

The  
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Society

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**The Martineau Society**

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**Martineau Society Subscription Information:**

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\* Overseas: Individual members \$30 // Concessionary rate \$20. This may be paid in dollars to Prof. Elisabeth Arbuckle, Condo. Montebello M526 Trujillo Alto PR00976 USA.

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### **Editor's Note**

Your newsletter is an eclectic mixture of views of Harriet Martineau's life. We have, as promised before, a paper from the Society's successful 2009 Conference in Boston USA on Harriet's journalism and a paper on her "singledom". We look at Harriet's taste in hymns and music and at her home and her social housing efforts in Ambleside where the Society's 2010 Conference is to be held.

A quotation from James Martineau forms the newsletter's end-piece. This is another 'great whale' of an idea rising from the deep sea of James' religious writings. It makes the arguable point that Harriet and James may have diverged in views and become estranged in later life but their shared Unitarian background – their sacred causes of social service – remained as firm as ever. Their views went on to contribute to the development of political ideas and to the development of Unitarian ideas to the present day.

Thanks again to our contributors. The errors you may find in the newsletter belong solely to your editor. Do enjoy the newsletter.

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### ***The only woman in England who thoroughly possessed the art of writing: Harriet Martineau and journalism<sup>1</sup>***

**Gaby Weiner**

*This paper focuses on Harriet Martineau's journalism. It provides an overview of the numerous journals for which she worked, concentrating in particular on her Daily News leaders, letters and articles which formed the mainstay of the last two decades of her working life. It seeks to show that Harriet's relationship with journalism was two-way in the sense that as a profession, it provided her with a steady income and a ready audience (no mean feat for a women writing in nineteenth century England). On the other hand, journalism itself was a beneficiary – of the characteristic diligence, scholarship and perspective that Harriet brought to all her work.*

Harriet Martineau is reputed to have been one of the first practising woman journalists in England, and furthermore, according to George Eliot, 'the only woman in England who thoroughly possessed the art of writing'<sup>2</sup>. However accurate such claims, there is little doubt that no other woman in England at the

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Martineau Society, 15-19 July 2009, Boston, USA

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Haight (1954-5), 2, 32

time was so active in, or owed so much to, the profession of journalism. It sustained her economically and intellectually throughout her life and particularly in the 1850s and 1860s, and enabled her to write on a wide range of 'male' subjects. In other words, journalism provided Harriet Martineau, as a woman, with unique opportunities to excel.

The daily press of mid-Victorian Britain was largely composed of 'serious' journalism on topics such as politics, finance, and commerce, though this was supplemented by what was called the 'pauper press', comprising mainly weekly titles sold for a few pennies and aimed at a largely working class readership<sup>3</sup>. From the 1850s onwards, however, newspapers directed at the middle classes such as the *Daily Telegraph* began to see the economic advantage of extending their appeal to the literate working classes. So, they sought to adopt a more accessible journalistic style which aimed to entertain as well as inform, which as it happened, coincided with Harriet Martineau's writing preferences and her availability.

Harriet Martineau began her career as a journalist/writer in her twenties as an unpaid contributor to W.J. Fox's Unitarian journal, the *Monthly Repository*, and later became a paid regular. As her career progressed, an impressive number of periodicals took her work including Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine*, *Chambers' Journal*, *Penny Magazine*, *Westminster Review*, *Edinburgh Review*, Dickens' *Household Words*, *People's Journal*, *The Leader*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, and *Once a Week*. In addition she wrote for American journals such as *Atlantic Monthly* and *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (NASS). But writing for journals was not the only form of journalism open to her. Her finest journalistic accomplishment was her work for the Liberal newspaper, the *Daily News*. Her friend and executor, Maria Weston Chapman reported that between 1852 and 1866, Harriet Martineau supplied 1,642 leaders. Though unsigned, most of these were identified in Webb's (1959) unpublished 'Handlist of Contributions to the Daily News by Harriet Martineau' (see also Arbuckle, 1994)<sup>4</sup>. In this paper therefore I first briefly touch on her earlier journalism and then explore her work for the *Daily News* and in particular her use of the newspaper to campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts.

It was on health and sanitation matters that Harriet wrote for Charles Dickens' *Household Words* from its first issues in the early 1850s, and she also provided a

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<sup>3</sup> Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Webb, R. K. (1959) *A Handlist of Contributions to the Daily News by Harriet Martineau*, unpublished, available in the British Newspaper Library. In the introduction to the *Handlist*, Webb notes Martineau's archival tendencies. Apparently Webb checked his list, culled from numerous contemporary references, against the contents of a tin trunk owned by Sir Wilfrid Martineau and noticed that the 'cuttings were arranged chronologically in packets, each covering six months; each cutting was dated in Miss Martineau's handwriting'; see also Arbuckle, E. (1994)

descriptive series on industrial matters. Here she writes on buttons

Here, we had better stop, though we have not told half that might be related on the subject of buttons. It is wonderful, is it not? That on that small pivot turns the fortune of such multitudes of men, women, and children, in so many parts of the world; that such industry; and so many fine faculties, should be brought out and exercised by so small a thing as the Button. (Martineau, 1852)<sup>5</sup>

She later parted company with the journal and its editor (unusually as we shall see) over what she saw as its anti-Catholic stance and over Dickens' portrayal of women. Her objection to the latter was expressed succinctly: in modern parlance, she took exception to Dickens's portrayal of women as sex objects.

In the autumn of 1849, my misgivings first became serious. Mr Willis [the assistant editor] proposed my doing some articles on the Employments of Women (especially in connection with the Schools of Design and branches of Fine-Art manufacture), and was quite unable to see that every contribution of the kind was necessarily excluded by Mr Dickens's prior articles on behalf of his view of Woman's position; articles in which he ignored the fact that nineteen-twentieths of the women of England earn their bread, and in which he describes the function of Women; viz., to dress well and look pretty, as an adornment to the homes of men (Martineau, 1877: 419).

In 1850 and 1851 she contributed sketches to *The Leader* and *Once a Week*, and when short of money in 1864 due to the collapse of some investments, she wrote articles for *The Cornhill Magazine* and *Edinburgh Review*. However, periodical writing (and also the writing of books) merely punctuated her regular work then for the *Daily News*. She started writing on Australian emigration in May 1852, and wrote continually until 1866, bar a three month break in 1855 when she was occupied by the *Autobiography*. At times, she wrote as many as six leaders a week, particularly when the office was short staffed at holiday time. The *Daily News* had been launched in 1846 as a Liberal newspaper. It gained its financial base from the printing firm Bradbury and Evans, and Charles Dickens was its first editor. It was aimed at middle-class readers of a liberal disposition, and thus campaigned for reform on a wide range of social issues including education, and civil and religious tolerance and equality. Dickens lasted only a short time as editor and was succeeded by Frederick Knight Hunt who made more of a success of the paper. It was Hunt who recruited Harriet to be a leader writer and when he died suddenly in 1854, his successor William Weir continued to rely heavily on her leader writing, as did his successor Thomas Walker. A later managing editor of the newspaper, Sir John Robinson expressed his admiration of Harriet Martineau's achievements as a newspaperwoman while W.E Forster, the Liberal politician, claimed that it was she alone who kept public opinion on the

<sup>5</sup> Martineau, H. (1852) 'What there is in a button', *Household Words*.

side of the Union before and during the American Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

The range of topics about which she could write was surprisingly wide. She always had 'half a hundred topics' she told Lord Carlisle that she could write about if the occasion offered<sup>7</sup>. Her subjects ranged over a wide field of foreign and domestic affairs. She gave her opinion on political, social and economic conditions. She wrote about the war in Crimea and about imperial policy in Ireland, India and the colonies. She expressed her continued concern for education at all levels of society, as I showed in an earlier paper to the Society<sup>8</sup>. She argued for improvements in public health and for political, legal and prison reform. She kept the question of slavery in America, almost single-handedly as we have seen, in the public eye and was also almost a lone voice on the 'Woman Question'. And almost always, her perception of and solution to problems of the day, positioned her at the progressive end of the political spectrum. She was thus more than just the free-market liberal that she has sometimes been portrayed, although rather too attuned to her own (middle) class interests to achieve the widespread recognition she deserved as a thorough-going reformer and intellectual powerhouse.

Her *Daily News* editorials well exemplify her various positions. On the Crimean War, for example, she offered her support to military engagement, motivated not by imperialism and expansionism which she condemned but because she saw the Russian regime as an archetypical symbol of despotism. She was fearful of the spread of oppressive Russian forces. However, she expressed scepticism about the ability of the British establishment to mount a successful military offensive, and was appalled at what she saw as the mismanagement of the campaign, the hardships inflicted on the British soldiers, and the tragic neglect of the sick and wounded. She pronounced the army, as a good indication of national character; 'servile, passive... reduced to single uniformity'.<sup>9</sup> She commended the valiant efforts of Florence Nightingale with whom later, in 1859, she had a fruitful collaboration over the publication, *England and her Soldiers*, an account of the inefficiency of the Crimean War<sup>10</sup>. She placed the blame squarely on the ruling class for the outcomes of the war in a *Daily News* leader in 1855.

Our aristocracy have received their rebuke in their proved incapacity to manage our army...the results of our political tendencies have told disastrously on our organisation and management. In a country where the aristocracy has ever been the real ruling power, there is no hope for justice to the army but in constant warfare (Martineau, 1855, 6 December).

<sup>6</sup> Arbuckle, E. (1994). *Harriet Martineau in the London Daily News*. New York, Garland Publishing, x-xii

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Webb (1960). 315.

<sup>8</sup> Weiner, G. (2003)

<sup>9</sup> Martineau, H. (1855)

<sup>10</sup> Martineau, H. (1859) *England and her Soldiers*

She expressed strong opinions about India under imperial rule and also about the mutiny, which she had considered inevitable. She accepted the fact of the British presence in India but thought of the Empire in terms of improvement of colonial territories rather than aggrandisement and expansion of British interests. She argued that the impact of British imperialism had thus far been disastrous: 'the arts and manufactures of India have been decaying ever since we landed there'. Moreover, the best ships carrying wood, ivory, carpets and fabrics had been pillaged by the British. In fact, despite grants of money, the British presence had produced, in Madras for example, wretchedly poor people verging on the 'lowest ebb of pauperism'<sup>11</sup>. Eventually, she believed, all dependencies would achieve independence, but in the meanwhile, India should be ruled by the British but according to Indian ideas and customs, and with the assistance of the Indians themselves.

We must go to business and that immediately - to get a well- compacted responsible government, organised for India, and laws that can work, and courts that can be confided in, and a power of control over war-makers, and a power of stimulating the arts and peace. (Martineau, 1853, 7 June)

As her books *How to Observe* (1838) and *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848)<sup>12</sup> also show, Harriet Martineau sought to preserve 'native' culture against the processes of Anglicisation. She expressed concern at the folly of undermining the traditional Indian systems of land tenure, tax collection, and economy; and reported her distress at the blatant bias against appointing Indians to administrative positions. Hence, according to Pichanick, she was too much of a democrat to approve of government by authoritarian and alien administration, whether it issued from the East India Company's offices in Leadenhall Street or from the government in Whitehall<sup>13</sup>.

She was also, as has already been noted, one of the most influential voices in the British press on the abolition of slavery and the American Civil War. 'It was Harriet Martineau alone... who was keeping English public opinion about America on the right side through the press', wrote W.E. Forster (1819-86), the Liberal parliamentarian.<sup>14</sup>

She kept her readers up to date with political and constitutional developments and explained the territorial struggle between the free and slave states. For Harriet Martineau, the slave question was the axis on which the destiny of

<sup>11</sup> Martineau, 1853

<sup>12</sup> Martineau, H. (1838) *How to Observe*, London, Charles Knight; Martineau, H. (1848) *Eastern Life, Present and Past*. London, Edward Moxon.

<sup>13</sup> Pichanick, V. K. (1981) *Harriet Martineau: the Woman and her Work 1802-1876*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press; Martineau, H. (1857). *British Rule in India*. Smith, Elder & Co., 124-135, 180-183.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Miller, F. Fenwick. (1884) *Harriet Martineau*. London, W. H. Allen, 100.

America turned.

Every public movement in the United States is, and long has been, determined by the immediate condition of the slavery question; and the question supplies the whole group of tests by which the political conduct of every public man will necessarily be tried till the controversy is extinguished one way or another. ('The United States under the Presidentship of Mr. Buchanan', 288, quoted in Pichanick, 214)

She argued, as she had in *Demerara*<sup>15</sup>, that slave owners could not be 'effectual' champions of human freedom. However, in her *Daily News* leaders she prioritised ethical considerations above economics. For example, in 1854 she wrote that American slaves were 'an oppressed race of men who are shut down in dumbness and helplessness, and whose condition must be judged of, not according to the expediencies of internal administration, but to the eternal principles of right and wrong'.<sup>16</sup> Despite unwillingness to become involved in the internal affairs of the United States, she argued, the British could not ignore the 'privation of a race of men':

It is the height of absurdity to expect or to desire us to abet the cause of slave-holding by silence or indifference, after such a course of action as we have, as a people, pursued for half a century, with regard to other nations as slave-trading, and to ourselves when slave-holding. (Martineau, 1854, 8 July)

She, thus, welcomed the start of the American Civil War and remained an unequivocal champion of the North. For her, it provided the opportunity both to end slavery once and for all, and to revise the Constitution without compromise or evasion.

Another subject to which Harriet Martineau turned repeatedly in her leaders was the issue of social class. Her middle-class eye frequently turned on the conditions of the working-class. During the cotton famine in the 1850s, she helped to organise relief for unemployed Lancashire Operatives, and suggested forms of state welfare such as soup kitchens, provision of living accommodation in areas where work was available, and temporary plots of land for the unemployed.<sup>17</sup> By providing work for the unemployed, for example, on worthwhile public projects like road building and drainage, instead of outright charity, she argued, the pride of honest men would be spared without offering succour to the idle. Pichanick<sup>18</sup> suggests that this endorsement of government-sponsored work projects and soup kitchens though limited nevertheless created

<sup>15</sup> Martineau, H. (1833) *Demerara (Illustrations of Political Economy)*, London, Charles Fox

<sup>16</sup> Martineau, H. (1854), *Daily News*, 8 July.

<sup>17</sup> Martineau, H. (1862), *Daily News*, 17 & 21 July.

<sup>18</sup> Pichanick, (1981).



a major exception to dominance of *laissez-faire* ideology of the time, particularly for someone still fundamentally opposed to charity on the grounds that it encouraged improvidence, discouraged frugality and created dependence on charity.

As Harriet Martineau grew older she became increasingly interventionist and less scrupulously *laissez-faire*. However, she remained opposed to organised labour and to political power for trade unions, though she was happy for them to exist as friendly societies. She admitted, however, that given the apparent tenacity and effectiveness of trade unionists, there might be a 'natural law' of organised labour which had not yet been discovered.

The tendency to combination [has] been so constant as to point to a future time when some natural laws of organisation of labour will have been disclosed, and these arrangements will indicate themselves which will secure beyond dispute the benefit of all parties. (Martineau, 1853, 28 June)

She remained convinced of Adam Smith's principle of identity of interests, and was thus opposed to strikes. For her, it was against the interests of workers to strike: 'the employed should know, if they do not know, that now more than ever, their refusal to work is directly diminishing the demand for their labour'<sup>19</sup>. Further, she issued the warning that withholding labour could lead to unemployment: 'in the case of manufactures where machinery is employed the immediate effect of strikes is to stimulate the invention and use of machinery to supersede human labour.' She contended that workers and their employers should arrive at a shared understanding of their problems by means of mutual negotiation<sup>20</sup>.

She also opposed much of the factory legislation of the mid-century, not because she had a callous disregard for the suffering of the worker but because she had faith in middle-class employers, no doubt because of her factory-owning family background. She was convinced of their ultimate fair-mindedness and benevolence. However, her faith weakened with the passage of the Ten Hours Act in 1847, when she finally became convinced that long hours and unhealthy conditions were the rule in factories rather than the exception. The Act, she argued, should be extended to cover female and child labour in hitherto unregulated industries. She still clung to the principle of *laissez-faire* but reluctantly concluded that nineteenth century industrial relations were clearly not ideal.

<sup>19</sup> Martineau, 1853, 28 June.

<sup>20</sup> Harriet Martineau's position on labour relations was rehearsed many times in the *Daily News*: see also, (1853) 17 February, 26 March, 16 June, 21 October, 1 November; (1854), 17 March; (1857), 30 January; (1859) 19 September, 3 October; (1860) 20 August.

It ought not to be an office of law to protect the operative from being overworked, deprived of sleep, and of time for meals, and of education; but it was worse to see operatives oppressed, as they too often were before the protection of law was provided for them...We have to extend this protection beyond its present range. (Martineau, 1860, 15 March).

Her *laissez-faire*-ism, consistent with her beliefs concerning sex equality, led to her insistence that there should be no male monopoly of jobs, that work should be apportioned according to ability and not sex; and that there should be equal pay for equal work – all demands of the modern feminist movement. Over a century and half ago, she wrote the following.

Discountenance no exercise of female industry, but encourage it. Do nothing to keep up the exclusions which belong to the old days of guilds and monopolies. When you see the work to be done, and the hands ready to do it, let the hands and work come together.

If the natural laws of society are not permitted free play among us, we may look for more beating of wives and selling of orphans to perdition; and more sacrifice of women to brutal and degrading employments, precisely in proportion to their exclusion from such as befit their social position and natural abilities. (Martineau, 1856, 2 April.)

Harriet Martineau was not afraid to tackle the controversial issues of the nineteenth century in particular relating to women, such as birth control, divorce and prostitution. In opposing the Contagious Diseases Acts which sought to control venereal disease by the registration and control of prostitutes, she sympathised with the prostitutes rather than their clients, and argued that the licensing of prostitutes in order to protect their clientele would simply condone and perpetuate the evil. In 1863, she questioned whether 'the sin and disease in question can be dealt with only by a system of police regulation; that is, by the establishment of a systematic registration of prostitutes, and inspection for the purposes of preventing the spread of disease.'<sup>21</sup>

She had been horrified, she said, when she first heard about the possibilities of such legislation, and was wholly condemnatory of its eventual passage. The first Contagious Diseases Act, passed in 1864, directed that women in garrison towns could be stopped in the streets, summarily arrested as prostitutes, imprisoned, forcibly examined and if found to be diseased, confined to a designated, secured hospital. The second Act, passed two years later, eradicated anomalies and extended the geographical area of imposition of the Acts.

It is difficult to explain why attempts to legislate against venereal disease surfaced in Britain in the 1860s. Walkowitz suggests that this was a reflection both of a concern for the high incidence of venereal disease in the British army (in 1864, one out of three sick cases had been diagnosed as venereal in origin)

<sup>21</sup> Martineau, H. (1863) *Daily News*, 20 September, letter.

and enthusiasm for intervention into the lives of the poor on medical and sanitary grounds.<sup>22</sup> Most strikingly, the rhetoric underpinning the legislation revealed the sexual double standards which riddled mid-Victorian culture. Arguments such as the following prevailed:

We may at once dispose of any recommendations founded on the principle of putting both parties to the sin of fornication on the same footing by the obvious but not less conclusive reply that there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse. (Report, 1871, *Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1866-69*, quoted in Walkowitz: 71)

Despite Florence Nightingale's opposition to the Acts, and it was she who alerted Harriet Martineau to their damaging potential,<sup>23</sup> there was little public antagonism to them until Josephine Butler embarked upon her campaign in the 1870s and 1880s. The Contagious Diseases Acts were finally repealed in 1886.

Harriet Martineau's four letters, all published in the *Daily News* in September 1863 (4, 15, 20, 25), before the Acts became law, were the first shots fired in one of the main British feminist campaigns of the nineteenth century. The debt that the movement owed to her was acknowledged later in Josephine Butler's autobiography.<sup>24</sup> In the letters, written as letters rather than editorials because of the 'delicate' nature of the content, Harriet Martineau advanced the arguments against the suggested legislation. The remedy for venereal disease, she wrote, lay in moral rather than in preventive measures as follows. The best ways of tackling the problem were to remove temptation from soldiers by keeping them busy, active and occupied, and also healthy and well fed. Moreover, if the Acts were passed, there was no guarantee that they would prevent disease. But they would imply state support and approval of immorality and they would force the intervention of civilians in military affairs.

She was particularly critical of Victorian conviction of the unremitting nature of male sexuality: in the case of the military, the perceived necessity for the gratification of the soldier's sexual appetites [his 'animalism'] was 'to be provided for like his need of food and clothing':

This admission of the necessity of the vice is the point on which the whole argument turns, and on which irretrievable consequences depend. Once admitted, the necessity of a long series of fearful evils follows of course. There can be no resistance to seduction, procuration, brothels, disease

<sup>22</sup> Walkowitz, J. (1980) *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 69-89.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277

<sup>24</sup> Butler, J. (1898) *Personal Reminiscences of the Great Crusade*. London, Marshall.

and methods of regulation, when once the original necessity is granted. Further, the admission involves civil as well as military society, and starts them together on the road which leads down to what the moralists of all ages and nations have called the lowest hell. (Martineau, 1863, 20 September)<sup>25</sup>

Nearly a year later she felt able to reintroduce the issue to the *Daily News* readership once more. In a leader in July 1864, she apologised for the awkwardness of the subject but pronounced it her duty as a journalist to warn against legislation which endangered the rights of innocent women. She trusted that her representatives in parliament:

will surely not forget that to pass such a measure as this is to enter on a new and fearful province of legislation, from which we can never withdraw to the previous moral position; and that it is proposed to us to do this while existing laws against brothels and violations of decency in our streets remain unenforced, and while there is evidence in existence of the operation in other countries of laws for the protection of men from the consequences of their own passions which would make it a less evil to any conscientious member to quit public life than to have the smallest share in bringing down such a curse on his nation and on the moral repute and prospects of his country. (Martineau, 1864, 2 July)

One of her last actions for the campaign was to sign a letter, along with Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler and twenty eight prominent women, from the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in the *Daily News* in 1869.<sup>26</sup>

Despite poor health, Harriet Martineau continued to support Josephine Butler's campaign by writing posters and contributing 'fancy work'. Also, in collaboration with John Stuart Mill and other feminist activists, she helped to mount a challenge against Sir Henry Storks, a supporter of the Acts when he ran against a 'repealer' in a Colchester by-election in 1870. Colchester was one of the garrison towns under the jurisdiction of the Acts. Harriet Martineau's *Daily News* letters of 1863 were reprinted in pamphlet form, and a poster in the form of a letter from Harriet Martineau, Ursula Bright and Josephine Butler, was addressed to the women of Colchester.<sup>27</sup> Despite the fact that the women of Colchester had no voting power, they were urged to 'lift up your voices within your homes and neighbourhoods, against being ruled by lawmakers like the authors of these Acts; in other words, against Henry Storks as candidate for Colchester'.<sup>28</sup>

The publicity was effective and Storks, the official Liberal Party candidate, was

<sup>25</sup> Martineau, H. (1870) *Contagious Diseases Acts*. Liverpool, T. Brackell, reprint of the 1863 *Daily News* letters.

<sup>26</sup> Reproduced in Chapman, 430.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 433-434

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 434-5

not elected. The loss of the seat persuaded the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, to reconsider the Acts and to set up a parliamentary commission for this purpose. When it voted 13 to 6 for repeal and proposed new legislation, the opposers were jubilant. Sir John Richard Robinson, the *Daily News* editor, wrote to congratulate Harriet Martineau. 'You have done more than anyone, I really believe, to defeat the plans of the military.' But with characteristic honesty, she pencilled the margin of his letter with the private comment, 'No, Mrs Butler'.<sup>29</sup> In the event the congratulations were premature as the new bill was introduced too late in the parliamentary session to complete its passage, and in fact, the Acts were not finally repealed until 1886, a decade and a half later.

Apart from campaigns and issues of particular interest to Harriet, a good many traditional writing tasks fell to her as a working journalist for the *Daily News* such as reporting on royal occasions, biographical obituaries, book reviews, commenting on the passage of the seasons, summaries of the year's news and so on. As Webb notes, she applied herself to these with the same frankness and vigour as she did with topics of immediate interest to her.<sup>30</sup>

In April 1866 at the age of 64, Harriet Martineau retired from the *Daily News*, although when the Brighton Railway stopped paying dividends at the end of the 1860s and she was in some financial difficulty, re-publication of some of her biographical sketches from the *Daily News* was arranged to tide her over<sup>31</sup>. She came out of retirement again on two occasions only; once to write an article opposing spiritualism for the *Edinburgh Review*<sup>32</sup> and, once, to take part in the fight against the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1870 alongside Josephine Butler and Florence Nightingale, as already mentioned.

### Reflections

How can Harriet Martineau's journalism be evaluated? First, it seems to me to be the most accessible of all her work to the modern reader largely because her writing style was clear, sharply focused, and jargon-free. And, because she wrote for many journals and newspapers throughout a long period of cultural and political change, we can gain a real sense in her work of the unfolding of the early and mid Victorian era. Clearly some contemporary issues are of more interest to the modern reader than others. For example, her views on education and on women's issues seem fresher and more relevant than her deliberations

<sup>29</sup> Letter from J. R. Robinson to Harriet Martineau, 22 May 1871, Harriet Martineau Papers, MS 758, University of Birmingham Library

<sup>30</sup> Webb (316) evaluates Harriet Martineau's work as a journalist thus: 'Her work has relevance, urgency, cogency, and impatience with muddled situations, those characteristics of good journalism which must mark any paper which would inform opinion and influence policy'.

<sup>31</sup> Martineau (1869), *op cit*

<sup>32</sup> Martineau, H. (1868), *Edinburgh Review*, 128, July, 1-47.

about the Crimean War or arterial drainage<sup>33</sup>. Whatever topic she addresses, however, she offers an insight into the excitements and the disputations of an era long since gone but still of enormous importance to our history and culture.

As a sometime writer myself, mainly of academic texts, I have been particularly interested in Harriet's attention to the detail of getting her work published, her anxiety about misprints and copyright law, and the delight of eventual public recognition of her work.<sup>34</sup> Harriet Martineau was above all a 'professional' journalist and writer. From the time of the collapse of the Martineau family income in the 1820s, she lived by the pen, and in the main, did so fairly successfully. She never made huge amounts of money but managed her finances effectively by investing wisely and, at times, living frugally. She remained on good terms with most of the editors of journal and newspapers for whom she wrote (excepting Dickens), probably because her manuscripts were an editor's dream; neat, intelligible, needing almost no corrections or changes and she was conscientious about getting her copy in on time, even so far as to press Rowland Hill to provide a speedier mail service between Ambleside and London.<sup>35</sup> Most importantly, as we have seen, she provided criticisms of, and humanitarian and well-argued solutions to the political and social problems of mid-Victorian England that challenge today's stereotypes of that particular era as stuffy, prudish and ignorant.

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<sup>33</sup> Martineau, H. (1853) *Daily News*, 28 July. Harriet Martineau seemed to be particularly interested in 'arterial drainage'. In this fairly typical leader on the subject, she argues that recent floods could have been prevented if there had been 'a wise co-operation with Nature, under the form of control of her forces. What individuals have done there [in the "fenny districts"], individuals may do elsewhere.'

<sup>34</sup> Logan, D. (ed.) (2007). *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau*, 5 vols. London, Pickering & Chatto.

<sup>35</sup> See *Collected Letters* (ed. Logan).

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**'The Happiest Single Woman in England.' Singledom in Harriet Martineau's Deerbrook**

**Sharon Connor**

Harriet Martineau described herself as the happiest of single women both in a number of letters, and in her autobiography. Critical opinion of Martineau's attitude to her singleness has generally concurred that this became a fixed state after the death of her fiancé in 1827, and I'm particularly thinking of Mrs Fenwick Miller's description of Martineau being left to a 'life of heart widow-hood', and which was further reinforced by the section 'Single Life' in Martineau's *Autobiography*.

Yet Martineau's expressions of contentment and pleasure with her life as an unmarried woman were not made until many years after the death of John Hugh

Worthington. The letters I referred to were written between the years 1849-1852, and the *Autobiography* in 1855. For the purpose of this paper, which is based on on-going research for my thesis, I am looking to Martineau's 1839 novel *Deerbrook* as an experimental exploration of the diverse ways in which, often subtly, singleness manifests itself as distinct from a married state (or sometimes surprisingly related to it), and of the different kinds of experience and being which come under the social category 'spinster' or 'single'. This diversity in the manifestations of singleness offers a challenge to the Victorian social ideal of marriage as equating to automatic happiness while spinsterhood was a fate to be avoided at all costs. Martineau described the writing of *Deerbrook* as having an almost cathartic effect, claiming she found in it 'a relief to many pent up sufferings, feelings and convictions.'<sup>2</sup> I wish to argue that it was a first staging post in the literary journey which resulted in her proclaiming herself 'the happiest single woman in England.'

In his book *Strange Stories and other Explorations in Victorian Fiction* Robert Lee Wolff makes a clear connection between Harriet and her fictional characters.

Three of the women in the novel - the jealous Hester, the submissive Margaret, the detached Maria Young - we may safely regard as different aspects of Harriet Martineau herself. The wild jealousy that Hester feels in the story for her sister Margaret, Harriet herself tells us that she felt in real life for *her* sister Rachel... Sick with the aggression she cannot hide, prone to inexplicable bursts of bad temper, disillusioned with marriage though ostensibly deeply and passionately in love with her husband, Hester displays a mixture of characteristics all of which Harriet Martineau knew she shared, declared to be her own, and was in *Deerbrook* striving to portray (p. 84)

I agree that these characters can all be described as depicting aspects of Harriet, but I feel that rather than a clear cut attempt to portray these 'selves', Harriet aspires to a continuous investigation of selfhood and *Deerbrook* becomes a text of 'what ifs', an exploratory means of coming to terms with the position of being a woman alone, and the many levels or modes of experience that that state may hold within itself.

There are three main characters in *Deerbrook* that engage with the concept of singleness; the two Ibbotson sisters Hester and Margaret and the invalid governess Maria Young. Here I will be concentrating on the two women who remain unmarried throughout the novel, Maria Young and Margaret Ibbotson. My main purpose is to demonstrate by contrasting the thought processes and syntax which emerge from these fictional representations of an unmarried state, that singlehood as it emerges in *Deerbrook* is NOT a single thing or reducible to a single category or mode of being.

I agree with Erica Wright, who, in a conference paper delivered last year at UCL, described Maria as,