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## Harriet Martineau

Born 3rd July 1802

Never married

Died from bronchitis 1876

More widely known than James her older brother

More rigid in views than James

Always an outsider

A medium impact fish in a large pool – but ripples on

She is nineteenth century humanist and feminist



- Daughter of textile manufacturer from Norwich
- Father had married eldest daughter of sugar refiner of Newcastle
- Parents **Unitarians**, **Norwich** based
- Unhappy child and much indigestion
- Sometimes suicidal thoughts in **wishing to reach heaven**
- Imagined angels would take her from **Octagon Chapel** through skylight windows
- **Mother distant** personality
  
- Unitarians: women to obtain a good education but **not university**

## Notes on Harriet Martineau

- Learnt reading, numbers, Latin, music
- Went to new Unitarian school, included French
- After closure, learnt Classics at home
  
- Went to Bristol for 2 years in 1818
- There learnt about Joseph Priestley/ David Hartley/ John Locke from Lant Carpenter (**cause and effect**, and **no free will**)
- **Progressive deafness** with great loss by 16

Became **campaigner on women's causes** in USA and Britain

First piece: *Female Writers in Practical Divinity* in Unitarian journal, *Monthly Repository* 1822

1823 *Monthly Repository*, 'On Female Education' (written anonymously)

Article was first of many on **education** and over **6,000 articles** on the condition of women (in several countries) – articles for example on girls schooling, girls education in the home and higher education for women

- **Financial failure and death of father in 1829** – Harriet moved to London
- Earned money from needlework
- Continued to write for *Monthly Repository*

Became **economically independent from writing**

1832 from Ireland (with James) wrote monthly series, 'Illustrations of Political Economy' – **economics as a developing subject put into fiction** to popularise it. This brought her fame.

She **did not endorse Robert Owen** and his socialism

- Two years in the USA travelling 1834–1836 and kept a journal
- Lost Americans' favour with (early) **anti-slavery stance**
- In Britain published *Society in America* (1837)
- Strong criticism of not meeting its democratic principles
- Especially on women in the chapter 'The Political Non-existence of Women'
- Made **analogy between women and slaves**
  
- Retrospect of Western Travel
- *How to Observe Manners and Morals*

Novel *Deerbrook*

- 1839 **Venice but ill**
- Returned to Britain and Tynemouth to rest
- Refused offer of support from Lord Melbourne

Novel *The Hour and the Man* based on a black liberator in Haiti

Children's books

*Life in the Sick Room*

## Notes on Harriet Martineau

- After **mesmerism** got well, though it a co-incidence
- She wrote letters on Mesmerism in *Athenaeum*
- Friction with her physician and family (1844)

1846 **new house**: *The Knoll* at **Ambleside** was built. It became her base up to death.

- But to **Egypt** and **Palestine**, with the Yates, returned 1847
- Wrote *Eastern Life Past and Present* which said the religions were human made not divine

*The History of England during the Thirty Years Peace 1816–1846*

- 1852 translated **Auguste De Comte** *Positive Philosophy* into English
- Describes his 'tedious repetitions'
- 6 volumes became 2
- **Utilitarian** echoes
- Continuation of **First cause** but in **sociology**
- Comte gets Martineau's translation back into the original French
  
- Hers an '**evolutionary naturalism**' close to Comte
- She adopted this **social science method** and made her thoroughly atheistic; **social science replacing theology** completely
- Agrees that 'evolution' is the principle of social change
- Agrees that mechanisms of **cause and effect** explain human action
- Disagrees to the effect that **knowledge is constructed and verified by human experience** (remains of Unitarianism?)
  
- Wrote first 1852 to *London Daily News* from Ireland as **foreign correspondent**
- **Leader writer** (1642 articles) in *London Daily News*
- Other subjects included foreign affairs, cousin marriages and agriculture

Book: *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851) with sceptic Henry G Atkinson (he the main contributor) and **rejected theism**. James Martineau called it "**Mesmeric Atheism**" in the *Prospective Review* (rather a nasty title given her experience).

1859 'Female Industry' in *Edinburgh Review* **advocated paid employment for women**

1866 signed John Stuart Mill MP's **petition for women's suffrage**

1869 **Last work**: Ladies Campaign for the **Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act** (women could be examined by police on the suspicion of prostitution). She gave wordy support to campaigners including Josephine Butler.

- She wrote her **obituary** in 1855 (!) published in 1876
- Autobiography 1879
- She saw her life as a **populariser of existing ideas** but she **gave them focus** and thus was forefront of their promotion

Compare with brother...

## James Martineau

Born 1805, died 1900

Less widely known than his sister Harriet

Broadened his views

Within tolerated dissent

He was a largish fish in a small pool

Century plus later he needs wider rediscovery, unlike Harriet



- ◆ As a baby **heard religious views from pious sister**
- ◆ Completing grammar school in Norwich **went to Bristol** after Harriet
- ◆ There learnt about **cause and effect** etc. from Lant Carpenter too
  
- ◆ Failed engineer (training)
- ◆ Unitarian ministry **student** at **Manchester College** (York) from 1822
- ◆ Ministry at Eustace Street, **Dublin** 1832

- ◆ Refused state support with promotion

### Ministry at Liverpool

- ◆ Started with views **accepting the Divinity of Christ**
- ◆ Later believed that **Jesus was fully human**
- ◆ Jesus reflected God in human form
- ◆ **Human conscience** guides to right action
- ◆ **Human reason** guides to (critical) understanding of biblical truth

1836 wrote *Rationale of Religious Inquiry* defending human reason

1839 lectured with others on *Unitarianism Defended* in Liverpool

- ◆ 1840 **Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy** at **Manchester College**
- ◆ **Principal Manchester College** (London) 1869–1885
- ◆ Taught ethics and morals up to 1885 (though a short gap)

*Types of Ethical Theory* (1885)

*The Seat of Authority in Religion* (1890)

He maintained a **high and dry theism**, the essential truth, one that left the bible as its illustrator, as Christ too was God's illustrator.

*Source:*

Yates, Gayle Graham (1986), 'Harriet Martineau and Her Brother James', in *Faith and Freedom*, Summer 1986, Vol. 39, Pt. 2, No. 116.

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See main sources:

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