

The
Martineau
Society



Second Newsletter
August 1994

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

The new Newsletter Editor, elected at the Inaugural Meeting of the Martineau Society on 16 July 1994 is Dr Valerie Sanders, who can be contacted at the University of Buckingham, Buckingham MK18 1EG (Tel: 0280-814080, Ext. 2317), where she works as Senior Lecturer in English Literature. She is the author of two books on Harriet Martineau: *Reason Over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel* (1986) and *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters* (1990). She would be delighted to hear from anyone who has contributions to offer the Newsletter (next issue in January 1995): any comments on the material in this issue would be particularly welcome, as would ideas for future articles or on the general direction you would like the newsletter to take.

SARAH AUSTIN'S SECRET LIFE

In 1838 Harriet Martineau wrote to her mentor, W J Fox, editor of the Unitarian **Monthly Repository**, remonstrating with him on the break-up of his marriage to Eliza Florance, and his friendship with Eliza Flower, into whose Bayswater house he moved (apparently platonically) in 1834. Harriet commented:

'I know but one case of "Union unconsecrated by affection": & that one instance affords (in many respects) a beautiful contemplation. It is of a wife oppressed by her husband: but we all feel that the religious patience with wh she endures, for the sake of her daughter, yields her more peace of mind than she cd find by throwing off her yoke.'

Professor Joseph Hamburger of Yale University has suggested that the woman described in this letter might be Sarah Austin (1793-1867). Co-author, with Lotte Hamburger, of *Contemplating Adultery: The Secret Life of a Victorian Woman* (Macmillan, £14.99), Professor Hamburger has discovered that Sarah began writing to Prince Hermann Puckler-Muskau of Prussia, whose travel notes she was translating in 1832. Penelope Fitzgerald, reviewing the book for the **Evening Standard**, comments: 'To Sarah, the correspondence seems to have been the cause, or result, of a mid-life crisis, and she found it "delicious to hang for hours over his letters" and to "kiss his portrait with full heart"'. When they finally met, in Berlin, in 1842, 'it was such an unremarkable occasion that there is no record of what they said and did. Sarah gave him her scrapbook and that was all.' Prince Puckler-Muskau was noted for designing parks and chasing women. Sarah Austin was described by Carlyle, who admired her, as a 'spiritual screamikin.' Harriet Martineau, it seems, was unaware of her friend's secret consolation for marital disappointment.

MARTINEAU SOCIETY INAUGURAL MEETING 16 JULY 1994

The Martineau Society was officially launched at its Inaugural Meeting on Saturday 16 July 1994 at Manchester College, Oxford. It was both a business meeting, to confirm the aims and constitution of the Society, and an opportunity to hear experts on Harriet and James Martineau describe their research. 21 members and friends were welcomed by Revd Dr Ralph Waller, the Principal of Manchester College, who acted as Chairman and quickly made everyone feel at home. Officers were elected as follows:

President: Professor R K Webb
Emeritus Professor of History, University of Maryland,
Baltimore, USA
Chairman: Mrs Sophia Hankinson (Kings Lynn)
Treasurer: Mrs Iris Voegeli (Norwich)
Secretary: Mr Alan Middleton (Wantage)
Newsletter Editor: Dr Valerie Sanders
University of Buckingham
Two Committee Members: Professor Elisabeth Arbuckle (San Juan)
Revd Dr Frank Schulman (Oxford)

Sophia Hankinson reported that so far the Society has 20 members. It was agreed that for the time being the membership subscription should remain at £10 a year for individuals and £30 for institutions, and that the financial year should run in parallel with the calendar year. Alan Middleton explained that the Society's Charitable Status was still being discussed, and would be explored further before the next meeting.

After the formal business of the meeting was completed, the Society was both honoured and delighted to be addressed by Professor R K Webb, author of the 1960 biography of Harriet Martineau, and the first to draw serious attention to her influence on Victorian society.

Abstracts of three talks are included in this Newsletter, but Bob Webb's was particularly lively and entertaining as he recounted his efforts to locate and see the collection of letters held by the Martineau family. He paid tribute to the work of Dr Reinhard Speck in California, who had amassed the valuable collection of Martineau letters and manuscripts now held in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, and who sadly died last year.

The paper provoked an enthusiastic question and answer session around some still controversial areas: was Harriet Martineau a latent lesbian? Or were her relationships with other women merely 'romantic friendships'? Was Harriet ultimately more successful than James? This might seem a surprising statement, given James Martineau's professional recognition, but the argument was that whereas James devoted himself to a small sector of religious life, Harriet was involved in a wide range of major controversies, including the anti-slavery debate, the American Civil War, Ireland, the British Empire, political economy, and education.

With plenty to think about the meeting broke for lunch, and reassembled after sandwiches, coffee, and a visit to the special display in the library, for five shorter talks, representing the range of research on Harriet and James Martineau: James's theories about church disestablishment, written when he was 80; tutors' reports on their Manchester (York) College students in James's time, Harriet Martineau's contribution to the study of sociology, and the role of Joseph Blanco White in James's development. Christine Penney, the Archivist of Birmingham University, described the library's extensive Martineau collection, and revealed that the manuscript of *Deerbrook* was currently on the market for a staggering £35,000.

In the final section of the meeting, proposals for future gatherings were discussed. Should we move to a two-day format, and include a walk round local sights? Where should meetings be held? How should prospective new members be identified? If you have any views on any of these questions, do write in to the Newsletter. For now it was decided we should meet again at Manchester College, probably on Saturday 15 July next year.

For many of us, Manchester College was the ideal location, and we should like to thank Ralph Waller for his kindness and hospitality in hosting the occasion down to arranging sandwiches for those who had come without! I am sure everyone agreed with him that it was a 'happy' day, with an exciting international flavour. The presence of several distinguished American and Canadian scholars added a special atmosphere: we were delighted they were able to come, and hope they will make a return visit in a year's time.

INAUGURAL MEETING: REPORT ON PAPERS GIVEN

After the formal business of the Inaugural Meeting, members heard a keynote address by Professor R K Webb, and five shorter papers, four of which are summarised below.

Dr David Wykes: 'James Martineau: student at Manchester College, York'

There is surprisingly little direct evidence in the College archives relating to the period James Martineau was a student at York (1822-27). It was common for one of the tutors to write to the College Treasurer at the start of each session and to include a brief assessment of the new students. Some of these comments were very candid indeed. Unfortunately, what might have provided a fascinating insight is not available for 1822. There is only one letter in the archives which relates specifically to Martineau as a student, but it is an interesting one. In April 1826, John Kenrick, the Classics tutor, wrote to the College Treasurer about Martineau's intention to visit the Continent. The purpose of the visit was clearly to help reinstate Martineau's delicate health, but it is inconceivable that he would have ignored the chance to become acquainted with German scholarship. As we know, Martineau did not take this opportunity, and he completed his course at York. He did not study in Germany until the winter of 1848-9, with such profound results for his own scholarship and intellectual development. One can speculate what might have happened if he had taken up the opportunity twenty years earlier.

Prof R K Webb: 'Reflections on Writing about Harriet Martineau'

Professor R K Webb opened the programme with an informal address: "Forty Years On: Reflections on Writing about Harriet Martineau." He recalled the circumstances that led to his writing *Harriet Martineau, A radical Victorian* (1960), and noted what now appear to be the successes and the shortcomings of that book. He recounted the long approach to Sir Wilfred Martineau to gain permission to quote from Harriet Martineau's letters, a campaign that incidentally turned up a collection of cuttings of most of her leading articles for the Daily News; he reviewed the difficulties of interpreting her physical and psychological makeup and his own struggle to come to terms with her radicalism and the candour of her style. He emphasized how deeply his work was dependent on collaboration and noted how very different kinds of collaboration govern research and writing today on both Harriet and James Martineau. Professor Webb paid a special tribute to Dr Reinhard S Speck of San Francisco, whose premature death in 1993 was a personal blow to all active Martineau scholars, but whose influence—through his manuscript collection now deposited in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley—will broaden down through all future work. Professor Webb noted that James Martineau presents many of the same interpretive challenges as did his sister, suggesting that their sad and celebrated estrangement was, in the long view, far less important than their origins in the powerful provincial society of Norwich. He thought that the greatest accomplishment of the Society might be mediating that rich and fruitful culture to our more frenetic and specialized age.

Revd R T Charles: 'The Ecumenical Vision of James Martineau'

James Martineau believed that all churches were called to be a sign in the world of the ultimate reconciliation of all things to God. He desired to see the removal of any barriers which prevented this reconciliation. His concept of 'catholicity' or, as we would interpret it today, 'ecumenism', was to him the basis for the foundation of a Federal National Church, which might result in a communion in diversity.

Revd A J Cross: 'Moving Martineau off the Miracles: —the role played by Joseph Blanco White'

When James Martineau first published his *Rationale of Religious Enquiry* in 1836, he was still wedded to the notion that the miracles of the New Testament were an essential element in the demonstration of Christian, and, therefore, Unitarian truth. His close acquaintance at that time in Liverpool was the self exiled Spaniard, Joseph Blanco White, a thinker much influenced by philosophers of the Enlightenment, particularly Hume. Blanco profoundly disagreed. He wrote a long letter trenchantly criticising Martineau's reliance on this aspect of his apologetics. Did the coolness which arose in the friendship stem in part from Blanco's scepticism and Martineau's cautious unease? Belatedly, in the 3rd edition in 1845, Blanco having died in 1841, Martineau acknowledges his debt to him. He prints as an appendix an edited version of Blanco's earlier critical letter. Martineau and Unitarians generally have cause to be grateful to Blanco for moving their leading 19th century thinker off the miracles.

Dr Susan Hoecker-Drysdale: '*Harriet Martineau and the Rise of Sociology*'

What has been absent from Martineau scholarship so far is a sociological analysis of Harriet Martineau's life and writings. *Society in America*, for example, is in several respects a brilliant analysis in which she assesses that society's practices on the basis of its principles. In addition to her endeavours in literature, history and journalism, she was a pioneer in social research and social analysis. When her works are examined against those of the other founders of social science and sociology, we can see the extent to which she contributed to and participated in that development. Although she did not single-mindedly focus on the establishment of sociology as an academic discipline, she was interested in sociology's moral as well as intellectual mandate and in the question of how we can understand our own and other societies objectively and comprehensively. She was read by many later social scientists for whom she had set general precedents and sometimes very specific models, initiating a model of social investigation which helped to generate new understandings of society and to provide the foundation for modern sociology.

THE AVIEMORE CONNECTION

To those of us accustomed to regarding Aviemore in Scotland primarily as a skiing resort, it may come as a surprise to find that there is a Martineau connection. In fact James Martineau owned a holiday home, The Polchar, at Aviemore, where he spent many summers and autumns until 1898, within two years of his death. Three paintings by James's daughter Gertrude Martineau (1837-1924) are now displayed in the Village Hall, on the stage: originally, there were four, as reported by the Unitarian fortnightly newspaper, **The Inquirer** in 1984 and 1986. We hope to carry a further article on James Martineau and Aviemore in the next issues of the Newsletter.

MEMORIALS TO JAMES MARTINEAU

With the centenary of James Martineau's death only six years away, interest in the formal commemoration of his life has intensified. Two correspondents have commented on two related issues: preservation of his gravestone in Highgate Cemetery, and a plaque on the site of the Little Portland Street Chapel where he was Minister from 1859-1872.

Alan Ruston writes: 'On 22 May 1994, in conjunction with members of the Enfield and Barnet Unitarian Fellowship, I visited Highgate Cemetery, the Eastern Section. This Section is more available to members of the public (admission £1) than the Western Section which can only be visited by accompanied parties. We found the grave of James Martineau in "dissenters' path", as it is called. It was marked as no. 38 in the list of some 60 which are shown on a single piece of A4 paper of notable persons who are buried in this Section which can be purchased at the gate.

There are several photographs of the gravestone available in booklets and journals. It is in the second row back from the path (not metalled) and is clearly visible without problem. A single tall upright stone, it is now slightly at an angle, and some of the lettering is starting to come off. The inscription to James, however, is clear. It is in one of the less overgrown areas of the cemetery, which may be because it is not too far from the large memorial to Karl Marx.

It would seem to me that the immediate vicinity of the gravestone could be tidied a little, but the greenery would still encroach after only a short time. Indeed the stone could be refurbished for the centenary of James's death and this would cost a few hundred pounds at present prices. A visit at a weekend, or during the week, could be arranged through the cemetery authorities, probably without much difficulty.'

Howard Hague has approached the Little Portland Street Trust, commenting: 'As far as I am aware, there is no public memorial or plaque to James Martineau other than his gravestone in Highgate Cemetery (in London, that is—there is the large memorial near Aviemore to him and his daughters). This is rather odd, bearing in mind that Gladstone called him 'the greatest of living thinkers', and he was awarded doctorates by three universities—Harvard, Leyden and Edinburgh.' His hearers at the Chapel included, besides Gladstone himself, George Eliot, Charles Darwin, Frances Power Cobbe, and Charles Dickens (a seat-holder).

'According to the Alan Godfrey reprint of the 1870 Ordnance Survey map of the West End, the chapel stood on the north side of Little Portland Street between Great Portland Street and Great Tichfield Street, nearer to the Great Portland Street corner. The chapel closed in 1909 and was demolished. I have recently paid a visit to the area. At No. 6 Little Portland Street is now 'Alexandra House-1910', a not unattractive building with some classical features. Although this would need to be checked, this seems the most likely site of the chapel. Outside the building hangs the sign "Munkberry's Brasserie", though curiously all the other nameplates from alongside the entrance door appear to have been removed. There would certainly be room on the building for some kind of plaque.'

THE ARMITT TRUST

A valuable archive for Harriet Martineau scholars is the Armit Trust in Ambleside, Cumbria—about which members may like to know more. The Trust is named after Mary Armit (1851-1911), a Victorian scholar and local historian, who collected a vast number of books and other artefacts concerned with the Lake District. Under the terms of her will, they formed the nucleus of a reference library based in Ambleside, founded in 1912. The collection covers not only Martineau letters and books, but also material on Beatrix Potter (especially her watercolour paintings), Ruskin books and manuscripts (including the legal papers for his court case with the painter Whistler), Wordsworth papers, natural history books, and material on topography, fine art and archaeology. Presently housed in a small room in Ambleside, many of the valuable items of interest are boxed and not on public display. From its beginning, the Armit Library acted as a repository for documents, a vital local history resource.

GROTE AGAINST MARTINEAU

Can anyone explain the background to the following passage in John Tulloch's *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century* (1885; reissued by Leicester University Press, 1971)? 'Mr Grote must be pronounced therefore more of a Millite than John Stuart Mill himself. His attitude in the well-known controversy as to the Chair of Logic in University College in 1866, when Dr James Martineau was a candidate, and was defeated almost entirely by his influence, is an unpleasant illustration of the same extreme tendency. The event is not one on which we are called to dwell, but it is highly significant, as showing how thoroughly so great an intellect can shut out all the influence of higher religious speculation, and intrench itself with undeviating complacency within the narrowest limits on so great a subject...' (p. 250). George Grote (1794-1871) was a banker and historian, a friend of James and John Stuart Mill. He helped Harriet Martineau with her financial backing of the **Westminster Review** in 1857; she was also friendly with Grote's wife, Harriet, an accomplished musician; but clearly relations between Grote and James Martineau were considerably less cordial. If anyone has further information about this event, please let us know!

ANSWER to the question in the last Newsletter:

WHO SAID: "Harriet Martineau accepts the Universe" "Gad, Sir! She'd better!" The answer was supplied by Professor R K Webb, who referred to William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Lecture II:

"I accept the universe" is reported to have been a favorite utterance of our New England transcendentalist, Margaret Fuller; and when some one repeated this phrase to Thomas Carlyle, his sardonic comment is said to have been: "Gad! she'd better!"

Professor Webb adds: 'It is a remark entirely characteristic of Margaret Fuller, and entirely uncharacteristic of Harriet Martineau.' So apologies if this seems to have been a trick question! And thank you to Professor Webb for putting us right!