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The Jewett Library

Mrs. Ernest Bowditch

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THE JEWETT LIBRARY
By MRS. ERNEST BOWDITCH

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article is contained in an album with twenty large photographs of the Jewett home at South Berwick, Maine. On one of the last pages L.E.R. wrote: "These photographs, and the accompanying letter-press, are the work of the late Mrs. Ernest Bowditch, a frequent visitor in this beloved house which was like no other house; which might have borne the name of WELCOME.

Here dwell, among the books and pictures they loved, their green garden blossoming about them in the very heart of the ancient village of Berwick, two rare and noble women, Sarah Orne Jewett and her sister Mary — fine flowers of the New England which they loved and served in their widely different ways.

Mary, the elder, was through life a power for good in the whole surrounding countryside, as her father, the "Country Doctor," had been before her.

The work of Sarah Orne Jewett needs no praise of mine. Her stories will be read and prized as long as there are readers who care for charm; who value the qualities of nobility, faithfulness, delicate humor, and crystal clarity.

After the death of the two sisters, Mrs. Bowditch arranged this lovely tribute, and gave me this treasured copy. I now give it to the Library of Colby College, in the hope that this reminder of a gracious and scholarly Past may be an inspiration for the students of the Future."

Laura E. Richards
Gardiner, Maine
October 14, 1942]

As we look at a room in a museum, which the guidebook tells us is an example of a French drawing room of the period of Louis XVI, little do we realize how much inferior it is in its present state to the same room in its former proper setting. A similar situation attaches itself to the books from the Jewett Homestead, South Berwick, Maine, which have recently been received by the Harvard College Library as a bequest from the estate of Dr. Theodore Jewett Eastman, of the Class of 1901. Though in their present habitat one instantly realizes their age-old beauty, only in the library of that Colonial house did one appreciate the atmosphere they gave and the many interests they represented of several generations of one family.

Going back a few years, we drive down the main street of the village of South Berwick, now dotted with modern buildings, banks, etc., until at the end an imposing pre-revolutionary house
attracts our attention. Instantly we forget the twentieth cen-
tury, and our imagination sees a chaise approach bringing a
visitor for the first time to the home of Sarah Orne Jewett. Opening the wicket gate he looks down the path through the
hallway “with a great door at each end, through which the lilacs
in front and the old pensioner plum tree in the garden are seen
exchanging bows and gestures.” Both sides of the path are
bordered by hedges of high box, and here and there green
painted kegs from which tall plants of tea roses are ready to
bloom. At the porch itself, supported by fluted Doric columns
which are reeded to one-third their height, stand Chinese garden
seats on top of which are placed rare plants. Seldom closed,
the hospitable door leads into the hall that has been called one
of the most beautiful in New England. Tradition has it that it
took two men one hundred days to carve the cornice, the stair
rail and archway. Under this archway the stairs ascend slowly
by broad low steps leading halfway up to a square landing,
under which there is a very unusual paneled soffit, and upon
which stands a large Chippendale chair in one corner and a
grandfather clock in the other, and between them an arched
window with splayed raised paneled jambs, “looking out on the
garden and the village, the hills far inland, and the sunset be-
yond all.” In fact, as Laura E. Richards says, “There is noth-
ing obtrusively new in the whole house. Everything is old in
the best sense of the word, brilliantly, gracefully, shinningly old
with the brass and silver gleaming and the fine old mahogany
glowing with rich soft tints.”

Yet our chief interest is the library around which the life of
the family revolved; for it was not only the treasure room of
the books, but the centre of activity of its members. Living in
the past more or less, the Jewetts revived the traditions of their
ancestors in old England, and as squires of this small town,
proffered a welcoming hand to all regardless of race or creed.
To limit this room, then, as a family haven would be wrong,
because here all sorts of conditions of men were received with
open arms, for many came to seek hospitality, advice of every
description, and condolence.

As one entered this room which had welcomed so many dis-
tinguished and literary guests, the first thing to be noticed was
the large fireplace framed in Dutch tiles and guarded by a
picturesque fender brought by a seafaring ancestor, Captain Jewett, from Holland. The unique part of the fender is that he had a double railing of brass added to shield the children from fire. In front of the chimneypiece, where glowed the driftwood blaze, stood an elaborately inlaid Sheraton sofa with comfortable pillows covered with a rich Chinese tapestry. What stories this sofa could tell; tales of adventure to unknown shores; (“for the men of Maine in early periods, occasionally accompanied by their womenfolk, had braved the angry seas of Cape Horn and rounded Cape Hope in their wooden ships”); tales of ghosts which racked listeners to the core; gossip of the neighborhood; and scholarly argument of nineteenth century notables.

Marking the time over the hearth, the Simon Willard banjo clock, the name of T. F. Jewett being engraved on its weight, was still ticking as it had for four generations. Accompanying this timepiece on the walls hung early engravings by Boydell, “The City of London and the City of Westminster from Hampstead Heath,” brought from England about 1820, and also photographs of much beloved authors, silent reminders of their literary taste.

Amongst the familiar faces one recognized Tennyson, who mentions in a letter to a friend the beautiful crystal ball on a silver chain worn by Sarah Jewett; Robert Burns, whose poems the family admired, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who inscribed on the back of his gift: “To S. O. J. from T. B. A. on Xmas Day.” While on the subject we are reminded of many autographed likenesses which numbered amongst them Ellen Terry, George Sand, Madame de Castellane, Madame Blanc, and others.

A secretary with glass doors to its cabinet standing in the corner holds our attention. Though at a superficial glance we see only books, in reality the drawers unearth “all the small curiosities and knick-knacks there seemed to be no other place for,—odd china figures and cups and vases, unaccountable Chinese carvings and exquisite corals and sea shells, minerals and Swiss wood work, and articles of vertu from the South Seas. Underneath were stored boxes of letters and old magazines, for this was one of the houses where nothing seems to have been thrown away.”
Of particular interest are charming ivory miniatures of the Marquis and Marquise de Lafayette. In 1825 the Marquis had had a reception tendered him at the Berwick Academy. To account for this we found bills from the various creditors in the town. A few items in particular are: to A. Abbott for two nights watching $1.00; to John Frost for 2 qts. of Lisbon wine 8/ per gallon 67 cents. The full cost of this entertainment amounted to twenty-eight dollars, for which the leading citizens of the town were assessed, of whom Captain Theodore F. Jewett was one, being a member of the "Committee of Arrangement."

Another drawer disclosed many ship papers, for the desk had been brought from the family's brick counting house across the street, when sailing vessel gave way to steamer. The ships, barques and schooners of the fleet of T. F. and T. Jewett listed a dozen and more, the "Perseverance," "Berwick" and "Sea Duck" being amongst them. Interesting papers of all kinds showed the rules and regulations of many ports of call, besides several grants for freedom of the seas to Captain Jewett; one signed by Jefferson and Madison in the year 1808 is made out in French, Spanish, and Dutch as well as English; others signed by Madison and Monroe.

The genealogical papers showing the ancestry of the family were squeezed into a deep drawer at the right; records of the Oddiomes, Ornes, the rare 1792 Supplement of the General Law of Massachusetts showing transfers of land of the Rices, many historical papers of New Hampshire as two Gilman great-grandfathers had been its governors, and a letter from William Perry who had travelled to Union College, Schenectady, to consult his brother Gardner concerning his choice of college. His decision one learns by the discovery of his first quarter bill to the President and Fellows of Harvard College, dated October 6, 1808, the amount being $15.10. On his return journey he boarded the "Clermont" at Albany for its first trip down the Hudson River.

Standing by the window facing the village street was an antique Chippendale chair, one of a set of six which always bore the current magazines on religious, horticultural, and current topics, counting amongst them the Atlantic and Westminster Gazette.

Of necessity in such a busy household the library had its
desk always littered with papers of all descriptions. This desk was supported by spindle legs, and its deep satinwood drawers contained correspondence of a later generation. To Sarah Orne Jewett in her youth the mail brought letters of advice from Scudder, Howells, Aldrich, successively editors of the Atlantic, and later on letters of congratulations from all the leading literary lights of the latter end of the nineteenth century. Space forbids us the privilege of mentioning all of these notables, but a few can be cited: Henry James, Charles Eliot Norton, Henry W. Longfellow, Charles Dudley Warner, James Russell Lowell, Celia Thaxter, John G. Whittier, Willa Cather, comprise some of her more intimate friends, all members of the literary clique whose salon was the home of Mrs. Fields, whose husband, James T. Fields, was a publisher who before the international copyright was established dealt honestly and generously with English authors. "The decorous Georgian house at 148 Charles Street was," as Henry James said, "addicted to every hospitality and every benevolence, addicted to cultivation of tact and wit, and to the ingenious multiplication of such ties as could link the upper half of the title page with the lower."

From across the sea came letters from Rudyard Kipling, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Madame Blanc, Christina Rossetti, and others.

Besides these memoirs of a literary life were found the early records of the Berwick church, and papers on all subjects relating to the community, for Sarah’s sister, Mary Rice Jewett, became more and more its friend, counsellor and helper. In sickness or in trouble she was sent for as naturally and as inevitably as had been her father, whose visits were so well told by his daughter Sarah in her book A Country Doctor. This sister Mary had begun her good works when very young, for she remembered her aching fingers when her father sent her with the silver tankard filled with hot soup to suffering friends and patients.

And now we turn to the closet which was piled to the ceiling with books; children’s books, horticultural books, books on early American furniture, china, glass, and medicine. These last, which formed the working library of the country doctor, Theodore Herman Jewett, Bowdoin 1834 (whose early papers on obstetrics were very advanced for the times), reveal to us now the early system of medicine as practiced in America.
Though these are of interest to many, perhaps of greater importance to the Harvard College Library are the books found on the shelves that lined the northern wall of this room and filled the bookcases of every room in the house besides the rows of shelves in the attic, — especially if we consider the fact that these books were not bought to make a collection, but simply entered the library as heirlooms, gifts, or for edification of the many topics of family interest.

From the earlier period, there is a copy of the 1491 edition of the Armandus Tracts bought from the Royal Library in Munich; two Elzevirs in excellent condition; the 1630 edition of the Travel Series on Russia, Moscow, and Tartary, and the 1675 edition of Julius Caesar.

Of the seventeenth century printing are three editions of the Essays of Montaigne, Paris, 1659, 3 volumes; Rouen, 1619, 1 volume, and London, 1685, 3 volumes; Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici, as first translated into French by Lefabvre and published in Holland in 1668; and by the same author is the London edition of Pseudodoxia Epidemica, which appeared in 1646 and is supposed to have been originally owned by Charles Lamb. Another is a collection of the works of Samuel Daniel which appeared in London in 1602, in which the "Wars of the Roses" is bound last rather than first, and in which the transposed lines in "Musophilus" have been corrected, this being the third and probably rarest state in the issue of that poem.

From the eighteenth century, the library held the London edition of Pope, 1756, in 9 volumes, together with the London Odyssey of 1752, in 5 volumes, and the Iliad of 1750 in 6 volumes; the London edition of the Dramatic Works of John Dryden, 1725, in 6 volumes, as well as the Dryden Virgil, London, 1709, in 3 volumes.


We see also on the shelves books on travel in America, notably the editions of Liancourt and Chastellux.

From the nineteenth century, two editions of the Imitatio
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Christi; two editions of Paradise Lost; a number of early New England Hymnals; two editions of James Hogg; the London edition of John Donne of 1839 in 6 volumes; the Boston edition of the Poems of Mrs. Felicia Hemans, of 1826, with its Supplement of 1827, of some little rarity; the Kelmscott Press edition of Caxton’s Golden Legend in 3 volumes; and the Symonds edition of the Life of Cellini, from the Valentine Press, are of particular moment.

Another volume of considerable scarcity is the first English printing of Sir Philip Sidney’s Psalms of David from the Chiswick Press of 1823.

There are several Stevenson rarities, one of the best of which is the New York edition of A Christmas Sermon, 1900, and the New York issue of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, of 1886, in the original paper covers. There are as well three first editions of L. M. Alcott, including the rare 1868 part I of Little Women.

From the later nineteenth century, there are many limited and privately printed editions of men and women famous in American letters of the time, usually autographed copies presented to Miss Jewett.

Probably the most entertaining part of the whole collection are the clippings and letters to be found in all the books, but the autographed letters and inscriptions in the books of the late Victorian age make these particular editions unique. A book by Ian Maclaren is inscribed thus: “For Gold I send you Copper.” Tchelovich by Th. Bentzon carries the caption: “With greatest admiration for the writer of ‘A Tory Lover,’ and love to my dear friend I am so fond of.” Irving Bacheller writes: “To Sarah Orne Jewett. For fear of being forgotten.” In his first edition of Studies of Prose Fiction, Bliss Perry says: “To Sarah Orne Jewett, whose examples of fiction writing are so much better than these precepts.” Relation of Literature to Life carries the following: “Miss S. O. Jewett from a fellow soldier. Charles Dudley Warner.”

From the center table, lighted by a Colonial lamp and surrounded by comfortable chairs for the enjoyment of reading, and on which rested Leech’s original Sketch of the Horgins, one takes at random From Sunset Ridge — Poems Old and New, with S. O. Jewett’s signature on the title page. On one of her many visits the author must have picked up this book,
for on the same page is written, "Julia Ward Howe is glad to find her book here Dec. 7, 1902." Nearby was Whittier's own prayer book, and inside the manuscript of his last poem and a page from a letter from him to Miss Mary Jewett, dated 18 Mar. 1886; "An old plain farmer called on me yesterday and wanted to know if I knew anything about that girl at Berwick who wrote such stories of country life. He had just been reading The King of Folly Island. 'She knows all about us farmer folks,' he said; 'nobody has ever so well described us, and this pleasant way of telling her stories makes me feel as if I was listening to my mother's talk fifty or sixty years ago.' I wish Sarah could have seen and heard him as he sat in his old patched overcoat and cow hide shoes."

A quotation from a letter to Miss Jewett from Rudyard Kipling after the receipt of her Country of the Pointed Firs as a Christmas gift from Charles Eliot Norton is: "I maintain (and will maintain with outcries if necessary) that that is the 'reallest' New England book ever given us."

This book and all her other publications, whether in book form or in newspapers and periodicals, are preserved in first editions and, to make the collection complete, Miss Jewett's manuscripts have been given to the College Library by a cousin, Mrs. Elizabeth Perry, the wife of Henry H. Richardson, '95.

In a little notebook dated 1865, when Sarah was but sixteen years of age, she expressed her attitude towards the library. "My bookcase is the home of my dearest books, and a kind of hotel for those for which I have varying and lesser affection. Sometimes I leave one there for months, but there are a few who have lived in the same places ever since I was a child." And later: "I was born here, and I hope I shall die here and leave all the chairs in their places."

Thus the library stood (the favorite haunt of the family), the haven for literary men and members of the community, the natural expression of their literary, joyful, and benevolent minds.
LIBRARY IN THE JEWETT HOME AT SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE

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