other parts of Scriptures <might have been> for other Christians and <might become> for himself at some future time and in other moods & states of spiritual insight, the transparent Shrines of the same Spirit of Truth. –

Hence therefore it seems to me that the Church at present would be justified in expressing the true practical Rule of the Reformers, as resulting from the combined consideration of the second position and of the third by which the second is qualified, in the following formula. – The Bible is the safe and sufficient Canon of Christian Faith and Practice: because whoever seeks therein with a right spirit that which is requisite for his spiritual welfare and final salvation, will infallibly find what he seeks. Or –

The Bible contains all revealed truths necessary to Salvation, and for all men in all times: and every true believer has the promise of God that whatever he seeks in the spirit of Love and filial Trust the Spirit of Truth will enlighten him to find as far as it is profitable for him. – Or.

In all things profitable to our true Welfare the Bible is an infallible Guide for every sincere Inquirer, who reads the Letter by the light of the Spirit for spiritual purposes & with spiritual desires. –

Observe, however, that this promise is not required and therefore not extended to those who take up the study of the Scriptures as a series of Books written by diverse Authors in diverse ages, for the purpose of understanding the whole historically and philologically. This is indeed a most worthy and honorable Object of Pursuit – commendable for all Christians who have the means of so doing, and a duty for the Doctors of the Church/ – Here all the ordinary means and aids of rightly interpreting ancient writings are requisite – and such as the light of no single age can suffice to furnish – Who indeed could even wish, that so elevating, so edifying a pursuit should ever cease to be an object of intellectual effort – which, were it absolutely completed, must be the case? One man & one age correct the mistakes and fill up the deficiencies of the preceding; leaving still as rich a Harvest for their successors. – Methinks this latter, in the study of which the Bible must be read as any other Book of similar antiquity in a dead language, is as distinct from the former, as the examination by a scientific Lapidary or Mineralogist of the 12 precious Stones in the Urim and Thummim of the High Priest from the contemplation of the revealing Light & Flashes from the same in the moment of the Holy Spirit's Presence in the whole/–