Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Joseph Hughes: An Ecumenical Friendship, 1795-1831

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THIS PAPER CLOSES A BODY OF RESEARCH THAT BEGAN some twenty years ago, when I first linked Coleridge to a group of eighteenth-century Baptists at Cambridge and Bristol in the mid-1790s. An 1807 letter by Coleridge to John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1825), minister at Broadmead in Bristol and Principal of the Baptist Academy there from 1793 to 1825, initiated my exploration of these Baptist ministers and laymen. Most prominent in this group was the bookseller Joseph Cottle (1770-1853), who introduced Coleridge to several of his Baptist friends in Bristol, such as Josiah Wade (1761-1842), at that time an attendant with Cottle at the Baptist meeting in the Pithay; James Harwood, a linendraper recently arrived from Birmingham; Isaac James (1759-1828), a writer, bookseller, and tutor at the Academy; and John Foster (1770-1843), a former student at the Academy who would later become a prominent West Country preacher and literary figure. It was Harwood who gave Coleridge in August 1794 a letter of introduction to Robert Hall (1764-1831), another of Cottle's friends and a former assistant at Broadmead and tutor at the Academy who in 1791 succeeded Robert Robinson as minister at St. Andrew's Street in Cambridge. That September Coleridge and Hall met, most likely joined by Benjamin Flower (1755-1829), a member of Hall's church, a boyhood classmate and friend of Ryland, and Coleridge's early publisher in the *Cambridge Intelligencer*. This meeting occurred a short time after Coleridge's introduction in London to George Dyer (1755-1841), Robert Robinson's biographer and a former attendant at St. Andrew's Street and tutor at Ryland's Northampton academy, where Flower had attended *c.* 1766-69. All of these connections have been explored in previous articles.[1] This paper will examine Coleridge's lengthy friendship with one more Bristol Baptist, the Revd. Joseph Hughes (1769-1833), Ryland's assistant minister between 1793 and 1796 and Robert Hall's replacement as classical tutor at the Academy. Coleridge's relationship with Hughes became the most lasting and diverse of all of his Bristol acquaintances, beginning with a political kinship within a diverse Dissenting community in Bristol *c.* 1795-96 and evolving into an ecumenical interest after 1805 in the Baptist Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the founding of the University of London.

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[1] See Timothy Whelan, 'Coleridge, Jonathan Edwards, and the 'edifice of Fatalism',' *Romanticism* 21.3 (2015): 280-300; 'George Dyer and Dissenting Culture, 1777-1796', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* N.S. 155 (2012): 9-30; 'William Hazlitt and Radical West Country Dissent', *Coleridge Bulletin* N.S. 38 (Winter 2011): 111-27; 'Coleridge and Some Bristol Baptists, 1794-96', *Wordsworth and Coleridge in the West Country*, ed. Nick Roe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2010), 990-114; 'Coleridge, the *Morning Post*, and a Female 'Illustrissimae': An Unpublished Autograph, February 1800', *European Romantic Review* 17 (2006): 21-38; 'Thomas Poole's 'Intimations of Immortality' in a Letter to John Sheppard, February 1837', *Romanticism* 11 (2005): 199-223; 'John Foster and Samuel Taylor Coleridge', *Christianity and Literature* 50 (2001): 631-56; 'Joseph Cottle the Baptist', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, New Series 111 (2000): 96-108; and 'Coleridge and Robert Hall of Cambridge', *Wordsworth Circle*, 31 (2000): 38-47.

I

Though raised in a Dissenting family at George Whitefield's Tottenham Court Road Chapel in London, Hughes's youth bore several similarities to that of Coleridge. Each man lost his father before completing his tenth year, each was sent to a boarding school at a young age, and each was the recipient of assistance from wealthier friends of the family. In 1784, not yet fifteen, Hughes was sent to Bristol Academy as a Ward's Trust scholar, where he studied under Caleb Evans (1737-91), the Principal, and his two chief tutors at that time, Robert Hall and James Newton (1733-90). Hughes's closest friend at Bristol was John Evans (1767-1827), a distant relation of Caleb Evans and by the 1790s a leading General Baptist (Unitarian) minister in London and friend to George Dyer, William Frend, William Godwin, Mary Hays, and many others known to Coleridge from his days in Cambridge and Bristol and later in London.

Hughes and Evans left Bristol in 1787 for Aberdeen, but not before Hughes, still a teenager, made his entrance into radical politics. That year Thomas Clarkson arrived in Bristol to assist in the formation of the Bristol auxiliary of the Abolition Society. Clarkson later commented on the Bristol group in his *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1808), noting that 'Mr. Hughes, a clergyman of the Baptist church, was anxious and ready to serve it'.[2] Caleb Evans and Robert Hall also worked with Hughes at that time, though the committee did not officially form until January 1788, after Hughes had departed for Aberdeen. Bristol contributed one of the numerous petitions presented that year to the House of Commons in favor of Wilberforce's anti-slave trade bill.[3] As Caleb Evans declared in a 1775 sermon, 'Let the vassals of despotism glory in the forging chains of slavery for all around them: but let the freeborn subjects of King *George*, glory in the preservation and spread of civil and religious liberty'.[4]

Hughes's moderate Calvinism and ardent republicanism were honed at Bristol and strengthened during his time at King's College, Aberdeen, where he and Evans hoped to equal Robert Hall's intellectual and rhetorical stature (Hall completed his M.A. at King's in 1785).[5] Hughes struggled with mathematics, natural philosophy, logic, and metaphysics but, like Hall, excelled in theology, history and poetry, both ancient and modern.[6] After completing his graduate studies in 1790, he removed to Edinburgh, where he conducted some post-

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2 Thomas Clarkson. *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament,* 2 vols (London: Longman, 1808), 2.366-367.

3 Clarkson, *History*, 1.568-569.

4 Evans, *British Constitutional Liberty*, 29-30.

5 Hughes declared many years later, 'No one before I listened to him [Hall] had translated the classics in my hearing with equal grace and spirit: no one had given me such an impression of intellectual nature.' See *Memoir of the late Rev. Joseph Hughes, one of the Secretaries of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1835), 38.

6 Leifchild, *Memoir*, 44.

graduate studies until the spring of 1791 when he returned to London, only to leave on 1 July for Bristol to assume duties as assistant pastor at Broadmead and Classical Tutor at the Academy. Two weeks later the Birmingham Riots occurred, with Hughes noting to an Aberdeen friend that 'Dr. Priestley's letter to the inhabitants of Birmingham is a model for the injured to copy after'.[7] Hughes's interest in reformist politics remained strong at this time, as evidenced by his attendance at a debating society in Bristol where 'democratical principles, or at least those that were then so denominated, were violently urged'.[8] That same year he wrote to his Aberdeen friend that

If truth and equity are to prevail on the earth, I see a short path through the successful and glorious revolution in France. Bankruptcies, poverty, and corruption, threaten the overthrow of Britain. If Heaven intends us a moderate share of returning felicities, Lansdowne and Fox will conduct the fight for a plan of reform.[9]

Hughes was fully aware that his congregation and academy were divided over loyalty to the Crown and allegiance to the principles political reform. He adds in that same letter, 'I have neither talents, nor authority, nor inclination, to interfere: an anxiety to secure quietude and comfort to myself engrosses a very important part of my labours'.[10]

The following year he voiced his opposition to the threat of hostilities against the French Republic, writing once again to his Aberdeen friend:

> I lament the part England takes in foreign quarrels. I triumph in the French Revolution, though tarnished all along. 'Despotism has received a blow (to use Mr. Hall's expression) which has sounded through the universe'. Babylon is falling, and whatever foreign dignities fall with it, they will only increase the shouts which shall accompany the final overthrow.[11]

After the trial and imprisonment in 1793 of his friend William Winterbotham, Baptist minister in Plymouth, Hughes's desire for 'quietude and comfort' increased, but not enough to derail his interest in the abolition of the slave trade. That year Hughes proudly joined the nationwide sugar boycott instigated by William Fox's pamphlet, *An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum*, a pamphlet printed and distributed (some 200,000 copies) by Fox's former business partner, the bookseller/printer Martha Gurney (1733-1816), a member of the Baptist congregation in Maze Pond, Southwark. The Gurney family (not to be confused with the Quaker Gurneys of Norwich) were well known to Hughes, who sent three copies of the *Address* to his Aberdeen friend, with one to be given to his former professor and advocate of political reform, William Ogilvie

[7] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 109.
[8] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 116.
[9] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 116.
[10] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 116.
[11] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 132.

(1736-1819). Hughes resolved 'never to use sugar whilst it is derived to us through the medium of the Slave Trade. I am surprised we have so long shut our eyes against our inconsistency', a position Coleridge echoed in his Bristol lecture on the slave trade in 1795.[12]

The sudden death of Caleb Evans in 1791 catapulted Hughes into the position of interim minister at Broadmead and head of the Academy, positions he maintained until the arrival of John Ryland, Jr., in December 1793. Hughes was formally installed as the church's assistant pastor and the academy's classical tutor in January 1794. The following summer, Cottle (he would become a regular attendant at Broadmead in 1800), while on an afternoon buggy ride with Ryland and Hughes, fell from the rig and injured his foot, leaving him with a halting step the rest of his life.[13] Either that August, when Coleridge made his first appearance in Bristol with Robert Southey, or in the early months of 1795, Cottle would introduce his young friend to a formidable coterie of well-read, outspoken advocates of religious dissent, political reform, and abolitionism in Bristol. Even Coleridge's enthusiasm for Pantisocracy would not have been shocking to these men, for they were all admirers of the newly founded American republic and some, like Harwood, had even entertained thoughts of emigration. Hughes understood the motivation (though not the feasibility) of Pantisocracy well enough, writing near the end of 1792 that 'Many persons of worth, and of a spirit which the frowns of their country possess no power to subdue, are gone in search of freedom in other climes. May they find all that they wish, and may they impart principles which shall adorn their patriotism'.[14] Hughes choose to remain in England, the same decision Coleridge would later make. Coleridge's political lectures that spring would have been well received by Cottle, Hughes, Ryland, and their other Baptist friends in Bristol, all of whom at that time (less so by 1800) graciously separated political and religious positions, though both fell within the purview of Dissent. At some point prior to his departure from Bristol in 1796, Hughes met Coleridge, most likely in the home of Joseph Cottle. John Leifchild, Hughes's friend and biographer, notes that 'at the abode of this amiable man [Cottle] and of his excellent sisters, Mr. Hughes found, to the end of life, whenever he visited Bristol, a welcome and a home', further adding that Coleridge, during his time in Bristol, 'formed that high estimation of [Hughes's] talents, which no change of circumstances occurring through the lapse of many years could abate'.[15]

II

Hughes left Bristol for London in 1796 to become pastor of the Baptist church

[12] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 129-130; Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 1. Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 246, 248.
[13] Joseph Cottle, *Malvern Hills: With Minor Poems and Essays,* 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1829), 2.366.
[14] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 132-33.
[15] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 147-48.

in Battersea, later serving as a founding Secretary of the Religious Tract Society (1799) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804). During Coleridge's intermittent stays in London between 1800 and 1815 and his permanent residence with the Gillmans in Highgate, Coleridge continued to meet and correspond with Ryland and Hughes, meetings often initiated by his interest in two of their chief concerns, the Bible Society and the Baptist Mission in India. During his extended visit to the West Country in 1807, Coleridge spent some time with Tom Poole at Nether Stowey, where he annotated several works, including *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared* (1793), a polemical work by Ryland's friend and fellow Baptist minister at Kettering, Andrew Fuller (1755-1814). During that same trip to the West Country, Coleridge sought John Foster's advice about his future periodical *The Friend*.[16] In 1808, after his return to London, Coleridge gave a series of lectures at the Royal Institution which Hughes most likely attended, for his correspondence with Foster that year often turned to Coleridge, with Foster informing Hughes that Coleridge is 'greatly improved as to the religious part of the character of his mind', adding in another letter that he had learned from Cottle that Coleridge 'is much more firmly established in the principles of religion than at any former period of his life'.[17] In May and June 1812 Coleridge gave a series of lectures on drama in the Willis's Rooms in London, an event attended on at least one night by Hughes, for a Coleridge notebook entry reveals that he reserved two tickets for 'Mr Hughes'.[18] Coleridge even spoke once at a Wiltshire meeting of Hughes's Bible Society. During Coleridge's extended visit in 1815 at Calne with his old friends, the Morgans, Foster heard from Hughes, 'in mingled language of admiration and compassion, that he [Coleridge] made, a week or two since in Wiltshire, at a Bible Society meeting where Hughes was, a speech of profound intelligence; only, as was to be expected, too abstract for a popular occasion'.[19]

After 1816, Hughes met often with Coleridge in London and they corresponded on several occasions, even critiquing each other's writings and activities.[20] One of the most enduring evidences of their friendship is an inscription by Coleridge to Hughes, dated November 1819, on the prefatory title page of the first volume of an 1818 edition of *The Friend*, a set now belonging to Manchester-Harris College at Oxford and bearing significant faircopy annotations initialed by Coleridge that suggest his intentions for a 3rd edition.[21] Coleridge wrote to Hughes on 24 November 1819, asking the

[16] J. E. Ryland, *Life and Correspondence of John Foster*, 2 vols (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), 1.226.

[17] Ryland, *Life and Correspondence*, 1.229.

[18] Kathleen Coburn, ed., *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 5 vols (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957-2002), 3.4159.

[19] Ryland, *Life and Correspondence*, 1.293-94.

[20] E. L. Griggs, ed., *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), 4.965; 5.300, 447, 455; and 6.1048-50, 1053-56.

[21] The inscription reads: 'The Reverend M^r^ Hughes, from the Author. On testimony of Esteem and Regard', Coleridge writes from Highgate, 'and ~~o~~in ~~a~~^th^e humble ~~pray~~^hope^ that the Bread cast on the fluctuating waters of the Author's mind by M^r^ Hughes in early manhood and years long gone by, will be here found again, neither innutritious nor unmultiplied'.

accomplished theologian and classical scholar to examine the volumes he had sent him as well as his first *Lay Sermon* for any passages that 'shall have struck you during the perusal of them as *objectionable*, whether as unscriptural in the doctrine or rash and uncandid in the application or language'. In his letter he defends his emphasis upon the 'distinction between the Reason and the Understanding', hopes his 'Essays on Method' are 'intelligible throughout', and believes he has soundly defeated objections from the Unitarians who, in many cases, possess overrated intellects that differ from animals 'in degree only'. Most likely Hughes did as he was asked, which may have prompted Coleridge to return the favor in 1822 in a critique of Hughes's sermon on the death of his fellow Bible Society secretary, John Owen. In a letter to an unidentified cousin of Hughes, Coleridge praises the sermon for being 'perspicuous and intelligible for all readers who are capable of reading with more than their *eyes*, and yet possesses the liveliest marks of originality, i.e. of origination in the writer's own mind and heart, and not merely in his memory or his bookshelf'.[22]

Coleridge's interest in Hughes's public ministry also manifested itself in the mid-1820s as discussions proceeded, mostly led by Dissenters, toward establishing London University. Coleridge wrote to Hughes on 12 May 1825, proposing a series of lectures under seven heads concerning the origins, divisions, definitions, and purposes of English and European universities, comprehending, he boasted, 'all the several advantages on which all the different parties have grounded their particular schemes'.[23] Coleridge's friend, Crabb Robinson (1775-1867), was working behind the scenes as well throughout the formation of the new university, as were several London Dissenters with Bristol and Cambridge connections, such as Olinthus Gregory (1774-1841), mathematics professor at the Royal Military College in Woolwich who had been a member of Robert Hall's congregation in Cambridge in the 1790s (he would later become Hall's biographer) and Benjamin Flower's assistant, and Sir James McIntosh (1765-1832), Hall's former roommate at Aberdeen. Hughes was kept abreast of all the proceedings by his crosstown Baptist colleague and educator, F. A. Cox (1783-1853), who served as Honorary Secretary of the Council in 1826 and Librarian in 1827, and the reformer and prominent Dissenting Deputy Henry Waymouth (1775-1848), a long-time member of Hughes's congregation in Battersea. Coleridge's proposal to Hughes occurred nine months before the distribution of the official prospectus of the new university. Since he never gave his lectures, any comparison of Coleridge's 'full *exposé* of the plan and means of the greatest practicable approximation to the ideal of a university at the present time' with the published prospectus of February 1826 or the actual form of the University at its opening in 1828 cannot be fully known. Coleridge's chief interest, however, was not so much Hughes's opinion on the validity of his ideas about a metropolitan university but rather the utility, or *profitability*, of such a series of lectures in the public arena. Coleridge was convinced that Hughes knew 'the

[22] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 275.
[23] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 467.

public mind, and the prevalent tone of feeling' far better than he did, and a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer would suffice. We may assume the response was a polite 'no'.

On 14 January 1831 Coleridge wrote to Hughes again, this time about a subject that had surfaced some 25 years previously in his letter to John Ryland – the work of overseas missionaries. The earlier letter concerned the Serampore and Calcutta missions of William Carey and the Baptist Missionary Society, but now Coleridge's attention was fixed on the activities of some missionaries connected with the London Missionary Society in Hawaii and the Sandwich Islands whose work had been severely maligned by Otto von Kotzebue (1787-1846) in his 1830 account of his second voyage to the South Seas. Averse to Kotzebue's 'Russo-gallican sentimentality', Coleridge proceeded with 'great caution' but nevertheless warned Hughes that, if the accusations were true, they 'disclose a woful scene of folly and fanaticism, spiritual pride, and lust of temporal power, masked under spiritual purposes' and therefore 'ought not to remain uncontradicted'.[24] Kotzebue's charges would soon be countered by William Ellis (1794-1872), a Congregationalist missionary in Hawaii *c.* 1823-24, in his widely circulated pamphlet, *A Vindication of the South Sea Missions* (1831), a work Hughes immediately sent to Coleridge and which, Leifchild notes, 'perfectly disabused' Coleridge 'on the subject'.[25] Regardless of Kotzebue's charges, Coleridge had long had concerns about the quality of missionaries being sent from England, though he allowed for some 'splendid exceptions' in India, he tells Hughes, referring to William Carey's mission. Though British missionaries represented a variety of denominations, to Coleridge they were nevertheless emissaries of Christianity and Western values, and thus should understand that 'civilization and Christian faith' should 'mutually [aid] each other' and not be instruments of destruction. Coleridge's fears about the productive ends of missionary activity in India, however, had surfaced a decade earlier, as revealed in Coleridge's annotations to J. A. Dubois's *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India, and of their Institutions, Religious and Civil* (1817) and some previously unknown annotations by Coleridge in a copy of James Hough's *A Reply to the Letters of the Abbé Dubois, on the State of Christianity in India* (1824), Hough's work being a response to another volume on India by Dubois that appeared the previous year.[26]

Sometime after the spring of 1831, Coleridge engaged one last time with Hughes, this time providing a lengthy annotation to his sermon (most likely a gift from the author) on the death of Robert Hall, who had returned to Bristol in 1826 as pastor at Broadmead and principal of the Baptist Academy,

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[24] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 468.

[25] Leifchild, *Memoir*, 469. Ellis had previously published *A Journal of a Tour Around Hawaii* (1825) and was working on his monumental series, *Polynesian Researches, During a Residence of Nearly Eight Years in the Society and Sandwich Islands*, 4 vols (New York: Harper, 1829-33; 2nd ed., London, 1831).

[26] For Coleridge's comments on Dubois's *Description*, see George Whalley, ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 12: Marginalia II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 339-49. The Hough volume can be found in the Baptist Missionary Society Collection, Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, shelfmark III/272.

replacing Ryland, who died the previous year. Hughes's sermon, *The Believer's Prospect and Preparation*, delivered at Broadmead on 6 March 1831, with Cottle in attendance, not only reminded Coleridge of his connections *c.* 1794-96 with Hall, Ryland, Cottle, and Hughes, but also provoked a lengthy annotation on the nature of the body and soul and the doctrine of imputed righteousness.[27] This final annotation reveals Coleridge's ties to Hughes to be substantive and lasting, though little known today among Coleridgeans. From abolitionism, rational Dissent, and critiques of High Calvinism to an engagement with evangelical missionary activity in India and the West Indies and the founding of a metropolitan university without religious tests, Coleridge's letters, notebooks, and marginalia leave a trail of brief but fascinating glimpses into the ecumenical breadth of the religious character upon which his early posthumous reputation was established.

[27] Whalley, *Marginalia II*, 1187.