

## Porter, Sarah Ricardo

Sarah Ricardo was born on 22 December 1790 to Abraham Ricardo and Abigail Delvalle, the youngest in a family of 15 and 20 years younger than David. Sraffa writes that she married George Richardson Porter and she is known as a writer on educational subjects (*Works*, X: 60). If this sounds disappointing, wait to see what Henderson has to say in 675 pages, namely just that she married outside the Jewish Community and we ignore where she was buried (Henderson, 1997: 140–41).

No details about her education or other circumstances in her life before marriage are known apart from that Abraham Ricardo left, at his death in 1812, a remarkable fortune that he allotted in his will in equal share to both sons and daughters, that he established that the daughters' share should be left in trust until they married, with an annual allowance of £90, that David offered further financial support and Sarah kindly declined the offer (Esther and Sarah Ricardo to their brother David, in *Works*, X: 133).

Sarah married George Richardson Porter in 1814 or earlier (*ibid.*: 60) and appears to have become a Christian by marriage, like several other siblings (Henderson, 1997: 140). Her husband was born in London in 1792, the son of a merchant, was employed in the statistical department of the board of trade and in 1841 became one of the secretaries of the railway department. He published two books on colonial agriculture and the massive statistical report *The Progress of the Nation 1836–38*. The *Gentleman's Magazine* tells us that Sarah died on 13 September 1862, at her residence, West Hill, Wandsworth, aged 71 (Anonymous, 1862).

Sarah, while living the life of a middle-class married woman, became one of those literary women – ranging from Jane Marcet, the author of a series of renowned introductory books for children to various branches of learning, to Sarah's cousin Delvalle Varley *née* Lowry, the author of an introduction to mineralogy – who were remarkable novelties from the 1830s onwards. Her first publication was *Alfred Dudley, or the Australian Settlers* (1830), mentioned here and there in histories of literature as a work possibly by an unidentified Sarah Porter (Wilde et al., 1994: 2; Hunt, 1995: 323). The author was first identified as Ricardo's sister in the new *Oxford Dictionary of Biography* (Drain, 2004). The plot is as follows: loss of land and wealth by a member of the gentry due to the sinister influence of a dishonest speculator; emigration to Australia; hard choice faced by the eldest son between either return to England in order to inherit an estate from an uncle and a seat in the House of the Lords or loyalty to his family and the new homeland; choice of wealth without status and virtuous use of inherited wealth in a development project that will offer land and home for destitute-but-honest members of their original English community.

The circumstance of having been the wife of the most famous British statistician and the sister of the most famous political economist of her times clearly played an important role in shaping Sarah's concerns, and yet the novel's message sounds more original than repetition of her brother's and husband's ideas, namely that: (1) manual labour is as dignified as any activity; (2) cultivation of intellect is a necessity for every rank; (3) relationships between different races may prove peaceful, friendly and useful; and (4) becoming a philanthropist is the greatest calling for a human being and the only source of additional happiness once the need for basic comfort has been satisfied. She writes that, living 'in comparative affluence and comfort, his wealth could but little increase the enjoyments of his family and himself, except by being expended in the blessed office of doing good to others' (Porter, 1830: 178).

Five years afterward, she published a textbook, *Conversations in Arithmetic*, conceived along the lines of Jane Marcet's series of *Conversations* (on Chemistry, on Political Economy, and other subjects) and Delvalle Varley's *Conversations on Mineralogy*. The exposition is in the form of a dialogue between teacher and pupil, and here the pupil's name is also Alfred Dudley, the novel's main character. The Preface explains that 'the form of conversation has been chosen, since it affords a greater facility for explanation and familiar illustration than any other. . . avoiding all terms or even words, but those which it might be supposed a young child can well understand' (Porter, 1835: vii).

The book was restyled as a textbook for classwork under the title *Rational Arithmetic*, abandoning the dialogical structure. The Preface explains that 'to rescue arithmetic from the degraded rank it at present occupies among intellectual pursuits is a principal object of the following work' (Porter, 1852: v) and that it may provide the main tool for turning children not into mathematicians but rather into reasoning beings, for no other subject is 'so admirably adapted to call forth and strengthen the reasoning powers' (*ibid.*).

Sarah contributed two essays to volumes published by the Central Society for Education, a recently founded society (among whose members there were four Ricardo siblings) committed to the cause of a non-Church-based system of education. In 'On Infant Schools for the Upper and Middle Classes' she quotes Locke to the effect that virtue and control over the passions cannot be taught by speeches but need be learned through habit and example (Porter, 1838: 238). She pleads for the extension of school education to children of all classes and argues for due place to be conceded to imagination, for 'the teaching of facts is made too much an all-important feature. . . Children should be rather encouraged to show their own ingenuity and contrivance in different games, than be always led from one occupation to another' (*ibid.*: 236).

Similar topics are discussed in 'The Expediency and the Means of Elevating the Profession of the Educator in Public Estimation'. She quotes Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg to the effect that systems alone do not suffice in order to shape the character, but what is required is the educator as a living personality. She contends that obstacles to the growth of a body of competent and dedicated educators lie, first, in 'want of respect' for teachers on the part of society as a whole, second, in 'want of independence of character and of high moral dignity on the part of the educator' (Porter, 1839: 450). Finally, she addresses the issue of religious education. She had argued in the previous essay that children from families belonging to different confessions may attend the same school and yet the Christian religion be 'taught to all the children in a manner approved of by all the parents. There is, then, a common ground on which children of all denominations may meet, and learn Christianity and brotherly love at the same time' (*ibid.*: 238).

In the second essay she clarifies that a choice should be made upon reflection among three competing hypotheses, namely, separate denominational religious education, no religious education, and the one she favours, that is, religious education on an inter-denominational Christian basis. It may be remarked that, albeit a Jew by birth, she does not consider children from non-Christian families.

Apart from the interest the overlooked story of this educational writer and novelist has in its own right, there are lessons for Ricardo scholars too (Cremaschi, forthcoming). One is that the ideas that Ricardo 'had his mind to form, he had even his education to commence and to conduct' (Mill [1823] 1995: 212), or that he was a 'modest, unlettered paterfamilias' (Hutchison, 1995: 51) are not so plausible. If we keep in mind that brother Moses was a

physician (Henderson, 1997: 138–9) and Sarah the author of several publications, the statements that it is ‘not true. . .as has been insinuated, that Mr. Ricardo was of a very low origin, and that he had been wholly denied the advantages of education’ for his father was ‘both able and willing to afford his children all the advantages which the line of life for which they were destined appeared to require’ (*Works*, X: 4) may be taken at face value. One implication is that Ricardo was probably no self-made pure scientist vaccinated forever against ‘metaphysics’, and another is that James Mill’s intellectual influence on Ricardo was not so overwhelming as some literature has implied. One further consideration is that, if his younger sister was committed to the causes of a general system of education and war on poverty, perhaps also her older brother was not a wholehearted apologist for the status quo as some literature has implied, albeit in more respectful terms, for example, than those employed by Leslie Stephen while writing that Ricardo ‘was a Jew. . . Now Jews, in spite of Shylock’s assertions. . .are naturally without human feeling’ (Stephen, 1900, II: 222). On the whole, apart from undesirable effects of firm belief in iron laws and especially so at the beginning of his career, Ricardo was one more friend of humankind who hoped that political economy, as scientifically worked out as possible, would finally contribute in singling out the cause of poverty as well as possible remedies.

SERGIO CREMASCHI

**See also:**

Jewish Background; Life and Activities.

**References**

Anonymous (1862), ‘Obituary: Porter Sarah’, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, **213**, October, 509.

Cremaschi, S. (forthcoming), ‘Sarah Ricardo’s tale of wealth and virtue’, *History of Economics Review*.

Drain, S. (2004), ‘Porter, Sarah Ricardo’, in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XLIV*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 973.

Henderson, J.P. (1997), *The Life and Economics of David Ricardo*, with supplemental chapters by J.B. Davis, Boston, MA: Kluwer.

Hunt, P. (ed.) (1995), *Children’s Literature: An Illustrated History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hutchinson, T. (1995), *Uses and Abuses of Economics*, London: Routledge.

Mill, J. ([1823] 1995), ‘Letter to the editor of the Morning Chronicle’, in *The Collected Works, of James Mill, Vol. VII*, London: Routledge and Thoemmes Press, pp. 212–13.

Porter, G.R. (1836–38), *The Progress of the Nation, in its Various Social and Economical Relations, from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Present Time*, 2 vols, London: Knight.

Porter, S. née Ricardo [Anonymous] (1830), *Alfred Dudley, or the Australian Settlers*, London: Murray.

Porter, S. née Ricardo [Mrs G.R. Porter] (1835), *Conversations in Arithmetic*, London: Murray.

Porter, S. née Ricardo [Mrs G.R. Porter] (1838), ‘On infant schools for the upper and middle classes’, in *The Second Publication of the Central Society of Education*, London: Central Society of Education, pp. 229–42.

Porter, S. née Ricardo [Mrs G.R. Porter] (1839), ‘The expediency and the means of elevating the profession of the educator in public estimation’, in *The Educator. Prize Essays on The Expediency and the Means of Elevating the Profession of the Educator in Public Estimation*, London: Central Society of Education, pp. 435–535.

Porter, S. née Ricardo [Mrs G.R. Porter] (1852), *Rational Arithmetic*, London: Murray.

Stephen, L. (1900), *The English Utilitarians*, 3 vols, London: Duckworth.

Wilde, W.H., J. Horton and B. Andrews (eds) (1994), *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.