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CERTAIN SYMBOLS IN *THE RIME OF THE
ANCIENT MARINER*

BY GEORGE HERBERT CLARKE

Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired *The Ancient Mariner* very much, but that there were two faults in it,—it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of moral, I told her that in my own judgement the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief, fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights'* tale of the merchant sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, *because* one of the date-shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son.

Thus Coleridge, according to his nephew, Henry Nelson Coleridge, answered the lady whose own literary style and "propriety of mind" had actually attracted him as late as 1797, although after a few years she lost her pedestal, as Elizabeth Hitchener did in the corresponding case of Shelley. On October 23, 1802, Lamb, writing to Coleridge, remarks indignantly that

Mrs. Barbauld's stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery. . . Knowledge insignificant and vapid as Mrs. B.'s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge*; and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learnt that a horse is an animal, and Billy is better