



THE MARTINEAU SOCIETY

FIRST NEWSLETTER

January 1994



EXTRACT FROM THE PROSPECTUS:

...Far from being wholly or primarily Unitarian or theological in composition or outlook, the Society should embrace other subjects in which the Martineau family were skilled: linguistics, medicine, art, engineering and industry; and Harriet's and James' connections in academic, political and economic circles; as well as their more prominent personal friends (and adversaries).

It is proposed to issue Newsletters in January and August: items for inclusion, on any topic relating to the Martineaus and their circles, should reach the (Acting) Editor (address at the end of this issue) by the beginning of July or December.

Every journey starts with a single step. A suitable setting-off point for exploring this remarkable family might be the family tree (lost from the family Bible but retrieved and sent to Harriet in 1832). It begins with a strong bias towards medicine; we propose to follow its development and ramifications, generation by generation, in later newsletters. The name MARTINEAU is very rare in Norfolk, London, Newcastle and Liverpool now - where are the other descendants?

The MARTINEAU FAMILY TREE  
(simplified, from Vera Wheatley:  
Harriet Martineau 1957)

...15th century landed proprietors in Poitou  
and Touraine...

...Elie Martineau = Marguerite Barbesson

Gaston = Marie Pierre de Columbine  
(Chirurgien, Bergerac et ?Dieppe) (came from Dieppe  
to London 1686 in the same ship)  
to Norwich 1695

David (surgeon, 3rd of 9 children) = Elizabeth Finch  
1697 (possibly related  
to Peter Finch,  
Presbyterian minister, or Martin  
Finch, Independent minister)

David (surgeon, 4th of 6) = Sarah Meadows 1725-  
1726-68 1800, daughter of  
Philip (Mayor 1734,  
son of John, ejected from Ousden, Suffolk)  
her sister Margaret=Richard, woolmerchant,  
son of John Taylor, minister at Norwich  
/continued overleaf...

1733-57; Martineaus were thus entrenched among leading citizens, but Philip (South Sea Bubble) and Richard (Lisbon earthquake) lost their fortunes, and

Thomas (youngest of 7) = Elizabeth Rankin  
(bombazine manufacturer) of Newcastle  
1764-1826

was equally unfortunate in business; his children were brought up to earn their own living:

Elizabeth 1794-1850  
Thomas 1795-1824  
Henry 1797-1844  
Robert 1798-1870  
Rachel 1800-78  
Harriet 1802-76  
James 1805-1900  
Ellen 1811-89

Elizabeth married a surgeon at Newcastle. Thomas, a brilliant surgeon, partner to his uncle Philip Meadows Martineau, died young (his widow married Edward Tagart, minister at Norwich 1825-7 and at Little Portland Street). Henry, his father's business partner, died unmarried in his forties. Robert became an engineer at Dudley, with his uncle, and Birmingham: his happy marriage was a source of great joy to Harriet. Rachel kept house for James before he married, and later for her mother, but had her own career as a teacher. Harriet will need many newsletters to herself!

James married Helen Higginson, daughter of the minister at Derby with whom he had boarded as an apprentice engineer, in 1828. Ellen married another Higginson, Alfred, a surgeon in Liverpool and Newcastle; her daughter inherited 'The Knoll', Ambleside, Harriet's last home.

James and Helen had eight children, one son and three daughters surviving them. The eldest son, Russell (1831-98), became Assistant Keeper of the British Museum Library (Professor at Manchester 1866-74), but was not strong. With his brother Basil he edited Hymns of Praise & Prayer in 1876. There is a drawing of James by Basil's wife in the Octagon Chapel; but Robert Martineau, the fashionable Victorian artist (of 'The Last Day in the Old Home' and 'The Christmas Hamper'), was of a London family, perhaps distantly related.

Gertrude, the last surviving daughter, laid the foundation stone for the Martineau Memorial Hall and Sunday Schools, adjoining the Octagon, in 1905. The appeal brochure (the site was bought for £2000: another £4000 was needed for a 'building adapted to modern requirements for a school of 300-400 scholars including a central Martineau Hall and adjoining Class Rooms, and some for Congregational purposes') attributes James Martineau's interest in theology directly to the ministry of Revd Thomas Madge (at the Octagon 1811-25 and thereafter at Essex Street) and states that James resolved on 'the same high calling' in 1822. The Dictionary of

National Biography, quoting his retirement speech, identifies the death of his cousin Henry Turner, minister at Nottingham, as the cause of his 'conversion' and entry to Manchester College, York, in that year. Yet his early schooling by Carpenter at Bristol (at Harriet's suggestion, because he was not happy at Norwich Grammar School) and boarding with Higginson (a strong character, who insisted that his daughter should not see Martineau for four years before they were formally engaged) must surely have had much influence.

In Norwich on vacation in 1823 (states the brochure), Martineau instigated the founding of the Octagon Sunday School and 'in the cause of Sunday School teaching he laboured for more than half a century'. Expiry of the lease on the premises 80 years later, leaving Boys, Girls and Infants without proper accommodation for 'Sunday meetings or week-night work', was the reason for a new building. Within a generation, economic and social changes removed the factories and their workers' families away from central Norwich. The last pupil still attending the Octagon, Ellen Neave, died two years ago; but another, now in a sheltered home nearby, came to a concert last month and was delighted to renew his acquaintance with the Chapel - especially the organ, for in those days it was worked by a hand pump which it had been his privilege to work!

But Harriet could remember a charming old lady coming to visit her mother in the old home nearby: Mrs Anna Letitia Barbauld (daughter of Dr Aikin), who as a child had heard Joseph Priestley read his poems at Warrington Academy, and vowed herself to become a poetess. Such are the links, backwards and forwards, which make up our free-thinking heritage. Let us never fail to appreciate them.

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This Newsletter is necessarily of a provisional nature: the next will benefit from improved production methods and invited articles. (A Norwich bias is not inappropriate for a start but should disappear in time.)

Future topics will include:  
James Martineau in Dublin; Harriet in America;  
the Hutton connection; Harriet and Mesmerism;  
Ambleside and Aviemore; Taylors and Taylors.

WHO SAID:

"Harriet Martineau accepts the Universe"  
"'Gad, Sir! She'd better!" ?

Arrangements are being made for the Inaugural Meeting of the MARTINEAU SOCIETY to be held, probably at Manchester College, Oxford, in the summer of 1994.

For details and application form (available soon) please send your name and address to the Acting Secretary, Alan J Middleton, at 49 Mayfield Avenue, Grove, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7ND.

Annual subscriptions (£10 individual, £30 corporate) should be sent to the Acting Treasurer, Mrs Iris Voegeli, The Granary, Church Farm, Happisburgh, Norfolk NR12 0QY.

Correspondence on other matters should be sent to the Acting Secretary or the Acting Editor, Mrs Sophia Hankinson, 26 The Granaries, Baker Lane, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 1HY.