Dr. Larry K. Uffelman
Professor of English Emeritus
116 S. Academy St.
Mansfield, PA 16933
USA
E-mail address: luffelma@epix.net

From 'Martha Preston' to 'Half a Life-Time Ago':

Elizabeth Gaskell Rewrites a Story

Friendship with William and Mary Howitt helped bring Elizabeth Gaskell into the world of periodical publishing. After publishing under the pseudonym Cotton Mather Mills in *Howitt's Journal*, a magazine edited by the Howitts, Gaskell was asked by Mary for a story she could place in the American *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art.*[1] At this time Mary Howitt was acting as an agent for the American monthly.[2] Gaskell provided her with 'The Last Generation in England', which appeared in *Sartain's* in July 1849. A second story, 'Martha Preston', was also published in Sartain's in February 1850. Later, 6-20 October 1855, the completely rewritten "Martha Preston" appeared as

'Half a Life-Time Ago' in Charles Dickens' *Household Words*. In 1859 'Half a Life-Time Ago' appeared again, this time published by Sampson Low in a collection of linked stories titled *Round the Sofa*.

My thanks to the members of my Gaskell seminar: Robert Bones, Amy DeMarco, and Tana Helson, with whom I began this study. Thanks go also to Bernard Koloski, Donna Uffelman, and John Ulrich of Mansfield University; and to Mary Kuhlman, English Department, Creighton University, for their criticism and advice. Special thanks go to Karen Lemasters, Mansfield University interlibrary loan librarian.

‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ has since been reprinted numerous times, whereas ‘Martha Preston’ has been largely forgotten. Although the two are fundamentally the same story, the differences are nevertheless significant. ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ constitutes a ‘re-vision’, a seeing anew, of material Gaskell had been over once before. Her reworking of this, one of her finest stories, offers an interesting insight into Gaskell’s changed conception of her story’s plot and characters, particularly into the function of chance in her central character’s life.

In revising her story for Dickens’ magazine, Gaskell introduced other major revisions that affect the mood and tone of the story. The central interest in each version, however, is the same: a deeply proud, ultimately independent but duty-bound woman, whose character is formed and whose possibilities are limited by the Lake Country agricultural word she inhabits. The faithlessness of her lover and the death of her brother remove from her outlets for her passionate nature until, as a fully mature woman, she finds happiness unexpectedly.

The character of the happiness she finds, however, as well as the determination with which she grasps it in ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’, are vitally different from their counterparts in ‘Martha Preston’. In revision, Gaskell not only emphasized the role of chance in her heroine’s life but also changed the conclusion of the story by eliminating her role as honorary ‘aunt’ to her one-time lover’s son. In place of this relationship in ‘Martha Preston’, Gaskell created in ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ a sisterly connection between her heroine and the heroine’s former lover’s wife.

I

When the story first appeared, it was as ‘Martha Preston’ in the struggling *Sartain’s Union Magazine*, owned and published in Philadelphia by the English-born engraver John Sartain. Intended from its beginning in 1847 to find a niche in the marketplace alongside such magazines as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *Graham’s Magazine*, *Sartain’s Union Magazine* was dedicated to developing the artistic and literary culture of the United States. Like Charles Dickens with his weekly *Household Words*, Sartain aimed to produce ‘a monthly miscellany that is not only lively and entertaining, but useful and instructive’. It was devoted to publishing ‘domestic home tales and sketches calculated to elevate the moral in intellectual facalties [sic]’. Intending to publish ‘emphatically a FAMILY MAGAZINE’, the editors stated *Sartain’s* would ‘contain articles in prose and verse by authors of established Reputation’.[3] With this emphasis on authors “of established reputation” apparently came the opportunity—through the agency of Mary Howitt—for Gaskell to place her two pieces in this American monthly.

Gaskell’s tale, identified as ‘by the author of *Mary Barton*’, appeared in *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* in February 1850, in double columns, running from page 133 to 138. Appearing in the same issue, among other items of interest, were an installment of Harriet Martineau’s ‘A Year at Ambleside’ and ‘Life in the North’ by Frederika Bremer. Thus, Gaskell’s story, in its American periodical context, is a fiction that presents the life of Lake Country agriculturists to a self-conscious and literate, but not yet culturally secure or widely traveled audience.

Readers of *Sartain’s* would have recognized the romantic setting of the story. Wordsworthian in character and theme, ‘Martha Preston’ is set in the Loughrigg district

of the Lake Country and is told by a chatty, openly inviting first-person narrator who acts as a guide leading her readers on a walking tour of the area. First, she places her American readers in the scene by describing the beautiful natural setting. Then she focuses on one particular item in that scene: ‘a stone cottage there in the more open part, where your attention was called off from more immediate objects, by the sunny peep into the valley between Loughrigg and Highclose’. The narrator declares her intimacy with the place, noting that ‘a few years ago’ the cottage had conveyed a sense of ‘hermit-like isolation from the world’. Next, she invites her readers to ‘sit down on this felled tree, and while the noonday hum of busy insects in the wood mingles with the hum of the bees in yonder hives, I will weave together what I have learnt of ‘“Martha Preston”’.[4]

With that introduction and with momentary confusion concerning the name of one of the characters, the story begins. Martha Preston is the daughter of Thomas (or John, as he’s called on the second page and throughout the rest of the story) and Jane Preston. She has a brother called Johnnie. Because Jane Preston ‘had to go to market, to see after the cows and the dairy, to look after the sheep on the fell and was a busy, bustling, managing woman; the “gray mare” some people said’, she turns over the care of Johnnie to Martha. When Martha is fifteen, her mother dies, and Martha must take her place running the farm. This sends Johnnie to Grasmere school, and Martha’s increasing maturity attracts a suitor, William Hawkshaw, a highly sociable, handsome young man ‘full of spirit and life, and bringing a sort of sunshine with him wherever he went’. His active nature brings Martha, who had lived ‘in a green solitude with her father and brother, (of like retired, unsocial habits)’, to life. They are engaged, and Martha’s ‘heart was full to the brim of

happiness'.[5] Two or three years pass while Martha struggles with the central conflict of the story: her desire for a home of her own versus her loyalty to her father and brother.

Her plans are cancelled when Johnnie is sixteen, for Mr. Preston dies, charging Martha 'to be father and mother to Johnnie'.[6] Martha's share of her father's property is but £80, an unpleasant surprise to Will. Then Johnnie catches typhoid fever and after twenty days of 'raging illness', he awakens mentally reduced: 'Martha knew the truth in her heart, that her brother was an idiot'. Having promised her father to care for Johnnie, she accepts her duty. When Will arrives on the next day, he understands that 'if Johnnie were shut up in an asylum, he and Martha might have the land, and marry at once'. Something of a ladies' man, Will is confident of his charm and believes he can persuade Martha to institutionalize Johnnie. Then he can marry Martha and control the land. He's wrong. Instead, Martha steels herself to a future of caring for Johnnie.

After a time, Will marries another woman, and Martha's life 'present[s] no outward variety for many years'.[7] She and Johnnie live frugally and her agricultural talents make them financially well-off. After Johnnie has died, her neighbors invite her to 'the 'gaieties' of the neighbourhood'. She declines, however, out of concern that at one of these gatherings she might meet Will: 'She had never been able to displace her ideal by the thought of the man he really was, and as she acknowledged him to herself to be'.[8] She continues her lonely ways until one night during a terrible storm she and her dog rescue a child. The child is John Hawkshaw, Will's son, whom she begins to love. When she meets the boy's mother, she notes Mrs. Hawkshaw is 'bonny and bright, younger looking than her years', a striking contrast to herself.[9]

She seeks permission for John to visit her. He does and, over time, returns Martha's love. Ever on the lookout for Martha's land, Will permits the visits because he hopes Martha will eventually leave it to John, who loves her as an aunt. When he wishes to marry but is unable to because he lacks means, Martha brings John and his intended to live with her as a son and daughter. This makes marriage possible for them. The story ends, with Martha Preston dandling a baby Martha on her knee while a little Johnnie toddles about and calls her 'Granny'.[10]

II

As 'Martha Preston', Gaskell's story fit very well in *Sartain's*: its author was one of established reputation, and it was neither 'whipt-syllabub' nor a 'milk-sop' love story.[11] Instead, following Wordsworth's 'Ode to Duty', it is an affecting tale, the central theme of which is compensation at the end of life for one's sacrifices to the stern demands of duty. Over time, however, Gaskell's conception of certain elements of the story changed. With the considerably greater amount of room allowed her by Dickens' weekly *Household Words*, she both revised and expanded it. Moving her story to *Household Words* was possibly simplified by the fact that although Dickens' magazine and *Sartain's* addressed different audiences, they generally agreed on editorial policy.

Angus Easson, commenting on Dickens' general editorial guidelines, notes the reader of *Household Words* is allowed to feel 'harrowed' by the suffering portrayed, but also to be reassured that the suffering is not in vain, 'that good was to be rewarded, although the reward had to be worked for'.[12] Furthermore, although in 1850 *Sartain's* published only fiction complete in one installment, the magazine shared with *Household*

Words an editorial desire to be—as *Sartain's* put it— 'useful and instructive, and at the same time attractive'.[13] As we have seen, 'Martha Preston' shows suffering rewarded by goodness after a lifetime of sacrifice, a message that is 'useful', 'instructive', and 'attractive'.

The new and enlarged story appeared in *Household Words* as 'Half a Life-Time Ago' in five chapters arranged in three installments from 6-20 October 1855, just eight months after the conclusion of *North and South* on 27 January. As Dickens and his sub-editor W. H. Wills prepared 'Half a Life-Time Ago' for publication, however, Dickens' and Gaskell's differences over where to divide installments during the publication of *North and South* resurfaced. This is indicated by Dickens' tart instructions to Wills on 25 September:

> 'Half a Life Time Ago will be well divided, I think, as you propose. I have marked a place at page 235 where the effect would be obviously served by making a new chapter. Is such a thing to be done with that lady? If so, do it'.[14]

The first installment, consisting of chapters 1-2, occupied 15 3/4 columns on 6 October; the second installment, chapter 3, occupied 9 columns on 13 October; and the last installment, chapters 4-5, occupied 11 columns on 20 October.

John Geoffrey Sharps suggests the origin of her plot might be 'a true story along the lines of 'Martha Preston' [she heard] while near Skelwith' and speculates that she might have altered a few details of that story and 'then narrated [it] from memory'. He speculates further that for her American audience Gaskell felt no need to 'fictionalize the facts for the sake of any living people concerned.[15] But, he says, when she moved the

story from *Sartain's* to *Household Words*, she might have made certain changes in order to protect actual people and places by making identification more difficult. For instance, she moved the setting from Loughrigg to near Oxenfell and Blea Tarn.[16]

She also changed the names of her characters: Martha Preston became Susan Dixon, John and Jane Preston became William and Margaret Dixon, Johnnie became Willie, William Hawkshaw became Michael Hurst, Mrs. Hawkshaw became Eleanor Hebthwaite, and the name Preston was given to a doctor who examines Willie. When she placed 'Half a Life-Time Ago' in *Round the Sofa*, she introduced yet another Preston by assigning the tale to a Mrs. Preston, the wife of a Westmoreland squire.

In moving her story from *Sartain's* to *Household Words*, Gaskell also localized it for a British audience by adding dialect words and constructions. In 'Martha Preston', written for an American audience, the only word Gaskell used that approaches the status of local dialect is 'ghyll', marked off in the story by quotation marks to tag it as such. Her addition of other, perhaps less familiar, dialect words and constructions in the *Household Words* text adds to the Lake District ambience for a British audience in a way *Sartain's* American audience might have found distracting.

As Sharps noted, when Gaskell moved the story from *Sartain's* to *Household Words*, she also placed greater distance between the narrator and the reader by telling the story in the third person, not the first person.[17] 'Martha Preston' begins, 'Within the last few years I have been twice at the Lakes'.[18] 'Half a Life-Time Ago' begins, 'Half a life-time ago, there lived in one of the Westmoreland dales a single woman of the name of Susan Dixon'.[19] Although the revised opening has a fairytale quality, suggesting that one is about to read an invented story that happened 'once upon a time' and not one that is

'true', other elements of the narration suggest that the essential elements of the story are 'true'. For example, the narrator tells us Susan's house 'is yet to be seen', provides instructions for how to find it, and describes its setting by contrasting its appearance now with its appearance then.[20] Interestingly, when Gaskell assigned the story to Mrs. Preston in her collection *Round the Sofa*, she again toyed with the question of whether the story is 'true'. In that context when Mrs. Preston is called upon for her contribution to the entertainment of the group gathered round Margaret Dawson's sofa, she 'rummage[s] through her memory to see if she could not recollect some fact, or event, or history', that might be of interest.[21]

Other of Gaskell's changes subtly shift the focus of 'Half a Life-Time Ago' by altering her conception of certain characters as well as their relationships with each other. One of the most notable revisions concerns the character of Martha's/Susan's mother. In both versions, the heroine's oath is primary, causing 'a conflict between familial loyalty and romantic love', as E. Holly Pike says.[22] In 'Martha Preston', unlike in 'Half a Life-Time Ago', however, Mrs. Preston is a busy wife too fully occupied with her duties on the farm to attend to her children. Thus, Martha assumes care of Johnnie from the beginning. Their mother dies, but only later does the heroine swear her oath to care for Johnnie, and when she does, she swears it to her dying father. In 'Half a Life-Time Ago', Mrs. Dixon dies, but not until after Gaskell has established her as a loving, caring parent deeply concerned for the welfare of her children, especially Willie. Even then, in a tearful death scene that would have fit well in either *Sartain's* or *Household Words*, she lives

long enough to persuade Susan to swear that she will care for Willie. Still, the principal difference is that in ‘Martha Preston’ the husband and children lose a farmhand, whereas in ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ they lose a wife and mother. But in both cases, the heroine’s fidelity to her oath costs her marriage to the man she loves and consequently narrows her life.

Another important change concerns Gaskell’s treatment of Johnnie/Willie. He is more of a problem in ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ than he is in ‘Martha Preston’. In the latter story Johnnie misses his mother very little because his sister has always been more his mother than his mother has. After several years he is sent to Grasmere School and Martha, who has taken her mother’s place on the farm, is attracted to William Hawkshaw. Eventually her father dies and Johnnie contracts ‘a sort of typhoid fever’.[23] After twenty days, he awakens intellectually diminished. It is at this point that Johnnie gets in the way of Martha’s hopes for marriage and a family. In ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’, by contrast, Willie’s case is more complicated. Willie is a problem before and not just after his illness. Gaskell portrays him as a striking contrast to Susan: she is ‘strong, independent, healthy, clever . . . a spirited companion to her father; more of a man in her (as he often said) than her delicate little brother ever would have’.[24] In ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’, it is also clear that Susan is a more capable farmer than it is possible for her weak-witted brother to be. In ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’, Susan’s brother is also in Michael’s way, but in this version of the story not just because as a male he will inherit the land when his father dies. Early on, Willie causes conflict between Susan and Michael. He is jealous of Michael, who mistreats him even before the boy falls ill, and extracts from Susan the promise ‘Lover nor husband shall come betwixt thee and me, lad—ne’er a one of them. That I promise

thee (as I promised mother before), in the sight of God and with her hearkening now, if ever she can hearken to earthly word again'.[25]

Gaskell's treatment of Will/Michael darkens his character. In both versions of the story, he is something of a charmer and not nearly so emotionally attached to Martha/Susan as she is to him. In 'Martha Preston', he is 'a fine, handsome young fellow,

light-hearted and gay in appearance; full of spirit and life, and bringing a sort of sunshine with him wherever he went, 'at church or at market'.[26] He is self-satisfied and smug about his effect on Martha: he is '*in his way*, attracted to Martha (emphasis mine)' and pleased at being able to 'stir the depths of that soul, so still and calm in appearance'. They are engaged to be married but without definite plans. Further, in both versions of the story, his principal interest is in obtaining land to farm. In 'Martha Preston', Johnnie's illness focuses Will's intentions, for Will sees that if Johnnie were to be placed in an asylum, 'he and Martha might have the land, and marry at once'.[27] But Johnnie's illness also causes Martha to suggest to Will that they marry. He could then farm the land; she could care for Johnnie and be a wife to him. However, he refuses, believing his charms are great enough to persuade her to marry him and set Johnnie aside. 'He had made many conquests among the farmers' daughters, and had a great idea of his own power'. But he is mistaken about Martha's determination as well as about her loyalty to her brother. Consequently, 'anger took the place of the love he had had; and at the best of times his way of loving had been very different from Martha's'.[27]

In 'Half a Life-Time Ago' Michael is 'strikingly handsome, admired by all the girls for miles round, and quite enough of a country coxcomb to know it and plume

himself accordingly'.[28] He dances and in 'merry moods' performs his steps in Yew Nook kitchen to Susan's 'admiration'. He finds Susan 'hard and headstrong', but believes in his power to kiss her and 'make all right'.[29] While courting Susan, he holds Eleanor Hebthwaite in reserve, even though he regards her as 'milk and water' compared to Susan. Neither Mr. Dixon nor Mr. Hurst does much to speed the marriage. Although Mr. Dixon agrees to the match, he provides little dowry; for his part, Mr. Hurst offers very few high-quality pigs as a promised wedding gift. At this point, Willie extracts from Susan the promise that no one will come between her and him and very shortly after that both of them succumb to typhus fever. When they recover, she has 'no heart' to think of marriage; Michael secretly has Willie examined by Dr. Preston, who pronounces Willie's case hopeless. Michael then presses her to institutionalize Willie.[30]

As in 'Martha Preston', Will/Michael is interested in marrying Martha/Susan because he wants land to farm; however, in 'Half a Life-Time Ago' Gaskell makes her central male character potentially more threatening by his treatment of Willie as well as by his focus on Susan's land. In the latter story, Willie is in Michael's way from the beginning. First, he's weak minded and querulous, then his illness makes him simpleminded; in both versions of the story, however, he's a major obstacle to Will's/Michael's plan because he inherits the land when his father dies.

What's more, in 'Half a Life-Time Ago' Michael broods for some time over how to gain control of the land, going so far as to discuss the matter with his father. Imagining himself married to Susan and with Willie set aside, Michael had 'secretly rejoiced over the possession of the farm and land which would then be his in fact, if not in law, by the right of his wife'.[31] Gaskell even subtly shifts his regard for Susan, causing him to value

her not for who she is but for what she controls: he grows ‘to esteem her as mistress of Yew Nook’. He even leaves Susan alone for several days, expecting her to weaken and consent. When they meet next, however, she is adamant. This causes Michael to force the issue: she must choose between him and Willie. Bringing his sister to intervene on his behalf, Michael confesses to himself that he finds Susan a bit of a ‘termagant’ and that he would prefer Eleanor Hebthwaite—if she possessed wealth equal to Susan’s.[32] But Michael’s cause is lost; Susan remains true to her promise to her mother. As in the case of Martha Preston, Susan Dixon’s life narrows over time even as she proves herself a champion farmer.

The conclusion of ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ follows this darker path as well. In effect, Gaskell ‘punishes’ Michael for his failure to acknowledge Susan’s worth, for his concentration on her land instead of on her value as a capable and emotionally powerful woman. Whereas in ‘Martha Preston’ Will succeeds without Martha, in ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ Michael fails without Susan. As noted above, in ‘Martha Preston’ Martha and her dog save Will Hawkshaw’s son, whereupon she acts the role of his aunt, even to the point of bringing him into her home and enabling him to marry. In the conclusion of that early version, Will is a successful farmer who nevertheless remains interested in Martha’s land even though it will be his son and not he himself who might one day get it. By this point there have been three deaths: Martha’s mother, her father, and her brother.

In ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’, the resolution is more complex. For one thing the body count is higher. In the rewritten story there are eight deaths: Susan’s mother, her father, her brother, a servant named Peggy, three of Michael’s children, and finally Michael himself. Furthermore, in this version Gaskell foregrounds Susan’s loneliness by

emphasizing more forcefully that Willie's death and Michael's marriage to Eleanor Hebthwaite were no slight things to her. Coupled with her 'stern sense of duty', they have determined the course of her emotional life: 'there was no one to love her. Worse doom still, there was no one left on earth for her to love'.[33] Also, in 'Half a Life-Time Ago', the aged Susan becomes philosophical and reflects on the meaning of life itself. She bends over, holding the dead Michael's head, 'as if caressing it'. As she does so 'she thought over all the possibilities and chances in the mingled yarn of their lives that might, by so slight a turn, have ended far otherwise'. She characterizes these 'chances' as the 'weary chain of unrealised possibilities'.[34]

On the night of the fateful storm and in a melancholy mood, Susan has been brooding over her life, as she had done many times, 'trying to recall the scenes of her youth; trying to bring up living pictures of the faces she had then known—Michael's most especially'.[35] Emphasizing the depth of Susan's passion for her lost lover, Gaskell has her reflect that she would know him if she met him, even if she didn't recognize his face, because 'she should feel [him] in the thrill of her whole being'.[36] Hearing what she takes to be a call for help, Susan goes into the storm alone, not with a dog, and finds Michael himself, not his son, collapsed in the snow. She drags him to her house through the deepening snow and tries in vain to resuscitate him. Unlike Will Hawkshaw in 'Martha Preston', Michael is a failure. His farm has not prospered, three of his children have died, and he has even turned to drink, 'not at stated times when there was no other work to be done, but continually, whether it was seedtime or harvest'.[37]

In 'Half a Life-Time Ago' as in 'Martha Preston', Susan/Martha visits Michael's/Will's home shortly after the storm. In 'Martha Preston', Will's son survives

the storm with Martha's help. When Mrs. Hawkshaw comes to Martha's house to claim her son, she is 'bonny and bright, younger looking than her years'.[38] 'Half a Life-Time Ago', however, paints the scene differently. On the day after finding Michael dying in the storm, Susan rides to his house, which she finds 'carelessly kept outside, slatternly tended within'. Although Nelly is still pretty, a contrast to Susan, her face shows an 'expression of plaintive sorrow'. Trying to break the news gently, Susan learns that Michael went into the storm in search of a public house to rent, 'for our farm does not answer'. For some time he had been looking for a supplement to the family's income, because, as Nelly admits, 'things have not gone well with us'.[39]

Over the course of a strained meeting, Susan and Nelly achieve a sisterly understanding: they are bound together by having spent their lives loving the same man and by having suffered deeply. Finally, Susan's reserve breaks down and she declares to Nelly, 'I would have laid down my own [life] to save his'. She then confesses her despair: 'No one would have cared if I had died'. At this moment—brought on by a lifetime of repression, her despair, and the strain of the moment—she collapses abruptly from a stroke. Nelly in turn 'nurse[s] Susan like a sister'. When Susan has recovered, she takes Nelly and her surviving children home with her to Yew Nook to 'fill up the haunted hearth with living forms that should banish the ghosts'. Emphasizing the role of chance, Gaskell ends the story with the terse statement 'And so it *fell out* that the latter days of Susan Dixon's life were better than the former [emphasis mine]'.[40]

This conclusion is more somber than that of 'Martha Preston'. Here is no closing golden end-of-the-day vision of Susan dandling 'grandchildren' named after her and her dead brother, as was Martha Preston's reward at the end of the original story. In their

place, ‘living forms’ banish ‘ghosts’ from a ‘haunted hearth’ as Susan stoically accepts the role of chance in life and determines not to lose another outlet for her love. Chance had caused her parents’ death, it had caused her and Willie’s illness, it had caused Willie’s incapacity, it had caused Michael’s death in the storm, and—finally—it had caused her stroke as she stood face to face with Nelly at the climax of their lives.

This emphasis on the role of chance in Susan’s life makes the conclusion to ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ more complicated and less innocently happy than the conclusion to ‘Martha Preston’. The use of a sudden stroke—a sort of stroke ex machina—to bring Susan and Nelly together at the end is, perhaps, too quick and unanticipated to be easily accepted by modern readers because it violates our sense of probability. Yet it reminds us that Susan’s life has been largely determined by chance, not by probability, and draws other ‘chances’ together to emphasize the theme. Finding a ‘sister’ in Nelly, Susan is determined to grasp this chance, perhaps the last one her life will offer, in order to gain an outlet for her stifled passion. She acts positively in order to make what would otherwise be another link in the ‘weary chain of unrealised possibilities’ connect her instead to Nelly and to Nelly’s children. Through them, perhaps, she feels connected to Michael Hurst as she had imagined him to be but as he had never really been when she, Michael, and Nelly were young.[41] This decision enriches Susan’s old age by giving her near the end of her life the one thing she has so desperately needed throughout the story: someone to love. It also, and not incidentally, offers her a kind of compensation for her promise to her mother and her sacrifices on behalf of her brother.

Gaskell leads us into both versions of the story by observing, in a Wordsworthian kind of way reminiscent of half-completed sheepfolds and deserted cottages, that these

features on the landscape prompt memories of human suffering and nobility among the common people of the Lake Country. However, she leads us out of ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’, more soberly than she leads us out of ‘Martha Preston’. Although the outline of the two stories remained nearly the same, in revision—especially of the conclusion—her conception became more complex.

Between the publication of ‘Martha Preston’ and the publication of ‘Half a Life-Time Ago’ stood her novel *North and South.* By 1855, the tale written ‘by the author of *Mary Barton*’ had become altogether deeper and richer. Her increased maturity as a writer and her changed sense of her story, combined with the greater amount of room Dickens allowed her in *Household Words*, permitted her to develop her later vision both more fully and more profoundly. The product of that revision is one of Gaskell’s finest stories.

1. Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993), pp. 172-3.

2. *Ibid*., p. 234.

3. See inside front cover, *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (December 1848). *Sartain's* began in New York 1847, was purchased by the engraver John Sartain and moved to Philadelphia in 1848. It ceased publication in 1852, leaving Sartain with a considerable debt. Basic information about this periodical is most readily available in Frank Luther Mott's *A History of American Magazines 1741-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1939). The best modern study is Heidi Lynne Nichols master's thesis, "A Pilot Study of *Sartain's Union Magazine*, 1849-1852," Villanova University, June 1997. However, much information about the magazine can be derived from the lengthy editorial material published at the beginning of each issue. Sartain himself told his story in *The Reminiscences of a Very Old Man* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1899; rpt., 1969).

4. *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (February 1850), p. 133.

5. *Ibid*., p. 134.

6. *Ibid*., p. 135.

7. *Ibid*., p. 136.

8. *Ibid*., pp. 136-37.

9. *Ibid*., p. 138.

10. *Ibid*.

11. 'The Editor's Table', *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (June 1850), p. 433.

12. ‘Dickens, *Household Words*, and a Double Standard’, *The Dickensian* 60 (1964), pp. 110-11.

13. ‘The Editor’s Table’, *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (June 1850), p. 433.

14. *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, and Angus Easson, vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 710.

15. *Mrs. Gaskell’s Observations and Inventions* (Fontwell: Linden Press, 1970), p. 244.

16. *Ibid*., p. 245.

17. *Ibid*.

18. *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (February 1850), p. 133.

19. *Household Words*, No. 289 (6 Oct. 1855), p. 229.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Round the Sofa*, vol. 2 (London: Sampson Low & Son, 1859), p. 96.

22. *Family and Society in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 74.

23. *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (February 1850), p. 135.

24. *Household Words*, No. 289 (6 Oct. 1855), p. 230.

25. *Ibid*., p. 235.

26. *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (February 1850), p. 134.

27. *Ibid*., p. 135.

28. *Household Words*, No. 289 (6 Oct. 1855), p. 231.

29. *Ibid*., p. 232.

30. *Ibid*., No. 290 (13 Oct. 1855), p. 253.

31. *Ibid*., p. 254.

32. *Ibid*., p. 256.

33. *Ibid*., No. 291 (20 Oct. 1855), pp. 277-78.

34. *Ibid*., p. 280.

35. *Ibid*., p. 279.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid*.

38. *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (February 1850), p. 138.

39. *Household Words*, No. 291 (20 Oct. 1855), p. 279.

40. *Ibid*., pp. 281-82.

41. *Ibid*., p. 280.