

# Sarah and Arabella Lawrence: Some Biographical Notes on S. T. Coleridge and Sir W. R. Hamilton Waka Ishikura

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IN THIS PAPER, I WOULD LIKE TO CLARIFY Coleridge's relationship with Sarah Lawrence and Hamilton's with Arabella Lawrence. This will modify my 2008 paper in the winter *Bulletin*, and I will be able to shed new light on the Lawrence sisters in relation to Coleridge, Hamilton, and even Lady Byron and her daughter Ada. I am grateful to Anne van Weerden, who informed me the eldest of the Lawrence sisters was Sarah, who knew Coleridge in his youth. She also informed me that Sarah published *The Descendants of Philip Henry* (London, 1844), an ejected minister at the time of the Act of Uniformity in 1662. Sarah was one of the his descendants and that book was her lifelong work. These facts made me think that my 2008 paper had room for further development, as the letters exchanged between Sarah and Coleridge in 1832—although a letter from Sarah to Coleridge isn't extant—seems to be one of the keys to a Coleridgean philosophical issue that involves questions of nonconformity.

First, an outline of my 2008 paper to explain why the Lawrence sisters were important: it was focused on W. R. Hamilton (1805-1865), an Irish mathematician who became Andrews Professor of Astronomy as well as the Astronomer Royal in his early twenties. It described how far Hamilton embraced his ideal of the unity of science and poetry, and his way of pursuing Coleridgean poetic visions, outlining his biographical backgrounds. Soon after being appointed as Andrews Professor, Hamilton befriended William Wordsworth, and from 1830, as he read Coleridge's works, he became eager to see Coleridge. Hamilton asked Wordsworth more than once for a letter of introduction to Coleridge, yet Wordsworth, rather obstinately, declined and wrote that he thought Coleridge's health would not permit him to see anyone. Hamilton finally gave up on that letter of introduction, but did not stop trying to see Coleridge. The Lawrence sisters were family friends, first introduced to him by Maria Edgeworth. Hamilton was probably somehow informed that one of them had made Coleridge's acquaintance a long time ago. So, he went to see them in the Grange, near Liverpool, and got a letter of introduction to Coleridge in March, 1832. Hamilton successfully interviewed Coleridge twice in Gilman's house at Highgate; and during Hamilton's stay in London, Coleridge sent him letters, and gave him a German copy of Kant's *Urthilskraft*.<sup>1</sup>

In this story, the Lawrence sisters, played an important role in connecting Hamilton with Coleridge, but they are such obscure figures that little has been written about their life. They ran a girl's school in the Grange, and both Sarah and Arabella, and probably other sisters, worked for the school, or became

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Percival Graves, *Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton*, 3vols (Dublin, 1882-89), 3, 116-117. Hereafter cited as Graves. Hamilton recollected in 1859 as follows: "I have possibly been *bribed* to like that work of Kant, by the circumstances of its having been *mentioned* to me in conversation—for our intercourse was not always monologue—by my illustrious friend, and (if I may dare to say so), Master, Samuel Taylor Coleridge; who gave me his German copy of the *Urthilskraft*, through his own particular ally, Joseph Henry Green." Hamilton was heavily influenced by Coleridge and Kant in his formation of a metaphysical mathematics, one of the outcome was his theory of "Algebra as a Science of Pure Time."

governesses elsewhere. They had some taste in poetry and were in the social circle of Maria Edgeworth. In Sarah's *The Descendants of Philip Henry*, a description of their family indicates that at the time of Hamilton's visit in 1832, five Lawrence sisters were alive, and the following sisters could thus be identified: Sarah, the eldest, Arabella, the third, and Harriet the fifth.<sup>2</sup> In his *Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton*, however, in many cases, Robert Perceval Graves has referred to them as "the Lawrences," or "Misses Lawrence," as if they were a collective existence without individual personalities.<sup>3</sup> This may be due to the fact that Hamilton's letters often did not specify any given name, and just had, for example, "Miss Lawrence." Their individuality has thus been blurred, which seems to have affected some of the descriptions Graves presented in his *Life*: for example, the following part of Graves' *Life*, where he first introduced "Miss Lawrence" in detail, contains some problems as his narrative is not perfectly clear.

It was some time in the course of this year [1825] that Hamilton made acquaintance with Miss Lawrence, the eldest of three sisters who kept a girls' school at the Grange, near Liverpool. It seems likely that she was on a visit to Miss Edgeworth, and that the mutual introduction took place through her.

The three sisters were women of sound judgment and much culture, and two of them are highly spoken of by Miss Edgeworth in letters written by her in July, 1820, from Paris, where she was in intercourse with them. So highly did she esteem the elder, that she desired to secure her as governess for the children of the Duchess of Orleans; but the post was wisely declined by Miss Lawrence. This lady became to Hamilton, for some years, a valuable friend and adviser, as letters from her still in existence amply prove. He visited her and her sisters more than once, and to them he was indebted for an introduction to the elder Coleridge. To Miss Lawrence Hamilton had shown some of his poems, and had received from her in return criticisms honestly blending praise and dispraise.  
(Graves, I, 191)

In these passages, there seems to be one "Miss Lawrence," but actually, there were two: Sarah and Arabella. Sarah was the eldest, but not just of three but of more than five sisters (as two younger sisters had died young, and one older sisters had died in 1811), and two or more sisters probably helped Sarah in running the girls' school. The two sisters who were spoken highly of by Edgeworth are, presumably, Sarah and Arabella, and Sarah ("the elder") was offered the governess's post for the Duchess of Orleans, probably when the

<sup>2</sup> Three sisters are mentioned in Hamilton's letters in Graves' *Life*, but I could not find the name "Sarah" was specified. I consulted Geni HP (<https://www.geni.com/family-tree/html/start,20190820>) for the years of their birth and death, and the results are as follows: Sarah (1780-1859), Arabella (1787-1873), and Harriet (1789-1863). However, this genealogy information might not be completely reliable, as some sisters' birth dates are not compatible with those in *The Descendants of Philip Henry*.

<sup>3</sup> In writing my 2008 paper, I thought the eldest was Arabella, but in reality it was Sarah. It was Sarah Lawrence who met Coleridge in the 1790s, and wrote an introductory letter for Hamilton. In my 2008 paper, page 66, the name, "Arabella Lawrence" appears four times, all of which should be changed into "Sarah Lawrence."

royal family was living in exile in Orleans House in Twickenham, from 1814 to 1815. Graves wrote that “This lady became to Hamilton . . . a valuable friend and adviser,” suggesting their exchanges of letters. However, although there was a possibility that both Sarah and Arabella were his corresponding friends, and gave him advice, it was Arabella who wrote letters to Hamilton that contained her criticism of his poetry.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the Lawrence sisters were prone to being treated as a single family group without given names, even when Hamilton described the family to some of his own family members. This is probably due to the circumstances of his introduction to the sisters.<sup>5</sup> Hamilton was introduced to Maria Edgeworth by Dr Brinkley, Astronomer Royal, in 1824, who introduced him to some of the Lawrence sisters. Hamilton’s sisters, especially Eliza, also enjoyed their society. Hamilton thus both had and befriended sisters en masse. He visited their home in the Grange in 1827, and then again in 1831, while he began writing letters to Arabella, including his poems, asking her opinion of them. Most of these incidents were reported by Hamilton to his sisters Eliza, Grace and others, which in turn made the Lawrence sisters a family story, the sisters always featuring as “Miss Lawrence.” Although Hamilton probably met Arabella several times, he got few opportunities to see all the sisters together.

In 1830, Hamilton received a letter from Arabella Lawrence, written from Lady Byron’s residence, Hanger Hill.<sup>6</sup> In this period, probably until early in 1832, Arabella was a governess there, taking care of Ada, the poet Lord Byron’s only legitimate daughter.<sup>7</sup> Arabella wrote that she would like to introduce him to Lady Byron, but, it seems, this offer did not materialize. Lady Byron herself was a known mathematician, concerned about her daughter’s waywardness, and was looking for someone who would discipline her. Arabella was invited as an able educationalist, together with other governesses. Hamilton might have been an interesting excitement for Lady Byron, but he was busy accepting Lord Adare as his pupil at the Observatory, while writing papers on optics. It seems that Hamilton’s mind was so much occupied by various matters that he could not consider Arabella’s invitation seriously.

When Arabella’s letter to Hamilton arrived from Hanger Hill, he probably did not foresee the future, when he would have something to ask of her, or her family. Hamilton’s relationship with the Lawrence sisters was, by this time,

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas L. Hankins, *Sir William Rowan Hamilton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 52-53, 406. Hereafter cited as Hankins. This is one of the most important Hamilton studies, but Hankins did not distinguish between Sarah and Arabella, and he wrongly considered Arabella was a friend of Coleridge. See 26 and 430.

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton lost both of his parents at an early age; he was raised by his uncle, while his sisters were in the care of by their relatives. In a word, his family set-up was that of an extended family whose traits we can also see in the Lawrences.

<sup>6</sup> See Graves, I, 374. Graves did not quote Arabella’s letter, so it seems difficult to identify the letter (or its copy) from Hamilton’s manuscripts in the Trinity College Library, where Arabella’s letters are stored among Hamilton’s manuscripts. See also Hankins, 406.

<sup>7</sup> See *Collected Letters of Joanna Baillie*, vol.2, ed. Judith Bailey Slagle, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 728. Graves wrote that, in this letter, Arabella enclosed Lady Byron’s statement about Thomas Moore’s *Life of Lord Byron*, which was published in 1830. She was one of the governesses and tutors summoned by Lady Byron for her child’s early education. Arabella Lawrence is described as a “Co-operatively minded Unitarian educationalist,” in Benjamin Wholley’s *The Bride of Science: Romance, Reason and Byron’s Daughter* (London: Pan Books, 2015).

limited to his letter exchange with Arabella, so that he did not clearly memorize the specific name of the eldest one. In the case of Coleridge, the circumstances were different.<sup>8</sup>

Coleridge met Sarah Lawrence in person, and the circumstances were memorable. Mr Peter Crompton was a friend of Dr Erasmus Darwin of Derby, and had asked Coleridge to set up a school for children near Derby in 1797, suggesting his financial help. This educational venture was not realized, but Coleridge's relationship with the Cromptons continued for a long time. When Coleridge first met Sarah, she was a governess to the Cromptons' children. In response to her letter of introduction of Hamilton, Coleridge started his letter as follows: "YOU, and dear DEAR, DEAR Mrs Crompton, are among the few Sunshiny Images that endear my past life to me".<sup>9</sup> This was from 1796 to the early 1800s, when he was in his twenties, while Sarah was still in her teens or 20 years old. Coleridge was probably unforgettable for Sarah, as even in 1832, she still clearly remembered gossipy stories about him, such as Coleridge's love for Mary Evans, and his enlistment in the Dragoons.<sup>10</sup>

Hamilton visited the Lawrence sisters again on 25th, June, 1832. Sarah Lawrence showed him Coleridge's letter to her. Hamilton wrote to his sister Eliza about the letter as "a very affectionate and interesting letter, chiefly of a religious nature"(Graves, I 576). This simplifies the content far too much. Coleridge repeated what he wrote to Sarah and her family in terms of Christian faith in his letter to Hamilton. In these letters, Coleridge condemned Unitarianism more than Spinozism, and what he called 'Infra-socianism' more than either. To Sarah Lawrence, he wrote about the impossibility of "no *fate*, no God, as imagined by the Unitarians"(CL, 6, 890), which looked back to his early life when he had been a convert to Unitarianism 'for a year or two', and when he had met first met her. He is thus drawing on the difference between his changed and her unchanged opinions:

O my dear Miss Lawrence! prize above all earthly blessings the faith—I trust, that no Sophistry of shallow Infra-socinians has quenched it within you—that God is a God that heareth prayer. If varied Learning, if the assiduous cultivation of the reasoning Powers, if an accurate & minute acquaintance with all the arguments of controversial writers; if an intimacy with the doctrines of the Unitarians which can only be obtained by one who for a year or two in his early life had been a convert to them,

<sup>8</sup> In March 1832, when Hamilton visited the Lawrences, it seems clear that he hoped to get an introductory letter to Coleridge, and had he not been familiar with Sarah, he would have needed to ask Arabella to mediate the situation; yet, he did not respond to Arabella's invitation to Lady Byron's residence. It was natural for him to write in a modest way to his sister Eliza, and say that having an introductory letter was "what I had not all expected"(Graves, I, 535), as he had not felt certain that Sarah or Arabella would be kind enough to fulfill his own hope, before he revisited them.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6vols, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-1971), 6, 890. Hereafter cited as *CL*.

<sup>10</sup> See Graves, 1, 576. Hamilton's letter to Eliza: "Did you ever hear of the unsuccessful attachment of Coleridge, when a young man, to a certain Mary, who loved him too, though he did not know it? He had not courage to speak, and she was persuaded by friends to marry another, on hearing of which he ran away in despair, and enlisted as a common soldier."

yea, a zealous, and by themselves deemed powerful, Supporter of their opinions;—lastly, if the utter absence of any imaginable worldly interest that could sway or warp the mind and affections;—if all these combined can give any weight or authority to the opinion of a fellow-creature, they will give weight to my adjuration, sent from my sick-bed to you, in kind love—O trust, O trust, in your Redeemer! (CL, 6, 891)

On 18th March, Coleridge sent a letter to Sarah Lawrence, and she replied him soon. Although her letter is not extant, Coleridge's letter, written just before 27th March, indicates that he found in her letter the same religious trait she had long before, which he considered regrettable. He wrote to Hamilton:

I wrote to dear Miss Lawrence in reply to the letter, to which I owe the gratification of having seen you. I was affected, not surprised, not disappointed, by her answer, but yet through great affection could not wholly suppress the feeling of regret to find her and her family still on that noiseless sand-shoal and wrecking shallow of Infra-Socinianism, yclept most calumniously and insolently, Unitarianism: as if a Tri-unitarian were not as necessarily Unitarian as an apple-pie must be a pie.<sup>11</sup>

This part might describe a degenerated aspect of nonconformity in his age, and Coleridge saw the Lawrence family as obstinately keeping a faith in some religious form of anti-trinity (or "Infra-Socinianism"). Sarah's ancestor, Philip Henry was an ejected minister, and his son was a Presbyterian minister, known for a Biblical work.<sup>12</sup> Sarah's publication of a genealogy of Philip Henry shows that she was proud of being a descendant of the ejected minister. However, the Lawrence family's nonconformist or 'Infra-Socian' attitudes, in Coleridge's view, were much more damaging than the Unitarianism he often objected to.

In his *Life*, Graves introduced Hamilton's draft of a letter to Arabella Lawrence, in which Hamilton refuted Unitarianism. In his preparation for writing this draft, he had written an abstract of the review of 30 pages on William Ellery Channing's *Works* in the *British Critic* published in October 1831. This draft was without dates, and Graves estimated it was written after the publication of the review; I presume it was written after his meeting with Coleridge in March 1832. It is natural that Coleridge's letters to Hamilton reflected the content of their talk, and Coleridge's incisive comments on Unitarians in his letters seems to have been impelling enough to have made Hamilton cautious of his reluctant involvement in dissenting society, philosophy, or politics. Coleridge wrote: "Now your *male* Unitarians are all of

<sup>11</sup> CL, 6, 893. Coleridge's letters to Hamilton contain some caustic phrases—more than in most other letters—probably because he was addressing a young Irish mathematician, socially naïve, ignorant of the past, yet very bright. Coleridge was trying to distract Hamilton from a fruitless involvement in Unitarianism. Decades later, Hamilton wrote that he felt bribed by Coleridge to like Kant (see fn.1)—a kind of power play Coleridge exerted sometimes, trying to manipulate Hamilton to be a good Christian as well as a Kantian—which would not have required manipulation. I suspect that Wordsworth well understood Coleridge's game, and hoped to keep Hamilton away from Coleridge. As a mathematician, Hamilton's life later became burdened with philosophical speculations.

<sup>12</sup> This is Matthew Henry (1662-1714), author of the biblical commentary, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

this *class*—they are *knowing* fellows. Never once have I met, or heard of, a philosopher, or a really *learned* Priestleyian or Bleshamite” (*CL*, 6, 894). We can find more such caustic remarks in his letters to Hamilton.

In his draft of a letter to Arabella Lawrence, Hamilton referred to Channing’s *Works*, and indirectly rejected Unitarianism. This letter reveals Hamilton’s hope to keep an appropriate distance, when socializing, from those who believed in the anti-trinity. The following is the beginning part of his draft:

You know that in our many conversations, remembered by me with great pleasure, I always studiously avoided the usually unprofitable topic of religious controversy, and you will not think that I now wish to introduce it, but will consider me as only anxious to guard against the possibility of being mistaken, if I shortly express my opinion of Dr. Channing’s *theology*. You know that I have read with great delight and admiration many of the non-controversial works of Dr. C., and that I consider him as a good man and an eloquent writer. But in his anti-trinitarian speculations—the term of courtesy “Unitarian” I cannot use as a distinctive epithet, since it would imply that the members of the Church of England did not pray on the festival by which they intend to express their belief of the Trinity, to be enabled “in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity”—in these Dr. C. appears to me to have ventured beyond the region, I will not say of all philosophy, but of his own philosophical attainments. (Graves, 1, 464-465)

It might be that in conversation with Arabella, Hamilton said something about Channing without having detailed knowledge of his theological arguments, but he soon realized that he should openly modify his view on Channing. Hamilton’s letter, however, could be also read as a declaration of his orthodox Christian creed. It is not known whether this letter was sent to Arabella or not.

Hamilton was knighted in 1835, and in the same year, he published a Coleridgean mathematical work, “Algebra as a Science of Pure Time.” Since he began reading Coleridge seriously, Coleridge had remained as his spiritual mentor. Sarah Lawrence published a book for children,<sup>13</sup> and as previously mentioned, *The Descendants of Philip Henry* in 1844, while Arabella Lawrence was said to have been active as an educator as well as in the cooperative movement.<sup>14</sup> Yet, we have little information about Hamilton’s relationship with the Lawrence sisters after he met Coleridge. Their presence in Hamilton’s life virtually faded away.

<sup>13</sup> In *Critical Notice* in 1829, the second edition of her *Stories, Presenting a Summary of the History of Greece, for the Use of Children and Young Persons* was cited as “enlarged and improved.” This book is “a connected series of stories, in which all the most important events are told in their order, and leave on the mind a just impression of time.” The reviewer quoted her words: “chronology, important as it is universally allowed to be in the study of history, can only prove an unprofitable burden on the memory of a child, whose largest conceptions of time can scarcely extend beyond the period of a year.” This book seems to be organized in order to train a sense of time, or a historical awareness, which shows a historical interest somehow relevant to her later genealogy study.

<sup>14</sup> See Miranda Seymour, *In Byron’s Wake* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018) and Betty Alexandra Toole, *Ada, the Enchantress of Numbers: Poetical Science* (New York: Dutton, 2017).