

“THIS NEVER, NEVER CAN BE THE NATURAL STATE OF A HUMAN BEING”

3 LAW (William), annotated by COLERIDGE (Samuel Taylor).

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life. Adapted to the State and Condition of all Orders of Christians.

London: G. Robinson, 1772

£28,000

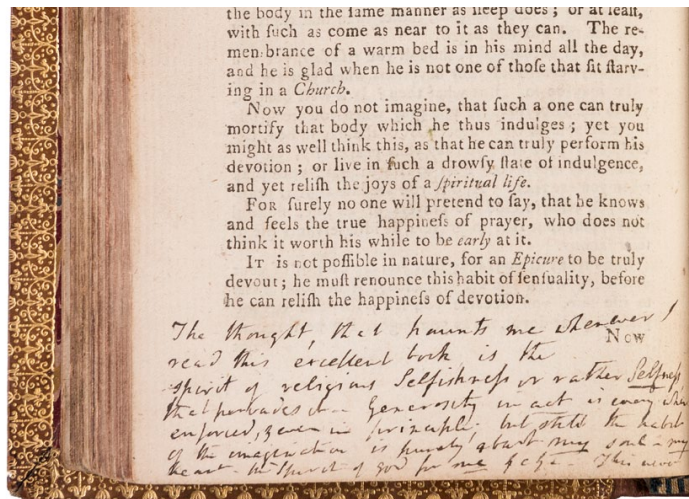
Tenth Edition. Small 8vo (172 x 100mm). vi, 353, [1] pp. Small ink blot to the title-page some marking in places throughout, four circular stains to leaves F5-6. 19th-century blind panelled calf by Nutt of Cambridge, red and green morocco labels to the spine, later gilt edges (rebacked preserving the old spine).

“Shut not thy heart, nor thy library against S.T.C.”: Wordsworth’s copy annotated by Coleridge.

A copy of Law’s most popular work from the library of William Wordsworth which has been read and annotated by his friend and fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (possibly when Coleridge was staying with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy between June 1809 and March 1810 at Grasmere). Coleridge’s long and passionate annotation (approximately 90 words) covers the entire lower blank margins of p.166-7:

“The thought that haunts me whenever I read this excellent book is the spirit of religious selfishness or rather selfness that prevades it. Generosity in act is everywhere enforced, and even in principle; but still the habit of the imagination is purely about my soul, my heart, the Spirit of God for me, etc etc. This never, never can be the natural state of a human being; it makes every movement of the mind too much an act of full consciousness. Even in common life we instinctively dislike self-conscious folks -- no odds, whether humility or pride”.

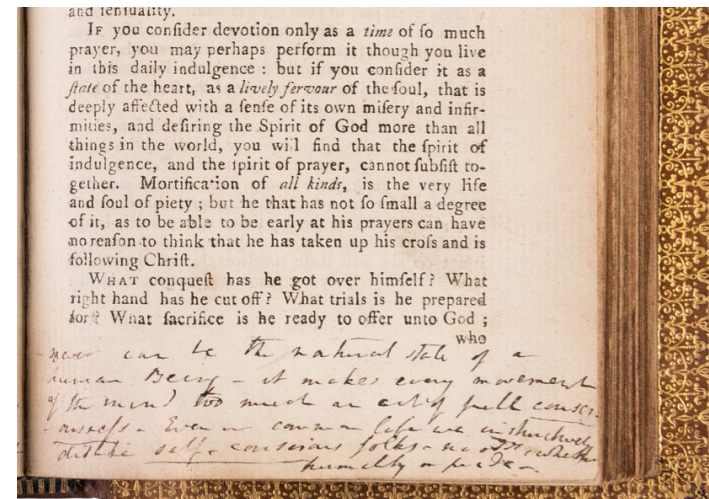
The long annotation by Coleridge was published in George Whalley’s *Coleridge Marginalia* (Princeton University Press, 1980) from a 19th-century transcription (itself based on transcriptions) in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* (2nd series IX (1870) p.433). **This book has been unavailable to scholars since the 19th century.** The modern editor ascribes Coleridge’s annotation to a passage by Law on early rising, but it is clear looking at the book itself that Coleridge is commenting



on the text as a whole but also on the wider concerns of the passage which included the measuring of self enjoyment, gluttony and “notorious acts of intemperance”. If this book was annotated by Coleridge when he was staying with William and Dorothy Wordsworth in Grasmere it was a period of Coleridge’s life when he was attempting to throw off his opium addiction, leaving him “unfitted by temperament for any course of action demanding application” (ODNB). With this in mind, Coleridge’s annotation and his reading of Law in general appears strikingly pertinent.

Pamela Edwards in her essay “Coleridge on Politics and Religion” notes that Coleridge “drew heavily” on Law’s work when writing *Aids to Reflection* as he attempted to establish “the foundations of true theology in distinction to false religion” (*The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Frederick Burwick, p.243).

Coleridge read voraciously from an early age - he claimed, according to the ODNB, “to have read a book of the Bible by the time he was three, and the *Arabian Nights* when he was five”. His father was so disturbed by his addiction to romances and tales of magic that he set fire to a number of his books. Coleridge described himself as a “library-cormorant” and annotated an enormous number of books, enough to fill numerous large volumes of marginalia in his collected works and consolidate his reputation “as 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). Jackson goes on to argue that “the once scattered marginalia deserve to be taken into account in studies



of Coleridge’s life and writings, especially since they have now been conveniently and reliably brought together” (p.273).

“The annotated books provide a vivid image of the working of his mind, the occasion of writing and the relative order in which the notes were written, sometimes layer on layer” (Whalley BG).

This book is listed as No. 67 (of 141) in George Whalley’s “Coleridge Marginalia Lost” in *The Book Collector*, Winter 1968 as “In the possession of Alexander Macmillan in 1870”. It is again reported as “not located” in George Whalley’s exhaustive collected edition of Coleridge *Marginalia* (Princeton University Press, 1980) with the long annotation, “published from an appendix to C.M. Ingleby ‘On Some Points Connected with the Philosophy of Coleridge’ *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*. 2nd series ix (1870)”. A copy of Law’s *A Serious Call* is listed in the sale catalogue of Wordsworth’s library (no.223, with no date of publication given) and also in the manuscript catalogue of Wordsworth’s library at the Houghton Library (listed as “Law’s Call”). See *Wordsworth’s Library* ed. Chester Linn Shaver (1979).

Provenance: Alexander MacMillan (1818-1896), publisher and co-founder of Macmillan Publishers. Noted as being in the possession of Macmillan in 1870 by George Whalley in *The Book Collector* [see above]. This volume does not have Macmillan’s bookplate (which is present in another book from Coleridge’s library - Henry More’s *Philosophicall Poems* [see following item], which we purchased with this book.