

NEXT MEETING OF THE GASKELL SOCIETY WILL BE IN
MANCHESTER AT 84 PLYMOUTH GROVE

Date: APRIL 26TH

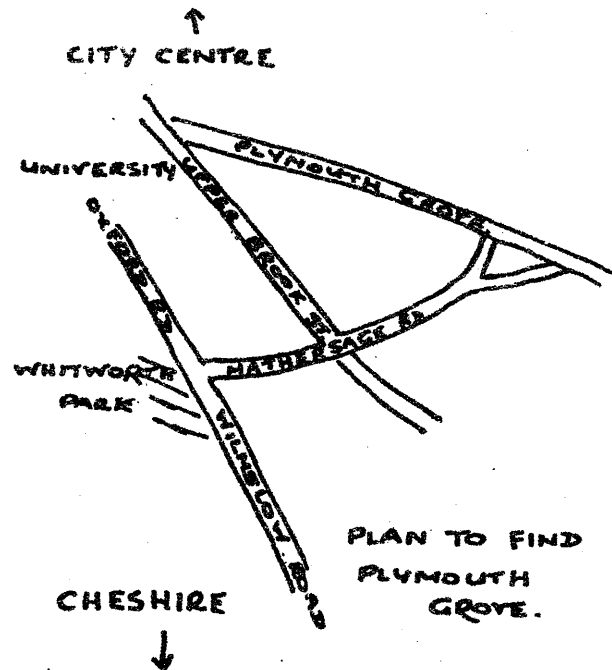
Time: 2.00 p.m.

Speaker: J. GEOFFREY SHARPS

Subject: HOW I BECAME A GASKELLIAN

Teas: £1.00

RSVP: MRS J. LEACH - Tel: 0565 4668



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The Gaskell Society



BROOK ST. CHAPEL
and
Mrs. Gaskell's Grave.

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 1986 NO.1

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EDITOR'S LETTER

I have only recently realised how many literary societies there are and what excellent literature many of them produce, so I am rather nervous about venturing into print as editor of this, the first Gaskell Society Newsletter. The Brontë Society was founded in 1893 so I am sure that their first publications must now be collectors' items. Our two Societies share a common interest through the friendship of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë; in the current Brontë Society Transactions Mrs Gaskell's name appears on a third of the pages.

As members of The Gaskell Society we have some missionary work to do, to win better recognition for Elizabeth Gaskell's varied achievements. It is encouraging to note that her novels are now available in several paper-back series: C.U.P., Penguin and Dent.

I was appalled by the inaccuracy of Longman's Outline of English Literature entry for Elizabeth Gaskell which I found on the shelves of my local library; 'Ruth is the sad story of a girl whose parents are dead. North and South is a study of the different lives led by English people, especially the poor in the north and the happier ones in the south'. There is no mention of Cousin Phillis, Sylvia's Lover's or Wives and Daughters; the fact that it was written for overseas students does not excuse such omissions and inaccuracies and I wrote to tell them so.

Our steering committee has met twice since October and now has a draft constitution prepared to present to members at the April meeting. We propose to hold the spring meeting each year in Manchester on the last Saturday in April and the A.G.M. in Knutsford on the last Saturday in September. As I have been asked several times when I am going to do the Cranford Walk again (sounds as if it should be set to music!) I shall repeat it on the last Sunday in September, Mrs Gaskell's birthday being September 29th. If it takes place in the morning, perhaps some of our members from distant places may wish to stay overnight and join us; we Knutsfordians might even treat them to a sanding.

Many societies are trustees of the home of their authors which gives them a sense of purpose and identity, but we

are fortunate in having available to us, for meetings, places with strong Gaskell connections without having the responsibility for upkeep and maintenance. Brook Street Chapel can only be described as Elizabeth Gaskell's spiritual home; one of her ancestors was a witness to the earliest extant trust deed in 1694 and many others are buried close to her in the chapel graveyard. All Gaskellians will cherish Brook Street Chapel.

In Manchester there is Cross Street Chapel where William Gaskell ministered for many years and all the family joined in Sunday School teaching and social work; at the Portico Library William was chairman for many years, and 84 Plymouth Grove, where the Gaskell family welcomed so many visitors. This latter Mecca is where we shall hold our next meeting.

Our membership is increasing steadily and now is nearly sixty. We are pleased to have Dr Edgar Wright (Mrs Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment, O.U.P. 1965) join us from Ontario, Canada; and Dr Enid Duthie (The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell, Macmillan 1980) who wrote to me, 'It was a joy to me to live in the Gaskell world when writing my book.'

We are especially pleased to announce that Professor Arthur Pollard has accepted our invitation to be our President. Not only was he joint editor, with J. A. V. Chapple, of the Collected Letters but also author of 'Mrs Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer' (M.U.P. 1965). The idea for a collection of letters was germinated in Knutsford when Professor Pollard attended an event to mark the 150th anniversary. Dr J. K. Walley was Chairman of the Committee for that anniversary and is now Chairman of our Society. Although I am a genuine Knutsfordian, I was living in Kent at that time, or perhaps The Gaskell Society might have originated then; I am sure Mrs Gaskell will still have faithful readers at her 200th anniversary, but I might not have had the necessary drive for a founding secretary if I had left it till then!

INAUGURATION OF THE GASKELL SOCIETY

A Brontë Society Member's Account

On Saturday, 12th October 1985, the small Cheshire town of Knutsford openly recognised a notable historic link by providing the setting for the formation of a new literary society, to be known as The Gaskell Society. It was an event - surprising only in that it had not happened long ago - that is of all the more interest in view of the common ground which the new Society will inevitably share with the Brontë Society, now not so many years short of its 100th anniversary. Apart from the friendship which formed naturally between the two novelists and advocates of women's rights, it was her "Life" of Charlotte Brontë that won Elizabeth Gaskell a place among the great biographers.

In the late afternoon of a bright autumn day, at the southern end of the town, the Brook Street Chapel schoolroom was opened to the public, invited there, in the terms of the prospectus, "to discuss the formation of the Gaskell Society". In the event, the only discussion needed centred on a few practical details, for as had become evident to anyone with even a cursory acquaintance with recent developments at Knutsford, the concept of a Gaskell Society had been steadily growing during the course of 1985, the 175th anniversary year of Mrs Gaskell's birth; the series of events arranged to celebrate this anniversary had, by the end of September, so much taken on the form they would have taken had a Gaskell Society existed, that it needed only the presence of some 45 interested persons in the schoolroom on the 12th October to acknowledge that the Gaskell Society was not just virtually but verily in being.

The Society owes its inauguration to the work of Mrs Joan Leach, herself a Knutsfordian, who at the outset became interested in local history. But as her research proceeded, her findings became so inextricably interwoven with Knutsford's Gaskell associations that inevitably Mrs Gaskell came to occupy a great part of her interest. It was this that led her to celebrate the 29th September, Mrs Gaskell's birthday, by organising and conducting a

"Cranford Walk" (for which she also published an admirably informative and attractive leaflet), and to follow this up the next day with a Literary Luncheon held in the Royal George Hotel.

Mrs Gaskell was brought up in Knutsford from her second year by her aunt, her deceased mother's sister, and she paid her tribute to it in her book "Cranford", by which she is perhaps most generally known. The Brook Street Unitarian Chapel, built in 1689 and lovingly preserved, became her spiritual home. She herself was buried there, together with her husband and two of her daughters; nearby are the graves of her ancestors. It was thus fitting that in the earlier part of the afternoon of 12th October the Chapel should be the scene of a presentation by Barbara Brill, ably assisted by Mary Humphreys and Joe Tindsley, of "An Afternoon with the Gaskells", an account of Mrs Gaskell's life, illustrated by readings from her books and from her own and her husband's letters.

After a break for tea, the inaugural meeting, introduced by Mrs Leach, was held in the schoolroom nearby. Among the founder-members present were Dr Walley, alderman, and previous to his retirement, for nearly 30 years a County Councillor; Mr J. G. Sharps of Scarborough, author of Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention: A Study of her Non-Biographical Works, published in 1970; Barbara Brill, whose biography of William Gaskell was published in 1984; Tessa Brodetsky, author of a book on Mrs Gaskell due to be published in May 1986; and Mrs Thwaite, Custodian of the Gaskell Library, Brook Street Chapel. Other founder-members who had come to contribute their experience of forming and running similar Societies were: Mr Kenneth Oultram, Secretary of the Lewis Carroll and the Randolph Caldecott Societies; and three members of the Brontë Society.

It was proposed and agreed that at least until the next general meeting, provisionally fixed for the week after Easter 1986, and to be held probably in Manchester, the Society's affairs should be administered by a steering committee of eight persons, with Mrs Leach as Secretary and Treasurer. The yearly subscription was provisionally fixed at £4, with a life membership at around ten times

this amount. Mrs Leach had already obtained subventions from local bodies for the anniversary celebrations, and thought that more could be done in this direction. It was envisaged that two general meetings would be held each year: a September meeting, probably combined with a Literary Luncheon, at Knutsford, and a spring meeting, most probably in Manchester. Other mooted activities included the publication of an annual magazine or journal, and visits to places connected with Mrs Gaskell, such as Gawthorpe Hall, Silverdale, and the Lake District. The aim of the new Society, as stated on the day's programme, is to link all those with an interest in Mrs Gaskell, and to promote connected activities and research, as well as a wider appreciation of her achievements.

Between now and the April 1986 meeting, the steering committee will have much to consider and decide. It can hardly be expected that the course of the Society's development will become clear before the April meeting has been held. By that time, given effective publicity, it may well have gained new members, among them possibly some who could take a hand in the administration of its affairs or lend it the prestige of their scholarship. It was said at the meeting that interest in Mrs Gaskell was by no means confined to this country. The general mood of the meeting was enthusiastic and confident. Judging by the progress already made, the Gaskell Society would appear to have a promising future.

JOHN NUSSEY

(Editor - John Nussey is a great great nephew of Ellen Nussey, close friend of Charlotte Brontë)

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IN GASKELL FOOTSTEPS

If you live near, or visit, any place associated with Mrs Gaskell, I would be pleased to have any information.

I intend to keep a reference file.

Also, items on such places and any other Gaskell material will be welcomed for inclusion in future newsletters or journals.

JOAN LEACH

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ANNIE A. AND FLEEMING

So many names are scattered through the COLLECTED LETTERS OF MRS GASKELL, that the reader is grateful to the editors (J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard)* for the extensive index they have compiled which gives the clues to the backgrounds, with dates, addresses, married names, relationships and professions, of individuals named in the correspondence. This was my starting point in tracing the story of Annie Austin and Fleeming Jenkin.

Annie, referred to by Mrs Gaskell as Annie A., to distinguish her from the other Annies - Green and Holland - has an early mention when she was visiting Plymouth Grove in 1851 (90); Marianne is given permission to visit Mrs Austin and Annie when they are back in London, obviously a family of whom Elizabeth approved. This is confirmed when Annie is described as 'Meta's great friend' (145) and was sharing the grey room with her when the house was full (143). It was a lasting friendship, as Annie joined the family in 1858 when they were on holiday at Silverdale (394) where only close friends were invited.

The first indication there is of Annie's interest in music is when she was coming to stay with the Gaskells just after Christmas in 1851 and Elizabeth hired a grand piano and expected to have 'noise enough' (112). The following Christmas when Annie joined them again the Gaskells bought a new piano. 'I shall want it as soon as we can have it if A. A. comes' (142). While Annie was with them on that occasion she joined Mr Gaskell and Meta at a Halle concert (144).

Annie played a prominent part in a game of charades she 'got up' with Meta and Tottie Fox at Plymouth Grove in March 1851 (92).

That same year a young engineering apprentice, Fleeming Jenkin, who was working in Manchester, was invited to the Gaskells. It appears he did not join the intimate family circle but was on friendly terms with the girls; he was a year older than Marianne. No mention is made of him in the letters until 1855 (259) when he called to say

goodbye before taking up a new position in London 'at Penn's ... as known near London as Fairbairn's here.' He had been invited to tea and afterwards, Elizabeth writes, 'we sauntered in the garden, Fleeming saying how he had counted on his Saturday afternoon calls for nearly 4 years and I saying how hot I used to feel when the tea bell rang and owing to it's being Papa's busy day I could not ask him to stay. He praised you up (Marianne) and Meta ... he staid to supper and then bid us goodbye - really, fairly, finally gone.'

His mother, Henrietta Jenkin, lived in London and wrote two novels, VIOLET BANK AND ITS INMATES and COUSIN STELLA. Mrs Gaskell wrote to George Smith (412) on behalf of Mrs Jenkin when she was looking for a publisher for COUSIN STELLA in 1859.

The names of Annie A. and Fleeming disappear from the letters until 1859 when they come together in a letter Mrs Gaskell wrote to Charles Norton (418). 'Annie Austin is married to another friend of ours, a young engineer employed about ocean cables, Mr Fleeming Jenkin. It was a pretty country walking wedding about a fortnight ago ... they went to Oxford for two days and then to his lodgings at Birkenhead.' Later in the same month the newly married couple dined at Plymouth Grove (422).

The Jenkins were living in London in 1862 and Fleeming, at Annie's suggestion, was looking for suitable lodgings for Mrs Gaskell and the girls to stay during June (505). Fleeming recommended a number of addresses, including one where he and Annie had once stayed and found 'a very nice landlady'. This is where they chose to stay at 32 Belgrave Road, Pimlico.

Fleeming was made Professor of Engineering at London University during these years in London and after Mrs Gaskell's death the Jenkins moved to Edinburgh. Fleeming was offered and accepted in 1868 the new chair of Engineering at Edinburgh University. During their first years in the Scottish capital Annie met a young schoolboy of 15 who was shortly to become one of her husband's students. She was visiting his parents and was hardly

aware of the boy sitting in the corner of the room. When he led her to the door, to see her out, his conversation and appearance made a great impression. When she was back home she said to Fleeming 'I have met a poet'. The youth was Robert Louis Stevenson, who against his own inclination was to take up an engineering course, as he was expected to continue in the family profession of lighthouse building and harbour works. (LIFE OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON by Graham Balfour)

The young Stevenson started his studies under Fleeming but eventually pleaded with his father to switch to legal studies. He did not lose touch with the Jenkins for by that time he had become an intimate friend and regular visitor to their home and was made as welcome there as the youthful Fleeming had been at Plymouth Grove.

Annie aroused in Stevenson for the first time a love of music and also persuaded him to take part in the amateur theatricals which she regularly organised at the house, always well rehearsed and of a high standard. James Pope Hennessey in ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON describes Mrs Jenkin as 'an erudite and charming Englishwoman with a passion for private theatricals' and Margaret Mackay in her biography of Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson, THE VIOLENT FRIEND, writes of Annie as 'an attractive and cultured woman of strong personality, with an expressive face and grand manner, nicknamed by her family and friends 'Madam'. It seems as though echoes of the hubbub of life at Plymouth Grove were heard in the Jenkins' home in Edinburgh which buzzed with music and talk from men and women in all walks of life.

When Stevenson left Scotland for London and then went wandering far afield in search of better health in a more suitable climate, he never lost touch with the Jenkins. He counted Fleeming among his closest and wisest friends and relied on him for advice and criticism (Graham Balfour's LIFE). During 1878 Fleeming was appointed a juror at the International Exhibition in Paris and asked R.L.S. to join him there as his secretary. During that stay they went together to many plays and though Stevenson loved the theatre he was, in Fleeming's

opinion, no more successful as a dramatist than he had been as an amateur actor. When W. E. Henley was pressing him to collaborate with him in writing plays Jenkin wrote: 'I am so thoroughly convinced that while you could write appreciative and admirable things this play business is an ignis fatuus - causing waste of time and brain ... I am not sure that Henley could not write a play but if so you are hindering not helping him.' (ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON by James Pope Hennessey)

Jenkin was responsible for introducing R.L.S. to the Savile Club where he first began to move in literary circles. In those early days of struggling to earn his living as a writer he had success with essays, among them TALK AND TALKERS published in 1882 by the Cornhill magazine, which published Mrs Gaskell's WIVES AND DAUGHTERS, COUSIN PHILLIS, CURIOUS IF TRUE and SIX WEEKS AT HEPPENHEIM. In this essay R.L.S. described some of the brilliant conversationalists he had known, giving them fictitious names. Jenkin was "Cockshot", 'who was vastly entertaining and has been meat and drink to me for many a long evening ... He is bottled effervescency and the sworn foe of sleep. "Three-in-the-morning Cockshot" says a victim.'

Three years later Fleeming was dead, suddenly after a minor operation at the age of 53. R.L.S. wrote immediately to Annie. 'I never knew a better man nor one to me more lovable. I cannot see my poor Jenkin without you, nor you indeed without him, but you may try to rejoice that he was spared that extremity. (I was so much his confidant) he never spoke of you but his face changed, it was - you were - his religion.' (LETTERS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON edited by Sidney Colvin - June 1885)

He started on MEMOIR OF FLEEMING JENKIN within a few months of his friend's death. At this time Stevenson and his wife Fanny were living at Bournemouth and Annie visited them and was able to supply details for the memoir. He worked hard at the book and wrote to Edmund Gosse (LETTERS - Jan 1886) 'I am very full of Jenkin's life; it is painful yet pleasant to dig into the past of a dear friend and find him at every spadeful shine brighter.'

From the MEMOIR other facts emerge that are of special interest in connection with the friendship of Mrs Gaskell and Annie A. and Fleeming. Annie Austin was the only child of Mr and Mrs Alfred Austin. He was a barrister and for a time was Poor Law inspector in Manchester, particularly concerned with the potato famine and Irish immigration in the 1840s, work that doubtless brought him in touch with the Gaskells. He then went to London and distinguished himself during the epidemic of cholera and finally became Permanent Secretary of Her Majesty's Office of Works and Public Buildings. Stevenson tells us that Fleeming was given a letter of introduction to Mr Austin by Mrs Gaskell when he went to take up his post at Penn's. It seems as though his and Annie's paths never crossed at Plymouth Grove. Fleeming became a regular visitor at the Austins and two years later asked leave to 'pay Annie his addresses'. They were courting for two years.

The following facts about Fleeming's engineering career are of interest. He was apprenticed to Fairbairns when he first came to Manchester so in view of the Gaskell and Fairbairn friendship it is to be expected that Mrs Gaskell would offer hospitality to one of their young employees, new to the town. When Jenkin went to work for Penn's he was involved with marine telegraphy and moved between London and Birkenhead. It was his work with electrical experiments that led to the offer of a chair at London University. He and Annie made a happy home at Claygate in Surrey where their three sons were born. They made an equally happy home in Edinburgh and his parents and Annie's came to Scotland to live close at hand.

Stevenson was working on the book during a period of ill health when he was often confined to bed and forbidden to write. He passed some of his spare time in studying the technicalities of music and exchanged letters with Mrs Jenkin about studies for the piano and asks her advice about where he can find the easiest works by Bach (LETTERS March 1886). He completed the MEMOIR in 1887 and it was published the following year, first in America. By this time Stevenson and his wife had left

Bournemouth and were themselves in America on the first stage of their journey westward that was to lead them to their final home in Samoa.

The last existing letter that he wrote to Annie was from their island home, Vailima, in December 1892. He pleads with her to come out to stay with them - 'Spare us a month or two for old sake's sake, and make my wife and me happy and proud. ... Do, please, make a virtuous effort and take a glimpse of a new world I am sure you do not dream of, and some old friends who do often dream of your arrival.' (LETTERS)

Annie never made the journey and two years later Stevenson was dead, the second of the literary geniuses who had been her friends, and like Mrs Gaskell, prematurely (R.L.S. was 44) and at the height of his literary powers and with an unfinished masterpiece on his hands - WEIR OF HERMISTON.
Barbara Brill

*Numbers refer to Collected Letters

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GASKELL STUDIES

Members will not be able to attend Keele University Adult Education Weekend on: ELIZABETH GASKELL AND KNUTSFORD - because it clashes with our next meeting! The course is from Friday evening, April 25th to Sunday 27th, for residential and day students. If I arrive at our meeting on April 26th rather breathless, it will be because I am meeting the Keele group at Brook Street Chapel, for a talk, before coming on to Manchester.

Barbara Brill and myself will be conducting a similar course for Manchester University Extra-Mural Department. This is a 2-day Summer Campus course: on July 16th there will be three seminars; followed on July 17th by a coach tour around Manchester and Knutsford area. The course is: MRS GASKELL'S MANCHESTER AND KNUTSFORD.

Joan Leach

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SOME NOTES ABOUT BOOKS

by Mary Thwaite

As custodian of the "Gaskell Collection", donated in 1960 by the late Professor Whitfield to Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford. I have been impressed with the steady increase of interest in the life and work of Mrs Gaskell. Additions to the collection since then have chiefly been donations and these have recently included several works in Italian, presented by Professor Francesco Marroni of Pescara, among them "Cranford" for Italian readers, and his own article on Mrs Gaskell's two social novels, sub-titled "Reflections on Mary Barton" and "North and South". Professor Marroni is expecting to publish a full-length study of Mrs Gaskell's writings this year.

Another donor in Italy is Professor Michele Ingenito of Salerno University who has presented his 150-page study of "Mary Barton", published in 1983, "Mary Barton: il romanzo della denuncia". This is published for the University by Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 80121, Naples, via Chiatamone 7.

"The Gaskell Collection" at the Manchester City Reference Library

Christine Lingard, the librarian responsible for the care of the wide-ranging resources in this collection, has sent me some details of a work recently added which may not be well-known to members:

Frycksett, Monica Correa

"Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton and Ruth: a challenge to Christian England". 1982

This is a Doctoral dissertation (in English) accepted by the University of Uppsala. It is distributed by Almqvist & Wiksell International, S-101 20 Stockholm (Sweden). Its book number is ISBN 91-554-1318-8.

She also mentions a new edition of "Ruth", edited by Alan Sherston (O.U.P. "World's Classics" series. 1985). There are many notes, including the suggestion that Eccleston was founded on Macclesfield, rather than Knutsford or Newcastle.

New Publications

Forthcoming in May is a volume in a new "Women's Series" by Berg Publishers Limited (Leamington Spa), "Elizabeth Gaskell" by Tessa Brodetsky. The cost is £8.95 (hardback) or £3.95 (paperback).

Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd. has just issued two Gaskell titles in a new series of "Pocket Classics":

"My Lady Ludlow" £2.95

"The Manchester Marriage" £3.95

This second item includes "An accursed race", "The Doom of the Griffiths", "The Poor Clare", "The Half-brothers", and "Mr Harrison's Confessions".

Editor's note

"My Lady Ludlow" is of particular interest to me as I am sure that her ladyship owes much to Lady Jane Stanley, daughter of the 11th Earl of Derby, who lived in Knutsford. A solicitor in the town keeps a black metal deed box labelled 'Lady Jane Stanley's Charity', which still exists and dates back to her will of 1802, the longest I have ever seen. Perhaps there will be space in a future journal to write about her. She has sometimes been identified with Mrs Jamieson in 'Cranford' but this is less likely.

"Mr Harrison's Confessions" is a delightful prelude to 'Cranford', clearly based on Mrs Gaskell's knowledge through her uncle, Peter Holland's work as a doctor in Knutsford. Although Mr Harrison tells the story it is the ladies who dominate the action and intrigue.

Mentioned in our Book News notes, Professor Francesco Marroni, Christine Lingard and Tessa Brodetsky all belong to our Society and are working to spread wider knowledge and appreciation of Elizabeth Gaskell's works.

MRS GASKELL - A CINDERELLA AT CHATSWORTH

Mrs Gaskell was warned, soon after her sudden rise to fame as the authoress of 'Mary Barton', by an unknown correspondent, 'against being lionised'. She replied, 'I hardly understand what is meant by the term; nor do I think anything could alter me from my own self; but I will be on my guard'. She commented later after a visit to London that she had 'done her duty as a meek, submissive lion, fresh imported from the desert'. (40,48)

Although she shunned publicity it was only natural that she should enjoy some of the rewards of fame. One such occasion was a visit to Chatsworth with her daughter, Meta, in September 1857.

It was in a birthday letter to her eldest daughter, Marianne, that the events were related (Letters: ed. Chapple & Pollard - 372) Chatsworth, Sunday mornng.

... You will be surprized at the date of this; and so indeed am I. I feel more like Cinderella, than anyone else you can imagine. I am writing before breakfast; waiting for Meta, who I heartily wish was ready; for I do not know what room we are to breakfast in or how to find it out in this wilderness of a palace of a house. All yesterday we were driving and going about, so that it was impossible to write a line to any of you but I thought of you often my darling, and of twenty three years ago, when you lay by my side such a pretty wee baby, and I was always uncovering you to look at you, and always getting scolded for giving you a cold by the nurse.'

Mrs Gaskell went on to describe how they had travelled from Manchester on top of the coach, there being no 'inside places', in the pouring rain, 'to the great detriment of our clothes'. After lodging overnight in nearby Rowsley Village, she wrote, 'Directly after breakfast we took a little pony carriage, and we came on here to see the house with our green card; as I expected, I soon had a message from the Duke, who was

not yet up ... so a nice looking housekeeper took us over the house, and the Duke's gentleman came to tell us that 'luncheon would be at two and that rooms were prepared for us'. You may imagine how Meta and I looked at each other remembering our wardrobe'.

Reading this I was puzzled by the 'green card' and why Mrs Gaskell 'expected' the Duke would wish to see her. I photocopied the letter and sent it off to Chatsworth asking for information. I received a fascinating reply from the Duchess of Devonshire who told me that she had known of the visit and the letter but 'was delighted to read it again, so charmingly written and full of interest for anyone who likes this place. I asked Michael Pearman, our librarian, if he could throw any light on the green card. Lo and behold, I found on my table 3 cards, green, blue and buff, beautifully embossed with a wreath of flowers, the word 'Chatsworth' in the middle and 'This card to be presented to the Housekeeper' underneath.

We think the colours meant grades of status, perhaps how long a tour or something like that. I had never seen them so you have been responsible for a lovely surprise!'

Mrs Gaskell went on with her letter, telling Marianne that there were more visitors in the house than they had been led to expect but 'we thought it was a pity to miss seeing and doing many agreeable things for the sake of no gowns - so we bravely consented to stay after sending an apologetic message to the Duke ... We are established in two great rooms, the curtains to my bed being of thick, white satin stamped with silken rosebuds. Meta proposed that we should dress ourselves up in them.'

The Duchess of Devonshire writes that 'the same curtains are still in the best visitors' bedroom on the four-poster bed. Some was re-done by my grand-mother-in-law, hand painted on satin.'

So if you pay a visit to Chatsworth, do look for them and also try to imagine Mrs Gaskell and Meta 'being driven up and down (accompanied by Sir Joseph Paxton, 'almost

like the host') in a little low poney (sic) carriage and four lovely circus-like ponies, postillions etc. and felt like Cinderella, seeing views and improvements and all the fountains playing and all the waterworks going, and ended by driving through the conservatory.'

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FORTHCOMING MEETING - APRIL 26TH

The next meeting will be held at 84 Plymouth Grove on April 26th, beginning at 2.0 pm. How delightful it will be to gather in Mrs Gaskell's drawing room and drink tea in her dining room. The house belongs to Manchester University and is used by The International Society which exists to encourage greater understanding amongst peoples of different cultural backgrounds and is a welfare and information centre for overseas students.

The staff of The International Society have kindly agreed to provide us with home-baked teas at £1 each. Please let me know if you will partake; tea and biscuits will also be provided.

We are privileged to have as our speaker at this meeting, J. Geoffrey Sharps who has so enthusiastically supported our endeavours to found The Gaskell Society, nothing daunted by the distance between Scarborough and Knutsford. He will tell us, 'How I Became a Gaskellian'. His book, 'Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention' (Linden Press 1970) involved him in extensive research, collection of material and contact with the elite circle of other Gaskell scholars, all of which he shares with fellow Gaskellians in his indispensable book. He was involved with Chapple and Pollard on the Collected Letters and assisted Chapple with his immensely readable, 'Mrs Gaskell: A Portrait in Letters' (M.U.P. 1980).

This will be an epoch making meeting of the Society. Do let me know if you can come; our numbers are limited to 80 and I would not want any disappointed members - or empty seats!

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