

CHRISTABLE

By

COLERIDGE

Explanation with Comment

Off, wandering... Geraldine? (L.205-07)

Entering the chamber of Charitable Geraldine sinks on the floor. Christable thinks that Geraldine is too exhausted to stand. She gives her invigorating drink made by her mother. Geraldine wants to know if Christable's mother will pity a poor woman like herself. Christable informs her that her mother died at the time of her birth. She wishes that her mother were present by her side, when the spirit of her mother appears there, visible to Geraldine, but not to Christable. Seeing the spirit of Christable's dead mother Geraldine cries out and asks it to be off. She also wishes it to waste away and grown thin in anxiety for its

daughter. This one hour of midnight is hers. She has power to keep it (the spirit of Christable's mother) off and to exercise her charm on Christable for an hour. As Christable can not see the invisible spirit of her mother, she can not make out what distresses Geraldine.

Comment: In "peak and pine" we have a reference to the medieval belief that witches had power to make their victims wither and waste away under their spell. Geraldine exercises her powerful spell on the spirits of Christable's dead mother to keep it off. The expression "peak and pine" recalls the words of the First witch of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" in act 1. Scene 3, who says,

"Weary seven-nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle; peak and pine".

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But this she knows... over all,(329-331)

These are the concluding lines of Coleridge's "Christable", Part the first. After the one hour of Geraldine's enchantment had been over, Christable recovered from the trance, and fell into an easeful sleep. In her sleep she dreamt dreams which made her weep and smile alternatively, like a hermitess living in a wilderness. Perhaps she dreamt that the spirit of her dead mother was nearby to save her from all evil. Whatever she might have been dreaming, she was atleast sure that in joys and sorrows, in rain and sunshine, the saints and angels will come to the aid of those who pray to them for their help, that all men live under the loving care of God. It was this convention which gave her comfort.

Comment: These lines illustrate, Coleridge's habit of tagging moral preaching to his poetry. In "The Ancient Mariner" he also gives a course of moral teaching through the following lines;

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small".

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