

Chapter 8

Last of the Series a Let-down, but Martineau's Reputation Intact (1834)

After the dazzling success of her first series, Martineau seemed to experience a let down. She felt burdened by work and loss of energy and was becoming "fastidious & frightened" though "rising still in consideration & influence," she told Fox. The Government's free offering of materials now gave her a fine opportunity of "finding fault with them to their faces." Two more *Illustrations of Taxation* were left to plan "& four only to execute." Her "Letter to the Deaf" aroused deep excitement over the "love" she received. One admirer married to "a rich lover of art" sent her a picture she had admired in the "British Gallery." How did Fox and "poor M^{rs} Gaskell" get on? Lately she had longed for a visit from "Liese," but if "Liese" cannot come, she "must try & come to her."¹

In the last week of April, Martineau paid two visits to the Metropolitan Lunatic Asylum for paupers, run by Dr. and Mrs. William Ellis. Acting as an investigative reporter, she then produced "The Hanwell Lunatic Asylum" for *Tait's*, treating an emotion-laden subject objectively to draw the public's attention "to one of the noblest discoveries that philanthropy ever made." In the Ellis's institution, patients performed domestic tasks but were not chained or put in straitjackets, only a few having their arms "gently confined." Rich lunatics needed similar "free action, variety of scene, and social sympathy," she urged. Governors and servants of such institutions should be trained; women could be equal participants but must possess intellect as well as kind hearts. In June after the article had come out, she begged Tait for six copies to give to "that great lunatic-keeper the Chancellor, & some other influential people." This would be her last paper for him until she returned from America. He would be glad to hear that "the Hanwell has been busy with visitors" and that "the head Poor Law Commiss^r in Ireland has got a bundle of your last month's Mag^{ne} to distribute [there], where insanity is very common."

As Martineau prepared to investigate similar public institutions in America, her enlightened view of social work caught the eye of Lady Noel Byron. Martineau's appeal for the mentally ill "must have a powerful effect," Lady Byron wrote, and she was sorry to have met her so near the time of her leaving for America.²

The second of Martineau's five tales on taxation, *The Tenth Haycock*, appeared in May. Using historical figures and customs, Martineau attempts to expose the absurdities and wrongs of tithing. The tale opens with the annual "perambulation" by a vicar who spends his days studying Greek and doesn't know the boundaries of his rural parish so must follow the wardens and parishioners as they parade crazily through houses and gardens. Further incongruities in the system appear in a Quaker widow and her sons who efficiently run the abbey farm (owned by a deist) and by the paid tithe agent who harasses them. Even the vicar's little daughter is forbidden to make her own small haycock, the "tenth" being owed to the parish. Martineau's quirky characters seem oddly convincing, but the *Spectator* deemed *The Tenth Haycock*, "not, upon the whole," one of her most successful tales.³

In mid-May, Brougham again asked Martineau to come to see him, possibly about saving the Whig Poor Law bill. Her social life was flourishing too. On a Saturday, for example, she offered to call on Fanny Wedgwood and her new baby before she dined out.⁴

When James was in London to deliver an anniversary sermon at Fox's South Place chapel for the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, he may have suggested that Martineau invite the two unmarried Yates sisters, his parishioners, to go with her to America. Outlining the particulars to "Miss Yates," Martineau wrote that the cost would be £400, and that ladies could travel safely in America. She hoped to see most of the east coast, the south and the "west." Pleasantly, she already held "introductions to every place, & . . . offers of unbounded hospitality."⁵

Martineau's next two taxation tales, inspired by Inglis's book on the Channel Islands, appeared in June and July. *The Jerseymen Meeting* and *The Jerseymen Parting* begin and end among Druidical temples, idyllic green lanes, snug farmhouses, blossoming orchards and picturesque castle ruins. The members of a farming family on the island prosper from the local shipping, only occasionally paying taxes. They hear mistakenly that there are no taxes in England, and when an uncle leaves them a pottery factory in Lambeth they decide to emigrate. In London, however, they dislike the smells, dust and noise, while the father finds that he must pay a bewildering array of excise taxes in his new business. At the end of the first tale, the father and son are called into court for failing to follow the strict excise tax laws. A narrator tells of past taxes that were ruinous to English industry, and the characters voice anomalies of the present system.⁶

In *The Jerseymen Parting*, the son flees; the father refuses to pay a fine and goes to prison. From there he writes a long letter to the king outlining the wasteful expenses of tax-collecting. His daughter is to deliver the letter but is meanwhile called into court for illegally making tea from local shrubs. Jersey friends advising her to dress like an innocent Jersey peasant, she gets off lightly. Disenchanted with life in England, however, mother and daughter set sail for Jersey. On the way they encounter the son, now a smuggler, who argues the moral right to break bad laws. In attempting to exonerate her characters, Martineau cites the bewildering excise regulations imposed on ordinary citizens. In the final pages, perhaps to enhance her not-very-credible melodrama, Martineau portrays St. Paul's as seen from the Thames, the bleak landscape of the Channel Islands and the islanders' festive gathering of "vraic" (seaweed), which is dried and used as fuel and manure.⁷

Her earlier sense of optimism revived, in July Martineau wrote to Isaac Goldsmid. "I hope that even such a barbarous defeat as that of the other night will not dishearten you." She trusted that the "disgrace of the exclusion of the Jews" from Parliament would soon be remedied.

Racing to tidy away her commitments, Martineau learned that Fox's marital problems had reached a new crisis. The unhappy Eliza Florance Fox had "confided her troubles to several members of [his] congregation," and a group took it upon themselves to look over Fox's private correspondence and household accounts, no doubt seeking evidence of improper conduct with Lizzie Flower. On 15 August Fox tendered his resignation in protest against "the evils . . . of domestic inquisition." London journals reprinted Fox's letter, and on 7 September a snide paragraph headed "The Fox and the Flower" appeared in the *London Sunday Times*. Fox insisted that his unpopular opinions such as advocating divorce on the basis of incompatibility

were the cause of his troubles. In September a large majority of the congregation convinced him to withdraw his resignation, and he arranged a formal separation from his wife. In the following January, Fox moved with Lizzie Flower and two of his three children to the country village of Bayswater. While continuing to preach at the South Place chapel until 1852, he no longer used the title Reverend.⁸

(When Lizzie Flower's younger sister, Sarah, married the railway engineer William Bridges Adams, Lizzie turned to Harriet Taylor as confidante, pouring out her anguish at the "wretchedness of this state," from which she was "sick at heart.")

Though Martineau's role as Lizzie's loving intimate had waned, she later wrote to Fox from America saying, "Lizzie has done what was due to my friendship for her, & told me all." Though she strongly disapproved of his conduct, her "respect & friendship" for Fox remained "precisely what they were before." Towards his wife, who had shown "great cordiality" to her, Martineau felt sympathy, as "one of the most miserable of beings, struggling under injury, as well as troubles of her own infliction." Fox's consolation, she added, must be "in the consciousness of doing what you think is right."

(James was commendably sympathetic. Staying with Fox in 1827 he noted: "Mrs. Fox was at her very worst in her relations with him." When Fox was expelled by the London area association of Presbyterian [Unitarian] ministers in spring 1835, James offered to help arrange for him to come into his neighborhood "for a visit.")⁹

Shortly before Martineau was to leave London, the last Poor Law tale, *The Land's End*, appeared. Set in Cornwall among neat cottages and gardens owned by miners of the Wheel Virgin copper mine during the difficult times of 1818, the tale depicts colorful local mining processes. The plot concerns a hard-working miner, a Methodist lay preacher, who almost loses his cottage and garden when his allotted seam fails to produce ore. High poor rates burden all members of the community while a few privileged individuals benefit from cheap pauper labor. Finally, the stalwart "lady" of the town procures a re-rating commission to adjust property assessments, ending the over-use of pauper labor. Having bid on a new mine, the hero hires a local grandfather called "Daddy" to "douse" with a forked stick for a copper lode. A festive scene on the downs ends the story.

(In a brisk note to Coates on 1 July, Martineau defended her mining terminology and "the divining rod story." Meanwhile, the *Spectator* declared the tale to be about abuses of the labor-rate and law of settlement, as well as voicing a protest against the Duke of Richmond's idea of making paupers work for those who did not want them.¹⁰)

Martineau's last taxation tale, *The Scholars of Arneside*, came out in August. In the preface dated 1 July 1834, she said she wished to show "unjust, odious and unprofitable" methods of taxation but was writing *faster* than was convenient, finishing the tale two days before she left London. Now she would be silent for a long time.

That she had promised Fox the manuscript of "taxes on Knowledge" may have hindered her in working out the plot. Treating issues like primogeniture, class snobbishness and education vs. superstition, the contrived-seeming tale features a widowed nurse who can only afford to send her three children to *Sunday* school. The two younger, sheep-herder children attend only on alternate Sundays and after a few years almost *forget* how to read. The better-educated elder son works in a paper mill, learns shorthand and writes a pamphlet against the excise tax on paper, which limits the spread of knowledge. He plans a book on shorthand but

cannot publish it because his earlier work was not stamped. Moving to a larger town he then becomes secretary to the Mechanics Institute. His weekly newspaper opposes the duty on shipping that puts England at a disadvantage with other countries as well as opposing taxes like those on property insurance and newspaper advertisements. The local MP (whose mother *his* mother has cared for) offers him a bribe to stop publication, but he refuses. At the end, the widow's younger son goes to prison for belonging to a "secret lodge" (i.e., a union), which his sister helped to publicize, and the widow is attacked by a mob for being a "witch." Ignorance and the lack of access to information have brought about the ruin of the family.¹¹

In her autobiography, Martineau recorded a heady rush of attention from government figures over the taxation tales. Various callers further demanded her attention before she left, and uncorrected proofs followed her "from place to place." Even James Mill now "made the frankest possible acknowledgment of the mistake . . . that political economy could not be conveyed in fiction" and asked if she planned a book about the Americans--which she denied. Her first object was rest, she claimed, and to escape the role of "literary lion." That she was sought and made much of was making life at home difficult, and friends counseled her "to go without any misgiving." No doubt to Martineau's relief, Elizabeth quickly found a third lady to share expenses with Aunt Lee and herself (staying on at Fludyer Street, Elizabeth was to manage even without the stipend Martineau provided). With Ellen, Martineau would soon depart for visits to Birmingham, Derbyshire and Liverpool.¹²

"I sail on Friday next" Martineau wrote hurriedly to Richard Potter from Liverpool in early August. Thanking him for his "few kind lines" (probably in letters of introduction) she vowed she was "much pleased" with their vessel, "Capⁿ James" having desired his best regards to Potter. Throughout the summer, Martineau had asked anyone she could think of for letters of introduction to Americans. From Mary Somerville, for example, she secured a letter to Prof. Farrar at Harvard. When she met actor William Charles Macready for the first time at Anna Jameson's in June, she must have hinted at a letter. Macready begged her address from their mutual friend Abraham Hayward and called on her briefly in July. He promised "letters with the power of delivering [to whomever] she might feel convenient."

During Martineau's continuing social life at least one small party was held at Fludyer Street on 26 June. Moreover, word of her plans caused both publishers Richard Bentley and John Murray to approach her about a book on America. The finances of her journey had already been planned, however, and on 4 August she authorized her cousin Richard, or Isaac Goldsmid, "to receive . . . the £175 still due to me" from the SDUK, Goldsmid having included that sum "in a letter of credit on an American house."¹³

¹ HM to WJF, 25 [24?] April 1834, CL 1: 242-43; HM to Elizabeth Gaskell, Saturday [28 April?] 1832, HM/FL 13-14.

² HM to "Madam," 26 April [1834], BANC [Box 1] 71; HM to William Tait, 1 May and 30 June 1834, CL 1: 243-44 and 247-48; "The Hanwell Lunatic Asylum," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 5 o.s. (June 1834): 305-10; Lady Noel Byron [henceforth LyB] to HM, June 1834, BANC [Box 5] 66; Martineau was to devote a half-page to the Hanwell asylum in *History of the Peace* (1: 569).

³ *Spec.*, 10 May 1834: 447; Martineau's study of tithing may have helped prepare for her battle against church rates at Ambleside twenty-four years later.

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- ⁴ HM to FW, [May 1834], *HM/FW* 1 (Fanny's baby, named for her father, the distinguished historian Sir James Mackintosh, was nicknamed "Macky" or "Bro").
- ⁵ James spoke on 21 May 1834 (Drummond and Upton 1: 82); HM to [Anna Maria] Yates, 30 May 1834, *CL* 1: 246-47 (Anna Maria and Jane Ellen, daughters of John Yates, former minister of the Paradise Street chapel; James had accompanied the sisters on a tour of the continent the summer before).
- ⁶ Henry David Inglis, *The Channel Islands: Jersey, Guernsey, etc.* (London: Whittaker, 1834).
- ⁷ The *Spectator* waited until January to quote a long passage from the story yet pronounced Martineau's series "unparalleled in the history of literature" (*Spec.*, 4 January 1834: 13-14).
- ⁸ HM to Isaac Goldsmid, July 1834, *CL* 1: 249.
see Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent*, 188-96.
- ⁹ [HM to WJF, see *CL* 2: vii]; *The Land's End* anticipated Martineau's articles on industrial processes in *Household Words*, 1854-1855 (see, for example, *Auto.* 2, 385-88).
- ¹⁰ HM to Thomas Coates, [1 July 1834], *CL* 1: 249; *Spec.*, 2 August 1834: 737.
- ¹¹ *The Scholars of Arneside*, [Preface v-vi]; HM to WJF, [9 August 1833], *CL* 1: 206-208; the *Spectator* noted simply publication of the work (*Spec.*, 16 August 1834: 780).
- ¹² *Auto.* 2: 1-4.
- ¹³ HM to Richard Potter, 4 August 1834, *CL* 1: 250; the ship in fact sailed under another captain; MS Mary Somerville Letter, Schlesinger Library, Radcliff College; *The Diaries of William Charles Macready* [entries for 13 June, 4 and 12 July 1834], ed. William Toynbee (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912) 1: 153-54, 161 and 164; Hayward was a lawyer, writer and translator of *Faust*; see HM to Miss Bayley, [19 June 1834], *HM/FL* 20; for Bentley, see *Auto.* 2: 2 (Murray had cornered the market on guidebooks for travellers); Martineau was later approached by Harper and by the editors of several American periodicals in New York--all of whom she turned down; HM to SDUK, Thomas Coates, 4 August [1834], *CL* 1: 250.