

# *The Martineau Society*

**Newsletter No . 24**

**Spring 2008**

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## **Contents: Newsletter No . 24**

<i>Annual General Meeting, Manchester, 2008</i>	.....2
“Harriet Martineau and the ‘imperial gaze’” by Ruth Watts	.....2
“Harriet Martineau and her Scottish Friends” by Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle	.....6
“(Entre nous, please!) Harriet Martineau’s Correspondence” by Deborah Logan	.....10
“Harriet Martineau Protests from Ambleside, 1866-1876” by Elisabeth Arbuckle	.....16
Martineau Society Contact Information	.....22

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### *Martineau Society Subscription Information:*

2009 Subscriptions are due on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

\* UK: Individual members £15 // Concessionary rate £7.50 // Institutional membership £30

\* Overseas: Individual members \$30 // Concessionary rate \$20. This may be paid in dollars to Prof. Elisabeth Arbuckle, Condo. Montebello M526 Trujillo Alto PR00976 USA.

**Annual General Meeting, Manchester, 2008.** At the time of going to press the 14<sup>th</sup> Martineau Society Conference was to be held 17-20 July 2008 at the Luther King House, Rusholme, Manchester M14 5JP. There will be a report on this in the next Newsletter.

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***Harriet Martineau and the “imperial gaze”*** by Ruth Watts

In 2007, Britain commemorated the abolition of the slave-trade in 1807. Much has been said particularly about William Wilberforce, although rather less than about slaves themselves who opposed the system which oppressed them so cruelly or about other individuals and groups, especially women. Some of the more popular material has perhaps given the impression that slavery itself was abolished in British dominions which, of course, was not so until 1833. Here will be examined two of Harriet Martineau's writings concerning slavery – *Demerara* and *The Hour and the Man* to examine her views, contrast them with others of her day and think about why she thought as she did.

There was much agitation from those against the slave-trade and, subsequently, in the 1820s onwards, against slavery, intended to rouse people's sympathies and consciences. Anti-slavery struggles used many images of slaves, both in pictorial and written form, to urge their arguments.<sup>1</sup> Many children learnt about slaves and other people in the empire at Sunday school where stories, hymns and sermons alike sought to raise support for missionaries abroad seeking to Christianise 'heathen' people. The many men and women who went into the empire as missionaries, educators, health workers and explorers helped establish networks at home through which knowledge from empire was spread. Debates over the issues raised by such activities appeared in middle-class periodicals and magazines of the day and were discussed in middle-class and scientific societies, although the latter were not only class bound, but mainly only for men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marsh, J. ed. *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art 1800-1900*. Aldershot, Hampshire, Manchester Art Gallery and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery in association with Lund Humphries, 2005 (84, 142).

<sup>2</sup> Hall, C. "Missionary stories: gender and ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s" and "Competing masculinities: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill and the case of Governor Eyre" in *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992: 205-95); Rowbotham, J. 'Ministering angels, not ministers: women's involvement in the foreign missionary movement, c.1860-1910' in Morgan, S. ed. *Women, Religion and Feminism*

Slavery, however, was mixed up with empire and Britain's' trading and colonial interests. The very fact that so much campaigning was necessary and it took so long, first to abolish the slave-trade and then, nearly thirty years later, slavery (which still continued in various forms),<sup>3</sup> indicates that many people accepted it. Many, indeed, had long imbibed racial assumptions which seemed to justify alike slavery, colonization of other peoples and an 'imperial mission'. Such assumptions of superiority were reinforced by 'scientific' theories stemming from centuries of exploration, collecting followed by classification and explanation. This makes Harriet Martineau's stance all the more pertinent.

*Demerara*, written as one of Harriet's early *Illustrations of Political Economy*, cleverly opposes slavery as economically wasteful and unproductive. Using the device of a brother and sister, Alfred and Mary Bruce, returning to Demerara in Guyana, after being educated in England for fourteen years, she is able to contrast the views of an enlightened, well-educated young man, with those of his father, Mr. Bruce, who is a well-meaning slave-owner, but whose morality and ideas have been corrupted by the system in which he operates. This is even truer of his overseer and other local slave owners and their white servants. Even a younger sister, Louise, who has always lived in Demerara, accepts that a little whipping is all right for slaves. Alfred meets his father's complaints about the plantation losing profits by arguing that only a system based on humanity, and not bad institutions and property in people, is likely to prosper.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Harriet shows that slaves too are corrupted by the system. The reason that Cassius gains a reputation for being a lazy, bad labourer is that he is deliberately trying to keep his ransom money – that is, the price for his freedom – down so that one day he might be able to afford to buy it. Similarly, Robert and Sukie have learnt through slavery to treat others badly and are cruel to the little girl, Hester, whom they are supposed to look after. Willy prefers slaves to live together rather than marry as no male slave can be a proper husband and protect his wife. On the other hand, Cassius works hard to cultivate his own little plot of ground although he can't grow anything on it to rival his master's produce.<sup>5</sup>

Through various incidents, Harriet is able to illustrate her economical points about how

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*in Britain, 1750-1900*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002: 180; Watts, R. 'Mary Carpenter and India: enlightened liberalism or condescending imperialism?' *Paedagogica Historica*, 37, (2001): no. 1, 181-198; Inkster, I. 'The public lecture as an instrument of science education for adults – the case of Great Britain, c.1780-1850', *Paedagogica Historica*, XX (1980): no. 1, 80-107.

<sup>3</sup> Logan, D. ed. *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire*. Vol. I. Pickering & Chatto, 2004: xxxv, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Martineau, H. *Demerara* (1st ed. 1833) in Logan *Harriet Martineau ... British Empire*, 69-85.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-101.

freedom of the slaves would be more profitable to all and to express the mental, emotional and physical cruelties of slavery. Significantly, in doing this, she showed clearly the miserable unease and fear that the slave-owners perpetually lived in and the potential intelligence and nobility of the slaves, if they were allowed to work and live as free people. She emphasised, however, that whites could never know what that potential was until blacks gained their freedom.

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This book was written before Harriet had seen slavery for herself, although she researched well before writing it.<sup>7</sup> It was widely read and praised in England and sufficiently well-known in America for her to be courted by abolitionists and upholders of slavery alike, anxious to persuade her of their views, when she went to America from 1834 to 1836.<sup>8</sup> Her historical novel of 1841 on her hero, Toussaint L'Ouverture, on the other hand, was written after her tour of the States. Harriet much desired to present his 'actual sayings and doings (as far as they were extant) to the world' and later exulted in the fact that the book sold so well despite the initial misgivings of her publisher.<sup>9</sup>

Moxon's misgivings, however, would not have been unusual. What was unusual was to write a novel with a black man as hero. Thomas Carlyle, for example, termed black people lazy, "superstitious ... excitable and impulsive" and thought them an inferior, effeminate 'race' who should get accustomed to the whip.<sup>10</sup> Harriet's portrayal of Toussaint L'Ouverture as a noble black leader was in line with all her thoughts on education and morality. Toussaint, according to her, was able to rule intelligently and in an enlightened manner, partly because he had been fortunate enough to have a master who allowed him to read and he got hold of classical works, especially Epicetus and Fenelon who taught him to be a stoic. He also read Marshal Saxe's *Military Reveries* which taught him how to conduct troops and battles.<sup>11</sup> Most significantly, he had learnt to admire the struggles of the ancient Greeks for liberty, like a 'poet born blind, who delights in describing natural scenery', although he had no power of appropriately exercising the virtue in which he gloried.<sup>12</sup>

Toussaint is shown to have been loyal to the French king until he heard that the convention of 4 February, 1794 abolished slavery in all the French colonies. Realizing that if he

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-39.

<sup>7</sup> Martineau, H. *Autobiography*. London: Smith, Elder, 1877: 1:197-8.

<sup>8</sup> Martineau, H. *Autobiography*. London: Virago, 1983: 2:11-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-9.

<sup>10</sup> Hall, 'Competing', 270-3

<sup>11</sup> Harriet Martineau *The Hour and the Man: A Historical Romance*. London: Edward Moxon, 1841: 68, 90, 120-1

fought the revolutionary government he would be fighting against the freedom and rights of his race, he changed sides. 'I think now' he said, 'that the rule which the free man has over his own soul, over time and eternity, - subject only to God's will – is a nobler authority than that of kings.' The 'negro race', as Harriet termed it, could be redeemed' by liberty, whereas oppression had 'put out the eyes of their souls, and withered its sinews.'<sup>13</sup>

In the ensuing story, Harriet once again tries to show different responses from both whites and blacks to slavery and the situation in Haiti, where Toussaint is able to establish black rule. She was aware of class distinctions and jealousies in both groups, but through Toussaint, his wife and daughters especially stresses the dignity, intelligence and beauty of black people, once they are 'unhardened by degradation, undebased [sic] by ignorance, unspoiled by oppression.'<sup>14</sup> Toussaint, now L'Ouverture (because he has made an opening for the blacks in Martineau's interpretation), proves a wise ruler, teaching his people to forgive former oppressors and have confidence in their abilities. Ex-slaves start marrying, children go to school, the land is farmed well and inventions are encouraged.<sup>15</sup> It could be said that the ideal state was being realized until the reversal caused by Bonaparte's re-establishment of slavery and the eventual overthrow of Toussaint.

The picture may be very overdrawn, although Harriet included an appendix of nearly 60 pages at the end to show her evidence.<sup>16</sup> As in her political economy tales, the characters all serve the different purposes of the didactic plot. Toussaint accepted the superiority of the education and knowledge of the Europeans – he sent his two sons to France to be educated. He talks like the Greek heroes of liberty he admired so much.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Harriet both truly admired him and was earnestly, even passionately, trying to show others that black people, even slaves, could overcome their brutal upbringing and were naturally as intelligent, virtuous, humane and loving as Europeans could be, if given the right education and opportunities. Equally, Europeans could be corrupted by living in an unjust, brutal society as a slave state necessarily was.

Harriet was not alone, of course, in thinking that black and white were unequal in education and circumstances, not innately. Others, especially from Unitarian, Quaker and liberal ranks, especially said the same and Harriet's firm, unwavering stance may be traced to her own

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-2, 138, 146,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 210, 228-35, 284-5

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, 216-27, 260-8

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 247-304

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 230; II, 85; III, 239; vols. 1-3, *passim*

education and upbringing. Yet others were not as humane as the exhibition of the 'Hottentot' Sarah Bartmann in London and her subsequent 'scientific' treatment by celebrated anatomists in the early nineteenth century illustrated. Caged at first so that the audience could poke her to see if her large buttocks were real and dissected at death to see whether certain African peoples were related to apes or monkeys, this was a contemporary example of the 'imperial gaze'.<sup>18</sup> In the often virulent debates of the day about slavery, colonization and the treatment of subject people, Harriet was firmly on the side of those like John Stuart Mill and the liberal urban intelligentsia who championed the essential humanity of all beings and articulated egalitarian views, yet tempered by assertions that blacks, browns, women and the working-class had to learn the civilisation that was equivalent to independent British manhood through education.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Harriet appears more radical than most. In *Demerara*, she used the determined liberal optimism of a white man to articulate the potential nobility of black slaves; in *The Hour and the Man*, however, she portrays a noble black hero, fully equal to the most famous classical heroes so admired in the most elite education of the day. How far, therefore, was she leading her contemporaries?

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### ***Harriet Martineau and her Scottish Friends*** by Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle

In September 1838, Jane Carlyle told Thomas that a friend who had gone to the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Newcastle had "talked much of Harriet's 'tail of hundreds,' till I could not help fancying her as one of those sheep Herodotus talks about." Martineau's friends and admirers who followed her around the room (her "tail") to hear what she might say on an assortment of topics revealed the current craze for her opinions, wherever she went.

After the meeting, Martineau set out with friends on her second tour of Scotland (the first had been a walking tour with her brother, James). Like most early Victorians, Martineau had a romantic attachment to Scotland based mostly on the writings of Sir Walter Scott. (Two of her essays in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* from several years earlier confirm her admiration:

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<sup>18</sup> Fausto-Sterling, A. 'Gender, race and nation: the comparative anatomy of "Hottentot" women in Europe, 1815-1817' in Lederman, M. and Ingrid Bartsch eds., *The Gender and Science Reader*: London & New York: Routledge. 2001: 341-66.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, 'Competing masculinities', 254-5, 264-89; Woollacott, A. *Gender and Empire*.

"Characteristics of the Genius of Scott" and "Achievements of the Genius of Scott.") When her party got to Glasgow, Martineau went to see "public works and other objects of curiosity" (as reported by the Glasgow *Scottish Guardian*) and then to stay with Lord and Lady Murray at Strachur in Argyllshire. There "the little Loch Fyne steamer [was put] at our disposal," and every possible "Highland production, in the form of fish, flesh and fowl was carefully collected; salmon and Loch herrings, grouse pies, and red-deer soup, and so forth." Best of all, she liked a "conversation with Lord Murray by the loch side," when he asked for her help in supporting his prisons bill lost in the previous session of Parliament (she had reported on the enlightened treatment of prisoners in *Society in America*).

After Glasgow, the party traveled to the Western Isles, crossing the rough seas to a "little island, once the most important spot of the whole cluster of British Isles." Landing at Iona, they "examined its relics with speechless interest [including] Macbeth's grave in the line of those of the Scottish kings," and the "Cathedral standing up against a bar of yellow western sky, while the myrtle-green tumbling seas seemed to show it to be unattainable."

From the Western Isles, the party travelled to the Western and Northern Highlands. There they "sat down and lingered on the Witches Heath, between Nairn and Forres, and examined Cawdor Castle." For a last stop before Edinburgh, Lord Murray's brother had given them a letter of introduction that "opened to us all the known recesses of Glammis Castle."

Before Martineau left London, Charles Knight had asked her to contribute notes on the Macbeth country to his *Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspeare*. Duly, she noted details such as "Duncan's Court" on Birnam Hill, judging it to be "precisely the point where a general. . . would be likely to pause. . . and from this spot would the 'leavy screen' devised by Malcolm become necessary." At Edinburgh in October, Lord and Lady Jeffrey welcomed Martineau to their country retreat, Craigmuck, in Crammond parish, "on the eastern slope of Corstorphine Hill" (Jeffrey's elegant castle-like building and estate had been added to over the years from the traditional Scottish "earth hunger"). For Martineau's return to London, two ladies staying at the Jeffreys' invited her to take a seat in their carriage, with stops en route at Dryburgh and Abbotsford. Scott's dream castle was a let-down, however, and Martineau sniffed at its "smallness and toy-character."

In Edinburgh, Martineau had probably met the writer Catherine Crowe. Crowe belonged to a lively literary-artistic circle that included the painter David Scott, Professor John Pringle Nichol (astronomer and Martineau's later advisor on Comte), the aging Thomas de Quincey, Dr. John Brown (writer friend of Dickens) and his cousin, Dr. Samuel Brown. Crowe (an emotional

supporter of paranormal investigation) continued to figure among Martineau's wider circle of friends, as did Samuel Brown and his wife and children. Brown had trained as a medical doctor at Edinburgh but never practiced medicine. Instead, he devoted himself to chemical experiments to try to prove the convertibility of elements--e. g., that base metal could be turned into gold.

Brown was loved by his friends for his "buoyant frankness and beaming cordiality." When Ralph Waldo Emerson stayed with Brown during his lecture tour of Scotland in 1848, he named him "our new Paracelsus." By then, Brown had failed in his candidacy for the chemistry chair at the University of Edinburgh, and in 1849 married his cousin Helen Littlejohn. They lived at Portobello, outside Edinburgh, where Martineau stayed in 1852 at the start of her journey to Ireland.

Scottish friends like the Carlyles had come to see Martineau during her illness at Tynemouth. Lord Murray sent her books and helped with her testimonial fund. Mrs. Francis Homer, wife of a member of the *Edinburgh Review* coterie, corresponded with her. Samuel Brown may first have come to learn about her cure by mesmerism and later stayed with her at Ambleside, which was "a vast pleasure. .. though he was not well;--worn out & chilled in London." Brown may in fact have been suffering from stomach cancer. In 1846, Professor William Gregory (another Scot; Brown's competitor for the chemistry chair) brought his family to Ambleside, "for the two purposes of holiday and further mesmeric investigation." The Scottish publisher Robert Chambers also called on Martineau at Tynemouth. In her *Autobiography*, she notes that "Edinburgh was quite a different place to me when I went for my third Scotch journey, in 1852, [by Chambers's] charming home being open to me."

Susan, Robert's eldest daughter, accompanied Martineau on the Irish journey undertaken for the *Daily News*. While they stayed with the Browns at Portobello, Frederick Knight Hunt, editor of the *Daily News*, came to discuss Martineau's future contributions. The Samuel Browns' little daughter, Isabella Spring Brown, her father's delight, was to become one of Martineau's most faithful correspondents.

From Edinburgh in 1852, Martineau and Susan journeyed westward through romantic Scott country. At Inversnaid on Loch Lomond, they climbed the bank in a "prodigious rain. . . the worst part of [their] 11 weeks' journey," but they "did it somehow" and boarded the steamer on Loch Katrine. Back at Ambleside, Martineau welcomed Nichol, now regius professor of astronomy at Glasgow University. In the following spring, he "put his imprimatur,—most heartily,—on the first three books of Comte," translated and condensed by Martineau.

Though Samuel Brown's health worsened steadily, he continued to write articles,



including one on mesmerism, a review of Catherine Crowe's *Night Side of Nature* (a collection of dreams, apparitions, presentments and Doppelgangers) and a drama about the life of Galileo (a fellow misunderstood genius). Brown also lectured to rapt audiences. Though the doctors warned him not to overexcite himself, on one occasion he threw away his notes and, waving his arms wildly, demonstrated the origin of the universe. Sadly, Brown died at Edinburgh in September 1856. His cousin John Brown remembered him as an "eloquent critic and accurate thinker. . . yet doomed to failure by want of certain common everyday qualities." While Martineau had looked forward to reading Brown's *Lectures on the Atomic Theory* and *Essays Scientific and Literary*, she was perplexed two years later to find them interesting but "less strong & clear" than she'd fancied.

Like Samuel Brown, Catherine Crowe had enthusiastically welcomed Emerson to Edinburgh. Standard biographies of Crowe call her a disciple of the phrenologist George Combe, who lived in Edinburgh, but she also published novels like *The Adventures of Susan Hoply; or, Circumstantial Evidence* (1841), a picaresque tale taking the heroine to Paris for French conversation and stylish dresses. Jane Carlyle once commented that her life had much in common with a novel by Mrs. Crowe: "futile in the extreme, but so full of plot that the interest [is] never allowed to flag." A reviewer at the end of the century placed Crowe in the school of Richardson and Fanny Burney and claimed that she "upheld the standard of a woman's right to education and economic independence long before these subjects were discussed in newspapers and upon public platforms." Yet Edinburgh gossip recorded Crowe's susceptibility to violent but brief attacks of insanity. Just before Samuel Brown died, she developed "faith in new and unknown conditions of life." Escaping from her attendants in her nightgown one Sunday morning, she sallied out to visit Brown "armed only with a card in her hand inscribed with three mystical marks which she believed rendered her invisible. Fortunately, it was a Scotch Sabbathday, not a soul was within sight," and she was met by "an astonished medical friend [who] threw over her his top-coat and took her back to her house." Apparently, Crowe resumed her writing, and in 1858 she called on Martineau at Ambleside. Later, from France, Crowe told Helen Brown that a spirit of her youth had been with her, promising eternal union. Crowe's irrepressible romantic nature--including a belief in ghosts and in spiritualism--differed radically from Martineau's rationalism. But Martineau seemed pleased by Crowe's early gestures of friendship and remembered her with fondness.

Various Scots figured in Martineau's obituaries for the *Daily News*. And when Charles Knight balked at publishing the final section of her *History of the Peace*, Chambers of Edinburgh took over. At first Martineau was highly pleased, but in 1858 their mutual goodwill broke down

when Messrs. Chambers refused to let her rewrite parts of *Introduction to the History of the Peace* (badly done by others, she claimed). Defiantly, Martineau vowed to rewrite it for posterity, and the whole work went eventually to another publisher.

Martineau's friendship with Thomas Carlyle had ended with his progressive reactionism and pessimism, but not her sympathy for "Poor Jenny," married to "that raging maniac." In 1865, Dr. John Brown tried unsuccessfully to call on Martineau at Ambleside when she was recovering from shingles, leaving her a copy of his "new little book." In later years, Helen and Spring Brown became Martineau's dearest Scottish friends, staying at The Knoll and corresponding with her almost to the end of her life. At age about 6, Spring had sent Martineau a "nicely hemmed" cambric handkerchief, which she would use inside the canvas of her wool embroidery. Later, she praised Spring's "pre-running hand" and one Christmas thanked the Browns for a "prodigious Scotch cake—and supply of Scotch bread." When Maria lay ill with typhoid fever in 1864, Martineau began to confide in Spring. Almost every letter to Spring acknowledged a gift--a glass for champagne (prescribed by her doctor), drawings, photographs and a jacket that "fits like a skin!" In 1871, Martineau sent Helen Brown a photograph of an engraving of Josephine Butler. And she asked how Spring liked "the idol of the time" in the United States, Bret Harte?

To Helen, Martineau often spoke her mind on men and current events; to Spring, she chatted about housekeeping and farming at The Knoll. In November 1873, she begged Spring not to order expensive Australian ox-tongue, but she loved the (knitted?) chemise Spring had made, proving "an immense comfort" on cold mornings. By Christmas day 1874--not a good one for Martineau, though the new phosphate helped her "brain-mischief" --she was signing her letters to Spring "Ever your affectionate Aunt Harriet." Clearly, Martineau's early ideal of an heroic and romantic Scotland had dimmed with the fading allure of Sir Walter Scott, but she gained in its place the warmth and affection of a few loyal Scottish friends.

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***(Entre nous, please!) Harriet Martineau's Correspondence*** by Deborah Logan<sup>20</sup>

Harriet Martineau was inexorable on the subject of publishing correspondence. Her books, articles, and letters are peppered with commentary that make clear her strong views against making private letters public – to be read, scrutinized, interpreted out of context, and therefore misconstrued. So intent was she on securing complete control over her private letters

that she made their destruction (or return) a condition of maintaining the epistolary relationship; those who refused – her brother James, for example – were eliminated from her circle of correspondents. Literary historians and Martineau scholars are deeply grateful to those many recipients who quietly preserved her letters; the range of insights and depth of comprehension into her life and work these letters afford reveal the complexity of this woman-of-letters through what may be her most significant literary production: her correspondence.

Richard Garnett, in his *Life of W. J. Fox* (1910), spoke for many scholars frustrated by recipients' compulsion to obey Martineau's "selfish" strictures about letters: "The simple publication of every word she ever wrote to Fox...would...restore her to the place she ought to occupy, and which she would always have enjoyed had she been content to refrain from a posthumous control over her correspondence...no one would gain so much from their publication as the writer. They would rectify the false impression which she has given of herself in her autobiography" (80). Garnett, who had read both Harriet's letters to Fox and her *Autobiography*, was uniquely positioned to make such an observation, with its provocative implications for the decline in Martineau's reputation in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Fifty years later, R. K. Webb's influential *Harriet Martineau. A Radical Victorian* (1960) was written with the assumption that the Fox correspondence was among that unknown quantity of material that had been lost or destroyed. The example of the Fox letters is singular in that it has a happy ending. Thanks to the foresight of collector Reinhard Speck, this pivotal and revelatory record of Martineau's intellectual coming-of-age was rescued from the shredder and preserved for the use of scholars whose aim is, in Garnett's words, "to restore her to the place she ought to occupy" in literary, social, and intellectual history.

James Payn and Maria Weston Chapman also obeyed, but openly regretted, her stricture, claiming that no biography, autobiography, or memorial could match the energy and rhetorical power of Martineau's voice in her private letters. "I regret inexpressibly that [the] long journalizing letters of this period cannot...be made public," wrote Chapman. "Every letter is full of charm and instruction...They might all go to press as they stand, without a word of omission" (25-6). James Payn regrets having to "speak" for her, instead of letting her letters speak for themselves: "It is a great pity, for she discussed people and things that have an interest...that is most unusual" (95). Given her unsparingly critical self-assessments (her "Biographical Memoir," published in *Daily News* as her obituary, for example), Martineau vastly underestimated the significance of her life and work to literary history – a significance as eloquent in her private correspondence as in her publications. The wife of Charles Kingsley laments, "Alas! all

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<sup>20</sup> From a talk presented at the Institute of English Studies, University of London, 21 April 2007.

[Kingsley's letters] to Harriet Martineau, most important ones...are destroyed. But he would have said,...'Don't you think God would have let you have them if they were worth anything?'"<sup>21</sup> Martineau would have pointed out that God had nothing to do with it.

While explanations vary regarding her inflexibility on this point, violation of privacy is an obvious concern: "Epistolary correspondence is written speech....The most valuable conversation, and that which best illustrates character, is that which passes between two friends....How could human beings ever open their hearts and minds to each other, if there were no privacy guaranteed by principles and feelings of honour?" (AB 1:3-4). For her, letters are a vicarious substitute for two people sitting by the fire, engaged in intimate conversation, the full context of which is available only to them. The idea of publishing letters or, worse, of writing letters with a view toward posterity, constitutes a betrayal of the epistolary relation. Martineau's views on "Literary Lionism," shaped by her concern with fame's capacity to compromise one's ethical integrity, heighten the significance of preserving private letters from public eyes. Any mercenary concern with pecuniary profit aroused her deep disgust: hence, her critique of those who published letters in lieu of a proper autobiography; hence, her sharp rebuke of Frederick Knight Hunt's son, who sold her letters at auction to pay his debts. She categorically resists the exposure of letters that are "written from the heart" – adding pointedly, "and I write no others."

Another explanation for Martineau's defense of "freedom of epistolary speech" involves confrontations with mortality. An early example surfaces at the end of a long letter to her sister-in-law, Helen Bourne Martineau (1826). The letter discusses the fatal illness of Harriet's fiancé, John Worthington – issues of such profound seriousness that her question – "are my letters in safety?" – seems bizarrely timed and placed; as if embarrassed, she shifts to a bit of family news and abruptly concludes the letter. The outcome of this episode is unknown; but the crisis doubtless compelled her to think twice, for the remainder of her letter-writing life, before committing her most private thoughts to paper – which, once out of her hands, were also out of her control. Her plaintive "May I trust you to keep my letters to your self; & to forgive all marks of weakness you may find in them?" anticipates the more emphatic command she employs later in life: *entre nous, please*.

The next crisis occurred in America (1835-6), after her much-publicized alliance with the abolitionists earned her death-threats. With admirable bravado, her concern was less with her own well-being than with the safety of her letters and journals, the written record that would bear witness should the lynchers act on their threats. Several years later, the Tynemouth illness (1839-44) prompted her to think in more permanent terms of putting her worldly affairs in order.

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<sup>21</sup> Violet Martineau, *John Martineau: Pupil of Kingsley*, 136-37.

It was during this period that she issued her strongest statements on the sanctity of private letters; with some correspondents, this resulted in quite a bit of wrangling over the intersections of personal and professional relationships, emotional vulnerability and intellectual property, and the law. Given the ultimatum (1843) to destroy her letters or forfeit her correspondence, brother James refused to comply. In a more covert form of rebellion, he made a shorthand copy of over two decades of Harriet's letters to him and ostensibly disposed of the originals; Harriet continued corresponding with her sister-in-law Helen through 1851, when the Atkinson letters debacle permanently severed the relationship. James's shorthand is held at Harris-Manchester College, along with Coloe's transcriptions, made at R. K. Webb's request; given the margin for error possible through such an odd history, this material is interesting as a curiosity but has little other merit. In terms of the surviving texts, the transcriptions consist primarily of James's summaries and paraphrases of Harriet's letters, not direct quotations, with a particular focus on passages concerning him. Two other notable collections are relevant to this discussion: letters to Fanny Wedgwood, from a private collection, edited by Elisabeth Arbuckle (1983), and letters to Elizabeth Jesser Reid, which were employed by Margaret Tuke during the writing of *A History of Bedford College for Women* (1939), after which they disappeared. All that survives of the Reid letters is a handlist, available at Royal Holloway College, listing and summarizing several hundred pieces of "missing" Martineau correspondence – Garnett's frustration over thwarted scholarship and the loss to literary history comes to mind here.

With what strikes me as an amazing degree of patience, Martineau went to extreme lengths to clarify her position to Henry Crabb Robinson. "It never before entered my head to think whether my letters were good, bad, or indifferent:...My letters are all talk; & I cd not write them if they were not to be sacred to the friend to whom they are addressed." And again: "I see I have not made myself understood by you.... I discovered that my most private letters were kept labelled & prepared for publication after my death [who? James?]: & also that those who were corresponding with me on an agreement that letters shd not be kept had not kept the agreement on their side....I am in possession of 3 legal opinions...[that] the right of printing letters resides solely in the writer. I choose that my letters shall not be printed." And yet again: "Surely you do not think that the paper & ink part of letters is the enduring part wh the immortal mind craves....The enduring & valuable part of letters is the ideas in them. These are what I confide to my correspondts, – what becomes theirs for ever....[I have expressed] my wish with regard to the past, & my intention with regard to the future: ...And here I close this subject with hearty thanks to you for your tone, & for your promise as regards the future."

Her published commentary on the topic, also written during the Tynemouth period,

appeared in *Life in the Sickroom*. The book, addressed to “You, my fellow-sufferer, now lying on your couch” (79). The penny-post counteracts “the present action of our new civilization [which] works to the impairing of Privacy” (91). So central to her life and work was letter-writing that she regularly wrote copious letters and kept a filing system comprised of ten categories for preserving epistolary materials (*Memorials* 270); she wrote letters well past midnight, and when ill, dictated them to an amanuensis. She especially valued her role as recipient, for the psychological healing it afforded: “Post time is looked to for its sure freight of love and pity and good wishes.....Letters are one’s best company on that day, and best if they are one’s only company.” To Henry Crabb Robinson, she wrote: “I shd find all the comfort – all the freedom gone, if I had your idea of [letters];...There wd be an end of the flow of talk wh the post brings me every evg, & wh is the great solace of my life.” Her words offer a poignant reminder of the loneliness of chronic invalidism, exacerbated by deafness – difficult burdens for as inherently a social being as Harriet Martineau.

But this was not her final illness, and the transition to health and vigour was swift and dramatic. When she got up from her Tynemouth prone-couch in 1844, she confidently ordered that it be given away, as she had no further use for it. The period from 1845 through 1855 was remarkable for her unprecedented degree of health; this shift is best symbolized by gestures towards stability – building her permanent home, the Knoll, in Ambleside – and by travelling – in the Middle East, England, Scotland, and Ireland, while moving steadily into the journalism career that distinguished the last phase of her life. Correspondence with *Daily News* editor Frederick Knight Hunt reveals the writer at the height of her intellectual and physical powers as a woman of wit, confidence, and authority: “I think you will be glad perhaps of a woman’s word (under manly pretensions)...It is just a year now since you made me a “gentleman of the press,” – or Maid-of-all-work to D. News. I have enjoyed it very much, – the finding utterance for so much that was on my mind” (1853).

Her return from London in Winter 1855, after her diagnosis with heart-disease, marked the end of that vigorous decade: she never again left her Ambleside home. Convinced she would die at any moment, she resigned herself to invalidism; but quite in character, her “need of utterance” manifested itself in the form of books (about a dozen volumes) and periodical articles (well over 1,000). Her first act as an invalid was to complete her over 900-page *Autobiography* (printed in 1856, and therefore lacking an account of the last 21 years of her life); this she offers as the definitive version of her life in lieu of the letters she assumes have been destroyed. Interestingly, the frequent plea “(entre nous, please)” in her letters suggests that even her most loyal recipients needed perpetual prompting if “the institution of private epistolary

correspondence is to be guarded” (DN 22 March 1859).

As both a reader and a writer, Martineau understood the literary appeal of the epistolary format; the directness, immediacy, and spontaneity of this style made it a highly effective vehicle for a number of her works written for publication. She was born into a letter-writing culture, where correspondence maintained familial relations from a distance, and letters were shared with family and circulated among friends and neighbours. At a young age, she learned of the efficacy of the epistolary format when brother James left home for university. While she valued this correspondence for its capacity to maintain the siblings’ emotional connection, it was also a means for assuaging her hunger for knowledge, enabling her vicariously to participate in James’s expanding intellectual horizons. She found the instructive capacity of regular correspondence so compelling that she attempted (unsuccessfully) to establish a girls’ correspondence-school in the late 1820s.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, she began her literary apprenticeship by writing for the *Monthly Repository* and corresponding regularly with its editor, William J. Fox. Intellectual authority thus shifted from James Martineau to Fox, whose mentorship afforded her “the greatest intellectual progress” she made prior to publishing the *Illustrations of Political Economy*; more important, it was Fox’s guidance that enabled her to become her own intellectual authority.

The literary profession during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century offered a tough field to enter and to survive in, especially for women; sexist and classist critics, pompous moralizers, and sanctimonious “women’s missionaries” compelled Martineau to cultivate psychological resilience in order to maintain her professional integrity and inner composure. Perhaps her ability to adapt in this rough-and-tumble, competitive discipline was predicated on the preservation of her privacy in other regards – writing, hermit-like, “From the Mountain,” transforming the Knoll into a sanctuary impervious to unwanted celebrity-hunters, protecting her correspondence from prying eyes. Further, the social alienation of deafness and chronic invalidism suggests that one whose world is not only silent but also circumscribed by medical management has a more legitimate claim than most to preserve the privacy of epistolary “talk.” And yet, no text from her pen speaks with greater eloquence than the words that were most assuredly never written for publication. In our era, in which e-mail and instant-messaging are the norm, and from which the social rites of epistolary correspondence have all but disappeared, even Harriet Martineau might approve our vicarious participation in “the private conversation of distant friends” – *entre nous*, of course.

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<sup>22</sup> When compelled to be self-supporting, HM could be neither governess nor music teacher because of her deafness. The correspondence course seemed a viable alternative, but there were no applicants to her advertisement.

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***Harriet Martineau Protests from Ambleside, 1866-1876*** by Elisabeth Arbuckle

Harriet Martineau's respected role as a strident supporter of worthy causes is often thought to have ended when she retired from the *Daily News* in April 1866. Yet we know she left a series of pungent obituaries (including her own) with the editor, Thomas Walker, to be published when the time came. Robert Webb has pointed out that she came out of retirement in 1868 to review a book on the 17th-century Salem witchcraft trials. This last effort stemmed from a book review in the New York *Nation* of a work by the Reverend Charles Upham of Massachusetts. Writing briskly to Henry Reeve, her cousin and editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, she asserted that thousands were "in the lunatic asylums of U. S.," while certain people in Britain were doing their best "to bring us to the same pass, by their so-called study & practice of 'Spiritualism.'" Not many editors would have the courage to publish "a really philosophical article on this unexplored province of human nature," she dared him. Yet the practices of the spiritualists were "almost as fearful as 'Witchcraft in Salem'" (she'd forgotten until reminded by Jenny that *she* had reviewed Upham's earlier, slighter, account of Salem witchcraft for the *Monthly Repository* in 1832). Arguing the significance of Upham's new book, she added that *she* had *no* doubt about "the power of thought-reading, of insight into bodily conditions, of discerning things distant, & *things future*," but that following this first stage, came a second stage when "the imagination & will get involved" and "the fatal last stage,--of invention w<sup>h</sup> is presently imposture." Her old friend Hallam was "the best man on the subject, she suggested. He had "studied the whole matter in Paris" and would be "fearless, outspoken, but moderate & *civil* in discussing it."<sup>23</sup> In the end, Reeve evidently twisted Martineau's arm, and she duly wrote up the review of Upham for the *Edinburgh* of July 1868.

Another well known incident of Martineau's coming out of retirement involved the series of letters to the *Daily News* in 1869 on behalf of Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts--this being a feminist cause of the first rank. In June of that same year, she'd helped to avoid a serious international incident by sending the *Daily News* a list of Confederate ships built in Britain during the American Civil War (a breach of Britain's stance of neutrality and a *causi belli* among American radicals). The resulting *Daily News* leader showed

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<sup>23</sup> *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau*, ed. Deborah Anna Logan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007) [henceforth *CL*] 5: 200-202, 202-205.



that only one ship--the *Alabama*, for which compensation had been paid--was technically open to a charge of belligerency towards the North.<sup>24</sup>

One of Martineau's "letters" to the *Daily News*, in December 1870, alerted readers to the dangerously weak-minded "Future Emperor of Germany," self-willed but under the spell of Bismarck, who had just engineered the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>25</sup>

Martineau's increasing discomfort and illness after 1866 meant that though her public statements became rarer, her *letters* showed no diminution of outrage at social, national and international wrongs. In May 1869, for example, she answered Sarah Martineau--who'd begged her opinion on current affairs--by complaining of "the vastness of the subject . . . so agitating that I dare not dwell upon it," but then plunging into a litany of worrying topics: a Continental war, "wide-spread & desperate [was] impending," while an American war was also probable "at the shortest notice,--vulnerable as we are at present in Ireland, our N. Amer<sup>n</sup> colonies, & the West Indies." The former American ambassador (Reverdy Johnson) knowing nothing of diplomacy, was "violent & indiscreet & insulting," nor could Motley (who succeeded him) keep his temper, pleasant as he was as a literary man. The "frontier fishery quarrel," between the United States and Canada, was getting worse daily; "the organisation of War office & the army hardly begun;" and Ireland was "abundantly desperate." All this, "just when we are involved in the vital struggle between the employers & employed [and] in the very first step in the new path of democratic gov<sup>t</sup> . . . manufactures & trade are in the lowest depression." Pauperism had increased and the working-class, "hitherto . . . our hope & pride," was rotting away. "At such a time, we have no statesmen" except the thoroughly unpredictable Gladstone. Bright was worse than no statesman, "so conservative that he dares not touch anything." Finally, there was "a black outlook as regards the Royal family" (i. e., the heir apparent), her concern being "purely & wholly for the country." The only *good* news was that her *Biographical Sketches* was "spreading every where," having been reviewed for a second time in both the *Spectator* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the reviewers "laying hold of the particular point of that [second] Preface pleases me exceedingly,"<sup>26</sup> she noted smugly. In the Preface to the second edition of *Biographical Sketches* dated April 1869, Martineau turned to a matter she had "most at heart,--the true principle of Biographical delineation." Men and women "of social prominence enough to be subjects of

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<sup>24</sup> "The Contagious Diseases Acts, [I]. II. III," *Daily News*, 28, 29, 30 December 1869 (for this and all other *Daily News* articles, see Appendix, *Harriet Martineau in the London "Daily News"*, ed. Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle (New York: Garland, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> "The Future Emperor of Germany," *Daily News*, 26 December 1870.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Martineau (née Greenhow), widow of Harriet Martineau's cousin George Martineau; *CL* 5: 250-52.

published Biography" had given themselves to society "for better for worse." The *characters* of distinguished men and women were more important than what they *did*. For a biographer to tell "what a man did, and to conceal or falsify what he was," was wrong. Solace to mourners was no excuse for overpraise; faults should not be charitably hidden, and "the lustre of intellectual ability" should not blind the biographer.

Macmillan had published both first and second editions of *Biographical Sketches*, and by March 1869, Martineau had begun to inundate him with titles of her other past works that might be republished. Who owned the copyright of her *Letter to the Deaf*, she wondered, supposing it was Tait, "who died 4 years ago." Should she ask Knight if Tait made it over to her or to him when it was reprinted? Knight was "extremely infirm," but she might ask his son, Barry, or his wife. Her story, "The Billow and the Rock," was Knight's property, she knew, but had he sold the copyrights along with the *Weekly Volume*? "I wonder who has the 'Playfellow'," she went on. How her *Forest and Game Law Tales* would read now she didn't know, but *the* book of hers to reissue was *Eastern Life, Present and Past*. Moxon's death had "spoiled its career when it reached a 3<sup>d</sup> edition" (a rather hard-hearted claim). According to reports from Eastern travelers, *Eastern Life* now seemed to have been pirated and sold as a guide book. Yet the copyright was hers (CL 5: 244-45).

When Martineau's "good doctor," Mr. Shepherd, died in 1871, she advised neighbors about a memorial fund for his headstone. Shepherd had left a young family--the eldest boy, Jemmy, was very ill, and there were sisters of twelve and thirteen and a baby of nine months--but Martineau suggested they wait to hear the family circumstances before taking further action. Meanwhile, she felt satisfied with Mr. King, who had been assisting Shepherd. King's "beautiful little wife" was in bliss with her baby, Martineau purred. And King's sister wanted to be a nurse in the Liverpool Workhouse Infirmary, where Agnes Jones (installed by Florence Nightingale) had served as matron (*further* proof of the King family's excellence).

Martineau "very seldom" passed a day "without writing letters,--or a letter," she told Reeve in 1871. Recently, Nicholas Trubner had asked repeatedly about republishing her translation of Comte. Other regular correspondents just then included (later Sir) John Robinson of the *Daily News* and old friends like Lady Henrietta Maria Stanley, the Beaufort sisters and Harriet Grote.

Martineau dreaded hearing of deaths by smallpox, she told Rosa Beaufort in June 1871. There had been a case at Grasmere and one at Ambleside. *Her household* had all been vaccinated, but had Rosa seen any in her travels? The disease was bad in Berlin in spite of vaccination, she'd heard. Sunspots were said to be the cause.

At the end of that June, she fired off advice to Reeve: "I am so struck by a topic & materials for its treatment . . . that I shall be haunted by it till I have suggested it to an Editor or two." Though not thinking of writing it herself any more than she could "mount Helvellyn," she thought he might give the work to one of his "very ablest hands." In the weekly New York *Nation* had appeared notice of a report of the Massachusetts "Bureau of Labour Statistics" which opened up "some of the most interesting & *vital* questions" of the time. She was frightened to see "the ignorant eagerness with w<sup>h</sup> our people,--Irish & English workfolk,--are emigrating, to the U.S<sup>s</sup> instead of our North Amer<sup>n</sup> colonies." They were unaware of "the dearness of living in the U. S<sup>s</sup>, the crushing taxation, the declining agriculture, manufacture & commerce, & wages, & the truly appalling hostility . . . between capitalists & labourers." As proof, she cited the declining cotton and shoe manufactures--the latter owing to the importation of Chinese products. She could add the fishing interest, "so closely concerned with the new Washington Treaty: & the Shipping interest,--ruined by the Tariffs of late years." Such an article *must* tell of "the war in the coalfields of Pennsylvania" as well as of the "prospects of Western Agriculture, & settlement of European emigrants, under the Homestead law or otherwise." The "formidable & embarrassing" decline in wealth of the United States, "& the ignorance of polit<sup>l</sup> economy on the part of the 'Workies,'" made her, "like many others," almost despair "for the great Republic." Attention should be drawn to the persistent mistake of "our emigrating class in going to the U. S<sup>s</sup> instead of Canada," she ended, for the Irish were "a dreadful curse to the U. S<sup>s</sup>," while "German labour" seemed "likely to swamp all other" (CL 5: 293-95, 291-93).

Writing to Josephine Butler in December 1872, Martineau diverged from the all-absorbing Contagious Diseases Acts to the failure of common justice for dissenters. A new example (featured in *Punch*) showed "how badly the present system of dole by favour or caprice" worked. Was Butler aware "that thieves, & police, & low attorneys" now ascertained those "who cannot get justice?" And that "some of us,--& I for one,--have been pointed out in a newspaper as safe subjects for burglary, garrotting &" (CL 5: 316).

In 1873, the election of Birmingham school boards became an issue of intense interest to Martineau, partly because her nephew Frank was involved. No election in the country was of "so much consequence," she declared. Cleverly, the Birmingham people had printed "as a prodigious poster, a passage from the Queen's book about the Dublin schools [on] the true Christian way of combining religious education, where desired, with liberty of conscience." Such a sentiment was crucial to *her* philosophy of education. A still lively enthusiasm for reform was furthermore matched by her satisfaction in a well-run household: "Our superb meal-fed pig weighs nearly nineteen stone," she boasted, and she'd just had the ivy "clipped close; in mercy

to the small birds" (*Autobiography* 3: 418-19).

As a biographer, Martineau looked at new lives of her contemporaries with an eagle eye. John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* in 1873 she deemed "far too exclusively occupied by his personal relations with Forster" and likely to "lower Dickens in popular estimation." In Forster's second volume, she'd been "struck by Dickens's hysterical restlessness [which] must have been terribly wearing to his wife." Dickens's friends ought to have seen that "his brain was in danger,-- from apoplexy, not insanity." But how completely the women in Dickens's family were ignored by Forster! Indeed, the whole impression left by the work was very melancholy, especially that Dickens entirely "opposed and criticised all existing legal plans for the relief of the poor" (i. e., the new Poor Law, which had caused the end of *her* relations with Dickens) (*Autobiography* 3: 416-17). Next exchanging views on new books with Harriet Grote, in late December 1873 Martineau described Sara Coleridge's letters as "melancholy," while the first volume of Mary Somerville's autobiography was "amusing if superficial." She had known Sara Coleridge little, but Mary Somerville *well*, she said. In dispensing "scientific" information, Somerville remained *cheerful* and unworried about an "intermediate state" (after death), unlike Coleridge. And Martineau looked forward to Grote's new volume of her "minor pieces."

By 1874, Martineau had admittedly slowed down. When an American, Henry Wilson (Republican senator from Massachusetts and former member of Lincoln's cabinet) sent her his book, "History of the Slave Power in the United States," which she'd received "from the hands [her] friend, M<sup>r</sup> Forster," she wrote to say she rejoiced in "the quality & the effects of the great work you have given to the world," but feared she could not help the world to appreciate it, being "too far advanced in my illness."<sup>27</sup>

Yet a year later, she was concerned with getting her volume, *The Martyr Age*, to Forster's daughter, Frances. She'd corresponded with more and more of her friends' daughters over the years, including Louisa Jeffrey McKee's daughter, Ellen (Louisa had been her companion on the American journey). In November 1875 (eight months before her death), she wrote to Ellen about the republishing of *Eastern Life* by an American company. That day had arrived "the proof of the two Prefaces," and if Ellen's mother could "*conveniently* spare her copy [of the work] while the printing goes on," Martineau (who did not have a copy of the second edition) would be grateful. "For type, paging &c I must begin with the later imprint." On a personal note, she'd been "slightly annoyed" in her neighborhood at Ambleside just then, "by the presence of a crazy Amer<sup>n</sup> woman,-'Miss Harriet Shippen of Phil<sup>a</sup>,' who insists that she saw me there,--for w<sup>h</sup> she is not old enough. She seems *very* poor, & is certainly too odd to be sane"

(perhaps Harriet Shippen of Philadelphia thought Martineau's mind was slipping and that she'd offer her money--but Shippen must have come in for a rude shock). That Ellen had been to France and "seen *some* of the beauties of poor Paris," Martineau was "heartily glad;" but "I wish the Commune had let you see them all first" (the violent populist government of the French capital after the end of the Franco-Prussian war disgusted her).<sup>28</sup>

Martineau had had to close her long letter to Maria Chapman, in January of 1876, to finish knitting a bassinet blanket for the baby of a friend of her niece Harriet--the baby having come before the blanket was ready! And just two weeks before she died, Martineau answered Maria Chapman's queries about Macaulay: Trevelyan (Macaulay's biographer) had "done his work as well as an adoring nephew . . . could be reasonably expected to;" Macaulay was kindly and generous and less vulgar than many supposed, "but he was not lofty in views," and his slander of William Penn was *never* retracted (CL 5: 351-52).

As had happened earlier, Martineau had the last word on one of her contemporaries.

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<sup>27</sup> Library of Congress Henry Wilson Papers 02115-2545 ff. 195-96.

<sup>28</sup> John Rylands University Library, Manchester, English MS C B1/24.

***The Martineau Society***

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