

Tim Fulford

Coleridge and J. H. Green: the Anatomy of Beauty

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Essays for Thomas McFarland

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Essays for Thomas McFarland

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Coleridge and J. H. Green: the Anatomy of Beauty

TIM FULFORD

Joseph Henry Green, 1791–1863, Professor of Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Royal Academy Schools, was concerned to ensure the dignity of his rapidly advancing branch of medicine by establishing a methodology based on philosophic principles. He is respected as one of the founders of the surgical profession and his eminence in operations upon diseases of the eye was praised in the early issues of *The Lancet*.¹ He is best known to non-medical posterity, often with a certain condescension, as Coleridge's disciple and literary executor. In the literary world of his day even those who were personally and intellectually sympathetic to Green tended to treat his *philosophical* work as an exposition by a disciple of his master's thought. Robinson wrote congratulating Green on his Hunterian Oration and on 'the progress of public opinion in favour of the Master's notions'.² Green himself often took the attitude of a disciple, and his own words may have encouraged judgements such as Robinson's. He wrote in 1832 that the truths of Coleridge's system 'appear to me rather as revelations than as human thoughts'.³ His *Spiritual Philosophy; founded on the teaching of S. T. Coleridge*, published in 1865, was treated as a disciple's labour of love, but its arguments were attacked by Coleridge's biographer, Traill.⁴

In face of these prevailing views a detailed estimate of Green's friendship with Coleridge and of his own achievements was needed. This was provided in 1982 in a

1 J. H. Green, 'On the Diseases of the Eye', *The Lancet*, 2 no. 8 (16 February 1824), 244-57 (p. 257).

2 *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books And Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Dent, 1938), n, 664.

3 Letter from J. H. Green to S. T. Coleridge (30 March 1832) in Reading University Library, Microfilm 48: 'Miscellaneous Manuscripts In Victoria College, Toronto. Contents of Envelopes: MSS and Letters'.

4 *Spiritual Philosophy: founded on the teaching of S. T. Coleridge* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865). H. D. Traill's comments occur in *Coleridge*, ed. by John Morley (London: Macmillan, 1884), pp. 184-8.