

The  
Martineau  
Society



**Sixteenth Newsletter**  
**January 2002**

## THE MARTINEAU SOCIETY

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### **EDITORIAL**

This is it ! 2002 – the Bicentenary year in which we'll be celebrating Harriet Martineau's birth. A full programme of events has now been arranged in Ambleside for 11-14 June – combining lectures, 'The Great Harriet Debate,' walking tours, evening entertainment, and a celebration dinner on 12 June – Harriet's birthday. Members should have been sent the conference leaflet, but if not – or you would like more – please contact Alan Middleton or Barbara Todd. Special thanks are due to Barbara for all the hard work she has put into arranging the whole event. Sophia Hankinson has also been busy - collecting copies of the papers given at Martineau Society Annual General Meetings, or included in previous Newsletters, so that they can be made available at the Bicentenary event in one 'collected papers.' This is an important way of marking the Society's achievements over its relatively short period of existence, since 1994. Because of this and the Bicentenary celebrations, we shall be issuing only one Newsletter this year.

### **NOTICEBOARD**

- ❖ Congratulations to Professor Ken Fielding for his large two-page spread, 'The Trump and her trumpet,' written with Ian Campbell, in the *Times Literary Supplement* of Friday 30 November on a collection of newly-discovered Harriet Martineau letters to Jane Carlyle. Ken has also written an article on this exciting discovery for the forthcoming special issue of the journal *Women's Writing*, edited by Deborah Logan and Valerie Sanders. The letters discussed in the *TLS*, which cover the years 1841-50, when Harriet reached her lowest ebb, and then recovered her ebullience and good health, reveal a side of her that was both loving and demanding.



- ❖ Congratulations, too, to Susan Hoecker-Drysdale and Michael Hill, whose collection of essays on Harriet Martineau has just been published by Routledge. The book, called *Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*, is reviewed elsewhere in this Newsletter.
- ❖ Valerie Sanders has received a contract from Penguin Classics to reissue *Deerbrook*, which will include a new introductory essay. Her new book, *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Palgrave 2002) has a section on Harriet and James Martineau; and her article, 'Meteor Wreaths: Harriet Martineau, L.E.L., Fame and *Fraser's Magazine*,' has appeared in the latest issue of the journal *Critical Survey*.
- ❖ The April issue of *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Association* will include a selection of papers given at the James Martineau Centenary conference in Oxford in 2000.
- ❖ Thanks are due to Mrs Mollie Martineau, who has sent us some fascinating papers from her late husband Denis's collection. These are the 'In Memoriam' issue of *The Inquirer*, about James Martineau's death, and a copy of the leaflet describing the Martineau Memorial Hall (adjacent to the Octagon Chapel) which included a photograph of Martineau House before the shop fronts were introduced. These items were displayed at the Norwich AGM, giving members a fascinating insight into the family's past.
- ❖ Barbara Todd will be attending on our behalf the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies at Burslem on 27 April 2002.

**Annual General Meeting at Norwich: 2-4 August 2001**

The Martineau Society has met before at Norwich, for very successful trails, but each time we go back there always seems to be something new or different to see. This time we had booked a three-day stay at the University of East Anglia, where despite the rain, the campus rabbits were hopping about in fearless family groups, providing free entertainment. We stayed in en suite accommodation on campus, and took our meals either in the nearest cafeteria or in the famous Sainsbury Wing.

After an introductory address on the opening afternoon by Chairperson Barbara Todd, four papers were presented, by Anka Ryall (on Harriet Martineau's relationship with Erasmus Darwin: see below), Peter Holloway ('Harriet's Head'), Sarah Knight ('*British Rule in India: A Modern Perspective*') and Valerie Sanders (comparing Harriet and James Martineau as autobiographers). The papers were followed by dinner and a sociable drink in the bar.

The second day, which was dry and warm, was devoted to the Martineau Trail: an all-inclusive tour of the various Martineau sites in Norwich: the Octagon Unitarian Chapel; Harriet's birthplace in Gurney Court (now sadly looking rather overgrown and dilapidated); James's birthplace and the family home in Magdalen Street, where the current owners generously gave us a sandwich lunch and showed us round; Norwich Grammar School, which James attended; and the French Church of St Mary the Less, which was a base for the original French Huguenot refugees fleeing from the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1688 – the Martineaus' ancestors among them. Having walked about all day, we were ready for dinner in the evening, but made our own



arrangements – some exploring the city, and others returning to the University campus.

On the final day of the meeting, we held the formal AGM, re-elected the current officers, and discussed ideas for the Bicentenary celebrations. Maureen Colquhoun outlined plans by the newly-formed Harriet Martineau Foundation to purchase and restore The Knoll – Harriet's house in Ambleside – which is a Grade II Listed Building. The restored house will become a centre for Martineau studies, providing a library and manuscript collection as well as accommodation for visiting scholars.

After the meeting, some members stayed on for another night and revisited the centre of Norwich during the afternoon. As usual, the occasion was a good opportunity to catch up with friends and hear the latest developments in Martineau scholarship – which is clearly going from strength to strength.

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Anka Ryall

**“Erasmus’s Belle”: Harriet Martineau and the Darwins**

A paper given at the 2001 Annual General Meeting of the Martineau Society, Norwich

In their 1991 biography of Charles Darwin, Adrian Desmond and James Moore call Harriet Martineau ‘Erasmus’s belle’ (205). This expression succinctly sums up her role in the Darwin circle in the late 1830s – a circle that included not only the Darwin family and their Wedgwood relations, but the brothers Charles and Erasmus Darwin’s large network of friends and intellectual acquaintances. Seen from another perspective, needless to say, the Darwins

belonged to Harriet's circle, and Erasmus could as well be called 'Harriet's beau.'

The relationship between Harriet Martineau and the Darwin brothers during the period (approximately 1836-39) when all three of them lived in London, has two dimensions, but in the following I shall focus on only one of them, the social connections. What interests me is less her close friendship with Erasmus, which as we know lasted until the end of her life (he was two years her junior and died in 1881), than Charles's opinion of the friendship. I'm particularly interested in what it may tell us about Harriet's situation as that anomaly in the nineteenth century: an independent female intellectual. It is, however, the other dimension that is potentially most significant, and that is the mutual exchange of ideas between Charles and Harriet – more precisely, the intertextual connections that can be located in some of their works. These, to my knowledge, have never been explored, even though they are traceable both in their published writings and in some of Charles's notebooks.

I should add that the two dimensions cannot, of course, be separated. Charles's concern with Harriet's influence on Erasmus had a great deal to do with his unease about her role as a female intellectual. But it is fascinating to compare the repeated – and gender-neutral – references to her in his so-called *Transmutation Notebooks* (where she is simply one of the many authorities he consults) with the intense ambivalence revealed in his correspondence.

It is important to keep in mind that during the period in which Charles and Harriet moved in the same circles – that is, roughly the



period between *his* return from the *Beagle* voyage and marriage to Emma Wedgwood and *her* return from America and removal to the Tynemouth sickroom – *she* was the star. As Janet Browne puts it in her recent biography of Charles Darwin, when describing the consequences of his move to London in March 1837: 'Erasmus took charge of his free hours and introduced him to his clever acquaintances, including Harriet Martineau, then at the height of her fame as a political author' (355). While *she* was established, *he* was up-and-coming: in Browne's words, 'one of the bright young men on the scientific circuit' (354). He was ambitious and hardworking, but had yet to write any of the works that would make him famous. His first book, *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by H.M.S. Beagle*, was published in 1839, while Harriet in the period 1836-39 published five books including two travel books, a novel and the theoretical *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), which in his *C Notebook* appears in the list of 'Books examined: with ref. to Species' (319-21).

Charles had encountered Harriet before they met in person via her *Illustrations of Political Economy*, some of which (if not all) were mailed to him while he was on the *Beagle* voyage by his sister Caroline in October 1833: 'I have sent you a few little books which are talked about by every body at present,' she writes on October 28<sup>th</sup>, '[they are] written by Miss Martineau who I think had hardly been heard of before you left England. She is now a great Lion in London [...] – Erasmus knows her & is a very great admirer & every body reads her little books & if you have a dull hour you can, and then throw them overboard, that they may not take up your precious



room –' (l: 345-6). He did not follow her advice, because nine months later, in a letter dated July 20<sup>th</sup> 1834 'a hundred miles South of Valparaiso,' he mentions in a letter to her that '[t]he little political books are very popular on board,' though he claims that he himself has not yet had time to read any of them (l: 392).

The difference in their standing during the London period is reflected too in Harriet's brief and slightly patronizing reference to Charles in the chapter on 'Literary Lionism' in her *Autobiography*. He is there singled out together with his friend, the geologist Charles Lyell, as one of the few 'eminent men who were not vain' and summed up as 'simple, childlike, painstaking,' though she adds that he was in the process of establishing himself 'at the head of living English naturalists' (l:355). Her assessment, however, accords quite well with his own modest claim late in life, that he was a man of 'moderate abilities' who had succeeded primarily because of hard work and industrious 'observation and collection of facts' (*Autobiography* 145, 141).

The best source of information about the relationship between Harriet and the Darwin brothers is the first two volumes of *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* published in 1985 and 1986 and covering the years 1821-1836 and 1837-1843 respectively. This is the source that has been mined by Charles Darwin's biographers. Surprisingly Harriet Martineau's two major biographers, R.K. Webb (1960) and Valerie Kossew Pichanick (1980) have little to say about the relationship, though Webb does quote from two of Charles's letters about Harriet, as well as from one of hers about him, which comments enthusiastically about *On the Origin of Species*.

By far the fullest description of the relationship from Harriet's perspective is Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle's introduction to another correspondence, namely *Harriet Martineau's Letters to Fanny Wedgwood* (1983), which makes me look forward to reading her full-length biography. According to Elisabeth Arbuckle, Harriet met Fanny Wedgwood (through her friend, the writer Anne Marsh) in March 1833, and renewed the acquaintance when she returned from the United States in 1836, and it was through Fanny that she also became acquainted with Erasmus, who was a cousin of Fanny's husband Hensleigh and 'a Wedgwood family friend.'

Elisabeth Arbuckle writes that Erasmus, like his younger brother Charles, 'suffered from severe, chronic ill health,' and although he, again like Charles, had studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, he never practised. Instead, he, as she puts it, 'chose to have no serious occupation at all. He received a comfortable allowance from his father, lived at a series of fashionable London addresses, and devoted much of his time to paying calls and to doing kindnesses for his friends and family' (xvii). In the words of Thomas Carlyle, in a letter to his brother quoted by Elisabeth, he was 'an Italian, German travelling University sort of man, who "keeps a cab," if you know what that means: a very polite, good, quiet man' (xix).

Though Elisabeth Arbuckle notes that '[Harriet] often counted on Erasmus Darwin to escort her to parties and on evening calls' (xvii), she speculates that they both may have 'felt safe from romance' (xviii) and supposes the reason to be that Harriet was convinced that she did not want to marry and over the years 'grew more self-sufficient,' while Erasmus may have loved Fanny Wedgwood and



even had 'a lasting love affair' with her, as the family seems to have thought (xviii). Most importantly, Elisabeth Arbuckle's collection includes 11 letters by Harriet to Erasmus, written between 1843 and 1868, that is, during a period of over twenty years. They are all very affectionate, if not (with one or two exceptions) exactly intimate, and range thematically from international politics and American abolition, to details of common interest (higher education for women, for instance), personal finances and health.

The most affecting letter, which goes back in memory to the London period and indicates the quality of their long friendship, was written in October 1866. It begins as a thank-you note for a barrel of oysters he had sent her, and then moves on to condolences on the death of his sister Susan: 'I fear your sister's illness must have been a great suffering to you,' she writes, 'and now that she and her sisters are at rest, there must remain to you a sense of desolation which it grieves me to think that you have to bear. We little thought, in middle life, that you would be the survivor of so many. We must have patience, - you and I; and we may surely believe that it cannot now be very long. And I suppose you find, as I do, that, in proportion as these ties snap, it is easier to wait, because it is of less importance what happens to us' (271).

But I want to continue by returning to the brief early phase and look at both the Darwin correspondence itself and what it tells us, and at some of Janet Browne's comments. In Charles's letters to his sisters after his return to England, when Harriet occasionally appears, it is primarily as 'Erasmus's belle.' This is how he describes her in a letter to Caroline on November 9<sup>th</sup> 1836:

My London visit has been very pleasant, but too much visiting, although only to people whom I am delighted to become



acquainted with. Erasmus is just returned from driving out Miss Martineau. – Our only protection from so admirable a sister-in-law is in her working him too hard. He begins to perceive (to use his own expression) he shall be not much better than her 'nigger'. – Imagine poor Erasmus a nigger to so philosophical & energetic a lady. – How pale & woe begone he will look. – She already takes him to task about his idleness – She is going some day to explain to him her notions about marriage – Perfect equality of rights is part of her doctrine. I much doubt whether it will be equality in practice. We must pray for our poor 'nigger' – (l:318-19).

We should note that the curious image of the husband as a slave also runs through his own debate with himself during this period on the pros and cons of marriage. Concerning the disadvantages he writes as follows: 'Eheu!! I should never know French, - or see the continent – or go to America, or go up in a Balloon, or take solitary trip in Wales – poor slave – you will be worse than a Negro.' Even in its advantages, marriage is conceived as enslavement of the male: 'One cannot live this solitary life, with groggy old age, friendless & cold, & childless staring one in one's face, already beginning to wrinkle. – Never mind, trust to chance – keep a sharp look out –There is many a happy slave-' (quoted in Browne, 379).

Yet it probably was neither Harriet's demands nor even her radical views and intellectual independence that most worried Charles. Judging from the letters to him by his sisters Susan and Caroline, as well as his fiancée Emma, he was surrounded by intelligent and strong-minded women. But they usually deferred to him, and – as we shall see – Harriet clearly did not. In another letter to Caroline, dated 7 December 1836, he is disconcerted by the fact that Harriet behaves as his equal not only in intellect but in self-absorption: 'I called as in duty bound, on Miss Martineau, and sat

there nearly an hour,' he writes. 'She was very agreeable and managed to talk on a most wonderful number of subjects, considering the limited time. I was astonished to find how little ugly she is, but as it appears to me, she is overwhelmed with her own projects, her own thought and her own abilities. Erasmus palliated all this, by maintaining one ought not to look at her as a woman' (l: 524).



Charles Darwin at the time of his marriage: portrait by George Richmond

Erasmus Alvey Darwin, Charles's elder brother



Harriet's anomalous, unclassifiable position as a woman behaving according to a masculine norm is even clearer in a letter to Susan dated 1 April 1838 (his account of her follows the report of a visit to the Zoological Society, where he first describes seeing the Rhinoceros and then 'the Ourang-outang in great perfection'):

So much for Monkey, & now for Miss Martineau, who has been as frisky lately [as] the Rhinoceros. – Erasmus has been with her noon, morning, and night: - if her character was not as secure, as a mountain in the polar regions she certainly would loose [sic] it. – Lyell called there the other day & there was a beautiful rose on the table, & she coolly showed it to him and said 'Erasmus Darwin' gave me that. – How fortunate it is, she is so very plain; otherwise I should be frightened: She is a wonderful woman: when Lyell called, he found Rogers, Ld. Jeffrys, & Empson [all writers for the *Edinburgh Review*] calling on her. – what a person she is thus to collect together all the geniuses. – Old Rogers seems to [be] a warm admirer of hers. – He says her laugh is so charming, it is 'like tickling a child in a cradle.' Was there ever such a simile. – a pretty little baby indeed. – She is very busy at present in making arrangements about her new novel. One bookseller has offered 2/3 profits & no risk, but I suppose that is not enough. – (2:80-1).

An interesting feature of this letter, which presents Harriet as she must often have appeared – a woman surrounded by men, is that much of it repeats gossip by his friend Charles Lyell. Probably Lyell shared Charles's unease with a woman like Harriet. Perhaps they were both a little afraid of her. Charles's inability to come to terms with her is obvious in his uncertainty of tone: the letter manages to admire, though grudgingly, and to denigrate at the same time. It should also be noted that the references to 'all the geniuses' is clearly ironic, as is most likely his use of the ambiguous expression 'wonderful woman' about Harriet.



But in a letter to Susan dated May 15<sup>th</sup> 1838, he strikes another note. Here he describes an encounter with a sympathetic and companionable fellow-writer who shares some of his own experiences:

I will give an account of all my Cambridge doings, but first for Erasmus' dinner, which I arrived in time for. It was a brilliant little party, as all his inevitably are. – I had a very interesting conversation with Miss Martineau, – most perfectly authorial, – comparing our methods of writing. – It seems wonderful the rapidity with which she writes correctly. – I felt, however, no small gratification, to find, that she is not a complete Amazonian, & knows the feeling of exhaustion from thinking too much. I thought she was quite invincible; but she confesses, a few hours consecutively exhausts every grain of strength she possesses. – She never has occasion to correct a single word she writes, which account [sic] for the marvellous rapidity with which she brings forward her books. – [...] I forgot to say that Miss Martineau is going to pay me a visit some day, to look at me as author in my den, so we had quite a flirtation together. – (2:86)

Charles, in Janet Browne's opinion, 'quite liked Harriet,' and 'enjoyed her company at Erasmus's dinner parties.' But Browne also remarks that Harriet obviously 'did not fit into his idea of a winsome bride' (355). His views, quoted earlier, about the pros and cons of marriage, make it clear that his opinion of women and the relationship between the sexes was entirely conventional. In the context of his impending marriage to Emma Wedgwood, Browne comments on 'the dichotomy characterising Darwin's mental life' in the late 1830s: 'His sense of duty to his fellows, his innate conservatism, his inbuilt appreciation of the values of gentlemanly society and unthinking acceptance of the advantages of Britain's hierarchies of power, lay uneasily together with the radical thrust of his philosophical views' (397).

How then did Harriet feel about her role as an independent intellectual woman in such a 'gentlemanly society'? This is a big topic, and there is no simple answer, but she seems to have persisted on the basis of a firm belief in what 'ought to be.' If she lived up to the same standards as the men, worked as hard as they did, and made her own living, she took it for granted that she would be taken seriously. This, of course, was not the case, but claiming that it 'ought to be' so and – perhaps – living as if what 'ought to be' was a reality seem to have been her great strength. Her comment in a letter to Erasmus written many years later, in February 1866, on the publication of Charles's *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* may be read, I think, as an oblique summary of her own life-long accommodation to masculine prejudice: 'Of course you must have seen Monday's "Pall Mall," she writes:

I do hope you have. That sentence about 'noble calmness' has been in my mind ever since, - sweetening every thing. I have always hoped and felt confident that the hostility of the ignorant and prejudiced did not trouble him. Still – it is not pleasant; and his bad health might easily render him more sensitive than in his earlier days. On the other hand, the absence of reasonableness in his opponents and their complaints is a great help to 'noble calmness.' Really – what nonsense it is to stop, and scream and struggle, and have a faction-fight at every mile on the road to knowledge! I dare say it is the very easiest thing to your brother to hold on, - straight through the mob of them! (294-5)

And on that note of defiance I will conclude.

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**Review of Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives, ed. Michael R. Hill and Susan Hoecker-Drysdale (Routledge 2001)**

'Martineau is a giant in sociology': so claims Mary Jo Deegan, cited in this new collection of essays on Harriet Martineau's contribution to the evolution of sociology (p. 12). While we may not all see her primarily in this light, the book's authors intend to give Martineau her due as a sociologist of work, religion, women, health and disability, tourism, and a whole host of other substantive issues that still engage sociologists today. Their point, emphatically made



at the beginning, is that she has been repeatedly devalued or overlooked in favour of better-known male sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim, Alexis De Tocqueville, or John Stuart Mill. Her books have gone out of print, and this in turn has hindered her introduction to students and hence into the school and university curriculum. Those critics who have paid attention to Martineau's writings have been mainly from literary or feminist backgrounds.

The contributors to this volume reinstate her as a 'founding mother' of sociology, who was herself closely affected by the conditions in which she lived. Mary Jo Deegan suggests that Martineau was 'empowered' by her own deafness, and indeed by being a woman: instinctively aware of gender and physical disabilities, she trained herself to observe intently, integrating her deafness into her methodology. Similarly, as Susan Hoecker-Drysdale notes, in her two-chapter study of Martineau in relation to the sociology of employment, work, for her, 'took on first moral and then sociological dimensions, so that it became, for her, synonymous with autonomy, emancipation, and selfhood.'

Martineau is presented repeatedly as a woman who took her own life as a starting-point, and developed a sociological theory from it. Nevertheless, several contributors to this volume discuss her in relation to her social context (the Unitarian connection, for instance) or a significant collaborator (Florence Nightingale, and in a sense Auguste Comte). Michael Hill concludes the volume with a review of Harriet Martineau's position in relation to the future of sociology as a discipline. Asked what difference Martineau makes to sociology today, he suggests that her approach 'provides a personal, professional, and pedagogical alternative to the pervasive

but bankrupt abstracted empiricism so prevalent during the last fifty years.' Coming at the start of her bicentenary year, statements such as this do much to restore Harriet Martineau to her place in modern as well as nineteenth-century thinking.

Valerie Sanders

**Hugh Kinder: Philip Meadows Martineau and the Artificial Ruin in Bracondale**

When Philip Meadows Martineau (1752-1829), surgeon and well-known lithotomist, built Bracondale Lodge in 1792, Humphrey Repton designed the garden. In it was placed a fake ruin, a common custom at that time. Incorporated in the ruin was the top slab of the tomb of Richard de Walsham, Abbot of St Benets (1411-1439). The remains of the ruin still exist in the wood behind County Hall, Norwich.

Richard de Walsham was buried within the Abbey's church in an 'altar tomb.' The top slab was incised with the effigy of an abbot with a mitre on his head and surrounded with tabernacle work. Around its edge was inscribed 'Ater ricardus De Suth Walsham Abbas Monastrii Sancti Benedicti De Hulmo Qui Obit DNI Millimo Quadrgentesimo Tricesimo Nono.' That is, 'Richard of South Walsham, Abbot of the monastery of St Benets of Holme who died one thousand four hundred and thirty nine.' In the four corners were rondels, two of which contained the arms of the Abbey and the other two the Pascal Lamb.

When the tomb was dismantled after the Abbey fell into disuse, the top slab was used as a doorstep at the Duke of Norfolk's Palace, off St Andrews Street, Norwich. Here it remained until 1711 when the Palace was demolished. After being recognised by an

Antiquarian Authority, Anthony Norris, it was taken to the sham ruin in Bracondale.

In 1940 it came to the notice of the then Rector Reverend S. Williams, a keen historian, that a large slab of stone of ancient origin had come to light at Bracondale. Upon investigation it was recognised as the top part of an Altar Tomb of Richard de South Walsham. In view of its close connection with South Walsham, it was thought right for it to be brought back to the Abbot's birthplace. It now lies on the floor on the right of the Communion table in St Mary's Church and part of the inscription can still be deciphered. Thus the tombstone has come full circle after five hundred years. (I am indebted to G.S. Amos for this account, taken from his History and Description of South Walsham, Norfolk – 1981 ISBN – 9537929-0-0).

#### **A Curiosity**

Mr Richard Gurney has sent in a silhouette of W.H.Martineau. Does anyone know exactly which 'Mr W H' this would be? There was a William Henry (1812-49), son of Peter (1786-1869), son of Peter Finch Martineau (1755-1847), but it may not have been him.





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An updated and corrected list of members' E-mail addresses

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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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