A New Letter by Sara Fricker Coleridge to Matilda Betham, 16 February 1811

Tim Whelan

I

AMONG THE MASSIVE CACHE OF MANUSCRIPT LETTERS belonging to the Simon Gratz Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia is a folder marked 'Sara Coleridge, 1802-52', the dates denoting the daughter of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a writer of considerable note in her own right and whose work in editing and publishing the writings of her father after his death established his life and thought, especially his views on religion and the church, on a more solid and accurate foundation than at any point during his lifetime. Within the folder is a letter by Sara Coleridge to Henry Crabb Robinson from March 1841, accompanied by a miniature of her when she was 25 originally in the possession of the Revd Edward Coleridge.[1] Also included in the folder is a letter by her mother, Sara Fricker Coleridge (1770-1845), to Matilda Betham, composed on 16 February 1811, a letter obviously misidentified and misplaced.[2]

Besides these two letters, the Historical Society holds six other letters written by Sara Coleridge the daughter: a January 1843 letter to the publisher Edward Moxon belonging to the Ferdinand J. Dreer Collection of English Prose Writers,[3] and five letters to Maria Jane Jewsbury (1800-33) residing within the Hall Series (as it is noted in the card catalogue), a subsidiary of the Dreer Collection. These previously unknown letters form a small but important part of an impressive collection of manuscripts once belonging to Samuel Carter Hall (1800-89) and his wife, Anna Maria Hall (1804-81), both of whom enjoyed long careers as writers and editors between 1825 and 1880, during which time they collected thousands of manuscript letters, poems, and prose works. These manuscripts formed the basis for S. C. Hall's *A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age, from Personal Experience* (London, 1871, 1876) and his *Retrospect of a Long Life: From 1815 to 1883* (London, 1883), in which he composed vignettes on nearly every popular writer during the many decades of his literary career, nearly all of whom he and his wife had known personally and corresponded with at various times.

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1 Case 11, Box 6, Folder 14. For more on Sara Coleridge's correspondence with Crabb Robinson, see Hilary Newman, 'Henry Crabb Robinson and Sara Coleridge', *Coleridge Bulletin*, N.S., 46 (Winter 2016), 101-14; the above letter, however, is not discussed in that article. The portrait, engraved by C. Jones in 1827, was used by her daughter, Edith, in her *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, 2 vols (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873). A forthcoming article in the *Coleridge Bulletin* will provided complete transcriptions and background on these new letters at the Historical Society by Sara Coleridge.

2 Mrs. Samuel Taylor Coleridge appears in scholarly works as 'Sara' or 'Sarah', and arguments exist for both; I have chosen to retain the former primarily because that is how she signed her letters, which may explain (assisted by the lack of a complete date) why her letter was placed in the same folder in the Gratz Collection as that of her daughter, despite the dissimilarity in their hands.

3 Box 209, Folder 46, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

In 1881, as he neared completion of his *Retrospect*, Hall sold the bulk of his manuscript collection to George W. Childs (1829-94), co-owner for many years of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*.[4] Childs subsequently had the manuscripts meticulously glued into the pages of fifteen folio volumes (each with a printed title page) and presented them as a Christmas present in December 1888 to his friend and fellow collector Ferdinand Julius Dreer (1812-1902), who served many years as Vice-President of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Childs inscribed the title page of Volume I with the following note:

> My dear Mr. Dreer
> Allow me to offer for your acceptance the volumes of letters and manuscripts from the library of my old friends Mr. & Mrs. S. C. Hall.
> George W. Childs
> Your friend of over forty years
> Christmas 1888

In 1890 Dreer donated his collection of some 15,000 manuscripts, which now included the Hall volumes, to the Historical Society, most of which were noted in *A Catalogue of the Collection of Autographs formed by Ferdinand Julius Dreer* (2 vols, 1890). Since the *Catalogue* appeared so soon after Child's gift, the only letter by Sara Coleridge cited in the *Catalogue* was the 1843 letter to Edward Moxon. At the end of Volume 2, however, a list of 'Special Collections' appeared which included a short description of the manuscript volumes collected by the Halls and presented by Childs.[5] Among the more than 400 individuals who have manuscript remains embedded in these volumes are William Lisle Bowles, William Cullen Bryant, Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Leigh Hunt, Washington Irving, Walter Savage Landor, Thomas Moore John Ruskin, and William Wordsworth. Some 80 women writers can be found as well, including Joanna Baillie, Eliza Bray, Fredrika Bremer, Sara Coleridge, Maria Edgeworth, Eliza Foster, Anna Maria Hall, Felicia Hemans, Mary Howitt, Anna Jameson, Geraldine Endsor Jewsbury, Maria Jane Jewsbury, Jenny Lind, Florence Nightingale, Catherine Elizabeth Sarah Norton, Amelia Opie, Jane Porter, Mary Shelley, and Charlotte Mary Yonge.

Only a small portion of the letters by women contained in the volumes comprising the Hall Series have been noted by scholars or have appeared in print. The largest is a set of some 30 letters by Dora Wordsworth (1804-47) to Maria Jane Jewsbury. These letters are the epistolary counterparts to a similar set of letters by Jewsbury to Dora now belonging to the Wordsworth Trust at Grasmere.[6] Dora's letters (and a few by William and Dorothy Wordsworth)

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[4] In his *Recollections* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1890), Childs mentions the Halls: 'From the late Anna Maria Hall and her husband, S. C. Hall, I procured a valuable collection of letters, manuscripts, and sketches of many celebrated people of the past fifty years' (58-59).

[5] *A Catalogue of the Collection of Autographs formed by Ferdinand Julius Dreer*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: [privately printed], 1890), vol. 1, p. 131; vol. 2, p. 571. The materials collected by the Halls belong to 'Series 3: Volumes' within the Dreer Collection, under the title 'Original Manuscript and Correspondence of Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall'.

[6] WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane/ 1-40, Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere. A set of eleven letters by Letitia Landon (L.E.L.) can be found in the Hall Series, vol. V, pp. 139-71, 253-54, of which four appeared in print in the

can be found in volumes IV and VIII in the Hall Series; they were transcribed and edited by Howard Paton Vincent and published in 1944 in a limited edition of 250 copies. Vincent's transcriptions (not always accurate) have been widely used by scholars of a circle of women writers that included Jewsbury, Sara Coleridge, Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), Caroline Bowles (1786-1854), Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-38), and Maria Gowen Brooks (1794-1845), all of whom served as 'protégées' (to use Dennis Low's term) of William Wordsworth in the late 1820s.[7]

Vincent's introduction mainly concerns Dora, but he adds a brief summary of Jewsbury's life, relying heavily on a memoir of her by Eric Gillett (1932). Gillett believed that after Jewsbury's untimely death in India in 1833, her husband, the Revd William Kew Fletcher (1802-67), a Chaplain for the East India Company, refused to send back to England the letters and manuscripts that she had taken with her in 1832. Gillett bases this assumption upon a December 1836 letter by Geraldine Ensor Jewsbury (1812-80), Maria Jane's younger sister and a significant literary figure in her own right, in which she relates the fate of her sister's manuscript writings and letters:

> [Maria Jane] took with her all her MS. Papers and copies of all her fugitive pieces, which are so scattered many of them in most obscure periodicals now extinct, and done without her signature that it would be impossible to collect them all – she was, I believe, intending to publish her minor pieces, it is a source of great mortification that we possess none of them for she either took with her the works to which she had contributed or else cut out her own papers, as the most convenient way of keeping copies of them all there, and every thing she might write subsequently are in the hands of Mr. Fletcher. I fear it would be to little purpose to apply to him, as he has hitherto taken no notice of our repeated letters, nor have we had the slightest communication from him since her death – and as he is now married again I much fear we never shall – it has, you may imagine, greatly added to our sorrow to have been thus prevented paying any respect to her memory.[8]

Jewsbury's manuscripts, however, did survive, a fact not unknown to Vincent in 1944. He added to a note on Jewsbury that 'a large batch of letters, essays,

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nineteenth century: two in Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), and two in S. C. Hall's *Memories*. All four were reprinted in F. J. Sypher's *Letters by Letitia Elizabeth Landon* (Ann Arbor: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2001), pp. 57-58, 63-64, 140-41, 186-87, but without any reference to the manuscripts residing at the Historical Society. The remaining letters by L.E.L. in the Hall Series (and several other letters at the Historical Society) have remained unknown until now. Sypher opined in his Introduction that the original manuscripts used by Blanchard and S. C. Hall and some others in the nineteenth century 'seemed to have been dispersed to untraced locations, if indeed they survive at all', and later adds that he hoped they would come to light at some point. The L.E.L. letters in the Hall Series and other letters in the Gratz, Dreer, and Ettings Collections at the Historical Society partially fulfil that wish, though a careful examination suggests that Sypher's claim that most were 'faithfully transcribed' may need some qualification (x, xviii).

[7] See Howard Paton Vincent, *Letters of Dora (Wordsworth)* (Chicago: Packard & Company, [1944]); also Dennis Low, *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006).

[8] Eric Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury: Occasional Papers, Selected with a* Memoir (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1932), lxv-lxvi.

and poems in Jane's holograph' resided at the Historical Library. It may be that Vincent worked primarily from photos of Dora's letters, for it seems unlikely that, during a residence at the Historical Society transcribing these letters, he would never have examined the General Index for all fifteen volumes. Had he done so, he would have seen the volume and page numbers for Sara Coleridge's five letters and most likely Felicia Hemans's 41 letters and Caroline Bowles' s four letters, all addressed, like Dora's letters, to Jewsbury.[9] These other letters not only provide important glosses on Dora's letters but significant insights into each woman's thoughts about marriage, child-rearing, domesticity, and literary activity, as well as the difficulties women writers faced in finding a satisfying degree of intellectual and emotional fulfillment during the peak of the "Cult of True Womanhood."

Unfortunately, Vincent never identifies the specific collection housing Dora's letters to Jewsbury nor does he note that they had at one time been in the possession of S. C. and Anna Maria Hall, a pertinent fact given the couple's role in the proliferation of literary annuals, especially among women writers, in the late 1820s and early 1830s.[10] How the Jewsbury materials arrived in the possession of the Halls cannot be known with certainty but some tentative conclusions are possible. Sometime prior to or after the death of Revd Fletcher in December 1867 in Worthing, Sussex (he had returned to England from India the previous year), Jewsbury's literary remains came into the possession of her sister Geraldine. These materials comprised more than 140 letters between Jewsbury and some 30 correspondents, 28 manuscripts of her juvenile writings and poems, and a long biographical work on Aureng-Zebe, a seventeenth-century Mughal Emperor of India who was the subject of a play by John Dryden in 1675. Geraldine apparently retained the collection until her death in 1880, at which time it was transferred to the Halls, whose friendship with the Jewsbury sisters originated in the 1820s. Had the materials been given to the Halls previous to Geraldine's death, it seems likely a letter to that effect would have remained among her letters to the Halls, but none exists.[11] No references to any of these materials is present in the two editions of S. C. Hall's *Memories* (1871, 1877), but references do appear in his *Retrospect* (1883), which was published three years after Geraldine's death. Thus, it seems probable that the manuscripts came into the possession of the Halls around the time of

[9] Hemans's letters to Jewsbury can be found in the Hall Series, vol. XIII, pp. 185-311, Dreer Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; another eleven letters by Hemans to a wide range of correspondents are scattered among various collections in the Historical Society, making the library an important source for material on Hemans. Bowles' letters to Jewsbury (including one to Anna Maria Hall) are in the Hall Series, vol. I, pp.279-90.

[10] See Vincent, *Letters*, 14. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both writers highly revered by Jewsbury and the Halls, were actively recruited by the editors and publishers of several annuals. Between 1826 and 1834, Coleridge published more than 30 poems and short prose pieces in *The Literary Souvenir*, *Friendship's Offering*, *The Amulet*, *Bijou* (*Cameo*), and *The Keepsake*. Wordsworth's five poems in the 1829 edition of *The Keepsake* earned him 100 guineas. See *Andrew Boyle, An Index to the Annuals*, vol. 1 (Worcester: Andrew Boyle (Booksellers) LTD, 1967), 63-64; D. Furr, 'The Perfect Match: Wordsworth's "The Triad" and Coleridge's "The Garden of Boccacio" in Context', *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840*, 15 (Winter 2005). Online: Internet (5/25/2022): http://www.romtext.org.uk/articles/rt15_n03/.

[11] More than twenty letters by Geraldine Jewsbury to the Halls can be found in the Hall Series, vol. V, pp. 1-54, Dreer Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Geraldine's death in 1880; that they were then used by S. C. Hall for his biographical vignettes on the two sisters and their friend Felicia Hemans that he was preparing for his *Retrospect*; that they were then sold by the Halls, along with their other manuscript collections, to George Childs of Philadelphia, who eventually gave them to Ferdinand Dreer, who then donated his manuscript collection to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, from which Howard Vincent extracted Dora's letters to Jewsbury and published them in 1944.

Based upon evidence in the correspondence between Jewsbury and Dora Wordsworth, both at the Historical Society and at the Wordsworth Museum in Grasmere, Joanne Wilkes argues that similar letters must have passed between Jewsbury and Sara Coleridge, letters that Wilkes, taking her cue from Gillett, was certain 'have not survived'.[12] Fortunately, they did survive a miraculous journey from England to India and back again to England and eventually to America over a span of half a century, passing through the hands of Maria Jane to the Revd Fletcher to Geraldine Jewsbury to the Halls to Childs to Dreer and finally to the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Survival, however, does not necessarily translate into recognition for manuscript collections; the Hall Series is a classic example. Besides Dora's letters to Jewsbury, only a letter by Mary Shelley to Jewsbury and a poem by Anna Letitia Barbauld have surfaced in modern editions; the remaining materials pertaining to nearly every significant woman writer of the nineteenth century still reside in obscurity within these fifteen volumes.[13] It seems likely that the few manuscripts from the collection that have appeared in print were transcribed from photographic images and not the actual manuscripts, for anyone examining these large bound volumes in person would have recognized the extent and value of the impressive collection.[14] Whatever the reason, this newly uncovered treasure-trove of nineteenth-century manuscripts significantly enhances the biographies of many of the period's most important women writers, including Sara Coleridge and, in a surprising bonus, her mother, Sara Fricker Coleridge.[15]

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[12] Joanne Wilkes, *Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 42. Besides Wilkes, the only other scholar to draw connections between Jewsbury and Sara Coleridge is Kathleen Jones in *A Passionate Sisterhood: The Sisters, Wives and Daughters of the Lake Poets* (London: Virago Press, 1998), xix, 251.

[13] A few letters by male writers within the Hall Series have been noticed, such as those by William Wordsworth (and Dorothy) to Jewsbury and a manuscript of Coleridge's poem, "Love's Burial Place," all within the Hall Series, vols. IV, pp. 261-62, 281-84, VIII, pp. 299-300, 315-16, and II, pp. 163-66, Dreer Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. See Alan G. Hill, ed., *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), vol. III, pp. 480-81, 606-09; and vol. V, pp. 26-28, 127-30, 195-96, 217-20, cited only as belonging to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; also J. C. C. Mays, ed., *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* Vol. 16, Part 2, vol. 2, p. 1259 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), where the manuscript poem is cited as the Historical Society and the Dreer Collection, but without reference to the Hall Series.

[14] A more complete discussion by Timothy Whelan of the manuscripts pertaining to the women writers found within the Hall Series will appear in a forthcoming publication.

[15] Sara Coleridge has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest the past three decades, beginning with Bradford Keyes Mudge's *Sara Coleridge, a Victorian Daughter* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), followed by Kathleen Jones's *A Passionate Sisterhood* (1998), Dennis Low's *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (2006), Katie Waldegrave's *The Poets' Daughters: Dora Wordsworth and Sara Coleridge* (London: Hitchinson, 2013), Jeffrey Barbeau's *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Peter Swaab's *Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and Robin Scholfield's *The Vocation of Sara Coleridge: Authorship and Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Pertinent articles on Sara Coleridge have also appeared in the pages of the *Coleridge Bulletin*: see Dennis Low, "The very way to be not read': The Creative

II

Sara Fricker Coleridge's letter to Matilda Betham is only dated as 16 February, but internal evidence establishes the year as 1811. The letter fills a gap between Sara's letter to Thomas Poole of Nether Stowey on 3 August 1810 and two later letters by her, one to Catherine Clarkson on 12 May 1811 and another to Poole on 14 November 1812. This new letter adds important details to Sara's response to her husband's lengthy absence in 1810-11 from his family at Keswick and his failure to communicate with her during that time, a painful realization that their marriage, dysfunctional as it had been for more than a decade, was on the edge of dissolution.[16] Samuel Taylor Coleridge had returned to Keswick in May 1810 after a long absence, and in her letter that August to Poole Mrs. Coleridge writes that her husband has exhibited a 'kind disposition towards us all during his residence here' and that his spirits 'are in general better than I have known them for years'.[17] On a darker note, she cannot avoid commenting on the impending failure of *The Friend* and her concern for her two sons and their educations. 'I am so bewildered about our affairs', she laments to Poole, 'that I know not what to wish or what to *do* – these Lads too, H. [Hartley] in particular is fast approaching towards Manhood – what can he think is to become of them if he does not exert himself – these dear Boys are the source of much pleasure to me at present – heaven only knows how long it will last!'[18]

Coleridge remained at Keswick until 18 October, when he departed for London with Basil Montagu and his wife. He did not communicate again with Sara or anyone at Keswick until early May 1811. Her letter that February to Matilda Betham (transcribed in full below), like those to Poole, reflects the constant anguish she experienced over her failing marriage, her anxiety about the many rumors she had heard about her husband's life in London since his departure from Keswick, her interest in his attempts to find a suitable doctor to help treat his opium addiction, her concern about the education of her two sons, and enquiries about the health of various members of Betham's large family along with updates on the health of the inhabitants at Greta Hall. Mrs. Coleridge also provides a touching reminiscence of Southey's mother (she last saw her in 1800) and a postscript in which her fear that Coleridge 'has been different since he left us' poignantly foreshadows the imminent demise of her

Significance of Literary Inconsequentiality in Sara Coleridge's Phantasmion', *Coleridge Bulletin*, New Series, 12 (Winter 1998), 27-56; Jeffrey Barbeau, 'Grief and Consolation in Sara Coleridge's Poems', *Coleridge Bulletin,* New Series, 33 (Summer 2009), 80-88; and Newman, 'Henry Crabb Robinson and Sara Coleridge'.

[16] For these letters, see Stephen Potter, ed., *Minnow among Tritons: Mrs. S. T. Coleridge's Letters to Thomas Poole 1799-1834* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1934), 11-21; Molly Lefebure, *The Bondage of Love: A Life of Mrs Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Victor Gallancz LTD, 1986), 201-02. Manuscript collections of Mrs. Coleridge's letters can be found in the Sara Fricker Coleridge Collection, MS-0867, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; Thomas Poole Correspondence and Papers, British Library, Add. Ms. 35344, fols 8-94; 104-05 (letters to Poole from 1799 to 1834); and WLMS 14/6, 11; WLMS Moorsom/66/3; 2001.50.18, Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere.

[17] Potter, *Minnow among Tritons*, 12.

[18] Potter, *Minnow among Tritons*, 14.

marriage. Coleridge's return in February-March 1812 would not only be his last visit to the Lakes but also the last time he would perform duties as husband and father in his family's residence.

Sara Coleridge, Greta Hall, Keswick, to Matilda Betham, [London], Sunday, 16 February [1811].[19]

Greta Hall Sunday. 16 *Feb.*

My dear Miss Betham,[20]

I should long since have troubled you with a few lines, if I had not waited for a letter from M^r^ Coleridge, who I hoped, you ^would^ be able to give me some account of you, during his visit to M^r^ & M^rs^ Montague.[21] – Three months and more have elapsed and he has not *once* addressed any of his northern friends and we have heard very little of him from other persons; of course I have passed a very uneasy winter.

Last Sunday, (having by chance heard that he was at M^r^ Morgan's at Hammersmith,) I wrote a letter to my friend M^rs^ Morgan,[22] who informed me, (to my great surprize) that he had been with them ever since the 3^d^ day of Nov:^r^ and is at this time at Lodgings in Southampton buildings, with an intention of applying for advice from M^r^ *Abernethy*[23]– he had left them about a week, had visited them once since and was in very good spirits. – When M^rs^ Montague was here, I ventured to make

[19] Simon Gratz Collection, Case 11, Box 6, Folder 14, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Address: Miss Betham; no postmark.

[20] By the date of the above letter, Mary Matilda Betham (1776-1852) had published two volumes of poems (1797 and 1808) and *A Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of every Age and Country* (1804); she also exhibited at times at the Royal Academy as a miniaturist and moved easily within London's literary scene, counting among her acquaintances the Lambs, Coleridges, Southeys, and the Barbaulds. Her finances were never reliable, and her mental health suffered greatly at times, yet she continued to publish into the 1840s, remaining popular among the literati until her death in 1852. Her miniature of Mrs. Coleridge, painted during a visit to Keswick in 1809, was used as a frontispiece for Lefebure's *The Bondage of Love*. Betham was in contact with Coleridge during this time or shortly thereafter, as evident from Coleridge's letter to her on 14 March 1811, about the time she also painted a miniature of him.

[21] Basil Montagu (1770-1851), a barrister, writer, and philanthropist, had been a close friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge since the latter's time at Nether Stowey. Montagu's third wife, the former Anna Dorothea Benson (1773-1856), had been Montagu's housekeeper and his children's governess prior to their marriage. The Montagus lived at that time at 55 Frith Street, London.

[22] John James Morgan (d. 1820) was a childhood friend and classmate of Robert Southey. He married Mary Brent in 1800 and worked as a silversmith, living at the time of the above letter at 7 Portland Place, Hammersmith. The reference to Coleridge being at the Morgans is significant. Sara and her relations at Greta Hall had only recently found out about Coleridge's situation with the Morgans, to whom he turned for assistance after breaking with the Montagus over Wordsworth's critical comments to Montagu. Though the letter suggests Coleridge was actively pursuing a place with Dr. Abernethy, he would soon settle with the Morgans, living with them first at Hammersmith and then at 71 Berners Street before removing with them in late 1814 to Calne. In April 1816 Coleridge moved in with Dr. James Gillman and his wife, Anne, in Highgate, remaining with them until his death in 1834.

[23] Dr. John Abernethy (1764-1831) was a prominent surgeon at St. Bartholomew's Hospital and a laudanum user himself, believing, like Coleridge's old friend Thomas Beddoes of the Pneumatic Institute in Bristol, that opium was useful as both an anodyne and a stimulant. Coleridge first sought help from Beddoes early in 1808 about his opium use, only to discover that Beddoes was dead; he then sought out Abernethy, but failed to see him at that time, renewing his efforts in December 1810 after having first sought help from another doctor, Anthony Carlisle. See Coleridge's letter to John Morgan on 21 December 1810, in E. L Griggs, *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959-71), vol. 3, pp. 300-01; see also Neil Vickers, 'Opium as a Literary Stimulant: The Case of Samuel Taylor Coleridge', *International Review of Neurobiology* 120 (2015), 336.

the request of a few lines from her if she found C. was not in the habit of writing. I now fear I made an *improper* request as I have not heard from her – perhaps C. did not remain long under her roof; but I am altogether in the dark about C. and his affairs, excepting the slight intelligence I have just received from kind M^rs^ Morgan.

I received your remembrances from Southey's letter (in acknowledgment of Kehama) but I want ^to^ hear more about you; perhaps you will have the charity to write to me very soon. [24] – I ought to have answered y^r^ note by M^rs^ Montague – you wish to know how we liked her – it is sufficient to say, that ^if^ we were as well acquainted with her as you are, we should admire her full as much, no doubt – she is very sensible & interesting – and so much like Southey's mother, that I could almost have fancied her in the room with us: one evening, after Supper, I so far forgot myself, in sitting half behind her chair, to listen as her voice was *really* so much like our dear friend's as it seemed when looking at her, that I was just going to lean my forehead upon her shoulder (as in times of old) when recollection came. I remember M^rs^ Southey ever since Southey was six years old; of course M^rs^ S. looked older than M^rs^ M. does ^now^ when she died – but it is now 11 years since I saw her last.[25]

I dread to ask if you have heard any thing of y^r^ long-absent brother – where is your sister Mary now? your sister Anne – tell ^me^ something of all your family for I feel a considerable interest for all who bear y^r^ name.[26] – Do you ever hear ought of the Thelwall's? I have not observed any of his Advertisements lately.[27]

My poor Boys ^were^ tormented from Sep:^r^ to Dec:^r^ with the hooping-cough, it has reduced Derwent a great deal but Hartley is stout & well and much altered.[28]

We have [had] a very sickly winter among the children. Herbert[29] has had frequent returns of the Croupe but nothing dangerous; yet Southey has been exceedingly apprehensive upon the slightest occasions. – Poor Mary has had a sad winter, she is never well five days together, she now never rises until eleven and lies down again after dinner; – there does not

[24] Southey's epic narrative poem, *The Curse of Kehama*, appeared in December 1810.

[25] Southey's mother was the former Margaret Hill; she died in 1802, about two years after Sara last saw her.

[26] Betham had more than a dozen siblings, of which three are mentioned above.

[27] John Thelwall (1764-1834) was an outspoken supporter of the French Revolution and member of the Society of the Friends of the People and the London Corresponding Society in the early 1790s, becoming known thereafter as 'Citizen Thelwall'. His radical views caused the followers of Pitt to label him a Jacobin, eventually charging him, along with Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke, and several others, with treason in May 1794. He was acquitted in December 1794, and as a result of the Pitt and Grenville Acts in December 1795, turned to lecturing before retiring to a farm in Brecon, Wales, in 1798, where Coleridge and Wordsworth visited him. Thelwall resumed lecturing in 1800 and became an early innovator in the field of speech elocution, which would have been the source of the advertisements seen by Sara.

[28] The children of Samuel and Sara Coleridge were Hartley (1796-1849), Berkeley (1798-99), Derwent (1800-83), and Sara (1802-52), the latter not mentioned in the above letter.

[29] Henry Herbert Southey (1806-16) was Southey's first son; his physical constitution was never strong, creating apprehensions about his life that Southey often voiced, as suggested above.

seem to be the least chance of her ever being strong again.[30] If you are not very particularly engaged may I expect a letter from you in a few days after you receive this? – I think, if you had seen C. you would have written to me to tell me of it. – M[rs] M. in her letter hints about a disagreement between C. and M[r] Carlisle[31]; I heard something of this before but can make nothing of it – I wish C. would write – both Southey and myself have written often to him but can obtain nothing. – You will probably see Southey in Town in the Spring – and perhaps my sister; my journey thither is still in the distance.

My brother & sisters unite with me in kindest remembrances to you, and I remain dear Miss Betham

very affectionately yours

Sara Coleridge.

This very day Coleridge left us 4 months ago; he had been here 5 months in better health, spirits and humour than I had seen him, for any great length of time for years before. I fear he has been different since he left us.[32]

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After her letter to Betham, Mrs. Coleridge had to wait until the beginning of May before she heard from her husband. That letter is no longer extant, but fortunately she summarized the contents in her letter to Catherine Clarkson on 12 May 1811. Sara had heard previously about Coleridge's estrangement from Wordsworth over negative comments Wordsworth made to Basil Montagu about the difficulties that might occur if Coleridge resided for a time in the Montagu's London home. Despite her poor relationship with Coleridge, Sara dutifully took his side in the quarrel against Wordsworth, as did all those at Greta Hall, including Edith Southey, Sara's sister. When Coleridge returned to Keswick in February 1812, he visited Ambleside and Grasmere with his two

[30] Mary Fricker Lovell (1771-1862), Sara's younger sister, married Robert Lovell in 1794. He died in 1796, after which Southey became the primary provider for Mary and her son, Robert, Jr. They moved with the Southey's to Greta Hall in 1803 and remained there until Southey's death in 1843, sharing the house with her sister Sara and her three children and all the Southey children.

[31] Anthony Carlisle (1768-1840) was a prominent surgeon at Westminster Hospital from 1793 until his death in 1840. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1804. Carlisle was a friend of the Montagus and their choice of physician to help Coleridge gain control of his opium addiction. Coleridge had confided in Carlisle shortly before the above letter about his health problems only to discover that Carlisle had mentioned them to a female friend who then repeated many of the details during conversation at the dinner table, a situation that doubly offended Coleridge for Carlisle's lack of discretion and the unnamed woman's debasing of proper 'table talk'. See Carl Woodring, ed., *Table Talk*, vol. 1, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, vol. 14 (London and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. xxxviii.

[32] Southey notes in a letter to George Danvers on 8 October 1810 that Coleridge was still at Greta Hall and doing well, 'in good humour, talking of what he will do; & of what he is adoing, – studying incessantly, & yet leaving undone all that he ought to do. Yet I despair less than I used to do of his effecting great things. His mind is so matured, his knowledge so extensive & so constantly increasing, that there is nothing which he may not accomplish'. See Lefebure, *Bondage of Love*, 197-201; Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt, eds., *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey, Part Four: 1810-15*, at *Romantic Circles*, https://romantic-circles.org/edtions/southey_letters/Part_Four/index.html..

sons but did not stop to see Wordsworth.[33] The two men were reconciled later that spring largely through the efforts of Crabb Robinson, but, as Sara would remark in her next letter to Poole on 14 November 1812, 'there will never more be *that* between them which was in days of yore'. She informed Poole of Coleridge's desire to take her and the children to London once his earnings were sufficient, but Sara wished to remain with her children in the country a while longer, demanding that 'a regular correspondence was to be kept up between himself, and me, and the children', as a defense against promises that all too often were 'like his Castles, – airy nothings!'[34]

[33] Lefebure, *Bondage of Love*, 202-03.
[34] Potter, *Minnow among Tritons*, 16, 17.