



A new Wordsworth letter: "Lyrical ballads" and John Taylor

Citation

Bates, Madison C. 1955. A new Wordsworth letter: "Lyrical ballads" and John Taylor. Harvard Library Bulletin IX (2), Spring 1955: 273-282.

Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37363550>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

few such items as the baby undershirt of President Edward Holyoke, Class of 1705, are included until such time as the University has a museum of Harvardiana.

More typical are the long series of records emanating from the departments of the University, and the supplementary materials of student life and alumni activities. The copious correspondence files for each department, payroll record cards, clipping files of various kinds, superseded sheet shelf lists and catalogues from the College Library, examination questions (dating from 1836) and sample examination papers, a selection of students' lecture notes (from 1650), many thousands of student record files each containing an average of a dozen or more forms, scrapbooks, theses and prize papers covering a great range of knowledge, student club archives (the earliest 1719), some diaries and reminiscences, and a few early menus—these may indicate the range of docu-

ments retained. With records holding educational and biographical data dating as far back as the meeting of the Governors of Harvard College on 27 December 1643, the University Archives has an importance for the history of American education that can hardly be overemphasized.

While the Archives fills about one thirteenth of the entire Widener Library building, and ninety per cent of this collection is non-book material, other non-book material elsewhere in the University would fill another tenth of the building—a total space that would take care of some 350,000 volumes. This figure represents one eighteenth of the book space in the University; and the full time of at least twenty members of the staff—again one eighteenth of the total—is devoted to organization and service of this feature of the Harvard University Library.

DAVID C. WEBER

A New Wordsworth Letter: *Lyrical Ballads* and John Taylor

A FEW years after the death of Frederick Locker-Lampson in 1895, his collection of manuscripts and rare books known as the Rowfant Library was sold to Dodd, Mead and Company of New York; and about 1908 one item therefrom, a large album made up chiefly of holograph letters by English writers, was bought by the late Paul M. Warburg. After his death the album passed into the possession of his son-in-law and daugh-

ter, Mr and Mrs S. B. Grinson, through whose kindness an autograph letter of Wordsworth contained in it is here printed for the first time. The album is now on deposit in the Harvard College Library.¹

¹In his article on Locker-Lampson in the *DNB*, Austin Dobson gives the date of sale of the Rowfant Library as 1905. The Harvard College Library has an undated catalogue issued by Dodd, Mead and Company offering for sale the 'Great Album' and listing the Wordsworth letter, together with

The letter fills two and a half pages each measuring 9 by 7¼ inches. It is addressed to 'John Taylor Esq^r / No 10 — Hatton Garden / London' and reads as follows:

Grasmere April 9th — 1801

Sir,

Had I not been prevented by indisposition I should have returned you my thanks some time ago for the letter which you were so kind as to send me, containing your opinion of my Poems. The confidence which I formerly entertained that I had not altogether failed in my attempt to excite tender sensations in the hearts of my Readers has derived a firm support from your good opinion, a support which is at once a valuable reward for what I have already done, and an encouragement to me to proceed in similar efforts. Your praise, highly valuable in itself, was made far more so by possessing that character of discrimination for which you are distinguished. You say that mine is the pathos of humanity: these words are a favorable augury for me, for, this is the very excellence at which I aimed.

It may perhaps be interesting to you to be informed that the very evening before I received your last letter, Mr Coleridge & I had a long conversation upon what you with great propriety call jacobinical pathos; and I can assure you that he deeply regretted that he had ever written a single word of that character, or given, directly or indirectly, any encouragement whatever to such writings; which he condemned as arguing both want of genius and of knowledge: he pointed out as as [sic] worthy of the severest reprehension, the conduct of those writers who seem to estimate their power of exciting sorrow for suffering humanity, by the quantity of hatred & revenge which they are able to pour into

five sentences quoted from it. The *Rowfant Catalogue* of 1886, p. 220, also lists the letter and summarizes it in three brief sentences.

the hearts of their Readers. Pity, we agreed, is a sacred thing, that cannot, & will not be prophaned. Mr C is as deeply convinced as myself that the human heart can never be moved to any salutary purposes in this way; & that they who attempt to give it such movements are poisoners of its best feelings. They are bad poets, & misguided men.

I shall not request you to return my thanks (for the kin)² to your Sister, for the kind notice which she has taken of my poems, as I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of writing to her — I am very sorry to have sent you a Book so incorrectly printed. Owing to some untoward accidents, the copies which my publisher sent down to me did not reach me till the middle of last month. Of course I was ignorant of the condition in which the book was. If you think it worth while, by applying to Mr Longman, a half sheet will be sent to you which contains sixteen lines which were omitted in the last poem of the second volume, also a page of Errata, many of which are material to the sense — I ought to add that this half sheet is reprinted in such a manner that it may be inserted in the Volume without disfiguring it.

If Business or Pleasure should ever lead either you or Miss Taylor this way, I shall be very happy to shew you those things which are most worth notice in our neighbourhood. I shall not fail to do myself the pleasure of calling upon you if it should ever by [sic] my fortune to revisit London.

I am, Sir, with great Respect,
Your faithful Serv^t
W Wordsworth

If as late as the turn of the century Wordsworth still cherished a lingering hope, as some have maintained, that good might yet come of the upheaval in France,³ the letter offers new

² Canceled in the original.

³ Thus George M. Harper (*William Wordsworth*, New York, 1923, II, 8, 10)

evidence that the doctrines of the Revolution no longer dominated his thinking or tempted him to use his art for purposes of propaganda. (The term 'jacobinical' which he quotes from Taylor had come to be applied loosely to any utterance that could be construed as sympathetic to the Revolutionary dogmas, much as the word 'communistic' is indiscriminately used today.) During the richly creative period beginning about 1796 agencies of another kind had been leading him to a different conception of his office as a poet in a confused and tragic time.

His sister Dorothy had been teaching him, however unconsciously, to trust 'our elementary feelings,' 'the essential passions of the heart.'⁴ The immensely stimulating influence of Coleridge had encouraged him to devote his great gifts not to the 'bad passions'⁵ but to nothing less than the 'beauty and dignity'⁶ of the human mind. In a letter of April 1798 to his brother, Coleridge quoted a few lines of Wordsworth's, later included with some revision in Book IV of *The Excursion*, dealing with the influence of Nature as exciting 'no morbid passions . . . no vengeance, and no hatred' but 'the pure principle of

thinks that the poet did not relinquish hope till the renewal of war between England and France in 1803, while Lawrence Hanson (*The Life of S. T. Coleridge: The Early Years*, London, 1938, p. 479) believes that the final quietus came in 1804 when Napoleon was crowned emperor.

⁴Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 (*The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Sélincourt, Oxford, 1944, II, 386).

⁵*Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest H. Coleridge (Boston, 1895), I, 244.

⁶Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 (*Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. De Sélincourt, II, 389).

love';⁷ and to Wordsworth he wrote in the summer of 1799: 'I do entreat you to go on with "The Recluse"; and I wish you would write a poem . . . addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind. . . . It would do great good. . . .'⁸ This eager plea proved germinal. Out of it finally grew *The Prelude* and almost at once the memorable poem of 107 lines beginning 'On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,' which Wordsworth first called by the significant title of 'Prospectus' and later included in *The Recluse*. He had formed a new synthesis and a conception of his art at once deeper and broader than before. In the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* he could declare that the poet is a 'preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. . . . The Poet binds together . . . the vast empire of human society. . . .'⁹ The new letter records the vehement regret of Wordsworth and Coleridge that in support of ideals which they had once believed the Revolution to symbolize they 'had ever written a single word' to incite division and enmity, the 'hatred and revenge' of which the letter speaks. To the extent that they had done so they had profaned the sacred emotion of pity. This, pretty clearly, is the 'jacobinical pathos' to which the letter alludes. And whenever they had dealt with the tragedy of the human lot in such a way as to

⁷*Letters of Coleridge*, I, 244.

⁸Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (London, 1851), I, 159.

⁹Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 (*Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. De Sélincourt, II, 396).

bind the family of man together in relationship and love, they had given expression to 'the pathos of humanity.'

All this is, of course, implicit in the poems of the new edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and in portions of the Preface; and one feels that Wordsworth looked upon a particular poem, 'Michael,' which he refers to in the letter as the last poem in the collection, as in a special sense a touchstone, a measure of his success. In a letter to Thomas Poole written the same day as the new letter, he asked Poole to believe that 'Michael,' dealing with 'two of the most powerful affections of the human heart, family love and love of the land, had 'drawn tears from the eyes of more than one'; and he was eager to learn his friend's response to this poem. Similarly when he sent the volumes to Charles James Fox, he said in an accompanying letter that he was offering them 'solely on account of two poems . . . the one entitled "The Brothers," and the other, "Michael."'¹⁰

The name of the John Taylor (1757-1832) to whom the new letter is written is all but absent from the Wordsworth story. He is unmentioned in the biographies. In the correspondence only one complete letter to him, dated 21 November 1826 (Letter 784 in De Sélincourt's collection), has hitherto appeared.¹¹ There

¹⁰ *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Sélincourt (Oxford, 1935), pp. 266, 260.

For the 'sixteen lines . . . omitted in the last poem ['Michael'] of the second volume,' see *Letters of Coleridge*, I, 350 n. The passage begins, 'Though nought was left undone' (*Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. De Sélincourt, II, 86).

¹¹ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. Ernest De Sélincourt (Oxford, 1939), I, 259-260.

is, however, a five-line fragment, dated 30 January 1828 (Letter 813 in De Sélincourt);¹² and there is a letter to Miss Taylor, written the same day as the new one to her brother (Letter 120 in De Sélincourt).¹³ To the first and third of these De Sélincourt has three footnotes, totaling twelve lines — the only treatment of Taylor, so far as I have found, that any editor of Wordsworth has given us.

For light on the origin of Wordsworth's connection with Taylor, we are obliged to rely on the latter's autobiography,¹⁴ written late in life and by no means free from inaccuracies. In this instance, however, his narrative dovetails so well with what Wordsworth writes in the new letter that there seems to be no reason for calling it in question. It contains two pages devoted to Wordsworth.

'To my surprise,' he says, 'I received a letter from him many years ago, accompanied with two volumes of his "Lyrical Ballads"; the letter imported a desire to know what impression his poems, written by an author living in rural retirement, had made upon a man living in the bustle of active life. It was not a little gratifying to me to find that I was known at all to a poet of such original merit, and residing at so distant a place.' Taylor acknowledged the receipt of the volumes, and after he had read them wrote Words-

¹² *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, I, 291.

¹³ *Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. De Sélincourt, pp. 268-272.

¹⁴ John Taylor, *Records of My Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1832). Although it is the chief source of information about Taylor, this is a strange and unreliable work. It is an interminable series of reminiscences set down from memory without benefit of documentation or dates or index or organization of any kind, even chronological.

worth a second letter, 'to testify the pleasure which they had afforded me.' In the poet's reply, the letter with which we are dealing, 'he expressed his satisfaction with the opinion which I had given of his work, and after a little farther correspondence between us, I heard from him no more.'¹⁵

No clear answer appears to the question why Wordsworth wrote Taylor in the first place, a man whom he did not then know; but one may make a plausible guess. The correspondence of both Wordsworth and Coleridge just before and just after the new edition of *Lyrical Ballads* came off the press (in January of 1801) shows that the two friends were in a state of keen excitement concerning the reception of the two volumes; and they collaborated on a kind of promotional scheme, Coleridge taking the initiative. To the publisher, Longman, he wrote on 15 December 1800: 'I have already commenced negotiations [sic] for securing [the new publication] a fair and honest Review—I should advise that 3 or 4 copies should be sent to different people of eminence: one to Mrs. Jordan . . . one to Mrs. Barbauld and one to Mr. Wilberforce. . . . Mr. Wordsworth will write appropriate complimentary Letters with each. With neither of these has Mr. W. any acquaintance. I have written Letters to all my acquaintance whose voices I think likely to have any influence.'¹⁶ Toward the end of January 1801, he wrote to Poole: 'By my advice, and at Longman's expense, copies with appropriate letters, were sent to the Dutchess

[sic] of Devonshire, Sir Bland Burgess, Mrs. Jordan, Mr. Fox, Mr. Wilberforce, and two or three others.'¹⁷ On February 13 Coleridge reported to Poole: 'Wordsworth has received answers from all but Mr. Fox—all respectful and polite, but all written *immediately* on the receipt of the Poems, and consequently expressing no opinion.'¹⁸

Coleridge was writing at intervals for the *Morning Post*, of which Taylor had been editor only a few years before, and it is extremely likely that he would have known of him as a figure in London journalism. That Taylor was but a second-rate journalist is less important in this connection than that he was a widely known one. Thus it would be at least understandable that Coleridge in his advertising zeal should suggest to Wordsworth the inclusion of Taylor's name on their list of 'people of eminence' to whom the new volumes should be sent 'with appropriate complimentary Letters.'

It is perhaps worth while to summarize the evidence of the whole connection between the two men. All the letters of which there is record are the following:

1. Wordsworth's letter to Taylor (lost) submitting the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 to his attention. The date would necessarily fall between the publication of the volumes in January of 1801 and April 9, when the new letter was written.
2. Taylor's note of acknowledgment (lost).
3. The letter (lost) that Taylor wrote after he had read the volumes.
4. Presumably a letter by Miss Taylor sent with her brother's letter.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Records of My Life*, II, 287-288.

¹⁶ *Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl L. Griggs (New Haven, 1933), I, 163-164.

¹⁷ Mrs. Henry Sandford, *Thomas Poole and His Friends* (London, 1888), II, 27.

¹⁸ *Unpublished Letters of Coleridge*, I, 173.

5. The new letter, 9 April 1801, which Wordsworth wrote in reply to Taylor.

6. Wordsworth's letter to Miss Taylor (No. 120 in De Sélincourt) written the same day as the above.

7. What Taylor calls 'a little farther correspondence,' lost and undated but obviously not long after the letters listed above.

8. After an interval of some twenty-five years, a letter from Taylor, lost but belonging to November 1826.

9. Wordsworth's reply (No. 784 in De Sélincourt), dated 21 November 1826.

10. A letter by Taylor, lost but belonging to about January 1828.

11. A fragment (Letter 813 in De Sélincourt) of a reply to the above, dated 30 January 1828.

However, letters are not quite the only evidence of the association.

In No. 9 above the poet thanks Taylor for an 'elegant sonnet' in his honor. This is no doubt the sonnet, a very flat one, which appears on page 191 of the first volume of the subscription edition of Taylor's *Poems on Various Subjects*, 1827. It may be plausibly dated as belonging shortly before the letter.

Although there is no indication that Taylor ever accepted Wordsworth's invitation to visit him in the Lake District or that Wordsworth ever called on Taylor, they did meet and talk in London. In his autobiography Taylor says that he met Wordsworth by chance at an annual exhibition of the Royal Academy. 'As I was going up the stairs of the academy, I overtook Sir George Beaumont and a gentleman, whom he introduced to me as Mr. Wordsworth. I was very much gratified in seeing him, and he testified a similar pleasure in seeing me, inso-

much that we paid more attention to each other than to the pictures. Sir George invited me to dine with him, and to meet Mr. Wordsworth, and this invitation the worthy baronet frequently repeated while Mr. Wordsworth remained in town. I hardly need add, that these invitations were a source of more than amusement, as it would be strange indeed if I had not profited by such enlightened society.'¹⁹ The wording here is a little ambiguous but it seems to mean that Wordsworth, Taylor, and Sir George dined together several times. Taylor records no details of these meetings.

Finally something should be said as to who Taylor and his sister were.

Of the latter, to whom the new letter alludes so pleasantly, little information is available. Taylor's autobiography contains three mentions of her, all of them undated. Two of these are too casual to be of any help. The third, written late in his life, says that there were eleven children in his father's family, of whom five died in infancy, and that he and his sister are the only survivors; and he adds: 'The affection of my sister, together with her merits, both moral and intellectual, in a great degree compensate for the loss of the rest.'²⁰

In the subscription edition of Taylor's poems, 1827, there is an undated sonnet with the title 'To My Sister.' This tribute, which gives every evidence of genuine feeling, says of her that she is both 'faithful friend' and 'kind sister,' and praises her unselfishness, her generosity, and her tenderness of heart.²¹

¹⁹ Taylor, *Records of My Life*, II, 288.

²⁰ Taylor, *Records of My Life*, I, 4.

²¹ John Taylor, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London, 1827), I, 177.

That she should have written to Wordsworth at all as early as 1801, when he was but little recognized, says something of her; and the fact that she admired the 'genuine simplicity' of the poems and the independent thought evinced in the Preface pleased Wordsworth so deeply that he would not 'refuse [himself] the pleasure of writing to her' a separate letter. The tone of this letter — its candor, its friendliness, its assumption that he is addressing a person of taste — shows that Wordsworth believed he discerned in Miss Taylor an intelligent, open-minded, and sympathetic reader. Otherwise he would hardly have written at such length on the question of how his 'present opinions' on poetry and the language of poetry had been formed; nor would he have been at pains to offer her a list of emended readings of 'The Female Vagrant' in order to illustrate the wide difference between his ideas of poetic diction when that poem had been composed (it was begun in 1793)²² and his present convictions on the same subject.

At best Miss Taylor is a shadowy figure, but it is fair to suppose, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that she deserved the high opinion of her held by her brother and Wordsworth.

The brother is the fourth John Taylor in unbroken succession to be connected with the practice of medicine. His great-grandfather was an apothecary-surgeon. His grandfather, the redoubtable 'Chevalier' Taylor, was a traveling oculist and something of a mountebank. Dr Johnson said of him that though 'sprightly' he 'was an in-

²² *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth: Poems Written in Youth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford, 1940), p. 330.

stance of how far impudence could carry ignorance.'²³ (It is not surprising that the grandson expressed his resentment of 'the insolent abuse of my grandfather by Dr. Johnson, as recorded in the life of that literary hippopotamus by Mr. Boswell.')²⁴ The Chevalier was repeatedly satirized, in public (by Hogarth and others and in *The Operator: A Ballad Opera*) and in private (for example in Horace Walpole's letters).²⁵ His grandson quotes, without protest, 'an old number of the Monthly Review' wherein the Chevalier is called 'a coxcomb, but a coxcomb of parts.'²⁶ He was for many years oculist to George II, held M.D. degrees from three continental universities, wrote medical treatises, and practiced as an 'Ophthalmiater,' his own term, in most (he says all) of the courts of Europe. Edward I. Carlyle, while deprecating his flamboyant methods of self-advertising, says of him that he 'possessed considerable skill as an operator.'²⁷

Of the third John Taylor (1724-1787) all that need be said is that he lived in London (most of the time at Hatton Garden), that he became ocu-

²³ *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George R. Hill, rev. Lawrence F. Powell (Oxford, 1934-50), III, 389-390. A footnote to this passage gives an amusing example of the Chevalier's quickness at repartee. At a dinner with a group of barristers he had been boasting of the remarkable things he could do. One of the diners thereupon asked him to tell them anything he could not do. "Nothing so easy," replied Taylor: "I cannot pay my share of the dinner bill, and that, Sir, I must beg of you to do."

²⁴ Taylor, *Records of My Life*, I, 27.

²⁵ *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. Mrs. Paget Toynbee (Oxford, 1903), IV, 201, 214.

²⁶ Taylor, *Records of My Life*, I, 16.

²⁷ Article on Chevalier Taylor in the *DNE* by Edward I. Carlyle.

list to George III, that he was fond of the theatre and knew 'many of the actors,' and that our John Taylor was his eldest son.²⁸

This fourth John achieved some medical reputation and like his father was oculist to George III. But his interest in his profession gradually waned, and he added journalism to his activities, first as a writer of theatrical reviews for the *Morning Post*. However, as will be seen, his career as a London newspaperman fell far short of distinction.

As early as about 1787 he became editor of the *Morning Post*, succeeding two unscrupulous editors, Henry Bate and William Jackson, who had brought the paper into ill repute, and preceding by seven or eight years Daniel Stuart, who improved its standards and secured contributions from gifted writers, including Coleridge.²⁹ Taylor's incumbency was inglorious and brief—about two years by his own account.³⁰ According to H. R. Fox Bourne, the proprietor dismissed him.³¹ In his autobiography Taylor blandly remarks that his nocturnal sessions with his staff became on occasion a kind of 'Comus's court.'³²

Somewhat later Taylor bought the *True Briton*. The nature of this paper is indicated by a libel suit brought in 1796 against the *Courier* for an article in which the *True Briton* was called 'the most vulgar, ignorant, and scurrilous journal ever published in Great

Britain.' Lord Kenyon of the Court of King's Bench ruled, in effect, that the strong language was justified and therefore not actionable.³³

Taylor's last important venture in journalism was his connection with the *Sun*, of which he became part proprietor in 1813. Of this rabidly Tory paper H. R. Fox Bourne says that it had 'during many years an evil reputation' and he quotes a quip that appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for May 1823: 'The Sun appears daily but never shines.'³⁴ William Jerdan (1782–1869) had part ownership of the paper and a quarrel developed between him and Taylor over its control. By 1815 they were carrying on their quarrel publicly, both claiming to be editor at the same time.³⁵ Shortly the feud became a complicated law suit that continued for two years or more.³⁶ In the end Taylor bought out Jerdan, but the paper had suffered so heavily from the protracted litigation that it seems to have been increasingly a liability; Alexander Andrews says it was almost ruined.³⁷ Taylor kept it going for a few years and sold it in 1825.³⁸ The story is much confused, but it is certain that Taylor believed

²⁸ Alexander Andrews, *The History of British Journalism* (London, 1859), I, 258; and Bourne, *English Newspapers*, I, 331 n.

²⁹ Bourne, *English Newspapers*, I, 288–289.

³⁰ In his *Records of My Life* and even in his poetry, Taylor has frequent but unclear allusions to the quarrel; and William Jerdan treats it at length in his *Autobiography* (London, 1852), II, 67–80 and 137–159. Jerdan (II, 77) reprints from the *Sun* rival notices twenty-three days apart, the first saying that 'all communications for the *Sun* newspaper must . . . be addressed' to Jerdan, while the second one says that 'all communications' are to be sent to Taylor.

³¹ DNB.

³² Andrews, *British Journalism*, II, 86.

³³ DNB.

²⁸ Article on Chevalier Taylor in the DNB; and Taylor, *Records of My Life*, I, 4, 357.

²⁹ Article on John Taylor (the Chevalier's grandson) in the DNB by Charlotte Fell-Smith; and H. R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers* (London, 1887), I, 220–223.

³⁰ Taylor, *Records of My Life*, II, 268.

³¹ Bourne, *English Newspapers*, I, 224.

³² Taylor, *Records of My Life*, II, 271.

himself to have been very unfairly used and that by 1825 or 1826 he was in such difficulty financially that he set about recouping his losses by publishing a subscription edition of his poems and by writing an autobiography.

Taylor's poetry is voluminous, facile, and third-rate. Much of it is occasional verse, in neo-classic heroic couplets, written for the theatres — prologues, epilogues, 'addresses' for actors' benefits, and the like; and he turned out sonnets in profusion. The only poem that was widely known was 'Monsieur Tonson,' a narrative of twenty-eight stanzas founded on a not very amusing practical joke.

Taylor's reputation, however, was based less upon his poetry and his efforts in journalism than upon a curious combination of personal qualities, some of them admirable, some of them of a sort appropriate to the grandson of the picturesque 'Chevalier.'

That he had a gift for making friends is clear from the endless reminiscences in his autobiography and from the roll of subscribers to the 1827 edition of his poems — a list containing no less than 391 names headed by 'His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex' and constituting an imposing roster of peers, political figures, artists, writers, and theatrical people from Mrs Siddons and Charles Kemble down to the lesser followers of the stage. (His life-long passion for the stage was certainly genuine.) He was, in short, 'everybody's Taylor,' as he was sometimes called. It is clear, also, that he was, within limits, good company. Crabb Robinson, who records a dinner at which Taylor was present, speaks of him as a man of 'lively parts'; and even his enemy Jerdan, who has

left an unflattering sketch of him, gives him credit for being 'a very amusing companion.'³⁹

But there were other strongly marked elements in his make-up. He was an inveterate and indiscriminate maker of jests, including practical jokes; a constant teller of anecdotes; a prolific retailer of gossip, scandal, and small beer generally (precisely the kind of thing for which Wordsworth was to express his distaste in the sonnets called 'Personal Talk'); a bacchanalian boon-companion in the Green Rooms of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, at coffeehouses and taverns, and at the meetings of the Keep-The-Line Club; something of a poseur; and a good deal of a tuft-hunter.⁴⁰ Moreover all the evidence indicates that his thinking was superficial and his opinions, including his Toryism, conventional. The fact that Wordsworth, in the new letter, said of him that he was distinguished for his discrimination is difficult indeed to account for, as anyone will testify who has plowed through the eight hundred pages of his autobiography and the long array of his poems. One is tempted to suspect that the flattering phraseology employed by Wordsworth in the letter is an instance, however uncharacteristic, of the 'appropriate complimentary' language which Coleridge and he used in their promotional scheme referred to above. In any case Taylor's early recognition of the value of Wordsworth's poetry seems the only notable instance he

³⁹ *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler (London, 1872), I, 254; and Jerdan, *Autobiography*, II, 71.

⁴⁰ Evidence of all this occurs in profusion in the two volumes of 'Taylor's *Records of My Life*.

has left us of discrimination of any kind.

Since most of the association between the two was by letter it is possible that Wordsworth had but incomplete knowledge of his correspondent's qualities. If, however, he became pretty well aware of them and yet maintained a warm feeling for him, it would seem that in his personal judgments he was capable of less rigidity and more tolerance than he is sometimes said to have been; for Wordsworth clearly felt that the connection which began in 1801 and was still cordial more than a quarter century later constituted a genuine friendship. The best evidence that this is so is Wordsworth's response to the appeal of Taylor when in 1826 the latter found himself in financial straits and asked Wordsworth to be a sub-

scriber to the forthcoming edition of his poetry.⁴¹ The poet answered Taylor's letter instantly and warmly. 'I shall be glad and proud to have my name enrolled in this list,' he wrote; and he observed that it was some consolation for Taylor's misfortune that it would enable him to distinguish his 'supposed' friends from his 'true' ones. Wordsworth placed himself in the latter category.

MADISON C. BATES

⁴¹Strictly speaking, this is conjecture, since we do not have Taylor's letter; but from the language of the poet's reply there can hardly be any doubt. It must be added, however, that Wordsworth's name does not appear in the list of subscribers. Possibly Taylor received the permission too late for the insertion of the name. To suppose that Wordsworth revoked his consent would be inconsistent with the exchange of letters two years later (see Letter 813 in De Selincourt).

The George David Birkhoff Mathematical Library

A MATHEMATICIAN thinks of a library in much the same way that a physicist or chemist thinks of a laboratory. It is the center of his most important activities, where the ideal of scientific truth can best be pursued.

At Harvard, Widener provides one such center for work in mathematics, housing as it does the main research collection of about 10,000 volumes and 5,000 pamphlets and reprints, plus periodicals.¹ But, since only one copy of a book or periodical is nor-

mally acquired, many of the most important items are frequently out on loan. Moreover, the stacks are not easily accessible to all students.

For these reasons, a special library consisting almost entirely of duplicates, maintained and supervised by the Department of Mathematics, plays a very useful role. Named the George David Birkhoff Mathematical Library, in memory of the late Professor of Mathematics and Dean of the Faculty of Art and Sciences, because of his outstanding mathematical distinction and leadership, the Library is located in the building of the former Institute of Geographical Exploration, which

¹ See Keyes D. Metcalf and Edwin E. Williams, 'Harvard's Book Collections,' *HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN*, V (1951), 214.

List of Contributors

- HENRY NASH SMITH, Professor of English, University of California (Berkeley),
and Literary Editor of the Mark Twain Estate
- RICHARD M. GUMMERE, Lecturer on Latin and Chairman of the Committee on
Admissions (Retired), Harvard University
- ANDREW D. OSBORN, Assistant Librarian of the College Library in charge of the
Catalogue Department, Harvard University
- GEORGE B. WATTS, Professor of French, Davidson College
- CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives, and
Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society
- ADRIANA R. SALEM, Paris, France
- DAVID C. WEBER, Senior Assistant in the Harvard College Library
- MADISON C. BATES, Professor of English, Emeritus, Rutgers University
- GARRETT BIRKHOFF, Professor of Mathematics, Harvard University
- ROMAN JAKOBSON, Samuel Hazzard Cross Professor of Slavic Languages and
Literatures, Harvard University