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DODD, MEAD NEW YORK

A Whirlwind with Sunbeams

COLERIDGE THE TALKER: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments. By Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1940. 480 pp., with index. \$4.

Reviewed by FREDERICK A. POTTLE

THIS is an admirable volume, combining extensive research and luminous editorial method with good writing and firm critical judgment. So well have the authors managed to sink the idiosyncrasies of their style, that it is hard to believe, it began as two independent investigations.

Every one who has read any of the books about Coleridge knows of old Carlyle's malicious description of the sage sitting on the brow of Highgate Hill singing and snuffing about "om-m-mject" and "sum-m-mject." (Is it not time to point out that Carlyle's phonetics are exactly reversed? A man who cannot breathe through his nose—Coleridge had adenoids—can say "object" with perfect distinctness. It is precisely "om-m-mject" that he cannot say.) Reports of Coleridge's manner of speaking can be found in De Quincey, Emerson, and Hazlitt, and others could be collected. But this book brings together no fewer than seventy-six independent testimonies to the preëminence of Coleridge's discourse, most of them of surprising literary distinction. The editors preface these by an essay, which seeks to show that, save for the divine accident of three poems, Coleridge was first, last, and always a talker; that he would have been a talker, opium or no opium; that as a talker he made a greater impression on his age (and on

ours) than he ever could have by printed books.

I fancy that one who has time only to sample Coleridge could get a more correct impression of his artistic achievement and historical importance by following up the handful of great poems, with this book and a selection from the "Table Talk," than by risking his teeth on the "Friend" or the "Biographia Literaria." No other work will go so far to correct the general notion that the elderly Coleridge was not respected. It shows beyond doubt that Coleridge had a larger and more enthusiastic personal following than Johnson.

The comparison, or contrast, with Johnson is obvious, and was frequently made—not, disappointingly enough, by any one who had heard both. Hearer after hearer laments that he is not a Boswell, to have bottled up the golden stream. But if Boswell had lived to talk with Coleridge (and in 1815 he would have been only seventy-five), it is certain that even he could not have produced a rival to his "Life of Johnson." He could not have recorded Coleridge in Coleridge's most characteristic vein because he could not have understood him. Nobody understood him. As Tom Hood said, you felt as though you "had been carried, spiralling, up to heaven by a whirlwind intertwined with sunbeams, giddy and dazzled," but when you found yourself on the earth again recovering from the spell of the three-hour monologue, you could not recollect a word of what had been said. It is, I fear, highly probable that Coleridge did not understand himself, and that there was often less in his talk than met the ear.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE CASE OF THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS Anthony Boucher (Simon & Schuster: \$2.)	Cal. sunshine and cinema lunacy encourage visiting Doyle devotees to investigate deep laid murder plot and mystery of vanishing corp.	Spectacular synthesis of Sherlockian saga over case that Master would have solved in two shakes of Dr. Watson's bull-pup's tail.	Watson, two needles!
AND SO TO MURDER Carter Dickson (Morrow: \$2.)	Death in various frightful forms pursues guileless English girl writer all over film-lot, until Sir H. Merivale says, "Stop!"	Customarily excellent Dicksonian opus—not too serious in this instance—with plenty of thrills and a solution you'd never guess.	Grade A
WHILE SHE SLEEPS Ethel Lina White (Harpers: \$2.)	English miss, all unawares, marked for death in London, Switzerland, and Parisian underworld. She escapes into matrimony.	Idea ought to work out in such capable hands but for some reason it just doesn't.	Thin
THE LADY WEPT ALONE Carolyn Byrd Dawson (Crime Club: \$2.)	Badly-tangled family murder (Southern?) unraveled by Sheriff Tim Hammond and Miss Matilda Brockett after several casualties.	Neither better nor worse than others of the Rinehart-school of mystery—except that this has more humor than most.	Good

THE NEW BOOKS

Biography

SAINTS AND SINNERS. By Charles J. Dutton. Dodd, Mead. 1940. 303 pp. \$3.

Beginning with a boyhood as a "child of the Manse" in a New England town where his father, who died while this book was being written, was the liberal influence, Charles Dutton has given us a delightful, rambling account of his early years. Stories of pumping the church organ, of a surrepetitious reading of Nick Carter, Old King Brady, and Frank Merriwell stories, visits to the Portsmouth Navy Yard at the time of the Spanish-American War, a visit with Mark Twain, playing on the as-yet unrestored *Constitution*, are written with the nostalgic flavor of one now a member of the Pennsylvania Board of Parole.

What follows in the early years of maturity, and the twenty years Mr. Dutton spent as a minister in a "liberal church," the Universalist, is the record of one who came into his ministry

with the mixed blessing of a fine law school training, a poor theological school background, a desire to preach and practise the kindlier virtues of tolerance and good-will, and hardly any other equipment save his common-sense and a "fine voice." As one who became the friend of Clarence Darrow, Bertrand Russell, and a variety of saints and sinners, he illuminates his story with many an anecdote.

One detects quite early the feeling of a growing disillusionment with "saints" who were far from such, and an understanding of "sinners" not as black as good people would paint them. We read of funerals not so sad, and weddings not so gay; of killers who were willing to "do a job" for him should he wish it done, of smug church members, of old sailors, of other clergymen. One could have wished he might have spent less time venting his spleen and more on "constructive" criticism, but this would be to try to rewrite his book for him. Further, one is generally in a fog as to where he is located, though the



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