

The Martineau Society

Newsletter No. 29

Summer 2011

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Editor's Note

The excitement of the Royal wedding at the end of April has subsided. Here in Great Britain, toasts to the young couple were generally universal and the extra day's holiday was well received. In this sleepy part of Norfolk, there was an extra golf tournament and, at least, one more game of cricket.

For the Martineau Society, we have now the opportunity to reflect on the marriage of one Kate Middleton to the prince some two steps from the British crown. For according to Press reports of researches into Kate's family, she comes from a family of Unitarian dissenters (although our own Alan Middleton denies any knowledge of his connection). More, it seems Kate is directly descended from a sibling of Harriet and James Martineau. Just what would Harriet and James, given their lifetimes of arguments and struggles with the British Establishment, have made of Kate's marriage and ennoblement as Duchess of Cambridge?

Your newsletter has one further paper, "Harriet Martineau: Journalist Extraordinaire" by Elisabeth Arbuckle, from the Society's 2010 Conference at Ambleside. Your Editor had hoped for more and is grateful to Alan Middleton to be able to publish a paper he gave to the 2008 Conference. He hopes that you, Dear Reader, will forgive him using unexpected and undeserved space in this newsletter to include a most partial resume of the Ambleside Conference. Despite the Lake District weather, it was a happy success and encourages very high expectations of the Society's 2011 Conference at Tynemouth. You can be sure the Editor will pursue the speakers at Tynemouth assiduously to publish their papers in future newsletters. As ever, the undoubted errors in this newsletter are all his own.

"Harriet Martineau, Journalist Extraordinaire"

Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle

On New Year's Day 1856, William Weir, editor of the *Daily News*, sent Harriet Martineau high praise for her autobiography, saying not one word should be altered. "Judging by my recollections," Weir wrote in his scrawling hand, "I think you underrate some of your works of fiction. This document--and all your notes--make me regret more & more that I have made your acquaintance so late." More

even than her talents, Weir admired Martineau's "moral courage, truthfulness, and abiding sense of duty," as well as her "fearless assertion of opinions." If permitted, he would retain the "MS" as one of his most valued treasures (Weir was not the only friend to have read the two volumes of *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography* before publication--another being Richard Monckton Milnes (but that's another story).¹

Weir continued to ply Martineau with ideas and compliments. "My dear M^{rs} Harriet," he began on 12 March, "I am glad you have turned your attention to the epidemic character of crime." The subject had been "floating" in his head for some time, and he now felt it was in "better hands" (on 14 March [two days later], Martineau's leader addressed scientific methods of solving crimes like the frequent wife poisonings). On that day, moreover, a friend had spoken "in high terms" of Martineau's recent leader on Egypt. Within a week Weir had dashed off two more letters. "I know not what I should do without your aid," he avowed, but remembered to ask about her pear trees at The Knoll. On the 19th, Weir lamented "the *bureaucracy* of Exeter Hall" (on 24 March, Martineau then decried spendthrift charities). Owing to her practical, no-nonsense attitude towards writing for a living, Martineau tried in her journalism to accommodate her editors: she *usually* followed their advice and often struck up close personal relationships with the men and their families.²

William Weir was not Martineau's first editor at the *Daily News*. In April 1852, then editor Frederick Knight Hunt had asked Martineau through a "literary" friend to send him occasional leaders (editorials), a demanding genre she had not yet tried. During that spring Martineau had not been idle. In addition to translating Comte, she was writing articles for Dickens's *Household Words* and a review of the German historian Niebuhr for the *Westminster Review*. In her free time, she gave evening talks to her workless neighbors on emigration to Australia--seen as a pressing relief for England's over-abundant population. With Hunt, Martineau exchanged "frank and copious letters" and soon perceived that writing for a newspaper "might be an opening to greater usefulness than . . . anything else I could undertake." Hunt then printed six of Martineau's leaders on Australia, but at the end of June she demurred: "We are not getting along very well,--are we?" Her papers were not exactly what he wanted, and she wished for a lesson from him "to learn something of what your paper was before I saw it."

3

Aimed at middle-class readers, the *Daily News* had been launched in 1846 to support "progress and improvement, of education, civil and religious liberty, and equal legislation"--all objects dear to Martineau's heart. In the last week of July 1852, Hunt arranged to meet Martineau in Scotland at the home of the Samuel Browns in Portabello outside Edinburgh. There pouring forth his ideas for two half days, Hunt evidently established deep rapport with his new contributor (Martineau's niece Susan fled outside during their conversations, to recover "her mind's breath"). In fact, Martineau had already accepted an extended

assignment from Hunt: a series of travel "letters" from Ireland to report on social, economic and political conditions there. Ultimately, Hunt published twenty-seven of Martineau "letters" dating from 13 August to 14 October 1852.⁴

Meanwhile, on "June 1st. 1852," as Martineau noted in her autobiography, she had attained "sufficient insight and familiarity" with Comte to write what was to stand. Before leaving home, she had also received invitations from "various seats of manufacture" to be written up for Dickens's *Household Words*, comprising:

Paisley shawls . . . when I was in Scotland, at the same time with Paperhangings ('Household Scenery') and 'News of an old Place,'--the Lead works at 'Leadhills.' From Scotland . . . I passed into Ireland [and] at the Giant's Causeway, 'the Life of a Salmon;' and afterwards 'Peatal Aggression,'--the Peat Works near Athy; the 'English Passport System,'--Railway ticket manufacture; 'Triumphant Carriages.'--Messrs. Hutton's Coach factory at Dublin: 'Hope with a Slate Anchor,'--the slate quarries in Valentia: 'Butter,' 'the Irish Union,' a workhouse picture; and 'Famine-time,' a true picture of one of the worst districts, at the worst time of the visitation.

Happily, Martineau found "Capital tenants" for The Knoll, she told her friend at Sawrey, Frances Ogden. All were adults, "who won't spill milk on the carpets, or send a ball through the window:--& all ladies but one." During their travels, she and Susan (Robert's eldest daughter) would have "a charming home at Dublin" with the Richard Webbs, "(ci-devant) quakers" turned Unitarians, "old correspondents of mine, & hearty friends." However, she didn't mean to "tell any of the mouldy old Unitarians there" (from whom her brother James had fled in 1832) of her coming.⁵

Martineau's "Letters from Ireland" fulfilled Hunt's expectations, and almost immediately on her return she plunged into an impressive range of added subjects: American expansionism, West Indian sugar, Catholics, working men, the Poor Law and the on-going abuse of British involvement in slave dealings. Sending Hunt a new type of article in late November, she explained: "I wrote this on Miss Berry after tea last night--I hope you can put it in . . . I think this notice will certainly carry D. N. where it is not likely to go otherwise." Yet she had not been able to "put [in] *all* about these 3 old ladies" (Mary Berry, her sister, Agnes, and their friend Lady Charlotte Lindsay), such as their "astonishing paint (red & white) & their swearing--eg, 'Oh! my God! where's my fan?'" Martineau's sharp but genial account became the first of a distinguished series of nearly fifty obituaries, including her own, to be published in the *Daily News*.⁶

Evidently pleased with her new source of income, Martineau soon tried still another kind of article for the *Daily News*. In January and February 1853, Hunt was to print three book reviews discussing essays by W. R. Greg, Richard

Cobden's "Letters" and (crucially) Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Although "Currer Bell's" third novel was "crowded with beauties," Martineau declared, the quantity of "subjective misery" was a drawback "of which we were anxious before." Like Balzac's female characters, "Currer Bell's . . . in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought--love." Worse, Martineau went on sourly, the heroine seemed "to have entertained a double love," or to leave the reader with that impression (the review ended Martineau's friendship with Brontë).⁷ Henceforth, besides obituaries and book reviews, Martineau continued to write on a vast range of subjects--currently on American, Irish, British and colonial topics as well as on the continuing efforts for an international copyright (not yet passed by the American Senate). By agreement with Hunt, Martineau's articles now appeared three times a week. Hunt met and took Martineau to his home in London in September 1854, where they agreed on a "glorious programme of work" to Christmas. Two months later, Hunt was dead of cholera. "One of the most upright and rational of men," a saddened Martineau described him in her autobiography.⁸

William Weir (introduced earlier) now took over as editor. During the Crimean War, he trusted Martineau to formulate the *Daily News's* anti-French but pro-hostilities stand. In 1857 following the Indian mutiny, he instigated what became her *British Rule in India* followed by *Suggestions towards the Future Government of India*. On rare occasions Weir balked. In October 1854 in the *Westminster Review*, Martineau had defended Sir James "Rajah" Brooke (the controversial developer of Sarawak in Malaysia), calling him "one of Nature's Princes." Weir, however, did not buy Martineau's penchant for hero worship. "I appeal to your philosophy," he began half-humorously. "Miss Martineau says that unless I take up the cudgels for Sir James she will cut me. Yet Miss Martineau is an honest woman [and] you will surely allow that a person may differ from you in his estimation of that gentleman & yet be honest."⁹ (No leader on Brooke by Martineau, as far as is known, appeared in the *Daily News*.) In May 1856, Weir warned that affairs had begun "to look complicated on the continent," and he "must fire off a double barrel with your ball cartridge one of these days." The Italians were hoping to drive out the Austrians, "Bunsen vows the second Punic war will begin," and Weir was inclined to believe Bunsen had "hit the mark." On 24 May, Martineau followed Weir's suggestion with a blistering attack on the Catholic "boy" emperor of Austria who had "chained" his fortunes to the sinking destinies of Rome.¹⁰

(In contrast to the prickly Weir, George Smith--who published several *collections* of Martineau's *Daily News* leaders--was polite, warm and gentlemanly, though not suggestively *personal* like John Chapman. Robert Chambers also remained on cordial terms with Martineau until they fell out over an extension to her *History of the Peace*.¹¹)

Like Martineau, Weir suffered from deafness--perhaps helping to explain his

brusque manner. He died after a short illness in September 1858 and was succeeded by a younger member of the *Daily News* staff, Thomas Walker. As Martineau's third editor at the newspaper, Walker quickly assured her that he "could not get on without her." The growing tension in the United States between North and South that posed a threat to Britain's cotton supply now gave Martineau's writing on American affairs decisive importance. *The Times*, that "rotten old oracle," became her whipping boy.

While Martineau had been producing politically charged leaders for Weir and long pieces for John Chapman at the *Westminster*, she had continued until 1856 to write for Dickens' *Household Words*, when they hotly disagreed over industrial accidents. Breaking next with Chapman over the *Westminster* mortgage, Martineau turned in 1858 to her second cousin Henry Reeve, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. For Reeve, she soon began to publish long review articles on sociological, historical and political topics. In June 1859, she then boasted to Reeve: "I am rather amused to find myself dealing with anything in the Magazine way" (less challenging journalism often aimed at unsophisticated readers). Samuel Lucas, editor of the new *Once a Week*, had asked her to write for him, "& I was so indignant at Dickens's conduct to Bradbury & Evans, that I agreed." She was to begin with "three papers on our miniature farming," but why was not the *Edinburgh* "rural, now and then?" She had also "half-promised to *Chambers's Journal* two papers on *Flood & Drought*," grounded on that year's experience, and she meant "to enforce the duty of Drainage & Irrigation"--a "picturesque & entertaining, as well as most useful subject." Hinting further to Reeve: "arterial drainage, for which provision must be made on a national scale," was what she meant.¹² Reeve did not prove accommodating, however, and no article by Martineau on drainage or agricultural subjects appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*.

In the *Daily News*, Martineau's interpretation of events in the United States drew on her experiences of 1834 to 1836, when she interviewed dignitaries in both the North and the South. Once back in England, she received a steady stream of American newspapers and other (often antislavery) publications. In virtually every article on the United States, she attacked slavery directly or indirectly. Yet support for the North by the *Daily News* was controversial: *The Times* and many other publications tended to sympathize with the South. Later, W. E. Forster was to declare that during the American Civil War it was "Harriet Martineau alone who kept opinion on the right [i. e., pro-North] side."

Martineau's success at the *Daily News* often seemed to her editors to be owing to her grasp of facts: she had a good memory (as well as a careful filing system) and skill in organizing data. Weir had mentioned her "underrated fiction," however, and the real secret of her success may have been the imaginative

quality of her writing. Powerful male figures, for example, stand for the struggle between progress and reactionism: Cromwell, Aberdeen, Palmerston, the Russian Czar, Napoleon III, Lincoln, Emerson and William Lloyd Garrison take the stage like actors in an epic drama, sometimes becoming the subjects of Plutarian comparative biography. At times, Martineau deploys potent visual and kinesthetic imagery--using gerundive forms like "sinking," "crumbling," and "degenerating" to describe negative entities like the American South.

That Martineau thrived on her late journalism is evident. In July 1864 she boasted to Sarah Martineau, her cousin by marriage, that she had "engaged for an article for the October N^o of the 'Edinburgh Review,' which, if I am able to do it, will bring me £30 or so: & there is always 'Daily News.'" By 20 August, Martineau was still holding onto her manuscript for the *Edinburgh* article, waiting for "a bit of information" to come from Birmingham. To Reeve, she confided: "Matt: Arnold put me up to writing on middle-class education," and being already engaged for *him*, she chose the *Cornhill*--"Boys' in October,--'Girls' in November"--the proofs just being corrected. Furthermore, her *Daily News* editor would soon be off on holiday, and his "L^{ts}" begged her for more articles in the "roving season". It was the proper role of a stationary person like herself to be a "resource & resort." She had a long list of topics and *could* work, but she felt like a piece of "ever so shaky" cracked china put "on a high shelf in a cupboard." The piece might last for years but could fly apart if taken out!¹³

Martineau's *Daily News* leaders over the rest of August and in early autumn showed her adaptability at using material gathered for her longer articles, for example on middle-class education (7, 27 September), strikes (4, 18 October) and dwellings for laborers (5 October). Other topics were Spanish financial irresponsibility, drought, Russia, fish and meat supplies, criminals, Egypt again, the problem of transported criminals and of course the American Civil War.¹⁴

Increasingly prostrated by bouts of disabling illness, in 1866 Martineau saw she could no longer continue with the *Daily News*. To her letter of resignation Walker responded that there was "only one feeling among us--regret that a connexion which has lasted so long . . . & been so pleasant & fruitful should terminate."¹⁵ Two years later it was evident that Martineau's reputation as a journalist had not languished. A proposal came from (later Sir) John Robinson, business manager of the *Daily News*: would she allow "the biographical sketches . . . contributed to the *Daily News*" to be published in a volume? He should "esteem it a privilege . . . to put the materials together and see that your views are carried out." A good businessman, Robinson had rightly judged the commercial appeal of Martineau's obituaries: three editions of the *Biographical Sketches* were to appear. The edition of 1876 included Martineau's obituary of herself as written for the *Daily News*, thereby placing the crown on her career as a journalist *extraordinaire*.¹⁶

¹ William Weir to Harriet Martineau [henceforth HM], 1 January 1856, "Women, Emancipation and Literature. The Papers of Harriet Martineau, 1802-1876," Birmingham University Library MS 952 [henceforth BUL]; *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman* (London: Smith, Elder, 1877) [henceforth *Auto.*].

² William Weir to HM, 12, 18 [17?], 19 March 1856, BUL 957, 958, 959; see Appendix, *Harriet Martineau in the London "Daily News." Selected Contributions, 1852-1866* (New York: Garland, 1994) [henceforth *HM/DN*]; Martineau's leader of 12 March noted that England must press Mediterranean allies like Egypt to govern wisely.

³ See Introduction *HM/DN* x-xi; HM to Frederick Knight Hunt, 17 May 1852, *Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007) [henceforth *CL*] 3: 226-27; "Emigration to Australia" [*Daily News*, 8 June 1852], *HM/DN* 3-9 (see also, *Daily News* [henceforth *DN*], 10, 15, 21, 31 May, 5 June, 1 July 1852: Appendix, *HM/DN*).

⁴ *Auto.* 2: 406-7; see Appendix, *HM/DN* and *Letters from Ireland* (London: John Chapman, 1852).

⁵ HM to Frances Ogden, 5 June [1852], Armitt Library MS 367.14 (partly published *CL* 3: 231-32).

⁶ HM to Hunt, 25 November 1852, *CL* 3: 252; Martineau's tribute to Henry Clay had appeared as a leader on 13 July 1852: see Appendix *HM/DN*.

⁷ "LITERATURE. *Essays on Political and Social Science. Contributed chiefly to the 'Edinburgh Review.'* By WM. R. GREG, [London: Longmans, 1853]," *DN*, 27 January 1853: 2, cols. 1-2 [Greg, Martineau charged, was simply one of Empson's "dogmatic Whigs"], rptd. *HM/DN* 57-62 (for Empson, see *Auto.* 1: 211-15); "MR. COBDEN AND THE WARS WITH FRANCE [review of] *1793 and 1853, in Three Letters* (London: James Ridgway, 1853)*DN*, 2 February 1853: 5, cols. 3-5; "LITERATURE. *Villette.* By CURRER BELL [London: Smith, Elder; 1853]," *DN*, 3 February 1853: 2, col. 1 (Brontë was stunned by Martineau's remarks and did not want to return to The Knoll); from 1853 to 1865, Martineau was to review for the *Daily News* a total of thirty-three books and four issues of the *Westminster Review*: see Appendix, *HM/DN*.

⁸ *Auto.* 2: 406, 405.

⁹ "Rajah Brooke," *Westminster Review* 62 o. s., 6 n. s. (October 1854): 381-419; Weir to HM, Saturday, BUL 951.

¹⁰ Weir to HM, 12 May 1856, BUL 960; Baron Bunsen, former Prussian ambassador to Britain recalled for supporting a Prussian alliance with the Western powers in the Crimean War; *DN*, 24 May 1856 (see Appendix, *HM/DN*).

¹¹ Smith, Elder published *British Rule in India: A Historical Sketch* (1857), *Suggestions Towards the Future Government of India* (1858), *Endowed Schools of Ireland* (1859) and *England and Her Soldiers* (1859); see "Harriet Martineau and John Chapman," *Martineau Society Newsletter*, November 2004: 11-15.

¹² HM to Reeve, 29 June 1859, *CL* 4: 177-78; Samuel Lucas, a barrister and contributor to *The Times*, editor of *Once a Week: An Illustrated Miscellany of*

Literature, Art, Science, and Popular Information, founded by Dickens's publishers Bradbury and Evans when Dickens broke with them after they refused to print in *Punch* his statement of why he was leaving his wife; from July 1859 to July 1865 Martineau contributed at least 120 articles and stories to *Once a Week* (most articles reprinted in *Health, Husbandry, and Handicraft* [London: Bradbury and Evans, 1861]); "Flood and its Lessons" and "Drought and its Lessons," *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Arts*, 6, 13 August 1859: 81-84 and 104-107 (anecdotal accounts of early floods in Norwich and drought in England in 1820 and 1826; "arterial drainage" was another of Martineau's special topics in the *Daily News*).

13 HM to Sarah (Mrs. George Martineau, née Greenhow), 9 July 1864, *CL* 5: 74; HM to Reeve, 20 August 1864, *CL* 5: 78-79; "Co-operative Societies in 1864," *Edinburgh Review* 120 (October 1864): 407-36; "Middle-Class Education in England: Boys" and "Middle-Class Education in England: Girls," *Cornhill Magazine* 10 (October 1864): 409-26 and (November 1864): 549-68.

14 See Appendix, *HM/DN*.

15 Thomas Walker to HM, 26 April 1866, BUL Add. 28.

16 Thomas Walker to HM, 26 April 1866, BUL Add. 28; John R. Robinson to HM, 30 April 1868, BUL 738; "Autobiographical Sketch of Harriet Martineau," *Biographical Sketches* (London: Macmillan, 1876), xix-

The religious journey of life as experienced by Harriet Martineau

Alan Middleton

Harriet was born in Norwich, 12 June 1802. This is a chronological summary of her life and is in the form of a series of selected quotations which describe Harriet's religious beliefs at particular stages.

Childish dreams

When she was young and attending services at the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, from the *Auto* we know that she was happy on the religious side if nowhere else, and she says on p22, 'The Octagon Chapel has some curious windows in the roof...I used to sit staring up at those windows, looking for angels to come for me....'

Auto I. 32, age 7)When she was staying at her grandfather's house she says ,

'the best event was that my theological life began to take form'. (Auto I. 34) 'On the whole.. religion was a great comfort and pleasure to me.' Very soon she came across the age-old debate, 'Are Unitarians Christians?' Harriet says, 'our family certainly insisted very strongly, and quite sincerely, on being Christians.... while yet it must have been from wonderful slovenliness of thought'. Thus, with the benefit of hindsight, Harriet reflects upon the family's religious beliefs.

(Auto I. 42, age 8) However, '... by the help of public worship, and of sacred music, and Milton, and the Pilgrim's Progress, I found religion my best resource', but it was 'Ann Turner and her religious training of me [that] put me into my own moral charge'. (Auto I. 43, age 8)

Fanaticism

(Auto I. 60, age 10) Harriet, at 10 years old, spent a whole month at Cromer (for baby sister Ellen's benefit), where she 'obtained many new ideas, and much development;- the last chiefly in a religious direction'.

(Auto I. 82, age 15) At age 15, 'I was then in the height of my religious fanaticism', and she took that fanaticism with her when she went to Bristol and came under the influence of Dr Carpenter, (Auto I. 95) where she was 'living wholly in and for religion and fiercely fanatical about it'.

(Auto I.103, age 19) At 19, she says, 'I studied the Bible incessantly and immensely', but she had a problem and it was the discussion she had with her mother and brother James about free-will, and James said that she must sort it out for herself. At that time her reading of Priestley and Hartley showed her that there was a doctrine known as Necessarianism which met her needs, and she says, at age 19, (Auto I. 112). 'As to the effect of that conviction on my religion, in those days of my fanaticism and afterwards, I had better give some account of it here...' and she proceeds to declare what her beliefs had been and concludes - 'But at length I recognised the monstrous superstition (Auto I. 116) in its true character... and I became a free rover on the broad, bright, breezy common of the universe.'

(Auto I. 117, age 19) When brother James went to college she missed his company so much, and she used some very affectionate words to describe her feeling - 'my idolized companion' - 'he left me to my widowhood', a very poignant metaphor. He advised her to think about other things and to write what was in her mind. And so she entered the Unitarian competition writing three essays, to Catholics, to Mohammedans, to Jews, each copied and submitted by different persons so that the handwriting would not identify her. Harriet, in effect, won all three. She was plugging the Unitarian cause but realised later that she (Auto I. 156) 'had no conception of the weakness and falseness of the views I had been conveying.'

Break with Unitarians

(Auto I. 158, age 29). 'I had already ceased to be an Unitarian in the technical sense'. 'At length, I hope and believe my old co-religionists understand and admit that I disclaim their theology *in toto*...'. So, she had, in effect, left the Unitarians. And yet we find that she declares herself 'a dissenter' (Auto I. 305, age 31) when Mrs Barbauld's niece questioned her, and she would not 'object to all the world knowing it'. Most Unitarians would declare themselves dissenters.

She wrote to William J Fox, June 1830 (CL I, 67) 'As for me, my altar is now in the shades of Bracondale [an area on the outskirts of Norwich where her uncle had a house]: the birds are my choir, and my memory my sermon book.'

In her book, *Miscellanies. A collection of Essays*, which is very evangelical, on p160 she reveals '..when an experience over which I had no control shook my confidence in that which I held; when I discovered and rejected some of the falsehoods of my creed, and when I was therefore really wiser than before, the torment began.' On p164 she is rather despondent, 'I prayed, to whom I knew not, - for madness'.

The American tour

When Harriet went to America a year later (RWT) , one of the first things she did was to attend a Unitarian Church in New York (RWT. 48, age 32) (RWT. 186). 'An old lady, on being told that I was a Unitarian, exclaimed, "She had better have done with that: she won't find it go down with us."' So, she still allowed herself to be recognised as a Unitarian and was prepared to sample the American version; perhaps it was her 'Unitarian breeding' (Auto. 115) which was not easy to shake off.

Invalid at Tynemouth

(Auto II.147, age 37) Then she had four years at Tynemouth, where, for health reasons, she was a recluse. She had plenty of time to think, although she felt that she was not ready to think deeply about philosophy.

(Auto II.173, age 41) ' ...I was lingering in the metaphysical stage of mind, because I was not perfectly emancipated from the debris of the theological... I had not yet learned, with decision and accuracy, what conviction is.' Harriet claims that she was cured of her illness by the use of Mesmerism.

(Auto II.214, age 43) A few years later Harriet met Mr Atkinson [they co-authored a book, *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*]. It was suggested that it was he who persuaded her to change her views, because she says, many persons 'think it necessary to assign some marvellous reason for my present philosophical views,...' but she was careful to explain that it was not so in

her case, as she says later, (Auto III, 328) 'it was through years of thought and study... that I attained my present standpoint'... Harriet goes on to talk of her metaphysical wanderings, but there is no mention of attending churches.

Move to Ambleside

Harriet designed her own house and ran a mini-farm.

(Auto II.280, age 44) At age 44, she says, 'I will later disclose...how I reached the other point of view for which I was now exchanging the theological and metaphysical.'

(Auto II.p280) 'I had no desire to conceal...my total relinquishment of theology...' In a letter to Mr Atkinson she writes, (Autoll.283, age 44) 'But I do feel sadly lonely, for this reason,- that I could not , if I tried, communicate to anyone the *feeling* that I have that the theological belief of almost every body in the in the civilised world is baseless.' Does she feel that she is the only one *in step*? Or one of the few to be shown the light?

(Auto II.330, age 48) 'It is the rarest thing. ..to find any body who has the remotest conception of the indispensableness of science as the only source of, not only enlightenment, but wisdom, goodness and happiness. It is, of course, useless to speak to theologians or their disciples about this, while they remain addicted to theology...' What point would there be in talking to brother James, even if she could bring herself to do that?

Brother James was one of the people who thought Harriet had become an atheist. (Auto III.291) 'I am not an atheist according to the settled meaning of the term. I cannot conceive the absence of a First Cause,'

(Auto III.325) 'Among the unknowable things, the first we recognize is the nature or attributes of the First Cause; and this is why we are called atheists.'

Agnostic?

(Auto II.283, age 44) 'I used to long to be a Catholic, though I deeply suspected that no reliance on authority would give me peace of mind. Now, all such longings are out of the question;...'

(Auto II.291, age 44)'I can't and don't believe what I once did; and there's an end.'

(Auto II.333, age 48) 'I had got out of the prison of my own self, wherein I had formerly sat trying to interpret life and the world,....'

In the final chapter of her *Auto* Harriet reflects on 'Her Last View of the World'

and comments (Auto II. 460, age 53) 'The fetish worshipper attributes consciousness like his own to everything about him;... His God is an invisible idol, fading away into a faint abstraction...'

She lived for another 20 years, so Harriet might have changed her views as she got older but in reading the record of her letters during her last four years of life - only twice did she mention religion. Once when writing to Harriet Grote about Mrs Somerville, (CL. 5, 23 Dec.1873, p326) '...Mrs Somerville was actually furthering and diffusing Scientific truth, instead of spinning metaphysical and spiritual cobwebs;...'

(Auto III.454) Then in the last letter to Mr Atkinson, May 19, 1876, a month before she died, Harriet writes, 'Above all I wish to escape from the narrowness of taking a mere human view of things, from the absurdity of making God after man's own image, &c.'

Harriet Martineau died at age 74 on June 27, 1876, and was buried beside her mother in Key Hill Cemetery, Birmingham.

The following books are cited:

Auto = Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, 3 vols. (London, Smith , Elder & Co., 1877)

RWT = Retrospect of Western Travel, 3 vols. (London: Saunders & Otley, 1838)

CL = Collected Letters - 5 vols. Ed Deborah Anna Logan. (London, Pickering & Chatto, 2007)

The above article is an abridged version of a paper presented to the Martineau Society Conference, Manchester, 2008

The Martineau Society 2010 Conference – A Few Days in Ambleside

Bruce Chilton

There is a lot of water in the Lake District of England. The different shades of green of the roadsides, gardens, fields, hills and mountains must outdo the west of Ireland. Alternating walls of water in the form of rain, drizzle or deluge, guarded the glistening A591 road into Ambleside on Thursday, 15 July. In constant rain, the motorcyclists' lot is not happy. Ours was certainly not.

The entrance to the campus of the University of Cumbria at Ambleside does not advertise itself. Add heavy rain and it is not easy to find through a public car

park. It proved easier to find the back gate into the campus and the back door into the reception building. Two dripping bikers were relieved to find old friends.

The University student's room down the steep hill and across the street at Fairfield Hall was reasonable and the dining room back up the hill in Scale House was large and elegant. A large portrait painting of a Dorothy Wordsworth from a later generation than that of William's sister looked down on the diners. If there was a problem, it was the same one. To get up to Scale House, one had a five minute climb up steep steps and garden pathways through the unending rain. But the food was good and well-presented by friendly young people who told of the weeks of drought in the Lake District and a pending hosepipe ban cancelled just in time for our arrival.

What a good turnout of Martineau Society members – more than 30 at each meal and each meeting! Pamela Woof, President of the Wordsworth Society, set a high standard with her opening address “Dorothy Wordsworth, Harriet Martineau and the Lake District”. She made interesting comparisons of the two women starting with their childhoods. Dorothy lived with an aunt from the age of six and discovered she had four brothers when she was 15. She made a home at Grasmere and later at nearby Rydal with her famous brother, William, and devoted herself to his support and his poetry. Her own Journals and her keen observations on the natural world around her were a valuable resource for William and his friend, Coleridge. It seems Dorothy followed her brother to the Lake District where he had spent happy times at school.

By comparison with Dorothy, Harriet found Ambleside and made her home there as part of an “experiment with peace”. Pamela linked Dorothy and Harriet through the post office at Ambleside and its postmistress, Anne Nicholson. Pamela also drew out comparisons between the writings of the two women. Dorothy was “helping the private few” whereas Harriet wrote “to help the public many”. Harriet “rouses the reader to want change and improvement” but Dorothy spoke of “the essentials in the human soul which wants permanence”. Standing at the evening window looking through the soft, endless rain at the magnificent hills, one could feel how Dorothy was inspired.

Our own Society Chairman, Ruth Watts, presided over the lively meetings of the conference with gentle skill. She opened the addresses on Friday, 16 July, with a paper of her own “The spirited pen: *The Ladies Treasury* and Harriet Martineau” which pointed a lesson for all – don't go past the bookstall in an Oxfam shop without giving it a careful look! Ruth had found a bound year's set of the 1850s monthly *The Ladies Treasury* in her local Oxfam shop and it was a most diverting buy.

Like so many modern women's magazines, *The Ladies Treasury* had sound advice, moral tales and guides of every sort and a lot more besides including how to hire and fire servants and judge the quality of their household services –

everything an aspiring Victorian lady might require. Although *The Ladies Treasury* did not contain writings by Harriet Martineau – she wrote for competing publications – it did contain references to Harriet in glowing terms.

Babs Todd and her friend, Maureen, own Harriet Martineau's house in Ambleside. Babs told us of her researches at the Armitage Museum at Ambleside and the Jerwood Research Centre at Grasmere where there are collections of the writings of the Wordsworths and Coleridge and others, including Harriet. Babs again introduced the same character who linked Dorothy Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau. Mrs Anne Nicholson, the postmistress at Ambleside, was known to both women albeit some 30 years apart. Harriet wrote a reference to Post Office worthies, including Rowland Hill, for Anne's daughter, Hannah, recommending that she followed her mother as postmistress. Clearly, Harriet gathered valuable local news as well as postage stamps at the Ambleside Post Office, no doubt as did Dorothy Wordsworth before her.

Babs told us that the Wordsworths attracted a string of notable visitors to Grasmere and Rydal. Later, Harriet did the same at Ambleside and an attraction of Ambleside for Harriet had been the proximity of the homes of other literary figures. Babs explained how visiting friends and acquaintances was a major social past-time for everyone in the nineteenth century Lake District giving rise to impressively-filled visitors' books, autograph-collecting books and "Birthday Books". The birthday book required each visitor to enter a signature and possibly a few words in the space for his or her birthday. Babs had been able to decipher the birthday book of Maria, another daughter of Anne Nicholson, the Ambleside postmistress.

Thursday afternoon was taken up with a trail to Dove Cottage and the Jerwood Research Centre at Grasmere. Some of our more hardy members walked through the rain from Ambleside while most of us cowered on the open-top local bus. The guided tour of Dove Cottage was a revelation. How could the Wordsworths have produced such a quantity of works in such housing conditions? Our entertainingly lugubrious guide explained how William drafted his poetry while rambling through the countryside and then dictated a version to Mary, his wife, or Dorothy when he got home. Quite how this dictation was done when there were often up to 13 persons staying in the small cottage, never quite became clear. With the dry humour of our guide, it did not seem to matter – it was a delightful visit wholly undampened by the rain and followed by the interest of the collections in the Jerwood Research Centre and the Wordsworth Museum.

At the annual Martineau Society conferences, we work hard and then play hard. The full day's programme was followed by great fun, an evening of music hall, all home-grown, with comic songs, readings, and serious songs and high drama. There was something for everyone and everyone did something if only sing along with everyone else. Two 'turns' stood out. Alan Middleton sang "Haf' ye go' a light, boi?" from the Singing Postman in such a genuine-sounding Norfolk accent

it probably was as well understood by the Japanese and Chinese speakers in the Society as by the many of the English members. We have a sprinkling of Norfolk dwellers among the members but clearly the apprenticeship to become a speaker of Norfolk is a good while longer than the 35 and more years of this writer.

The other item, the one of 'high drama', was the chapter from the Pickwick Papers of the disaster for Mr. Pott, the editor, with each of the characters read by a member and to hilarious effect. It was a full-blown warning to all editors, especially this one. Goodness knows what the new members made of it!

And it was a new member at her first annual conference who bravely stepped forward after breakfast on Saturday morning, 17 July. But Jane Bancroft is a Martineau and she told us how she established her family connections via Unitarians in Liverpool and directly to Harriet Martineau. Her grandmother had bequeathed her an envelope holding a single photograph of 'The Knoll', Harriet's home in Ambleside. Jane's talk gave rise to a very lively discussion. She posed the question to the meeting of the Society - why has Harriet Martineau been airbrushed out of women's history in the 21st century? Answers came from many quarters – Harriet was a cigar-smoking atheistic polymath who boldly took up controversial arguments such as those about slavery and public health. She was everything the romantic novelists were not. David Hamilton described Harriet as a 'philosophe' at a time when British universities were no longer willing to look at issues and subjects, arts and sciences with the wide scope of the 18th century polymaths. Ruth Watts translated 'philosophe' for us as "a woman of ideas" and Pamela Woof felt that Harriet's neglect was the result of the fear by men of powerful women such as Harriet and Mary Wollstonecraft. Stirring stuff – but how Harriet's reputation might be restored? Perhaps by television documentary or drama.

Getting into controversies was something Harriet excelled at locally in Ambleside as well as nationally. John Warren called his paper 'Rows in Rydal, Angst in Ambleside and Balm in Bowness: Harriet Martineau and the Clergy of Ambleside' and plunged into 19th century religion and politics at high speed – "The Anglicans had two wings – not a monolith. The Evangelical wing was 'low' and close to the Dissenting churches while the 'High' Church, particularly the Oxford Movement, concentrated on sacraments and continuity through reformation from Roman Catholicism." (Keep up, everybody!) He told us Harriet felt the local High Church acolytes and, in particular, Benson Harrison (who was one-time owner of Scale House where the Society was meeting) were trying to block improvements in public health and housing for the poor in Ambleside. Why did Harriet object to the High Church Anglicans when by the middle 1850s she had supposedly rejected religious beliefs? Harriet had an established reputation for opposition to the Anglicans. Her 1830 Prize essay "The Essential Faith of the Universal Church" meant freedom of conscience for every man and woman to form his or her own religious beliefs. In her "The Tenth Haylock" of 1834, she had opposed

tithes as a tax for the Anglicans and attacked many High Anglican values – “Love is better than extortion” and “It never occurred to him (the vicar insisting on his right to tithe) that his attitudes to the true Apostolic church... led to degradation of the Church.” Harriet fell into arguments with a local Anglican vicar, who was supported by Benson Harrison, over purchases of land for her building society, the Windermere Permanent Land Building and Investment Association. When another local vicar attempted to impose church rates on local Quakers and Harriet herself, feathers flew. Benson Harrison opposed the building society by buying up land and “imposing his base system of long credit.” Rows in Rydal and angst in Ambleside indeed.

(Insert Photo of 1st page of Prospectus. Please add below - *Ambleside, December 11th, 1848.* - With thanks to the Armitt Trust -)

John told us there was balm or, at least, calm in Harriet Martineau’s relations with Reverend Graves of Bowness, along the valley from Ambleside and Rydal. They stated their different views very clearly in correspondence but remained friends and without a real rift. In the discussion following John’s paper, views were expressed by modern Unitarians among the members on Harriet’s religious beliefs and social action. She was a modern Unitarian (and possibly a Universalist as the movements have since merged) before her time – “a religious humanist”. While Harriet never described herself as “an atheist” – there always remained the ‘First Cause’ of the Universe – her ideas would sit happily in many 21st century Unitarian meetings. Today, many of Harriet Martineau’s controversies rumble on, including the conflicts of church and state and the call for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church. As with so many of her ideas, Harriet was far ahead of her time.

The next speaker that Saturday morning was another new member, Keiko Funaki of Musashi University, Japan, with “Re-evaluation of Harriet Martineau: Consideration in terms of Economic Thought”. Keiko explained her study of Harriet Martineau’s contribution to 19th century economic theory and dealt robustly with John Stuart Mill’s later criticisms – “Mill’s concept was a science: Martineau’s concept was a popularisation”. Keiko’s conclusion was that Harriet Martineau has still not had a fair evaluation in the history of economic thought. Her paper sparked some lively debate. Babs Todd considered J.S.Mill was very influenced by Harriet in his attitude to women. It led him as an MP to support a petition for female suffrage. Ruth Watts said Harriet has again been excluded by a persisting “male only” club among economic historians while Stuart Hobday thought Harriet was embroiled in the real economics of people’s lives following the collapse of her father’s business rather than, as Mills was, seeking economic theories.

Saturday afternoon saw more unceasing rain. Everyone paused from looking at the options for ‘trails’ organised by the Society’s secretary, Gaby Weiner, for a steady look out of the window at the pending weather. Those with waterproof

clothing tackled a walk to the cottages at Rydal built by Harriet Martineau's social responsibility action, Windermere Permanent Building Society, or a genuinely muddy trail over the hill to Rydal Mount, Wordsworth's home in his later years. Those with aversion to rain equipped themselves with umbrellas for a short walk down the hill to Rydal Road where the Armit Trust had an exhibition of Harriet Martineau artefacts. There, hanging on a wall, was a printed poem attacking Harriet Martineau for her support of emigration to Australia. Her practical answer to the British economic woes in her time went too far for some of her contemporaries. With thanks to the Armit Trust, the poem is before you –

(Insert Photos of the Ballad "Advice to Harriet Martineau". Please add below - With thanks to the Armit Trust -)

Everyone returned from their separate ways with happy stories. Those visiting the "Harriet Martineau Cottages" reported finding the most elderly member of the Martineau Society, John Lund, tending the garden of one of the cottages where he now lives. Mr Lund showed and explained the beneficial design of his cottage to his unexpected visitors. The Conference dinner that evening was a good time had by all. Happy tiredness was relieved by good food, good wines and entertaining conversations.

Well fortified by the previous evening, the Conference resumed with the final session of papers on Sunday, 18 July, plunging again into one of Harriet Martineau's major controversies – science and religion. Stuart Hobday enthusiastically took us through his paper "The Reception and Reaction to the publication of Harriet Martineau's and Henry G. Atkinson's *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Redevelopment* and the subsequent effect on Harriet Martineau's life and reputation". And we all took to it enthusiastically! The *Letters* was published at a peak in Harriet's popularity as a writer – after *Eastern Life* in 1848 and before *Auguste Comte* in 1852. Harriet had met Henry Atkinson, a psychologist, in 1845 and the main thrust of their *Letters* was to deal with the idea of the separation of mind and body. The two writers clearly saw mesmerism as subject to physical laws and not something supernatural – "It may be comfortable to believe in life after death..." but "all life falls within nature's laws." *Letters* was a direct challenge to established religion.

In Stuart's view, the language of *Letters* is unusually direct for 1851 and purposely aimed to replace religion with science. It appears to be orchestrated by Harriet and to have been shared with Henry Atkinson to divide the expected opprobrium. It was an opportune moment for publication as 1851 was the year of the Great Exhibition in London. But the two writers got the criticism they had expected and, in the case of Harriet, the criticism of *Letters* by James Martineau, her brother, was painful. In an article, "Mesmeric Atheism", James Martineau criticised both his sister's grammar and language and, using his inside

knowledge of Harriet, described her “beliefs in the morals of the living God”. The sting was returned to James by Harriet in the obituary she wrote for herself in 1855 – “condemned but no answer given”. The response to *Letters* certainly distinguished friends from enemies.

Stuart thought the later impact of *Letters* on Harriet Martineau’s reputation was reflected in the lack of republication – scientists were put off by mesmerism and establishment figures by the attack on the established Church. He concluded that *Letters* was a curious way for Harriet Martineau to have attacked religion. Her perceived atheism offended both establishment and the religious figures of her time. It was a lasting impact. *Letters* has only been republished in the last two years and Stuart ended with an interesting question – did the reaction to *Letters* in 1851 persuade Harriet’s friend, Charles Darwin, to postpone his publication of *Origin of Species* to 1859?

Shu Fang Lai took us back to economics with her paper “Harriet Martineau’s *A Family History: A Victorian Fantasy about the South Sea Bubble*”. The economic collapse of the late 2000s has excited interest in Victorian authors including Harriet Martineau who wrote an article in the magazine “Once a Week” in May, 1865 about the South Sea Bubble of 1720. *A Family History* is about the disaster for one family “speculating on foreign wealth”. Harriet’s father’s business had known failure in the 1820s and many of her contemporaries had financial troubles. In the 1820s and 30s, the Stock Market had fallen steadily and in the 1830s to 1850s dozens of fortunes were made and lost in “the Railway Mania”. In the 1860s, investments in Joint Stock companies were at risk and Harriet was a victim herself. In 1864, Harriet wrote to Sarah Martineau of her anxiety about money – “my income is a little short of my needs”. By 1867, Harriet was writing to Florence Nightingale and others about her “concern at loss of two-thirds income in Preferential Stock”. In December, 1867, Harriet wrote again to Sarah Martineau that she “could not know how we live for so little ... the farm supports”.

Other writers, including Thomas Macaulay of *The Lays of Ancient Rome*, complained of British morals weakened by speculating. Harriet’s own criticism of speculating did not apply to the virtue of saving. Indeed, her Windermere Building Society was designed to encourage the investors both to save and secure their homes.

The last paper of the Conference was presented by Elisabeth Arbuckle. Her “Harriet Martineau: *Journalist Extraordinaire*” explained how Harriet won success as a leader-writer for the ‘Daily News’ of London, how her attack on slavery “kept (British) opinion on the right (North) side” and, in Elisabeth’s answers to questions, how Harriet made her first local lecture in the Wesleyan Hall just a few yards from ‘The Knoll’ and a few hundred yards from where we were sitting. But a fuller report on this last paper of our Conference you do not need. You will have read Elisabeth’s interesting paper earlier in this Newsletter.

And so the Society's 2010 Conference at Ambleside came to an end and we said most of our goodbyes for another year over a noisy luncheon. Members started their journeys home while just a few of us wandered around the sights and shops of a still-wet Ambleside and enjoyed an evening meal at an Italian restaurant before setting off the following morning. The glistening A591 road towards the M6 motorway dried after just a few miles. The sun came out strongly, the rain disappeared and we were treated from our motorbike to fine views of the Lake District hidden by the clouds of the last days.

We had enjoyed an especially good Martineau Society Conference – they seem to get better each year. Many thanks to all the speakers and the organisers and, in particular, to our indefatigable secretary, Gaby Weiner. As we swept out of the Lake District on our long motorbike journey to Norwich, we were already looking forward to the Society's Conference in 2011.

The Martineau Society

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“This is the master-key to the whole moral nature; what does a man secretly admire and worship? What haunts him with the deepest wonder? What fills him with the most earnest aspiration? What should we overhear in the soliloquies of his unguarded mind? This it is which, in the truth of things, constitutes his religion.” James Martineau, *Endeavours II, I.*

