

**THE DIARY OF SAMUEL  
TEEDON: 17 OCTOBER 1791  
TO 2 FEBRUARY 1794**

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**SAMUEL TEEDON**

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THE SHIEL HALL, OLNEY.

TEEDON'S SCHOOL

Was the upper room, approached by two flights of steps.

**THE DIARY**  
*Of Samuel Teedon,*

17 OCTOBER 1791 TO 2 FEBRUARY 1794.

**Edited by**

THOMAS WRIGHT OF OLNEY,

*Author of "The Life of William Cowper," &c.*



**London :**

*At the Sign of the Unicorn, VII. Cecil Court, W.C.*

1902.

## Introduction.



The Diary of Samuel Teedon, schoolmaster of Olney will be welcomed by students of English Literature, chiefly on account of its numerous references to the poet Cowper. From 27 August 1701 to 2 February 1794—a period of 891 days—no fewer than 277 recorded letters passed between Olney and Weston, namely :

- From Cowper to Teedon, 72 letters.
- From Mrs. Unwin to Teedon, 17 letters.
- From Teedon to Cowper, 126 letters.
- From Teedon to Mrs. Unwin, 62 letters.

It gives me pleasure to say that I have been able to secure every letter of the 72 written by the Poet. They will be found in my edition of *The Correspondence of William Cowper* (Hodder & Stoughton).

Samuel Teedon is himself an interesting and a picturesque figure. He was neither a dunce nor a hypocrite, as uninformed writers have carelessly branded him. He was educated for the church, and could read his Testament in Greek and Latin. He had some knowledge of French and took a delight in English Literature. We may smile with Cowper at his involved and flowery English, but, seeing that he sinned in company with half the university dons of the day, we ought perhaps to regard that as a product not so much of ignorance as of execrable taste. His spelling is erratic, his grammar original, his punctuation, or rather lack of it, perplexing. In order to spare the reader, I have myself

supplied many stops. But let us not forget that we are perusing a Diary in which matter is dotted down hastily and irresponsibly. If there are plenty of mistakes there are not more than may be found in the letters of Thomas Gray.

Our information respecting Teedon is gathered from three sources (1) Cowper's Letters, (2) this Diary (3) the Manuscript Life of Teedon, written by William Soul of Olney.

Samuel Teedon, who was formerly of Bedford, seems to have come to Olney about 1775. By and by we find him living in a cottage at the junction of Dagnell Street and High Street, and earning a pittance by teaching, in the curious old building on the Market Place called the Shiel Hall.

His household included three other persons, namely his cousin Elizabeth Killingworth, familiarly "Mammy;" Mammy's son Eusebius, or "Worthy" (the Mr. Killingworth of Cowper's Letters), and Polly Taylor. "Polly," observes Mr. Soul, "called Teedon her cousin; the common sense or natural intelligence of the place called her his daughter." Eusebius Killingworth, who assisted Teedon in the school, and worked as a book-binder, was, to use Mr. Soul's words, "a beautiful penman," and "a first rate arithmetician and algebraist." If says, Mr. Soul, "the drift of the inhabitants of Olney had seconded the ability of the masters they must have had a good school." The masters "deserved a popular and flourishing establishment. Their work however was not appreciated, and in consequence they never rose above the condition of poverty." Teedon "prayed extempore every morning with his scholars, and on Thursdays delivered an exhortation to them."

In a letter to Newton, dated 25 Feb. 1781, Cowper speaks of the tediousness of Teedon's discourse. "He has just left us after a long visit, the greatest part of which he spent in the narration of a certain detail of facts that might have been compressed into a much smaller compass"—"You know how scrupulously nice he is in the choice of his expression; an exactness that soon becomes very inconvenient both to speaker and hearer."

There is also an amusing reference to him in the letter of 7 February 1785, in which Teedon is described as having felicitated himself on being connected with a man "of genius and ability" such as Cowper was. The speech says



Cowper "made the sweat gush out on my forehead. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense." Thus Cowper at first regarded Teedon as somewhat of a bore, though a worthy and a decidedly amusing one. But both he and Mrs. Unwin sympathised with Teedon. They pitied and often relieved his poverty; and as for his weaknesses—his vanity and obtrusiveness—they good naturedly got what amusement they could out of them and troubled no further.

Teedon, a not uncommon product of the Evangelical movement, had got it into his head that he was especially favoured by Providence, and, extraordinary to say, Teedon's belief, by and by, came to be shared by Cowper, with the result that, by degrees, the refined and gifted poet got to regard the vain and eccentric schoolmaster as a kind of Delphic oracle. Cowper had seen visions, dreamed dreams, and heard voices.\* Teedon in like manner received, as he took them to be, revelations from God. But there was this difference; Cowper believed himself a man whom God abhorred; Teedon regarded himself as Heaven's special favourite. Consequently, whenever in doubt, Cowper had recourse to Teedon. That Teedon was sincere in his convictions we have no reason to doubt. He endeavoured to use his influence for the poet's good, urging him to keep continually occupied, encouraging him to be frequent in prayer, and assuring him that God in His own time would remove the terrible burden. For example it was owing mainly to Teedon that Cowper undertook the editing of Milton, and that he was persuaded to make the journey to Earham.

Teedon commenced to write his Diary on Oct. 17th 1791. After his death it seems to have got into the possession of the Johnson family; then for many years it was lost. It was discovered in 1890, by Mr. W. J. Harvey, of Champion Hill, s.w. and passed subsequently into the hands of Mr. W. H. Collingridge, who, on Cowper Centenary Day (25 April 1900) presented it to the Cowper Museum at Olney, where it is now preserved.

\* Those who wish to know more about the subject of Clair-audience or the hearing of voices, with special reference to the case of Cowper, should consult the series of able articles in "The General Practitioner" for 1900, from the pen of Dr. Barker Smith.

It is a small volume, 6 inches by 3½ inches, containing 122 pages closely written in a neat and minute hand. As we turn over its soiled yellow leaves the little world in which Cowper lived and moved becomes rehabilitated. "The Squire" and "Madm." (Cowper and Mrs. Unwin), are the central figures, but, their abode being Weston, they are only rarely seen in Olney, though now and then they take tea with their new friend, the Rev. James Bean, at the Vicarage. We see Teedon—a spare man—in quasi-clerical costume of blue coat and black waistcoat and breeches trudging up Overs Hill towards the Lodge, say to receive his money; for the poet thanks to the beneficence of an unknown friend, is able to allow him as much as £7/10/- per quarter—a sum which, considering the modest total his pupils' pence amount to, is a small fortune. We see Teedon another day approaching Weston on a very different errand. "The Squire" has heard voices, whether from God or from the devil he is uncertain, and he wishes to consult the man favoured by Heaven. Teedon's face is serious this time, and it is evident that before setting out he had wrestled long in prayer.

The voices heard by Cowper usually caused distress, but not always, as witness the letter to Teedon of 16 Oct. 1792: "On Sunday, while I walked with Mrs. Unwin and my cousin "(Johnson)" in the orchard, it pleased God to enable me once more to approach Him in prayer, and I prayed silently for everything that lay nearest my heart with a considerable degree of liberty. Nor did I let slip the occasion of praying for you. This experience I take to be a fulfilment of those words: 'The ear of the Lord is open to them that fear Him, and He will hear their cry.'"

Upon receiving a communication which seemed to come from God Teedon would at once write to Cowper, and the poet thus replies to one of these:—

"Dear Sir, in your last experience, extraordinary as it was, I found nothing presumptuous. God is free to manifest Himself, both in manner and measure, as he pleases; and to you He is pleased to manifest himself uncommonly in both."

Other figures which rise before us as we turn these pages are the Rev. John Newton, the Rev. Thomas Scott, Hannah

Willson—pretty, spoilt, vain and abominably extravagant  
 "Miss" Hannah — Cowper's protégée, Dick Coleman  
 brought as a lad by Cowper from St. Albans, Sam Roberts,  
 (Cowper's faithful man), Thomas Kitchener ("Kitch" the  
 gardener), the Rev. John Sutcliff one of the founders of the  
 Baptist Missionary Society, Dr. Carey the distinguished  
 Missionary, and the Rev. Thomas Hillyard, Minister of the  
 Independent Meeting.

The Diary closes on 2 February 1794.

Cowper left Weston for Norfolk 14 July 1795.

Teedon died, after a night's illness, early in June 1798, and  
 was buried in Olney churchyard on June 9<sup>th</sup>.

Mummy lived till 1807 and was buried on Dec. 5th of  
 that year.

Early in the next year (18 April 1808) Eusebius Killing-  
 worth and Polly Taylor were married. Both were between  
 fifty and sixty.

Mrs. Killingworth was buried at Olney 19 Nov. 1817, Mr.  
 Killingworth, who died at the age of 77, on 24 Feb. 1828.  
 It is pleasing to add that to their descendants Fortune  
 proved kind.

William Soul, Teedon's biographer, was a designer of lace  
 patterns and lived at Olney, where he died on Friday March  
 3rd, 1865. He was an intelligent, thoughtful man, a close  
 observer of nature, "something of an artist and something  
 of a poet."

THOMAS WRIGHT.

*Cowper School,*

*Olney, Bucks.*

1 Jan. 1902.