The Martineau Society

Fifteenth Newsletter
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THE MARTINEAU SOCIETY

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CONTENTS: NEWSLETTER NO 15

Editorial	2
Noticeboard	2
Harriet and the Civil War	3
Harriet Martineau's Feminism	8
Review of Juliet Barker's *Wordsworth*	17
More on Harriet's Statue	18
James on Harriet's Will	19
E-mail addresses	20
Addresses for Communication	20

EDITORIAL

Hot on the heels of James Martineau's centenary conference last year, we now have preparations for the bicentenary of Harriet's birth, coming up in 2002. (Apologies to everyone for the lack of material on James in this issue of the Newsletter!). Valerie Sanders and Deborah Logan are editing a special issue of the journal *Women's Writing* devoted to new work on her writing, life, friends and relationships. If you would like to contribute, please send an outline proposal initial to Valerie or Deborah, and final copy (no more than 7,000 words) by 1 September. We are limited to about nine articles, so there may have to be some tough editorial decision-making if we are overwhelmed with offers! Meanwhile, material for the Newsletter is still urgently needed twice a year, if members have other kinds of writing they would like to offer.

You will shortly be receiving details of the annual AGM and Trail, which is this year returning to Norwich from 2-4 August. If you haven't been to an AGM before, do consider coming this year. Papers are given by active Martineau scholars (both for James and Harriet), and there are plenty of opportunities to see the local sights, meet new people, eat sociable meals and talk. If you come to Norwich you will of course see where James and Harriet were born, went to school, and grew up.

NOTICEBOARD

- The Gaskell Society's annual conference this year at Bath Spa University (17-19 August) will include a paper on Elizabeth Gaskell's relationship with Harriet Martineau – to be given on behalf of the Martineau Society by Valerie Sanders.

Elisabeth Arbuckle: Harriet Martineau and the Civil War

[Part II of a paper given at the Martineau Society annual conference in 2000: beginning with Martineau's criticism of *The Times's* coverage of American affairs].

When *The Times* reviews Harriet Beecher Stowe's new novel, *Dred, A Tale of the Dismal Swamp*, Martineau assails the newspaper's 'perfectly astonishing' ignorance about the North sending blacks to the South. 'The coloured population of the North is abundant and prosperous beyond what European travellers have any means of witnessing,' she scolds, with some exaggeration. The South, however, was trying desperately to 'stop the competition of free labour with slave labour by engrossing the area of production, and hedging in the numbers and enterprise of the North.' Meanwhile, the North was stirring but had not yet taken up a position in either 'politics or war.'

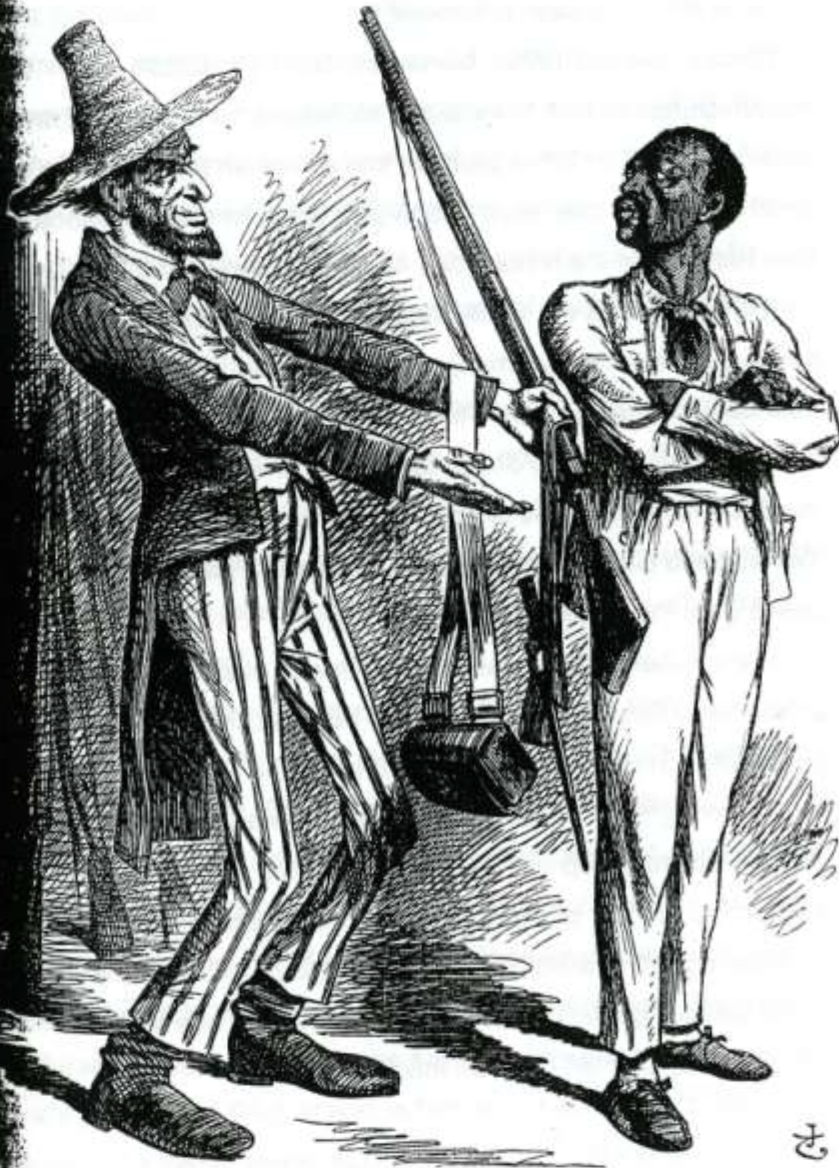
Two months later, Martineau reported on the upcoming presidential election. In 1856, sectional differences had led to the formation of the new Republican Party. Attracting members of the elite, eastern establishment including New England intellectuals who had not before participated in politics, the party opposed the extension of slavery in the territories and nominated the controversial explorer Colonel John Charles Fremont as its candidate. 'Our suspense about the issue of the Presidential election is drawing to a close,' Martineau assures her readers on 15 November, and even 'Aristocratic Europeans, who never before sympathized with anything republican, now [see that nothing] can compare with the interest of the struggle.'

Though the Republicans carried all but four of New England's 67 counties, Frémont lost the election to the Democrat Buchanan, who gained fewer popular votes than the combined total of the Republicans and the Know-Nothings or American Party. Buchanan's subsequent unwillingness to offend the South, over the four years of his term, simply exacerbated the national crisis.

On 25 November 1856, Martineau took another tack against the South. In a first paragraph probably added at the last minute, she concedes that the election was a disappointment, but she is not worried because:

> The remarkable diminution of the Democratic majority [is] enough to sustain the confidence and invigorate the nerve of the Republican party, [which has] begun their preparations for bringing in a free-soil President in 1860.

In this leader, her real target is a Southern movement to revive the African slave trade – outlawed by international treaty since 1807. With a sly reference to 'the reappearance of the sea serpent' to pique readers' attention (such a sighting *was* reported in *The Times* of 26 September 1856), she urges that, incredibly, the movement exists and must be studied. She then cites an impressive series of quotations taken from Southern newspapers and probably reprinted in the North. Readers, she urged, must remember Olmstead's book [*A Journey to the Seaboard States in the Years 1853-1854*, 1856] (which she reviewed) on the decay of Southern plantations, 'the recent decree of WALKER, as President of Nicaragua, ordaining the introduction of slaves into his territories from any quarter where they can be found' and 'reviling by Americans of all Mexicans and native Texans who may be found within their newly annexed dominions' (a reference to the Gadsden Purchase and Mexico's



ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.

"WHY I DU DECLARE IT'S MY DEAR OLD FRIEND SAMBO! COURSE YOU'LL FIGHT FOR US, SAMBO. LEND US A HAND, OLD HOSS, DU!"

abolition of slavery). Having extinguished the African Slave Trade, 'it is our duty,' she concludes self-righteously, 'to let no movement towards its revival pass unheeded.'

Through the late 1850s, Martineau had urged British cotton manufacturers to look to India and elsewhere for a supply of raw cotton. When *The Times* protests that American planters have a great advantage over other cotton-producers 'in the excellence of their handling of the cotton,' she admits that this is true, but *The Times*, as usual, is not wholly informed. On 18 February 1859, she points out that 'the [assumed] boundless extent of fertile soil, the abundant capital, the agricultural improvements, the perpetual supply of trained labour do not exist.' And she quotes statistics on the declining economies of Southern states, telling readers that the 'position and circumstances' of South Carolina planters are 'very unlike what the *Times* sets forth.'

In November 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President. A month later, South Carolina seceded from the Union, to be followed by six other Southern states. In April 1861, the Civil War began. That autumn, 1861, Martineau forwarded Florence Nightingale's 'Military Sanitary Reports' and the 'War-Office Regulations founded on them' to the war office at Washington, to help keep Northern soldiers in fighting condition. Yet she would have liked to 'give the same sanitary guidance...to the Southern army,' she said. [1] A virtuous war, after all, must be fought fairly!

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[1] Harriet Martineau to Fanny Wedgwood, 20 January 1862, *Harriet Martineau's Letters to Fanny Wedgwood* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1983) 215.

With the exception of the *Trent* episode – also in 1861 – Martineau's support of the North never faltered, and she resigned from the *Daily News* only when the North had won the war.

Until her retirement, Martineau contributed articles on the US and slavery to other journals, but the leaders she poured out for the *Daily News* – sometimes at the rate of six a week – became her *raison d'etre.* Ill and dosed with laudanum, tended by two servants and one niece after another in her home at Ambleside, she felt confident she was furthering the progress of the human race by keeping it informed.

As we know, the identification of Martineau's *Daily News* leaders came from a trunk full of clippings in the possession of Sir Wilfrid Martineau, crucially and efficiently examined by Bob Webb. Yet most of those on the US during the Civil War were missing, and the trunk itself is now missing. Did Maria Chapman carry off those leaders to America?

In spite of this maddening non-conclusion to the story of Martineau and the American Civil War, the degree of her emotional involvement is clear. Several examples appear in letters to Chapman included in the *Memorials* to Martineau's *Autobiography*. After the North's disastrous loss at the Battle of Bull Run, Martineau expresses 'an anguish of shame and discouragement such as I never thought to feel again.' President of the Southern Confederacy Jefferson Davis's message, she says, 'makes one's heart sink and one's gorge rise.' *Disgust* was in fact one of Martineau's best devices. To demonstrate indignation most forcefully, she often uses alliteration as well as exaggeration. Bushels of mail, she tells Chapman, come to her from Northerners who insist the war is

about preserving the Union. 'But such people have not been truckling and trimming all these years to be trusted by you or me today' (403).

Deborah Logan: 'Not fine ladies, but true-hearted Englishwomen': Harriet Martineau's Feminism

[Part II of Deborah Logan's paper from the Martineau Society conference in August. Using modern feminism's links between the personal and political as a starting point, its aim is to explore Martineau's feminism through her relationships with famous British and American women. In this part, Deborah discusses Martineau's relationships with Elizabeth Barrett ,Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Florence Nightingale and Maria Martineau].

Martineau's relationships with Elizabeth Barrett and Charlotte Brontë are similar in several ways: with both, she is cast in the role of mentoring the younger writer, the friendship is terminated due to ideological differences, and the marriage of the one and the candid literary criticism of the other subvert, rather than forge, the women's literary network even as it is being constructed. The epistolary friendship between Martineau and Barrett waned as both left their sick-rooms for more active lives – Martineau to hike through the Middle-East, and Barrett to elope to Italy with Robert Browning. Robert's dislike for Martineau and her distaste for Elizabeth's hero, Napoleon III, hastened the conclusion of the friendship. Charlotte Brontë, who sought Martineau's literary advice through letters and visits to the Knoll, defends Martineau's reputation against charges of atheism; however, the break in this friendship hinges not on theological issues, but on gender ideologies and, again, the

disparity between private and public practice. Simply put, in Martineau's view, Brontë creates women characters who perpetuate damaging stereotypes rather than promote Woman's Cause.

Martineau's review of *Villette* in the *Daily News* objects to its romance theme, which essentializes women as having only one object in their minds: 'All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, - love.' She questions the novel's psychological morbidity as well as Lucy Snowe's being in love with two men simultaneously. Stunned by the review, Brontë writes, 'she has hurt me a good deal. [...] My wish indeed is that she should quietly forget me' (Barker 720); the two never meet again before Brontë's death. But Martineau's perspective is consistent with her long-standing feminist agenda: 'What apology *can* C.B. offer to 100,000 women, - especially governesses' whose private lives have become open to public speculation as a result of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*?' (Arbuckle, *Letters,* 125). Again, as public figures, women writers are responsible for promoting Woman's Cause in an unassailable fashion to a public strongly predisposed to resist sexual equality, in their fictional characters no less than in their own behaviour.

Martineau's remarks on Brontë in *Biographical Sketches* attest to her genuine admiration for the younger woman, who had 'the strength of a man, the patience of a hero, and the conscientiousness of a saint.' Martineau's opinion of Brontë approaches her admiration for Chapman and Nightingale, although the novelist's fragility prevents her from participating in the active world with the vital, forceful presence demonstrated by those

women. Despite Brontë's many fine qualities, she lacked the physical, emotional, and intellectual stamina required of the sort of woman best able to promote Woman's Cause.

The relationship between Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell is more difficult to characterize, since it seems like a missed opportunity in terms of feminist and literary networking. Martineau praises Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* – 'Oh! What a beautiful book it is!'; *Cranford* also earns praise. But *Ruth*, oddly, she condemns: '"Ruth" won't help us. [Amidst] much that is beautiful, there is much that is disgusting.' As a social-problem novel, *Ruth* dramatizes the plight of seamstresses. Given that Gaskell's topic complements Martineau's own writing on the plights of working women, especially needlewomen, her objection highlights a contradiction in her distinction between realism and 'coarseness. Not only was Gaskell's writing distinctly influenced by Martineau's own combination of fiction and didacticism in the *Illustrations of Political Economy*; but Gaskell's persistence in treating the fallen-woman theme throughout her career aggressively counteracts the romanticization of female sexuality exhibited by Bronte and other women novelists to which Martineau objects. Gaskell was also involved in active 'recuperation' of fallen women in her community through 'magdalen homes': she not only writes about social change, she actively participates in it, making Gaskell a stronger example of Martineau's ideals than she gives her credit for.

George Eliot, whose literary standards mirror Martineau's, but whose unconventional morality earned her disapproval, is not a promoter of Woman's Cause either. The two women actually had a great deal in common: aesthetically, both valued literary realism;

both 'converted' from Necessarianism to Positivism; both wrote for the *Westminster Review* and shared an interest in phrenology and mesmerism; and both experienced permanent breaches with beloved brothers who rejected them – Martineau for her agnosticism and Eliot for her adulterous relationship with George Henry Lewes. Eliot's semi-autobiographical character Maggie Tulliver (*The Mill on the Floss*) displays many qualities that are strikingly resonant with Martineau's experience.

Eliot visits the Knoll in 1852 (this is not mentioned, *interestingly*, in the *Autobiography*), and reports that 'Miss M is quite charming in her own home – quite handsome from her animation and intelligence, with her simple energetic life, her Building Society, her winter lectures and her cordial interest in all human things (Pichanick 139). Martineau asserts: 'Miss Evans's visit was a vast pleasure' and regrets she could not prolong it. Eliot's *Middlemarch* heroine, Dorothea Brooke, who promotes affordable housing for the poor, is reputedly modeled after Martineau and her Ambleside Building Society; Martineau, who pronounces *Middlemarch* 'the ablest book ever written by a woman,' seems not to recognize herself in Dorothea. Eliot admires Martineau's writing – 'After all she is a *trump*, the only English woman that possesses thoroughly the art of writing,' but also observes ungraciously, 'I have read *Deerbrook*, and am surprised at the depths of feeling it reveals' (Sanders, *Reason Over Passion*, 59). This is curious in light of the parallel themes shared by *Deerbrook*(1839) and *Middlemarch* (1871-2), the publication dates of which strongly suggest an influence of the former over the latter that Eliot seems reluctant to acknowledge. Scholars also note the influence of Martineau's

History of England on Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* and of 'The Hill and the Valley' on *Silas Marner*. Perhaps each woman thought the other ought to have known, and behaved, better than she did; perhaps each felt the other gave woman's cause a 'bad name.'

Since adequate role-models are not to be found among literary women, who are the women Martineau views as the embodiment of womanliness? As the remainder of this discussion shows, the women Martineau most admires, along with Maria Weston Chapman, share three distinctive qualities: none of them are professional writers, all of them are committed activists in the period's social purity campaigns, and each one rewrites the angel-in-the-house script from women's perspective. These examples reveal that the future of womankind is far more optimistic than the repeated disappointment of Martineau's high standards suggests.

Maria Martineau is the embodiment of Martineau's ideal of womanly grace, strength, and power. As her aunt's companion, secretary, nurse, housekeeper, and close friend, as well as her primary contact with the world outside the Knoll, Maria quickly proves herself capable of many undertakings, most importantly in her capacity to keep pace with Martineau's demanding schedule of writing, domestic and social projects. Maria Martineau is herself a sanctuary, a safe and reliable haven, and her indefatigable support of her aunt during a crucial period in her life and career marks her as singular among Martineau's circle of friends indeed.

As a nurse, Maria is a natural healer. She is 'incomparable,' 'glorious,' and 'unsurpassable': 'We are very happy – my dear nurse and I,' Martineau enthuses. Maria also proves adept at domestic skills, a topic on which Martineau is opinionated and

exacting. 'I do wish F. Nightingale knew her; and then she would see one heaven born nurse, - somewhat like herself' (Sanders, *Letters* 133; 161;151). Martineau finds in Maria the perfect prototype for Woman's Cause: she is domestic, yet professional; an instinctual, intelligent healer; open-minded and energetic, and too busy for psychological morbidity, romanticizing, sexual scandals, or other behaviours which retard woman's social progress. To Nightingale, Martineau writes, 'I do think you would find her as near to your standard of a nurse as anybody in Europe.' [1]

The professional counterpart to Maria Martineau is Florence Nightingale, whom Martineau regards as one of the most exemplary women in the world. Their correspondence is characterized by news about business and professional matters, by reports on the status of their health, and by an absence of gossip and trivialities. Throughout the crisis of Maria's illness and death, Nightingale wrote weekly, sometimes bi-weekly, letters comforting her grieving friend. The two women collaborated on sanitary reform through books, articles, and letters to the War Office; Martineau was a vigorous promoter of *Notes on Nursing*, the Nightingale Fund, and the nursing profession. At every opportunity, she held Nightingale up as a role model even the Queen would do well to emulate.

Martineau, in her unpublished obituary of Nightingale, emphasizes the combined values of respectability and social impact constructing her ideal of womanhood: Nightingale 'was no declaimer [like Wollstonecraft] but a housewifely woman [like Bronte]: - she talked, and did great things' (quoted in Sanders 180). Her championing of nursing - 'the most womanly of Woman's work'

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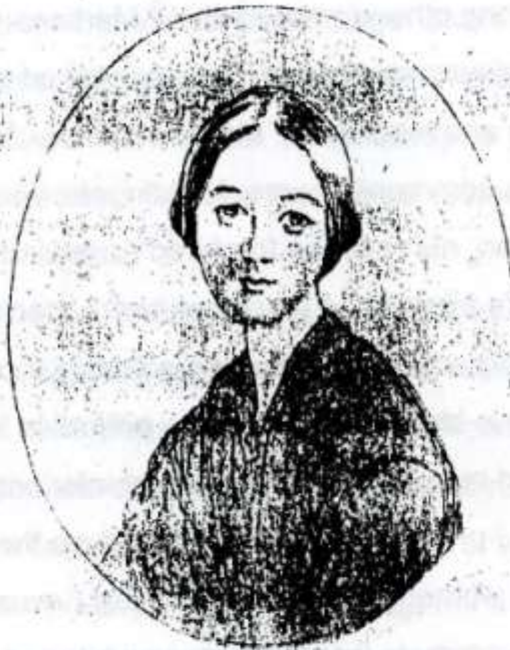
[1] HM to Florence Nightingale, Jan 7, 1860, British Library.

– reminds us that domesticity does not, for Martineau, signal the gender oppression assumed by modern feminism. She equates womanliness with strength, energy, and intellectual vigour, the courage to act on innovative ideas and fearlessness in the face of controversy [like Maria]. It is Nightingale who ends up outliving and eulogizing, Martineau, for whom she also reserves *her* highest praise: 'She was born to be a destroyer of slavery, in whatever form. The thought actually inspired her – no matter what, she rose to the occasion' (Chapman, 479).

To Martineau, the best friends of Woman's Cause are those 'who are morally *as well as* intellectually competent to the most serious business of life.' Publicly prominent women owe it to all women to rise above the sexual scandals and biological prejudice deterring their progress. Wollstonecraft and Eliot compromise the impact of their intellectual brilliance with sexual impropriety; Barrett Browning and Fuller prefer imaginary or foreign realms to the social realities plaguing their own countries; while Bronte's strong women characters promote the ideology of womanly dependence rather than autonomy. In the words of a modern critic which highlight the pluralism in these feminist perspectives, Martineau's work suggests she is 'a more complete and, indeed, more modern figure than were the Brontes and Wollstonecrafts, whose emotions once flared and have now passed away' (Richardson, 457). As a feminist, as in other realms, Martineau demonstrates a visionariness, often unappreciated in her time and in ours, aimed at eradicating the fundamental biological prejudice underlying all women's oppressions.



Florence Nightingale
From a drawing by Lady Eastlake

Maria Martineau's 'evident fitness and preparation for taking up Florence Nightingale's work' links her with the two women Martineau most venerated – Nightingale and Chapman. Chapman provides 'the most perfect proof within my experience of the possible union of the highest *intellectual and moral* attributes. Such a *nurse* among other domesticities!'[2] Martineau writes. The best promoters of woman's cause, then, are linked by their association with healing and restoration: Maria, Martineau's private nurse and Ambleside's community nurse; Nightingale, who nurses the empire; and Chapman, nurse to the fractured American union.

Martineau's feminism stems from her recognition that what prevents Woman's Cause from progressing more than any other single factor is biological prejudice – prejudice linking passion, sexuality and maternity with intellectual inferiority, irrationality, and 'coarseness,' prejudice that seeks to reduce the accomplishments of intelligent women to sexual aberration. Sexual respectability has the power to promote woman's cause while scandal, however unfairly, impedes it. Simply put, in her view, women cannot get on with the 'serious business of life' until they prove false the expectation that they are destined, by nature, to fail. One of her more striking prophetic insights, which significantly pays homage to the maligned Mary Wollstonecraft, was written to Chapman in 1840: 'You will live to see a great enlargement of our scope, I trust; but, what with the vices of some women and the fears of others, it is hard work for us to assert our liberty. I will, however, till I die, and so will you; and so make it easier for some few to follow us than it was for poor Mary Wollstonecraft to begin' (Chapman, 233).

[2] Harriet Martineau to Florence Nightingale, April 7, 1860, British Library.

Rachel Young reviews Juliet Barker's *Wordsworth: A Life* (Viking, 2000)

Harriet Martineau first met Wordsworth on 16 January 1845, at a dinner party. Harriet was then staying in Ambleside: she was 43, he 74: they could not have been more different. He was by then an Anglican Tory, opposed to almost any change. She was a Radical, from a Nonconformist background. Afterwards, Wordsworth told a friend that he had found her manner 'a little abrupt & peremptory,' but he might be prejudiced 'as everybody else seemed to like her without the least drawback.'

When Harriet settled in Ambleside, he was kind and helpful, as she acknowledged. She came greatly to admire Wordsworth's wife, Mary. In a letter of 1846, Harriet praised her intelligence, kindness, serene cheerfulness and skill in keeping the house running smoothly (no mean feat when they had hundreds of visitors, mostly uninvited, every year). Mary, in fact, did not like her and complained (1846) to a friend that Harriet, when their guest for dinner, went on and on about mesmerism, of which both she and her husband disapproved.

In her *Autobiography*, written 5 years after Wordsworth's death in 1850, Harriet was critical of him, both as a man and as a poet. In her letters written when they were neighbours, she is less severe, referring to him with a sort of amused condescension. She did however criticize him for his unrestrained grief after the death of his daughter in 1847, because this added to his wife's distress.

When Harriet first met Wordsworth he was old, deaf and with failing sight. He had ceased to write poetry. She may have assumed he

had always lived in Ambleside and was therefore limited and provincial in outlook. She can have known nothing of his eventful early life or of the family problems (son's failing marriage, daughter's ill health) which so depressed him at this period. How shocked she would have been to know that Wordsworth had an illegitimate daughter in France, with whom he was, from time to time, in touch. But this was a very well-kept secret: even his children didn't know about Caroline, though his wife and sister did.

People are apt to think that Wordsworth lived quietly in the Lake District all his life, writing poems about daffodils and such. They could not be more wrong, as Juliet Barker shows in this detailed biography. The reader is carried along by the interest of the story and the lucid and well-organized manner in which a mass of fascinating material is presented.

More on Harriet's statue

Readers who would like to know more about the statue of Harriet Martineau created by Anne Whitney for Maria Weston Chapman, which was the subject of an article in the previous Newsletter, are referred to an article by Lisa B. Reitzes, 'The Political Voice of the Artist: Anne Whitney's *Roma* and *Harriet Martineau*,' in *American Art*, Spring 1994. Reitzes argues in her article that Whitney viewed the commission for a portrait statue of Martineau as 'an opportunity for something other than a likeness' (p. 55). She wanted the portrait to be 'more like her than herself' (p. 57), and to embody what she stood for. Generalizing the facial features, Whitney tried to make her look universal, 'an ideal modern woman' (p. 59), wearing a

costume that is both contemporary and in the style of 'an ancient figure of female intellect and social service – the vestal virgin' (p. 60). Though the statue eventually went to Wellesley College, it was initially offered to Boston University, who declined it 'for reasons unknown' (p. 62). Valerie Sanders has a full copy of the article if anyone would like to see it.

James on Harriet's Will

Mrs Mollie Martineau has sent in a fascinating note from James Martineau about his sister's will. The note is as follows:

Harriet Martineau deceased

Received from Sir Thomas Martineau and Mr. Robert Francis Martineau the Executors of the Will of the Late Harriet Martineau deceased, the sum of, One hundred and seventy one pounds ten shillings being a further and final portion of the Residuary Estate now distributed by the said Executors and which amount together with the sums previously received by me makes the whole of the share of the Residuary Estate to which I am entitled under the said Will and I hereby express my satisfaction with and approval of the accounts now submitted to me by the said Executors.

Dated this 28th day of October 1887.

James Martineau

£171.10.0

As everyone knows, Harriet and James were never reconciled after their falling-out in the 1850s. Harriet appointed her brother Robert's sons as the executors of her will: James was not singled out for any special legacy, but only given his share as one of her surviving siblings. The note is now in the archives of Harris

Manchester College, Oxford. Mollie also has a copy of the will (as does Valerie Sanders).

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NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS:

Articles, book reviews, letters, notes and observations, for the next Newsletter should be sent by the end of the year to the Editor:

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