THE ROMANCE OF INDEPENDENCE: MARY TAYLOR, FEMINIST JOURNALIST AND FRIEND OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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The name of Mary Taylor (1817-1893) is closely linked to that of Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855); if Taylor is known at all, it is as Brontë's lifelong friend. Most Brontë biographers pay tribute to the quality of Taylor's friendship with Brontë, describe their relationship and discuss the Taylor family as the prototype for the Yorke family in *Shirley*. They also mention Taylor's reputation as an outspoken and energetic woman who emigrated to New Zealand and returned to England in 1860, five years after Brontë's death. Although there is no doubt that but for her association with Brontë few people would have ever heard of Mary Taylor, she does have a claim to our interest in her own right. A forceful personality, Taylor achieved an ambition, first formulated in early womanhood, to work and earn enough money to enable her to live independently and to enjoy foreign travel, music and literature. But more significantly, she was one of those women of the nineteenth century who laid claim to new legal, political and social rights which had been hitherto denied to females.

Research into the movement and the conditions of women in the nineteenth century is already extensive and there are notable accounts of some of its leading figures and the range of reforms to which they aspired. In the shadows of these leading personalities there stands a second echelon of women who devoted considerable energies to the cause and without whom the leaders would never have been able to launch or maintain their campaigns. Mary Taylor may be counted among these. From 1866 to 1877, by means of her articles in the *Victoria Magazine*, Taylor joined in the debates on "the woman question." For fifteen years (1863-1878) the magazine edited by Emily Faithfull provided a platform for the women's movement. It was a serious women's publication struggling to be heard amongst a host of powerful and influential opinion-forming periodicals aimed at the middle-class reader.

Mary Taylor was born into a family of small textile mill owners and merchants with a tradition of religious dissent and republican sympathies. She attended the same small boarding school as Ellen Nussey (1817-1897) and Charlotte Brontë. Her friendship with Brontë, begun at this time, stood fast until Brontë's death. In 1812 the district of West Yorkshire where the Taylors lived was the scene of labour discontent including the Luddite riots, events which form an important element in Brontë's *Shirley*. The Yorke family in the novel embody features of the Taylor family: Mary Taylor describes her family to Elizabeth Gaskell as "our house of violent dissent and radicalism" (Gaskell 170) and Rose Yorke's characteristics of absorption in literature, desire for travel and questioning of women's domestic role reflect aspects of Mary. Mr Taylor seems to have suggested not only Mr Yorke but Yorke Hunsden in *The Professor*. Mary's protest against what she regarded as their teacher's injustice towards Charlotte at school was transformed into incidents and characterisation in Brontë's two unfinished works, *Ashworth* and *Emma*.

From one generation of writers to the next, Taylor's image emerges essentially unchanged and quite briefly delineated. Her contemporary, Elizabeth Gaskell, for

instance, describes her as "a cherished associate of Charlotte Brontë's" (129). And Brontë herself in one of a number of tributes to Taylor declares to Ellen Nussey: "It is in vain to limit a character like hers within ordinary boundaries . . . she will overstep them. I am morally certain Mary will establish her own landmarks" (Wise and Symington 107). In the twentieth century, critic F.R. Leavis names her as "Charlotte's most intelligent school-friend" (7), Ellen Moers as "the most radical feminist Brontë knew" (139). And Juliet Barker in her recent Brontë biography echoes these tributes to Taylor's intelligence and liveliness: "With her intellectual curiosity, utter disregard for appearances or opinions of others and fearless pursuit of self-improvement, [Mary] was a stimulus to Charlotte's longing to do and be something in the world" (182). In her brief mention of Taylor's writings Barker comments: "Unconventional to the end, she published a number of what would now be called feminist articles, defending the right of women to think, work and employ themselves in purposeful activity" (827). With its accusations of cowardice and treachery, the oft-quoted letter from Taylor to Brontë reproaching her for appearing to compromise in her attitude to women working in *Shirley* encapsulates Taylor's views on women and work. It speaks in the uncompromising voice of a principled woman fervently committed to women's right to work and to self-reliance (Wise and Symington 550, Boumelha 79).

In 1855 when Elizabeth Gaskell embarked on her biography of Brontë, Taylor provided her with useful assistance in the form of letters and reminiscences although she shrewdly viewed the enterprise with some misgiving. Intimating that she feared Gaskell was putting her head into a wasp's nest, she asked in a letter: "How she will get through with it I can't imagine" (Wise and Symington 966). When Gaskell was threatened with libel actions and needed to make changes in the text she drew verbatim on Taylor's information (Stevens 157). Acknowledging the receipt of the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Taylor wrote to Gaskell that "the book is a perfect success in giving a true picture of a melancholy life. . . . Though not so gloomy as the truth, it is perhaps as much so as people will accept without calling it exaggerated, and feeling the desire to doubt and contradict it (Wise and Symington 987). Taylor criticised the prettified Richmond portrait of Brontë and referred contemptuously to reviews of the book which lauded Brontë's life in its self-sacrifice and self-suppression as a perfect model of woman's nature. Taylor's anger at what she regarded as the waste of the "first rate talents" of women remained with her all her life and possibly explains why on her return from New Zealand she consistently refused to co-operate with later biographers and became estranged from Ellen Nussey (Bellamy).

In 1845 Mary Taylor emigrated to Wellington with the intention of making money and eventually returning to England. Like many middle-class women she had no expectation of inheriting sufficient money to live independently. If she remained unmarried she would have to seek employment (probably for small remuneration) or remain dependent on her family. Earlier, in 1842, she had considered accompanying her youngest brother Waring who had decided to settle in Wellington. Brontë explained at the time to Ellen Nussey that "Mary has made up her mind she can not and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet-maker nor a housemaid. She sees no means of obtaining employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it" (Wise and Symington 112). Dissuaded from emigrating at this time, Taylor joined her sister in the same year at a finishing school for young ladies in Brussels. She had already helped Charlotte and Emily Brontë with advice and contacts to facilitate their stay at the

Pensionnat Heger. Lacking any evidence of the reason why Taylor gave up her plan to go to New Zealand in 1842, we can only presume she went to Brussels to improve her French and German in order to prepare herself, however reluctantly, to become a teacher.

After working in a boy's school in Germany, much to Brontë's disapproval, Taylor finally succeeded in joining Waring in New Zealand in 1845. In going off alone to teach abroad she had already demonstrated a degree of self-reliance and independence and a loosening of her ties with home and family. Emigration was to see her develop the capacity for independent action which she believed was fundamental to women's happiness. Her support for the women's cause was rooted in the consciousness that it was unequal access to material wealth, not the essential nature of women, that was the root cause of their subordinate status. She provocatively declared to Ellen Nussey that "there are no means for women to live in England but by teaching, sewing or washing. The last is best. The best paid the least unhealthy and the most free" (Wise and Symington 422).

In articles written after her return to England and published in the *Victoria Magazine* Taylor stressed that self-reliance was the product of knowledge and practical experience in facing difficulties and overcoming them, an idea she had perhaps already shared with Brontë who, as Mary was leaving, had commented that "Mary Taylor finds herself free—and on that path for adventure and exertion to which she has so long been seeking admission—Sickness-Hardship-Danger are her fellow-travellers—her inseparable companions. Strength—Courage—Experience are their inevitable results" (Wise and Symington 194). Although this sounds like a description of a romantic heroine on the threshold of her great adventure, Mary's situation once she had arrived in Wellington was prosaic enough. She invested in a cottage which she leased out and, capitalising on her musical skills and enthusiasm, advertised herself as a piano teacher. She kept house for her brother until his marriage to Mary Knox in 1848 and, as well as venturing some capital of her own, probably gave him some practical assistance in his export-import business. After his marriage she moved out of his home to occupy a succession of lodgings (Stevens 67).

Despite her declared intention of never working as a teacher, Taylor spent seven months as governess and companion to the daughter of William Couper who had a farm on the coast at Porirua six miles from Wellington. Evidence shows that she was not strongly committed to New Zealand's future and had no desire to remain there. In her extant correspondence she makes only one mention of the politics of the settlement in Wellington; she shows no awareness of any possible problem raised by Europeans settling in someone else's country; and only once does she mention the Land Wars, and that indirectly when referring to the departure of troops. She appears to have had no contact with those women in New Zealand who, like their counterparts in Britain, were raising demands for the suffrage and other rights and who achieved the vote long before their English sisters in 1893, the year of Taylor's death. Although Brontë envisaged Taylor as lonely and homesick, which sometimes she was, it was unlikely that she would have admitted defeat and returned home. After two years in Wellington she claimed that her health was better than it had been in Europe, but there is no doubt that she felt culturally and politically isolated.

After four years Taylor began to establish herself as she had hoped. This was facilitated by the arrival of two cousins, Ellen and Henry Taylor. With help from their

brothers, Mary and Ellen set up a general draper's store. At this stage it is possible to sense in her correspondence the excitement, even romance, of an active, congenial life stimulated by a growing sense of expanding possibilities and self-confidence. Ignoring reservations their brothers had about the probability of success for their business, the two women went ahead with their plans, although, as Taylor confessed, "we were frightened shy and anxious. Neither the shyness nor the anxiety is at an end, as we very well know but we know what we have to contend with and can never feel so thick a mist round us as there was when we first began" (Wise and Symington 585). Not only did Ellen Taylor share her cousin's enthusiasm for business but she sympathised with her ideas and cultural interests. This must have been a blessing for Mary who had become so used to suppressing her opinions and her interest in literature that she imagined her head to be filled with "crazy stuff."

A marvellously vivid passage in a letter to Ellen Nussey describes Mary's excitement and pleasure, even in physical effort, when new supplies of goods arrived.

> How we work! and lift and carry, and knock boxes open as if we were carpenters by trade; and sit down in the midst of the mess when we're quite tired, and ask what time it is, and find it is the middle of the afternoon and we've forgotten our dinner! And then we settle to have some tea and eggs, and go on reading letters all the time we're eating, and don't give over working till bedtime, and take a new number of D. Copperfield to bed with us and drop asleep at the second page. (Wise and Symington 647)

In the same letter she describes how her social life is expanding, explaining that class distinctions had to be breached if people were to create any sense of community. After Ellen Taylor's tragic death on 27 December 1851 of the consumption she had contracted before leaving England, Taylor decided to carry on the business single-handed. Her letters show that in the years that followed she established the store, worked at her novel and what she called "my other book." She yearned for even one hour's talk with Brontë fearing that her ties with home were weakening. Her happiest moments came with the arrival of letters and books from England. She felt little in common with the middle-class New Zealand women of her acquaintance who, in her opinion, were too ignorant for intelligent conversation. She believed working-class women enjoyed more equality with their menfolk and declared that she found it easier to talk to a joiner's wife than a merchant's (Wise and Symington 382). She commented ironically on the stratagems women employed in her shop to persuade their husbands to buy things for them.

Although she often took a gloomy view of her brothers' prospects for happy marriages, and although she valued her own single independence, Taylor was no enemy to matrimony. In 1852 Charlotte Brontë at her father's bidding rejected a proposal of marriage from his curate Arthur Nicholls. However, she eventually agreed to an engagement and married in 1854. Ellen Nussey, who believed Nicholls was not good enough for Charlotte, wrote to Mary describing the situation and seemingly suggesting that the outcome of the crisis rested with Charlotte's "lot." Mary replied in her characteristically forceful way:

> You talk wonderful nonsense abt C Bronte in yr letter. What do you mean about "bearing her position so long, and enduring to the end"? and still better "bearing our lot, whatever it is". If it's C's lot to be married, shdn't she bear that too? or does your strange morality mean that she shd refuse to ameliorate her lot when it is in her power. How wd she be inconsistent with herself in marrying? Because she considers her own pleasure? If this is so new for her to do, it is high time she began to make it more common. It is an outrageous exaction to expect her to give up her choice in a matter so important, and I think her to blame in having been hitherto so yielding that her friends can think of making such an impudent demand. (Wise and Symington 879)

In the same letter Mary discusses her prospects of returning home, expecting it to be two or three years ahead. By the middle of June 1858 she had stopped ordering goods for the shop; she bought land in Wellington dividing it into lots and naming one of the streets after the city of Leeds. She left Wellington (probably in 1859) to travel through New Zealand before embarking for England where she arrived at the end of the year. Due to her own enterprise and an inheritance from the family business, she had enough money on which to live comfortably for the rest of her long life. She could now indulge her enthusiasm for travel, her passion for books and for music. Having achieved many of her personal ambitions, she continued to work more systematically on her novel and proceeded to write for the women's movement.

Mary Taylor was out of England during the first stirrings of the mid-nineteenth-century women's movement. The 1860s and 1870s saw the movement gathering force with demands for new rights; this was the period when women began to gain courage and to move out into the public political sphere, they read papers at conferences, published pamphlets, launched petitions and lobbied male politicians. In 1863 Emily Faithfull established the *Victoria Magazine*; at the Victoria Press she trained and employed women as typographers. The magazine provided a platform for the claims of the movement and for news of its activities, and it was here, after her return to England, that Mary Taylor found her opportunity to publish in support of the principles of women's rights. One group of her articles bear the word "feminine" in the title; these articles were probably developed in New Zealand and constituted the ideas she had worked on for her "other book"; other articles responded to the debates current in the periodical press. She also produced book reviews, one or two articles on political economy, two short stories, and an account of a moment of danger and panic while she was walking a glacier in Switzerland. In 1870 she published under her own name *The First Duty of Women*, a book comprising a selection of articles from the four previous years of the magazine. As a consequence, even though she generally only appended only her initials to her work, her authorship of subsequent contributions became public knowledge.

The main demands of the women's movement were for improvements in women's legal status; for property rights for married women; for the right of access to trades and professions; for educational reform to provide serious education for girls and higher education for women; for female suffrage; and for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act. Although she wrote one article on the causes of prostitution, Taylor did

not debate the repeal question. She shared the fundamental concern of the founders of the movement that married women should have the right to own property and to the monetary proceeds of their own work independent of their husbands. Moreover, she argued that it was the right, or even the duty of married women of the middle classes, including those with children, to work outside the home to add to their family income. In addition, she claimed that these women needed wider access to trades and professions. Taylor discussed the effects of dependence on middle-class women in particular, which she saw as leading to poverty, denial of social status, ignorance of the world and intellectual deprivation. She had a holistic view, arguing that ill-health (psychological and physical) as well as more general social problems such as mercenary marriages, male immorality, and prostitution were the consequences of a system of women's subordination.

In defence of her views Taylor was prepared to challenge well-known male public figures. Her first work for the *Victoria Magazine* was a review article, "A Philistine's Opinion of Eugénie de Guérin," in the December 1866 number (rpt. *First Duty* 229-46). *Eugénie de Guérin's Diary* and *Letters and Diary and Fragments* attracted a number of reviews in the periodical press between 1862 and 1866, including one in 1863 by the well-known, poet, critic and Oxford professor of poetry, Matthew Arnold. The *Victoria Magazine* also discussed the book but, surprisingly, echoed the general, conventional praise of de Guérin's piety, self-suppression and self-sacrificing devotion to her brother—a promising poet who had died young. The reviewers approved of de Guérin as an ideal of womanhood, an example of woman's essential nature. Their discussions bear an interesting similarity to reviews of Gaskell's Brontë biography about which Taylor had protested because they praised Brontë as a model of womanhood, elevating the spiritual woman above the artist.

Despite the fact that she was writing for the same journal, Taylor's article challenged the *Victoria Magazine* reviewer as well as the others: "The notices that have fallen in the way of the writer, appears [sic] to her so much beside the mark, so like the play with Hamlet omitted, that the temptation to supply what seemed to be wanting, has proved irresistible" (*First Duty* 229). The title of her review article is an explicit reference to Arnold, who had first employed the epithet "Philistine" to describe the money-grubbing, uncultivated, but powerful middle-classes. After describing the various mortifications de Guérin inflicted on herself such as deciding to write no more poetry because she felt God did not want her to and wrestling with terrible feelings of sinfulness, guilt and ennui, Taylor deplored her passivity: "Is it true that we are so placed on this earth that our life arranges itself without us? That we may wisely remain passive, assured that a superior power directs events? So far from it that there is no one so weak and incapable that their own exertions will not modify their condition" (239). Dependency like de Guérin's, she claimed, distorted family relationships: "Women in her position are always a burden on their relations. It is the practical result of denying themselves, and neglecting the care of their own interests" (242). Taylor believed in the possibility of the self-made woman, applying the typical, nineteenth-century principles of self-reliant individualism to women's condition.

W.R. Greg was another well-known contributor to the periodical press challenged by Taylor. In April 1862 Greg published an article in the *National Review*, "Why are Women Redundant?" which attacked the demands made by middle-class women for the right to work. Six months later a response was given by Francis Power

Cobbe in *Fraser's Magazine*. Reprints of Greg's classic statement of the case against better opportunities for women to work appeared in successive editions of his collected essays over a number of years and in 1870 Taylor published her answer in "Redundant Women" (*First Duty* 25-47), opening her article with a challenge to the proposition that only women were "redundant":

> It gives a curious feeling to a person of the wrong sex to hear for the first time the question why are women redundant? It conveys the idea—though not quite distinctly—that there are, in Malthusian phrase, no places for them at Nature's table. But why none for them exclusively? Why should not the redundancy consist of both sexes or of both in proportion to their numbers?" (*First Duty* 25)

In his article Greg expressed concern at the number of spinsters of marriageable age, attributing the phenomenon to a selfish and unnatural refusal by some women to marry and to the reluctance of celibate men to assume the responsibilities of marriage. He saw male emigration as another cause. Greg's remedies included encouragement, if not the virtual compulsion, of the emigration of women to the colonies where there were significant numbers of unmarried men. Women were to be excluded from most forms of employment in order to deny them the possibility of self-sufficiency, thus enhancing the attractiveness of marriage which he saw as their "natural" destiny. He approved of women's employment only in those occupations which represented extensions of their caring "natural" functions: nursing, teaching and domestic service.

Taylor shrewdly identified the "redundancy" not as a question of marriage or the single life, but as one of poverty:

> The reason why Mr Greg and a great many other people cannot let the question alone is, that the phrase redundant women really means starving women very often, and almost always women whose means have fallen so much below their position that they are miserably poor. To call the single poor woman redundant in any sense that does not apply to poor people in general, a man must believe that marriage is the proper and only cure for feminine poverty. (*First Duty* 27)

Taylor's alternative solution was that women should be free to work and earn their own subsistence. By identifying the problem as one of economic inequality and not as some kind of violation of the laws of nature, she offered a rational perspective for its solution. She pointed out that opportunities for work and independence would also liberate women from the temptation of contracting loveless marriages in return for economic security. Marriage, Taylor believed, was no solution for poverty, indeed it often exacerbated it; allowing married women to work, however, would enable them to relieve family poverty. Although she never referred to her own life as an emigrant, Taylor spoke from her own experience when she mildly explained that even in the colonies people had to have resources before embarking on marriage.

To counteract resistance to the idea of women working because of the threat to male employment, Taylor argued that, since labour increases wealth, working women

were not drawing on a fixed amount of material wealth, but expanding it and enhancing their access to it:

> There are many people who believe that the metaphor concerning Nature's table and the seats thereat really answers to something in actual existence, and these, one would think, must acknowledge that if there are more guests than places, some of the guests must starve. But we cannot fail to see that nature in England at least, provides nothing—but blackberries, and that all our immense amount of wealth and comfort is the product of human labour. We may see too that, fraud and misfortune apart, these good things belong to those who produce them, otherwise they would cease to be produced. The mere statement of these facts gives the reason why non-workers are poor. In the classes that inherit accumulations of previous generations, women are poorer than men for another reason—they inherit less. But still the main reason for their poverty (and probably of their not inheriting as well) is that they produce nothing. (*First Duty* 28)

There may be flaws in Taylor's argument, but the view that the exclusion of women from wealth creation was a factor in their poverty and subordination seems a sound one.

Other well-known writers directly challenged by Taylor include Professor Goldwin Smith, a former Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford and an influential figure in Liberal politics. Smith's opposition to any extension of the franchise to women shocked many in the women's movement, and some Liberal men as well. His article, "Female Suffrage," attacking women's demand for the vote, appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in August 1874. Such attacks forced the women's enfranchisement cause to again take up its disheartening trek through the English political landscape: although married women householders had gained the municipal vote in 1869 contrary to expectations, there had been no further successes for women as far as suffrage was concerned; in 1870 Gladstone's opposition had squashed a bill to extend Parliamentary franchise to single women householders; and the 1874 attempt (opposed by Smith) to get the bill through was rejected.

Attitudes to the two established political parties varied in the women's movement. Some put their hopes in the Liberal Party, some favoured the Tories; others, like Taylor herself, despaired of both. Enfranchisement of single women would lead to married women gaining the vote and to demands for women to be allowed to sit in Parliament. Both parties feared the leap into the unknown that women's suffrage seemed to represent. They feared the power that voting rights would give to women; seeing them on the one hand as weak, irrational creatures needing the protection of men and on the other as rapacious and irresponsible. Goldwin Smith's article played on these fears and reiterated the female stereotypes they represented. It assumed that the women's vote would be monolithic and forecast the disruption of family life, civil strife and racial degeneration.

The month after Smith's article appeared in *Macmillan's*, Taylor's "Liberal Tyranny" appeared in the *Victoria Magazine*. Alluding to Smith's reputation as a Liberal she pointed out that he was using familiar Tory arguments when he referred to female suffrage as a notion of such dangerous and far-reaching significance that it

should be resisted. She debunked the idea that the women's vote would represent one monolithic unit: "The class excluded from legislation may look united, compact and formidable, but once admitted, it is mingled with the rest of the electors. It gets a hearing—perhaps attention and redress, but even the largest does not become all-powerful, for as a class it is never united" (23: 405). Taylor also tackled the perception that by achieving the right to vote women would forfeit the protection of men:

> The danger of losing their most valuable privileges is one that women are always threatened with when there is any question of their acquiring legal rights. It reminds one irresistibly of the threats of masters to agricultural labourers. If you begin to use efforts to improve your own condition, they say, you will lose all the help and kindness we have hitherto given you. Is it not a suspicious sort of goodwill that disappears when the protected people endeavour to help themselves? (23: 400)

Some men, Taylor reminded her readers, were protectors, but others were aggressors. What women needed was the protection that the law can provide: the most certain guarantee of security.

Taylor varied the structures of her articles to include imaginary dialogue as in "An Old Dispute" (*First Duty* 247-62), for example, as well as using fictional characters and situations. "What Am I To Do?" (*First Duty* 1-24) is written in the form of a plea by a young middle-class woman for a more meaningful life embracing education and employment. The narrator finds herself questioning the rationale of the conventions which condemn her to ignorance, inaction and the possibility of poverty. In this article Taylor was answering "The Cry of Women" in the *Contemporary Review*, June 1869—a cry for education which the article seeks to prove is misguided. Women's bodily functions were seen to preclude their achieving intellectual greatness and the "cry" runs counter to the whole of human history, which demonstrates the existence of an essential feminine type vital to civilisation shown "as plainly in the Helen and Nausicaa of Homer as in the Portia and Miranda of Shakespeare" (207).

The woman in Taylor's story is the youngest of three daughters who shares household duties with her sisters, her mother and the servants. She is "the fourth part of a housekeeper." She is told to pass away her time in charity-teaching and visiting or in practising her music of which only parlour pieces, or those admired by her father and brothers, seem to be acceptable. Her attempts at serious study have come to nothing because they increase her sense of social isolation; nobody is interested in discussing the ideas she has learned: "I found all my friends even more averse to speak of books of any kind other than novels, than older people. They all had the impression that it was wrong; not morally wrong, perhaps, but a sort of solecism in manners, like putting your knife in your mouth. Not anything that would prevent your getting to Heaven, but fatal to your respectability on earth" (*First Duty* 2). Taylor's sardonic wit breaks through when the speaker reflects that "a type that includes Mrs. Menelaus is a curious one to guard at all hazard. I should have thought that in the right type her existence was impossible. I feel very curious to know what is meant by the words feminine type, and how one that includes Helen as well as Nausicaa, is of 'enormous value to civilisation'" (*First Duty* 7). Taylor's young woman fears that her lack of education may lead to a poverty stricken

old age: "Now answer me: Are we right, one and all, in folding our hands, even though we bear both our wants and our idleness with patience, and though some of us feel no present evil, and can shut out eyes to the future? It is customary, it is feminine, in the sense that women generally do it; and it is approved of by most men. But is it right?" (*First Duty* 18).

Taylor's "The Shah on English Laws Relating to Women" (*Victoria Magazine* 21: 359-65) is in part an imaginary interview between the Shah of Persia and the British Ambassador, "A Dialogue that Might Have Been." The Shah had visited England in June 1873, two months before the article appeared. Not noted for benevolence or respect for women, he is ironically represented as outraged when he learns of the oppressive laws restricting women's hours of employment in England and the hypocrisy surrounding them. His persistent questioning reduces the Ambassador to confusion and embarrassment and exposes what Taylor regarded as the illogicality of a new Parliamentary Bill proposing further restrictions on women's hours of work in industrial enterprises.

It was disagreements about the laws controlling women's working conditions which led to disagreements between Taylor and her editor, Emily Faithfull. Although Faithfull published "The Shah on English Laws Relating to Women," she printed a statement specifically distancing herself from Taylor's accusations. Similar accusations were levelled by numbers of other women against men who had supported the Nine Hours Bill which proposed to limit the working day of women in enterprises over a certain size. One section of the women's movement regarded this bill as important protection for women while others, like Taylor and distinguished campaigner Millicent Fawcett, believed it served the interests of men since the bill would restrict women's earnings. It was also feared that employers would refuse to hire women if their working hours were restricted, thus leading to the perception that men would see this as an opportunity to get rid of women's competition for their jobs.

Taylor's style is lively, bold and often humorous, free of the pious and sanctimonious tone which often mars journalism about civil rights issues. Drawing on a wide range of knowledge of literature, history and politics, she assumes her audience to be an educated one. From time to time she produces the telling aphorism, for example: "Let her not seek for 'God in him', for He is not there to be found" (*First Duty* 180); in relation to marriage: "The hard reality is, she gives herself" and: "Some may get high payment for the article, but some must get less" (192), also: "Their choice lies in very many cases between frightful poverty and mercenary marriage" (216).

Taylor published "Once More the Woman Question," her last contribution to the *Victoria Magazine*, in July 1877 when she was sixty-one (29: 209-18). This was, in effect, her valedictory article. In it she looks back over the previous ten or twelve years to draw up a sort of balance sheet of what the women's movement has achieved. On the whole her verdict is pessimistic. She thought that women were perhaps now treated with more politeness, but feared that this might prove to be merely a passing fashion. Women were essentially still in much the same under-privileged position they had been in ten years before:

> They have not got the suffrage. They have not got the power to own property if they marry. They have not even got the freedom to help themselves, to educate themselves, and work for their bread against

> the strong trade-union whose interests are involved. Have they got anything? or are they just where they were, when indecency and ridicule were the weapons used against their first uprising? (209)

Taylor felt that public debate was at a low ebb. She detected some small advances in the provision of education for women but feared that teaching would be the only profession open to them. Young women were still being brought up to prepare them for marriage and domestic responsibilities and were kept in ignorance of the "real" world. Taylor's only hope appears to be for improvements in general morality, which in turn would ensure at least some respect for women. Even had she wished to continue to publish her articles the opportunities diminished with the closure of the *Victoria Magazine* in 1880. This closure was perhaps symptomatic of the stagnation which appeared to be afflicting the women's movement at the time. The ideas, theories and demands to which Taylor had contributed were not, however, abandoned, as she feared. They were to reappear in different forms and political circumstances whenever women raised their voices for more freedoms.

Taylor was disappointed in her ambition to publish her novel *Miss Miles or a Tale of Yorkshire Life Sixty Years Ago*—a book she considered to be "full of music, poverty, disputing, politics and original views of life" (Wise and Symington 763). She believed art should have a message and her fiction carries the same messages about the situation of women and how they might improve it that is so eloquently argued in her journalism. Of the four young women protagonists in *Miss Miles*, three make their ways in the world through crisis and stress but by their own efforts, finally finding employment and achieving independence. The fourth, wishing to earn her living but lacking the courage to defy her family's conventional and false gentility, languishes and dies. Her situation echoes that of the speaker in Taylor's article "What Am I To Do?" (*First Duty* 1-24). In the name and origins of one of the heroines there is a private tribute to Charlotte Brontë. Maria Bell, whom we first meet as a child, is the daughter of a clergyman and raised in a moorland parsonage; her family name echoes Brontë's *nom de plume*, Currer Bell. The novel was published in 1890 but was too late to succeed: the fashion for the "Condition of England" novel had passed, and one which dealt not so much with class tensions but the conditions of women was even less likely to succeed.

If proof were needed of the exhilaration and pleasure women can feel in the exercise of independence free from petty conventional constraints, we need only look at the privately published *Swiss Notes by Five Ladies*, a diary of a holiday in Switzerland in 1874 written jointly by Taylor and the four young women with her at the time. They travelled without a male escort, climbing Mont Blanc and other mountains, enjoying the pleasures of physical activity and ignoring genteel social proprieties. Characteristically, Taylor observed the harsh lives of Swiss women, describing their heavy labour in the fields and in their homes, and their extreme poverty (131-32). Unlike some English middle-class travellers of the time who often behaved contemptuously towards the people among whom they found themselves, Taylor expresses deep admiration for the Swiss families she came to know in the course of her regular annual visits, as well as for other foreigners she met.

Ill-health eventually brought an end to Mary Taylor's travels abroad. She lived on in the village where she had been born in a house owned by her brother. Despite national economic crises, she remained financially self-sufficient for the rest of her life,

prospering even when other male members of the family were in serious difficulties. Her death in 1893 elicited obituaries in the *Illustrated London News* (18 March 1893: 326) and in the regional press (*Leeds Mercury* 2 March 1893; *Cleckheaton Guardian* 3 March 1893). Both local newspapers memorialised her as an interesting personality and member of a well-known local family, the national magazine focused on her friendship with Charlotte Brontë. None mentioned her commitment to the cause of women's emancipation. She would not have been unduly surprised by this oversight but perhaps recognition of her life and work, and the achievements of other "lesser known" women like her, is somewhat overdue from those who have come after.

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Mary Taylor's Contributions to the *Victoria Magazine*

The list includes two short stories; except where indicated the articles were signed "T." Articles collected in *The First Duty of Women* are indicated by an asterisk. The frontispiece of the collection states that the articles appeared from 1865-1870, however, a careful check has found no article earlier than December 1866.

Volume 8
*"A Philistine's Opinion of Eugénie de Guérin" December 1866: 162 (unsigned)
"Co-operation and Competition" January 1867: 215
"Drifting" February 1867: 297
Volume 9
*"Feminine Honesty" May 1867: 7
*"Feminine Knowledge" June 1867: 99
*"Feminine Work" September 1867: 403
Volume 10
*"Feminine Idleness" November 1867: 1
*"Feminine Character" December 1867: 97
*"Marriage" January 1868: 193
*"Feminine Earnings" March 1868: 385
Volume 11
*"Feminine Respectability" May 1868: 1
"Feminine Suffrage and the *Pall Mall Gazette*" July 1868: 211
"Memoirs of Baron Bunsen" August 1868: 346
Volume 13
*"An Old Dispute" July 1869: 239 (unsigned)
*"Crystallised Morality" September 1869: 406
Volume 14
*"Plain Living and High Thinking" February 1870: 331
Volume 15
*"Redundant Women" June 1870: 97
*"What Am I To Do?" July 1870: 215
"Feminine Profitable Labour" October 1870: 555
Volume 17
"The Revolt and the Revolters" July 1871: 193 (signed "Mary Taylor")
"Notes of A Swiss Tour" August 1871: 289
"Domestic Economy" August 1871: 345
Volume 19
"Plain Sewing" September 1873: 385 (signed "Mary Taylor")
Volume 21
"The Shah on English Laws" August 1873: 359 (signed "Mary Taylor")
"A Tale" September 1873: 395
Volume 23
"Liberal Tyranny" September 1874: 398 (signed "M.T.")
Volume 27
"A Servant Girl's History" October 1876: 503 (signed "M.T.")
Volume 29
"Once More the Woman Question" July 1877: 209 (signed "M.T.")