

The
Martineau
Society



Twentieth Newsletter
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THE MARTINEAU SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL: BIRMINGHAM 2004

Welcome to the twentieth Newsletter, which opens with an account of our highly enjoyable AGM and Conference in Birmingham, a city with a long history of connection with the Martineau family. Sophia Hankinson had booked us into the extremely comfortable Wast Hills House conference centre which belongs to the University of Birmingham but is out on the edge of the city. Our biggest adventure was probably getting there: our initial conversations began with an exchange of information about buses and the cost of taxis, but once we were established, a booked coach took us on the various excursions Sophia had arranged.

As usual, the format was the highly civilized one of business in the morning and outings in the afternoon. Arriving on the evening of 1 July, we had a relaxing dinner and conversation before knuckling down to a committee meeting the next morning. The first two talks after coffee were by Elisabeth Arbuckle, on 'Harriet Martineau and John Chapman', and Sophia Hankinson on 'Lenton and the Richard Martineaus' - both offering intriguing insights into the social and literary world which was Harriet Martineau's. After lunch, we were bused into the University, where Christine Penney had arranged a display of the extensive manuscripts and other Martineau materials in the Library's Special Collection. A visit to the Barber Institute on the campus completed the day's activities before we returned to Wast Hills for dinner.

The next morning we heard papers by Deborah Logan on *Eastern Life, Present and Past*, Gaby Weiner on feminist scholarship and Harriet Martineau, Alan Middleton on the connections between William Morris and James and Harriet Martineau, and Blue Badge Guide Alan Griffiths on the Birmingham of the Martineaus. The

morning's papers provoked much lively discussion, which sent us out eager to see the sights of the city. One of the most interesting - to me, at any rate - was the large white house in Edgbaston where Robert Martineau lived: the brother who became Lord Mayor of Birmingham and provided a welcoming home to Harriet for a while after she had recovered from her Tynemouth illness and relations with James had gone beyond the point of no return. We also tried to resolve the confusion around Harriet's burial place in the Key Hill Cemetery. Surely with a whole bus-load of people scouring the site we should be able to identify the plot and gravestone? Sadly not. We afterwards subscribed to the Friends of the Key Hill Cemetery in the hope of getting some answers, but it seems to be the case that the stone has fallen in and been lost. There are now plans to turn the cemetery into a conservation area, which will actually reduce the chances of our ever finding Harriet's grave.

Never mind: we consoled ourselves with a tour of the model housing development at Bourneville and then a walk round the attractive Symphony Hall and other new architectural improvements to central Birmingham. That evening we celebrated both Alan Middleton's birthday and the tenth anniversary of the Society's foundation with a special cake at the end of a buffet supper. Alan proposed a spontaneous debate about Harriet Martineau which kept some of us up late arguing excitedly about her status and contribution.

The final leg of the conference was an illustrated talk by Valerie Sanders on the Martineau artists (Robert Braithwaite, and James's daughters, Gertrude and Edith). We then held our Annual General Meeting, to which we were delighted to welcome Mrs Mollie

Martineau who lives in Birmingham and is one of the 'mayoral Martineaus' of whom we had heard so much the day before. The AGM as usual generated much argument and many differences of opinion among the fourteen of us who attended, but this is the sign of a Society that still cares about its concerns. Having agreed to meet next year in Liverpool, a place associated more with James (2005 being the bicentennial of his birth) we ate Sunday lunch together and then went our separate ways.

Sophia is especially to be thanked for her brilliant management of the excursions and all the details of food and accommodation, which we all found very enjoyable. Please come and join us next year in Liverpool. You will find out things you didn't know about the city and the Martineaus, besides hearing some stimulating talks!

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I liked the article by Sophia on James Martineau and the review of Frank Schulman's book in Newsletter No 19, February 2004. Sophia presents a question on page 15, '...why did JM and HM never make up their quarrel?' There is some evidence to suggest that they failed to make up because Harriet would not meet James. Certainly, James did not 'discard his sister'.

In James' Biographical Memoranda he reports how he tried to visit Harriet at Ambleside, '...proposing, through a letter of my wife's, a few hours visit at The Knoll, I found that my sister's house and heart were closed against me. (Are there any records of Harriet's reply to J's wife?) And again, '....that I might at least have the chance of making amends for my own wrong, a curt refusal was

returned.' A request by three of his sisters and a brother for a meeting of Harriet and James met a similar reception.

He goes on,...'The estrangement produced by this cause [the review of the Atkinson Letters] and its antecedents was all on one side. My affection for my sister Harriet survived all reproaches & mistakes: and, if she had permitted, would at any moment have taken me to her side for unconditional return to the old relation.'

James had not discarded his sister.

It is open to conjecture as to why Harriet did not want to meet James. She may have felt that she had moved on from the position where they were on common ground. Had she moved on from the time when, 'All who have ever known me are aware that the strongest passion I have ever entertained was in regard to my youngest brother.'? [*Autobiography*, I, p. 99] On page 330 of the *Autobiography* Harriet states her case '...to find any body who has the remotest conception of the indispensableness of science as the only source of, not only enlightenment, but wisdom, goodness and happiness. It is, of course, useless to speak to theologians or their disciples about this, while they remain addicted to theology...'. What would be the point of talking to James, when all he could write about was theology?

So we end up with more questions...

Yours faithfully,

Alan Middleton

[Response: there are indeed letters from Harriet to Helen Martineau in the Birmingham University Library, especially some written in 1851, which show that she still felt very bitterly towards him. Ed.]



Susan Martineau (1826-1894), eldest child of Robert and Jane Martineau of Birmingham (brother of Harriet and James)

Claudia Orazem: Review of Caroline Roberts: *The Woman and the Hour*

Harriet Martineau had a remarkably long and successful career as a writer and journalist. Any scholar embarking on a discussion of her works, which cover different genres, is faced with the task of making a judicious selection from this rich, diverse oeuvre. Caroline Roberts' study *The Woman and the Hour*, published by the University of Toronto Press in 2002, bases its selection on a well-known passage from Martineau's autobiography: "On five occasions in my life I have found myself obliged to write and publish what I entirely believed would be ruinous to my reputation and prosperity." The focus on what Martineau herself perceived as risky publications offers Roberts the opportunity to locate those works in a number of cultural contexts and to show why despite the controversies surrounding some of her texts Martineau remained a popular author whose books continued to sell well.

The Woman and the Hour begins with a discussion of the *Illustrations of Political Economy*, the series of 25 short novels illustrating various principles of classical political economy which made Harriet Martineau famous almost overnight. Before the publication Martineau was a little-known writer and reviewer, whose texts had appeared mostly in Unitarian periodicals. After *Life in the Wilds* came out in 1832, she found herself a national celebrity with an active social life in London. While popular, some of the *Illustrations*, particularly *Weal and Woe in Garveloch*, with its depiction of Thomas Malthus' theory on population, and *Cousin Marshall*, with its criticism of the poor laws of that time, were highly controversial. Drawing on numerous reviews of these two novels,

mostly from important periodicals such as the *Edinburgh Review*, Roberts presents various critical opinions and shows that it was Martineau's perceived attack on a number of ideological commonplaces of the pre-Victorian period that exposed her to hostile criticism.

Chapter 2 shows how this pattern of popular, topical text on the one hand and emotional criticism on the other was repeated when Harriet Martineau published her first book based on her travels in the United States of America, *Society in America*, in 1837. Here it was her spirited discussion of the situation of women and slaves that provoked reactions on both side of the Atlantic.

The next work that made Martineau fear for her reputation and her career was *Letters on Mesmerism* (1844; in the same chapter Caroline Roberts also discusses *Life in the Sickroom*, which, however, was not controversial). Roberts shows in convincing detail how Martineau's advocacy of mesmerism, which she claimed had saved her from a debilitating gynaecological disorder, contradicted the professional opinions of established medical practitioners at a time when the medical profession as a whole was actively seeking a greater, more systematic organization of its members as well as a more solid scientific basis for diagnosis and treatment.

Another result of Martineau's alleged cure by mesmerism was her long trip to Egypt and Palestine. As in the case of her American travels more than a decade earlier the trip resulted in a book, *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848). Since the book examines the origins of the Christian religion it is hardly surprising that it created a stir at the time, particularly since Martineau did not restrict her analysis to the well-known indebtedness of Christianity to

Judaism, but also showed that various elements of the former had its origins in the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, a faith of which very little was generally known in Victorian England. In the process of this analysis Martineau rejects all literal interpretations of the Bible as well as its divine authority, that is traditional Christianity's claim that it is literally the word of God. Caroline Roberts points out that while criticism along these lines was not novel at the time of the publication of *Eastern Life*, both public and academic disputes on this matter were far less advanced than e.g. in France or Germany, where the examination of the Bible according to exact academic standards had introduced the era of modern Bible criticism.

The book concludes with a chapter on *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851), Martineau's collaboration with Henry George Atkinson, a work that went even further than *Eastern Life* in its critical analysis of Christianity. Despite the nominal supremacy of the Established Church of England Victorian religious life was extraordinarily diverse; for all the differences in dogma and history the different religious groups (including Unitarianism, the faith Harriet Martineau was brought up in) had a common ground in that they all postulated the existence of God, accorded special status to Jesus Christ and believed in the divine origin of nature and mankind. Martineau and Atkinson ignored this consensus and, while promoting phrenology as a science, denied the existence of the traditional Christian God as well as the so-called First Cause. The discussion and analysis of these five controversial works are supplemented by chapters on each of Martineau's two major novels, *Deerbrook* and *The Hour and the Man*. The inclusion of

these works, however, is neither explained satisfactorily by Roberts nor does it become clear throughout the book why these works were chosen from Martineau's varied output. The points made in the chapter on *Deerbrook* in particular remain isolated, despite a number of cross references. The historical novel *The Hour and the Man*, a fictionalisation of the life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, fits in much better, since its presentation of slavery provides a link to such texts as *Demerara* or *Society in America*. Furthermore Roberts shows persuasively that the problems Martineau encountered when presenting historical events and characters resurfaced later when she wrote *Eastern Life*. Since the problems of historiography feature prominently in Roberts' study an inclusion of Martineau's *A History of the Thirty Years' Peace* would have been illuminating. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary reviews Roberts carefully works out why the books discussed in her study were controversial at the time of their publication. She shows that Harriet Martineau, who contrary to her reputation was intellectually open-minded, did not shy away from criticizing prevalent ideologies of the Victorian period. It must have come as a shock to most readers of her *Eastern Life*, for example, to come across Martineau's statement that the difference between the members of an Egyptian harem and the English middle-class angel in the house was merely one of degree, not of kind, and that in both instances women were reduced to mere objects symbolizing a man's wealth and power. Martineau was also good at spotting topics that were important to the reading public of her time. While most of her contemporaries claimed a consensus on those topics Martineau's works and particularly the reaction they provoked show that this was not the

case. This circumstance helps to explain why Martineau had such a long, successful career as an author. Roberts' study does not always make clear why certain reviewers were critical of Martineau's publications, if not downright hostile – here background information on the various periodicals that published the reviews would have been helpful. All in all Caroline Roberts' book is a thorough, well-informed and readable study that draws on a large number of original and scholarly works to show how Harriet Martineau's career as a writer progressed and how Martineau's views developed over the time.

Paper Summaries: Birmingham Meeting

Elisabeth Arbuckle: 'Harriet Martineau and John Chapman':

John Chapman stepped into Martineau's life in 1850 as publisher of *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*. Twenty years younger than Martineau and from a provincial background, Chapman had run away from his early apprenticeship to stay with his medical student brother at Edinburgh. Briefly in Australia, at twenty-one he was in Paris and then at St Bartholomew's in London studying medicine. Always impecunious, Chapman's Byronesque looks and lively personality enabled him to marry a well-off older woman. Literary ambitions led him to offer a semi-philosophical work, *Human Nature*, to a London publisher who promptly offered to sell Chapman his business. Using his wife's money, the sanguine, recently-wed young man accepted and moved into rooms over the shop.

In 1847, the Chapmans lived at 142 Strand. There the ground floor was devoted to bookselling and publishing, while the upper

rooms accommodated lodgers. At the Chapmans' in January 1852, Martineau met George Eliot -soon to be involved in a romantic entanglement with Chapman. In 1853, he was to bring out Harriet Martineau's translation and abridgement of Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*.

In 1851, Chapman had bought the *Westminster Review* for £300 with the help of philanthropist Edward Lombe, and installed George Eliot as unofficial editor. From 1852-8, Martineau's tie with the *Westminster* provided an ideal platform for her opinions, while she and Chapman carried on a freewheeling correspondence. By April 1851, Martineau must have considered translating Comte, who was misunderstood in England, she claimed. Nobody saw the grand effect Comte would have, except for friends who didn't *publish*, she told Chapman, and the temptation was strong 'to bring him and the English mind into contact.' That July, Chapman recorded, Martineau came into his office with Henry Atkinson, to enquire 'whether I should be disposed to publish at my own risk "dividing the profits" an abridgment [of Comte] in one or two vols.' At Martineau's suggestion, Chapman wrote to Edward Lombe, who agreed to support a translation.

While she worked on Comte, in July 1852 Martineau contributed her first article to the *Westminster* under Chapman's editorship: 'The Political Life and Sentiments of Niebuhr.' She had now begun to write for the *Daily News*, and Chapman published her *Letters from Ireland* (to the newspaper) as a book, as well as an article in the *Westminster* (of 'Number 1 quality,' in Eliot's words).

By the time she finished Comte in October 1853, Martineau had relaunched herself as a high level journalist. Her efficiency and

speed would prove of great value to Chapman -though his finances seemed in shambles.

In her *Autobiography*, Martineau gives a candid account of her loan of £500 to Chapman, her 'good friend and publisher,' who had failed 'in consequence of misfortunes which came thick upon him, from the time of Mr Lombe's death.' Chapman 'never in all our intercourse, asked me to loan him money,' and the *Westminster* was 'mortgaged to me... entirely [by] my own doing,' she testified. At a meeting in August. His creditors voted to leave the review in his hands, though James Martineau wished to amalgamate the *Westminster* with the *Prospective Review*, of which he was now editor.

'I had an intimation in twenty-four hours that I was "not to be swindled out of the review,"' Martineau noted, 'but the whole anxiety, aggravated by indignation and pain at such conduct on the part of men who had professed a sense of obligation to Mr Chapman, extended over many weeks.' James, she raged to Chapman, was trying to 'throw the *Review* into the market at the most disadvantageous season, when London was empty because of the cholera.' Cannily, to stop James, she sent Chapman a cheque for the amount due him to deposit in James's bank account without his knowledge. To his credit, Chapman was doubtful about this step, though his principal creditor Samuel Courtauld advised that he was obliged to honour Harriet Martineau's trust by paying off James.

In the following years, Martineau continued to write for the *Westminster* on topics like American politics, Britain's foreign policy, the census of 1851, the colonial schemer Rajah Brooke and

the Crystal Palace (reopened) at Sydenham. By late 1854, however the strain of feeding of leaders to the *Daily News* and meeting other deadlines began to affect Martineau's health. Frightening symptoms of heart trouble took her to London in January 1855 to consult two doctors: 'at Mr Chapman's, Dr Latham visited and examined me, the day after my arrival,' she records in the *Autobiography*, while 'Dr Watson's opinion, formed on examination...was the same as Dr Latham's.' Her heart was 'deteriorated... "too feeble for its work," with "more or less dilation; and the organ...very much enlarged.'" In a few days, she was having 'sinking-fits.'

Martineau knew of Chapman's medical interests, especially of women's illnesses (he was to take a medical degree in Scotland in 1857), but the decision to stay with him (at his new address of 43 Blandford Square) suggests what an important confidant he had become. Moreover he was interested in publishing her *Autobiography*, and Martineau wrote to ask for an 'express note' for her executor about his terms. She was prepared to tell him (though not James and her brother-in-law TM Greenhow) that she thought her waist enlargement was caused partly by the continuing presence of her tumour (allegedly cured by mesmerism). The 'heart disease' was primary, she insisted, and she saw no dishonesty in not mentioning the tumour.

Once back in Ambleside, Martineau continued writing to Chapman, though from his 'unreserved nature' she found him less easy to know than she supposed. When Chapman rejected an article attacking Dickens over factory legislation, Martineau argued fiercely that Dickens's charity was unscientific. Chapman, ignoring

her argument, pleaded overwork and the renewal of medical studies.

In 1857, Martineau pressured Chapman to let her review the third edition of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, in which Mrs Gaskell had promised to correct the 'false' statements Brontë had made about her. And *had* he been able to do anything about transferring the mortgage? Her fragile state of health made that essential and could save him embarrassment - some believing his views tended 'more & more away from free thought, & in the direction of orthodoxy.'

Chapman replied ingratiatingly, and Martineau (reversing herself) said their differences had nothing to do with her loan. Yet she would take 'a transfer [of the mortgage] as a great favour.'

In 1857 and 1858, six more articles by Martineau appeared in the *Westminster*. In June 1858, however, she learned that other creditors had supplanted her on the *Westminster*, Chapman having used *her* money to finance his publishing business. 'I am perplexed & confounded,' she shot back. Matters must be settled in case she died - how long did he expect her to wait?

In a final angry communication in August Martineau addressed her remarks to 'Dr Chapman' (no longer 'Dear friend') and merely signed her name. Later, Chapman noted rather self-pityingly in his diary that Martineau was reporting injurious things of him - yet he continued to run the *Westminster* until his death in 1894.

Martineau had been flummoxed. But if Chapman's warmth and attractiveness had swamped her business judgement, she was in good company - George Eliot and Barbara Leigh Smith being only the best known of the other women he had charmed.'

