

The Martineau Society

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February 2016

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Contents

	Page
<i>Editor's Note</i>	2
<i>The Martineau Society 2016 Annual Conference 25 – 26 July</i>	3
<i>Harriet Martineau, the Classical Economists and the Factory Acts</i> by John Vint	4
<i>“One of the greatest women that our generation has seen” - Harriet Martineau's Transatlantic Obituaries</i> by Iain Crawford	17
<i>“Harriet Martineau and the Dales”</i> by Lyn Holt	25
<i>John Lund - Our Eldest Member</i>	30
<i>List of Recent New Members</i>	
<i>Martineau Society Contact Information</i>	
<i>Postscript</i>	32

Martineau Society Subscription Information:

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* UK: Individual members £20 // Concessionary rate £10 // Institutional membership £45. Life membership rate is £200.

* Overseas: Individual members \$37.50 // Concessionary rate \$25. This may be paid in dollars to Prof. Elisabeth Arbuckle, Condo. Montebello M526 Trujillo Alto PR00976 USA

Editor's Note

Now the debate has begun as to whether the United Kingdom should leave or remain in the European Union, it is interesting to see old politico-economic arguments being recycled.

A popular argument of the 'Leave' side is that "red-tape", primary and secondary legislation which all member countries and non-members on special terms such as Norway are obliged to enact, is damaging to British interests. With this, goes a secondary argument that foreign competitors do not observe the legal requirements (unlike the British, of course!) and so compete unfairly.

The 'Stay' side also marshals some hoary old arguments such as, since UK Plc is doing better than most other countries, why change the UK's direction and future so radically by leaving?

Both viewpoints are innately conservative and, behind both, we can detect standing in the shadows, an old economic demi-god known to the eighteenth and nineteenth century as Laissez Faire or, in modern terms for bankers, "light regulation".

Welcome to similar economic ideas in the Factory Acts, the embryo 'Health and Safety' law, of the nineteenth century and in the contribution by Harriet Martineau. Of particular interest in our first article by John Vint is how the attitudes towards Factory Acts legislation in the minds of Harriet Martineau and others changed through the nineteenth century. The Apprentices Act of 1802, the year of Harriet's birth in the major textile town of Norwich, was clearly guided by economists out of principles based on Laissez Faire. As the textile industry changed and poor working conditions became exposed, attitudes mollified towards controlling legislation even amongst the most principled of economists. Harriet's change is clearly based on a slow dawning that the working conditions set by most employers were not as caring for workers, men, women and children, as those no doubt made by her father and

other Unitarian and Quaker factory owners who or of whom she knew well. And, if there are few differences in some attitudes towards workers of most nineteenth century factory owners and the executives of modern large corporations in the United Kingdom, there seem to be big differences in ethical and moral attitudes. Was it the ethics and morals of such opinion-formers as Harriet which drove the improvements in conditions for workers?

Are you the sort of person who enjoys wandering through old graveyards, reading the details and pondering on the eulogies on the gravestones? Your editor is pleased to see the rehabilitation works, often by volunteers, in many old cemeteries such as Highgate in London, where James Martineau lies, The Rosary in Norwich (founded as the first secular cemetery in England by the Norwich Unitarians) and Key Hill in Birmingham, Harriet Martineau's final resting place. Iain Crawford brings us obituaries, those fuller eulogies, of Harriet from both sides of the Atlantic.

To keep changing these different viewpoints upon Harriet, Lyn Holt, herself "a daughter of the Dales", gives a possible local view of the lady who lived in The Knoll at Ambleside.

This *Newsletter* is again almost exclusively about Harriet Martineau. Almost, because the *Postscript* comes again from James Martineau – a toe-dip into the ocean of his religious writings. Curiously, where Harriet and her writings become more and more well known and recognised, her brother is still almost forgotten. And yet – and yet, it is his ideas on religion which are almost universal among Christians and persuasive among agnostics and non-theists in this increasingly secular age. Or is it evidence of the breaking-up of the beliefs of the Christian Factions? The *Newsletter* would welcome articles on other Martineaus besides Harriet and on their wide circle of friends and contemporaries.

Many thanks to our contributors. The errors in this *Newsletter*, as ever, belong entirely to your editor. Do enjoy your reading.

The Martineau Society 2016 Annual Conference 25 – 26 July

All members should have by now have received by email or by post the invitation to the Society's 2016 Annual Conference. If you have not, please go the Society's website for full details and the Registration Form. If you have received the invitation by post, is that because our Secretary and Treasurer do not have an up-to-date email address for you? If it is, please send your correct email address to our Secretary, Sharon Connor (email and postal addresses below). Online is a far speedier and more cost effective way to send you information.

The dates of the Martineau Society Annual Conference 2016 will be 25 – 28 July and it will be held at The Eaton Hotel, 279 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B16 9NB. The Society Conference in 2015 at Norwich (interestingly, held a few yards

from Eaton in Norwich) was most successful (see *Newsletter 37*) and this year's Conference will have a similar mixture of papers, trails to places of interest connected to the Martineaus and social evenings. You are asked to bring an item connected to the Martineaus or their friends for the auction to raise funds for the Society. How "connected" is an opportunity for your imagination.

To book your place at the 2016 Annual Conference, you need to take two simple steps – firstly, complete and send the Registration form to our Secretary, Dr. Sharon Connor at 13 Lancaster Road, Formby, Merseyside L37 6AS. or by email to: sharonconnor@live.co.uk .

and secondly, phone The Eaton Hotel on 0121 4543311 with your credit or debit card ready and quote "Martineau Society Conference 25 – 28 July" to get the special rates. For individual members, the full Conference cost is £350 for the three nights and days. For couples, the full Conference cost is £500. The Conference Daily Rate is £40 which includes lunch but not the evening meal.

The Eaton Hotel looks attractive on its website - see www.eatonhotel.co.uk . As you book your Conference accommodation directly with the hotel, do remember that you are entering into an enforceable contract. Please do not forget to have insurance against having to cancel! You can find fuller details and the Registration form on the Society's website - <http://martineausociety.co.uk/annual-meeting-2016/>

Harriet Martineau, the Classical Economists and the Factory Acts

John Vint

Introduction

The nineteenth century history of the Factory Acts is a long one, with over thirty major acts passed in the century following Peel's first Act in 1802. The development of the legislation was complex involving humanitarian proposals, political debates, draft bills, commissions, amendments, first, second and third drafts, legislation, consequences, re-evaluations, revisions and so on. The major concerns centred on the ages of workers, the long hours of work (up to 15 hours), the conditions in factories, and workers' rights. Many other theoretical arguments were also involved - the case for laissez faire versus government intervention; arguments concerning productivity, wages and profits; arguments concerning international competitiveness and even arguments concerning the Corn Laws.

This article presents a brief outline of the key features of the Factory Acts between 1802 and 1847 and the reactions of some of the leading political economists and Harriet Martineau to the legislation.

A fundamental concern of the Classical Economists was with the benefits of laissez faire – the belief that that industry and commerce should be left alone without

interference from government in order to run their affairs in the most efficient way for the benefit of society. Since the time of Adam Smith, classical political economy had specified a role for the state in the obvious areas of defence and justice, but also limited roles in other 'public' areas such as roads and education. The rapidly changing and very profitable textile industries remained largely free of control until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Until then there were no regulations concerning the hours of work of the labour force of men, women, young people and children, who could be working 12-15 hours a day in unpleasant and dangerous conditions. There was also no minimum age set for children to be able to work in the factories. The economists had a variety of views on the potential effects of regulation - such as the effect of shortening of hours on output, lower wages, lower profits etc. But in general their attitudes were conditioned at each stage of the debate by the degree of regulation already achieved. Often when a bill was introduced it was opposed by one or more of them only to be approved after it became law. In general, they were in favour of restrictions on the employment of children while at the same time they tended to defend a general rear-guard action designed to prevent the effective regulation of the labour of adults.

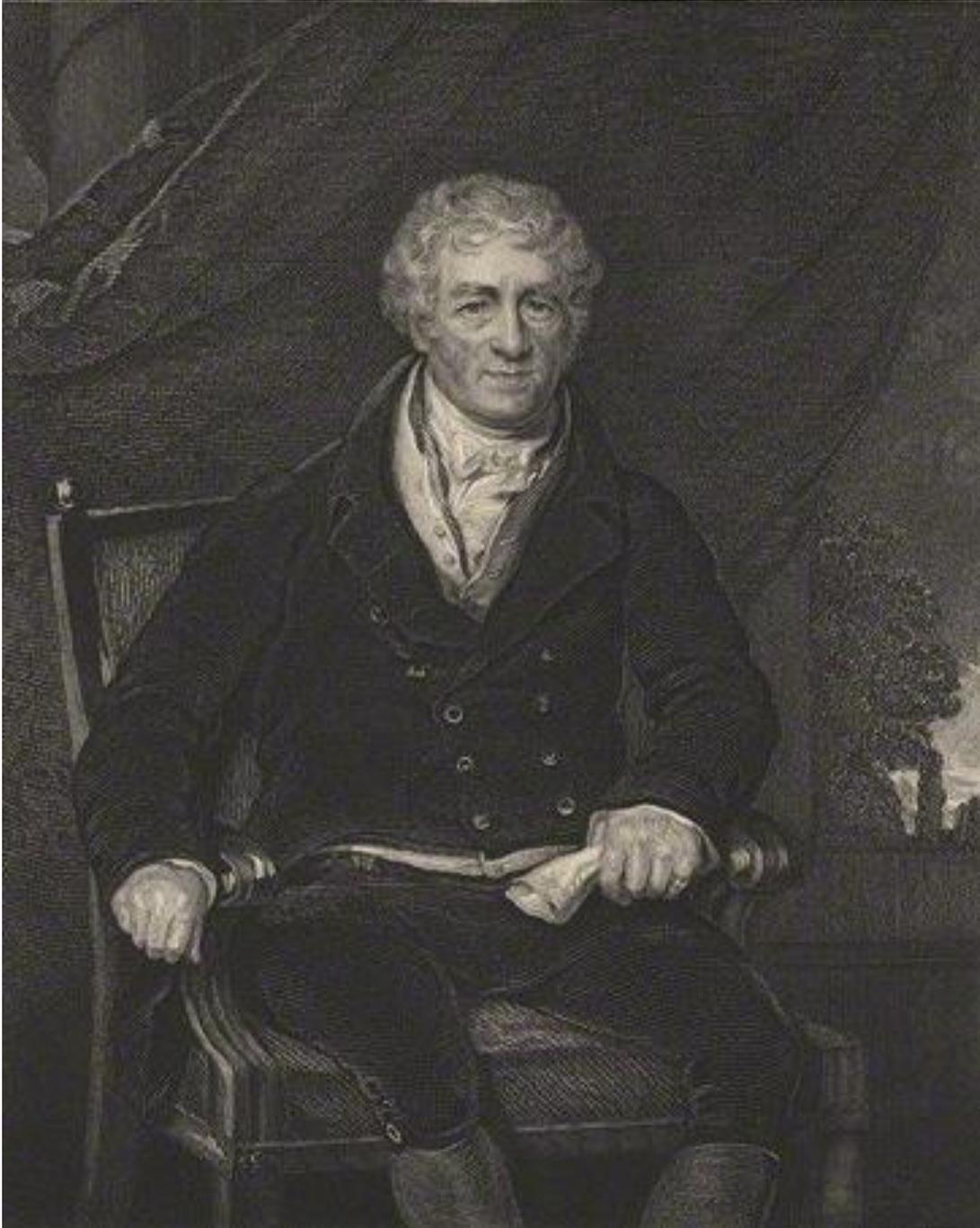
Harriet Martineau had strong views on the Factory Acts. On the grounds of *laissez faire*, she objected to any interference by government in the operation of the factories. She was also a strong believer in the right to work for everyone and in the case of factories she supported the right to work for women, men, young people (typically 12-18 years old) and even children (under 12) and was against any restriction on the hours of work of adults although she was sympathetic to the position of children.

1 Eighteenth Century beginnings: Pauper Children and Factory Conditions

In the late eighteenth century there was increasing concern for the health of pauper children and this became a factory issue specifically in 1784. In that year there was an outbreak of typhoid in a cotton mill in Radcliffe, Lancashire and the magistrates called in doctors from Manchester to investigate. A team was led by Dr Thomas Percival who was a pioneer in sanitation and public health. The team were not sure how the disease started but argued that it had been clearly aggravated by overcrowding, proximity to putrid effluence, injury to young persons from long labour and confinement. Their recommendations raised wider concerns about the health of the mill children:

We earnestly recommend a longer recess from labour at noon, and a more early dismissal [sic] from it in the evening, to all those who work in the cotton mills: but we deem this indulgence essential to the present health, and future capacity for labour, of those who are under the age of fourteen; for the active recreations of childhood and youth are necessary to the growth, vigour, and the right conformation of the human body. And we cannot excuse ourselves, on the present occasion, from suggesting to you, who are the guardians of the public weal, this further very important consideration, that the rising generation should not be debarred from all opportunities of instruction at the only season of life in which they can be properly improved.

The report forced the magistrates, led by Thomas Butterworth Bayley, to abandon the practice of binding parish apprentices to any mill not adhering to these conditions. This was the earliest known attempt of any public body to limit hours of



Sir Robert Peel the Elder (1750 – 1830)

By John Henry Robinson National Portrait Gallery

[Wiki Commons](#)

child labour.

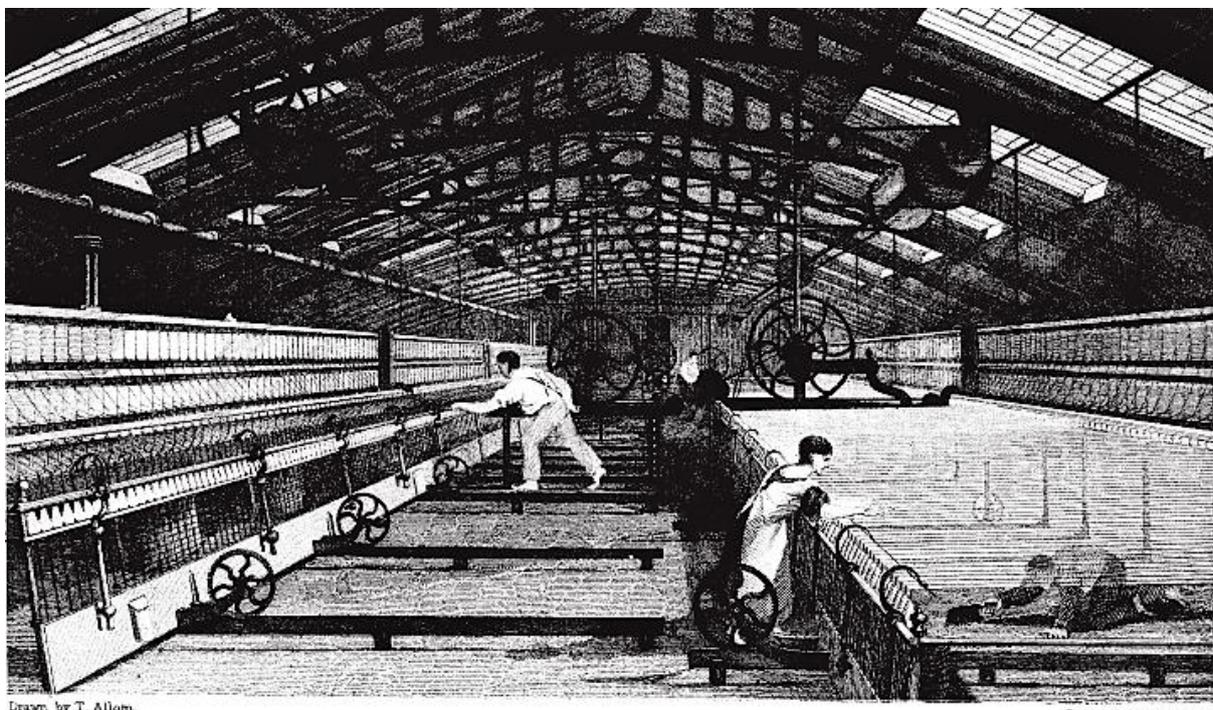
In 1796 the Manchester doctors formed what they termed a 'Board of Health' – and

having inspected local mills made a number of resolutions. These recommendations again concerned overcrowding, night working, long days and lack of education opportunities. They maintained that Parliament should be asked 'to establish a general system of laws for the wise, humane and equal government of all such work'. Their actions prompted Sir Robert Peel the elder to induce Parliament to pass an act to improve factory hygiene - the 1802 *Health and Morals of Apprentices Act*. This Act only applied to 'Apprentices' who lived in the factories (pauper children), and not to 'free' children who lived at home. All night working was to stop for these children and they should work no more than 12 hours a day. Some of the key issues of the later debate were outlined early on in these developments in the late 18th century and in Peel's Act of 1802.

Had the initial recommendations of the Manchester doctors been maintained and spread, the history of industrial relations might have been different and the long century of legislation been shortened. But the forces for reform faced the growing economic power and technical change in the industry.

2 The Early Nineteenth Century and the Beginnings of the Factory Movement

Peel's 1802 Act soon became out of date. Technical change – essentially the use of steam engines – meant that new mills developed near the great coalfields in Lancashire and Glasgow. Young workers (still outnumbering the adults) were now 'free' non-apprenticed labour, living at home, hired by a master, overlooker or operative (a more senior skilled male worker) by agreement with parents. Now the bulk of fine cotton spinning was performed by 'mules' – large moving machines (see photo).



Children at work in Cotton Spinning Mule Baines 1835 Wiki

Each operative needed three or four assistants. The youngest workers, aged 7-10, served as 'piecers' who leaned *over the machinery* to gather and tie loose threads

together; or as 'scavengers' who retrieved loose cotton from *under the machinery*. This was dangerous but necessary work and without the children, it was argued, the adults could not work. Opposition by operatives started to develop and there is evidence that Short Time Committees of operatives were formed in Lancashire as early as 1814.

After the end of the Napoleonic wars there followed a period of legislation which has been seen as the beginning of the Factory Movement and while this period saw some changes agreed they were not in the main very well enforced. This period included Acts in 1819, 1825 and 1831. The 1819 *Cotton Mills and Factories Act*, prompted by Peel and based on the suggestions of Robert Owen, prohibited children under the age of nine years from working in cotton mills, and restricted those aged 9-16 to a 12 hour day. Enforcement was in the hands of local magistrates. In the course of bringing this legislation about Robert Owen had argued that reducing hours at his New Lanark factory did not affect output. A key problem was that of enforcement. Reliance was placed on rewards paid to informers but only the workers really knew what was going on and they were too scared to speak up. In 1825 further changes were made in the *Cotton Mills and Factories Act*. This Act limited the hours of work of children under the age of 16 years to 12 per day between 5am and 8pm with half an hour off for breakfast and one hour off for lunch. It also forbade any justice of the peace who was a proprietor or master of a mill or factory to act as a magistrate in matters connected with this Act. Parents were allowed to certify their children's ages. A further Act in 1831 the *Cotton Factories and Mills Act* (known as Hobhouse's Act) banned night work for all under 21 and limited the working day of people under the age of 18 years to twelve hours per day, and not more than nine hours on a Saturday. It also introduced time-books in which masters had to enter children's working hours and which would be subject to inspection by magistrates.

Once again the problem with both the 1825 and the 1831 Acts was enforcement. Without proper inspection, many of the rules were ignored. This was not the case in all factories but there was still great concern about the effectiveness of the legislation.

3 The Ten Hours Movement and the Act of 1833.

The real period of intense discussion began after 1831 with four acts which involved the political economists and Harriet Martineau among many others. These were the Acts of 1833, 1844, 1847 and 1856.

Two important individuals become important during this period. One was Richard Oastler, an estate manager who had shown early interest in Methodism but became a staunch Anglican. He had argued against slavery and in 1830 he met up with John Wood, the greatest worsted spinner in Britain. Wood practised benevolence in his own factories but was concerned about children in the woollen factories generally (where the nominal protection offered to children in Lancashire cotton mills did not apply) and persuaded Oastler as a prominent slave emancipationist to take up the question. He opened up the debate by writing a letter to the *Leeds Mercury* in September 1830 entitled 'Slavery in Yorkshire' which detailed the harsh conditions in the Bradford mills. Oastler then became the leader of the 'Ten Hour Movement' – ten hours maximum for all children and young people supported by the short time

committees of operatives. Reformers in Lancashire gave the movement a new twist by demanding restrictions on the hours of operation of the *machinery itself* – the movement then became the ‘Short Time Movement’.

The other person was Michael Sadler, who also a supporter of Methodism turned Evangelical who railed against political economy – especially Malthusianism - and condemned child labour. He was anti-Catholic and this led the Duke of Newcastle to offer him a seat in Newark in 1829. In Parliament he opposed Catholic Emancipation and free trade and spoke in favour of a Poor Law for Ireland. Oastler became a supporter of Sadler.

In 1831 Sadler introduced a bill which corresponded closely to the aims of the Short Time Movement. Hobhouse's ban on night work up to 21 was retained; no child under 9 was to be employed; and the working day for under-18s was to be no more than ten hours (reduced from 12) and 8 on Saturday and these provisions were to apply across all textile industries. Considerable political manoeuvring followed which included Sadler being given the Chair of a Select Committee to investigate the issues and his later defeat in the election of 1832. His role as parliamentary spokesman for the Short Time Movement was taken by a formidable parliamentarian, Lord Ashley – later the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury and a notable reformer. The committee issued what has become known as the Sadler Report and it was a shocking indictment of the factory system showing that children were working excessively long hours in poor conditions. Government intervention to regulate child labour in textile trades was therefore called for - this required both new restrictions on hours of work and a new and effective organisation for enforcing them. There was concern and scepticism over the Sadler report and the nature of the evidence; and parliament ordered a Factory Commission led by Chadwick to further investigate. The results of the commission were not so graphic but concluded that children in factories were to be protected and educated.

The outcome of all of this was the 1833 Mills and Factories Act introduced by Lord Althorp. In this important Act Children under 9 could not be employed in textile manufacture (except in silk mills); those between 9 and 13 must not work more than 8 hours; those aged 14-18 not more than 12 hours and no one under 18 must work at night. Employers could (and it was envisaged they would) operate a 'relay system' with two shifts of children between them covering the permitted working day and as a result adult millworkers would be able to work a 15-hour day. The Act stated that children aged 9–13 must have two hours of education per day.

The Act led to a greater improvement in the lot of children between 9 and 13 bringing the maximum hours down to 8 which was below that proposed in the Sadler Bill. However the maximum for young people between 13 and 18 remained at 12 hours – a failure for the Ten Hours Movement.

The Act further provided for routine inspections of factories and set up a Factory Inspectorate (subordinate to the Home Office) to carry out such inspections, with the right to demand entry and the authority to act as a magistrate. Under previous Acts supervision had been by local 'visitors' (e.g. a Justice of the Peace, and a clergyman) and had been effectively discretionary. The inspectors were now empowered to make and enforce rules and regulations on the detailed application of the Act, independent of the Home Secretary.

4 Further Proposals for 10 Hours: Ashley's Bill and the 1844 Act

As time went on there were several main problems with the 1833 Act. The first was, as usual, the lack of enforcement with only four very highly paid inspectors (£1000 a year each; equivalent to around £84,000 today) and fifteen superintendents (£250 a year each; around £22,000 today). Ironically much of the superintendents' incomes were swallowed up in travelling expenses and they were open to bribery. The second was a great deal of sectarian strife over factory education which held matters up. A third problem concerned the relay system which became very complex: factory owners had to reconcile adult shift patterns with the 8 hour patterns of the children and has also to fit in the education requirements.

There was continued pressure for further reform led by Ashley. The political discussions and machinations during the period following the 1833 Act involving the Short Time Committees, the factory inspectors, reformers and politicians of all parties were too complex to detail here. Suffice to say that the government introduced another Bill in 1843 – the key feature of which was to fix a normal working day for women and young persons (14-18) at twelve hours. Ashley moved an amendment to reduce all hours to ten which was defeated by a majority of 138 votes. Eventually the Act of 1844 was passed with 12 hours for women and young people. The age at which children could be employed was *reduced* from 9 to 8 and, and children could now work for up to 9 hours a day – *an increase!* Young people could still be made to work up to 12 hours a day and thus once again the Ten Hour Movement had failed to get the legislation it pushed for.

There is one other very important point to note about this Act. Due to mounting concern about injuries in the factories, the Act required factory owners to place fencing around all shafts and gearing. Spinning and turning shafts and gearing in factories were usually left open and adults and children could get severely injured from stepping on to moving gearing, getting clothes or hair caught in turning shafts or in belts rotating between shafts. The question of fencing became an important issue for Harriet Martineau. Her opposition to it on behalf of the manufacturers led to conflict with Charles Dickens over the matter.

5 Views of the Political Economists

1831 Bill and 1833 Act

Among the first to react to the proposals was John Stuart Mill writing in a popular weekly, *The Examiner*, in 1832. He took a paternalistic view arguing that women and children should be forbidden from working in factories and that legislation was necessary to enforce this. The result would be that men's wage would rise so that a man would be able to earn all that is now earned by the entire family. Mill seemed to be unaware that children and young people were needed in the mills to assist the adults.

The economist Robert Torrens M.P. supported the legislation in Parliament but with an important qualification. The Corn Laws had raised the cost of food and thus depressed real wages. If the Corn Laws could be abolished then the price of bread would go down and workers could work fewer hours but be just as well off in real terms.

Nassau Senior in his *Letters on the Factory Act* (1837) accepted the Act but argued that further reductions would wipe out the margin of profit in mills, because the last hour of the day was where the profit was made. This was not taken seriously by fellow economists and, as we shall see, others argued more convincingly that the last one or two hours at work were the least productive.

Ashley's Ten Hours Amendment

Torrens wrote to Ashley as the Parliamentary debate continued in his *Letter to Lord Ashley*. He begins by condemning the principle of 'leaving things to their course' but went on to be mainly concerned with the 'delusion' of workers that they could receive the wages of twelve hour for the work of ten. He also argued that 'the rate of profit is already approaching the minimum at which no margin remains for an advance of wages' and that 'capital to an enormous amount already emigrates from our shores'. In short, a Ten Hours Bill would check production and lower wages. Ashley countered Torrens by referring to an argument put forward by Robert Owen in 1818 (see above) that a reduction in hours at his New Lanark factory had actually increased output. Ashley went on to argue that after each of the Acts since 1819 in which hours had been reduced there had been no reduction in production or wages and no great competition from overseas.

William Thornton made the same argument as Ashley although in a more convincing way in his 1846 volume *Over-Population and Its Remedy*. He argued that productivity falls off at the end of the day:

'If Lord Ashley's proposition, that women and young persons should not be allowed to work more than ten hours a day, had been adopted, it has been calculated that their wages would have fallen about a fourth part. ...it is not quite certain, that a diminution of produce would result from shortening the duration of labour. Persons who are not obliged to work so long may work harder than before, and may get through the same quantity of work in a short time as formerly occupied them for a longer period. The business of the eleventh and twelfth hours is most likely very languidly done, and might perhaps, without very great difficulty, be despatched in the preceding ten. If so, the limitation of labour to ten hours daily would not in any circumstances reduce wages...With this precaution, the adoption of Lord Ashley's plan, or even of one still bolder, would be an experiment of little hazard...' (chapter 8. Pp.398-399)

Contrary to what Senior had claimed, the last two hours of a twelve hour day may be inefficiently worked and if operatives had only ten hours they may work harder and make up for the two taken away. A ten hour day could be therefore accomplished without loss of output.

There are two general points that can be made about the classical economists' views. First, as we have seen their views varied. Secondly, the nature of their arguments added very little to popular thinking about the Factory Acts – to the extent that it has been argued that had there been no classical economic theory the arguments concerning the legislation would have been essentially the same (see M. Blaug, 1986, p.145).

6 The Views of Harriet Martineau

Views of Harriet Martineau on the 1831 Bill and 1833 Act

Her fundamental position was laid out in a letter to her mother in June 1833. The relationship between workers (including children) must be voluntary (a free market relationship) and legislation cannot assist. She wrote:

Mrs. Marcet is sorry to find that Mr. E. R. and I are of the same opinion about the Factory Bill, and I am very glad. She ought to hold the same, namely, that legislation *cannot* interfere effectually between parents and children in the present state of the labour-market. Our operations must be directed towards proportioning the labour and capital, and not upon restricting the exchange of the one for the other, - an exchange which *must* be voluntary, whatever the law may say about it. We cannot make parents give their children a half-holiday every day in the year, unless we also give compensation for the loss of the children's labour.

She did exhibit some pity for the children but it extended only so far as to hope that in the longer run they would be replaced by machinery:

The case of those wretched factory-children seems desperate; the only hope seems to be that the race will die out in two or three generations, by which time machinery may be found to do their work better than their miserable selves. Every one's countenance falls at the very mention of the evidence which has lately appeared in the papers.

Harriet Martineau was clearly moved by the findings from the Sadler Report and the report of the Factory Commission but nothing was to be allowed to intervene in the labour market.

Harriet Martineau's attitude to the 1833 Act are also fully explained by her in the *History of the Peace for the years 1832 - 4*. She put forward a very poor view of parents, arguing that they sold their children into excessive labour and some to death (by deliberately joining burial clubs and then poisoning the children thus claiming the benefits!!) The mills (factories) themselves were by contrast seen in a very favourable light: the owners were not oppressors; the pay was good; the work not severe; and all arguments to the contrary were deemed to be untrue. For Martineau a key problem was that the parents let out their children to 'that class of middlemen - "the spinners" who cared nothing for neither the parents nor their educated masters and thus the children were kept too long standing, too long awake, and too long at a stretch at work'. She continued, arguing that people thought only of the children's instant welfare (the reformers) and not of the practicality of the case when arguing for a reduction in hours. She then went on to say that the economists had shown how 'vain had always been, and must ever be, laws to regulate labour and wages'. She said that when the commissioners reported - the evil of over-working children became clear: stunted growth and too little of natural childhood. But the children were not the 'victims of the factory system' but victims of their parents poverty or heartlessness.

Could a cure be found? she asked. She pointed out that the commissioners thought not - they foresaw there would be false swearing about children's ages. She

maintained that the parents from whom children needed protection were exactly those who would have the least scruples about deception and perjury. But, she said, the commissioners had to bring in a law.

An issue the Commissioners themselves could do nothing about were the Corn Laws. If these were reduced food would be cheaper, people would be better off, and fewer hours could be worked without real loss and also children may not have to work. The next most important factor was education and the commissioners thought that this could be done under factory legislation. The children were to be at school for half a day. Martineau felt that the measure of education would be small and its quality poor. So in the *History of the Peace* she was taking a slightly more positive approach in general – the Corn Laws should be abolished and there was a strong movement towards this already, and she felt that education was crucial but nevertheless she maintained that the provisions in the Act were unsatisfactory.

Views of Harriet Martineau on Ashley's Ten Hours Amendment

In the *History of the Peace*, (vol.v, ch.vii, pp.99-106, 1843), Harriet Martineau criticised Ashley for putting forward a clause in the proposed bill in 1844 to lower the hours of work from 12 to 10 for women and young people. She argued that his speech showed he did not understand the nature of labour employed in the cotton industry any more than the great laws which regulate labour and production. He was supported by 'many who indulge in feeling at the expense of reason and in indolence of thought'. Martineau supported Sir James Graham, who introduced the legislation, when he opposed Ashley knowing, as Martineau put it, that 'the men must stop when the women and boys stopped and such a legislative interference with the natural course of manufacture was not to be adventured for any reasons which had been alleged'. Graham argued that what was needed was education so that workers could take care of their one great property, their labour – not deprive them of that property. Martineau went to say that to stop the labour of working men by restricting women and children was 'tyranny under the name of humanity'.

Harriet Martineau's views were based on principles – a belief in laissez faire and the right to work. She kept to her position strongly and forcefully until 1860 as we shall see.

7 Success at Last: Ten Hours for Young People and Women 1847

The pressure for change continued and in 1847 the Ten Hours Act (Hours of Labour of Young Persons and Females in Factories Act) was finally passed. The Ten Hours Act at last reduced the permitted maximum hours of work for women and children to 10 hours per day and 58 hours in any one week. The hours for women were thus further reduced from the 12 hours specified in the 1844 Act - a restriction to which Harriet Martineau had already objected. The Ten Hours Movement had achieved its key objective.

Ironically it was at this point that John Stuart Mill in commenting on the Act in his *Principles of Political Economy* 1848, now took the view that women *should* be allowed to work in the factories and that there was no case for controlling their hours – a convergence with Harriet Martineau's views. As with men, women should also be allowed to decide for themselves the hours they worked and the key hindrance, in

their case, being their unjust social position. His powerful argument along feminist lines was heavily influenced by his close friend and collaborator (later his wife) Harriet Taylor. The argument is so impressive that it deserves to be reproduced in full:

Among those members of the community whose freedom of contract ought to be controlled by the legislature for their own protection, on account (it is said) of their dependent position, it is frequently proposed to include women: and in the recent Factory Act, their labour, in common with that of young persons, has been placed under peculiar restrictions. But the classing together, for this and other purposes, of women and children, appears to me both indefensible in principle and mischievous in practice. Children below a certain age cannot judge or act for themselves; up to a considerably greater age they are inevitably more or less disqualified for doing so; but women are as capable as men of appreciating and managing their own concerns, and the only hindrance to their doing so arises from the injustice of their present social position. So long as the law makes everything which the wife acquires, the property of the husband, while by compelling her to live with him it forces her to submit to almost any amount of moral and even physical tyranny which he may choose to inflict, there is some ground for regarding every act done by her as done under coercion: but it is the great error of reformers and philanthropists in our time, to nibble at the consequences of unjust power, instead of redressing the injustice itself. If women had as absolute a control as men have, over their own persons and their own patrimony or acquisitions, there would be no plea for limiting their hours of labouring for themselves, in order that they might have time to labour for the husband, in what is called, by the advocates of restriction, his home. Women employed in factories are the only women in the labouring rank of life whose position is not that of slaves and drudges; precisely because they cannot easily be compelled to work and earn wages in factories against their will. For improving the condition of women, it should, on the contrary, be an object to give them the readiest access to independent industrial employment, instead of closing, either entirely or partially, that which is already open to them (*Principles of Political Economy*, book V, chapter XI, pp.952-953).

Not only can women now work in factories, but they are in a position to choose to do so or not and, far from being factory slaves, are the only labouring women who are not slaves. If they had equal rights with men there would be no case for limiting their working hours as in the 1847 Act.

It is interesting to note that while Mill had made a journey from a patriarchy to radical feminism, Harriet Martineau also made a journey – in the different direction in a sense and a little later – from radical opposition to factory legislation to acceptance and even advocacy in 1860:

We must consider ourselves under a kind of disgrace in our own eyes and those of others – as, in fact unfit to be trusted in those relations of industrial compact which should need no interference of the law...if we were wise and strong enough to live in accordance with the highest principle of government – we should not need, nor endure, the interference of penal law in the relation between the buyers and sellers of labour...It ought not be an office of the law to protect the operative from being overworked, deprived of sleep, and of time

for meals, and of education: *but it was worse to see operatives oppressed, as they too often were before the protection of the law was provided for them...We have to extend this protection beyond its present range* (*Daily News*, March 15, 1860, emphasis added).

The nature of their changes of mind differed in form. Mill was influenced by Harriet Taylor on a matter of principle while Harriet Martineau seemed finally to accept the reality of the situation concerning factories. However, neither writer's change of tack affected their core beliefs. Mill always believed that there were exceptions to *laissez faire* which required government intervention. He originally thought that women should be included in the list of exceptions – to be excluded from factory work for patriarchal reasons. Later women were taken out of the list, but the overall theoretical approach of 'support for *laissez faire* with exceptions' remained intact. This is not to belittle the magnitude of Mill's radical reversal but to set it in context.

Likewise, Martineau's apparent abrupt change of mind also left *her* belief in *laissez faire* intact. Harriet Martineau recognised the 'influence of natural laws on human existence but, at the same time, the moral responsibility and agency of each individual' (Hill, M. R. and Hoecker-Drysdale, S. pp. 185-186). It was the failure of individuals and agents collectively to take a moral stance with respect to factory conditions and hours which created the need for intervention.

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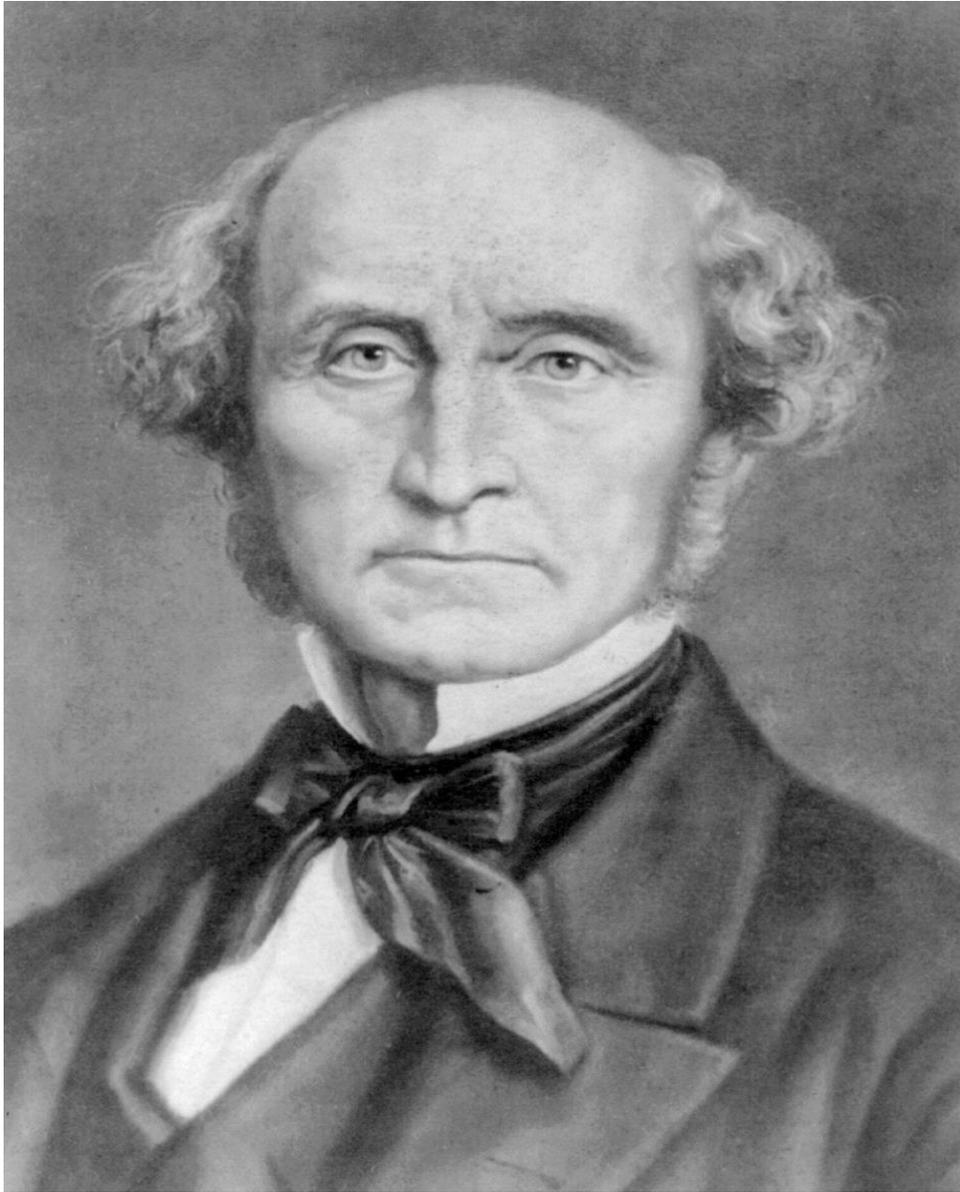
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John Stuart Mill, carte de visite, 1884.

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“One of the greatest women that our generation has seen” - Harriet Martineau’s Transatlantic Obituaries

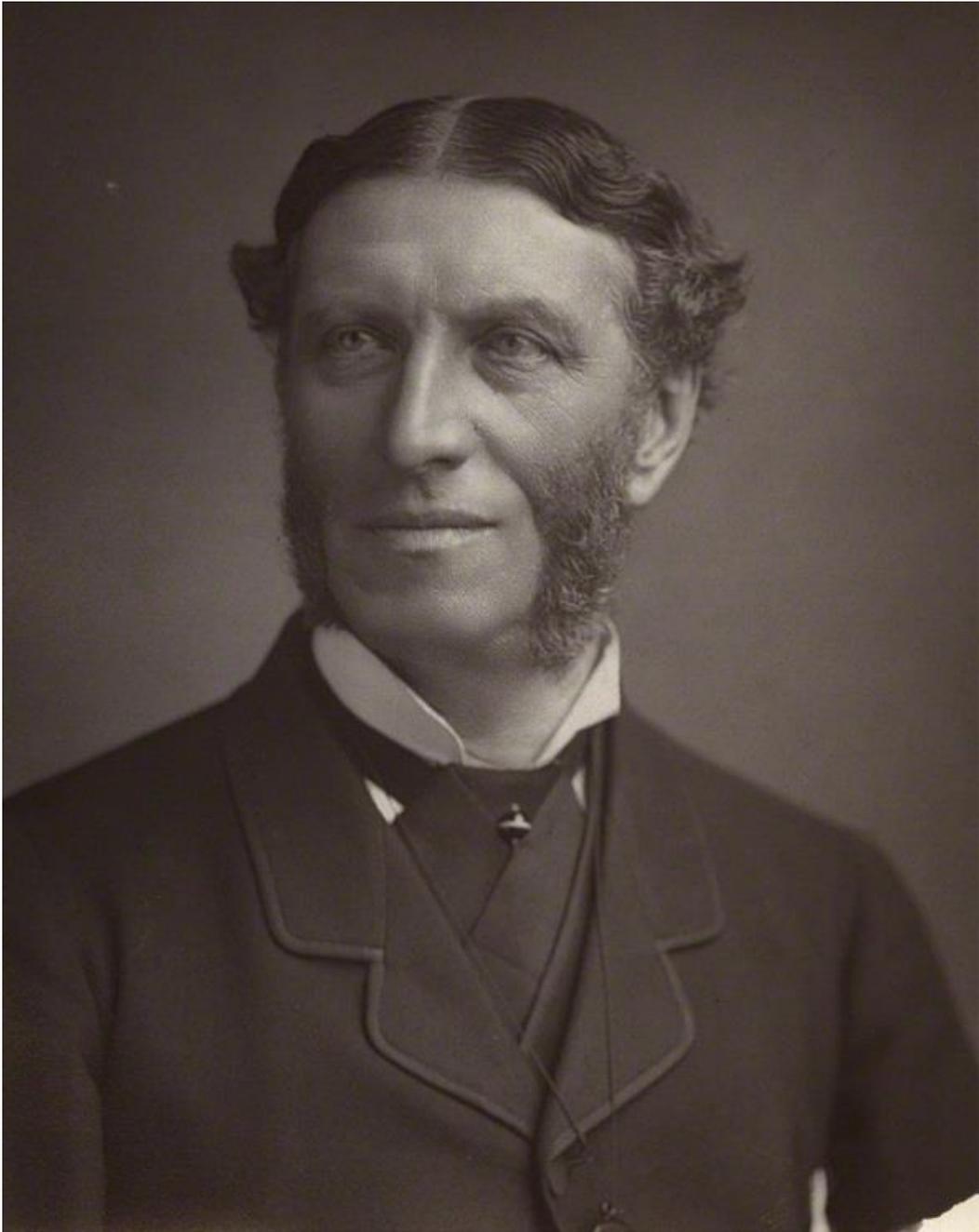
Iain Crawford

Though nothing may be certain but death and taxes, Harriet Martineau’s passing was an unusual phenomenon, as least as far as the way in which the Victorian press recorded it. Indeed, the oddity starts long before her actual demise, which was anticipated in print more than two decades before it actually occurred. Told by her doctors in late 1855 that she was in the final stages of an incurable illness, she set herself to writing an autobiography, only to seal it away for another twenty years until its posthumous publication in 1877.¹ Even as she was writing this life story, word of her condition spread and led to public expressions of concern from her friends and admirers. Matthew Arnold, for instance, was moved to compose what we might call an anticipatory obituary when he published his “Haworth Churchyard” in the May 1855 issue of *Fraser’s Magazine*. Lamenting the early deaths of the Bronte siblings and, in particular, Charlotte’s recent passing, Arnold also called out to his apparently dying friend. Praising her “steadfast soul,” he noted her “unflinching and keen” strength of mind as well as her refusal to be taken in by “Mist, and illusion, and fear.” And he found some measure of comfort in the thought that death would at least spare her witnessing England’s decline:

She will not see her country lose
Its greatness, nor the reign of fools prolong’d.
She will behold no more
This ignominious spectacle,
Power dropping from the hand
Of paralytic factions. . . ²

Reports of her death being greatly exaggerated, Martineau complicated matters for Arnold by surviving for another twenty-one years. As a result, he held off reprinting the poem until 1877 and then took out these lines – as it had turned out, Martineau, indisputably steadfast, unflinching, and keen as she was, had far more opportunity to see, and write about, the behavior of her contemporaries, both foolish or otherwise than anyone had anticipated back in 1855.

On June 27, 1876, however, her long last illness came to an end, and she died quietly in the Lake District house that had been her home for some thirty years. Given the length, range, and impact of her professional career, the event was widely noted in the press in both Britain and the United States, but, again, its reporting took an unusual course. That is, even in death Martineau took steps to maintain as much control as possible over the way her life story would be told. First, two days after her death, the *Daily News*, for which she had written over 1500 leaders during the 1850s and 60s, carried a 6000-word obituary she herself had written, and this document inevitably set the terms for many of those that followed. Second, nine months later, her *Autobiography* was finally published and triggered a second wave of responses to her life and work, responses that, also inevitably, were written in the context of the initial obituaries. Cumulatively, the obituaries and reviews point both to Martineau’s own efforts to manage her posthumous reception and to the complexity of that reception. As *The Standard* noted in its notice of her death, “most persons regarded



Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888)

Elliot & Fry in 1883 National Portrait Gallery

[Wiki Commons](#)

this singular lady as sui generis, and would never dream of binding her by the ‘fixed and settled rules.’”³

For this paper, I’ll focus primarily on just one portion of her obituarial legacy: the

notices carried in the newspaper press shortly after her death. Drawing from some thirty or so obituaries published on both sides of the Atlantic, I'll examine what they reveal about the reception of Martineau's life and career and what they tell us about the challenges she posed to received understandings of a woman's role in the world of letters. As I'll also show, while the British and American articles are in many ways thematically consistent, they differ most visibly in responses to her 1851 book, *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*. Universally seen as a declaration of disbelief in Christian orthodoxy, this book was the object of particular hostility in the United States and appears to have contributed to a wider perception in that country that she was a writer whose impact was largely in the past.

"One of the greatest women that our generation has seen," as *The Examiner* put it,⁴ Martineau remained a challenging subject in death as much as she had been in life. On the one hand, many of the obituaries echo this glowing summary of her life and career: For the *Manchester Times* she was the "foremost woman of her time,"⁵ a sentiment echoed by the *Hartford Courier* in dubbing her "one of the most useful and admirable women of her time."⁶ And *Harper's New Weekly Magazine* went even further with its appraisal that she was "the greatest among Englishwomen, except George Eliot."⁷ At the same time, buried within the encomia was a subtext that hinted at the challenges Martineau and her career had presented to the world of letters. To *The Morning Post*, for example, she had been "one of the few women whose intellectual achievements were such as to have had an influence upon the present age and century."⁸ Meanwhile, *The Times*, which had been a vigorous critic of Martineau's early ventures into political economy and other topics normally regarded as male preserves, ran a long and generous obituary. But, as the closing sentence of the article suggests, the paper was also clearly still wrestling with the very concept of a female public intellectual:

"If any lady of the 19th century, in England or abroad, may be allowed to put in a claim for not having lived in vain, that woman, we honestly believe was Harriet Martineau."⁹

Martineau's refusal to be defined by those "fixed and settled rules" *The Standard* had noted, then, becomes part of the overall assessment of her life and work and is embedded throughout the various components of the obituaries, beginning with her family history.

For many of the obituaries, the arc of the Martineau family history established Harriet within a fortunate narrative of English tolerance, middle-class endeavor, and provincial stability. Taking their cue from the account she herself provided in the *Daily News*, these writers noted her family's migration from France after the revocation of the edict of Nantes and its happy arrival on English soil in 1688, the year that marked the beginning of modern constitutional rule. Thus finding a secure refuge from the perfidy of French Catholicism in a nation that was itself emerging from a period of lengthy turmoil, the Martineaus became model immigrants as they went on to produce a series of eminent provincial surgeons and textile manufacturers.

This account of the upwards narrative of bourgeois success remains uninterrupted by one of the most significant events in Harriet's life -- her father's bankruptcy and subsequent death in 1826. Omitted from her *Daily News* obituary, this collapse in the family fortunes and its stimulus to her making a professional career in writing is

consequently absent from all but one of the initial obituaries. Not until nine months after her death and with the publication of the *Autobiography* does this “fortunate fall” become more generally visible. There, Martineau describes how she was forced on to her own resources and discovered that writing could become a transformative agency in regaining control of her life and establishing her independence. By steering the initial obituaries away from this episode, however, Martineau achieves two effects. First, she naturalizes her development into a professional writer as a logical extension of her family’s long commitment to education and public service. Second, she plays down the transgressive potential inherent in a single young woman’s decision to work towards a career as a professional author increasingly autonomous from the protection of her family.

If the obituaries largely had no access to this aspect of Martineau’s origination narrative, however, they were certainly able to assess the record of her publications, and it is in these accounts that a more complex response to her gendered identity as a professional author begins to emerge. For that complexity often appears inseparable from both the subject matter she chose to write about and the ways in which she approached it. Thus, for example, she is widely praised for her ability to translate the theories of political economy into narratives suitable for a mass-market readership. From the *Boston Daily Advertiser’s* describing them as “wonderfully popular”¹⁰ to the *Birmingham Daily Post’s* dubbing them “Truth severe in fancy fiction dressed,”¹¹ writers were unanimous in identifying her *Illustrations of Political Economy* as one of the major publications of the 1830s – no small matter when we remember that this was also the period in which Dickens, Carlyle, and Tennyson were all making their first impacts. Similarly, her “warm sympathy. . . for the working classes” (*The Standard*) and her nature as “A friend of the operative classes” (*New York Herald*)¹² were widely praised on both sides of the Atlantic. However, even as the obituaries praise her commitment here, they simultaneously critique its emotional tenor. Thus, although *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* noted “the singular vigour and moral elevation of her mind,”¹³ the *Manchester Times* demurred that “her economical doctrines had taken too little account of sentiment.”¹⁴ And even the *Daily News*, responding to her auto-obituary with one of its own, noted the “somewhat hard soil” of her nature and regretted “that severe truthfulness which sometimes wounded others.”¹⁵

Implied in this mixture of reactions, of course, and often made entirely explicit were concerns that Martineau tended to transgress conventional womanly expectations. Such concerns had been a substantial element in the reception of her early work in the 1830s; what is remarkable is how much they persisted into the posthumous appraisals of her entire life and career and how much the obituary writers tried to allay them. *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, prefaced James Payn’s extended review of her life and work with a piece of visual rhetoric that represented her in highly normative terms.

Harpers New Monthly Magazine, October 1876 (2 pages)

HARRIET MARTINEAU.



HARRIET MARTINEAU.

THE greatest among Englishwomen, except George Eliot, has just departed from among us. Her genius was not only various and remarkable in every line in which it was developed, but singularly masculine in its characteristics. She was a poet and a novelist; but she was much more distinguished in the more unusual developments of a female mind, namely, as political economist, theologian, and journalist. Of course she was precocious. Indeed, when one thinks of what she has done, and when she began to do it, it seems incredible that even three-quarters of a century should

have sufficed for so much work. To the last generation she must have seemed one of the most familiar and well-established of English writers; to the present generation it is a marvel to see her death announced to-day, for to us she was a British classic, and hardly accounted among the moderns.

In 1823 she published, at the age of twenty-one, her first book—*Devotional Exercises for the Use of Young Persons*. Seven years later she gained all three of the prizes offered by the British and Foreign Unitarian Society for the best tracts addressed respect-

ively to Roman Catholics, Jews, and Mohammedans—a feat probably unexampled in “prize” literature.

Between the two dates of the publications I have mentioned, she wrote a number of charming stories, chiefly addressed to children, another series upon matters relating to the interests of the working classes, and her admirable *Traditions of Palestine as it existed in the Time of our Lord*. But it was when she was thirty years of age that she attained her first marked success, in her *Illustrations of Political Economy*—the first attempt that had then been made to link the attraction of fiction with the great truths of social life. To the disgrace of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, this work was refused by its council, and had to be undertaken by private enterprise. The fact was, the sub-committee gave no attention to it, since they heard it was written by a young woman, though six months afterward the president of the society, Lord Brougham, allowed that “a deaf girl from Norwich was doing more useful work in the country than any man.” Of the details of this curious “adventure”—for such it seemed to the plucky little publisher who undertook it—you will soon hear the true story in Miss Martineau’s *Autobiography*, which will now be published, after lying for nearly twenty years in print at a bookseller’s at Windermere. I have myself had the privilege, enjoyed by not more than half a dozen people, of reading it; and a most interesting and striking production it is. Whether it has been added to and kept up to date during the long years that Miss Martineau lived in her beautiful cottage, “The Knoll,” at Ambleside, I have at present no information, but I sincerely hope that such is the case; for, though secluded and much distressed by bodily infirmity, she probably received more visits from eminent individuals, both English and American, during the last twenty years of her life, than any other person. During this period, strange to say, she followed with the greatest diligence her vocation of journalist, and I believe that almost all of the leading articles upon the American civil war that appeared in the *Daily News* emanated from her pen. I need not say which side she took in that great struggle.

During her visit, long before that date (in 1834), to the United States, she had been the guest of many important persons in the South, but even then and there had never hesitated to express her abhorrence of slavery, or to expose the fallacies by which her hosts endeavored to recommend to her their “peculiar institution.” In 1839 she fell ill, and so famous had she grown by this time that even her illness became a sort of national property, and was fought over, as a common battle-field, by the disciples of mes-

merism and its opponents. She always ascribed her cure to mesmerism, and she was not one to give up a theory or a belief because it was unpopular. Some very hard things were said against her, and some very jocose things—especially about that alleged experiment of mesmerizing her cow; but she overlived all that, though one would hardly have imagined that even the gentle nature which conceived *Life in the Sick-Room** could have endured so much obloquy with equanimity.

Upon the whole, I think *Life in the Sick-Room* is the most delightful of her works, and will live almost as long as sickness is in the world. One proof of its intrinsic merit is that though published without the aid of her then famous name, it achieved a great success at once; nor is it too much to say it would have been the foundation-stone of her fame as a religious writer, had she confined her attention to similar topics. It was now just twelve years since Miss Lucy Aikin had written to Dr. Channing concerning her, “You must know that a great new light has arisen among English-women,” and the light had grown very broad and bright. At that former period, though the wonderful talents of “the deaf girl from Norwich” were beginning to be acknowledged by a few high natures, and this young woman and Mr. Malthus were great allies,† she was in some danger of being patronized. Like Dr. Johnson, she found several Chesterfields to hold out a helping hand to her after she had reached land by her own exertions, and I am afraid that among them was Lord Brougham. He wrote of her: “She has a vast store of knowledge on many deep and difficult subjects, a wonderful store for a person scarcely thirty years old, and her observation of common things must have been extraordinarily correct as well as rapid.” But the object of these eulogies did not reciprocate them, and I am afraid, in many respects, thought his lordship rather a “common thing” himself. Her opinion of this once great man, however, is given in the autobiography, and if I remember right, as the auctioneers say, “without reserve.”

When her *Life in the Sick-Room* was published, she was far out of the reach of personal patronage, and at the zenith not only of her literary fame, but of her social pop-

* Many, many years after the publication of this beautiful book, I asked her to lend it me; and she smilingly did so, with a “That is all over now, you know,” expressive of her change of religious belief. But, as a matter of fact, the gentleness and patience and the belief in good which characterized that volume remained with her to the last, and were never “over” in their best sense.

† It was a period when Malthus was so little known among the gentle sex that I remember one lady, deceived by the classical termination of his name, asking whether he was not an ancient Roman.

In the text that followed Payn was careful in his phrasing as he noted that Martineau was “distinguished in the more unusual developments of a female mind.” The *Morning Post*, meanwhile, captured its ambivalence by commenting that “Miss Martineau in her writings was more of a man than a woman,” but then went on to add that her letters and conversation “were the outcome of a most truly feminine heart.” Similarly, the *Daily News* assured its readers that she had combined “manly discipline” with “real womanliness,” and the *Boston Daily Advertiser* recirculated Martineau’s own language from her auto-obituary:

“A quiet home of her own, and some few dependent on her for their domestic welfare, she believed to be essential to every woman’s peace of mind, and she chose her plan of life accordingly.”

Buttressing these efforts to render her in normative gender terms was the way in which her professional career was recounted, the things that were left out of the record and Martineau’s work that were given particular emphasis. There were, for example, few references to her non-didactic fiction: *Deerbrook*, her 1839 novel of manners with its unusual treatment of disability, is only mentioned occasionally; *The Man and the Hour*, her 1841 account of the Haitian slave rebellion, is even more conspicuous by its absence. Similarly, although she had made an enormous and wide-ranging impact on public discourse through her fourteen-year career writing leaders for the *Daily News*, there are only passing references to this work and no substantial discussion of her overall contribution to mid-Victorian journalism. Instead, several of the obituaries called out for special notice of a book that has remained largely sunken in oblivion even during the recovery of Martineau’s work that has now been underway for more than a quarter of a century. *Household Education*, a 1849 collection of papers she had previously published in the *People’s Journal*, is thus widely noted as “one of her most popular works,” with Martineau herself once again providing the originating language for this assessment in her own *Daily News* obit. Picked up and recirculated by other writers, including at the *Birmingham Post* and *Lloyd’s Weekly*, this privileging of the book further served to contextualize Martineau securely within the normative feminine space of the home and was repeatedly offered as evidence for her being less transgressive than the obituary writers and their readers apparently feared.

In the end, however, it was another of her now marginalized texts that received the greatest attention from the obituary writers: the *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development* that she co-wrote with Henry Atkinson and published in 1851. Although Martineau explicitly denied the charge of atheism in her own obituary and promised that the forthcoming *Autobiography* would address the matter more fully, writers on both sides of the Atlantic focused in upon the book and the charge that she had abandoned conventional Christian belief. British responses tended to be more tolerant: *The Times*, for example, saw the book as a precursor to Martineau’s adopting Comtean theories of social development, while the *Birmingham Daily Post* restrained itself simply to commenting that it avowed “certain opinions on the great principles of religious belief which were signally opposed to those of her previous career.” In America, however, maintaining religious orthodoxy was clearly a more stringent requirement and the reaction to Martineau’s book was far more virulent. The *Albany Evening Journal* described her as having “adopted views of religion and revelation hardly consistent with the most latitudinarian form of Christian belief,”¹⁶ while the *Boston Daily Advertiser* dismissed them “as not worthy of her.” Strongest

of all was the opinion voiced by the *New York Herald*:

Nothing can be more sad than to see a woman like Harriet Martineau. . . going under the veil with the assurance that there is “nothing in them worthy of immortality”. . . The practical operation of the general belief in immortality on the moral life of the community is greater than we think. To die like a dog is an incentive to live like one. To be nothing hereafter is to be nothing here.¹⁷

For all their recognition of Martineau’s admirable qualities, her commitment to the working classes, and the integrity of her dedication to the abolitionist cause, this charge of irreligiousness remained a prominent note in the American obituaries. Running through these obituaries, too, are a sense that Martineau and her career were most deeply associated with the ante-bellum era: in both her commitment to the principles of classical political economy and her work towards Abolition, she was identified with issues that time, and above all the Civil War, had historicized, and thus she herself was coming to be seen as a figure who belonged primarily to the past.

As this survey of Martineau’s obituaries shows, I hope, her reception in death was as complex as had been the reactions she had encountered during her lifetime. Often a controversial figure, rarely assuming easily conventional roles, she was as challenging subject for the obituary writers just as she had been a complex phenomenon in the many and various milieus in which she had lived her life. But, as *The Times* described, in everything she did “she took the greatest interest in every movement which had for its object the social, physical, and moral improvement of the world in which her lot was cast.” Dedicated to the use of the published word for the betterment of humanity, Harriet Martineau’s final achievement was to help shape her own reception as best she could, even after she herself could write no more, so let me close by giving her the final word. . .

“Her stimulus in all she wrote, from first to last, was simply the need of utterance.”

And:

“With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say. . . The function of her life was to do this, and, in so far as it was done diligently and honestly, her life was of use...”¹⁸

¹ Daily News, 29 June, 1876.

² Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country, May 1855.

³ The Standard, 29 June, 1876.

⁴ The Examiner, July 1, 1876.

⁵ Manchester Times, July 1, 1876.

⁶ Hartford Courier, June 29, 1876.

⁷ Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, October 1876.

⁸ The Morning Post, June 30, 1876.

⁹ The Times, June 29, 1876.

¹⁰ Boston Daily Advertiser, July 12, 1876.

¹¹ Birmingham Daily Post, June 29, 1876.

¹² New York Herald, June 29, 1876

¹³ Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper, July 2, 1876.

¹⁴ Manchester Times, July 1, 1876.

¹⁵ Daily News, June 29, 1876.

¹⁶ Albany Evening Journal, July 25, 1876.

¹⁷ New York Herald, November 19, 1876.

¹⁸ Daily News, June 29, 1876.

Harriet Martineau and the Dales

Lyn Holt

My sources for this brief account are not very extensive. I have used Harriet's own diary for 1845, with some notes by Barbara Todd ("Harriet Martineau at Ambleside") and occasional references from Harriet's autobiography. My aim is to discover Harriet's relationship to the Dales, and , more interestingly its Inhabitants, including her own domestic milieu.

First, how did she come to be in this part of the world? After years of illness she published "Life in the Sickroom " in 1844, and it seemed likely that she would spend the rest of her life as a permanent invalid. But, to everyone's amazement, including Harriet's, in a matter of months she recovered dramatically. She was convinced that her cure was due to mesmerism, a treatment well-known to other celebrated Victorians like Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Barret Browning and Wilkie Collins. Just exactly what "mesmerism " really was is not easy to tell, but it was obviously some form of psychotherapy. But it worked, whatever the reason, and in Harriet's eyes it was a "resurrection", and as she wanted a clean break from an environment associated with sickness, she gladly accepted an invitation to stay with friends on the banks of Windermere.

And she fell in love with the Dales. She said :-

"As I looked down into some of the vales, or around upon a wall of mountains, I was almost Incredulous of what I saw....From my host's porch we looked up the quiet valley to the glorious cluster of summits and ridges which the winter sun clothes with orange, crimson and purple."

She goes on to describe in fine detail the flora and fauna of the region which she seems to know quite a bit about. She talks of the "laurestina" (viburnum) in the "lawns" – she means "meadows" I hope. Where did she get this knowledge from? As far as I know there wasn't anything of a garden in Colegate, nothing in London and only a window-box in Tyneside.

So much for her relationship with the Dales – it was love at first sight. She was overcome with unquestioning admiration. Her relationship with the inhabitants of this paradise was rather different. With the educated literary coterie, yes, she was fine. After all she was a celebrity to them. Wordsworth was not in agreement with her

about the locals, adopting Dryden's image of the "noble savage", (nature's gentleman") but he valued Harriet sufficiently to agree when he was approaching eighty to plant a tree for her and to give her his blessing. Coleridge also saluted her with a deep bow from his porch. But these were "incomers". They weren't locals.

From the beginning she spoke of "the bad state and morals of the place" and decided (with her usual modesty!) that she could and would do something about these. She believed that there was nothing good about the cluster of houses but its position, which in her words needed purifying physically and morally. Obviously she was right about the need for a cemetery instead of an overcrowded churchyard. She saw it also as her vocation, above all to teach these ignorant souls a better way of life. She set about it by organising a Building Society. It was called the "Windermere Permanent Land Building Investment Association".

Thomas Bell was its titular Chairman, but it was Harriet who was the driving force. The object was "to place within the reach of every member the means of securing a comfortable existence in old age. No member could have more than four or less than half shares. An excellent idea, but as I found elsewhere she did not always practise what she preached. There is no record of her account in any Building Society yet she was able to pay off the debts for her house within the first year. In fact, her own house went up so speedily that the neighbours, jokingly, said that she must have mesmerised the builder, a local man, John Newton. They were lost in admiration at Harriet's design and achievement of the Knoll. But, what she had done was no more than anyone today, building their own house would do. Consider what your preferences are, find a builder, agree a price and let him get on with it. Her secret, at this time, was to arrange to give the builder £100 down every alternate month, provided he paid his workmen regularly weekly - a rarity at this age. She became the best paymaster in Ambleside.

Even so, Harriet was unlucky in that, both he and the carpenter, Thomas Cousins, died from cholera, for which Harriet, as expected blamed the local sanitation. She also set about educating the villagers by a stream of lectures which were well attended. Perhaps I am being cynical if I suggest this had something to do with the hall being heated, it was free and there being nothing much else to do, but it was the beginning of an era when knowledge was beginning to be valued in the countryside.

One of the themes she lectured about most vividly was the evil of drink. She went into such colourful detail about the effects of alcohol on the brain and stomach that one young man was so overcome that he promptly fainted. Yet, I hate to tell you, she ordered beer with her bread and cheese for a picnic, whiskey for a visit to a tarn, and was sustained in her last days by "turtle soup and wine"!

You can imagine the merriment this caused in the bar of the "White Lion" at Ambleside. But, I think her 'pièce de résistance' was her treatise on cow management. With her usual audacity and confidence she presumed to tell the locals how to farm cattle. This was on the strength of two cows and three people to look after them (Harriet and her two maids).

Perhaps I can set the scene in the bar of "The White Lion" or the "Salutation"- something like this :

“Yon lass from Norwich. She knows all there is to know about cows. You can tell by the size of her herd, there’s two on ‘em! Oh,(lifting glass) ‘eve another sup.”

I come from farming stock and I can just imagine the scorn with which my grandfather, with his eighty odd cattle cared for solely by him and one farm-hand would have greeted her pontifications (he had , as I remember, a very sharp tongue. When my grandma put on the table a plate of watercress that had started to dry up he said “What’s that? A haystack?”)

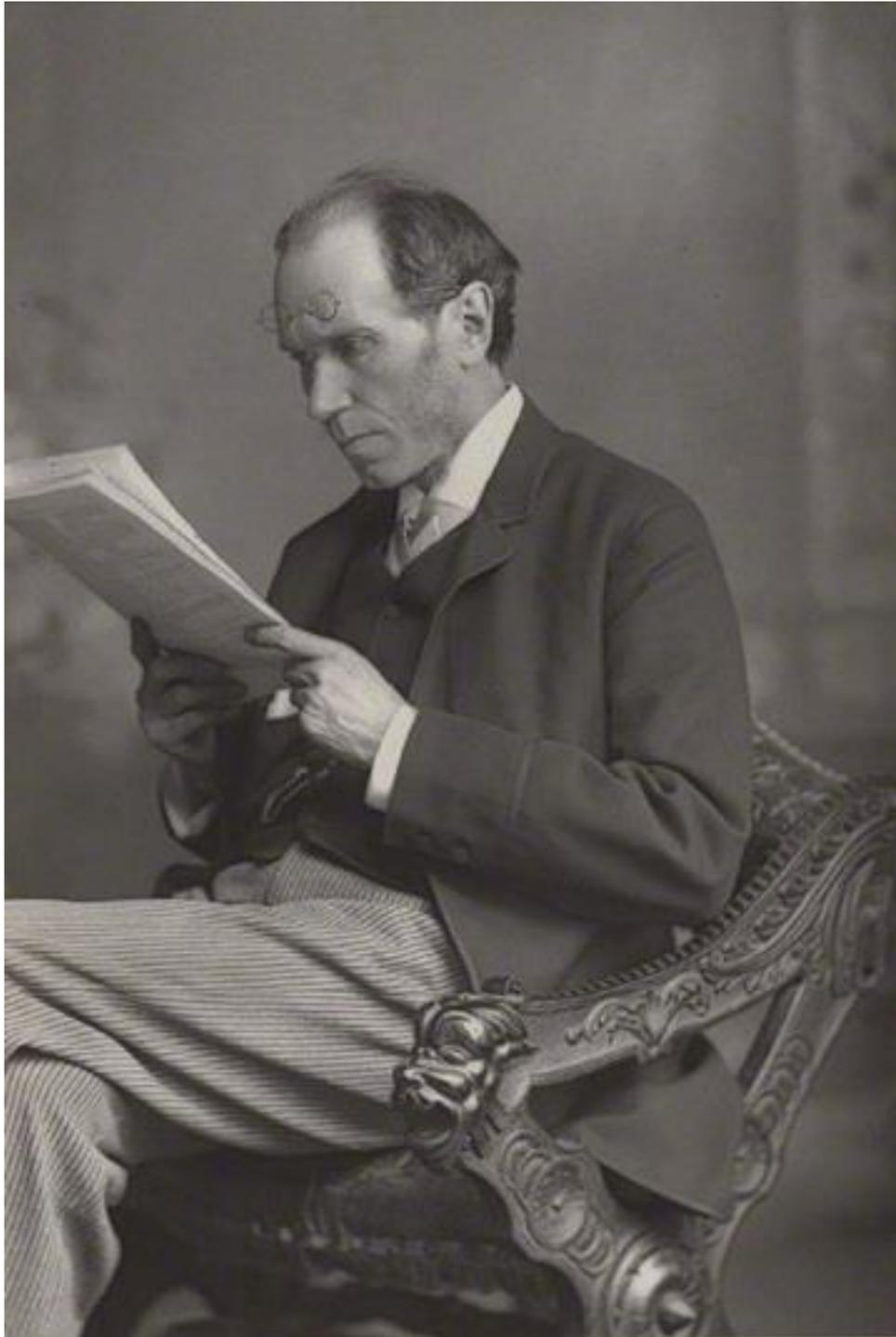
Thankfully Harriet left the sheep alone. Still, today. on the Lakeland fells sheep rearing goes on in a way that would have been understood by the Vikings, and even Harriet would not have dogmatised on this.

However the locals would have known little about her really admirable lifetime’s work in defence of female emancipation and struggle against slavery. They would have known that she was a person of influence – that she managed to persuade Rowland Hill to institute a second daily post in Ambleside. They would also have probably known that her treatment of her maids was unusual for this time. Here she did practise what she preached. She organized Martha’s wedding and did preparations herself. She provided her maids with good accommodation - and, typically, Harriet, provided them with a library so that should not waste their time in frivolous gossip and card-playing.

But, I come to the point I started with. If you were a local in Ambleside, would you have actually liked her? I doubt it. You would have perhaps been in awe of her, admired her knowledge, found her condescending (she obviously had no idea that if uneducated you might still be intelligent) and you would certainly have found her an outright killjoy. Not a drop of alcohol, but you weren’t even supposed to let your hair down on Bonfire Night. And the only thing she seemed to laugh at was being mistaken for a male writer.

But there was one group of locals who definitely disliked her, and the feeling was mutual. The local gentry she even excluded from her lectures. She called them “rich men and women who exact enormous rents for stinking undrained cabins”, and “in a place like Ambleside where wages are high, the screw is applied to working men in regard to their dwellings.”

She goes on to say that the inhabitants of these tied cottages were threatened that if they attended chapel instead of church they could be evicted. She was right: Indeed this situation went on well into the twentieth century. I remember that the head gardener in the village where I lived refused to say who he voted for in the 1931 General Election, for fear of losing not only his job if he offended the Manor but his house as well. However the Second World did change this position somewhat, in much the same way as the Black Death in 1350 caused a shortage of labour. Not only did the gentry dislike Harriet Martineau, but tried unobtrusively to thwart her Building Society plans. Harriet decided to ignore them.



James Payn (1830 -1898)
Photo by W.D. Downey 1880 Wiki Commons

But, Harriet had one saving vice. She was a secret smoker. She had taken a liking to tobacco in her oriental travels. When her young writer friend, James Payn visited her, the neighbours assumed that the cigar smoke arising from her porch was entirely due to him. Had they known that she was not quite so decorous as she

seemed it is likely that they would have found this endearing. Even worse he taught her to play whist and cribbage, even playing for pennies! What was it she had said about her maids not wasting time on gossip and card playing?

I set out to evaluate Harriet's relationship with a rural community in the nineteenth century. I'm not sure this was ever possible with a twenty-first century mindset. Be that as it may, whatever I found in this narrow field, in no way detracts from the achievements of this ethical, knowledgeable, energetic, extraordinarily courageous deaf woman from Norwich.



Harriet Martineau [Wiki Commons](#)

John Lund - Our Eldest Member

It is sad to record the death of our eldest member. John Lund died in March, 2015, aged 102. Some members may recall meeting him a few years ago outside his home in Ambleside, just a few hundred yards from The Knoll, when John told us that his house had been constructed by Harriet Martineau's building society, the Windermere Permanent Land Building Investment Association.

John was, in fact, a very eminent scientist, who spent much of his working life with algae in the tarns and lakes of the Lake District and made his retirement there. A splendid photograph and an obituary has been published by the Royal Society of which he had been Chairman as well as President of the British Phycological Society. Do see - <https://royalsociety.org/~media/about-us/fellowship/lund.pdf>

Recent New Members (UK unless stated)

Christine Thomas

The Martineau Society

The Martineau Society was founded in the early 1990s by members of the Octagon Unitarian Chapel, Colegate, Norwich, to foster interest in the descendants of Gaston Martineau, surgeon and Huguenot refugee who settled in Norwich in 1695.

Their skills developed in many fields: medicine, art, writing, engineering, education, religion and industry and the Society publishes papers on their lives and correspondence with others in these fields and with their other contemporaries.

The Society is a registered charity (no. 1064092) and holds an annual conference which includes an AGM, papers and visits to places connected with the Martineau family. The Society issues *The Martineau Society Newsletter* twice each year, containing scholarly articles and news of events and publications.

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The Martineau Society Newsletter submissions of 2,500 – 4,000 words or less may be sent to Bruce Chilton, Newsletter Editor:

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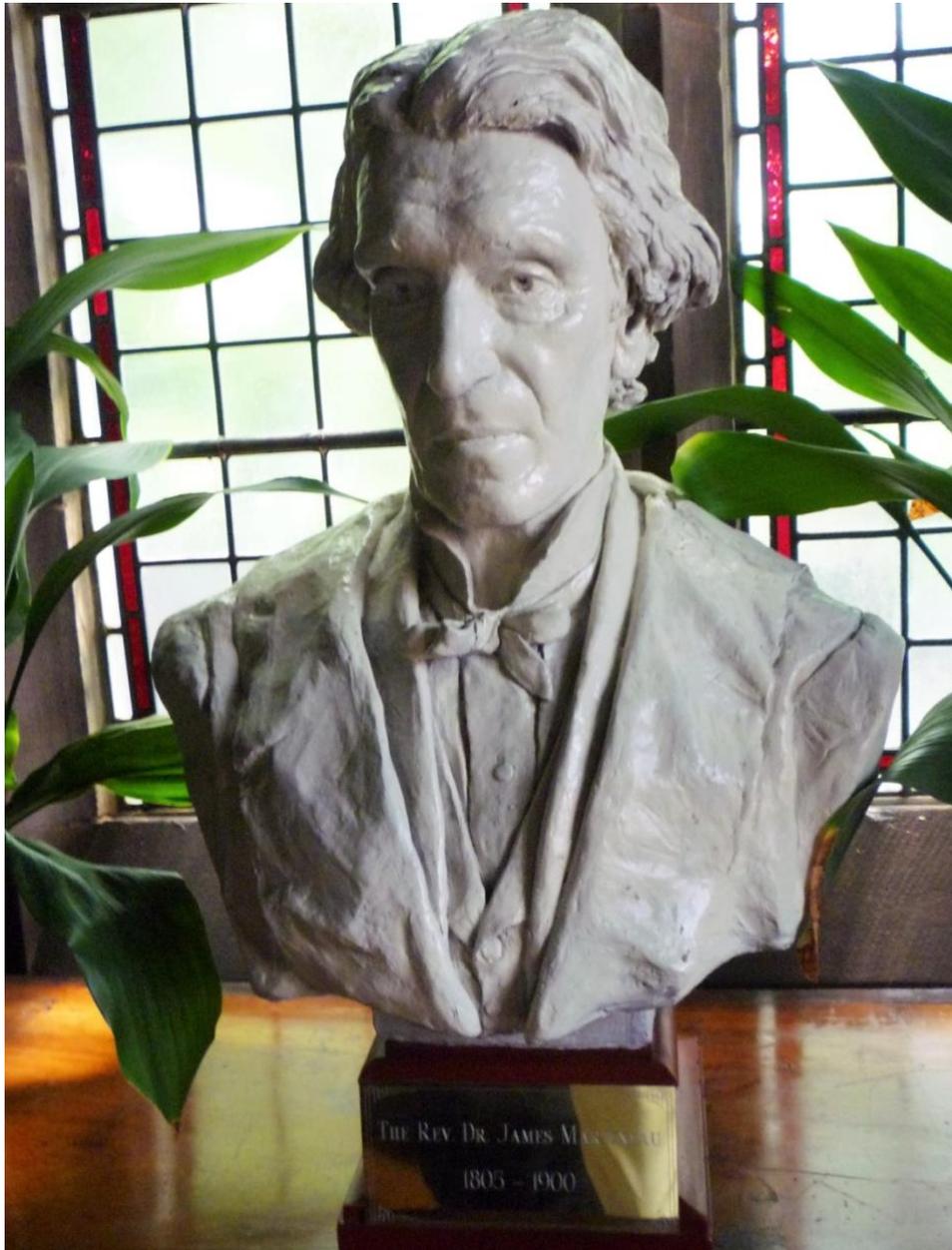
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History is an account of the past experience of humanity; and this, like the life of the individual, consists in the ideas and sentiments, the deeds and passions, the truths and toils, the virtues and the guilt, of the mind and the heart within. We have a deep concern in preserving from destruction the *thoughts* of the past, the leading conceptions of all remarkable forms of civilization; the achievements of genius, of virtue and of high faith. And in this, nothing can disappoint us; for though these things may be individually forgotten, collectively they survive, and are in action still. All the past ages of the world were necessary to the formation of the present; they

are essential ingredients in the events that occur daily before our eyes. There is no period so ancient, no country so remote, that it could be cancelled without producing a present shock upon the earth.

James Martineau *Endeavours*, 1st Series, xii



James Martineau (1805 – 1900)

Statue dated 1877 at Ullet Road Unitarian Chapel, Liverpool