

Henry Crabb Robinson and Sara Coleridge

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HENRY CRABB ROBINSON (1775-1867) WAS INITIALLY the friend of S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834), before also becoming a friend of Coleridge's daughter, Sara (1802-1852), whom he outlived. Thus Crabb Robinson was able to comment on all aspects of Sara's life, from a child until after her death. Sara also recorded her opinion of Crabb Robinson. They were both friends of the Wordsworth circle and Sara's view of them and theirs of her will be recorded as disclosed by Crabb Robinson's diary and letters. Sara and Crabb Robinson were also associated with the perpetuation of Coleridge's works, some of which were edited by Sara with some contribution from Crabb Robinson. In addition, both shared an interest in the religious movements of their times. They communicated candidly on this subject, though they gave their spiritual allegiance to different religious institutions: Crabb Robinson was from a non-conformist background, while Sara Coleridge belonged to a more mainstream Protestantism.

Crabb Robinson's first reference to Sara in 1816 comes among a more general one about the Coleridge children, whom he compared throughout their lives; evidently, he thought most highly of Sara, the only daughter. Even at this first meeting, Crabb Robinson singled out Sara for her 'face of great sweetness' and 'correct habits',¹ and in the same year commented that he 'was much pleased' with her.² His next mention of Sara is in 1821 by which time she was a teenager. His favourable opinion of Sara continued and he 'admired' her more than any of Southey's children. He still admired her 'very fine face' in which he saw 'some resemblance to her father'. She revealed a 'grave considerateness in her conversation'. Her professional life had already begun, as Crabb Robinson noted: 'I understand that she made a translation which is about to be published. She has taught herself modern languages, and is said to have great talent' (*On Books*, 270). Crabb Robinson's next remark suggests he believed in traditional gender roles for men and women: 'There was nothing forward in her behaviour, nor anything assuming, except that she had formed and intimated an opinion of her own upon the literary questions of the day' (*On Books*, 270). Apparently, young women were expected to be seen and not heard, and certainly to refrain from venturing any opinions about subjects outside their domestic sphere. At this period, Crabb Robinson believed that Sara's cousin Edith Southey was equally talented but more attractive than Sara. He withdrew this view in a later retrospective entry: '— an assertion that time has not verified, but contradicted' (*On Books*, 271). Indeed, only five years later Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to him about the beauty of Sara. Mrs Wordsworth and her sister Miss Hutchinson has seen a beautiful picture in

¹ *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* edited Edith J Morley. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited 1938, 190. All future references to this edition will be inserted in brackets in the text as *On Books* with page numbers.

² *Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb etc Being Selections from the Remains of Henry Crabb Robinson* edited by Edith J. Morley Cornell University Library Reprint 1997, 67. All future references to this edition will be inserted in brackets in the text with *Blake, Coleridge etc* with the page numbers.

Manchester for which £7,000 had been refused: 'I forget the Master's name, the subject is The Holy Family — the Virgin, they tell me, a striking likeness of Sara Coleridge'.³

Crabb Robinson continued to compare Sara with her brothers Hartley and Derwent Coleridge. In 1843, he wrote that Hartley and Sara Coleridge were editing their father's works, thereby 'presenting an exception to the rule that genius is not hereditary, though talents often are' (*On Books*, 636). In 1849, in a letter to his brother Thomas Robinson, Crabb Robinson wrote that Sara 'has as much industry as Derwent & as much genius as Hartley —' (*CWC*, no. 499, 680).

However, it may be argued that Crabb Robinson did not understand the relationships between the Coleridge siblings, for when he called on Sara in 1849, he did not sympathise with her grief for her recently deceased brother: 'She manifested a feeling for her brother Hartley I cannot comprehend. A woman's tears must be very much on the surface to fall for a brother she had not seen for twenty years' (*On Books*, 686).

Crabb Robinson's diary makes it clear that he did not always see the siblings together. After her marriage, Sara moved to London with her husband, where Crabb Robinson mainly lived too. His diary records various meetings with either Sara alone or with husband and wife. At a small party in 1839 attended by both Sara and Crabb Robinson, he recorded, 'Chatted with Mrs Nelson Coleridge' (*On Books*, 570). In 1840, he confided to his diary that he had been 'charmed with Mrs Nelson Coleridge' (*On Books*, 581). The following April Crabb Robinson was evidently feeling disgruntled: 'I had a genteel and plentiful breakfast which was not honoured as it deserved. Mr and Mrs H. N. Coleridge did not come' (*On Books*, 592).

That the Henry Nelson Coleridges shared some important values with Crabb Robinson is revealed in an incident, which occurred in 1838, when an elderly friend Thomas Clarkson published *Strictures on a Life of Wilberforce*. Edith J. Morley reveals that though it was published with Clarkson's name, Crabb Robinson had actually written most of it: 'The abolition not only of the slave-traffic but of slavery itself was one of the subjects on which Crabb Robinson could not brook contradiction'.⁴ In the *Edinburgh Review* Sir James Stephen repeated some of the Wilberforce sons' disparaging comments made about Clarkson in their life of their father. Clarkson was relieved to have his defence taken on by Crabb Robinson which resulted in the 1838 publication of *Strictures on a Life of William Wilberforce by the Rev W. Wilberforce and the Rev S. Wilberforce, with a Correspondence between Lord Brougham and Mr Clarkson, also a Supplement, containing Remarks on the Edinburgh Review of Mr Wilberforce's Life*. Crabb Robinson was responsible for the *Supplement*,

³ *The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle Volume*, 2 vols (I: 1808-1843, II: 1844-1866), ed. Edith J. Morley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), letter no. 72, 147. All further references to this edition will be inserted in brackets with letter and page numbers under the abbreviation *CWC*.

⁴ Edith J. Morley, *The Life and Times of Henry Crabb Robinson* London: J.M. Dent & Sons Limited 1935, 110.

which William Wordsworth said, was 'all that could be desired'. Crabb Robinson was pleased enough by this assessment to copy it into his diary, an entry which continues, 'The only other persons that were complimentary to me were Sara Coleridge, the wife of Henry Coleridge, and she says in a letter: "We also highly approve of the *Supplement*, which is powerfully and pointedly written' (*On Books*, 568).

The relationship between Crabb Robinson and Sara seemed to fluctuate; if he was sometimes unsympathetic to Sara, it is evident that he took an interest in her literary work from the beginning. Dorothy Wordsworth must have been confident in Crabb Robinson's interest as she informed him that though Sara was still suffering from weak eyes, she was busy correcting the proofs of her translation from the French. Dorothy was not sure of the title but it was the *Memoirs of the Chevalier Bayard by the Loyal Servant*, which was published the next year (*CWC*, no.66, 131).

In 1837 Crabb Robinson recorded reading Sara's fairy tale, *Phantasmion*, of which he was critical, associating her with the popular female novelist Ann Radcliffe. *Phantasmion* was

beautifully written and set off with very pleasing poems, like Mrs Radcliffe in her romances, and I was delighted with the beginning, but a thick volume of such luscious description surfeits as a bellyful of macaroons would.... What begins very pleasantly is ended with disgust. Some of the poems I should like to read again (*On Books*, 538).

More than Sara's translations or her original novel, Crabb Robinson was interested in her editions of her father's works. After her cousin and husband Henry Nelson Coleridge died in 1843 in the midst of producing new editions of S.T. Coleridge's works, Sara carried on the editing virtually single-handedly. Between her husband's death and her own in 1852, Sara edited the following works by her father: *Aids to Reflection* (1843), *Biographia Literaria* (1847), *Notes and Lectures on Shakespeare*, and *Some of the Old Poets and Dramatists with other Literary Remains of S. T. Coleridge* (1849), and with her brother Derwent, *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1852). Sadly, like her husband, Sara did not live to complete her editing task.

In the privacy of his diary Crabb Robinson admitted that he was unable to follow all of S.T. Coleridge's thought processes in the new edition of *Biographia Literaria*, which, he adds, 'has convinced me more strongly than before that I have no philosophical i.e. metaphysical, talent whatever. This book renews my impression of the great talent and even philosophical genius of Coleridge' (*On Books*, 667). He did not confess his intellectual inferiority to Sara, the editor of the new edition of the *Biographia Literaria* he was reading, but it is evident that she was well aware of his limitations during the period of her editorship, for in her diary she commented:

Mr HCR with all his talent and quickness appears to me very ignorant

and ill-informed on some points as to men and things and books — as to what is really contained in them. He talks so much that he cannot take in aught from others — he reads very much the one side and praises up to the skies whatever echoes his own preconceived notions.⁵

Doubtless Crabb Robinson would have been mortified to know that this was Sara's opinion of his talents, particularly as she was a woman and young enough to be his daughter. It would seem that Sara confided this estimate of him only to her private diary just as he also probably admitted his limited understanding of S.T. Coleridge's metaphysics only to *his* diary.

It is possible that Sara Coleridge was expressing a spasm of irritation with Crabb Robinson, rather than her considered view. Whether or not she rated him highly as a thinker, she was very willing to accept his reassurance about Coleridge. She knew and appreciated the diarist's 'good feeling toward my father & sympathy with his genius, and general respect — I hope I may add for his mind...'.⁶ In 1846 while Sara was seeing the *Biographia Literaria* through the press, Crabb Robinson was aware that Sara was perplexed about charges levelled against her father, this time that he had plagiarised ideas from Schelling. Indeed this is a recurring anxiety in her letters to the diarist. She wrote in one letter to him that she had no doubt that the similarities between Coleridge's writings and those of Schlegel and Schelling was owing to 'mere coincidence'. Sara added, 'Still, if you have aught to suggest or record on this subject, I should be very glad to hear it...' (DWL: 62b). On February 14 1849 in a long letter to Crabb Robinson, Sara Coleridge returned to the subject of her father's possible plagiarism from German writers. Here she asserts that Coleridge's ideas on Hamlet had been discussed by her father 'before he ever left the shores of Great Britain or knew a word of German' (DWL: 9b-11). He agreed with Sara Coleridge on the subject of plagiarism and was pleased to tell his diary, 'I gratified her by the assurance of my belief that he was unconscious of it' (*On Books*, 661). Griggs also writes that Crabb Robinson supported, along with other Coleridgeans, Sara's view that her father was the sole author of the *Theory of Life* (Griggs, 163). Crabb Robinson must have been a kindly man for he anticipated what reviews or books about Coleridge would upset Sara and was apprehensive on her behalf, so that he felt 'a slight jar' at a dinner where Sara's father was spoken of contemptuously. He also considered her reaction when *The Times* called Coleridge 'one of the greatest of men intellectually, and morally one of the least of men' (*On Books*, 669). But while Crabb Robinson agreed with Sara's disgust at Joseph Cottle publishing an offensive letter about her father written by Southey, he also recorded that 'I

⁵ Earl Leslie Griggs, *Coleridge Fille: A Biography of Sara Coleridge* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press 1940), 180.

⁶ Sara Coleridge to Henry Crabb Robinson, 13 February 1849, Dr Williams's Library, MS 9b-11. The notes from Dr Williams's Library were compiled by James Vigus and made available to me by the editor of the *Coleridge Bulletin*. A visit to the same Library has yielded further relevant material, which has been used in this article. My thanks to the Director and Trustees of Dr Williams's Library for permission to use material from the archive. The archive, when quoted from in the body of the article, is abbreviated to DWL.

altogether dissent' from Sara's view that Cottle should not have published a letter which made public Coleridge's opium addiction (*On Books*, 681).

Lack of a complete understanding of the *Biographia Literaria* did not prevent Crabb Robinson declaring that it was well worth reading by Wordsworth and Coleridge enthusiasts. Actually, though, Crabb Robinson seemed to favour Coleridge's opinions of Wordsworth, both good and bad: 'To recur to Coleridge again, his criticism of Wordsworth contains more blame than I had recollected; but as to much they carry conviction. Certainly the praise which is hearty, and generally the blame too —' (DWL: *Diary*, 18 June 1847).

Crabb Robinson was also greatly interested in the judgements made in Sara's Prefaces to her father's works: 'She has very ably, and not with gross partiality, apologised for his infirmities of intellect, not moral defects' (*On Books*, 665). He may be suggesting that Sara was ignoring the real issues about her father while putting up a defence of less serious charges against him; the double negative he uses is complex and suggests some reservation.

Notes on Shakespeare was pieced together by Sara from various notes which the audience had made at Coleridge's lectures during the winters of 1808, 1811, 1812 and 1818, 'notably J. Payne Collier and H. Crabb Robinson' (*Blake, Coleridge etc.*, 92). Crabb Robinson did not play down his part in this literary retrieval exercise; in November 1848 he called on Sara with the express purpose of communicating to her all he could remember of her father in 1808 and the lectures S.T. Coleridge delivered then. He even borrowed some of the letters he had written to Mary Clarkson, in which he had recorded his immediate impressions of the lectures. Two months later in January 1849, he wrote in his diary that his main call that morning had been on Sara, following a re-reading of his letters and journals of 1811-1812 when he had attended the lectures. He said he showed Sara his notes 'unfavourable as they were' (*On Books*, 687). Nevertheless, on receiving a published copy of the work from Sara Coleridge, he was evidently pleased to observe that she had quoted extracts from his 1808 letters to a friend. He was also more impressed by his own contribution, commenting, 'they do not read amiss, and I am not so ashamed of them as I was when I read them in my own handwriting. She speaks in a note civilly of me, without, however, any compliment which could be thought flattery' (*On Books*, 688-9). Evidently Sara Coleridge was sufficiently sensitive to his character and feelings to give him due credit, without in any way making him feel uncomfortable by what she said.

A comment made by S.T. Coleridge, quoted by Crabb Robinson, gives an amusing insight into the ambivalent attitude of Coleridge to lecturing:

If all the comments that have been written on Shakespeare by his editors could have been collected in a pile and set on fire that by the blaze Schlegel might have written his lectures, the world would have been equally a gainer by the books destroyed and the book written (Quoted in Griggs, 157).

Unfortunately, there are no comments by Crabb Robinson on Sara's edition of S.T. Coleridge's *Essays on his Own Times*. This is particularly vexing as this book, together with the *Biographia Literaria* and *Notes on Shakespeare* are the volumes upon which Sara Coleridge's reputation as an editor of her father's works is based.

Sara's last months were spent editing Coleridge's poems with her surviving brother Derwent Coleridge. In general discussions with Sara, recorded in Crabb Robinson's diaries and letters, Coleridge's poetry was frequently discussed. In April 1847, Crabb Robinson noted paying a visit to Sara 'with whom I had a chat about her father's poetry, his philosophy, etc; a long talk' (*On Books*, 664). In her reply to a letter from Crabb Robinson in 1852, Sara picked up some remarks, which Crabb Robinson had obviously passed on her father's poetry. These epistolary discussions show that both correspondents had an extensive knowledge of Coleridge's poetry. Sara remarked that 'I quite enter into your feeling about the "Myrtle Leaf", a 1797 poem whose full title was "To an Unfortunate Woman whom the Author had known in the Days of her Innocence"'. Crabb Robinson and Sara were in agreement about the title which they thought should simply be addressed 'To—— no *name* mentioned' so as not to individualise the identity of the 'Unfortunate Woman'. As to Crabb Robinson's question about Coleridge's poem 'Youth and Age', Sara refers him to Mrs Wordsworth or Miss Hutchinson (*CWC*, no. 601, 785). It is moving that Sara's last letter during her final illness to Crabb Robinson was about her father's poetry. The query of the last letter was evidently about the dating of 'Youth and Age', as Sara says that Mrs Wordsworth cannot throw much light on this aspect of the poem either (*CWC*, no. 603, 786).

Crabb Robinson rarely made critical remarks about Coleridge to his daughter. But in 1850 he noted calling on Sara and reading her Mrs Barbauld's 1797 forty-three line poem 'To Mr S.T. Coleridge', whose concluding line is a fervent prayer to the wayward young poet, 'Now Heaven conduct thee with a parent's love!' It is a concerned, affectionate poem, also an encouraging one, for which Coleridge was obviously not sufficiently grateful. According to Crabb Robinson, Sara 'is, I believe, made sensible that he treated her unworthily' (*On Books*, 697).

Through Crabb Robinson's correspondence and diaries, the reader is able to construct the attitude of the Wordsworth circle to Sara's edition of S.T. Coleridge's works. It was surprisingly unsympathetic and unsupportive; Mary Wordsworth wrote to Crabb Robinson, turning from a discussion of 'poor frail Hartley' to his sister,

& I do wish poor dear indefatigable Sara would let her Father's character rest. Surely that great spirit has left sufficient to gratify the craving for literary fame in any one, without that dear Creature worrying her brain in her endeavours to increase or justify it — which with all her pains she will never accomplish (*CWC*, no. 503, 689).

William Wordsworth shared his wife's rather smug conviction that Sara's literary endeavours on behalf of her father would fail, writing not to Crabb Robinson (who may well have been ignorant of the Wordsworths' attitude) but to Isabella Fenwick in November 1846:

You have seen, I understand, not a little of Sara Coleridge. I rather tremble for the Notice she is engaged in giving of her Father's life. Her opportunities of knowing anything about him were too small for such an Employment, which would be very difficult to manage for any one, nor could her judgment be free from bias unfavourable to truth.⁷

Crabb Robinson in a way that suggests innocence of the Wordsworth's real views of Sara, allowed himself to be a go-between for them. In June 1846, he wrote enclosing a list of questions from Sara about her father that it was thought the Wordsworths might be able to answer. He ends his request with '— it would be a Service to Mrs C: And a kindness to me' — thereby suggesting that he thought Sara's questions reasonable (*CWC*, no. 436, 629). Three days later William Wordsworth himself, who did not even have the letter to hand, answered it in a highly patronising way. In a truly snubbing fashion, he berates Sara's ignorance:

If Mrs C had been a reader of Milton she would have known that 'harsh and of dissonant mood from his Complaint['] is from a chorus — in the *Samson Agonistes* — beginning 'Many are the sayings of the Wise', & if of Akenside, she would not have been ignorant that 'The gayest happiest attitude of things' is the concluding line of the first Paragraph of the Pleasures of Imagination[.]

There are two Poems, perhaps more, in the English language bearing the title of the 'Excursion', one by David Mallet, and another by William Wordsworth; in the latter, is to be found within 60 lines or so of the beginning, the line & would

rejoice
In the plain presence of his dignity. —
(*CWC*, no.437, 630).

One would have thought that the pomposity — and sheer unfriendliness — of this letter might have alerted Crabb Robinson to the Wordsworths' feeling about Coleridge, and by extension Sara, but still he remained in ignorance and acted as a go-between again. When he was staying in Kendal in 1847, Sara sent a letter to Crabb Robinson asking him to 'beg' permission for her to dedicate her new edition of the *Biographia Literaria* to Wordsworth.⁷ He innocently

⁷ Bradford Keyes Mudge *Sara Coleridge, A Victorian Daughter: Her Life and Essays* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 135-6.

added, 'I have no doubt he will give leave' (*On Books*, 661). Once back in London later in February, Crabb Robinson happily recorded in his diary:

I should have mentioned yesterday that I called on Mrs Coleridge and had a most agreeable talk with her. Wordsworth consents to her dedicating her father's *Life* to him, which she asked of him through me
(*On Books*, 662).

Again, Crabb Robinson had not been aware of the undercurrents of the Wordsworths' feelings, which once more the poet expressed more candidly to Isabella Fenwick.

How hurt the unsuspecting Sara Coleridge would have been if she had known of Wordsworth's strong reservations about her edition of her father's works is revealed by her affectionate dedication, in which she subscribed herself, 'With deep affection, admiration, and respect, your child in heart, and faithful friend, Sara Coleridge'.⁸ However, she was aware of Wordsworth's critical attitude to her father. During Crabb Robinson's visit to Sara Coleridge on 18 October 1848, their conversation included the topic of Coleridge. Crabb Robinson shrewdly interpreted Sara's 'degree of soreness at the freedom and depreciatory tone with which (Wordsworth) is accustomed to speak of others', as actually a veiled comment on her mortification at the poet's freely given criticism of her father (*On Books*, 681).

Further, Crabb Robinson could have punctured Wordsworth's complacent dismissal of Sara Coleridge's knowledge of Milton. For a letter of Sara Coleridge to the diarist reveals her familiarity not only with the prose works of Milton but also with *Paradise Lost* (DWL: 13 February 1844).

Crabb Robinson and Sara sometimes broached some quite intimate thoughts about the Wordsworths, again suggestive of shared values and emotions and a degree of trust. In June 1843 Sara wrote to Crabb Robinson to share her thought that although William Wordsworth often tackled the subjects of sorrow and grief in his poems, most of them referred to the deaths of children. Wordsworth has never written of 'the heaviest loss of all', she says, explaining later in the letter: 'I often think with shuddering of his Mr W's misery, should he survive his wife' (CWC, no. 331, 502).

Perhaps in return for this private thought, Crabb Robinson shared with Sara his anxiety about Wordsworth's reaction to his daughter Dora's death. Oddly, we know of this letter only because Sara repeated its contents to Isabella Fenwick in January 1848, detailing Crabb Robinson's 'most melancholy account of poor dear Mr Wordsworth'. Evidently, Crabb Robinson had closely observed the bereaved old man whose depression he tried to distract by

⁸ Quoted in *Sara Coleridge and Henry Reed. Reed's Memoir of Sara Coleridge. Her Letters to Reed, Including Her Comment on His Memoir of Grey. Her Marginalia in Henry Crabb Robinson's Copy of Wordsworth's Memoirs* edited by Leslie Nathan Broughton (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press; London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1937), 9.

involving him in exercise and conversation.⁹

As suggested earlier in this essay, Coleridge and members of the Wordsworth circle seemed to have an ambivalent attitude towards intellectual women. One of the Wordsworth women in Sara's generation, Dora, also published a book, despite the apparent disapproval of her mother. Sara disagreed with Mrs Wordsworth's view that people should only write for money. But Sara adds (perhaps reciprocating a bit of the Wordsworth hostility) 'Mrs Wordsworth has all her life wished her daughter to be above both marriage and authorship, & finds it hard to submit to these vulgarities on her behalf in this stage of her life career'. Sara expresses her disapproval of this attitude to Crabb Robinson, stating that Dora deserves both success and happiness throughout her life. Perhaps pointedly she continues about Dora: I admire and love her for *her own* sake, and consider it a great proof of sterling merit in her, that she shines with light of her own & is more than a mere portion of the parental radiance' (CWC, no. 454, 643-644). Yet is not Sara happy to do just that, to be no more 'than a mere portion of the parental radiance'? Alternatively, is she hinting to Crabb Robinson that she wishes to be considered as an individual in her own right, despite devoting her life's works to editing her father's works?

It seems likely that Dorothy Wordsworth believed that Sara ought to play a more conventionally daughterly role once she had married and moved to London where her father was living. Dorothy obviously considered that it was Sara's duty to make regular visits to Coleridge in Highgate. Disapprovingly, Dorothy wrote that Sara and Coleridge 'cannot see much of each other' because 'to *walk* is impossible' and transport there is too expensive for a young lawyer. To Dorothy who regularly walked for miles in the Lake District, Sara's lack of pedestrian skill in London was probably incomprehensible and reprehensible (CWC, no. 111, 220)

In the last year of her life, Sara wrote to Crabb Robinson about another intellectual woman — Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) — who had written a book called *Letters on the Law of Man's Nature and Development* (1851) which had proposed the acceptance of the doctrine of philosophical atheism. Literary society in London disapproved of the book's mesmeric evolutionary atheism and it caused Miss Martineau to lose some of her friends. However, Sara suggested that Harriet Martineau had successfully defused hostility in the Lake District by exaggerating her 'feminine' side in her behaviour and manifesting '*every day deeds of kindness*, which people have before their eyes & ears — while the *book* is out of sight' (CWC, no. 600, 785). Such typical womanly behaviour was, Sara believed, enough to overcome the influence of Harriet Martineau's '*bad doctrine*.'

Sara does not appear to have discussed the value of her new editions of Coleridge's work with Crabb Robinson, nor did he attempt a full assessment of it in his diary. It seems probable that only in the privacy of her diary did Sara

⁹ Quoted in Peter Swaab, *The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 91-92.

confess that her work was undervalued and perhaps kept the secret of her knowledge of the attitudes of the Wordsworths confined there too:

No work is so inadequately rewarded by either money or credit as that of editing miscellaneous, fragmentary, immethodical literary remains like those of S.T.C. Such labours cannot be rewarded for they cannot be seen — some of them cannot even be perceived by the intelligent reader. How many, many mornings, evenings, afternoons have I spent in hunting for some piece of information in order to rectify a statement — to decide whether to retain or withdraw a sentence, or how to turn it — the effect being negative, the silent avoidance of error. The ascertainment of dates, too, and fifty other troubles of that kind, causes much work with very little to show for it. It is something to myself to feel I am putting in order a literary house that otherwise would be open to censure here or there. But when there is not mere carelessness but a positive coldness in regard to what I have done, I do sometimes feel as if I had been wasting myself a good deal — at least as far as worldly advantage is concerned (Quoted in Griggs, 157)

If this was not shared with Crabb Robinson, they did at least share a pleasure in more informal writing. When Christopher Wordsworth, the nephew of William had written his *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, Sara read Crabb Robinson's copy and at his request decorated the margins with marginalia. This spawned another work by another (American) author. This was Henry Reed (1808-1854), professor of rhetoric and English at Pennsylvania University from 1834 until his premature death at sea twenty years later. From 1845-1854 he was also the Provost at Pennsylvania University. Reed corresponded with Sara Coleridge and in 1937, another scholar, Leslie Nathan Broughton, edited Reed's various writings to and from and about Sara Coleridge. The fourth and final part of Reed's work was called *Sara Coleridge's Marginalia in Henry Crabb Robinson's Copy of the Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (henceforward abbreviated to *Marginalia*). Reed recorded having read the *Marginalia* in June 1854, some two years after Sara's death: 'Mr Robinson showed me, at my request, the copy of the Memoirs of Wordsworth which Mrs Sara Coleridge (as she told me in one of her letters) filled with her *Marginalia* and I spent half-an-hour reading them' (Reed, 14). Sara expressed her sense of a close relationship with William Wordsworth: 'I knew — and honour dear Mr Wordsworth perhaps as well as I have ever known any one in the world — more intimately than I knew my Father, and as intimately as I knew my Uncle Southey' (Reed, 63). In view of this declaration it seems exceedingly unlikely that Sara did know about Wordsworth's hostility to her edition of her father's works; nevertheless she unconsciously revenged herself on him by criticising him in her marginalia.

Sara's marginal comments tended to deflate Christopher Wordsworth's exalted view of his uncle. For example, Christopher Wordsworth claims that if

William had not had a bevy of admiring females who recognised that 'his poems were destined for immortality and that it was no small privilege to be instrumental in conveying them to posterity', it is likely that his poems, often composed on walks and written down by one of his women, would have been entirely lost. Sara drily comments on this scenario: 'I doubt that. He would have acquired more pen ease and dexterity'. She then added more sympathetically, 'I cannot however quite judge as to the nervous affection which writing produced' (*Marginalia*, I, 260 quoted in Reed, 102).

Sara objected to the Wordsworths' false sense of delicacy, 'even something approaching hypocrisy', when they complained that a cousin 'was introduced, improperly, I think, she being then a child to the notice of the public, as one of the English poetesses, in an article of the Quarterly so entitled'. We have already heard Sara's objection to Mrs Wordsworth's hypocrisy about Dora Wordsworth publishing a book. Here Sara adds, 'After all, has not every talent possessed by any near relative of Mr W been proclaimed every composition worth reading been published? — even to Miss H's lines on the Redbreast? No — not the Scotch tour' (*Marginalia*, II, 416, also quoted in Reed, 124).

Sara rejected William Wordsworth's view of Goethe as his nephew transmitted them. The *Memoirs* records that 'Wordsworth made some striking remarks on Goethe in a walk on the terrace yesterday'. Underlining the word 'striking', Sara rejected this: 'Only to be regretted that W gave an opinion having no knowledge on the subject' (*Marginalia*, II, 437, also quoted in Reed, 124-125). The *Memoirs* further states that William Wordsworth said of Goethe, 'Again there is profligacy, an inhuman sensuality in his (Goethe's) work which is utterly revolting'. Sara simply put two question marks and wrote one word — 'false' (*Marginalia*, II 478, also quoted in Reed, 126). The next comment by Wordsworth (on the same page) about Goethe was 'I there indict him (Goethe) for wantonly outraging the sympathies of humanity', beside which Sara simply put a question mark. Reed records more about her views on this topic: '(On the yellow fly-leaf facing the back cover are the following notes or more likely suggestions for notes): Opin of Gothe (sic) worthless' (*Marginalia*, II 438, also quoted in Reed 128). Finally 'Again Gothe' (sic) (*Marginalia*, II, 478, also quoted in Reed, 128).

Crabb Robinson agreed with Sara's view that Wordsworth's response to Goethe was inadequate. In a letter to Reed of May 1851, Sara tells him that Crabb Robinson 'thinks the remarks on Goethe really discreditable to his great friend; for Wordsworth knew hardly anything of Goethe's writings, and is not aware how great a similarity existed between his best strains of poetry and some of the best of his own. This similarity I had felt before Mr Robinson, who is well acquainted with modern German literature, & knew Goethe personally pointed it out' (Reed, 71). Sara obviously respected Crabb Robinson's knowledge of German literature; at the same time, she simultaneously felt a need to assert her own independent judgement and to call on him to confirm her own opinion.

Towards the end of her life, Sara also discussed Wordsworth's poetry with

Crabb Robinson, both in conversation and in letters. In a detailed letter to Crabb Robinson in January 1851, Sara told him how she and her cousin Edith Southey passed their time. After reading the Bible aloud in the afternoons, Edith did the same with Wordsworth's poetry in the evenings. They avoided the more recent poetry by Wordsworth; Sara said 'which I do not *love* (to say nought of approve and admire) as I do their predecessors'. She increasingly admires the Duddon sonnets, although she dislikes it when Wordsworth adopts a gayness and gallantry by talking of Cupids and 'love-sick youths begging to be transformed into roses, that they may be patted by some divine Laura'. Sara does make this sound ridiculous and one agrees with her verdict, 'This does not sit well upon the grand old bard. There is something forced about it'. Then she praises the line 'Whence that low voice — a whisper from the heart' and a few ensuing ones as being in Wordsworth's 'highest vein' which 'satisfy every thought and feeling' (*CWC*, no. 577, 766).

Nearly ten years after Sara's death and some five before his own, Crabb Robinson decided that he ought to make a proper record of Sara's *Marginalia* in the *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*. He knew that the motives behind the *Marginalia* were suspect. Crabb Robinson sums up the great truth: 'There was at all times suppressed jealousy, if not between the two great men themselves, between their respective children and respective friends' (*On Books*, 803).

Sara Coleridge undoubtedly respected Crabb Robinson's religious opinions and entered into earnest debate with him in the long letter already referred to of 13 February 1844. First, she apologised for 'a seemingly rude reflection' on his religious tenets. Twice in this letter, she expressed how she valued his reflections on religion. In the first case, she stressed that she 'really wanted to *know* what you thought of the predicament of minority in which Unitarianism continues to stand.' Later she wrote how she had 'a great desire to know how you interpret a series of texts which seem most evidently to show the Sacred Writers held our Lord to be God incarnate, & not merely a man more highly gifted and divinely inspired than any other man that ever lived.'

In other letters, Sara Coleridge is positively deferential to Crabb Robinson's reactions to her opinions expressed therein. In an undated letter to the diarist, she added a sort of postscript at the top of her letter in the form of an apology:

I have written this off this letter, with something of an [illegible word] toothache and a flushed face. It has a peremptory conceited air about it — as if I thought my opinion worth describing at large — But you will take it in the right way, & set this appearance down to haste and eagerness, & not to any notion that I think concern others, desirous as I may be to explain it as concerns myself.' (*DWL*: 2. I. k)

In the letter itself, she had launched into a spirited defence of Carlyle's views and his statements on the meaning of power advocated for religious and political figures, including Mahomet.

Another example may be cited, this time suggesting Sara Coleridge's

reluctance to assert her own opinions when they contradicted Crabb Robinson's. Their debate concerned the sincerity and disinterestedness of an Establishment Churchman. However, she manages to adhere to her conviction by an effort of will power:

So that when I read your remarks, it seemed as if they were a special admonition that I was not to be too much run away with my admiration of the Vicar of Leeds. However, after gathering my thoughts which had been beaten down by the double representation, like holly hocks by autumnal blasts, — I said firmly and determinedly, [in effect, that she would retain her original interpretations]. (DWL: 2. I. c).

At the end of this letter, Sara Coleridge offered a more personal note when she referred to 'a pet maxim of mine', which is of great interest as it gives a key indication of her view of human nature: 'namely that in the human breast very high and pure feelings may lie side by side with very low ones — and that there is in human nature a far greater intermingling of white and black than people admit in particular instances, though they normally assent to the truth of the maxim when presented in a general form.' (DWL: 2. I. c). One wonders whether she developed this tolerance to cope with the complexities of her father.

Crabb Robinson also drew conclusions about Sara Coleridge when he had to convey the news of her death on 7 May 1852 to his brother Thomas:

On this day died Mrs H. N. Coleridge, aged forty-nine — An excellent woman whom I highly esteemed — She was the poet's only daughter, and the larger portion of his spirit descended on her. — She retained her composure of mind to the last — She borrowed of me in her last illness — a large-print edition of Shakespeare — She had no scruples of conscience on that point — Her head and her heart were both better than her creed (DWL).

To the last, for Henry Crabb Robinson, Sara was primarily the daughter of Coleridge. Even in death, the association held for Crabb Robinson; he only went on to consider her as a separate individual afterwards. As the latter, she appeared to be a serial offender in her own right, over borrowing books from Crabb Robinson and then failing to return them! Thus in one of her surviving letters, she begs for the loan of 'some of the *works of Landor*.' Her awareness that the diarist might not wish to lend these books to her, may suggest a guilty response to her failure to return borrowed volumes to him (DWL: 2. I. c). Crabb Robinson's final sentence intimates that they both retained their own religious opinions at the end of their debates on the topic. He found these convictions the least praiseworthy part of Sara.

To conclude, Crabb Robinson learnt to overcome his prejudices about Sara Coleridge as an intellectual woman with pronounced opinions of her own. He

had been a friend of S.T. Coleridge, whose writings he valued, and he not only came to appreciate her self-imposed editorship of the poet's works, but also encouraged and supported her efforts. While Sara may have had certain reservations about Crabb Robinson's abilities (but think of the competition!), she appreciated his encouragement and reassurance. Always slightly defensive on the subject of her father's reputation, perhaps she was able to enter more confidently into deep and honest debate about religious problems with Crabb Robinson, whom she treated as an intellectual equal. She evidently trusted and respected the diarist, as religion was profoundly important to her and central to her life. These two earnest debaters on religion each extended to the other a mutual tolerance and respect, in areas where they differed. She did not know that part of Crabb Robinson's Christian charity extended to protecting her from hurtful criticisms of her father. Neither did she know the Wordsworths disapproved of her task and Crabb Robinson, who mediated between them, kept this knowledge to himself, thus avoiding undermining a labour which was already sufficiently difficult. However, ultimately their devotion was not to each other's characters and opinions but to the perpetuation of S.T. Coleridge's memory and works.