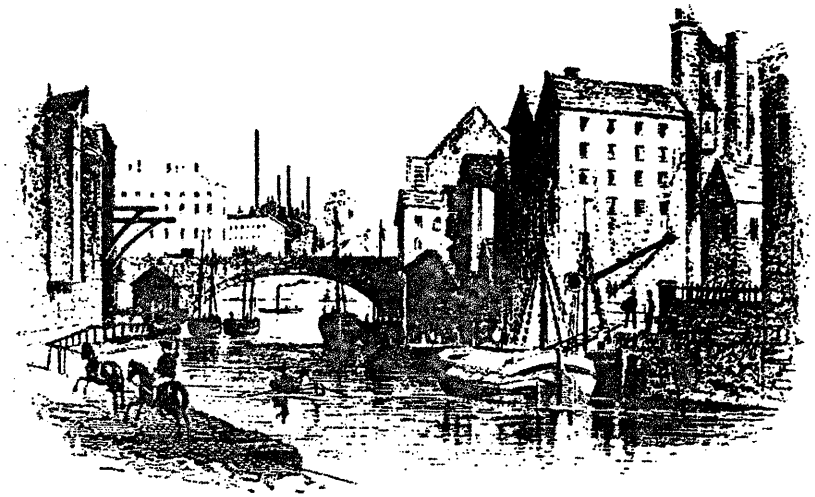
The Gaskell Society



The River Irwell & Albert Bridge Manchester

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1990 NO. 10

EDITOR'S LETTER

As soon as this newsletter has been mailed, final preparations will be made for our joint conference with The Brontë Society at Ambleside, 7-9th September. I am sure this new venture is going to be a memorable weekend for both our Societies and those of you unable to join us will hear about it in our publications. I know many of you enjoy these and are content to share our activities by reading about them; in this way our more distant members in Japan, North America, Australia and Europe can be with us in spirit.

We do try to give members the opportunity to get together but it is not easy to know just what members expect or enjoy, therefore we are always keen to receive suggestions As we are centred on Knutsford, we have a number of local members who could meet more often for social and literary events but recent response has been disappointing both for our unusual and fascinating 'cholera walk', Royal Exchange performance of School for Scandal and canal boat trip. Perhaps we have chosen the wrong times? Possibly more local members in our ranks would give wider scope, so please note the invitation to meet at The Angel on Saturday morning, August 25th, and bring a friend. Committee member, Mrs Alison Foster has agreed to take on the role of social secretary.

We are considering a monthly (or fortnightly?) literary circle, probably to read and discuss some of Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories; please let me know if you are interested and whether a weekday or Saturday afternoon would suit you best.

For our London and South East members, we are planning another London meeting, on Saturday 27th October at Chelsea, first meeting at Carlyle's house on Cheyne Row. Professor K J Fielding has agreed to speak on "The Sceptical Carlyles Meet the Unitarian Elizabeth Gaskell".

Looking even further afield and ahead we think Whitby area would make a fine literary venue for the study of Sylvia's Lovers. Cober Hill Conference Centre on the Whitby side of Scarborough offers excellent facilities,

in 6 acres of grounds overlooking sea and cliffs. The cost of a weekend at the end of May, for example, would be around £35 full board; or a three night mid-week break at about £55. The Royal Hotel Whitby could accommodate a group but it would be more expensive, but there is also a Methodist holiday home which is reasonable and central, so the party could be split. Let me know your thoughts on this; it seems the end of May/early June would be best for several reasons.

Our AGM weekend promises to be enjoyable. Saturday 29th September at The Royal George Hotel in Knutsford, which suited us very well last year. Brenda Colloms, writer and lecturer will speak about "William Johnson Fox and his circle". Those of you fortunate enough to own a copy of The Collected Letters of Mrs Gaskell edited by Chapple and Pollard (let me know if you ever spot a spare copy) will know that there are many letters to Tottie Fox, daughter of W J Fox, M.P. Brenda Colloms has a book due out on the subject of her talk and some of you will know her excellent study, Charles Kingsley: The Lion of Eversley.

On Friday 28th September, we hope you and your friends will join us at Tatton Hall for the premier of "Charlotte and Elizabeth", an imaginative new play on the relationship of the two writers. After the play there will be opportunity for informal discussion with the company.

It should be mentioned that there is always academic Gaskell work going on and we are pleased to be of use in any way. When I have finished this letter, I am going into Manchester to meet an American member and also hope to find time to look at registry records for Gaskell entries.

It is much appreciated if UK members will enclose a s.a.e. with any correspondence needing replies, and also if members NOT attending the AGM will pay their subs due on 1st September for 1991 year without waiting for reminders! (£5 for UK and EEC, £10 for overseas members, or $18 to our US representative, Mrs L Magruder

Box 1547, La Canada, Ca 91012.

We wish our President well on his visit to the Gaskell Society of Japan in October. Professor Arthur Pollard will give several other talks there, and we are pleased to acknowledge assistance from the British Council.

JOAN LEACH

* * * * *

(Above) Entrance Front, Capesthorne, 1843. Edward Blore, architect.
(Below) West Elevation 1843, showing the Paxton Conservatory.
John Wood - Edward Blore, architects.

(see following article)

AN UNPUBLISHED GASKELL LETTER

Mrs Susan Kearney has kindly given permission to print a letter to her great-grandmother, Agnes Sandars (neé Paterson). It describes a visit to Capesthorne Hall, the home of the widowed Mrs Caroline Davenport, who was then about to marry Lord Hatherton. This is worth reading alongside the first chapter of North and South (1854-55). At the end of the new letter Elizabeth Gaskell gives a brief account of a play by Bulwer-Lytton and a farce called Mr Nightingale's Diary, by Charles Dickens and Mark Lemon.

The letter has not yet been full researched, but our knowledgeable Secretary has identified the Macclesfield clergyman, Mr Weigall of Hurdsfield parish. Mr Nathan Hubbersty appears in volume 1 of the great edition of Darwin's Correspondence now in progress - as 'a Mr Hubble-Bubble' at first! The word 'Braidized' is exceptionally interesting. Dr James Braid, a Manchester physician writing scientifically about a popular phenomenon, first coined the term 'neuro-hypnotism' in 1842. He shortened it to 'hypnotism' in the following year, though 'Braidized' was still being used forty years afterwards.

I would welcome any information members of the Society could give me about minor figures or events in Elizabeth Gaskell's letters. It would be truly wonderful if the location of Caroline Davenport's diary and correspondence could be discovered, too. All that I have found so far are the two short extracts from her letters just printed in Brontë Society Transactions 1990, from a notebook of Jane Adeane of Llanfawr now in the Brotherton Library at Leeds.

Plymouth Grove
Wednesday [?27 January 1852]

My dearest Agnes,

I think you will perhaps like to hear something of my doings lately; of my visit to Capesthorne in the first place, and of the Amateur Play in the second. You know Mrs Davenport was going to be married on the 11th of Feb [1852], so she wrote to ask me to come and see

her a long time ago, & renewed the invitation when she knew the girls were gone. So I went. I joined her at Macclesfield as she was coming home from Staffordshire, and we drove together to Capesthorne (5 miles) and on the way she surprized me by praising the President [Napoleon III], and believing from all her private information from Paris, that he was going to try to be the Napoleon of Peace (whatever that means).[1]

At Capesthorne I found her uncle, Mr Charles Hurt, her cousin Miss Emma Wolley (such a nice girl do you know her? daughter of a clergyman near Nottingham, her father's name was Hurt.) Mr Osborne the Principal of [?] Rossall School and a very clever agreeable ugly man, and Mr Weigall a clergyman at Macclesfield. It was very pleasant that day, but the next our two nice clergymen left, and a very stupid Mr and Mrs Blore came. He is an architect, who has made his fortune, and his wife has been a beauty.[2] Her daughter is married to a Mr [?] Careton a minor Canon of Westminster. Her dresses and jewels were something to wonder at, & as we could not find out anything to talk to her about, Mrs Davenport brought down all her wedding finery for public amusement.

A set of diamonds and opals, and a set of diamonds & emeralds - (the first far the most beautiful & far the most expensive too,) a green velvet cloak down to her heels lined & trimmed with miniver 6 Indian shawls of various kinds, the lowest priced one 90 guineas - one a soft green exquisitely embroidered in pale lilac & gold, another a crimson or Indian red ditto in white & gold, another a blue scarf, ends in gold - oh dear! they were so soft and delicate and went into such beautiful folds. Her gowns (only 7) were in London, - a white moiré antique a maize coloured do trimmed with black lace & coral-branch 'fittings', a blue silk with white lace, a green velvet, a black cloth (the only one with a waistcoat whh her dress maker told her was only to be worn with a cloth dress, [?] & rather going out in that) a dark blue silk, & a mouse coloured ditto. Her everyday petticoats were all made without bodies, set into a

round band [small sketch] with pretty jacket bodies with little skirts [small sketch] loose; trimmed all round with Valenciennes and with high-bodied jackets with long sleeves for high bodied gowns. They looked so pretty. Then her tip-top best were with embroidered stomachers. Everything else was as pretty as could be, only nothing else so very new and [?]fancy.

Mrs Blore was in ecstasies at every separate piece of finery, & put on rings till she could not bend her knuckles to try & come up to Mrs Davenport's grandeur. She left on the Monday, & good go with her! I hope I shall never see her again. Such a testing of everything by money I never heard in my life. If she heard of a man being successful, she asked directly what income he had, & neither Mrs Davenport nor I could knock any other idea into her head.

Then on the Monday your friend Mr Nathan Hubbersty, and Mr Alfred Arkwright came; I liked the latter much. I did not like the former, & could not imagine how any sister of Mrs Davenport's could have married him. On Tuesday I went, with much regret to the Sam Gregs. He was ill, and they thought my coming might cheer him up, and do him good. When I came home on the Friday - (somewhere about Febry 5th) I found a note from Mrs Davenport, begging me to come back on the Saturday & stay with her over the Monday, when the tenants were to give her their presents; she had expected Lord H to be with her, but now she found he could not. So I went. I expected her to meet me at Chelford but she was not there & I took a fly. On the way I met another fly, and out jumped a nice-looking elderlyish gentleman, & introduced himself to me as Lord H. He had come down from London by the express train to see Mrs D unexpectedly as she had said she was not quite well, staid 3 hours at Capesthorne, & was going back by the evening express.

Sunday was a very nice day at Capesthorne. The S[unday] School come into the beautiful conservatory to be taught, and are clean wholesome country-looking children in the midst of camellias, & [?]sweet-scented geraniums

&c &c - the chapel through the conservatory - the pew a parlour with low luxurious sofas, a fire place &c, - how easy it seems to be good compared with a long wet tramp down to a close school-room, full of half-washed children, - that's very wicked is it not? Then in the evening after dinner the children & choir sing chants in this same beautiful conservatory (almost as large as that at Chatsworth, & we opened the library door, which went into the conservatory & heard them singing in a green bower[.]

Then on Monday came all the present giving [-] a present for every servant - for nearly all the out of doors servants too, for the school children[.] We arranged all: desks for the men-servants, nicely fitted up, - gowns for the younger, fur-cloaks for the older women servants - ladies' companions for the school-girls, double-bladed knives for the boys: & towards 12 o'clock came a poor idiot to whom Mrs D had been very kind. 'Silly Billy' dancing along the park dressed in a gay horse-cloth, and preceding a band then came 200 school-children, - then women, then men upwards of 500 in all. Mrs Davenport put on her beautiful cloak and went and stood in the raised & covered terrace in front of the house, while they formed a semicircle round her. Then an old farmer came forwards, crying & trembling with a little speech of farewell & a bracelet (value 60 guineas) the farmers had bought for her, - & she made a little speech, & then she cried - then came forwards the labourers who had bought a clock for her dressing-room but she could not answer them for crying - then her house-servants - a church service all in purple & gold; then the school children a silver vase for flowers; then they all came to wish her goodbye; but as we saw they each had their separate private thanks to render for some little kindness done to them; it was proposed they should raise a cheer that she might not be utterly worn out; & the band played Should auld acquaintance &c, - and then the crowd went to have refreshment. All that day we were helping Mrs Davenport, & the next morning she & I & Mr Crackenthorpe (her co-executor) went to Chelford; and

now I shall leave Lord Hatherton to finish out the story; you'll find a letter from him, among those I send which I thought you might like to see. I can't read Meta's all over again, but I am sure I may trust to your & Eliza's discretion if Meta is imprudent; and I should like to have all the letters back again sometime.

Yes! we went to see the Amateurs; we asked Mr Forster & Dickens to stay here, but they could not. Mr F came up however to call, & told us they expected to gain 1000£ by these 3 nights (2 at Liverpool, where he was not going to act.) He said the play was very heavy, and so it was. He gave me a private admission for any friends, so I took the Winkworths & we escaped the crowd. We sat right under the very much raised stage, on the front row, & I think I got Braidized for I had such a headache with looking up. The play is very very long too - 3 hours & a half, & they omitted 1 scene. And very stupid indeed. The farce was capital. Dickens was so good, & Mark Lemon, - D Jerrold was not there and Mr Forster was sadly too long over his very moral sentences in the play.

We hope to see you here dear Agnes before long. I must beg your pardon for my writing. I have so much to do just now I can hardly get through it. My kind love to Eliza. Wms remembrances to both of you.

Yours very affely

ECG

Our remembrances to Mr Saundars [sic].

Editor's Notes

1. The Editor of the Macclesfield Courier (Jan 17th 1852) also speculated on the French President's hopes for peace:
"Louis Napolean has promulgated a constitution in which he has appointed himself President for 10 years and adheres to the terms of the proclamation of December 2nd. For our own parts we are inclined to think that the Constitution is such as it will last if Louis Napoleon can escape assassination and keep the soldiery in good humour without going to war."

2. "a very stupid Mr and Mrs Blore came. He is an architect, who has made his fortune."
It seems that Mrs Gaskell was unaware that much of the building around her, at Capesthorne, was the work of Edward Blore, in 'the style of the Jacobean period, but in an idiom unmistakably of his own making, and the general tone of Victorian Gothic revival cannot serve as a description of his particular expression'. He was also architect to William IV and Queen Victoria. The work he did at Capesthorne had been put in hand by Mrs Davenport's husband, Edward Davies Davenport between 1837 and '47 when he died.
The Paxton conservatory is of the same period. 'It possessed several features which reappeared later in his design for the Crystal Palace ... and in its day may well have been the largest conservatory in existence' - (Quotes from Capesthorne guide book)

3. The family pew from the chapel is now part of the entrance hall.

* * * * *

A GASKELL PRECEPT

On the Gaskell Memorial Tower and other Watt buildings in Knutsford, texts are a feature of the architect's style; he believed architecture should instruct and uplift.

New building at the end of King Street in Watt's style gives the area a feel of Port Merion. An attractive Watt house, now offices, has a text from Mrs Gaskell (GL.12) which might serve us today:
"The beauty and poetry of many of the common things and daily events of life in its humblest aspect does not seem to me sufficiently appreciated"

On the opposite wall is a verse familiar to many, but few could identify the author as Carlyle:

So here hath been dawning
Another blue day.
Think wilt thou let it
Slip useless away?

TRUTH AND FICTION IN MRS GASKELL: TWO NOTES

There is no doubt that reminiscence and autobiography play a considerable part in Mrs Gaskell's work: Cranford, it is well known, owes much to Knutsford, and Wives and Daughters would not have been written, had Mrs Gaskell's father not remarried. Nevertheless, we must not forget that she was a novelist, and her experiences are not reproduced exactly in her stories.

(1) In My French Master (1853), Mrs Gaskell writes:

> "Three years ago I was in Paris, An English friend of mine who lives there - English by birth, but married to a German professor, and very French in manners and ways - asked me to come to her house one evening."

The friend is unmistakably Mme Mohl, and Mr J G Sharps, in his invaluable book, Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention, wonders, on the strength of this passage, if Mrs Gaskell could have paid an unrecorded visit to Paris in 1850 or 1851. This, however, is untenable, since she wrote to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth on 7 April 1853: "... we may go to Pa.is on May 12 or 13th! I have never been there ..." Clearly, we cannot take this sentence in My French Master as straightforward autobiography.

Mr Sharps is probably right in saying: "It seems [...] the basic ingredients of the story My French Master were Knutsford and a love-story which could easily have come from the salon of Mme Mohl". As the story was published in December 1853, it looks as if the visit to Paris very naturally reawakened in Mrs Gaskell memories of her own childhood lessons from the émigré French master, M. Rogier. The Parisian hostess, whose match-making efforts unexpectedly succeed, after all, though not in the way she intends, does resemble Mme Mohl, who was well known for her interest in young people and their love affairs, and whom Mrs Gaskell had already known for several years. Whether the love affairs in the story came from Mme Mohl or from Mrs Gaskell herself, who thereby achieved her (unconvincing) happy ending, of course, we cannot know, though we might suspect the latter.

Mme Mohl may have known of the daughter of an émigré returning as mistress to her father's ancestral mansion through marriage with a descendant of its subsequent purchaser; but the double marriage in the story strains credulity.

As for the phrase "three years ago" in the passage quoted above, Mrs Gaskell, one suspects, instinctively thought of 1853, not only the date of her first visit to Paris, but also - more important - the date of the publication of her story, to which it gave a ring of authenticity. She was obliged to antedate the action to "three years ago" to allow time for all the events she mentions - the two marriages, the installation of M. de Chalabre as an old man in the house (formerly his property) of his younger daughter, the birth of his grandchild (now of an age to play in the gardens) and his death.

Conjectural as this may be, it is possible, and in tune with Mrs Gaskell's procedure on other occasions. In My French Master, for instance, though the narrative is supposedly autobiographical, the character of the narrator, from the start, is not entirely that of the author, and her circumstances and her subsequent life very different indeed.

(2) We know little about Elizabeth Stevenson's sojourns in Edinburgh, and biographers have been tempted to fill the gap from Round the Sofa (1859). The narrator is a girl who has been sent to Edinburgh for medical treatment, and who lives a rather dreary life in drab lodgings. This has been taken as a reminiscence of Elizabeth Stevenson's own life in Edinburgh, and it has even been assumed that she and Ann Turner were sent to Edinburgh to escape from the cholera raging in Newcastle (see, for instance, Winifred Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell, 1976, pp. 42-43).

Now, just as Mrs Gaskell's visit to Paris may have revived old memories, and led her to write My French

Master, so the death in 1858 of Mrs Fletcher (née Dawson), the former society hostess of Edinburgh, who had known her parents and her cousin, may have awakened old memories (as W Gérin suggests, p. 205), and provided the occasion for Round the Sofa. But that the narrator's life reflects Elizabeth Stevenson's seems improbable. The letters to Harriet Carr, recently published by Professor J A V Chapple in vol. 4 of The Gaskell Society Journal, leave no doubt that Elizabeth Stevenson had left Newcastle for Woodside, Birkenhead, several months before cholera reached Newcastle; and, even if she had not, why should she and Ann have been sent to lodge in Edinburgh, when they could have gone to live with Mrs Lumb in Knutsford or Mrs Robberds in Manchester? Moreover, the narrator's life in Edinburgh does not tally with what little we know of Miss Stevenson's. According to Meta Gaskell, her mother stayed with relatives in Edinburgh; and the miniature and the bust of her, executed by well-known artists, suggest an interesting social life. Indeed, this, one feels, is likely. Mrs Gaskell was lucky with her friends and relations. In Newcastle, she lived with the Rev Turner, the very centre of the vigorous intellectual life of the city; and in Paris, she stayed with Mme Mohl, whose salon was frequented by many of the most distinguished writers, thinkers, and scholars of the day. It is hard to believe that her life in Edinburgh did not follow the same pattern.

E L DUTHIE

P J YARROW

* * * * * *

OUR AGM SPEAKER, Brenda Colloms, is Lecturer & Librarian at the Working Men's College, London. Her other books include Victorian Country Parsons (characters such as Jack Russell, William Barnes etc) and Victorian Visionaries about the Christian Socialist movement, both published by Constable. We look forward to her book on William Johnson Fox and his circle later in the year.

On a warm Sunday afternoon, though thankfully not as overpoweringly hot as it had been, July 22nd, members of the Gaskell Society drove into Manchester to Gt Ancoats Street for a 'Cholera Walk' conducted by fellow member, Blue Badge Guide and historian, Sheila Lemoine, M.A., M.Ed., Dip. in Adult Education. We were rather a disappointingly small band, possible due to holidays - just nine in number - which was a shame as the quality of the occasion was very high.

Sheila had arranged to meet us in 'The Crown and Kettle', a Victorian public house of great interest in itself as it had once been the local magistrates' court and boasted a splendidly ornate ceiling. We were thoughtfully provided with sheets of information on the background to the walk, including maps, and Sheila expanded upon them. In the early nineteenth century, she explained, cholera was not a new phenomenon - we had our own strain and actually called it 'cholera nostra'. But, in 1832, Asiatic cholera reached the shores of England, carried in by a boatman at Sunderland. There was no immunity and the new strain was devastating in its effect. By the May of that year, it had spread to Manchester though it was then considered to have arisen 'upon the spot', the first case being that of James Palfreyman, a 29 year old coach painter.

Much of Sheila's information about the cases came from the biographical notes written by Dr Henry Gaultier, a local physician, attempting not only to treat the patients (though there was little he could do for them) but also to determine the cause. How easy it is for us now to look back in horror, with the benefit of our modern knowledge, and realise that of course it was carried in the water and that lack of sanitation was responsible for its spread! But for Dr Gaultier, in the days when microbes and bacilli were unheard of and microscopes were only poor things which could not see them, how much more difficult it must have been! Yet this dedicated man chronicled in detail each of the first 300 cases he saw, including their previous condition, where they lived, what they had eaten and who

they had seen in an attempt to discover the relevant factors, before he was overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of them. His intuition was very close - he made particular note of the fouling of every court by open cesspools.

We set off on our walk - past the old market and across the broad streets built to accommodate six 'lanes' of wagons plying to and from the cotton mills - and soon reached Swan Street. Here an engineering works, fallen into disuse, had been taken over and whitewashed and used as the first hospital. It still stands today though it has returned to a commercial use. Here, so many died and were taken away for communal burial underneath nearby Victoria Station. Coffins were not usual for the poor then but the terror engendered by 'King Cholera' demanded them. Despite these precautions and the use of chloride of lime as a crude antiseptic, nurses (revealed by Dr Gaultier's notes to be of the same general standard as Dickens' Mrs Gamp!) and porters who handled the bodies also died.

Ms Lemoine spoke with an obvious passion for her subject and brought it to life vividly. By the time we reached Angel Street and the site of Woodward's Court, we imagined the smell of the place as well as the tragedy which had wiped out whole pathetic families there. In 1773, the population of Manchester was 48,821. In 1832, it was 142,026. Much of this explosion was contained - if that word can be used at all - in this small area. Houses were back to back, crammed into recesses even in the angles of the filthy courts and severely overcrowded with beds being shared if there were any at all. Abattoirs and tripe-works were based nearby contributing to the general stench. I was much struck with the repeated comment in Dr Gaultier's notes that children, although basically 'healthy', were in a poor condition, starving and half-naked and subject to attacks of diarrhoea, even before the cholera gripped them. The wonder is that so many survived at all, as somehow they did. 674 died in a matter of months and most

significantly in June and July.

Our next stop was the parochial graveyard near the site of St Michael's Church, now gone. The stones have long since been flattened and used as paving but the names and ages remain on the middle-class graves in the superior church graveyard next door. It is an overgrown and strange place now. Within 300 yards of each other, two 'Ragged Schools' still stand. We were reminded that this excess of urban population had never been known before. It was a new problem and here were the visible signs of someone striving to do something about it and an indication of the greatness of the need in their proximity.

Downwards again: underneath Stevenson's Railway, carrying the main line between Yorkshire and Lancashire, where we were invited to imagine the houses, now demolished, crammed in under the bridges and subject to the belching of smuts from steam engines all day long. And finally the River Irk: still flowing beneath the railway and the broad roads constructed overhead, on its way to join the Irwell. It is cleaner today, clean enough to grow long weeds but still choked with litter and harbouring rats, which we saw, and still conveying a chilling sense of evil as it winds through tunnels and conduits built deliberately high to accommodate flooding.

It was here that Friedrich Engels stood on the bridge and formed his thoughts whilst looking down on the crowded hovels of 'Gibralter'. He of course favoured Communist revolution as the remedy but, in England, it did not happen, possibly due to the sensibility of the need for reform.

We repaired to a pleasant afternoon tea in the Parker's Hotel, a different world indeed, only a street away, and we washed our hands gratefully in the sanitised water provided by the strenuous efforts of local government after the great cholera epidemics. Perhaps not quite the thing for a summer Sunday afternoon's outing? Not a bit of it. We headed home for the comforts of rural Cheshire with more than a slight feeling of awe and the knowledge that it was individuals such as Dr Henry Gaultier and

Mrs Gaskell that had drawn attention to the plight of the working classes in Manchester and, in their own separate ways, had done something about it.

ALISON FOSTER

Editor's Note

While Elizabeth Gaskell was writing about the evils of industrial Manchester, William was also working to bring about reform. Catherine Winkworth wrote to her sister Emily (November 22nd 1852, Memorials of Two Sisters, p.93):

'Mr Gaskell is doing a great deal now and is gaining many warm friends in Manchester, particularly among the clergymen, by his activity, good sense, and good temper in two committees. One is for the better regulation of beerhouses and places of public amusement, the other a Sanitary Committee to prepare the town for the next visit of the cholera. (Note the accepted inevitability of this) Both the Dean and Canon Richson are saying everywhere that he is the most valuable member on these committees, and he was invited the other day to the distribution of medical prizes . . to which no dissenting minister was ever asked before . . . Lily is proud that he is appreciated by people whose appreciation she cares for.'

* * * * *

A POSSIBLE NEW IMAGE OF MRS GASKELL

About three years ago, several old suitcases of family memorabilia came into my possession.

The cases contained many items which had belonged to Ellen Nussey, Charlotte Brontë's best friend.

A distant relation of mine, Mrs Richard Needham, attended the sale of Miss Nussey's effects at Moor Lane House, Gomersal, in May 1889.

The Brontë Parsonage Museum at Haworth has a catalogue of the house sale which gives details of some of the items bought by Mrs Needham. Catalogue item 192 refers to 14 small & 11 large photographs together with two

sheets of lithograph letters & a drawing of a cockatoo by Emily Brontë.

In one of the suitcases there was a large envelope containing what appears to be some of the above items, one of which is a photograph of a lady who looks convincingly like the known representations of Mrs Gaskell - arched eyebrows, centre hair parting and face shape. I have consulted Mr Colin Harding of the Bradford Photographic Museum about the above photograph and he has confirmed that it is a photographic print of a painting. If this photograph is a representation of Mrs Gaskell then I believe that it has not been seen before.

Mrs Gaskell spent many hours with Ellen Nussey collecting material for her biography of Charlotte Brontë. I can only think that Mrs Gaskell would have given this print to Ellen Nussey who had treasured it and kept it with her other "special" photographs.

AUDREY HALL

Lois the Witch & other stories. Pocket Classics series, Alan Sutton. £3.95.
This publisher continues its policy of producing lesser known works of the major Victorian authors in cheap no frills editions. Already available are the Manchester Marriage and My Lady Ludlow. This volume also contains the Old Nurses Story and The Crooked Branch, The Grey Woman and The Squire's Story. The Grey Woman has not been available in this country since the Knutsford edition of 1908. There are no textual notes and only a three page biographical introduction by Sheila Michell.

The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction by Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Assistant Professor of English at Boston College. Cornell University Press. £20.60.
(The Gaskell sections of this book are based on an article in Nineteenth Century Fiction, 1979).
A discussion of the social problem novel showing how the plot influences social change as much as the proclaimed social intent. The first half deals with women's novels in which middle-class heroines are the instruments of social change. Gaskell's North and South was deliberately written not only as a reaction to criticism of her own Mary Barton but in answer to reservations she had with Brontë's Shirley and is more challenging to traditional conceptions. Two inferior novels are discussed in detail by way of contrast: Elizabeth Stone's William Langshawe: The Cotton Lord and Geraldine Jewsbury's Marian Withers. The second half discusses three social problem novels in which the romantic ideas of nature play an important part in the structure - Oliver Twist, Alton Locke and Ruth. An interesting feature of this book is the use of letters to show how the novels came to be written.

Mutual friends: Charles Dickens and Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital by Jules Kosky. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £14.95.
Contains some small but new biographical details. Dickens was a patron of Great Ormond Street Hospital and solicited the help of a number of friends and colleagues in fund raising. Mrs Gaskell's involvement came about through a number of relatives who were already subscribers to the project - Henry Holland, the royal physician, Capt. Frederick Holland R.N. (her cousins) and Dr Samuel Gaskell, her brother-in-law who was on Shaftesbury's Lunacy Commission. There is quite a lot of information about Capt. Holland, who was the son-in-law of Dickens' friend Lord Denman, Lord Chief Justice. He lived at Ashbourne Hall, Derbyshire. Mrs Gaskell made several visits to him in the 1850s, usually following a stay at Lea Hurst, the home of Florence Nightingale who is also discussed in the book.

(Editor's Note:

This book has solved a mystery for Professor Chapple and myself, who have been puzzled as to why Captain Holland's photograph was seen by Mrs Gaskell in the Ward Room of the Royal Yacht when she visited Portsmouth in 1861 (GL.484). Captain Denman, commander of the vessel was Holland's brother-in-law. The Denmans were also related to the Brodies with whom ECG spent a happy time at Oxford.)

Living Space in Fact and Fiction by Philippa Tristram. Routledge. £40.00.
A study of the English house as depicted by English novelists from 1740. All classes are represented from Blenheim Palace to the weavers' cottages in Mary Barton. There is also an illustration and description of her drawing room at Plymouth Grove.

The Industrial City, 1820-1870 by Dorothy and Alan Shelston. Macmillan, 1989.
The interesting study by the Journal Editor of the Gaskell Society aims to show how the industrial city has been portrayed in a wide variety of writings not just fiction. Overseas topographical and sociological writers such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Friedrich Engels are treated alongside Dickens, Gaskell and George Eliot. Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool are amongst the cities described. Extensive quotations are used to

emphasise the points. The book is complementary to the address given by the author to the Gaskell Society - Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester (Gaskell Journal 1989) which was concerned with identifying and verifying Gaskell's descriptions, and, while including some of the same material provides a totally different angle.

A Brontë Diary: a chronological history of the Brontës from 1775 to 1915, by Michael Steed. Dalesman. £7.95. This is a table of events in the family from the meeting of Rev Patrick Brontë's parents to the death of Rev Arthur Nicholl's second wife. There is a Who's Who and over thirty photographs. It is a little confusing to use with three indexes - a topographical index, an index of people which includes several names not in the 'Who's Who' and a general index which includes references to the Brontës as well as those in the index of people. It would also have been useful to indicate which of the letters alluded to in the text have survived. On April 5th 1855 it states that Patrick writes to tell Mrs Gaskell of Charlotte's death with no mention of the fact that on April 4th she had replied to John Greenwood's letter informing her of the news.
Incidentally, Mrs Gaskell's maiden name was spelt Stevenson not Stephenson.

CHRISTINE LINGARD

* * * * *

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

Kenn Oultram has produced issue 2 of CHAPTER ONE, the official newsletter of the Alliance. This contains fascinating details of literary events and various societies, in fact essential reading for the literary connoisseur. If you would like a copy, please send 50p (i.e. 2 x 20p coins, 2 x new 5p coins, in strip of sellotape), plus self-addressed label to:
Kenn Oultram, Clatterwick Hall, Little Leigh,
Northwich, Cheshire CW8 4RJ

On 26th April 1990, three months into research on Mrs Gaskell and the achievement of the work Mary Barton, my search for material led me to Manchester for the third time, to attend the Spring Meeting of the Gaskell Society at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel. I had travelled from Birmingham to hear Dr Chitham's talk on Elizabeth Stevenson's education - some clues here perhaps to her extraordinary talent?

Prior to the meeting proper was a short Unitarian service to commemorate the newly-opened Gaskell room. This short service, led by Rev Denise Boyd, was my introduction to the non-conformist faith of Mrs Gaskell. It proved to be most revealing and enlightening: the intellectual content, the appeal for the love of learning and literature, the absence of ritual, a prayer shared without the need to clasp hands, bow heads or close eyes, the manner in which the service was led by an "unfrocked" lady minister - all this created an ethos indicating the special nature of the theology of Unitarianism, and the murmurings of its significance upon, not only Mrs Gaskell's actions and thought, but also her writing, began to stir in my mind. From this point, my study focused upon Unitarianism, and firm links began to emerge between her faith and her art in the work Mary Barton.

How then did Unitarianism, for which it remained a legal offence to openly confess belief until 1813, differ from orthodox Christianity? The weekly periodical for the religion was entitled 'The Inquirer' and this implies a questioning, intellectual response to religious thought. Rational thought and the quest for religious truth led the founding fathers to find the Trinitarian formula an impossible one, and in consequence the doctrine derived from it was equally invalid.[1] They rejected the Trinity and Divinity of Christ, whilst emphasising the simple humanity of Christ and his witness to the truth. Coral Lansbury (75) is particularly helpful in her explanation of Unitarianism. She states:

> "Their theology was an optimistic affirmation of man as a rational being who could ultimately attain a perfect state in this world without

> recourse to marvels and miracles. Further, they were untouched by the struggle between science and Christian doctrine ... they gladly espoused the cause of the apes as further proof of man's capacity to evolve by reason and by will."[2]

So at a time of religious doubt, Unitarians stood firm in their beliefs: the new science held no threat for them, it merely confirmed and strengthened their convictions.

Theirs was a particularly tolerant religion: as such Unitarians did not attack traditional doctrines, whilst insisting that no doctrine was too sacred to be questioned.[3] Additionally it was marked by forward thought in the search for religious truth, the areas of education, gender discrimination and emancipation for women. By mid-nineteenth century, they abandoned belief in the infallibility of the Bible. Accompanying the questioning, scientific attitude towards religious truth, was a marked independence of mind, and a belief that people must be free to work out their own salvation. Unlike mainstream Christianity, they were not over-preoccupied with the life to come, but rather sought to improve life on earth. So that whilst contemporary attitudes allowed men to quote the Bible and say 'the poor will always be with us', seeing the problem as inevitable, Unitarians refused to accept this logic, arguing that God had given each human reasoning powers which could be put to use in improving his fellow man's lot.

While freedom, reason and tolerance was the motto for their faith, theirs was also an active religion - they believed actions were stronger than words. Unitarians were at the forefront of social reform, and many a mechanic institute was founded by these active philanthropists, whilst ragged schools for children of the very poor were pioneered by Unitarians.[4] Education was a major Unitarian concern long before there was a national system of education. The enlightened views of the Unitarians led them to believe education was the right of every human being, male and female.[5] They

sought good education for their daughters, a most uncommon attitude in Victorian days. As a result, Unitarian women did not suffer the social and cultural deprivation known to most Victorian women. Because of their emancipated attitudes, Unitarians attracted to their ranks a number of eminent women, amongst them Frances Power-Cobbe, the greatest feminist campaigner of the century, Barbara Leigh Smith who in 1855 set up the first Feminist Committee to campaign for Women's Property Rights, and ten years later, the Woman's Suffrage Committee. Eliza Fox, Barbara Bodichon, Harriet Martineau, Emily Shaen and Florence Nightingale were all Unitarians of varying degrees of faith.[6] Another demonstration of their liberal thought was that they were the first denomination in Britain to accept women into the ministry.[7]

This impressive list of firsts enables us to understand the dynamics of belonging to such a church, a church at variance with mainstream religion, and at the forefront of modern thought. Whilst rationality was at the centre of Mrs Gaskell's religion, she was at the centre of Unitarianism, through birth, marriage and geography.

The attributes of this active faith, namely realism, rationality, independent thought, belief in the individual, tolerance and optimism were all headed by a quest for the truth. 'Truth to a Unitarian was the torch that would eventually illuminate the whole of mankind.'[8] Mrs Gaskell, moving between the world of the poor and the privileged world of her class was aware of the truth and beauty in the lives of the working classes, unknown to the middle classes. In a letter to Mary Howitt, she comments:

> "We have such a district, and we constantly meet with examples of the beautiful truth in that passage of 'The Cumberland Beggar'."[9]

Adhering to the truth for a Unitarian involves a refreshingly honest depiction of all aspects under consideration, and where scholars have often described Mrs Gaskell as authentic or realistic, they have missed the all-pervading nature of this quest for truth, I feel.

In addition, I believe it is possible to make strong links between the features of Unitarianism named above, and the work of Mary Barton, and this I have attempted to do in a study entitled The Impact of Unitarianism on the Work of Work of Mary Barton by Mrs E Gaskell, prepared for the Humanities Department of Birmingham Polytechnic for fourth year B.Ed. Hons. studies, and now submitted to Alan Shelston at the University of Manchester.

SYLVIA KIRBY
Birmingham Polytechnic
July 1990

References

1 Lansbury, C. p.12 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Novel of Social Crisis. Elek Books 1975

2 Lansbury, C. p.11/12

3 Goring J & R. p.27 The Unitarians. Religious & Moral Education. 1984

4 Goring J & R. p.31

5 Lansbury, C. p.12

6 Lansbury, C. p.13

7 Goring, J & R. p.45

8 Lansbury, C. p.14

9 Chapple, J A V & Pollard, A, ed. Gaskell Letter No.12 p.33 in The Letters of Mrs Gaskell

* * * * *

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs Joan Leach, Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 OHN (Tel: 0565 4668)

ISSN 0954 - 1209

Ashbourne Hall, 1839.

(see Book Notes p.19)