

## LONDON AND SOUTH EAST GROUP

Meetings during 2001 are as follows:

**Saturday 12 May** "The right of translation is reserved": Mrs Gaskell and her overseas publishers' - Alan Shelston.

**Saturday 15 September** 'Maids of Honour' – Hill Slavid.

**Saturday 10 November** Speaker: Edward Preston.

All meetings will be held at Francis Holland School, 39 Graham Terrace, London SW1W 8JF and will commence at 2pm. The dates in September and November have still to be confirmed by the school, Francis Holland School is a few minutes walk from Sloane Square underground station (Circle and District lines). Anyone who wishes may meet at 12 noon at Sloane Square underground station for a light lunch at the Royal Court Tavern, also on Sloane Square, prior to the meetings. Those arriving later than 12 noon should proceed directly to the Royal Court Tavern.

At some date during the year Edward Preston has kindly agreed to lead a literary walk through London. Details will follow later in the year  
Dudley J Barlow.

**South West Group will meet in Bath on Saturday 7 April**

The speaker will be Professor John Chapple on : *The Pains and Pleasures of a Literary Editor*.

**Arnold Bennett Country Trip**

**On Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June there will be an outing to Burslem: the Bursley of Arnold Bennett in *The Card, The Old Wives Tale* etc**

Members of The Arnold Bennett Society will be our guides and there will be time to see the visitors' centre of Doulton Pottery. The coach will pick up in Knutsford and Macclesfield .

**WEEKEND CONFERENCE AT BATH SPA UNIVERSITY**

17-20 August.

LITERARY WOMEN: Friends and contemporaries of Elizabeth Gaskell.

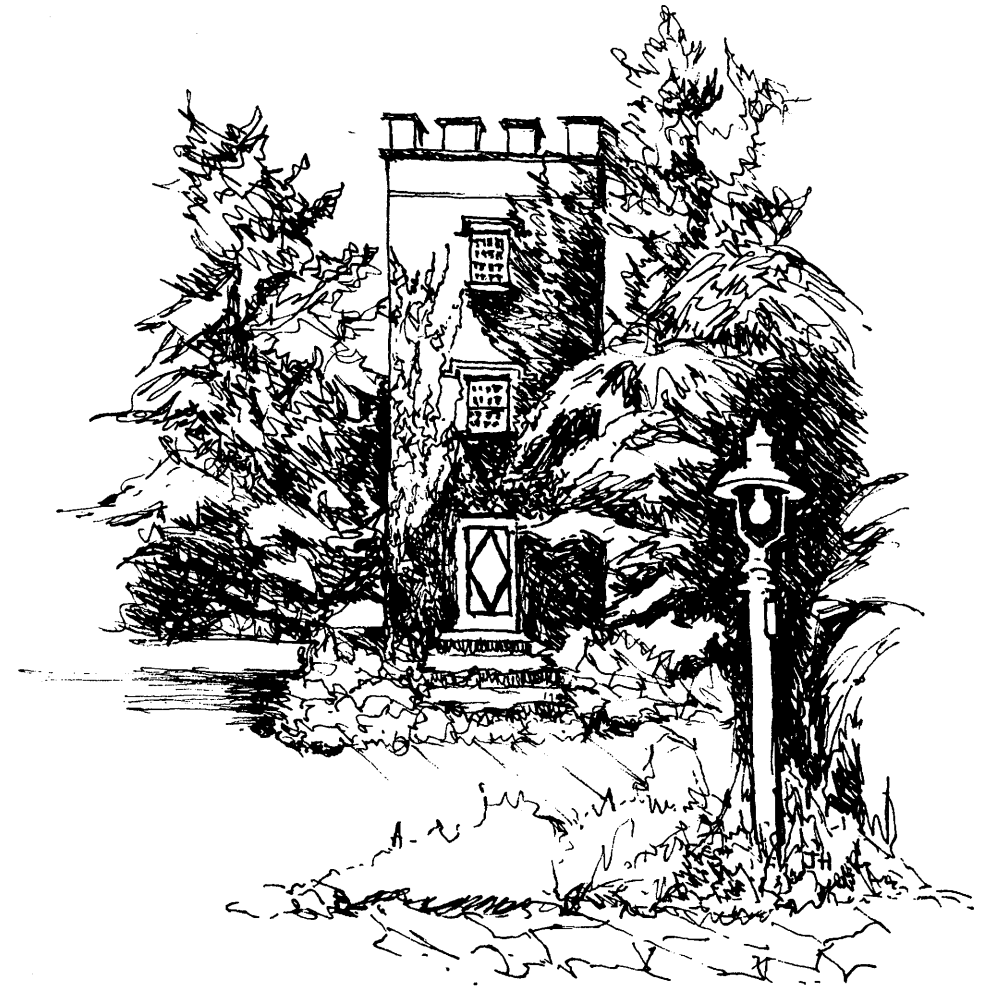
Full programme of lectures, visits etc

**AUTUMN MEETING AT KNUTSFORD 29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

**THE READING ROOM HONOURS ELIZABETH GASKELL**

The new public display in the great Round Reading Room within the British Museum features famous writers who have sat at the leather-covered desks under the great echoing dome. Among them was Elizabeth Gaskell, who obtained her Reader's ticket in 1860. All her books are on display with a brief introduction to her writing.

# The Gaskell Society



## NEWSLETTER

March 2001 - Number 31

## *Editor's Letter*

The rhythm of our Gaskell year has been changed by the decision to hold our AGM meeting in the Spring at Cross Street Chapel; this date relates more closely to our financial year and we hope members may find Manchester easier than Knutsford to reach from a distance. Our first general meeting was held at Cross Street in April 1986 and I am almost certain that Barbara Brill was there. We are saddened by her recent death and pay tribute to her in this Newsletter.

We are looking forward to the Conference at Bath , 17-20 August ,when we will be assisted by members of our South West branch. We already have over eighty members booked so if you wish to join us please do not delay in booking.

You will find future events listed towards the back of this newsletter. In Knutsford our monthly meetings from October to May are well supported and give much pleasure. There are also group meetings in Manchester, London/S.E and Bath/S/W . If you cannot get to these meetings you might think about planning meetings in your area with help from the Society. Our home page also lists dates of meetings and other information : [www.gaskellsociety@cw.net](http://www.gaskellsociety@cw.net)

In this Newsletter *The Gaskells , Popular Education and The Free Library Movement* is part of a paper read by Christine Lingard at a meeting in Manchester; a second part will follow in our next Newsletter. Professor Chapple traces for us some history of fairy stories and Professor Peter Skrine follows clues to a Punch pun with links to Catherine Winkworth .We welcome suggestions for talks at our future meetings, especially from prospective speakers; also items for the Newsletter.

Our trip to Rome in Gaskell footsteps will be either in spring or autumn 2002. Suggestions for group accommodation will be welcome.

**SUMMER ACADEMY** has a course at Manchester University  
16-23 June on ***Wives , Daughters and Literary Sisters***

This is a wide ranging programme including visits.

Details from Summer Academy , Keynes College, The University, Canterbury, KENT  
CT2 7NP

Joan Leach

# TRIBUTES TO BARBARA BRILL

## Janet Allan

Barbara Brill was over seventy when I first met her. Characteristically, when most people would be considering taking life easy, she was involved in the considerable task of writing the first (and only) biography of William Gaskell. This was published in 1984 by the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society to coincide with the centenary of William's death. She was one of the principal guests at the Royal George in 1985 on the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Elizabeth's death, and from then on was closely connected with our activities. Although she did not quite make her 90th birthday, I spoke to her a few days beforehand to discuss the lunch we were to hold in her honour. She had the same open, cheerful, kindly and intelligent approach that she had in 1984. We send our sympathy to all her family. She is much missed.

## Alan Shelston

One of the pleasures of editing the *Gaskell Society Journal* was that every year, a little time after the appearance of each new issue, one would receive a letter from Barbara expressing her appreciation of its contents. I say 'a little time' since she made sure that she had had time to read everything that had been included. In a similar way, I came to look forward to the Manchester and Knutsford meetings, when I could always be sure of renewing our acquaintance. Whenever I saw Barbara she was smiling: it is, in fact, the only image I have of her. That Barbara was a true scholar in her own right I discovered when we worked together on an article on the Gaskells' reading, as reflected in the Portico lending books, which appeared in an early number of the *Gaskell Society Journal* (Volume 5, 1991). Most of the work for that article was Barbara's but typically she insisted that it appear under our joint names. Her affectionate 'Portrait' of William Gaskell remains the best source of information about him. To my lasting regret she did not live to receive the copy of Mrs Gaskell's *Further Letters* which John Chapple and I were to inscribe for her. When we were putting the volume together I remember being moved by a message Mrs Gaskell sent to a bereaved friend: 'May we see the Light in God's Light, when that time comes.' It is a typical example of her optimistic uncertainty. Those words seem to me not inappropriate to the spirit in which Barbara lived her life, and I think we can fairly apply them to her passing.

## Irene Wiltshire

I was acquainted with Barbara Brill principally through the Portico Library where, just a few years ago, I heard her give a paper on Robert Louis Stevenson. I always found her to be a most charming and kindly lady, and so modest about her achievements. It was through a Portico mailing that I learnt the sad news, but I had for some time been aware of the part Barbara Brill played in the early years of the

Gaskell Society. The last time that I saw her was at the Society's AGM in September 2000. Even though she was full of years, few who saw her at that time would have been prepared for her death in November. The passing of Barbara Brill is a loss that is shared by all who knew her and by all who, like myself, were lucky enough to have met her.

## Joan Leach

Barbara Brill was a Gaskell devotee long before the Society was formed, in 1985, when she became an enthusiastic founder member. Her wide literary interests, research skills and ability to communicate her enthusiasm were evident from the very first Newsletter when she contributed an article on *Annie A(ustin) and Fleeming*. Barbara was always interested in personal relationships between writers and other creative people, and how they interacted. A long time enthusiasm for Robert Louis Stevenson brought to her notice Fleeming and Annie Jenkin who were also known to the Gaskells (Newletters 1 and 25)

In Newsletter 2 she described in *Job Legh and the working men naturalists* how her research into Victorian botanists coincided with her first reading of *Mary Barton*; drawing on her wide reading and research she adds much to our appreciation and understanding of Job Legh and his friends.

To a novice editor such as myself Barbara's thoughtful support was much appreciated; she would modestly tell me she was working on a line of research and offer it for the Newsletter, just at the right time and occasionally, when I had too little for an edition, she was able to supply material at short notice. You will all miss her contributions: who can replace her?

Many of us in the north and in London have enjoyed being *At Home with the Gaskells*. This was a script Barbara devised, mainly from Gaskell letters, for three readers. Barbara herself read a part when I first heard it, at the appropriate venue of Brook Street Chapel, at the inaugural meeting of the Society, 12 October 1985. Plymouth Grove Gaskell house and The National Portrait Gallery, the Portico and many other venues have also hosted readings. Only last year the text was published in book form by Teamband making it available for all to read.

Recently found letters from Kipling have been in the news and my first thought was, 'Barbara would be interested in that'. I know I am not alone in regretting her passing but having fond memories to keep.

**Editor's Note:** Barbara Brill's contributions to Newsletters are in Nos. 1,2, 4, 6,12,13,15, 22, 25, 28 and 29

# THE GASKELLS, POPULAR EDUCATION & THE FREE LIBRARY MOVEMENT

Christine Lingard

Elizabeth Gaskell came to Manchester on her marriage in September 1832, the year of the Great Reform Bill. Hers was a time of change, nowhere more so than in the field of education. The working class was developing a thirst for knowledge and reading ceased to be the preserve of the upper classes. In Manchester she was witness to the birth of one of the most significant but unsung forces in this revolution - the Free Library movement.

A regular supply of books was essential to her, but she was definitely a borrower not a buyer. 'I can't get the last of hers in Manchester anywhere unless by purchase' she moaned when she couldn't get the latest title. Libraries were a solution. For her this meant the Portico where her husband became President in 1849, but a subscription was necessary for the loan of books. Shares in 1836 were £12 and the annual subscription £2 10s. Membership was restricted to men so she was forced to rely on her husband for the latest title. Even so she found British libraries superior to those abroad. 'They got dingy books from the Caen circulating library, and had no other books, I fancy. No wonder they hate living abroad.' She tried to find out if Mudie's circulating library had any intention of opening a branch in Paris so her friends could get English books more easily. Other Manchester libraries were the Athenaeum, Exchange and Foreign Library (St Ann's Sq). The first commercial Circulating Library opened in Ducie Place in 1765. Shares were ten guineas and the annual subscription 20s - beyond the means of most.

Provision of working class libraries up to then was haphazard. There had been several attempts to provide them over the decades. It could be argued that Chetham's Library, Manchester was an early example but the stock was learned and its appeal limited. Enlightened benefactors had founded libraries in individual localities. Rev Thomas Bray of St Botolph's (City of London) founded a network of 80 parish libraries here and in Maryland at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Out of this grew the SPCK. In 1787 Rev. William Turner established a library of 197 books in the vestry of Hanover St church, Newcastle. Though not confined to religious topics books were moral or philosophical e.g. Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and Clarkson's *Abolition of Slavery*. James Darbishire endowed a library in Dob Lane chapel, Failsworth where her father was once preacher. From 1803 Sunday School libraries played a leading part in disseminating books.

Mechanics Institutes were the next development. This is a vague umbrella term encompassing a wide range of institutions and it is impossible to generalise. Each was independent of the rest. Ideally they would have a library, museum, laboratory and would have space for public lectures, all under one roof, though it would be difficult to find many that offered everything. They differed in their constitutions, aims and activities, offering tuition in a variety of general subjects, such as phrenology, rather than vocational courses. Some were workers' co-operatives, others relied on patronage and the availability to women also varied from complete exclusion to active encouragement. Some found it useful to admit them for music and dancing. In Manchester in 1839 women constituted a fifth of the total audience at lectures. Not all Institutes were successful and by the 1860s most had been replaced by local authority colleges or eventually merged into more learned institutions. Manchester's became UMIST. Others sank without trace.

Libraries were an important part of the provision of the Mechanics Institutes. Access was sometimes restricted to full members – sometimes a subscription to the library alone was possible. Some had a reduced rate for women. The Brontë sisters walked four miles to borrow from the Keighley Institute where the librarian was a Miss Frances Mary Richardson Currer, suggestive of Charlotte's pseudonym Currer Bell.

The institutes are believed to have developed indirectly from the lectures given by George Birkbeck in Glasgow early in the century. The Glasgow Institute, which is generally regarded as the first, (though this is disputed) opened in 1823 with 1,000 members. William Gaskell was at University there (1820-5) so he would have witnessed events first hand. The Rev. Turner, with whom Elizabeth stayed prior to her marriage, was Vice-President of the Newcastle Institute in 1829. The Manchester Institute was founded at the Bridgewater Arms on 7th April 1824 by William Fairbairn the engineer and two others, and it opened in Cooper Street the following year and moving to Princess St. premises in 1853. Patrons included Joseph Brotherton (1783-1857), recently retired from the cotton trade in Salford and the banker Benjamin Heywood. At least a third of the first committee, including Heywood and Fairbairn, were Unitarians. Other Presidents or Vice-Presidents included Lord Francis Egerton, Richard Cobden, Mark Philips, MP John Dalton, the chemist, Rev John Robberds of Cross St. and various Schuncks and Schwabes. The list reads like a Gaskell dinner party – all were known to the couple personally.

This description is taken from James Wheeler's *History of Manchester* 1836:

A main public object of the Institution has been the delivery of courses of lectures, for which purposes there is an excellent and spacious theatre. There is also a useful and valuable library of 3595 volumes, which is greatly resorted to. All works are now admitted by vote of the Directors, but the great part of the existing library consists of donations. Attached to the library is a reading

room at which all the leading English and Foreign periodicals are taken. The institution is principally active in privately educating its operative members who by attending "evening classes" may be instructed in English grammar, writing, arithmetic, French, Latin, algebra, geometry, figure and flower drawing, gymnasia and vocal music. It has been remarked that though the payment is only 20s a year or about 4s 6d a week the annual subscribers are not composed of those classes for whom such Institutions were originally designed.

He was referring to the fact that only a third of members were mechanics. The rest were merchants, shopkeepers, clerks, schoolteachers, artists, ladies etc. for even these prices were too high. The Institutes were seen as fulfilling a social as well as an educational need. Heywood also provided a branch at Miles Platting in 1836 and said it had 'in an evening a blazing fire, red curtains, easy chairs, a capital cup of coffee, chess, pictures, to see if we can make it a match for the public houses.'

William Gaskell was a keen supporter. He lectured regularly not on religious subjects but on literature and his wife encouraged him greatly in this:

My husband has lately been giving four lectures to the very poorest of the workers in the very poorest district of Manchester, Miles Platting, on 'The Poets and Poetry of Humble Life'. You cannot think how well they have been attended, or how interested people have seemed. And the day before yesterday two deputations of respectable looking men waited on him to ask him to repeat these lectures in two different parts of the town. He is going on with four more in the winter, and meanwhile we are picking up all the 'Poets of Humble Life' we can think of. [GL12 Mary Howitt 1838]

He has 2 deputations today to ask him to repeat his lectures – one from the Teachers of the Sunday School & Senior Scholars – the other from the Salford Mechanics institution. Neither of them pay, which is a pity – but if the Manchester M. institution come – shan't they pay for all. [GL11 to Elizabeth Gaskell]

Unfortunately the text of the lectures has not survived. Perhaps they were similar to one he gave on Crabbe in Eccles in 1872, reported in the press as being very thorough and detailed. He is also known to have spoken on Burns and Hood. He continued his interest with the Frederick Maurice's Working Men's College in the 1850s.

Gaskell mentions the Mechanics in *Mary Barton* in the following speech by Margaret Jennings:

I will tell you all and about it. You see there's a gentleman lecturing on

music at th'Mechanics and he wants folks to sing his songs. Well, last night th'counter got a sore throat and couldn't make a note. So they sent for me. Jacob Butterworth has said a good word for me, and they asked me would I sing? So I'm to sing again o'Thursday: and I got a sovereign last night, and am to have half-a-sovereign every night th'lecturer is at t'Mechanics.

The experiences of Samuel Bamford, the weaver poet, whom Gaskell knew in old age, provide further illustration. Born in Middleton in 1788 he learned to write at the Methodist Sunday School then got a scholarship to the local grammar school. In between his political activities (he was imprisoned for his part in the Peterloo riots) he made his living in the silk industry. In 1813 a subscription library had been opened but as the membership was 20s and 10s for mechanics, it didn't last long and Bamford helped to found a Mechanics' Institution in 1825. They collected what books they could and opened a room once a week gratis. Yet even this was not a success and it failed according to Bamford because of the disruptive activities of Chartists.

Perhaps this is similar to what happened in Failsworth where Ben Brierley (aged 16), the future dialect poet helped found a Mutual Improvement Society in his local Sunday school. Activities included amateur theatricals. It was closed in 1845 when the evangelical vicar objected to both the theatricals and the Chartist activities of members. They resolved to reform and during the night plied the watchman with drink and removed floorboards from a room above to enter the schoolroom. They held classes in secret till arrested. Brierley was charged with libelling a local mill-owner but was let off with an apology.

**To be continued**

*'PECCAVI'*

**Peter Skrine**

Many of you will have noticed the name of Catherine Winkworth in The Sunday Telegraph recently. It all began with the furore over the statues in Trafalgar Square. Ian Hislop, the journalist, stoutly defended General Napier's right to be there, but did so on rather shaky ground. Sir Charles Napier (1782-1853), a friend of Byron, made a name for himself as an enlightened and humane administrator in the Ionian Islands of Captain Corelli fame, and in the Indian province of Sind (now in Pakistan), his military annexation of which in 1843 he described as a 'very advantageous,

useful, humane piece of rascality'. Wellington admired him, and he was appointed commander-in-chief in India despite the East India Company's objections. As Roger Ellis tell us in his *Who's Who in Victorian Britain* (1997), there was no mourning for him amongst the evangelicals or the men of commerce, which was hardly surprising: among the many causes he championed was the plight of the broadloom weavers in Lancashire. 'Hell,' he said, 'may be paved with good intentions, but it is assuredly hung with Manchester cottons.' Though Mrs Gaskell only mentions his naval cousin, indirectly, in her letters, she must have been well aware of his existence.

But what did the Gaskells' young protégée, Catherine Winkworth, have to do with all this? According to Ian Hislop's follow-up in *The Sunday Telegraph* of 26 November 2000, it was she who made up the ingenious one-word intralingual pun Napier is said to have devised to communicate his victory to the world outside, 'peccavi' being Latin for 'I have sinned'.

This is not the first time this amusing controversy has arisen. Tucked into a file of Winkworth autograph letters in my possession is an old, undated cutting addressed to the Editor of *The Daily Telegraph* by Sir Patrick Cadell of Boar's Hill, Oxford. It supports the view that Sir Charles Napier never sent the message, and states that the original joke, which appeared in *Punch* in August, 1843, immediately after the capture of Sind, 'is believed to have been sent to *Punch* by Catherine Winkworth, then a girl of 14' whereas in Hislop's version 'the *bon mot* was actually coined by a 16-year-old schoolgirl,' Catherine Winkworth, who sent it to *Punch* in 1844, a year after the great victory. It is biographical fact that she was born on 13 September 1827. We also have her own word for it that she started to learn German with Mr Gaskell in August 1843, but she doesn't mention Latin lessons with him. Of 'peccavi' there is not trace in her sister Susanna's *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth*, privately printed in Clifton in 1883. According to Hislop, the archivists at the *Punch* library led him to an editorial note by a Mrs C. Mackintosh in the October number of a magazine called *East and West* for 1907, in which this lady stated that the pun was made up by Catherine Winkworth, her cousin. But there is no Mackintosh in the Winkworth family tree. The whole *canard*, Mrs Gaskell might say, is 'curious if true'.

**The Gaskell Memorial Tower** is a very visible reminder to all, and especially to visitors, of Elizabeth Gaskell's associations with Knutsford. It is a unique building and the focal point of King Street. The accompanying illustrations are from Ellis Chadwick's *Mrs Gaskell: Haunts, Homes and Stories* (1910 edition) On the side of the tower there is a bronze bas relief of the author ( more of this in our next Newsletter) and above it is a list of her works which , strangely, does not include *Wives and Daughters*; as this list is in chronological order and there is a space at the bottom, we propose that the Society should make arrangements to have it added. It is included in the list noted by Ellis Chadwick which is otherwise



correct and in Watt's list for the mason, though this includes many more works for which there was not space. We are now in consultation with the local conservation officer about this project.

## CHARLES PERRAULT, MADAME D'AULNOY, AND 'CURIOUS, IF TRUE'

John Chapple

Cinderella, The Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, Bluebeard and Puss in Boots are very familiar titles. All five tales were introduced to the literary world by a brilliant French stylist, Charles Perrault, in his *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* in 1697. Elizabeth Gaskell remodelled them in 'Curious, if True' (1860), together with Perrault's Little Thumb, who is given his French name, *Poucet*. Elsewhere she alludes to the other two prose tales in Perrault's collection - *Les Fées* (The Fairies) and *Riquet à la houppe* (Riquet with the Tuft). Philip Yarrow

picked up brief allusions to the former (words issuing as pearls and diamonds from the mouth of the queen's younger daughter) both in *Mary Barton* (1848) and in *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66). *Riquet* is briefly mentioned in *Ruth* (1853), as we learn from Professor Yarrow's very useful note in the *Gaskell Society Journal* 7 (1993), p. 35.

Apart from the Perrault stories, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The White Cat* occur in 'Curious, if True'. Many literary versions of *Beauty and the Beast* are known. They rate a separate entry in the *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (ed. Jack Zipes, 2000), which asserts that Madame Leprince de Beaumont's sophisticated, didactic version of 1757 for young people 'has become canonical in the modern world.' *The White Cat*, however, by Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, baronne d'Aulnoy, printed in her *Les Contes des fées* (1697-8), is barely mentioned in the *Oxford Companion* under d'Aulnoy.

Nor does Gaskell say a great deal in 'Curious, if True' about the 'delicate, fair woman, dressed all in the softest white', Madame de Mioumiou, though she is neatly characterised by her 'little noise of pleasure', reminiscent of both 'the singing of a teakettle' and 'the cooing of a dove', and her likeness to Puss in Boots when rats and mice were heard scuttering behind the tapestry. In chapter 37 of *Wives and Daughters* we find that Mrs Gibson's 'cat-like nature purred and delighted in smooth ways, and pleasant quietness.'

The English translations of these stories (Perrault's often called *Tales of Mother Goose* and d'Aulnoy's *Tales of Mother Bunch*) are probably not very relevant. They were altered, censored and softened by translators like J.R. Planché in 1855, and in any case Gaskell could read the French originals. 'Company Manners' (1854) is especially rich in its allusions, associated with the *salon* figure of Madame de Sablé:

I can fancy her stewing sweetbreads in a silver saucepan, or dressing salad with her delicate, plump, white hands - not that I ever saw a silver saucepan. I was formerly ignorant enough to think that they were only used in the Sleeping Beauty's kitchen, or in the preparations for the marriage of Riquet-with-the-Tuft; but I have been assured that there are such things, and that they impart a most delicate flavour, or no flavour, to the victuals cooked therein; so I assert again, Madame de Sablé cooked sweetbreads for her friends in a silver saucepan; but never to fatigue herself with those previous labours. ... The perfection of waiting is named in the story of the White Cat, where, if you remember, the hero prince is waited upon by hands without bodies, as he sits

at table with the White Cat, and is served with that delicate fricassee of mice. By hands without bodies I am very far from meaning hands without heads. ... And, now I think of it, Madame de Sablé must have taken the White Cat for her model; there must evidently have been the same noiseless ease and grace about the movements of both; the same purring, happy, inarticulate moments of satisfaction, when surrounded by pleasant circumstances, must have been uttered by both. My own mouth has watered before now at the account of that fricassee of mice prepared especially for the White Cat; and M. Cousin alludes more than once to Madame de Sablé's love for 'friandises.' Madame de Sablé avoided the society of literary women, and so, I am sure, did the White Cat. Both had an instinctive sense of what was comfortable; both loved home with tenacious affection; and yet I am mistaken if each had not their own little private love of adventure - touches of the gypsy.

Though d'Aulnoy's hero prince was offered a choice of two *bisques*, one of young pigeons and the other of very fat mice, rather than a simple, delicate fricassee of mice, it seems possible that Gaskell was inspired to write her story, 'Curious, if True', by her recollection of d'Aulnoy's humorous yet imaginative recreations of folk stories. Perrault's stories are beautifully told and Gaskell has captured his irony and light cynicism. However, d'Aulnoy's longer narrative is quaintly whimsical and realistically knowing, wonderfully rococo in its proliferating details. There is the little orchestra of cats playing guitars with their claws, yowling in different tones and grimacing madly, or the cats and monkeys dressed as Moors and Chinese dancing a ballet. *La Chatte blanche* went hunting baby eagles on a splendid monkey whilst the prince decorously rode a child's wooden horse. She composed passionate verses and songs, all carefully preserved, but which cannot now be read because of the execrable writing of her secretary, an old cat. The flow of invention seems inexhaustible.

In the introduction to the tercentenary edition of d'Aulnoy's *Contes des Fées* (Paris 1997), Jacques Barchilon underlines their fantastic and marvellous nature. Marina Warner, in her comprehensive and learned study, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1994), is illuminating on the subject of d'Aulnoy's transformed heroines, empowered by their animal disguises 'to enter a new territory of choice and speech'; their apparent degradation works for rather than against them. But it is what Barchilon tells us of Madame d'Aulnoy that awakens powerful echoes in the mind of a biographer. We are informed that not much is known of her childhood, and that there are 'zones d'ombre sur plusieurs périodes de son existence.' Her life was very problematic (*both femme fatale and salonnière*, it appears), but apart from this, she was the mother of four surviving daughters, travelled widely and achieved literary success in Paris at about the age of forty.

Her nature was lively and playful. She could write her tales in the midst of noise and visitors. She loved telling stories, possessing a fertile imagination and a quite unstudious attitude to writing. She died in 1705, when she was about fifty-five years of age. It all sounds rather familiar.

#### Editor's Note.

Newsletter 26 has an article by Irene Wiltshire: 'CURIOUS IF TRUE':LE PETIT POUCKET AND TOM THUMB. A case of mistaken identity?

## BOOK NOTES

### Christine Lingard

Longman have reissued Michael Wheeler's *English fiction of the Victorian period, 1830-1890*, first published in 1985 and extensively revised in 1994, (£20.99). This is a standard work with excellent appendices, proving to be a comprehensive reference tool for information on a large number of authors, alphabetically arranged.

Two other books to look out for: *The Brontë Myth* by Lucasta Miller. Cape (£15.99). Just published and favourably reviewed in the press, this book analyses the treatment of the Brontës from Gaskell to the present day.

There is a new Everyman edition of *Ruth* edited by Nancy Henry and Graham Handley (£5.99). The back cover states: 'The most comprehensive edition available, with introduction, notes, selected criticism, further reading, text summary and a chronology of Elizabeth Gaskell's life and times'.

*Ruth* is also now available on tape from Stirling Audio of Bath (£56.35) read by Eve Matheson.

*North and South* is published in Wordsworth Classics (£1.50) with an introduction

#### Request for research help

I am looking to trace the provenance of a painting which may relate to Mrs Gaskell. I would like a couple of volunteers to do a few hours research in the County Records Departments which relate to Tilford in Surrey and Steepleton in Dorset. It is possible

that I might need someone near Preston, Lancs. to help at a later stage. If you think you may be able help and would like further details, please contact me at: Ruth@scibydes.fsnet.co.uk or phone 0115 921 4411.

Liz Rye

## ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES REPORT

Committee member Kenn Ultram represented The Society at the ALS meeting in Birmingham on 17th February.

The secretary announced a membership now totalling over 100 societies. All are invited to send representatives to the AGM on 28th April.

Nominations have been received from the writer Susan Hill for the position of president and from Nicholas Reed (Edith Nesbit Society) for the position of chairman. Societies that have applied to host future AGMs include Arnold Bennett (2002), Dylan Thomas (2003), Graham Greene (2004) and the Marlow Society (2005).

A sub committee was appointed to formulate the subject and rules for a national essay competition which, it is hoped, will be launched later this year.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### AGM MEETING

**At Cross Street Chapel, Manchester on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April**

10.30 Coffee                      11.00 AGM

followed by The Daphne Carrick lecture by Dr Josie Billington :

*Wives and Daughters: From Screen to Page* (or what only the Novel Can Do)

Lunch

2.15 Lecture by Dr Joanne Shattock:

Biographies of Victorian Women Writers and how they influence our reading

Meeting closes about 3.45/4.00pm

## ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES AGM

This is to be held in Ledbury on **Saturday 28th April** and will be hosted by The Friends of The Dymock Poets ( Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater, Wilfred Gibson, and Lascelles Abercrombie). All previous AGM's have been held in Birmingham so it is hoped that members from affiliated societies will support this new venture which has an attractive venue and well planned programme. Tickets are £3 each: please apply to Joan Leach for booking details (SAE) or read more on our home page <http://www.gaskellsociety.cwc.net>