“AH! WHAT STRENGTH MIGHT I GATHER, WHAT COMFORT
MIGHT WE DERIVE”

4 MORE (Henry), annotated by COLERIDGE (Samuel Taylor).
Philosophicall Poems.
Cambridge: by Roger Daniel, 1647 £38,000
Title-page a little browned and with a short tear repaired to the lower fore-corner (just touching the imprint), some browning and a little marking in places throughout, closely cropped by the binder in places (occasionally just touching the catchwords, pagination etc and, in a few places, some of the annotations (without obscuring the sense)), early paper repair to upper fore-corner of E8 (just touching the page number), F5 (small repair, blank fore-margin) and some foxing to the lower margin of Bb4, original flyleaf (with manuscript annotations) preserved at the front and with another flyleaf laid down on later paper (preserving the manuscript annotations), flyleaves at end both laid down and strengthened with thicker later paper (preserving the majority of the manuscript annotations).
Mid-19th-century brown morocco, spine lettered in gilt, gilt edges, blue ribbon marker (a little rubbed at the edges, joints just starting).
Wing M2670. Hayward 94.

“Strange and sometimes uncouth as he is, there are lines and passages of the highest poetry and most exquisite beauty”: A great influence on Coleridge, extensively annotated by the poet and almost certainly the copy used by Coleridge for his heated discussion (with Southey) of More in Omniana (1812).

The first collected edition of More’s poems, the celebrated leader of the Cambridge Platonists. The important poem “Psychozoia, or the Life of the Soul” had been first printed in Cambridge in 1642 but appears here in a much longer, revised and annotated form. It was “Psychozoia” which fascinated Coleridge but led to a heated exchange with Southey in Omniana - the annotations in this volume reflect that
conflict. Southey wrote of the poem: “There is perhaps no other poem in existence which has so little that is good in it, if it has anything good” (Omniana p.157). Coleridge countered that: “Southey must have wearied himself out with the poem, till the mists from its swamps and stagnants had spread over its flowery pots and and bowers” (Table Talk p.339).

In George Whalley’s “Coleridge Marginalia Lost”, a list of books known to have been owned by Coleridge but which have remained untraced, this volume appears as no. 79 (recording ten annotations) and stating that it was last traced in the sale catalogue of Robert Southey’s library. A copy of More’s Philosophical Poems appears as lot 1958 in the Catalogue of the Valuable Library of the Late Robert Southey (1844, bought by “Petheran”, presumably John Petheran, London bookseller) where it is marked with an asterix to denote (“at the particular request of some of the Friends of the late Poet Laureate”) that the volume contains “his [Southey’s] Autograph”. This copy certainly belonged to Coleridge but does not have Southey’s signature. Some of the short marginal notes may be by Southey and they certainly echo many of his feelings towards More. It appears that Whalley may have been wrong about Coleridge’s copy of this book being sold in the sale of Southey’s library as we have traced another copy offered for sale in 1818 which has an identical manuscript note in it [see below]. The annotations by Coleridge are typically performative though and provide important evidence for Coleridge’s reading of More and his feelings on poetry in general.

Coleridge begins by providing a long passionate summary note of his feelings on More on the front flyleaf of this volume:

“Ah! what strength might I gather, what comfort might we derive, from the Proclo-plotinian Platonists’ doctrine of the soul, if only they or their Spinosistic imitators, the nature-philosophers of present Germany, had told or could tell us what they meant by I and we, by pain and remorse! Poor we are nothing in act, but everything in suffering”.

A number of notes [fig.2] on the following leaf (taken from 18th and early 19th-century assessments of More) describe how Spenser was “a favourite author with him [More] from childhood” and remarks on the use of “the same octave stanza, which Spenser borrowed from the Italian poets”.

Coleridge responds to this correcting the previous note: “...not an octave, but an ennead...which Spenser did not borrow from the Italians, but, after many and various experiments, invented for himself, as a perfect whole, as it indeed, and it only”. Coleridge then signs this note boldly “S.T. Coleridge” a clear indication that his annotations were intended to be read by others and echoing Jackson's assertion that Coleridge was “a brilliant writer in the minor and somewhat suspect genre of marginal commentary” (H.R. Jackson, “Coleridge as Reader”, in The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge ed. Frederick Burwick (2009) p. 273).

Alongside the two long notes by Coleridge on the front leaves (approximately 120 words – signed near the end of the second note “S.T. Coleridge”), there is also a long note on the recto of the rear flyleaf (approx 250 words, also signed “S.T. Coleridge”) [fig.4] and a shorter three line note (referring to a section of the printed text) on the
FIG. 3

CANT. 3. The Immortality of the Soul.

Upon her self she strangely creates,
And from her self and by her self returns
Into her self, thus the soul circulates.

Do bodies so? Her axle-tree is burned
With heat of motion. Thus the soul flies spurns,
Relish her self to catch infinity.

Indeemse, whole muddy atoms, fear the wind does fly.

Snake off time at both ends without end,
Makes place still higher, she, even creates

What God near made, nor doth all intend
To make, for from phantasies, scalds at future fires;
Forces her own condition, she relates

Th’ all comprehension of eternity,
Complaint she scarce fills in all estates,
That all the seas or has no estate

Hungry tells, nor will her vast capacity.

But I’ll break off: My Muse her self forgets,
Her own great strength and her foes feel displeased,
That the name by her own pains may blot,
While the so many strokes heapes in excess,
That fond profite, plaine quit for to supptre.
Of the fools corporall site. For men may think
Her advertisings strength doth that her profile
To multitude of reasons, makes her swine
With weary soyl, and sweats out that much forced ink:

O that the loves with trampling infirmtion
To dominion in calme victor,
But let not men date such occassion,
Against the blameless. For no matter,
Nor fruitful pomp, nor any rejoyce
Of such opinion that the here destroys
Made her so large. No, tis her jealousie
Grievous witching falshood that weak souls annoys,
And off death choke their cheering hopes of lasting joys.

Thus.
There are various additional notes throughout which may be by Robert Southey of which some are single words but others short notes. Southey in *Omniana* is predominantly concerned with More’s borrowings from other poets and the annotations in this volume largely tend to note similarities with poets such as Milton, Spenser and Chaucer. A note on p.7 likens More’s text to “Milton in Lycidas” with a note below observing a similarity to Spenser. There are other references to Spenser on p.26, 99 and 297 and Milton on p. 32 (*Comus*), 69, 96, 145 (*Comus*), 149 (*Paradise Lost*) and 244 (*Comus*).

The annotations by Coleridge were published in George Whalley’s *Coleridge Marginalia* (Princeton University Press, 1980) from a 19th-century transcription (itself based on transcriptions) in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* (2nd series IX (1870) p.433). This book has been unavailable to scholars since the 19th century, despite the continued interest in the influence of More and the Cambridge Platonists on Coleridge’s work. The annotations in the book which are not by Coleridge also require further research as they clearly provide evidence of a detailed reader of More who had a good knowledge of Milton and Spenser.

**Provenance:** 1. Henry Bradshawe (d. 1698), nephew of the regicide John Bradshaw, Lord President of the Commonwealth Council (1602-1659), signature on the title-page [fig.1]. 2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), poet, with numerous annotations both before and in the text (a number signed S.T.C or S.T. Coleridge). 3. This copy appears to have been offered as no. 1524 in *A Catalogue of Old Books in Various Languages* (1822) by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown which lists a copy of More’s *Philosophical Poems* with a manuscript note reading: “more uses many words that are obsolete many that are provincial, and many that are entirely his own coinage”, matching the note on the flyleaf of this copy. £15. This would make it impossible to have been the copy offered in Southey’s sale in 1844. 4. Alexander Macmillan (1818-1896), publisher and co founder of Macmillan Publishers, his bookplate on the front pastedown.

verso of the flyleaf, a five line note in the preface (Hiv) to *Psychathansia* responding to the printed text, a long annotation [fig.1] filling almost all of the blank space between the printed text on p.128 (*The Immortality of the Soul*), and a short marginal annotation a few leaves later at p.133 and a 10 line annotation in the blank space between the printed text on p.355 (*Notes upon Psychosia*).