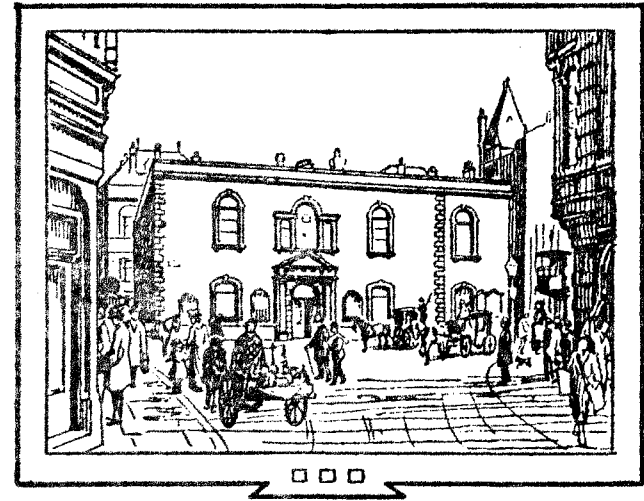


# The Gaskell Society



CROSS STREET CHAPEL

NEWSLETTER

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs Joan Leach, Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0HN (Tel: 0565 634668)

ISSN 0954 - 1209

AUGUST 1993

NO. 16

## EDITOR'S LETTER

As I type this letter I am trying to master my new word processor, provided from Society funds - not a very sophisticated one because I am incapable of coping with much technology, but I hope this will at least help to keep the mailing list in better order. It has taken me several attempts even to set the margins!

Uppermost in my mind is the forthcoming Edinburgh Conference, from 20th to 23rd August, when nearly a hundred members will gather to enjoy a varied programme of talks and events. This will be the climax of a busy year.

We are particularly pleased with the steady progress of our South of England branch; the meetings have been well attended and resulted in stimulating exchange of ideas. At the Annual London Meeting on 6th November we will be joined by members of the Dickens Fellowship.

Details of the AGM Weekend are on a separate sheet. Please make a note in your diary of the Spring Meeting in Manchester on 26th March.

Lucy Magruder, our USA representative, has assisted in the final design and production of our badge which we think will win your approval.

We have been trying to keep membership fees down but with ever increasing printing and postage costs a rise may be inevitable. We appreciate a grant from Manchester University to aid our Journal production.

We welcome any suggestions to improve service to members.

Joan Leach

SECOND THOUGHTS ON 'COUSIN PHILLIS'  
by Brenda Colloms

Let me confess at once that I have never been a fan of 'Cousin Phillis'. The story, begun in Mrs Gaskell's usual meticulous and leisurely style, was slow in getting to the point - if indeed there was going to be a point - and dwelt far too long on the emotional and physical collapse of Phillis. Was she a heroine, or an anti-heroine? Finally, it was all suddenly and brutally ended in a page or two, like an impatient cleaner sweeping the dust away under the carpet.

Why, oh why, must Phillis, the rustic beauty, the scholar-farmer, physically strong, always busy, much-loved and an heiress to boot - (she will inherit a prosperous 50 acre farm) - be condemned to droop, dwindle and drown in unrequited love when she is not yet out of her teens? Where is the robustness of Mary Barton, of Margaret Hale, of Molly Gibson? Phillis is not a medieval princess, sheltered from the world. She is reading Dante's 'Inferno' with the aid of a dictionary. She has been taught to read the Greek and Roman classics in the original. She works hard in the fields and harder in the house. She reads the newspaper. She is aware that the railway is already planned to run through the district, near the farm.

I found it a great puzzle and abandoned Phillis to her fate until I consented to lead a discussion on 'Cousin Phillis' at the May 8, 1993 meeting of the South of England group of the Gaskell Society. This necessitated re-reading the novella, but now I had assistance. From March, when I began the enterprise, I had a modern guide, Jenny Uglow's fine biography of Elizabeth Gaskell, and on pages 551-552 I discovered why I had been so discomfited. The ending I had disliked was not the ending which Mrs Gaskell intended. Phillis was meant to recover, and face the future with confidence. So I began to read 'Cousin Phillis' with zest, searching for clues, and my 'second thoughts' have revealed a different Phillis, capable of recovering from her

disappointment over Edward Holdsworth and able to say 'I will overcome' instead of 'I will return to the old days'.

Hitherto, received wisdom, which I suspect came chiefly from male critics reared on the classics, suggested that 'Cousin Phillis' was a well-nigh perfect story, exquisitely crafted, and of precisely the right length. '... a diamond without a flaw', as a reviewer wrote after Mrs Gaskell's untimely death. Hints were even made that had Mrs Gaskell lived longer, she might have abandoned the ponderous three-decker novel in favour of the novella form, wherein she would display her true literary genius to best advantage.

A delightful fancy, but a fancy all the same. The truth belongs to the workaday world. From the outset, Mrs Gaskell had the entire plot of 'Cousin Phillis' clearly in her head, beginning, middle, end. This was her invariable habit with stories and novels. Once she began writing with the scheme already fixed, she 'lived' her novels, not in the sense of becoming her characters, but in the sense of being an objective observer, recording details seen and heard, a video camera in fact.

From Jenny Uglow's book we learn of a hitherto uncollected letter of Mrs Gaskell's to George Smith, publisher of Mrs Gaskell's later novels and also of the 'Cornhill Magazine' edited by Thackeray, and just founded in 1860. This reveals that towards the end of 1863 (the first instalment of 'Cousin Phillis' appeared in November 1863) Mrs Gaskell gained the impression that Smith wanted the story to end with the old year. She was still in the midst of it on December 10.

She felt disappointed at having to cut it short, believing it would destroy her chosen ending. None the less, George Smith was one of her good friends upon whom she relied greatly; she was also trying to amass enough money to buy a house; and she duly dashed off a hurried conclusion. Nevertheless, she could not help including

her real ending, again seen through Paul Manning's eyes, to show Smith what she meant to do. She explained that she had been planning 'a sort of moral - "Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all"' (p.552).

From this letter, we know that Mrs Gaskell was foreseeing Paul Manning, many years afterwards - (maybe 20 years, bringing it up to the time she was writing?) - a married man, who, finding himself at Heathbridge, makes a detour to visit nearby Hope Farm, curious to see what has happened in the long interval. He finds that Minister Holman is dead and Phillis is in charge of the farm, which of course now belongs to her. There is a summer outbreak of typhus in the district - a common scourge in agricultural districts - and Phillis is using survey plans of a marshy area made by Edward Holdsworth to help her direct her labourers in a very workmanlike drainage scheme. Paul remembers having seen Phillis and her father, being instructed by Holdsworth who was using his theodolite to survey the area.

Paul is very impressed by Phillis's competence. He is also interested to observe two little children out there with her, and learns afterwards that they are orphans whom she has adopted. So Phillis has come through her ordeal strengthened, and is coping serenely with her life, fulfilled as a mother although not as a wife.

Charged with this knowledge, I could hardly wait to read 'Cousin Phillis' again, and I found a fascinating array of subtle clues leading inexorably to this intended ending. The novella positively overflowed with hints and half-hints exhibiting Mrs Gaskell's exuberant fascination with other people's lives, joys and problems - especially their problems. Like William Gaskell, her husband, Mrs Gaskell was in her own way a teacher. The 'morals' of her stories were her lessons.

Once readers have stopped being seduced by the rich embroidery of the word pictures - Hope Farm (is it a symbolic name?) with its garden and close interiors like

17th century Dutch paintings, and always Cousin Phillis with her pale gold hair and white skin at the still centre - have stopped smiling at the minister's pawky humour in naming the grand, never-used front door the 'rectory' and the commonly-used back one, the 'curate' - have stopped enjoying the lively accounts of hay-making, corn-harvesting and apple-gathering - then they can search for familiar Gaskell themes.

For Mrs Gaskell was a realist as well as a moralist. Not for her a stream of consciousness approach. Paul Manning, the gauche young cousin, is her recorder. He is the one who notices that soon after his first visit, Phillis discards her child-like pinafores in favour of pretty linen aprons in the morning, and a black silk one in the afternoon. This is a telling point, showing Phillis silently emerging from her shell and asserting herself. Minister Holman is too busy to see any difference; her mother is too proud of Phillis's good looks to make any comment. Phillis is not sexually interested in Paul, who is young for his age but he is likeable, and he is male: she enjoys looking nice for him. Paul registers the change of attire, mainly because he thought the pinafores 'obnoxious'. He does not regard her as a potential sweetheart. She is much too clever, and besides, she is considerably taller than he is. He has to look up to her, in all senses of the word.

It is obvious to the reader that a suitable mate for Cousin Phillis cannot be found in the environs of Hope Farm. Some dramatic mechanism must produce him, a stranger, out of the common mould. Mrs Gaskell needs a pantomime device which can disclose her prince in a puff of coloured smoke, - and reality comes to her rescue with the entrance of Edward Holdsworth, chief engineer of the advancing railway line and the puffing locomotives, introduced to the Holman family, albeit rather doubtfully, by Paul, who is his assistant.

Although Paul hero-worships Holdsworth, he is not sure whether Holdsworth's kind of 'goodness' is quite up to

the standard of the Holmans' 'goodness', and wonders how they will get on together.

Come he does, the friendly, sophisticated young man who charms the Minister, and Phillis, and - to a lesser extent, Mrs Holman. Only Betty, the trusted family servant, shrewd and unsentimental, remains aloof from him. Expensively educated, travelled, a long sojourn in Italy (how Mrs Gaskell must have enjoyed including that touch!) - Holdsworth is a prime example of the ambitious, hard-working engineer. He is fast rising to the top of his profession, and holds himself in readiness to go anywhere in the world at a moment's notice if called upon to do so.

Unlike Paul, who still sees Phillis as a rather awkward girl, Holdsworth instantly recognises her as a beautiful woman. His connection with the Holmans steadily grows. Even the Minister is fascinated and Phillis falls in love. Inevitably Holdsworth falls in love also, but only half in love because he is not a man of deep feelings. When he is unexpectedly summoned to go at once to Canada, he does not complain or protest. His job comes first.

He does, however, confide to Paul that he loves Phillis. He talks of her as he packs his bags, telling Paul that he expects Phillis to remain just as she is, untouched, an unsullied sleeping beauty, who will not change during the two years he must be away. When he returns, he will woo and win her. Like her father, Minister Holman, Holdsworth wants her to remain as she is, and where she is.

Paul's father, John Manning, who is a successful, self-educated inventor, visits Hope Farm, and becomes good friends with the minister. He is interested to meet Phillis, whom he sees differently from Holdsworth or her father. His view of the girl, however, is equally male-centred. John Manning thinks she would be an excellent wife for his Paul, who needs a strong wife behind him. Paul rather diffidently mentions Phillis's

other attributes, especially her love of scholarship, but his father brushes all that aside. She'll forget that once the babies come, says he. Paul remains silent, but he knows Phillis better than his father, and does not agree with him.

In the 1840s such ideas were commonplaces of male perception of young women. The profound and complex love of Minister Holman for his daughter, his only child, and his intellectual companion, is however far from commonplace, and represents a theme to which Mrs Gaskell returns more than once - the danger to all concerned of obsessive love. Squire Hamley's for his eldest son; Philip Hepburn's for Sylvia. Mrs Gaskell herself had once been afraid she would make 'an idol' of Marianne, her first child, such was her overpowering love. One can imagine the strength of her love if her son had actually lived, instead of dying in infancy, leaving a grieving memory forever just below the surface of her heart. (The Holmans, too, had lost their baby son.)

Another of her themes is the father-daughter relationship - Mary Barton and her father; Margaret Hale and hers; Sylvia Robson and Daniel; Molly Gibson and the ironic doctor. The paradox is that in the Gaskell family itself nothing suggests that William Gaskell was anything but a caring and intuitive father, prepared to let his daughters make their own decisions. Florence (Flossy) Gaskell, only eighteen, promised to marry her young man (an immensely suitable partner), without first going through the conventional hoop of discussing it with her parents. William Gaskell remained calm, being already acquainted with the young man, but Elizabeth Gaskell had a hard time coming to terms with the loss of her daughter. Could her use of the father-daughter relationship in the stories be a substitute for what was so important in her own life, the mother-daughter relationship?

Another theme which recurs in Mrs Gaskell's work is the notion of 'sinning' - humans are programmed to 'sin' in

one degree or another, and their natural development both as individuals and responsible members of society is therefore dependent upon their making amends - 'atonement'. This is what Mrs Gaskell, the minister's wife, believes, and what she considers to be a healthy happy ending to a story or novel. It is one of the bedrocks of her morality. Frequently the 'sin' is committed with the best of intentions. Paul Manning discloses Holdsworth's confidence, although he has no right to do so, but is driven to it because he sees Phillis's deep distress at Holdsworth's departure. Not only is Paul 'sinning' in betraying a confidence, he is also 'sinning' by making an error of judgment, having expected in his simplicity that Holdsworth meant what he said. And it is true that Holdsworth meant it at the time, but a more worldly observer would have doubted whether Holdsworth, half a world away, would really have kept to it.

Holdsworth's 'sin' was to put into words the wishful thinking which fills his heart when he is in an emotional state - and taken by surprise by the sudden call away to Canada. His remarks to Paul were private and unpremeditated. He did not expect they would be passed on to Phillis, but on the other hand he took no steps to protect her by telling Paul not to tell Phillis what he had said.

Phillis's 'sin' is similar to Paul's. As a consequence of her sheltered life, her worldly inexperience and her strong desire, she takes Paul's remarks to be tantamount to a definite proposal of marriage by Holdsworth. (Many popular Victorian novels were based on the fact that in the 1840s a very slight remark could, and often was, construed as a serious proposal, which if broken, might disgrace a girl for life.)

'Cousin Phillis' also follows other Gaskell stories with its theme of an agricultural society, hardly changed for many years, dragged by modern industrialisation and the railway network into a new and difficult way of life. Although Hope Farm appears utterly remote, in a time

warp, it is in fact near a fair-sized town. Its days of eighteenth century tranquility are numbered and not even Minister Holman with all his strength and intelligence can prevent it. Mrs Gaskell, acquainted with the ideas and policies of the great Manchester industrialists, never under-estimated their importance, and understood that stubborn opposition to factories and machines was wasted effort. That mellow sun shining on Cranford and Hope Farm is the nostalgic sun of memory.

In the months following Holdsworth's departure Phillis pines and begins to look ill. Paul becomes anxious for her sake, and to cheer her up, secretly tells her of Holdsworth's last words concerning her. Immediately she blossoms in mistaken assurance of Holdsworth's loyalty. Her father, with a blinkered view of his child, does not see her radiance just as previously he had not seen her sadness.

Finally, Holdsworth blithely writes Paul with news of his impending marriage to a French-Canadian girl. It is clear Phillis has become just one of the Holman family. He promises to send wedding card announcements to them. This puts Paul in a dilemma, but he feels it essential to tell Phillis the truth. She is stunned. Then, with great dignity, she makes him promise never to discuss it with her. Paul realises that her secret love must remain even more so. She could not bear the pain of other people's knowing.

But the arrival of Holdsworth's wedding cards in a letter to the Minister makes everything all too clear and triggers the emotional storm between Phillis and her father. This is the human equivalent of two earlier intense electric summer storms which play an important part in the development of Phillis's love. This bitter confrontation between father and daughter, watched by the conscience stricken Paul and the uncomprehending mother, is the dramatic climax of the novella. When Phillis hears her father blaming Paul for her unhappiness, she stands forth and bravely admits her love for Holdsworth, whatever kind of a man he is.

Paul, although involved in the quarrel, is still the bystander, recording the events. He realises that Betty was correct when she alleged that the minister would never have seen the growing friendship between Phillis and Holdsworth because he still saw his daughter as a child. Holman's love for Phillis has never been the measured love of a Puritan minister but the emotional devotion of a romantic scholar. The very name he gave her, Phillis, was a Greek name, a Pagan name, loved by Virgil, Holman's favourite author, a name redolent of verdant vegetation, the sweetheart of pastoral poetry. It betokened a special kind of love, and as the girl grew up to be a fine scholar, his prized student, sharing his interest in the classics, his proud and possessive love for her grew even fiercer. He could not admit she was becoming a woman because that would bring closer the day when she would leave home, taken by another man.

The battle of wills and recriminations between the two, who have so much in common, and are now virtual opponents, proves too much for Phillis, who collapses, semi-conscious. The Minister, distraught, proves useless in an emergency. His wife, kind and sensible although no scholar, takes charge, helped by Paul, who rides swiftly for the doctor. The physician is out, so the message is left with the assistant. This young man, unconnected with the Holmans, knows Phillis by sight - and immediately identifies her as 'that good-looking young woman'. Paul inwardly compares that remark to the Minister's broken phrases, 'my only child, my little daughter'.

The doctor's examination confirms that Phillis is seriously ill and needs utter quiet and careful nursing to recover completely. Her father seems to grow older overnight, and his strength leaves him. When Brother Robinson and a friend, both fellow Dissenters, come to pray with him, Holman cannot join them. (One is reminded of the king in 'Hamlet'.) Holman cannot even lead the customary family prayers after supper, and old John, his trusted labourer, does it instead.

Whilst Phillis slowly and reluctantly recovers, her long golden hair cropped short during the worst of her fever - Mrs Gaskell sharpens her minor characters. I am fond of Timothy Cooper, the 'half-wit' labourer, whose independent action in keeping the noisy market-day traffic of heavy carts away from Phillis's bedroom shows that he is far from being a 'half-wit'. Paul reflects upon this incident - Paul is growing up, too. He realises that the Minister's impatient temper was so often tried by Tim's slowness and poor memory that Holman dubbed Timothy a 'half-wit' and left it at that. Paul had followed suit. The truth was that Timothy was very slow but still capable of learning. When Paul explains to the Minister what Timothy had taken upon himself to do as a contribution to helping Phillis recover strength, he was full of remorse, and changed his attitude towards the man.

An important character, whether on centre stage or in the wings, is Betty, who nursed Phillis as a baby, and gave her baby brother 'his last earthly food'. She acts as a kind of Greek chorus to Paul's narrative. In the 'Cornhill' ending to the novella it is Betty's blunt rebuke to Phillis to stop being languid, and start helping herself to recovery that has the desired effect. Phillis at once takes the first step back to health, planning a long visit to Paul's parents in Birmingham, before returning home to the 'peace of the old days'.

We are not told whether Betty was satisfied with that promise - or whether Paul was. He knew that he was also due to be moved to another railway posting. Did these two prosaic persons believe that the 'peace of the old days' would last forever, as Phillis seemed to believe? Phillis was not yet twenty. She had the rest of her life to live. Thanks to George Smith, we do not know. Cousin Phillis was a victim, not of Holdsworth, or her father, or her cousin, but of the circulation manager of the 'Cornhill Magazine'.

Finally, allow me to comment upon two introductions of one-volume editions of 'Cranford' coupled with 'Cousin

Phillis'. The first, published by John Lehmann in 1947, edited by Elizabeth Jenkins, describes 'Cousin Phillis' as 'a single thread' compared with the 'fabric' of 'Cranford'. (Mrs Gaskell talks of 'Cousin Phillis' as 'a complete fragment'. Elizabeth Jenkins, whilst admiring the 'originality' of the characters of Phillis and her father, dismisses the novella as a reworking of the hackneyed theme of the 'mutual attraction of a man of the world and an inexperienced girl'.

Paul Keating, editor of the 1976 Penguin edition of 'Cranford' plus 'Cousin Phillis', alleges that Holman, Paul and Holdsworth are all guilty of lack of foresight in their conduct towards Phillis and accordingly must take some of the blame for what happens. 'It is this, together with the passivity of Phillis and the way she is associated with natural forces and the movement of the seasons that gives a mood of inevitability to her suffering.' A fair comment, given the circumstances, but the words 'passivity' and 'inevitability of suffering' strike a minor chord. Mrs Gaskell's intended ending, however, strikes a distinctly major chord.

It is my contention that in view of what Jenny Uglow called the 'alternative ending' and what I prefer to call the 'intended ending', 'Cousin Phillis' is due for a thorough reappraisal. Far from being an unexpected departure from Mrs Gaskell's other works, I submit that it is firmly in line with her beliefs, interests and literary style. 'Cousin Phillis' can be compared to an Old Master, dark with age which has for years hung in a neglected corner of the gallery. When a new director orders a thorough cleaning, the result is a bright new painting which the spectators can view with new understanding and admiration.

-----  
CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE

Jenny Uglow is on the programme and will give a lecture on Elizabeth Gaskell at 10.15 am on Sunday 10 October

ANOTHER BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR ELIZABETH  
 by C C Waghorn

In the second chapter of her book 'Elizabeth Gaskell: a Habit of Stories', Jenny Uglow deals with Elizabeth's childhood reading. She mentions a birthday present the future author received on her eleventh birthday:

'Aunt Lumb believed in handing on proven knowledge: Knutsford Library has a well-thumbed copy of 'The Monitor, or a Collection of Precepts, Observations etc' published in 1804, fondly inscribed to Elizabeth:

"from her affectionate Aunt Hannah Lumb, Sept the 29th 1821" - her eleventh birthday. Beneath the inscription are the pencilled ghosts of another, suggesting the little book had already done service to other relations.'

As I read this, my mind went to two little volumes which have had a place in my own library for thirty years or so. They are the two volumes of 'The Female Mentor or Select Conversations' by Honoria, the Second Edition of 1798.

These were also given to Elizabeth Gaskell on the occasion of her eleventh birthday. The donor this time was her father, as the inscription on the fly leaf shows: 'E C Stevenson from her Father on her birthday Sep 29 - 1821'.

My records of my book buying all those years ago are now somewhat incomplete, but I believe 'The Female Mentor' was bought from a catalogue of an Edinburgh bookseller; the price would have been modest by the standards of today, in part a sign of the partial neglect of Elizabeth Gaskell at that time. The volumes are in the original boards, though the spine has at some time been renewed with "Mrs Gaskell's copy" on the lettering piece.

'The Female Mentor' seems to complement Aunt Lumb's present. The 44 chapters or 'conversations' fall into two categories: those, chiefly in the first volume, which deal with some well-known historical figure, and those, chiefly in the second volume, which deal with such topics as On Novels, On Learned Ladies, On Modesty, On Dancing, On Marriage, On Dissipation, On Vanity, On



THE  
FEMALE MENTOR:

OR,

SELECT CONVERSATIONS.

*(Mrs. Phillips)*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

THE SECOND EDITION.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, JUN., AND W. DAVIES,  
IN THE STRAND.

1798.

*E. C. Stevenson  
from his Father  
on her birth day  
Sep. 29 - 1821*

Politeness, On Humane Institutions, On Female Friendship and On Maternal Affections. The historical figures are all women: they include Lady Elizabeth Gray, Boadicea, Catherine of Arragon, Anne Bolen (sic), Catherine Parr and, most interesting of all in terms of the adult Elizabeth Gaskell, Madame de Sévigné.

In her biography of Elizabeth Gaskell, Winifred Gerin writes: 'The purpose of the visit [to Paris in 1862] was to allow her to pursue her research into the project book on Madame de Sévigné, for which she had George Smith's blessing, and with which she was much more engrossed than with finishing 'Sylvia's Lovers'. It is a great loss that the book was never written, for no one was temperamentally better suited to the subject than Mrs Gaskell. She was immensely attracted to the seventeenth century 'grande dame', whose devotion to an only daughter inspired a correspondence that must rank amongst the finest in any literature ... They were two of a kind, as Mrs Gaskell obviously felt in wishing to introduce the French writer to the English public.' One can only wonder whether that chapter in 'The Female Monitor' played some part in the beginning of the "immense attraction".

Of the history of that copy of 'The Female Monitor' between the Gaskell birthday and my discovery of it in that Edinburgh catalogue, I know nothing. I do know that in the thirty years since it has served regularly as a teaching aid to introduce my former pupils to Elizabeth Gaskell and her work. Almost without exception they have been surprised that such a 'dry' book of moral instruction should have been given to one so young, 'but at least it showed that her father had not forgotten her'. Those who were from one parent families perhaps appreciated that most keenly. 'The Female Monitor' had helped them to think of Elizabeth as a real person.

I would like to think that she would have approved of this use of her birthday present.

'SO DIFFERENT A LIFE ...'

by Anna Unsworth

Elizabeth Gaskell arrived in Oxford at the beginning of November 1857 when making the first of the round of visits advised by her doctors to escape the rigours of winter in Manchester.

As predicted by a friend of Charlotte Brontë's, Elizabeth stirred up 'a hornet's nest' about her ears with her 'Life of Charlotte Brontë' published in February 1857, and all the summer a storm had raged about what she believed to have been the truth about the Brontë family. While this was going on she had had to act as an official hostess at the Exhibition of Art and Literature held in Manchester that summer. So it was a bruised Elizabeth Gaskell who arrived in November at Teddesley Park, Staffordshire, the home of Lord Hatherton, a whig politician, and his wife, an old friend from her Cheshire girlhood (formerly Mrs Caroline Davenport of Capesthorpe), to spend a few days with them on the way to some relatives who lived near Devizes. It was the Hathertons who reminded her that Oxford was a place she would pass through in her railway journey to Devizes and that she should take the opportunity of visiting the city, if only very briefly.

With many connections in the university, they at once wrote letters 'right and left' as Elizabeth put it in one of her subsequent letters, 'facilitating every pleasant arrangement'.

She and her 19-year-old daughter, Meta, were met, on their arrival at the Star Inn, by Dr Wellesley, Lord Hatherton's brother-in-law and Principal of New Inn Hall, who took them on 'a race up past X where Ridley and Latimer were burnt thro' the Radcliffe Quad to All Souls Quad into High St - back to his own house to lunch; donned a scarlet robe himself, having to attend convocation, & rushed off (with two scarlet wings flying all abroad) with me on his arm, to deposit us at the Theatre to hear A. Stanley's lecture.'

Arthur Stanley was another old Cheshire friend and now Professor of Ecclesiastical History. She went on: 'I saw Matt Arnold who was getting ready for his inaugural poetry lecture.' Elizabeth was a friend of Arnold's mother, the widow of the famous Dr Arnold of Rugby.

In the morning a breakfast had been arranged at the Stanleys' house in the High Street where she met Dr Acland, Professor of Medicine, John Connington, Professor of Latin, Dr Brodie, Professor of Chemistry and Matthew Arnold again, together with the wives. She had to catch the 11.30 train to Devizes but all those present insisted that she and Meta should make another visit on their return journey and, in the time left, Stanley took them to Christ Church and 'into the meadows up to the Bridge at one end of the High St. Anything more lovely than that morning cannot be conceived - the beech-leaves lay golden brown on the broad path-way, the leaves on the elms were quite still, except when one yellower than the rest came floating down. The Colleges were marked out clearly against the blue sky and the beautiful broad shadows made the lighter portions of the buildings stand out clearly in the sunshine. Oh, I shall never forget Oxford ...'

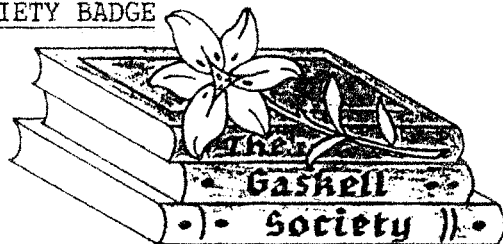
On her return journey, she spent three days with the Brodies, at their home, Cowley House, saw more of the University, heard Frederick Temple, newly appointed headmaster of Rugby, preach at St Mary's, was amazed at the lunch served to the students of New College, 'stewed eels, minced chicken, beef-steak with oyster sauce and College Pudding', saw the treasures of the Bodleian and the Pre-Raphaelite paintings at the Union. Back at home before Christmas she was once again 'desperately busy' but found time to write: 'I dearly like to call up in my mind pictures and thoughts of so utterly different a life to Manchester ...'.

The Gaskells and Brodies exchanged several visits over the years between 1857 and Mrs Gaskell's death in 1865. The Brodies' house was situated a matter of yards from the famously beautiful Magdalen Bridge, the official

entrance to academic Oxford, crossing the River Cherwell with its background of the Botanic Gardens and lawns leading to the equally famous Christ Church meadows mentioned by Mrs Gaskell. The house is now part of St Hilda's, one of the University Colleges which I found after considerable research in year books, street maps etc. I had the pleasure of visiting the College and was shown by the librarian the part of the College which was the Cowley House visited by Mrs Gaskell. I was particularly delighted to stand in the charming drawing-room which must be much as it was in her time with its huge French windows through which one could walk down wide steps to the gardens along the river and see across fields on the opposite side the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford.

In 1893 the house was sold to Miss Beale, one of the great Victorian figures in the education of women. It was named St Hilda's College as it is still today and celebrates its centenary in 1993 when a history of the College by one of the Fellows is to be published. I was fortunate that I was able to draw her attention to Mrs Gaskell's letters and the relevant material is to appear in the books, as well as the fine sketch of Mrs Gaskell which appears as the frontispiece to Winifred Gérin's biography. The house has now been vastly extended, but the house as Mrs Gaskell knew it is still quite distinctive with its Victorian decorative brickwork.

-----  
OUR SOCIETY BADGE



This MAY be available at Edinburgh, but will CERTAINLY be on hand for AGM and at the next South of England Branch meetings.

Otherwise £3.50 payable to "The Gaskell Society" will secure you one post free.

American and Japanese members will be supplied directly, please await further details.

BOOK NOTES

by Christine Lingard

ELIZABETH GASKELL by Jane Spencer, Macmillan, £9.50. 156pp.

The latest addition to Macmillan's series Women Writers whose coverage ranges from Fanny Burney to Margaret Atwood. Each volume consists of a short systematic critical analysis of the author in question and makes a good introduction to the subject for the beginner.

The biographical information is brief but stresses her relationship to her contemporaries and the problems she faced combining her role as mother and author in Victorian England. The influence of religion is also dealt with. Chapter two was previously published as Mary Barton and Thomas Carlyle in the Gaskell Society Journal, vol.2, 1988.

The rest of the book adopts a chronological approach and The Life of Charlotte Brontë is given equal treatment to the other major novels, but there is little mention of her short stories. The book is completed with copious notes and perceptive comments on critics. There is an extensive bibliography.

REWRITING THE VICTORIANS; THEORY, HISTORY AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER, edited by Linda Shires, Routledge, 1992. £10.99

This collection of essays is a rarity in that it contains an extremely scholarly treatment of My Lady Ludlow in the chapter The "female paternalist" as historian by Christine Krueger. She discusses why this novel has been comparatively neglected by critics and argues that time is ripe for feminist re-evaluation. It provides a link in the development of Gaskell's use of history between The Life and the major historical novel Sylvia's Lovers. The character of the eponymous narrator is re-assessed with full reference to a range of feminist and Marxist critics.

VERSATILE VICTORIAN; selected writings of George Henry Lewes; edited with introduction by Rosemary Ashton. Bristol Classical Press, 1992. £25

A modern edition of a selection of reviews by the Victorian critic now chiefly remembered for his relationship to George Eliot. Unlike his partner Lewes was known to Gaskell and she approached him for information during the writing of Life of Charlotte Brontë which the editor recounts in her introduction. Lewes' review Charlotte Brontë "Villette" and Mrs Gaskell "Ruth" appeared in Westminster Review of April 1853 and is reprinted here in full. It is highly appreciative -

'Ruth, then, besides being a beautiful novel, satisfies the highest moral sense by the pictures it suggests' though he objected to the intensity of grief which the child suffers on learning he is illegitimate.

-----  
SOUTH OF ENGLAND GROUP

Members have enjoyed stimulating and friendly meetings and hope to meet more of you at THE ANNUAL LONDON MEETING to which members of the Dickens Fellowship will be invited. This is on 6 November at Francis Holland School, 39 Graham Terrace, SW1W 8JF at 2.15 pm. Edward Preston, Secretary of The Dickens Fellowship, will speak on Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens.

PROGRAMME FOR 1994

Saturday 5 February, 2 pm at Francis Holland School. Hidemitsu Tohgo to speak. Subject to be arranged (he will let us know at Edinburgh)

Saturday 6 May, 2 pm at Francis Holland School.

Rev Ashley Hills: 'Mrs Gaskell's Unitarianism'

Saturday 3 September, 2 pm. Venue to be decided.

Elizabeth Hubbard: 'Mrs Gaskell and Adolescence'

Saturday 5 November

Annual London Meeting

For further details, please contact Dudley J Barlow, 44 Seymour Road, London SW18 5JA (081 874 7727)