

In the first Stanza, the atmosphere is gloomy. Coleridge is sitting alone in his cottage besides the fireplace, watching the snow as it forms. There is no wind to help the formation of the snow. The snow is a symbol of death. However, death in this poem is not physical but spiritual. Coleridge is spiritually dead because he cannot write poetry. He looks for a source of inspiration. He suddenly hears the owl's cry at intervals. He looks around him and finds that all the members of his family have fallen asleep leaving him in perfect solitude as if he is surrounded by death. His little son (Hartley), who is a symbol of life, is peacefully sleeping in a cradle by his side. There is perfect silence around him. In fact, it is so silent that he is disturbed in his thoughts. Here the poet suggests a well-known psychological fact. While it is true that if there is no solitude, there can be no deep thinking, it is also known that too much solitude produces a feeling of loneliness and uneasiness in the mind and thus disturbs deep thinking. The silence becomes oppressive and vexes meditation instead of promoting it. His mind leaves the cottage and flies around the village. The inhabitants of the village are lying asleep in their houses. The various activities of life have been suspended. They are now silent like dreams. Inside the cottage, the blue flame means that fire is going to fade. The only wakeful thing is the film; a line of smoke or soot, which was quivering on the grate; framework of bars used to hold fire. The poet thinks that the movement of the film creates between them some kind of affinity, since they are the only two wakeful things. The film is a kind of mirror in which Coleridge's thoughts are being reflected. He is playing with his thoughts as one plays with a toy. Here, the film is a source of inspiration. It inspires him to think and write.

Second Stanza

But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering *stranger* ! and as oft
With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!
So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:

Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face,
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!

The movement of the film stirs Coleridge's imagination. It reminds him of his childhood and the days he has spent in Christ's Hospital school. As a child, Coleridge superstitiously believed that seeing the film on the grate means that he would have a visitor next day. The visitors for the children are good omen because they bring sweets and gifts with them. So, he kept gazing at the grate to catch a glimpse of the film. Then, the poet thinks of his birth-place and hears the ringing of the church bells which was the only music the poor villagers could enjoy. The sound of the church bells aroused in him deep emotions of joy. In the next morning, he went to school and waited for the visitor he had thought of the previous night. His teacher was very strict; therefore, he pretended to be reading carefully. But in reality he was absent minded. The word "swimming" is used metaphorically and means that the words of the book were swimming in front his eyes. His eyes were fixed on his book but his mind was at the door. Whenever the door was half opened, he would steal a hasty glance, expecting the appearance of a visitor. He expected that a townsman, an aunt, or his beloved sister with whom he had played during his childhood when both of them were dressed alike might come to visit him.