

Chapter 19

Work, London (1838-1839)

While Martineau was away, Carlyle quizzed her enthusiasms to Emerson, "Miss Martineau" being a code term for sly humor between them. Emerson had objected to the high praise of himself in the "Cambridge Commencement" chapter in *Retrospect*. He knew she meant to do him "a signal kindness," but in fact did him "a great annoyance -- to take away . . . my privacy & thrust me before my time . . . into the arena of gladiators, to be stared at." When Carlyle read out Emerson's comment to Martineau, she took it with good grace. "But," Carlyle then wrote sarcastically, "I doubt, I doubt, O Ralph Waldo Emerson, thou that hast not been sufficiently ecstatic about her -- thou, graceless exception . . . In truth there *are* bores, of the first and of all lower magnitudes."¹

More hurtfully *The Times* published a derisive review of *How to Observe* as a "seven-and-sixpenny volume" ridiculously purporting to teach people of "tolerable education, eyesight, and understanding" how to "see." Martineau was "like the enchanter of the *Arabian Nights* who put ointment into the eyes of the Dervish," changing a rock and milestone into precious jewels and a bag of gold. With her "collyrium," even religion would assume "such a brilliant as will astonish the weak mind" while her "scribble, scribble" of "sentences, pages, sheets, volumes, societies in America, illustrations of political economy" (and so on)--of which the "imaginative parts are excellent"-- are "not reasonings . . . only words."²

Carlyle may have read the review in *The Times* before he wrote to Emerson again on 15 November to report that Martineau was "coming hither" that evening. She was "writing a Novel," and had now taught people "'How to observe.'" Scathingly, he went on: "The old plan was, to have a pair of eyes . . . and then to open them and endeavour with your whole strength to *look*," but "'God,' as the Arabs say, 'has given to every People a Prophet (or Poet) in its own speech': and behold now Unitarian mechanical Formalism [has] its Poetess too!"³

Reviewing *How to Observe* in the January *Quarterly*, J.W. Croker deployed the same fanciful tone as *The Times*. Making fun of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, he described "Miss Martineau's scrapbook [as] the very foolishest and most unfeminine farrago . . . of apocryphal anecdotes, promiscuous facts, and jumbled ideas -- picked at random . . . out of the Penny Magazine and such like repositories."⁴

At Fludyer Street, meanwhile, the "mountain of work" waiting for Martineau included "The Martyr Age" (completed 30 November) and the prison pieces for *Chambers's*. In late autumn, Anna Jameson, who moved in London literary circles similar to those of Martineau and the Carlyles ("the sentimental M^{rs} Jameson," Jane called her), sent Martineau a copy of her *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* based on her recent journey through the Great Lakes and to Mackinaw Island. Jameson believed Martineau to be a "lover of truth for truth's sake" in *Society*, where she displayed "a good and womanly spirit, candid and kind; -- stern sometimes, never sharp, never satirical," and Martineau acknowledged Jameson's support and sympathy.⁵

(Writing from America, the Follens now proposed to meet Martineau in Switzerland. Follen's brother in Zurich had sent word through Gannett that Follen [who hoped to lecture and to complete a work on psychology] would be "perfectly safe in Switzerland, though not in

Germany." He had a temporary pulpit in Boston, but even with German pupils and a lecture series on pantheism -- repeated in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the invitation of Henry Ware - he could not earn enough to support his family and had not found support for a free church in Boston).⁶

Martineau fell ill over Christmas within "100 pp of the end" of *Deerbrook*. Moxon now announced the price was "to be lowered to 2/," she to have "two-thirds of the profits" and the work to come out in March. Hoping "the transaction will end to our mutual satisfaction," Martineau explained to Moxon the slight delay by her wish "to go over my work again with the one friend to whom I have confided it."⁷

Rachel was staying at Fludyer Street, Martineau told James in early January, enjoying parties and evenings at Covent Garden." Rachel's school was prospering, and their mother felt better, "set free from daily resort" to belladonna. Martineau, though, had "to suspend her writing by a thumping head" for which Dr. Booth prescribed, and a week with her friends the Robert Huttons at Putney Park would "do the rest." In February she reported (by mistake) that the Follens were sailing for Le Havre, and she hoped to "share their Paris life with them."⁸

In a letter to the Wares, Martineau called up the day when "that hateful little steamer" sailed off from the *Orpheus*. Ware's new book "Probus" had "arrived safe, & without any charge." She read it "with strong interest & pleasure," but admired "Zenobia the most." Indeed, the *London & Westminster* editor would not let her review Ware, lest she should praise him "extravagantly." She had sent Ware's requests to Bentley but fancied Bentley hated her "because none of his bribes" would induce her "to let him publish any thing" for her. Just now her "daily & nightly dream" was of joining the Follens in Paris "& going with them to Switzerland." She loved "to think of the tumult of welcome" waiting for them in England, for it was owing

to the abolitionists that any respect survives the proceedings of Congress, -- its denial of the right of petition, its treatment of M^r Adams, its contempt of the very first principles of freedom . . .

(points Martineau often repeated). "The Martyr Age" had caused a sensation, inducing men of science, men of business, men of the world [to] go about reciting Garrison's sayings, & M^{rs} Chapman's magnificent paragraphs.

On the basis of that article, the editor pronounced her "the centre pillar of this review." Promising him "an article for every N^o," her next was to be "Literary Lionism" and perhaps "Governessing." The *London & Westminster* supported Lord Durham, whose Canadian policy would soon be disclosed. Just now she was "preparing the Notes for Macbeth . . . & writing the 'Housemaid' for the Poor Law Commissioners' Series." Finally, she gossiped that Gannett's preachings "reached a dreadful pass of wildness -- especially the very last, at Bristol, the night before he sailed."⁹

In early January, Macready begged Martineau's advice on the delicate question of staging a play by Fanny Kemble he believed treated too "gross" a subject. Martineau and her neighbor Henry Hart Milman both advised against it. Later at Covent Garden seeing Macready play Claude Melnotte in Bulwer's *Lady of Lyons*, Martineau was stunned when he appeared at her stage box in full court dress put on for the Queen, who was in the audience.¹⁰

Often encountering the Carlyles in the social whirl of London, Martineau received "a Swedenborgian letter" from Jane while she was at Putney Park. She would call on Tuesday evening with Erasmus, she replied. She and Carlyle[s?] were then invited to dine at the Macreadys' along with the Fonblanques, Dr. Elliotson, the Buller sons, Browning and Erasmus Darwin.¹¹

In March, Martineau told James that Lord Palmerston, foreign secretary, had asked her "to draw up a statement for just international copyright," the earlier petition having failed in the Commons. Madge was delighted to be immersed in the "Liverpool controversy," she then declared. He and his colleagues John Hamilton Thom and Henry Giles were responding to the Church's position on the errors of Unitarianism. She was sending James a further £110 (apparently a loan) but doubted she could do so again. Her expectations for *Deerbrook* were "moderate," though her "Abolition article" ("The Martyr Age"), had excited the attention of "Wordsworth, Dr. Arnold, and high church people, and members of the government." Cattily, she reported that Mill had gone to Pisa for his health, "to be soon followed by Mme. T. [Harriet Taylor], on pretence of having broken a blood vessel and needing change of climate." Meanwhile, *she* was introducing Robertson at Fludyer Street parties and for Ellen and Alfred Higginson, was making "careful inquiries of colonial people about the openings for capable young medical men in our settlements beyond the seas."

All Martineau's family relationships were not going smoothly, however. According to James, she stormed at the *difficulty* in accepting his "pressing invitation to come to see us" owing to "Rachel's ungrounded prejudice against her, and habitual misbehaviour to her." By the 18th, Harriet had agreed instead "to companionize and support Isabella Rankin on a necessary journey abroad for recovery of health." At Fluyder Street, Elisabeth Reid came every day to read proofs of *Deerbrook* to Elizabeth and would go "to the Rhine, to Basle, or Geneva or Lausanne" and possibly to Paris with Martineau to join the Follens. For the last fortnight, Martineau had been kept up reading proofs, "(arriving at 10 p.m.) till any time from 1 to 4 a.m." Poring over her pages, she corrected errors, changed several dozen words and supplied a title, "The School-Room," for Chapter 6, Volume 1.¹²

(Moxon reported in February that only 30 copies of *Deerbrook* had been sold after the account was closed in September; he was sorry she was ill but wanted another novel from her).¹³

In addition to writing, Martineau continued to give evening parties. On 16 March, Crabb Robinson met "a number of "distinguished persons in her little room," including the ever-present Carlyle. To Robinson's amusement, Martineau told him *three* times she was competing with "parties also at the Speaker's and Mr. Babbage's" that night. Meanwhile, the question of Henry's behavior and its effect on the household had not been resolved, and over the month she posted contradictory reports to James. On the 2nd, Henry seemed "steady and reliable," but "very thin;" on the 18th, he was "laid up by an eruption on legs and arm;" on the 28th, he proved "ever worse and unfit for work . . . very hard and selfish, and cannot be depended on for permanent improvement." Martineau planned to leave instructions for Richard to supply Elizabeth and Henry with "adequate means" in her absence. Ailsie, the slave child, was another care. If her master married again, Ailsie would stay in America, but if she arrived in England

while Martineau was away, Catherine Turner agreed to take her as a pupil, "on certain conditions of health."¹⁴

Martineau's lampooning "Literary Lionism" appeared in the *London & Westminster* for April (Carlyle terming "lionizing" "Martineau-ing"). Aimed at London "types," the article further sneered at the current craze for autographs, at third-rate painters who begged celebrities "to sit for portraits to be hung out as signs to entice visitors to the artist's rooms" (a partial slap at Margaret Gillies?) and at authors who wished to be treated as *gentlemen* first.¹⁵

Soon after *Deerbrook* had appeared, Martineau must have sent Knight her "notes on the localities of Macbeth and . . . permission to use them" in his *Pictorial Shakspeare*. Knight worried over having "to shape them a little with reference to unity of plan," but he *believed* not a line would be altered. Disparaging Chadwick's "too high" opinion of French manuals "about Trades," he further pronounced Martineau's *Maid of all Work* to be worth "all their codes for servants." Of *Deerbrook*, he would speak truthfully. Though "the purest and healthiest in tone -- the most thoroughly high-minded and elevating work of fiction . . . of our day" (here Knight began to fudge), it might not please *all* novel readers -- and her *next* would be better. "Any evening next week that you will bid me come to you -- I will come," he offered. Would she dine with them on the 18th or the 23rd before she left London?

Two days later, William Sharpe wished Martineau a pleasant journey, sending a half-year's payment of £17. 5. 1 from Charles Fox for profits on *Illustrations of Political Economy* (£9. 5. 7), *Illustrations of Taxation* (£4. 4. 2) and *Devotional Exercises* (£4. 16. 10), minus his share (£1. 1. 6).¹⁶ Before she left for the continent on 17 April, Martineau went to stay in Hertfordshire with the Kers, hurriedly finishing *The Housemaid* for Knight.

(Carlyle chortled [prematurely] to Emerson "Miss Martineau is gone to Switzerland, after emitting '*Deerwood* [sic], a Novel.' How do you like it, people ask. To which there are various answers returnable, but few so good as none."

Jane Carlyle and Catherine Macready smiled at Martineau's pretensions in writing a novel, but the ardent Macready recorded "feelings of gratitude and veneration to the author".¹⁷

In *Deerbrook's* opening scenes, the action focuses on women and children. Two sisters from Birmingham have come to live in the village of Deerbrook, and a tone of moral earnestness predominates. The wider plot revolves around two middle-class families: the wives gossip, vie socially and try to control the lives of others around them. Two eligible bachelors, a lame governess and servants and villagers of Deerbrook comprise the rest. Though lacking the wit and economy of Jane Austen, Martineau offers an array of charming domestic details: small incidents and thoughts and anxieties like those *she* must have experienced. Martineau family outings like walks and excursions on the river or gatherings at Philip Meadows's elegant home, Bracondale, may be sources for several of the episodes. An expedition to gather cowslips for "tea" evokes the pleasure of the outdoors. Staying at home, the lame governess gazes out the window where the

acacia with its fresh bunches of blossoms was weaving above . . . casting [its] flickering shadows upon the floor: the evergreens of the shrubbery twinkled in the sun, as the light breeze swept over them: the birds were chirruping all about, and a yellow butterfly alighted and trembled on the window-sill . . . meadows stretched to the brink of the

river, on the other side of which were the park woods. All was bathed in the afternoon sunshine, except where a tree here and there cast a flake of shadow upon the grass (chap. 5).

As the novel proceeds, the three young heroines voice the Victorian complaint of a lack of respectable employment for middle-class women. The governess earns barely enough to live on and practises Stoic resignation. The elder sister falls convincingly in love (despite stilted dialogue) and marries the bachelor doctor; the younger sister goes to live with them and to help care for their infant. The predicaments of humble females seem authentic as well as amusing, like the shopkeeper's worries about matching "worsted" for her customers. Characters talk about each other, about books and sometimes about death or enduring pain. Males battle outside forces: the young doctor, with disease and public ignorance. Meanwhile the women struggle against jealousy, fear and self-pity. After a year, the doctor's fortunes begin to fail while poor times in Deerbrook incite ignorant villagers to violence. When an epidemic strikes, the characters suffer but the novel gains unity and pace. Finally, suspense builds over a stolen engagement ring and the misunderstanding between the second sister and her suitor. In the end, the elder sister conquers her self-doubt and her husband overcomes his disappointment at having married the sister he did not at first love.¹⁸

Following Carlyle's early put-down, sympathetic as well as condescending comments on the novel poured in from friends and acquaintances like Elizabeth Gaskell and Fanny Kemble. Crabb Robinson deemed *Deerbrook* "a capital novel though . . . too full of preaching;" Sarah Austin heard it called dull but remarked "I dare say it is to pampered novel readers." By the end of April, Moxon was regretting he could not print more. Charles Knight, Lord Jeffrey, Elizabeth Ker and Monckton Milnes all approved. Gaskell thought "the conversations very interesting," and John Sterling deemed it "striking, and parts . . . very true and beautiful" though not so "clear and harmonious" as Austen's books. Lord Melbourne told the Queen he had a copy from the Duke of Sutherland and found it "a very clever work, a very curious picture of humble rural life, with all Miss Martineau's talent & little of her extreme opinions."¹⁹

Parallels to Jane Austen became the standard for reviewers. The *Athenaeum* gushed that the book contained matter that "opens, elevates, and humanizes the mind" even if the main characters seemed too idealized and their dialogue unrealistically perfect and complete. The *Spectator* called the work able, "but heavy and indifferent fiction," the plot devices weak, the narrative slow-moving -- delayed by "miniature painting of unessential subjects, by microscopic exhibitions of feeling," and so on. Martineau's "speculative habit of mind" was to blame, the reviewer said, and she had acquired bad habits from writing didactic fiction.²⁰

Late reviews appeared in the *Edinburgh*, *Blackwood's* and *Tait's*, and only 788 copies were sold in 1839. In the *Edinburgh*, Thomas Henry Lister compared Martineau's new work to her "Tales Illustrative of Political Economy" [sic], which contained vivid descriptions and "sound knowledge of human character." Like "the late Miss Austen" [sic], Martineau had a "quick sense of the ridiculous, especially as displayed in affectation and pretension." Both showed an "uncommon knowledge of human nature" but Austen wrote with intuition while Martineau merely understood the "science" of writing. In *Blackwood's* in February, V.S. Venables commented first on *Illustrations of Political Economy*, which had good descriptions but artificial teaching, while Martineau's two books on America showed disloyalty to Britain. *Deerbrook*,

however, demonstrated a high sense of morality and approached Austen in the portrayal of children, domestic life and ordinary people. *Tait's* called *Deerbrook* "a picture of real life" suffering from "trivial and commonplace details," but "must be taken up a second time, and will repay the study."²¹

Despite the novel's mixed reception, Martineau's story and characters were to have a significant influence on fellow Victorian novelists. Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot admired *Deerbrook* and created doctor heroes, while Charlotte and Anne Brontë created believable and sympathetic governess heroines.

¹ TC to RWE, 25 September 1838, *Carlyle Letters* 10: 185-88 (RWE to TC, 10 May 1838, *Emerson/Carlyle*, Slater 183-86.

² "How to Observe," *The Times* 9 October 1838: 5, cols. 3-5

³ TC to RWE, 15 November 1838, *Carlyle Letters* 10: 214-18.

⁴ J.W. Croker, "How to Observe. -- Morals and Manners," *QR* 63 (January 1839): 61-72.

⁵ For "The Martyr Age" and "prison pieces," see chap. 18, notes 12 and 14; JWC to Susan H. Stirling, 20 June 1838, *Carlyle Letters* 10: 108-109; Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838) 2: 141 (eight years older than Martineau, Jameson had been publishing works of non-fiction since 1825; she had gone to Toronto nominally to join her estranged husband but returned alone: see Clara Thomas, *Love and Work Enough. The Life of Anna Jameson* [London: Macdonald, 1967] 139).

⁶ Charles Follen to HM, 1 December 1838, *The Works of Charles Follen* 1: 505-507.

⁷ Edward Moxon to HM, 1 January 1839, BUL 1117-18; HM to Moxon, 5 January [1839], *CL* 2: 30-31 (the friend was probably Elizabeth Ker).

⁸ HM to JM, 10 or 17 January and 4 February 1839, *HM/FL* 482 and 482.

⁹ HM to William and Mary Ware, 25 January 1839, BPL Ms. Eng. 244 (partly pbd. *CL* 2: 31-33); *Probus: or, Rome in the third century. In letters of Lucius Piso [psued.] from Rome to Fausta, the daughter of Gracchus, at Palmyra . . .* (New York: C.S. Francis; Boston: J.H. Francis, 1837), also published as *The Last Days of Aurelian; or, The Nazarenes of Rome. A romance. By the author of "Zenobia, Queen of the East"* (London: R. Bentley, 1838); *The Housemaid. The Guide to Service* (1839); Martineau may still be justifying herself after the embarrassing episode with Gannett in December 1835.

¹⁰ *Macready*, Toynbee 1: 487, 491 and 494; Fanny Kemble's play was probably *An English Tragedy* about the elderly roué and cardsharp Baron de Ros, which Macready declined.

¹¹ HM to JWC, [Friday] 8 February 1839, Vornhegen Collection, Tagullonean U, Krakov ("Swedenborgian" perhaps meaning belief in a divinity and man's obligation to do good); TC to John S. Dwight, 14 March 1839 and TC to Jean Carlyle Aitken, 27 March 1839, *Carlyle Letters* 11: 56-58, note 4 and 63-65; *Macready*, Toynbee 1: 504.

¹² HM to JM, 2 and 18 March 1839, *HM/FL* 483 and 483-84 (Martineau loaned James's correspondence on the controversy to Bishop Stanley of Norwich); *Deerbrook*, vols. 1-3, corrected proof sheets, BANC [Box 10] 2-4.

¹³ Moxon to HM, 17 February 1840, BUL 1123-26.

¹⁴ *Robinson on Books/Writers*, Morley 2: 569; HM to JM, 28 March 1839, *HM/FL* 484.

¹⁵ "Literary Lionism," *L & WR* 32 (April 1839): 261-81 (nominally a review of Henry Fothergill Chorley's insipid novel *The Lion; A Tale of the Coteries* about struggling writers and society hostesses, and *Heads of the People: or, Portraits of the English*, a collection of drawings and essays; partly rptd. *Auto.* 1: 271-97); ironically, Martineau declared in her autobiography that she refused invitations to Lansdowne House after the Marquis and Marchioness demurred at meeting Elizabeth, explaining that "I went nowhere but where my acquaintance was sought, as a lady, by ladies" (*Auto.* 1: 333-34).

¹⁶ See chap. 18, note 16; Charles Knight to HM, 3 April 1839, BUL 1090; William Sharpe [a solicitor] to HM, 5 April 1839, BUL 1203.

¹⁷ *The Guide to Service. The Housemaid* (London: Charles Knight, 1839); TC to RWE, 17 April 1839, TC to John A. Carlyle, 15 April 1839, and JWC to Grace Welsh, 7 April 1839, *Carlyle Letters* 11: 89-92, 82-89 and 68-72; *Macready*, Toynbee [diary entry for 25 August 1839], 2: 22.

¹⁸ Sanders summarizes the wider implications of *Deerbrook* in *Reason Over Passion*, chap. 3

¹⁹ *Robinson on Books/Writers*, Morley 2: 576; Sarah Austin to Anna Jameson, 15 April 1839, *Anna Jameson, Letters and Friendships (1812-1860)*, ed. Mrs. Steuart Erskine (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915) 171-72; HM to JM, 18 April 1839, *HM/FL* 484-85; Elizabeth Gaskell to ?Anne Robson, [23 December 1841], *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (London: Mandolin, 1997) 47; John Sterling to Mrs. Fox, quoted in *Auto.* 3: 221; Melbourne to Queen Victoria, 10 October 1842, Royal Archives A4/83.

²⁰ *Athenaeum*, 6 April 1839: 254-56; "Miss Martineau's *Deerbrook*," *Spectator.*, 13 April 1839: 350-51.

²¹ Thomas Henry Lister, *ER* 69 (July 1839): 494-502; George Stovin Venables, "Miss Martineau--*Deerbrook*," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 47 (February 1840): 177-88; "Literary Register," *Tait's* 6 (June 1839): 411.