

William Taylor

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William Taylor (7 December 1673–7 September 1750) was baptized at St Michael's Bassishaw in St Alphage, London, to William Taylor and Dorothy Turner. He was an English poet and merchant known for his wit and facetious verse. He owned property in Essex, where he was married to Anna Crispe and had a son, Henry Taylor. Passing away at the age of seventy-six in Portsmouth, Hampshire, England, William Taylor left a literary legacy that extended to his great-grandson.

The biographical details about William Taylor are limited and primarily documented by his great-grandson Peter Alfred Taylor in *Some Account of the Taylor Family (originally Taylard)* (1875). Peter briefly mentions his great-grandfather William Taylor “of South Weald.” It describes William Taylor as a contemporary of Steele and interested in amateur theatricals. Taylor’s manuscript verse includes ten poems, one being “The Dropsical Man,” which are featured in Robert Dodsley’s *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1763).

Dropsy, also known as edema, is a medical condition that describes an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body’s tissues, often leading to swelling. During the eighteenth century, England experienced a gin epidemic, and the consumption of gin was widespread, particularly among the lower classes. This surge in alcohol consumption resulted in many health consequences, including cases of dropsy among heavy drinkers. Within this context, William Taylor’s “The Dropsical Man” is a satirical interpretation of the detrimental effects of excessive drinking.

“The Dropsical Man” engages in comic verse with an anapestic meter in couplets. It explores themes of drink, parents, and children, as it portrays a father grappling with the consequences of his excessive drinking. The verses of the poem combine jest and melancholy as the father informs his son about the impending inheritance. The poem illustrates the detrimental impact of immoderate alcohol consumption and demonstrates the repercussions of one’s actions, as seen in the predicted premature death of the father.

Further Reading

Abel, Ernest L. “The Gin Epidemic: Much Ado about What?” *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, vol. 36, no. 5, 2001, pp. 401–405.

Timio, Mario and Enrico Capodicasa. “Ippolito Albertini and Michael Albertus: Ddisparate Old and Innovative Theories on Dropsy and Edema.” *American Journal of Nephrology*, vol. 22, nos. 2–3, pp. 220–224.

The Dropsical Man²⁶⁶

A JOLLY, brave toper,²⁶⁷ who cou'd not forbear²⁶⁸
 Tho' his life was in danger, old port²⁶⁹ and stale beer,
 Gave the doctors the hearing — but still wou'd drink on,
 Till the dropsy²⁷⁰ had swell'd him as big as a ton.
 The more he took physic²⁷¹ the worse still he grew,
 And tapping²⁷² was now the last thing he cou'd do.
 Affairs at this crisis, and doctors come down,
 He began to consider — so sent for his son.
 Tom, see by what courses I've shorten'd my life,
 I'm leaving the world ere²⁷³ I'm forty and five;
 More than probable 'tis, that in twenty-four hours,
 This manor, this house, and estate will be yours;
 My early excesses²⁷⁴ may teach you this truth,
 That 'tis working for death to drink hard in one's youth.
 Says Tom, (who's a lad of a generous spirit,
 And not like young rakes²⁷⁵ who're in haste to inherit,)

Sir, don't be dishearten'd; altho' it be true,

²⁶⁶ *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands*, edited by Robert Dodsley, Vol. VI, printed J. Hughes, 1763, p. 125. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

²⁶⁷ *Topper*: someone who drinks alcoholic beverages.

²⁶⁸ *Forbear*: to hold oneself back from something.

²⁶⁹ *Port*: a fortified wine, originating from Portugal.

²⁷⁰ *Dropsy*: an old term for edema, a medical condition characterized by the abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body's tissues.

²⁷¹ *Physic*: medicinal treatment or medicine.

²⁷² *Tapping*: a medical procedure to remove fluid from the body, typically done by inserting a needle or catheter, often used to alleviate symptoms of conditions such as dropsy.

²⁷³ *Ere*: an archaic or poetic term meaning "before."

²⁷⁴ *Excesses*: behaviors or actions that go beyond what is considered reasonable or moderate.

²⁷⁵ *Rakes*: young men with wild and dissolute lifestyles.

Th' operation is painful, and hazardous too,
 'Tis no more than what many a man has gone thro'.
 And then, as for years, you may yet be call'd young, 20
 Your life after this may be happy and long.
 Don't flatter me, Tom, was the father's reply,
 With a jest²⁷⁶ in his mouth and a tear in his eye;
 Too well by experience, my vessels,²⁷⁷ thou know'st,
 No sooner are tapped, but they give up the ghost.²⁷⁸ 25



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²⁷⁶ *Jest*: a playful or humorous remark or action.

²⁷⁷ *My vessels*: a pun on his blood vessels/tissues and the vessels in which he keeps alcohol.

²⁷⁸ *Give up the ghost*: a euphemism for dying or passing away; also, a term for an open bottle of wine losing its flavour due to oxidation.