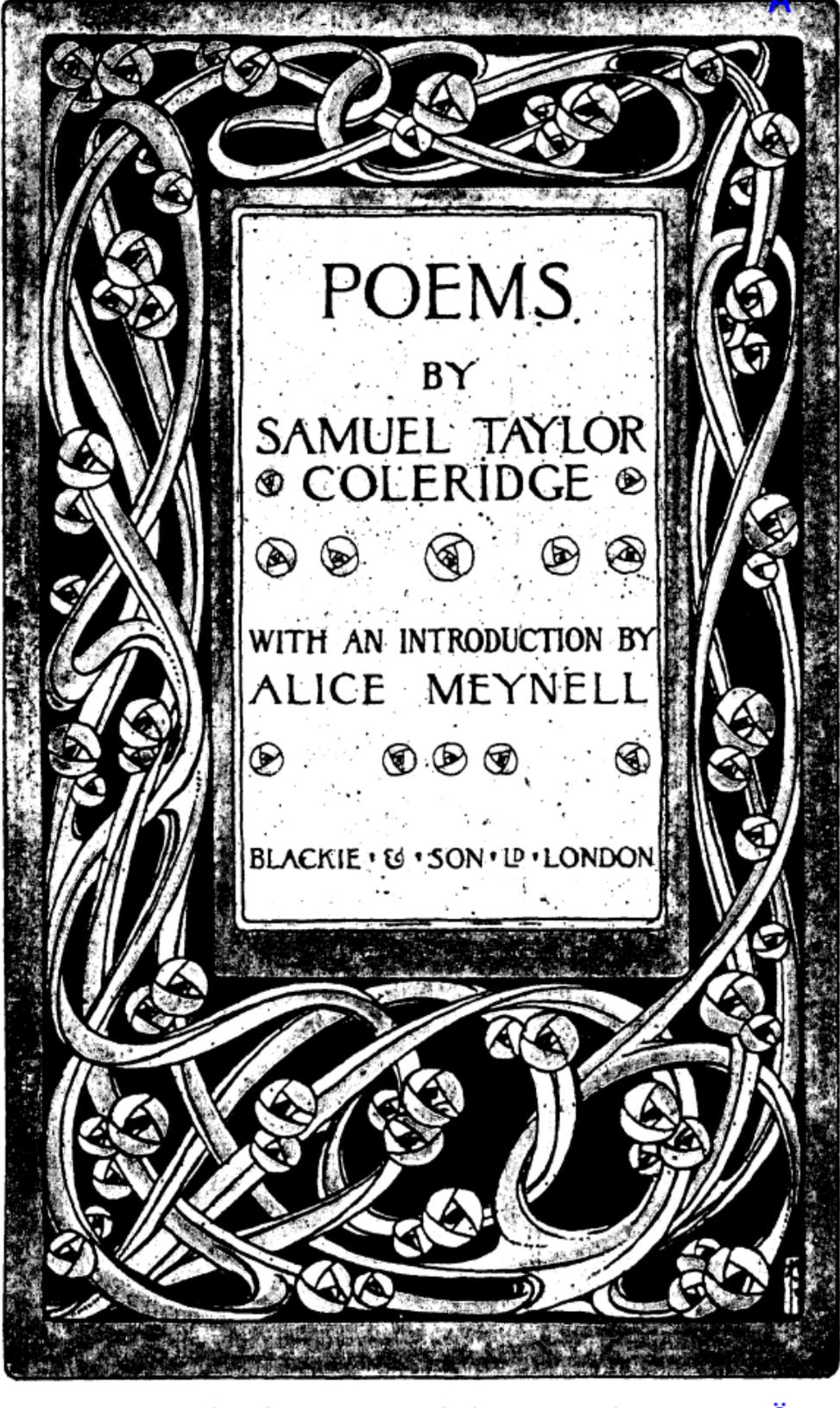


Red Letter Library

POEMS BY
SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE







POEMS.

BY

SAMUEL TAYLOR
COLERIDGE



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ALICE MEYNELL



BLACKIE & SON · LD · LONDON

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in 1772, the youngest of the thirteen children of the vicar of Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire. His life was uneventful. At Christ's Hospital he had Charles Lamb for a school-fellow; at Cambridge he did not take his degree, flying thence, under some pressure of petty debt, and enlisting in a cavalry regiment, from which his discharge was quickly brought about. His friendship with Southey was the most important relation of his life; with him Coleridge planned a reform of society called pantisocracy—which never took shape; and like other generous men whose youth or prime of life befell at the time of the French Revolution, he hoped for a general reconstruction of civilization, and like other generous men he confessed that these were not the means. He soon yielded to the fatuous impulse of reaction, when he became a Tory. His marriage brought him a brief happiness, and employment in Malta a brief change of scene; but he drifted help-

lessly away from wife and children, became so cowardly after long use of opium that he had not the resolution to read their letters for fear of ill news, and ended his days in 1834, after a time of self-absolution from human responsibility which left his poor conscience ill at ease. His work for Christianity, for philosophy, for liberty, for mankind, had been little indeed compared with his hopes, and with what we are told of his intellect. His achievement in magical poetry is altogether beyond price.

Coleridge, we know, was an intellectual man. Assuredly he was not an intellectual poet. As a poet, as a great poet, at his best, he seems to be almost incapable of thought. When he addresses himself to thought in his poetry, he is a turgid, excited, dull, and flaccid rhetorician, seldom reaching even a beautiful eloquence. Even the thought necessary for the telling of a story fails him; his better stories fade out obviously unplanned, and the completed story of his "Ancient Mariner" is, as a story, foolish, with a kind of culpable folly.

Not the poet of intellect, he is essentially the poet of the spiritual senses. He had an exaltation of the senses which is the richest of all endowments of the simpler poet. If Coleridge were not simple, his poems would not