Coleridge Among the Baptists: A Newly Discovered Annotation at the Angus Library, Oxford

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AT REGENT'S PARK COLLEGE, OXFORD, ARE THE REMAINS of the library of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), occupying several shelves within the secure holdings of the Angus Library Archive.[1] A chance search of these volumes has revealed an important signature opposite the title page of *A Reply to the Letters of the Abbé Dubois, on the State of Christianity in India* (1824) by the Rev. James Hough (1789-1847), Chaplain to the East India Company, Madras (BMS Location III/272). That signature belongs to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, dated March 1825. Further inspection of the volume has uncovered several short but interesting annotations by Coleridge.[2] Though it might seem odd for Coleridge to annotate a volume belonging to the Baptist Missionary Society, his connections with and interest in the Society, and missions in general, began as early as 1807 and continued into the early 1830s.[3]

Provenance of the BMS Volume

The original owner of the Hough volume is unknown, as is the manner in which the volume became a part of the BMS Library. It may have been purchased by the Society as part of an ongoing policy of acquiring any and all works pertinent to overseas missions, regardless of the religious persuasion of the author. Hough was a Anglican military chaplain in Madras from 1816 to 1822 and a devoted supporter of the Church Missionary Society. After a second brief tenure as chaplain in 1826, he was forced to return to England because of his health.[4] Abbé Jean-Antoine Dubois (1765-1848), who served as a French Catholic missionary to India from 1792 to 1823, received considerable attention for his first book on India, *A Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India, and of their Institutions, Religious and Civil* (London, 1817). His second work, *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* (London, 1823), proved more troubling for the missionaries, prompting responses from representatives of most of the major missionary societies. Besides Hough's rebuttal of Dubois, the

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1 The Baptist Missionary Society (founded in 1792 and now known as the BMS World Mission) delivered some 500 metres of manuscripts, books, papers, and photographs to the Angus Library in 1989.

2 Thanks go to Emily Burgoyne, assistant librarian, who first discovered Coleridge's signature in the front of the volume, and to Emma Walsh, Librarian, Regent's Park College, Oxford, for her assistance in making the volume available on several occasions for consultation.

3 For more on Coleridge's interaction with the BMS and missions in general, see Timothy Whelan, "Coleridge, Jonathan Edwards, and the 'edifice of Fatalism'", *Romanticism* 21.3 (2015), 280-300; and Timothy Whelan, "Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Joseph Hughes: An Ecumenical Friendship, 1795-1831", in this issue of the *Coleridge Bulletin*.

4 Hough continued to write on behalf of foreign missions, including *The Missionary's Vade Mecum* (1832), *The Protestant Missions Vindicated Against the Aspersions of the Rev. N. Wiseman, D. D. Involving the Protestant Religion* (1837), and his greatest work, *The History of Christianity in India* (5 vols, 1839-47), assisted by his son.

Congregationalist missionary Henry Townley responded with *An Answer to the Abbé Dubois* (London, 1824), as did an anonymous writer connected with the Baptist Mission in Serampore (signed only as "The Friend of India") in *A Reply to the Abbé J. A. Dubois's "Letters on the State of Christianity in India*" (Serampore Press, 1824). Copies of all three titles sit side-by-side in the BMS collection at the Angus Library on a shelf pertaining specifically to writings about missions in India. The Serampore volume is inscribed "To Benj^{m} Shaw Esq^{r} With the Author's respectful and affectionate regards July 11th", but the edge of the page has been clipped so that the year is no longer readable, though most likely 1824 or 1825. Benjamin Shaw (1770-1843) was a wealthy Baptist layman, MP for Westbury, Wiltshire (1812-18), treasurer of the BMS from 1821 to 1826 who, along with Isaac Goldsmid and John Smith, in 1825 purchased the land upon which the University of London (now University College) was built. All three volumes would have been of interest to the leaders of the BMS, who assiduously collected for the Society's library at 6 Fen Court, Fenchurch Street, any title devoted to missionary work in India and elsewhere.

Coleridge may have received the Hough volume from a subscriber to the BMS (someone who paid annual dues to the Society) who would have had borrowing privileges from the library. Coleridge knew of many in London who were subscribers, such as his friend Joseph Hughes (1769-1833), Baptist minister at Battersea and Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Hughes had been known to Coleridge since his Bristol days in 1795, and was working with Coleridge at that time in the early discussions about a new metropolitan university open to dissenters.[5] Besides Hughes or Shaw, other London Baptists known to Coleridge included Olinthus Gregory (1774-1841), former assistant to Benjamin Flower at the *Cambridge Intelligencer* in the 1790s and a professor of mathematics at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich; Francis Augustus Cox (1783-1853), Baptist minister at Mare Street, Hackney, and the first London University Librarian, 1827-31[6]; Henry Waymouth (1775-1848), a reformer, a frequent representative to the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, and a long-time member of Joseph Hughes's congregation in Battersea who joined with Shaw and F. A. Cox in siding with Henry Brougham and Thomas Campbell in establishing London University as an ecumenical institution open to all faiths; and Samuel Favell (1760-1830), another wealthy Baptist merchant living in Camberwell who joined Hughes, Cox, Waymouth, Newton Bosworth (1778-1848), and Samuel Medley (1769-1857) as members of the Provisional Committee formed in July 1825 (three months after the date of Coleridge's annotation) to assist in the work of

[5] See Coleridge to Hughes, 12 May 1825, in E. L. Griggs, ed., *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), vol. 6, 1053-55; also John Leifchild, *Memoir of the late Rev. Joseph Hughes, one of the Secretaries of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1835), 466-67.

[6] In February 1829 Coleridge declined an offer by F. A. Cox to compose something (the exact nature of the request is not clear) for a new work or new edition, possibly related to the new university; whatever the case, though flattered to be working under the "auspices" of Cox, Coleridge nevertheless declined the task for reasons of health, fearing the editors would be looking for a "sheet for the Press, when the Author was being layed out for his winding sheet" (Griggs, *Collected Letters*, 6.786).

establishing the new London University, with Gregory, Shaw, and Waymouth serving on the first Council of the new university formed that December.[7] Any of these men could have borrowed the volume from the library *c.* 1824-25 and then loaned it to Coleridge to read, possibly with the hope that he might leave some annotations inside; by that time Coleridge was known for his annotation as well as his conversation. It is also possible the volume was purchased first by an individual, loaned to Coleridge to read and possibly annotate, and then donated to the BMS Library, a common means of building a library's collections at that time. Whatever the mysteries concerning the volume's original provenance, Coleridge's annotations reflect a concern with missions and evangelical theology that coincided with his adoption of historically orthodox religious positions *c.* 1806-07.

Coleridge's Annotations to Hough's Reply

1. Opposite title page [the first annotation appears to predate the second one]:

[p.] 14. l.1[8] This may or may not be true; I dare assert, that it is not the language of Scripture, nor easily reconcilable with the words of St Paul; or those of the Blessed Saviour himself.

I beg it to be understood, that *on the whole* I am highly gratified by the perusal of this work, instructed, and to a considerable extent convinced. I do not hesitate in declaring it the ablest work on the Subject, I have hitherto seen; and I feel profound respect for the abilities, no less than for the aims and motives of the writer.
S. T. Coleridge
March, 1825 *Highgate*

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[7] An account of the formation of the Provisional Committee and a list of its members appeared in the *London Times*, 9 July 1825; Cox was appointed Provisional Secretary and Shaw one of the two Joint Secretaries. For a list of the members of the first council, see *The London University Calendar for the Year MDCCCXXXII* (London: Thomas Davison, [1831]), v-vi. Waymouth was also known to Henry Crabb Robinson, who wrote in his Reminiscences for summer 1809: "A few days before . . . I had dined with a city patriot & orator *Sam Favell* where I met *Miles* the pamphleteer *Weymouth* [sic] the dissenter – besides my friend [J. J.] Evans &c &c But in this line I did not make any great progress" (vol. 2, f. 421, Crabb Robinson Archive, Dr. Williams's Library, London). J. J. Evans had, like Waymouth, been raised a Particular Baptist, though by 1809 he had become a General Baptist Unitarian. Favell (1760-1830) was a Baptist from Southwark and was an outspoken member of the London Revolution Society and the Society for Constitutional Information in the late 1780s and early 1790s. He was a devout orthodox believer, often chairing meetings of the Camberwell Bible Association; at the meeting of 8 November 1813, he was joined by Samuel Palmer (1775-1848), father of the Romantic painter Samuel Palmer (1805-81), the latter becoming a friend of Crabb Robinson and William Blake in the 1820s (see Minutes of the Camberwell Bible Association, 1813-22, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University). Bosworth was an educator and, like Olinthus Gregory, a former member of Robert Hall's congregation at St. Andrew's Street in Cambridge before opening a Dissenting academy for boys in Tottenham in 1823. Medley, son of Samuel Medley, Baptist minister at Liverpool, was a portrait painter turned stockbroker who worshiped with Cox's Hackney congregation.

[8] James Hough, *A Reply to the Letters of the Abbé Dubois, on the state of Christianity in India* (London: R. Watts, 1824), 14. Beginning on the previous page, the text asserts that only the Jews could be, in relation to the death of Christ, guilty of the "greatest of pardonable crimes. To them alone has the Lord of Life and Glory been 'manifest in the flesh;' and, consequently, none but they can have had the opportunity of shedding His precious blood."

2. At the foot of p. 4:

Text: "... then we are justified in maintaining our sovereignty over the Hindoos, without once offering them that only equivalent compensation which is to be found in the benefits of the Christian Religion!"

Coleridge has marked this passage with a straight line in the left margin and added the following note:

Likely to give offence: and if the British Governor be, *comparatively*, a Blessing to the Hindoos, a just offence. For it implies a *dreadful* charge which, if untrue, is a black calumny.
S. T. C.

3. At the foot of p. 21:

Coleridge has placed an "x" next to the Hough's footnote, which reads as follows:

*Unless he holds the doctrine of personal election, what interpretation does he give to Rom. ix. 18.? And to what purpose does he adopt it as his motto, "Cujus vult miseretur, et quem vult indurat"?

Beneath the footnote Coleridge has added the following note:

*It is to me matter of wonder that any man of common theological Learning can find any difficulty in understanding this Chapter – which speaks of Races not of *Individuals*, of Things (for such Empirical States are) not of *Persons*.

4. p. 143, l. 7:

Text: "A Translation of the Holy Scriptures, in order to awaken the curiosity, and fix the attention of the Learned Hindoo, at least as a literary production, ought to be on a level with the Indian performances of the same kind among them, and be composed in fine poetry, a flowery style, and a high stream of eloquence; this being universally the mode in which all Indian performances of any worth are written (p. 41)." [This is a quotation by Hough from Dubois, *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* (London: Longman, [et. al.], 1823), p. 41.]

Coleridge has marked this passage with a straight line in the right margin but without comment.

5. Text: p. 172, foot of page

Coleridge has written without comment:

Origins of Female Schools

Coleridge and Missionary Societies

In an 1807 letter by Coleridge to John Ryland (1753-1825), Baptist minister at Broadmead in Bristol and the same minister to whom Joseph Hughes served as an assistant, 1793-96, Coleridge informs Ryland that he has

> read the Numbers, you lent me, with deep Interest: sometimes too much disturbed by the fear, that little can be done of permanent effect, unless the Government in India by especial favor shewn to the new Converts undermine the heart-withering Institution of Casts by creating a new one. Exile would lose part of it's Terrors, when the banished man knows that he is going to a land of Brothers, a land better than that which he quitted. But the injurious consequences of our present system of pretended Toleration, i.e. of shewing to Infidels & Romanists that we ourselves think their Religion as good as our own or better – (for so they must, and to my own personal knowlege so they do, understand & construe our conduct) would furnish matter for a long Essay.[9]

"The Numbers" is a reference to some recent issues of the *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society* that Ryland had sent Coleridge for his perusal, along with several tracts, including some works by the American divine, Jonathan Edwards (1703-58). In 1807 the British authorities in India passed several ordinances aimed at restricting the preaching activities of the missionaries and, in particular, their native converts, convinced that egalitarian preaching against the caste system was partially responsible for the revolt by Indian soldiers at Vellore in July 1806. The *Periodical Accounts* published first-hand narratives of governmental persecution inflicted upon missionaries and native preachers. Coleridge may have been referring primarily to the experience of the Hindu convert Deep Chund, who noted that various leaders in some of the villages in which he preached inquired if the English were come "to destroy our cast".[10] When Chund arrived at his home village of Panjeea with another convert, Ram Presaud of Pratna, whom he introduced as "his brother", Chund's relatives were displeased and replied, "Ah, till this time your cast remained; but having brought another with you, it is now completely gone!"[11] Chund was forced to flee his village, and his narrative could have provoked Coleridge's response to the actions of the government in India and his linking of "Romanists" and "Infidels" into a kind of perverse religious toleration that, he feared, might open the door for treating Roman Catholicism

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9 Coleridge to Ryland, [early November] 1807, in Griggs, ed., *Collected Letters*, 3.35-36.

10 *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society* (London, 1806), 269.

11 *Ibid.* Robert Southey reviewed the *Periodical Accounts* of the BMS in the *Quarterly Review* for February 1809 (193-226). Coleridge's Notebook entries about Carey and the BMS missionaries in India in 1809 may have been taken from the materials given him by Ryland in 1807. See Kathleen Coburn, ed., *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 3, 1808-1819 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 3505, 3507, 3511.

as doctrinally of equal value to Anglicanism.[12]

Coleridge's interest in missionary activity in India (Anglican and Baptist) and his general distrust of a Catholic presence there continued into the next two decades, as evidenced in his annotating of Dubois's *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India, and of their Institutions, Religious and Civil* (1817).[13] It is probable that Coleridge also read Dubois's sequel, *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* (1823), the work to which Hough responds. Dubois claimed that the missionaries, whatever their denomination, were wasting their time in India attempting to convert the natives. He believed the inhabitants of India had already committed the 'unpardonable sin' and should therefore be left to fulfil God's sovereign design, which to Dubois, did not include their personal or collective redemption. To Dubois, the missionaries were obstructing, not fulfilling, God's will for the people of India, and to seek to evangelize them or translate the Bible into their language (two of the chief objectives of the Baptist mission at Serampore from its beginning in the late 1790s) would prove a fruitless endeavour.

Hough attacked Dubois's claims with arguments that Coleridge found predominantly scriptural and compelling, as his lightly penciled inscription on the inside flyleaf opposite the title page of the volume makes clear. The note lies just beneath another annotation that appears to have been inserted prior to the inscription. The earlier annotation directs the reader to line 1 of page 14, a passage in which Hough claims that only the Jews during the time of Christ could have committed the unpardonable sin, not the Hindus of India, though he resists believing them unredeemable either, a statement Coleridge believes "may or may not be true," but one he finds "not easily reconcilable" with the words of Jesus or the Apostle Paul. Coleridge is unwilling to overlook Christ's pleas that "whosoever will may come" and "none will be cast out" or Paul's pronouncement that of all the Jews he was the "chiefest of sinners", yet still pardoned. This may be one of the reasons for the insertion of the qualifying phrases "on the whole" and "to a considerable extent" in his inscription.

Hough had earlier surmised that if Dubois is correct and the Hindus are incapable of being evangelized, then their perpetual subjugation is nevertheless still warranted without ever encouraging them to assimilate into a Christian society. As Hough argues: "If [Dubois's] views be correct, then we are justified in maintaining our sovereignty over the Hindoos, without once offering them that only equivalent compensation which is to be found in the benefits of the Christian Religion!" Coleridge recognizes that this is a potentially volatile comment on Hough's part, "[l]ikely to give offence," for it is one that "if

[12] On Coleridge's highly complex thinking about the controversial question of Catholic Emancipation, see the editorial introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[13] See George Whalley, ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 12: Marginalia II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 339-49. Coleridge frequently criticizes Dubois for inconsistent and contradictory arguments regarding the innate character of the Hindus, in which Dubois's claim that "neither Honesty or Fidelity or disinterested affection in any form can be expected from a Hindu" was to Coleridge a confounding of "the effects with the causes" (347).

untrue, is a black calumny". Coleridge adds his initials to this annotation, presumably for emphasis. The "offence" that Coleridge speaks of is probably to the British governors of India. Whether Coleridge considers the source of the offence to be Dubois's work, or Hough's ironic *reductio ad absurdum* of Dubois's argument, the implicit "charge" is that British colonial rule is in itself an evil. The only "compensation" for it, according to Hough's formulation, is the spreading of the Gospel. Coleridge's note suggests, on the contrary, that even if Dubois's position were to be admitted (that the natives cannot be converted but should still be ruled by the British), they might still be in a better situation than if the westerners had never gone there. To suggest otherwise is to calumniate the British government in a way that Coleridge would consider to require detailed justification, since the charge is so "*dreadful*".

Coleridge's next annotation concerns another theological question, this one provoked by Dubois's mocking of those missionaries who, in line with Coleridge's friends Ryland and Hughes, held to Calvinist principles of personal election and reprobation. To Dubois, they were all practitioners of a "gloomy tenet",[14] a tenet Coleridge likewise disliked, even when relegated, as the moderate evangelical Calvinists were wont to do, to the "mysterious" sovereign will of God. Hough adds a footnote to the passage in which he refers the reader to Romans 9.18 as proof of the dreaded doctrine: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Coleridge marks the note with an asterisk and beneath it adds his own commentary on Romans 9, rejecting the Calvinist reading for one that allows for a general predestination relating to *national* entities (in this case, the nation of Israel) but not to individuals.[15] Despite his appeal to mere "common theological learning", Coleridge compresses a great deal of implicit argument into this single sentence, introducing aspects of German transcendentalist reasoning into the discussion. Within the Kantian view of the moral law that Coleridge espoused, the distinction between "things" and "persons" is crucial. Only an individual person (not a group) is a moral agent. The status of moral agent means that (s)he must obey the moral law, each person being, in Kant's terminology, subject to the Categorical Imperative; and, conversely, that (s)he must be treated as an end rather than a means. A strict Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9.18, in asserting that God has predestined individuals to disobey the moral law and hence to damnation, would invalidate the Categorical Imperative by denying the kind of individual free will that Kant posits. In order to avoid a logical contradiction within his philosophical-theological system, Coleridge invokes the notion that a *group* of people, in this case a "race", may be in an *empirical* state of reprobation (God having 'hardened' the group, to recur to the language of Paul); yet that each particular *individual* may nevertheless still retain his or her *transcendental* freedom, which consists in the power of the moral agent to "originate a state" or obey the moral law. In

[14] Hough, *Reply,* 20.

[15] For an account of Coleridge's interpretation of the book of Romans in his late notebooks, see Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Coleridge, the Bible, and Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 95-98.

escaping the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9.18, however, Coleridge enters upon a no less problematic discourse, that of racial theory. The notion that there are different "races", rather than a single human race, each of which may occupy a different "empirical state" with respect to God's grace, appears to underpin Coleridge's interest in the debate about the efficacy of missionary work.[16] In this respect, his main source alongside Kant was J. F. Blumenbach, the anthropologist whom Coleridge had first encountered when studying at the University of Göttingen in 1798. Coleridge returned to the study of Blumenbach and his theory of four races in the mid-1820s, close to the time of his annotation of Hough.[17] Disturbing though this mode of thought appears to the modern reader, Blumenbach's position is moderate by comparison with other contemporary racial theorists. While maintaining the theory of multiple *races*, Blumenbach rebuts the claim that certain human beings belong to a different *species* – a point in which Coleridge strongly concurred with his former lecturer.[18]

Two other passages are marked by Coleridge. The first concerns the claim, made by Dubois but criticized by Hough, that biblical translations should be poetic in style, possessing "a high stream of eloquence" comparable to the Hindu sacred texts. Hough's concern is that such a method would push the text beyond the undestanding of the masses. Coleridge's view can only be surmised, but he may have shared Hough's reservation though on different grounds. Basing his view on the translations of Sir William Jones and Charles Wilkins, Coleridge dismissed the register of the Bhagavad Gita as a naïve, false sublime that "passes off bigness for greatness".[19] He is therefore unlikely to have supported Dubois's recommendation of "flowery" translations. The second one highlights a section concerning the formation of female schools in India by Carey and the Baptist missionaries, an action belittled by Dubois as unprofitable but strongly defended by Hough. In this case, it may be inferred that Coleridge clearly sides with the Anglican chaplain.

Coleridge's marginalia to a book whose defence of missionary work largely attracted his sympathy are brief, yet probing and critical. They enhance our knowledge of the way in which various streams of contemporary thought

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[16] Cf. CN 5.5868 f.70 for the idea of different races in different spiritual conditions. See also the introduction to *Coleridge's Assertion of Religion: Essays on the Opus Maximum*, ed Jeffrey W. Barbeau. (Peeters, 2006)

[17] For Coleridge's annotations of Blumenbach's *Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlecht* (1798), see *Marginalia* I 539-41. See further *Notebooks* IV 5506 and n. Coleridge owned and annotated Kant's *Vermischte Schriften*, in which "Von den Verschiedenen Racen der Menschen zur Ankündigung der Vorlesungen der physischen Geographie im Sommerhalbenjahre 1775" appeared, containing a table of races (II 629). See further J. H. Haeger, "Coleridge's Speculations on Race", *Studies in Romanticism*, 13.1 (Fall 1974), 333-357; Peter J. Kitson, "Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785-1800", in *Romanticism and Colonialism*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13-34.

[18] *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach […]*, trans. Thomas Bendysche (London, 1865), 97-99.

[19] Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, ed. Thomas McFarland with the assistance of Nicholas Halmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 281. Coleridge was not the only idealist thinker to take such a view: see G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, 375.

converged and developed in his mind. His annotation of an Anglican work destined for a Baptist library, using the vocabulary of German philosophy, echoes his 1818 annotation of Joseph Hughes's copy of *The Friend* and anticipates his annotation of Hughes's 1831 discourse at Bristol on the occasion of the death of Robert Hall,[20] all of which amply represent not only the richness of his marginal writing but also the breadth and duration of his ecclesiastical interests and connections with individuals and ideas he first encountered in the 1790s.

[20] The two-volume set of *The Friend* resides at Manchester-Harris College, Oxford (shelfmark 1818 Coleridge, S.T.); see also Joseph Hughes, *The Believer's Prospect and Preparation, described in a Discourse delivered in Broadmead Meeting House, Bristol, on Sunday morning, March 6, 1831, on occasion of the Death of the Rev. Robert Hall, A. M.* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1831), annotated copy by Coleridge residing at the British Library [shelfmark c.126.h.2.(7.)], transcribed in *Marginalia* II, 1184-87. In this late annotation, Coleridge draws distinctions between Being and Existence, Actual and Potential, Multëity and Unity, closing with his final comment on Hughes and an essential tenet of Christian doctrine: "Yet I trust, I am as firm a believer in Redemption by Christ Jesus, and in the necessity of that Redemption, as even the excellent & by me most affectionately esteemed Author of this Discourse" (1187).