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reads

Coleridge's Father: Absent Man, Guardian Spirit

(Friends of Coleridge 2014)

by J.C.C. Mays

EVEN THE ARDUOUS WORK OF EDITING COLERIDGE'S POETRY AND PLAYS for Princeton's Bollingen Series of the *Collected Works*[1] did not prevent Jim Mays continuing his research into the life and times of Coleridge's father, John Coleridge (hereafter JC). As a graduate student onwards, Mays traveled extensively across Devon and the West Country, excavating genealogies, subscription lists, local parish records, and a plethora of manuscripts and other forms of informal sources and rare printed works (assisted recently by the ever-expanding world of digital resources). His efforts culminated in 2014 in the first complete and accurate biography of JC. *Coleridge's Father* carves 'history out of what was dispersed beyond the bounds of comprehension' (xvi), and in so doing brings 'a previously absent man into focus' (xvi). In his monumental volume, Mays solves several mysteries and corrects numerous claims about this devoted parish priest, clever mathematician, experimental grammarian, and progressive schoolmaster in Devon whose youngest son would become one of the most brilliant literary figures of his day. Mays admits the extensive scope of his research poses some difficulties for the casual reader, but such 'means and materials' are necessary, he argues, to reassemble a life that touches upon 'church history, mathematics, literary criticism, Latin grammar, local history, [and] 18th century theological debate' (xvii). Though largely an 'absent man' in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (hereafter STC), JC has similarly been ignored by literary historians and biographers of his famous son.[2] *Coleridge's Father* reveals the shortcomings of such an approach, for despite STC's omissions, distortions, and idealizations of his father, JC's ghostlike presence pervades the life and writings of STC, establishing JC as the most influential father among the major Romantic writers (480).

One of the many achievements of the book is Mays's ability to find, organize, and analyze a vast body of material about key individuals and events in JC's life and present them to an audience generally unfamiliar with his career

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[1] Mays's edition of Coleridge's *Poetical Works* appeared in six volumes in 2001: two volumes of Reading Text, two volumes of Variorum Text, and two volumes of Coleridge's verse plays. See also Mays's recent monograph, *Coleridge's Experimental Poetics* (Palgrave, 2013).

[2] Preliminary comments on JC appeared in Mays's 'Was Coleridge's Father as Simple as a Child?', *The Coleridge Bulletin* (Spring 2003), 1-19, first presented as a lecture at the Coleridge Conference at Cannington in 2002. A late Victorian sketch of JC can be found in the Coleridge family history, *The Story of a Devonshire House* (1905). Surprisingly, few biographical details on JC appear in James Engell's *Coleridge: The Early Family Letters* (Oxford, 1994), perhaps because he was aware that the traditional accounts lacked accuracy. Knowing something of Jim Mays's research, he gave the project of publishing *Coleridge's Father* considerable support. Fuller if traditional accounts of the kind that Jim Mays seeks to correct can be found in Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (Penquin, 1990), 3-5, and Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Blackwell, 1996), 12-14. Historically, JC has been given only passing mention in most biographies of STC.

and family history. *Coleridge's Father* uncovers the shadowy web of financial arrangements surrounding the illegitimate birth of John Coleridge's father, also called John (hereafter JC Sr), as well as the identities of his grandmother and most likely his grandfather as a prelude to an exhaustive exploration of JC's birth and education, his two marriages and numerous children, his circle of literary and social acquaintances and benefactors, his publications, his teaching methods, his approach to literary and textual criticism, and, above all, his legacy to STC. In his search for JC, Mays has left his footprint in virtually every library in Devon and throughout the West Country (both public and private); in record offices, museums and parish churches; and in major libraries and special collections across the UK, the US, and elsewhere. We learn new details about the early assistance JC received in Crediton, Clyst Hydon, and South Molton from friends and benefactors like the surveyor John Richards (1690-1778) of Exeter, the Revd Lewis Southcomb (1684-1754) and his son, John (1719-88), of Rose Ash near South Molton, and, most importantly, James Buller (1717-65) of Morval and Downes near Crediton. Buller was the chairman of the Governors at Crediton in 1744 who signed the papers for JC's Cambridge exhibition and probably assisted in obtaining JC's first teaching position at Clyst Hydon, a pivotal moment in his early career. Buller's son, Francis (1745/6-1800), became a prominent London judge in the Court of King's Bench; he was JC's student at South Molton and Ottery and his marriage in 1763 at the age of 17 was intriguingly facilitated by JC. Just as JC was cognizant of the elder Buller's assistance in his early career, so the younger Buller never forgot his teacher, as Mays makes clear, noting that it was Francis Buller who was instrumental in STC's presentation at Christ's Hospital and who invited the young scholar to dinner at his home on Sundays and whose uncle, William Buller, the Bishop of Exeter, promised STC a title to orders during his time as a student at Jesus College, Cambridge. In creating these social networks so critical to JC's life, Mays has also set to right numerous incorrect dates, misidentifications, and factual errors concerning JC's family history, information primarily obtained from previously unexamined poor relief documents, parish records, unpublished letters, journals, notebooks, and even JC's little known annotated copy of Thomas Simpson's *A New Treatise of Fluxions* (1737) now residing in the Special Collections at University College, University of London.

Coleridge's Father divides into (1) an opening section consisting of a preface about the actual making of the book, a detailed chronological table of all the key events and personages in JC's family and career from 1676 through the death of STC's brother Edward in 1843 (amazingly, virtually every item in this exhaustive list is mentioned in the book), and an introduction that, like the chronological table, aptly forecasts the breadth of the book's historical context; (2) a middle section of twelve chapters (divided into six parts) and an afterword, with each chapter accompanied by digital images (some 400 throughout the book) of rare manuscripts, title pages, portraits of key individuals, and paintings of houses and other locations discussed in the

chapter that provide readers with a vivid pictorial summary of each stage in the life of John Coleridge, an inclusion Mays believes essential in reinforcing the biographical methodology of *Coleridge's Father*; and (3) a final section that includes an impressive set of twelve appendixes, notes on the voluminous illustrations, five bibliographies, and a select subject index, this latter section forming a fitting capstone to Mays's massive research.

Despite its size, *Coleridge's Father* contains little that is superfluous; everything has a direct bearing on some aspect of JC's life. The opening chapters examine STC's remembrances of certain key moments with his father at Ottery: a star-gazing illumination walking home one night, the time his father took him from Sir Stafford Northcote's arms after he spent the night by the River Otter, the moment his father broke in upon his superstitious dreaming over books, and the incident when his father struck him for interrupting the school play. In each instance, Mays demonstrates how these remembrances influenced STC's 'struggle to articulate a coherent theory of imagination' (73) as well as his creation of JC as his 'guardian angel'. Consequently, STC's comments in *Biographia Literaria* on his family and his time at Christ's Hospital are misleading at best, masking what Mays believes were powerful yet unacknowledged influences by JC upon his moral and intellectual development. Though STC (and other members of his family) viewed JC as a 'Parson Adams', by 1815 STC was already coming to terms with a radically different conception of his father as a provincial clergyman and schoolmaster actively engaged in the intellectual life of mid-eighteenth-century England, not afraid to tackle Newtonian fluxions, Latin grammar, biblical criticism, or the philosophical controversies surrounding such figures as Philo of Alexandria, the seventeenth-century millenarian Joseph Mede, or the Behmenist Francis Lee, all reflecting an intellectual diversity congenial to STC.

Before presenting JC's life, Mays provides a substantial account of the life of STC's grandfather, JC Sr, uncovering the mysterious and relatively unknown (*buried* might be more applicable, and not solely by accident) history of his unmarried mother Jane Smalridge Cowlridg (1658/9-1698) of Drewsteignton (she bore the first John Coleridge out of wedlock at the age of 17), his probable father (and therefore STC's great-grandfather) William Northmore (1639/40-1716) of Throwleigh, and the surprisingly detailed parish records of poor relief granted to Jane from the birth of her son until her death in 1698. Breaking from tradition, Mays posits that JC Sr was born in January or February 1676/77 and promptly taken from his mother and raised by foster parents in Shillingford until his baptism at Throwleigh in 1686 (previously thought to be the year of his birth, a claim Mays believes erroneous but admits cannot be conclusively disproved). After his baptism, JC Sr remained with his mother, having received a modicum of education in a local dame school but who most likely never maintained consistent work during his adult life. He married Mary Wills (1694/95-1756) on 6 February 1714/15 and removed to Crediton, possibly working in the cloth trade, though his exact vocation is not known. Mays suggests that, no matter what his situation, JC Sr was probably

near the bottom of the work force at that time, receiving poor relief from 1732 until his death in 1739. Between 1715 and 1732 the Coleridges had eight children, of which three survived childhood: John (21 Jan. 1718/19—6 Oct. 1781), STC's father; Mary (1717-93), later known to STC during his time at Christ's Hospital; and Elizabeth (1732-64).

Mays carefully reconstructs JC's education at Crediton between 1723 and 1737, first at a charity school and then the local grammar school (he was a chorister for his final six years), and explores several theories about his early work career, which may have included teaching in a charity school and possibly serving as a surveyor's assistant. What is certain is that in 1744 he accepted a teaching position at Clyst Hydon, the same year he received a five-year exhibition grant from the Crediton school to attend Cambridge University, an option he did not utilize, however, until 1749. Just prior to his removal to Clyst Hydon, he married Mary Lendon (1721-51) (by whom he had four daughters, three of which survived into adulthood), an event that obviously complicated his attending Cambridge but not his pursuit of mathematics and Latin, which he studied on his own assiduously at Clyst Hydon. Several answers by JC to mathematical problems (mostly related to his interest in fluxions derived from the writings of Isaac Newton and Thomas Simpson) appeared in print between 1745 and 1753 in *Miscellanea Curiosa Mathematica* and a few articles concerning translations of classical and biblical literature in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, all of which, Mays argues, laid the groundwork for his later work on grammar and textual analysis. His mathematical work at Clyst Hydon was enhanced by his involvement with a remarkable circle of Devon philomaths that included such figures as William Chapple, Benjamin Donn, and Samuel Bamfield, as well as his engagement with three prominent grammarians and literary historians—Robert Lowth, James Harris, and Joseph Warton—all contributing to the beginning point in JC's 'intellectual odyssey' (149).

The middle section of *Coleridge's Father* explores JC's career as a Devon schoolmaster, first at South Molton and later at Ottery St. Mary. Immediately prior to his arrival at South Molton in 1749, JC spent five months at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, finally utilizing his exhibition grant. His time, though short, was productive, qualifying him for a better teaching position and a clerical appointment even without attaining a degree. He was ordained in 1750 and shortly thereafter appointed curate at Mariansleigh and in 1753 lecturer at nearby Molland, all the while maintaining his teaching duties as Master of Squier's School in South Molton. Mary Coleridge died in 1751 and in 1753 JC married Anne Bowdon (c. 1727-1809), niece of the clerk of the church at Molland, by whom he had ten more children, the last of whom was STC. In another of the many unusual occurrences revealed for the first time by Mays, JC had previously announced an offer of marriage late in 1752 to a Hannah Laskey of Barnstaple, but the offer was withdrawn and the following December he married Bowdon. Surprisingly, she was already pregnant with their first child, John, a second shadow of marital scandal to fall upon the Coleridges, this one readily obscured by later generations of the family.

Chapter 6 surveys JC's contributions to various magazines and other publications during his years at South Molton, most of them involving literary and theological subjects, with nearly a dozen entries appearing in the *Gentleman's Magazine* between 1750 and 1759. His work at South Molton culminated in two major publications at the end of the decade: *Sententiae Excerptae* (1758, no extant copies today) and its companion volume, the *Short Grammar* (1759, only one extant copy, residing at the Bodleian Library), both of which reflect JC's status as 'a member of an intellectual and social community' (236). His circle expanded even further after his arrival at Ottery St. Mary in 1760, where he served as vicar of the parish church and Chaplain priest and master of The King's School until his death in 1781. The Coleridges lived in the school house, not the vicarage as some have previously thought, with JC laboring under difficult circumstances to provide for the welfare of his large parish and growing band of children (twelve of whom survived into adulthood), including his last child, STC, born in 1772.

Near the end of his first decade at Ottery, JC published his most important volume, *Miscellaneous Dissertations* (1768), a critical though somewhat oddly organized examination of the Hebrew text of Judges 17 and 18 from a literary perspective that, unfortunately, would be ignored by those who read it, partly because of its affinity to rational methods of enquiry employed by the deists and materialists, and partly because of its unwarranted speculation. Despite its commercial failure, the book boasted an impressive list of subscribers, though most were not of the sort to provide the book with an extensive circulation. Nor did JC's methodology endear his book to many readers, though Mays's ingenious reading reveals subtleties and nuances in JC's argument that make surprising connections with STC, who, like other members of his family, considered *Miscellaneous Dissertations* a literary failure. JC's critical approach to literary and biblical texts 'was contained in a believing mind that held closely to the orthodox scheme, but that was also fired by fluxionary enthusiasm' (248), an 'enthusiasm' (a term surprisingly absent in his writings) derived from his mathematical studies that, when combined with his theological interests, resulted in a living faith 'not undermined by rational methods of textual criticism' (252). At ease with what many in his and succeeding generations saw as paradoxical assumptions, JC persistently argued for a literal exegesis of biblical events within a scriptural narrative susceptible to textual critique and improvement, finding himself in opposition at various times to both rationalists and enthusiasts, though his sympathies seem closer to the latter. Thus, in his biblical translations, JC moved easily between rational critique and supernatural belief, well aware, as Mays notes, 'that readers of the scriptures write them forever anew and that emendation is a continuing process in the evolution of the text', even though such a 'process' was viewed as 'destructive' by many among the orthodox (253). It is this critical method, Mays argues, that 'constitutes the best evidence of what STC inherited from JC: a cast of mind more than particular thoughts, facts and opinions; sustained by a quality of trust, call it faith, which is deeper than knowledge' (316). Both JC and STC

assumed 'a perspective that must sometimes have appeared irresponsible' to family and friends, a 'kind of abstracted innocence' (116) that Mays believes enabled both to mix in social circles beyond anything for which their financial or social circumstances could have prepared them. As he matured, STC increasingly identified with his father's intellectual dualism (rationality and faith), their interests intertwining in matters of education, religion, church and state, especially the one question that persistently haunted STC—the relationship between pantheism and Christianity—to which a solution was 'ultimately elaborated', Mays argues, 'on JC's terms and was undoubtedly his most important legacy' (8).

Chapters 9 examines JC's later career at Ottery, looking closely at his last substantial publication, *Critical Latin Grammar* (1772) (an expansion of his *Short Grammar*), a work influenced by the popular grammar of William Lily as well as Robert Lowth's *English Grammar* (JC dedicated his book to Lowth, with James Harris, well-known grammarian and author of *Hermes*, heading the list of subscribers). In his Introduction, JC departs from traditional grammars of his day by proposing a six-part scheme of Latin tenses (three perfect and three imperfect tenses), yet in the actual grammar section of the book, he reverts to the more generally accepted five-part scheme, his original version presented now as 'speculative', a practical move for a provincial schoolmaster but one that nevertheless undercut his chief claims. As Mays reveals, JC's experimentations possessed more merit than he thought, for by the middle of the next century many of his ideas would find their way into popular revisions of Latin grammar. Chapter 10 returns to JC's life, recording the history of his thirteen children from both marriages with a genealogical precision that is one of the hallmarks of the book. The cost of sending three of his sons—William, Edward, and George—to Oxford between 1774 and 1780 and the death of William, his presumed successor, in 1780 took its toll on the overworked vicar-schoolmaster, and not even assistance from his two sons serving as military officers in the East India Company in the decade following his death could alleviate all the financial woes of the family, with STC's mother and elder brothers even contemplating at one point the possibility that STC should join his brothers in India. Mays closes this section with a glimpse at JC's final publication, a 1776 Fast Day sermon, in which the claims of the American colonists and those of the British state are situated in a surprising equipoise, not a typical proposition by a parish priest but one that nevertheless reflects JC's long held intellectual passion (this time expressed in a political sermon) to balance and, if possible, reconcile opposing opinions.

The final section of the book, appropriately titled 'Epilogue: Guardian Spirit', returns to some of the themes mentioned in the opening chapters, boring deeper into the influence of JC and the Coleridge family on STC's intellectual development from the 1790s onwards, a development, Mays contends, that is less a progression and more a return to the ideas and methods of JC. STC's attitude toward his family was partially shaped by the loss of his two elder brothers in India, Jack (1754-87) and Frank (1770-92), their

unfortunate deaths apparently regarded by certain family members as necessary sacrifices to 'a selfish or commercial spirit' (477) that would soon contaminate all the class-conscious Coleridges at Ottery, including STC's mother. Mays examines STC's response *c.* 1792-93 toward the Devon literary scene and his brothers at Ottery—James (1759-1836), the prosperous East Devon militiaman; Edward (1760-1843), a teacher-clergyman who kept his mother in his residence in Ottery; and George (1764-1828), who turned his father's school into a financial success—within the context of STC's philosophical and religious experimentations between 1790 and 1805, a period in which he moved from materialism and radical Unitarianism to a quasi-pantheistic Trinitarianism within the Church of England. STC's little known involvement in the early 1790s with a Devon literary society, a group of men he belatedly dismissed as poetasters and antiquarians, took a very different turn from his father's attitude toward a similar coterie of literary-scientific-religious men in Devon (and elsewhere) between 1740 and 1770. JC's experience propelled him to pursue open-ended intellectual questions in science and mathematics, literature, and biblical criticism, an attitude that by the 1790s had diminished considerably in England under the weight of orthodoxy. Mays argues that JC and his like-minded contemporaries were convinced that 'philological scrutiny does not destroy belief, as radical deists and conservative defenders of the faith had argued'. Instead, JC's *Miscellaneous Dissertations* and *Critical Latin Grammar* are marked by a persistent 'reconciliation of opposites', encapsulated in his essay on poetry affixed to the end of his *Grammar*, an essay celebrating 'liberty, not licence' (371). JC's attraction to opposites was passed from father to son, one of several 'curious habits of mind' (480) prevalent in such works as *Aids to Reflection* (1825), *On the Constitution of Church and the State* (1829), and *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1840).

In the appendixes, Mays begins with a complete genealogical summary of JC's grandparents and parents (bolstered by some well-founded speculation), followed by descriptions of his siblings and children as well as a genealogy of Anne Bowdon. Other appendixes include a detailed description of JC's teaching syllabus taken from an advertisement to *Miscellaneous Dissertations*; annotated lists of more than 400 subscribers to JC's *Miscellaneous Dissertations* and *Critical Latin Grammar*; an analysis of the printers and all extant corrected copies of *Miscellaneous Dissertations* and all variants in extant copies of *Critical Latin Grammar*, accompanied by the physical locations of these copies; two unpublished letters by JC, one a transcription of a letter (the original is now lost) to his friend James Quartly at Molland, dated 23 May 1761, and the other the final four pages of a letter to his son, William, dated 16 May 1775, the letters belonging now to the collections at Jesus College, Cambridge, and the Bodleian Library; a list of JC's students at Ottery, to which Mays has added considerable biographical details; a substantial biographical note on the Southcomb family of Rose Ash accompanied by a discussion of various publications by members of that family, several of whom were influential in JC's intellectual development during his time at South Molton; an

analysis of nearly fifty Devon subscription lists whose subscribers in many instances overlap with the subscribers to JC's two books; and a discussion of John Ward's revisions to Lily's grammar, many of which reflect similar approaches evident in JC's *Critical Latin Grammar*.

II

Coleridgeans have too often taken their cue from STC and his family members concerning JC, describing him as 'simple', 'innocent', or 'unimaginative', what one might expect from an obscure provincial clergyman and schoolmaster perceived by his family as someone who dabbled in writing but was mostly proficient in having children, essentially a caricature of another caricature, Henry Fielding's Parson Adams. Mays's work reveals just how wrong these views have been and the damage they have done in properly assessing JC's life and work, a life Mays argues is worth knowing in its own right, especially JC's mid-century engagement with science, mathematics, philosophy, and biblical criticism derived from his reading of such figures as Isaac Newton, Richard Bentley, Robert Lowth, and James Harris, among others. The end result was an interdisciplinary approach to biblical criticism that JC appropriated for all areas of intellectual pursuit—an ability to rest an argument in the midst of contrarieties, whether concerning a biblical text, mathematical formula, grammatical tense, or literary symbol. This liberal Anglican approach to faith and reason, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, Mays contends, was unfortunately revised by German scholarship towards the end of the eighteenth century in ways that distorted its actual positions for generations to come. As Mays puts it, JC was 'more than a forerunner of ideas that STC articulated with greater sophistication'; his engagement with the intellectual concerns of his day 'is of permanent interest . . . and the thoughts he struggled with only became the property of professional intellectuals when, by circuitous routes, they were incorporated in a European movement' some fifty years later (6).

Mays links JC's approach to faith and biblical criticism to a larger group of similarly-minded writers in England *c.* 1740-70, most having their origin in Devon and the West Country, writers known for their breadth of knowledge and openness to current ideas. Members of this group included Lowth and Harris as well as Joseph Warton (1722-1800) (poet and editor, headmaster at Winchester, and brother of Thomas Warton), Benjamin Heath (1703-66) (town clerk of Exeter) and his brother Thomas (c. 1705-59), John Hoadly (1711-76), James Upton (1671-1750) (master at Taunton Grammar School), Jonathan Toup (1713-85) (who held livings in Cornwall), Samuel Musgrave (1732-80) (Devonian classical scholar and physician, educated at Barnstaple), Floyer Sydenham (1710-87) (from Dulverton, a translator of Plato), Benjamin Kennicott (1718-83) (noted Hebrew scholar at Oxford, originally from Totnes), William Fortescue (1687-1749) (a founding member of the Scriblerus Club), and Archdeacon William Hole (d. 1791) (canon of Exeter Cathedral). Another figure engaged in this same mid-century mode of thinking was Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1758 to 1768, who, though

not a part of this West Country network, had received his early education among Dissenters at Tewkesbury. 'They were literary and scholarly but also speculative', Mays notes, 'unafraid to question received opinion and Whiggish in politics' (457), and their previously unknown connection to JC is noteworthy. As Mays argues, 'The poor boy who emerged by his own talents and was assisted by a local patron is not so very unusual, but the mix of his intellectual interests—Newtonian calculus, biblical criticism, the reform of Latin grammar—is peculiar: peculiar, that is, until one realises the connections between them and the further connections with a rich mid-century intellectual milieu that did not survive his lifetime' (457-58). Mays describes this pivotal period in JC's (and England's) intellectual life as 'a fold in history' (454), a window that opened multiple avenues of exploration to JC and led to a 'radical synthesis' (459) of faith and critical thinking.

To JC, no conflict existed between Newton's physics and his faith, for he did not see Newton as a proponent solely of a mechanistic, materialist universe, as Newton would be characterized by the end of the century, a view that even enticed STC for a time. JC and others of his generation were convinced that 'a critical attitude towards the text of the bible . . . did not undermine belief' (495) but was instead a vibrant example of 'a creative marriage of open-minded pragmatism and secure yet supple faith that the deists strove to force apart' (495). Like Newton and his successors, JC moved easily between orthodoxy and speculative thinking without thinking of either as unusual, unlawful, or mutually exclusive, though by 1800 that would not be the case, as deism, materialism, scepticism, Unitarianism, and fears of infidelity forced orthodoxy into a corner against open-minded and, to a degree, open-ended speculation. This speculative approach to biblical scholarship was taken up by German scholars and then fiercely resisted by English theologians when re-introduced into Britain from Germany (in a more sophisticated form, presumed to be atheistical) in the early nineteenth century (495). Thus, the idea of holding criticism and faith within a composite attitude toward the study of scriptural texts gave way to a more rigid rationalistic approach that placed science and criticism at odds with faith to the point that both became mutually exclusive, a position some erroneously attached to Newton. Mays believes, and rightly so, that this crisis should be viewed more as an interruption than a natural progression. JC was clearly a 'mid-century man' (462), and as such stands as 'a minor but representative figure during a fold in intellectual history that has almost been lost sight of' (494). Fortunately, STC eventually discovered its value. Despite his early departure from orthodoxy, Mays asserts that STC ultimately leapfrogged 'into the 19th century on principles inherited from JC' and these 'mid-century' men whose 'loose mix of attitudes' became 'the creative opposites' that inspired STC's thinking (463). Thus, JC's connection to this stimulating intellectual movement not only elevates his stature as a provincial clergyman/schoolmaster/writer (he is clearly no Parson Adams) but also enlightens our understanding of an important moment in British religious history, a moment that likewise has significant implications for

Coleridgean studies.

In an effort to further elucidate JC's 'open-minded pragmatism', Mays elaborates on a little known detail about STC's baptism at Ottery. One of the three witnesses that day (30 December 1772) was William Evans (1701-78), the son of Richard Evans (d. 1743), Independent minister at Staverton and Cullompton. The younger Evans was an orthodox Calvinist worshiping among the Presbyterians (turned Independents) at Ottery, the same group that had once been led by JC's acquaintance, John Lavington, Jr. (d. 1764). Evans became a successful cloth manufacturer in Ottery and one of his sons, Richard (1737-1824), subscribed to JC's *Miscellaneous Dissertations* during his long tenure as the Independent minister at Appledore. Though outside the established church, William Evans appears several times in the Ottery St. Mary Vestry Book as a signatory to parish matters, even the baptism of the vicar's son. Why JC chose Evans is not certain, but Mays does not see it as accidental but rather 'founded on mutual respect for independent thinking and integrity of conscience within the bounds of theological orthodoxy: qualities somehow communicated to the child beyond the death of both godfather and father' (488). As Mays makes clear, JC's mid-century attitude toward openness was not confined to Anglicans.

It may be JC was aware of another West Country Evans, this one being the Revd Caleb Evans (1737-91) of Bristol, who, like JC, fostered an attitude of openness and inclusivity during his tenure as assistant and later senior minister to the mixed Baptist/Independent congregation in Broadmead (1759-91) and President of Bristol Baptist Academy (1781-91), the latter decade producing several giants among the Particular Baptists, such as Robert Hall (1764-1831) of Cambridge and Leicester and Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832) of Norwich. During the 1780s some prominent Unitarians also emerged from Bristol Academy, including Anthony Robinson (1762-1827) (Kinghorn's friend who joined the Broadmead congregation in December 1783) and his classmate John Evans (1767-1827), a distant relation of Caleb Evans and later minister to the General Baptist congregation in Worship Street, London. Bristol Academy's religious and intellectual diversity was further stretched in 1789 by the introduction of lectures in mathematics by the Anglican mapmaker and schoolmaster Benjamin Donn[e], most likely the same philomath from Devon known to JC. A decade later, however, many Particular Baptists were rejecting such openness and the 'mixed' congregations it engendered, leading to a similar end as that discussed by Mays in his treatment of JC's mid-century circle of Anglican writers and divines. Thus, when Coleridge arrived at Bristol in 1795 he briefly experienced the kind of theological fluidity occurring among the Baptists that echoed his father's experience several decades earlier, for his early supporters within the Baptist congregations at Broadmead and the Pithay far outnumbered his Unitarian friends at Lewin's Mead. By 1798, however, the tide, even among Dissenters, was turning and Coleridge, feeling the weight of his heterodox tendencies, headed for Germany. Eventually, as Mays reiterates on several occasions, STC would find a way to retrieve his father's way of

thinking from within the established church, but the road would not be easy to navigate.

Coleridge's Father redefines STC's intellectual life by altering the basis of its entire conception, viewing it less as a series of reactions and reappraisals and more as an ongoing struggle by STC to reconcile his father's enthusiasm for wholeness and wonder with a fundamental belief in Christianity. JC's orthodoxy cast a wide theological net, from the writings of William Law and Samuel Walker to various forms of Dissent (like his friend William Evans) and even Wesleyanism, yet, as Mays makes clear, 'JC belonged to no party' (494). His embrace of orthodoxy was just as important as his interest in 'visionary and speculative matters', believing, as did STC, that simplicity of faith and speculative capacity could co-exist 'with qualities of mind outwardly at odds with them' (494). STC eventually broke free of the 'holy embrace' of German theology 'because it lacked an underpinning of supernatural recognition' (496). Unlike his German counterparts and more like his father, STC did not relinquish his faith as a result of his encounters with biblical criticism, nor did he espouse a sharp separation between biblical and literary criticism. JC and STC found ways to keep them conjoined, a legacy STC eventually passed on to an important group of religious figures in the 1820s and '30s, such as J. C. Hare, F. D. Maurice, and Connop Thirlwall, who in turn influenced the succeeding generation that included such prominent theologians as B. F. Westcott, J. B. Lightfoot, and F. J. A. Hort (500). Thus, 'the case rests', Mays declares with an authority possessed by few Coleridgeans: 'JC is the foundational presence in STC's emotional, intellectual and spiritual formation and STC is the hugely more important figure in history. The tradition which father and son differently embody—whence it derives and the direction in which it tends, its provincial manifestation and its international significance—is a product of the same shaping spirit' (505) and, accordingly, one of the most profound discoveries in this book, a discovery that, sadly enough, escaped both father and son.

As the previous paragraphs have shown, *Coleridge's Father* is about ideas but it is also a book about *people*, and in the appendixes Mays brings their importance to the forefront through a series of genealogies, bibliographies, transcriptions, and, most importantly, biographical excavations into the lives of the subscribers to JC's two major works and a host of other Devon books from the same period. As Mays makes clear, all are in one way or another connected to JC and help shape the narrative of his life. This method requires not only extensive research but also substantial space in which to reveal these connections. *Coleridge's Father* does just that, providing a panoramic survey of JC's ever-expanding network of social, intellectual, and religious friends and acquaintances and like-minded individuals, an achievement unprecedented in the field of Romantic biography. The encyclopedic nature of the volume comes alive in the fascinating array of names and faces (Mays has included many portraits), mostly from Devon, who played various roles in JC's history. Many are relatively unknown today, families such as the Smalridges,

Northmores, Hores, and Burringtons of small parishes on the north-east fringe of Dartmoor and whose intricate (and somewhat unusual) relationships are depicted in the history of JC's grandmother; the three clergymen—John Hole, schoolmaster at South Molton, Lewis Southcomb, rector of Rose Ash, and Lemuel Griffiths, vicar of Bishop's Nympton, 1736-65—who signed JC's ordination papers in 1750 at South Molton; and a circle of Devon philomaths whose paths crossed (some only in print) with JC during his time at Crediton and South Molton, such as John Richards of Exeter, William Chapple (1718-81) of Witheridge, Samuel Dunn (1723-94) of Crediton and London, Benjamin Donn[e] (1729-98) of Bideford and Bristol, John Petvin (1691-1745) of Ashburton, John Rowe (1735-92) and William West of Exeter, and Samuel Bamfield of Honiton. Many of these individuals subscribed to *Miscellaneous Dissertations* or the *Critical Latin Grammar* or both volumes, and some appear as well in other subscription lists of Devon books and authors, all representative of previously unknown networks of people who shared similar reading habits with JC.

Though these subscription lists were never hidden, the names of the subscribers have been largely ignored until now. To an inquisitive scholar like Mays, however, they are a biographical gold mine. In his elucidation of these lists, Mays establishes a model worthy of imitation, especially for scholars exploring authors whose publications were often dependent upon subscriptions. The controversial novelist Mary Hays (1759-1843) is a case in point. Though best known for her novels and friendships with William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s, Hays's life after 1800 has yet to be fully mined for biographical details, work that requires the kind of archival discoveries and scrutiny of rare printed sources that Mays has done with the life of JC. At the end of her volume of the correspondence of Mary Hays, Marilyn Brooks correctly notes that in 1824 Hays was living in Vanbrugh Castle on Maze Hill in Greenwich, a large structure joined by several houses built early in the eighteenth-century by the architect Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726). Hays was obviously not occupying the entire Castle, for an examination of property records and other manuscript sources reveals that she was actually living as a boarder with a Mr. and Mrs. Robert Brown, the couple having converted the Castle into an academy in 1823 that would continue for the better part of a decade, with Hays residing with the Browns for most of that period. Hays's friend Crabb Robinson provides an important gloss on her situation in his diary on 9 July 1823, noting that she was comfortably settled with the Browns at Vanbrugh Castle and that "her nieces M[rs] Bennett and M[rs] Francis are near her—And she sets out with a prosp[ec]t of enjoyment'.[3]

As usual, Robinson's familial and geographical acuity is spot on. Marianne Dunkin Bennett and her older sister, Elizabeth Dunkin Francis (1787-1825), daughters of Mary Hays's elder sister Joanna Hays Dunkin (1754-1805), indeed lived nearby, with the Bennetts living next door in Vanbrugh House (also

[3] Crabb Robinson Diary, vol. 10 (1 May 1823-4 Nov. 1824), f. 33. Quotation by permission of the Director, Dr. David Wykes, and the Trustees of Dr. Williams's Library, London.

called 'Mince-pie House') from 1819 to *c.* 1824, and the Francis family living a short distance away on Maze Hill into the 1840s. More details can be found in a subscription list affixed to a previously unidentified novel, *Fatal Errors; or Poor Mary-Anne. A Tale of the Last Century* (1819), by Elizabeth Hays Lanfear (1765/66-1825), younger sister to Mary Hays. The list reveals that 'Mrs. W.[William] Bennett' of 'Vanburgh [sic] House, Blackheath', along with her sister, 'Mrs. H.[Henry] Francis', at that time living in Finsbury (ix and xi), had each purchased three copies. Besides Hays, Lanfear, and their two nieces, all known to Crabb Robinson, Lanfear's list provides names and locations of no less than 23 family members related by blood or marriage to Mary Hays, as well as significant literary connections to Hays and her sister Elizabeth from the 1790s still alive in 1819. These include John Evans of Worship Street, the former student at Bristol and friend of Hays since 1793; the Presbyterian minister Stephen Weaver Browne (*c.* 1769-1832), a friend of Southey, Coleridge, Charles Lloyd, Crabb Robinson, and other Romantic figures during the late 1790s; and two Unitarians, George Dyer and Dr. John Reid (1773-1822), both men joining their long-time friends Hays, Evans, and Browne among the subscribers to Lanfear's novel. Reid and his sister, Mary (1759-1839), were originally from Leicester and became acquainted with Mary Hays and her sister *c.* 1795, not long after the Hayses had met Dyer, Evans and Browne, and four years before they came to know Robinson, a fascinating instance of how Dissenting networks cross-pollinated in London in the 1790s, a phenomenon not unlike what JC experienced within an Anglican circle of intellectuals in Devon a half-century earlier. More could be said but this is sufficient to demonstrate the value of the methodology Mays has employed so persuasively and persistently in *Coleridge's Father*. The knowledge gained from subscriptions lists may stand apart from a writer's *text*, but it is intimately connected with his or her *life*, and, as Mays makes clear, often has a direct influence on a writer's work.

Mays leaves no one nameless and few faceless in *Coleridge's Father*, giving his text a quality of suggestiveness usually reserved for a literary work. To many readers, names will come alive in unpredictable ways given the expansive nature of JC's networks recreated so carefully by Mays. One example emerges from Mays's suggestion of a likely interaction between JC and his Dissenting counterpart during his early years in Ottery, the Calvinist Independent minister John Lavington, Jr. Lavington probably shared several friends and acquaintances among JC's network of Devon intellectuals and writers, but Lavington also enjoyed a minor role in a literary circle that emanated from Broughton, in nearby Hampshire, a circle centred upon the prolific Particular Baptist poet/hymn writer Anne Steele (1717-78) ('Theodosia' to the public, but 'Silviana' within the circle). Besides Lavington ('Lysander'), other members of Steele's literary circle *c.* 1745-60 included her brother William Steele IV ('Philander') (1715-85); Hannah Towgood Wakeford ('Aminta') (1725-46), the niece of the prominent Arian Presbyterian minister at Exeter, Micaiah Towgood (1700-92); Hannah's husband for a brief time, Joseph Wakeford

('Portius') (1719-85) of Andover, Hampshire, an orthodox Independent; the Arian Independent minister Philip Furneaux ('Lucius') (1726-83) of London; Caleb Ashworth (1722-75), Principal of Daventry Academy; and Daniel Turner (1710-98), Particular Baptist minister at Abingdon, Berkshire. In fact, Wakeford and Furneaux would be instrumental in procuring the publication of Anne Steele's *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* in London in 1760, sold by James Buckland, a dissenting bookseller known to Lavington and JC who sold a work by one of the writers in JC's Devon network in 1767 and who in 1776 would also sell JC's Fast Day Sermon. This branch of the Steele circle, like the Devon networks known to JC, exemplified a similar mid-century ease in allowing opposing opinions on religion (the circle included Baptists and Independents, Calvinists and Arians) to repose side by side in letters, poems, and dialogues composed in the Steele's parlor at Broughton House. One wonders if Lavington ever shared with JC highlights of his poetic encounters with his friends in Hampshire, Berkshire, and London, and their shared sense of literary and religious openness, an openness that, in this case, crossed geographical, denominational, and gender lines.

In her later years, Anne Steele passed her literary mantle to her niece, the gifted poet Mary Steele ('Sylvia') (1753-1813), who in the 1790s oddly enough became friends with Mary and John Reid and other members of their circle in Leicester and later in London. A further oddity is that the Steele Collection, in which all the manuscript poetry and letters of Anne and Mary Steele resides, now belongs to the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, a library named for Joseph Angus (1816-92), a name that surprisingly appears in an image of a rare copy *c.* 1790 of *The History of Jack and the Giants*, printed in Newcastle by 'M. Angus and Son' and inserted by Mays at the end of his Prologue as a title possibly read by STC in his youth during a visit to his aunt's bookshop in Crediton (41). Though only one example from the illuminating panorama of images Mays has meticulously collected for *Coleridge's Father*, this particular title page nevertheless aptly demonstrates Mays's methodology, for it answers his specific purpose for the image (a possible connection to the lives of JC and STC) as well as a secondary purpose, the possibility that further connections and interpretations can be applied according to the experience of each reader. As Mays asserts in his Preface, 'by preserving something of the methods of inquiry [ie., the inclusion of digital images] others might be led to pursue the loose ends that remain' (xvii). This title page is one of those 'loose ends', for 'M. Angus' was actually Mary Angus, a relatively obscure printer/bookseller (she assumed her husband's business) and member of a prominent family of Particular Baptists in Newcastle from which Joseph Angus emerged. During his tenure as President of Regent's Park College (at that time in London), Angus began exhibiting his autograph collection in the college's library at Holford House *c.* 1860, one autograph being especially prized, a letter by STC to Samuel Purkis *c.* March 1800, a letter that escaped the notice of E. L. Griggs but is now proudly displayed once again in the Angus Library, the end product of a connectivity of names engendered by letters and other

informal sources and sometimes, as in this instance, by the random selection by a diligent scholar of an image of a rare title page.

Whether by images or manuscripts or any of the other means employed in this ground breaking biography, Jim Mays has vividly recreated the social, scientific, literary, and religious networks surrounding JC at every turn of his life, from Crediton to Clyst Hydon to South Molton and Ottery. Few if any scholars have pursued a subject with the breadth and precision Mays has done in this volume, piecing obscure and, at times, disjointed references scattered across Devon and elsewhere into a mosaic of genealogical, social, and intellectual networks. Instead of approaching JC from a theoretical context, in which assumptions about a historical subject are often worked backward through time to arrive at conclusions that are not always historically accurate, Mays begins with a clean historical slate and works forward to compose his biography without any preconceived or, as the Coleridges were later prone to do, ill-conceived notions of JC. Literary historians often recreate the historical context of a particular *work* (Mays has done this admirably with STC's poetry), but in *Coleridge's Father* Mays demonstrates the value of recreating, and, in this case, restoring the historical context surrounding a particular *person*. In essence, he has created a *biographical* text (illuminated by countless images throughout the book) that allows the reader to witness the unfolding of JC's life much the way we might approach the allusiveness of a literary text. And just as a literary text continues to live anew with each reading, so Mays has given us a biographical text that will continue to produce new insights and new connections with each reading. As Mays himself suggests, his book is designed not so much as an end in itself but rather a beginning for further exploration, not altogether removed from the ideals of JC and STC, ideals imbibed by the father within various circles in mid-eighteenth-century Devon, imparted to his son's consciousness in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and delineated now to twenty-first century students of Coleridge and Romanticism in the richly woven text and abundantly annotated apparatus of *Coleridge's Father*.