

## Prologue

### **Huguenot Background: Gaston Martineau I; the Martineau Family in Norwich (1685-1802)**

The Martineau family of Norwich looked back with respect to their Huguenot forbearer, Gaston Martineau I, master surgeon of Bergerac who had fled from France soon after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to reach England early in 1686.<sup>1</sup> Gaston's parents, Elié Martineau and Marguerite Baresson, came originally from Fontenay-le-Comte in Poitou but were living in Bergerac, sixty miles east of Bordeaux on the picturesque Dordogne River. When Gaston (Harriet Martineau's great-great grandfather) was born in 1660, Bergerac boasted a large population of Calvinists, known also as Huguenots, as well as a number of doctors and surgeons. Gaston would have been apprenticed to a master of the surgeons' guild (possibly a family member) at thirteen or fourteen. To qualify he would have spent seven years learning the practice, reading prescribed texts and passing examinations for admission to the guild. He is known to have qualified, but his movements for the following two or three years have not been traced. That he left Bergerac before the end of 1684 seems evident: his name does not appear on that year's list of protesters against the destruction of the local Calvinist church. Gaston's final destination in France was to be Dieppe--part of a triangle of Protestant centers together with Le Havre and Rouen from where many of the refugees who registered at the French church in Threadneedle Street, London, had set out.<sup>2</sup>

The Threadneedle Street church was well known on the continent and boasted the largest French congregation in England. The shock effect of the Revocation, ending the protection the Huguenots had earlier enjoyed, is evident from the tenfold increase in the number of refugees to register at the church in 1686 with a second tenfold increase in 1687 (the peak year for registration).

Gaston's actions after he left Bergerac may have comprised practicing as a doctor at Fontenay-le-Comte close to his father's family until the Revocation made it too

risky. Alternatively, he may have lived quietly in a town like Offranville near Dieppe, where the family of his future father-in-law, Guillaume Pierre, had property. Martineau family tradition held that a Marie Pierre, with her father and siblings, sailed from Dieppe for England on the same ship with Gaston. Like his future son-in-law, Guillaume Pierre escaped arrest in France, and he and his children including Marie were naturalized as English citizens on 20 March 1687. The following year, 1688, William and Mary ascended the English throne and permanently established Protestantism and the toleration of Dissent in England. Along with other men and their families from Bergerac, on 21 March 1689 Gaston Martineau also became an English citizen.

Spitalfields may have attracted Gaston because of the abundance of English surgeons in London proper. The community, moreover, boasted one of the three churches a letter patent of James II in 1688 had allowed French ministers to build within the city and suburbs of London. At La Patente de Spitalfields on 26 September 1693, the church register shows that "*Gaston Martineau, Me. Chirugien, de Bergerac en Perigort, f. d'Elie Martineau et de Marguerite Barbesson,--et Marie Pierre, ff. de Guillaume Pierre et de Marie Jourdain, de Diepe en Haute Normandie*" were married. The following July, Gaston and Marie's first child, Marie, was baptized at the "new church at London." Perhaps owing to economic uncertainties among the Spitalfield weavers, in 1695 Gaston moved his family to the thriving East Anglian town of Norwich. Recurring Christian names like Gaston, Guillaume and Marie among members of a Pierre family who remained in Spitalfields--as well as of Martineaus who continued to attend French Protestant churches in London--suggest that Gaston had taken the decisive step of leaving his extended family and friends for the second time.

By the main trunk road that led from the Bishop's Gate, Norwich lay one hundred and forty miles northeast of London. From medieval times, Flemish weavers had settled in Norwich, England's second most prosperous city.<sup>3</sup> As additional Dutch- and French-speaking master weavers and their journeymen and dependants (all called "Strangers") continued to settle there, the Norwich city fathers assigned them St. Mary the Less, a thirteenth-century church in Queen Street leased by the city in post-

restoration times, for use as a cloth hall. Though occasional services were held at St. Mary the Less, Huguenot families like Gaston's regularly attended the nearest Calvinist (Presbyterian) church. Gaston's signature in *Le Livre de Discipline de l'Eglise Walonne de Norwich* shows, however, that he conformed with the laws of St. Mary the Less. Four of Gaston's nine children were baptized there; he and Marie and a number of their descendants were buried in the church graveyard.

A few blocks north of St. Mary the Less, Tudor houses still cluster along cobbled Elm Hill, off Princes Street and close to the River Wensum that winds through Norwich. Not far away stand the castle (gallantly defended by the keeper's wife in the eleventh century) and the tall-spired, Norman cathedral with cloisters famous for their elaborately carved and painted ceiling bosses. The old-fashioned Norwich streets where Gaston first settled may have reminded him of Bergerac: in addition to his practice as a surgeon he became active in community affairs. When an Act of Parliament in 1711 made every parish liable for a contribution towards the building of a local workhouse, foreign congregations such as that of St. Mary the Less declared their wish to support only their own poor. Gaston's name then appears in the records as the conveyor of £4 paid in 1712 to the minister and officials who arranged for the foreigners' exemption.

Gaston's children like those of his fellow Huguenots quickly became part of Norwich English society. Although three of his daughters married men of French descent, his sons took English wives, mostly from families of the Presbyterian congregation.

In 1686, the year Gaston had sailed from Dieppe, the Presbyterian congregation in Norwich laid plans to build a new meeting house. Completed the following year, it was nevertheless pulled down in 1753 to be supplanted by the unusual "free classical" Octagon Chapel, which adopted Unitarian theology early in the nineteenth century and served as the Martineaus' place of worship. While forming part of the wider Dissenting community in Norwich for the next 150 years, the Martineaus also kept in touch with other families of Huguenot descent settled elsewhere. Over four generations Gaston was succeeded by four Martineau surgeons: his second son, David; David's son, David II;

David II's son, Philip Meadows; and Harriet Martineau's eldest brother, Thomas, who died tragically of tuberculosis in 1824.

Traces of all English history survived in Norwich. When Gaston Martineau arrived, one of the last members of the ambitious property-loving Paston family was sinking from debt and from an unfortunate loyalty to the Stuarts--most Norwich citizens having been loyal to Parliament in the Civil War. The town's prosperous cloth manufacturers, hard-working and Puritan in spirit, supported philanthropic and cultural objects. Elegant Assembly Rooms designed by Thomas Ivory, architect of the Octagon Chapel, were built in 1756.<sup>4</sup> In 1775, John and Henry Gurney founded the first Norwich bank, later housed in a splendid building on Bank Plain not far from Elm Hill. The Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, containing one hundred and ten beds and expected to treat eight-hundred poor annually, opened in Norwich in 1772 (partly as a result of the spate of hospital building throughout the kingdom). An impressive structure, it was built on land leased from the Norwich Corporation outside the old city walls at a cost of £13,000. A distinguished member of the hospital staff, Dr. Edward Rigby (related to the Martineaus through his mother, Sarah Taylor), had been apprenticed to David Martineau I and may have introduced vaccination into Norwich. (Two men from the county of Norfolk, Thomas Paine and Horatio Nelson, were to gain fame on the wider world stage in the late eighteenth-century).<sup>5</sup>

David Martineau I and II both died young, at thirty-two and forty-two respectively. In 1793, Philip Meadows Martineau, Harriet's father's eldest brother, became principal surgeon at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. Generously educated by his father, David II, Philip Meadows studied medicine at Edinburgh and London but completed his medical apprenticeship at Norwich after his father's death.<sup>6</sup> Philip Meadows specialized in lithotomy, the operation for kidney stones performed more frequently in Norfolk and Suffolk than anywhere else in England.

None of Philip Meadows's younger brothers entered a profession. David, Peter Finch and John became brewers and sugar-refiners in London; the youngest, Thomas, became a "manufacturer" and exporter of specialty cloths woven at Norwich.

Despite the “fine flowering of ease and culture which lasted with diminishing splendour into the early decades of the nineteenth century,” by the late eighteenth century the prosperous Norwich weaving industry had already begun to founder.<sup>7</sup> When Thomas started in business, cloths like camlet and bombazine supplied export as well as domestic markets.<sup>8</sup> Competition from weavers in Yorkshire and elsewhere, however, threatened Norwich’s control of the market. By 1788 the city’s prosperity was overtaken by Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham. Meanwhile, the fear of invasion that gripped all of Britain through the late 1790s reached a climax in the winter of 1803-1804, when Napoleon’s massing of men in a huge camp at Boulogne caused frantic volunteer activity along the Norfolk coast. Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar in 1805 ended an immediate threat of invasion, but the Napoleonic wars continued to take a toll on Norwich, and the city’s large-scale manufacturers failed to recover after 1815. Norwich’s isolation, the new competition, difficulties in getting yarn and changes in fashion all affected sales of Norwich’s hand-woven, luxury textiles.

Along narrow and poorly paved streets, Norwich weavers lived in cottages built on property left vacant by old monastic houses or grand estates. Tending their looms in summer from 4:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, men and women worked in buildings just off main streets or next door to the merchants who marketed the cloth. In greater London districts like Spitalfields, whole families sometimes lived and worked in a single room at the top of a house. Similar rooms with long many-paned windows can still be seen at Norwich.

As a merchant, Thomas Martineau and his partner distributed yarn to weavers and found markets for the finished “stuffs.” Goods were often sent to London by wagon road to avoid losses from transshipment through the Norfolk port of Yarmouth. Almost to the time of his death in 1826, Thomas traveled on business to London, Birmingham, Dudley and Bristol. Henry, his second son (later his father’s partner), traveled for orders as far as Spain where bombazine was favored by women for *mantillas* and camlet by the religious orders. “Thomas Martineau and Son” had an office at 1 King Street in the City of London, and Thomas followed the seventeenth-century practice of importing wines

from the continent in exchange for goods. After the collapse of the family firm, Henry became an importer of wines. All such family practices found their way into the stories and essays of Harriet Martineau.

Thomas Martineau and Elizabeth Rankin, the eldest daughter of staunch Newcastle Unitarians, had married in 1793. They may have met when Thomas was in Newcastle on business in the late 1780s or early 1790s. Thomas's retiring nature, overshadowed by that of his eldest, surgeon brother, found a complement in Elizabeth's strong-mindedness (a portrait of Elizabeth in late maturity shows her strong nose and full, rather simpering mouth). Elizabeth's father, Robert Rankin, supported his large family as a sugar refiner and merchant. When he died of a stroke in 1823, he was at his desk in a colliery office and left his widow, Ann Cole Rankin, to pay off £1,000 resulting from "his only mistake" and to give his unmarried daughters Margaret, Mary and Georgina their small bequests. Younger than Elizabeth, the three Rankin sisters became devoted aunts to Elizabeth's children.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of his reticence, Thomas could offer Elizabeth a respected place in the lively Dissenting society at Norwich. They first lived in the upper floors of a house in Gurney Court, Magdalen Street, where the Quaker prison-reformer Elizabeth Gurney Fry had been born in 1780. Inside the house a staircase leads to high-ceilinged rooms where Thomas and Elizabeth, their servants and five children made their home. Lawns and a garden with trees can be seen from tall windows in the two-story bow at the back of the house. In these rooms the eldest Martineau children--Elizabeth, Thomas, Henry, Robert and Rachel--romped and began a stern regime of learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis XIV's edict of 1685 deprived Protestants of all rights.

<sup>2</sup> In the previous century when continental wars of religion had sent streams of refugees to British shores, Edward VI granted French and Flemish Protestants, "banished and cast out from their own country," the use of St. Augustine's chapel in Austin Friars, London. The French-speaking half of the congregation then moved to St. Anthony's chapel in Threadneedle Street, slightly nearer the medieval Bishop's Gate. Outside the gate lay Spitalfields, a rural village where silk-weavers from Lyons and Tours were to settle in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1413 a flint structure with “checkered” and crenellated front was built to transact Norwich city business: it was named the guildhall in imitation of London, Norwich having no merchant guild (Cotman’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century watercolor of the hall and the historic provision market shows the colorful scene encountered by Victorian shoppers).

<sup>4</sup> After 1798 Martineau’s uncle Philip Meadows Martineau spent his winters in Ivory’s house on King Street.

<sup>5</sup> Harriet vividly remembered her mother’s weeping over Nelson’s death.

<sup>6</sup> As a student Philip Meadows spent time in Paris and Geneva.

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Mottram, *Success to the Mayor. A narrative of the development of local self-government in a provincial centre, Norwich, during eight centuries* (London: Robert Hale, 1937) 198.

<sup>8</sup> Camlet was a table-weave of various threads including hair; bombazine was woven of undyed silk and worsted wool and often dyed a deep black suitable for mourning clothes.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Martineau to Thomas Martineau, Jr., 25 December 1823, BANC [Box 8] 33; the painting was by Hilary Bonham-Carter (see James Drummond and C.B. Upton *The Life and Letters of James Martineau* (London: James Nisbet, 1902) 5; Robert Rankin was a partner in the bankers Surtees Burden & Co., who failed in 1803.