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# For the benefit of others: Harriet Martineau: feminist, abolitionist and travel writer

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# FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS: HARRIET MARTINEAU:

# FEMINIST, ABOLITIONIST AND TRAVEL WRITER

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ABSTRACT

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One of the distinctive and remarkable traits of Harriet Martineau was her need to publish information that she believed would benefit society. Her publications - *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838) - have the distinct characteristic of being published with the intent to inform and educate the British public. Scholars have focused on her later 1848 publication, *Eastern Life: Present and Past*, as her most important publication. Yet I will argue that it was her earlier works which set the stage for this later, better known book. Her travel to the United States in 1834 to 1836 showed her the moral problems with slavery, although her anti-slavery beliefs had already been published in 1832.

The writings of Harriet Martineau must also be viewed as crucial to the rise of women in the Victorian public sphere. Martineau's ability to travel to the United States as well as the Middle-East gave her writings a sense of power and authority with the British public. As Martineau's work rose to prominence, the place of women in the slavery debate changed as well. Women no longer worked only as behind-the-scenes activists, but also formed their own Anti-Slavery societies and published pamphlets and periodicals.

It will be shown that Harriet Martineau could be considered a radical in Victorian society, although she worked within the confines of roles acceptable for women of Britain. She was a woman who traveled with the intent to understand a society different from her own and chose to take a public stand on an institution she deemed an abomination. Through her earlier writings, which are rarely discussed by scholars, one can understand the beliefs she held and published throughout her life.

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Most important, this project is dedicated to Mom and Dad, who always told me this paper would see the light of day and stood by me through all of its challenges, setbacks and accomplishments. For always offering me unwavering and unconditional support and love and telling me that any dream was achievable, there are not words to express my gratitude. For all of this and more I dedicate *For the Benefit of Others* to them with a promise that they now will have a dining room table that will function as dining table instead of a research desk. All my love.

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# CHAPTER ONE:

# INTRODUCTION

Born into a middle-class manufacturing family in the city of Norwich, east of London, in June, 1802, Harriet Martineau led a remarkable life. Some scholars reference her as a radical Victorian or a woman before her time, in a moment when women were seen as behind-the-scene activists on issues such as women's rights and abolition. Harriet Martineau stood at the forefront of many Victorian debates.

She has been understood mostly as a feminist writer, who focused her life's works on speaking out for increasing the rights of women, particularly for extending education to girls. Yet there is more to Martineau's publications and attitudes than only women's rights. Opening the discussion of Martineau to include her Unitarian writings as well as her anti-slavery and travel writings, offers a more complex picture of this Victorian woman. By excluding these numerous writings[1] from the histories of Martineau and her feminism, historians have overlooked critical incidents that had an impact in her later more popular feminist writings. Several historians start their stories of Martineau with her 1848 travels to the Middle-East without any reference to earlier travels to America in 1834 to 1836. In doing so, these scholars have left out a critical piece to the evolution of Martineau's writings and influences.

These opportunities for travel in Martineau's life allowed her to confront her understandings of slavery and women's rights in a direct way. She described slavery with her own eyes and discussed her own perceptions of the institution while she traveled

[1] These writings include *Society in America*, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, "The Martyr Age in America," and various other articles she wrote in opposition to slavery from the 1830s through the 1860s.

throughout the United States. Her ability to travel and witness slavery afforded her more authority and power within the slavery debate once she returned to Britain.

Martineau was a woman who wrote about issues she believed were crucial in nineteenth-century British society. She stepped outside the normal role of a woman in the nineteenth century to write about abolition, economics, politics and feminism. Her writing did not follow the usual path for women of this time which largely involved fiction writing. Instead, she merged fiction writing with economic and religious issues.

There were many issues and people throughout Martineau's life who impacted her attitudes and opinions on various topics. One of the most influential aspects of Martineau's life was her connection to the Unitarian faith. Unitarianism was defined by a group of Methodist dissenters who tended to be liberal-minded and "were energetic leaders of provincial enlightenment in science and education."[2] They were also know for being active in many of the radical reforms of the period, including the Reform Bill of 1832, the Abolitionist Act of 1833 and the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 among others. Martineau was raised in this world of liberal and radical thoughts and ideas, so it would only be natural for those ideas to be seen in her writings.[3]

Her most famous works are all informative pieces on popular issues. As much as Martineau was a woman before her time, she was also a woman of her time. She wanted the public to understand the problems of slavery, and she sought to ensure they did by writing about what she had seen while she was in the United States as it coincided with her already strong abolitionist sentiments.

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[2] Christopher Harvie and H.C.G. Matthew, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford, University Press, 2000, 19.
[3] For more information on Unitarianism, see: Earl Morse Wilber, *A History of Unitarianism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Martineau used concerns over social and political injustice during the nineteenth century to fuel her own arguments. She was able to write in a fashion that ensured both aristocrats and the literate masses were able to comprehend her work. Martineau's great hope was that her writing would be read and understood by the general reading public. If a publication failed to reach her target audience she considered the work a failure. Yet, the popularity of Martineau's works,[4] specifically *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), *Society in America* (1837), *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), and *Eastern Life: Present and Past* (1848) reveal that even during the nineteenth century Martineau's works were influential. Her works hold clues to understanding nineteenth-century perceptions and reactions to abolition, slavery and women. They also help us understand the role of the woman writer in such debates. Martineau wrote countless works, which would take a lifetime to read and fully comprehend, yet her publications on the United States have never gained the full recognition they deserve.

It must be noted though that Martineau was an experienced authoress, even as early as her 1832 publications. She knew her audience as the general British public and wanted them to take her writing seriously. Knowing this, we must not take her writings at face value. They must be acknowledged as a device for Martineau to gain credibility among other writers of the period as well as a device for gaining authority among her audience.

By setting *Illustrations of Political Economy* as a series of short stories, Martineau is able to gain authority as a writer of political economy from a group who

[4] According to Martineau's *Autobiography*, which must be read cautiously illustrates that *Illustrations of Political Economy*'s first edition sold nearly five-thousand copies, and *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* were published in London, New York and Paris. See: Martineau, *Autobiography*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1877, 135 and 405.

previously had read very little on economics. Particularly, Martineau's *Autobiography*, is the best example of her writerly persona. She writes it in a fashion that one believes she is entirely sincere and yet it must be remembered that Martineau knew *Autobiography* would be published. That does not mean Martineau is not sincere in what she writes, on the contrary I think she is brutally honest in her descriptions of traveling and her experiences with slavery. Nonetheless, there is a hidden agenda in Martineau's own admissions that she had "no knowledge of any American book."[5] At heart, Martineau was an author who found it her duty to write.

## The Complex World of Martineau's Publications

This project begins by taking the reader through the female abolitionist movement, examining various ways women were able to become involved in the debates against slavery. Nineteenth-century women had few outlets to participate in the anti-slavery movements in the 1820s and 1830s, yet their power and influence cannot be underestimated. They created their own pamphlets and anti-slavery associations and tried to step outside the domestic sphere and take a stand often separate from the opinions and attitudes of their husbands, fathers and brothers. Martineau was not an average woman, who tried to abolish slavery by refusing to serve sugar or abstaining from buying slave-produced materials; she was one of the more radical women who participated in the Female Anti-Slavery societies. By traveling to the United States and clearly discussing what she observed, she was able to influence other women to join the movement.

Through many biographers of Martineau who trace her anti-slavery beliefs to her trip to America, she first spoke publicly against slavery two years earlier, with the

[5] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 330.

publication of "Demerara," a section of her larger *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832). In "Demerara" Martineau used a feminized form of literature, the short story, to discuss the economic problems of slavery. In this publication Martineau used the principles of political economy to argue against slavery, which laid the foundation for Martineau's American travels.

Once Martineau arrived on the shores of America and witnessed slavery for herself, her perceptions of slavery changed. She saw slavery as not only an economic problem, but also a moral problem. And through these observations Martineau's opinion shifted from an economic viewpoint against slavery to a more social, political and moral argument. Her publications in regards to America - *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* - give a clear insight into Martineau's beliefs on slavery and the sights she observed within the United States.

Her travels to America defined her writings later in life. It would be incorrect to judge her publications on the United States, particularly the observations made about slavery, without first discussing her earlier anti-slavery opinions that formed years before she left for America. *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* illustrate how Martineau redefined her abolitionist stance through her journey in the United States and showed how the treatment and oppression of slaves she came in contact with influenced the shift in her views. Those who have examined Martineau in her later Middle-Eastern and feminist writings have not read these experiences as crucial in shaping her work as an activist and writer.[6] This thesis takes seriously the notion that Martineau's works were

[6] These writers include Billie Melman, Nancy Stockdale, Maria Frawley and Deirdre David, who have discussed Martineau's later Middle-Eastern writings without much reference to her earlier American and slavery publications.

constantly influenced by the experiences and observations that she had made during her travels to both the United States and later, the Middle East.

## The Status of Women in the Nineteenth Century

The role of women shifted in the nineteenth century as some stepped out of the domestic roles and began to participate in acceptable public activities. According to Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's influential *Family Fortunes,* the theory of public and private spheres was an illustrative way to show how women stepped out of strictly domestic duties and into public life through activism, writing and charity.

Middle-class women of the early nineteenth century lived in the private sphere of society, a world that was confined to the home, family and domesticity. "A masculine penumbra surrounded that which was defined as public while women increasingly engulfed by the private realm, bounded by physical, social and psychic partitions."[7] Women could participate in the family business but could hold no land of their own or maintain the business in the death of their husbands, although women were direct contributors financially to their family's enterprise.[8]

Yet as the century progressed women gradually found ways to participate in the public sphere that would not endanger their gender identity or class status. K.D. Reynolds argues though, that "middle-class women were not debarred from 'public' activity (particularly those activities which stemmed from charity) but engaging in work, however genteel, endangered their social position, and political or campaigning activity

[7] Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. London: Routledge Press, 1987, 319.
[8] Ibid, 279.

threatened their identity as a womanly woman."[9] In order for middle-class women to maintain their identity and status, they needed to be aware of the activities in which they participated. This is one reason why many women who engaged in the campaign to expand female rights or the anti-slavery campaign did so behind the scenes. Husbands and fathers refused to see their wives and daughters parading around London fighting for a cause.

If women did want to participate in political campaigns, one avenue was to use their role as domestic consumers, "express[ing] political affiliation by selective trading."[10] Women could choose specific foods and 'brands' to bring home to their families. The most prominent example of this type of political activity was during the slave-trade debate in the late eighteenth century, when women refused to purchase slave-grown sugar. The abstention campaign involved almost exclusively middle-class women, who were the ones buying food for their families. These women instead paid a higher price for free-grown sugar, with the hope of swaying Parliament to abolish the slave trade. Working-class women could not afford the luxury of paying a high price for free-grown products, and the aristocratic women did not tend to be the ones purchasing their family's food. Middle-class women continued this type of political activity throughout the later American slavery debate in the 1860s, choosing to purchase products that were not produced in the American South.

While still working behind the scenes, aristocratic women could also play a more active role in the anti-slavery campaign. "Virtually all aristocratic women were engaged to some degree in activities – such as entertaining political connections, exercising

[9] K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 16.
[10] Davidoff, 448.

patronage, guarding political confidences, and offering advice – which was the particular specialty of the political hostess."[11] Aristocratic women were able to entertain the policy makers of Britain and offer advice in regards to various campaigns in which they were quietly involved. It is in this manner that women of varying social positions were able to involve themselves in different campaigns and issues.

The mid and late nineteenth century brought on a shifting role for women in British society. The rise of a women's press brought many of these women out of the shadows of their male family members and allowed them to announce their own political affiliations and opinions on political, economic and social issues. As Michelle Tusan notes, "the women's press brought women into the public life."[12] Women began to join and participate in these various presses, giving them a stable income that made them independent of their husbands and also allowed them to have their own public roles. Female Anti-Slavery societies allowed women similar freedoms as female journalists, which will be discussed more in Chapter Two. Nonetheless, the rise of female journalism cannot be underestimated as a way for women to have their own roles within public life.

Harriet Martineau maintained many political connections throughout her life, both in the United States and in Britain. And although she considered herself middle-class, Martineau's publications put her in elite social circles. She seems to have taken on a political role unusual for a woman of her class thanks to the popularity of her many books and series.

Martineau became an active political advocate in a time when women were just starting to explore these possibilities. Although she was primarily known for her later

[11] Reynolds, 156.
[12] Michelle Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005, 26.

nonfiction publications, earlier in her life, Martineau used fiction in order to publish topics that were not usually in a female repertoire. Her writings gained and gave her a great deal of authority and power, particularly among high-ranking Members of Parliament. Yet her success must also be attributed to the rising power of women in the nineteenth century, without which Martineau may never have been permitted to publish her famous works.

## Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing

Nineteenth-century women had opportunities to travel throughout the British Empire, including India, Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East.[13] The middle-class female traveler was a new kind of woman in the nineteenth century. The rise of expendable wealth and a changing understanding of a woman's place in society allowed them to step out of purely domestic roles. For Martineau, travel to the United States and the Middle East helped define her career as a writer and an activist.

Billie Melman is one of the scholars at the forefront of the scholarship, positioning women as pivotal voyagers. Her book *Women's Orients* discusses the way gender and class impacted the perceptions and views of women's travel experiences. Melman argues that the changing role of woman created a new type of empowered traveler. These women brought their own attitudes and ideas on their expeditions through the British Empire. According to Melman, travel became a status symbol and a means of

[13] For literature on British travel to the Caribbean see: Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. For literature on India see: Pallavi Pandit Laisram, *Viewing the Islamic Orient: British Travel Writers of the Nineteenth Century*. London: Routledge Press, 2006. And for African travel literature start with: Richard Price, *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth Century Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Any of these books would be a good starting point for a discussion of travel in other areas of the British Empire.

social mobility.[14] By traveling abroad these middle-class women were giving themselves more power and authority within British society.

In general, women saw travel as an emancipatory activity.[15] As women, they had access to various aspects of native societies to which men did not go. Women travelers to the Middle East had the chance to witness the harems in various cities such as Cairo and Damascus. In travelogues by male travelers, the harem was off limits and was an aspect of society that only women had the opportunity to see.[16] The growth in demand for travel books during the Victorian period opened the door for the woman travel writer: "Travel literature became the bread-and-butter of both the periodical presses and book publishing industry, and often replaced religious and advice books on the best-sellers lists of major publishing houses."[17] Women used travel as a way to make it in the publishing world, in ways that had been prohibited to them in earlier years. According to Frawley, travel writing was a politically expedient choice for women writers interested in moving into 'high prestige' and 'male specialty' genres of nonfiction, and it also offered an opportunity for women to establish or solidify their credibility in a public arena shared by men.[18]

While travel itself was a form of power, writing about their experiences abroad was another way women increased their authority in Britain. "Letters and journals, in the context of traveling, also gave women an authority based on her positioning as an expert eye-witness to events and practices about which she should presume to enlighten her

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[14] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992, 36.
[15] Ibid, 307.
[16] Lockwood, 115.
[17] Maria Frawley, *A Wider Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England*. London: Associated University Presses, 1994, 29.
[18] Ibid, 41.

audience back home."[19] Their ability to write books, letters and journals gave female travelers new status as commentators on the culture and society of the Empire. Women travelers not only wrote about foreign culture and society but also focused on social and political issues. Through their travelogues they engaged in discussions about the role of women and the condition of the native citizens. Travelogues took on a new dimension and redefined spheres of action for women.[20]

Female travel writers wrote about their experiences within the British Empire as early as 1717. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was one of the first female travel writers to visit the Middle East. Yet Montagu did not travel because she suddenly felt the urge to see the Empire; she followed her husband, who became Ambassador to Turkey.[21] For much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, travel was not completed by single women with an independent income. The majority of women to venture into the Empire were considered "auxiliary travelers" or those who were in supporting roles as spouses or siblings. These people had not chosen to travel, but instead went as "help-mates" of career diplomats, soldiers, missionaries, colonizers and scholars.[22] Throughout the years 1718 to 1918, nearly sixty-three percent of female travel writers had the opportunity to travel because of their husbands.[23] There are other women who had the opportunity to become a voyager on their own merit, such as Martineau, who traveled abroad as a single unchaperoned woman.

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[19] Anne Lockwood, *Voyagers Out of the Harem Within: British Women Travel Writers in the Middle East.* PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 1997, 4.
[20] Melman, 17.
[21] To read more about the travels and life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu see: Jack Malcolm, ed. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: The Turkish Embassy Letters*. London: Virago Press, 1994.
[22] Melman, 35.
[23] See Melman's table of these female travelers, 34.

Billie Melman, Nancy Stockdale and Maria Frawley all have examined Martineau's travels to the Middle East. Yet there is very little writing about her travels to the United States. It must be understood that travel writing in regards to the United States during this period is somewhat limited and confined to male travelers. It is thus particularly curious that many scholars who study women travelers neglect Martineau's earlier American journey in their examination of her. In part due to the influence of postcolonial studies on travel writing, scholars tend to overemphasize the impact of Martineau's Middle Eastern expedition and her experiences in Egypt and Palestine, without considering the impact of her two-year journey to the United States.[24]

Travel for Martineau fit much of what these scholars describe. She was part of the thirty-seven percent of single female travelers. Through her travel writings on both the United States and the Middle East became an authority on travel, as well as American slavery, which she wrote about throughout her life. According to Mary Louise Pratt, travel books gave reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to distant parts of the world which were still nearly unknown to the British public in the nineteenth century.[25] Martineau gave readers this sense of familiarity with the places she traveled and wrote about. Her descriptions of the cities of the United States and the deserts of the Middle East transport the reader to these locations, drawing them into her arguments against slavery, the harem and the role of women on both continents. Her engaging style, coupled with her activist sensibility, earned her wide appeal

[24] Postcolonial studies of travel have been defined by two specific scholars: Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979 and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge Press, 2007.
[25] Pratt, 3.

throughout Britain early on – particularly as it related to the debate on the abolition of slavery and the condition of the slave.

## Who were the Abolitionists?

The abolition of slavery has been a topic for historians for decades.[26] The emancipation of slaves was encouraged by people throughout history, in every country that had at one point condoned the institution, from Olympe de Gouges[27] during the French Revolution through Abraham Lincoln in the 1860s. Abolition has a long history, and yet scholarly work on the role of women in the abolitionist movements has only scratched the surface.[28]

Howard Temperley and David Turley focus almost wholly on the male experience of abolition in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; women have been almost entirely omitted from their histories. Turley mentions the work of Hannah More occasionally and that of Martineau once. Temperely's work similarly emphasizes men's role in ending slavery both in Britain and in the United States.[29] Clare Midgley proposes a reason women have been left out of the abolitionist story: "The nature of memorials and memoirs provides reason as to why historians have not considered it necessary to explore female contributions to the anti-slavery movement; as well as the tendency to rely on

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[26] Authors such as David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770*-1823, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975, David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860,* London: Routledge Press, 1991, and James Walvin, *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*, London: Macmillan Press, 1986, are just a few of the many scholars who have discussed abolition.

[27] See Gregory S. Brown, "The Self Fashioning of Olympe de Gouges, 1784-1789." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 383-401.

[28] Clare Midgley's *Women against Slavery: the British Campaigns* is a key asset to anyone wanting to study the role of women in anti-slavery roles in the British campaigns.

[29] There were obviously, men who traveled to the United States contemporaneously to Martineau including Alexis de Tocqueville, who also wrote about the United States with a drastically different outlook than Martineau. See: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1945.

records and publications of exclusively male national anti-slavery committees rather than on local provincial sources."[30] By reading Midgley one can see that the role of women was much larger than many scholars suggest. The resources historians mainly use to study these abolitionist movements were the memoirs of the activists and their contemporaries. Not considered were the anti-slavery pamphlets and petitions by women who created female anti-slavery societies. The writings of these women, including Martineau, are finally starting to find their way into the hands of scholars who are now able to tell the story of women's role in the abolitionist movements. The role of women in abolition will be fully examined in Chapter Two, but it is important to note that women were not merely sitting on the sidelines during these pivotal years of the slavery debate. Exploring the writing of women abolitionists, as Midgley argues, offers an important insight into how women such as Martineau influenced the slavery debate.

Most women who wrote against the institution of slavery, particularly in Britain, had never witnessed the institution and had never seen slavery with their own eyes. Women such as Elizabeth Pease and Anne Knight were well-known anti-slavery writers with the London Female Anti-Slavery society and later became members of the London Anti-Slavery Society, a rare achievement for any British woman. Yet neither of these women witnessed the institution of slavery, instead relying on secondhand testimony. Martineau's ability to witness slavery gave her writing more credence with the anti-slavery societies, as well as the British public. *Society in America* (1836) was published in at least three countries – Britain, the United States and France – and has been

[30] Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*. London: Routledge Press, 1992, 2-3.

continuously in print ever since. Publications by Knight or Pease are much more difficult to find.

## Harriet Martineau: Feminist, Abolitionist and Travel Writer

Harriet Martineau was an incredibly well-read child, whose aptitude for reading intricate and complicated books at a young age allowed her to become a well-known writer, journalist, reformer and traveler during her life. Being a member of the middle class permitted her a wide audience base as her lifestyle replicated with a growing British public. She wrote in a manner the general British public could comprehend. The impact her writings had on society and politics are wide ranging, as she was part of the movements to abolish slavery, reform public education, and expand female rights. Yet she was a typical Victorian woman, trying to impact and influence society the only way she knew how, through her pen.

Martineau was born the sixth of eight children in a middle-class household. Her father, Thomas, was a textile manufacturer specializing in dress materials, although the traditional family vocation had been medicine. She grew up in Norwich, which was regarded as culturally sophisticated for a provincial town. The Martineau family believed all of their children should receive a formal education, yet Harriet only went to school for two years, from age 11 to 13[31] otherwise she was educated by her older siblings. But it was through the radicalism that Norwich was known for that truly affected Martineau's opinions.[32]

Martineau and her family were all Unitarians, which brought a great deal of discrimination, since they carried a strong liberal and radical intellectual tradition. They

[31] Gillian Thomas. *Harriet Martineau*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985, 4.
[32] Robert Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, 57.

insisted on the education of both male and female children.[33] The education Martineau received in conjunction with her religious concerns, made her keenly aware of social problems brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Unitarians rejected claims that knowledge of the external world could be explained from biblical principles, and that knowledge was gained through a formal education of popular thinkers and theories.[34] Martineau's religious concerns and readings produced an enduring strain of interests ranging from metaphysics to politics and political economy to literature and poetry.

As early as age fourteen Martineau developed an active interest in political economy. Harriet Martineau's mother allowed her to keep a copy of *The Globe* newspaper near the dinner table, although it was believed to be bad manners to keep the newspaper on her chair at the dinner table. Through the reading of *The Globe* and the works of Milton and Shakespeare, she claimed she "became a political economist without even knowing it."[35]

Martineau's mother referred to her daughter as a "fragile" child, one who was weak and often ill. Martineau was also deaf which developed gradually from age twelve, but it was not fully apparent until she was fifteen. Her family tended to blame Martineau for her own misfortune, saying that "none are so deaf, as those that won't hear." The family's hard discipline of Martineau taught her not to depend on the opinion of others, a trait that one can see throughout her life, never taking negative reviews of her publications to heart. As Martineau explained, "I believe my family would have made

[33] It would not be until 1899, with the establishment of the National Board of Education, that free public education was provided to all children in England, and not until 1902, that public secondary education was available.
[34] Webb, 72.
[35] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 55.

almost any sacrifice to save me from my misfortune; but not the less did they aggravate it terribly by their way of treating it."[36]

Her older brother, James, was very influential in his sister's life, particularly on her religious attitudes and her writing. Martineau described him as her "idolized companion."[37] It was through James that she was introduced to Lant Carpenter, the great Unitarian preacher and teacher in Bristol in 1817. James saw that Carpenter was politically active and dedicated to liberalism, and believed he would be an admirable religious instructor.[38] James moved to Bristol to be trained in the Unitarian belief by Carpenter while his sister remained in Norwich. When Martineau's sadness at her brother's departure threw her into a depression, James suggested she try her pen at writing for the *Monthly Repository*, a Unitarian periodical, and so she submitted an article on "Female Writers on Practical Divinity."[39] A few weeks later her article was published under the ambiguous letter "V." James realized it was his sister's article and happily told her: "Now dear, leave it to other women to make shirts and darn stockings; and do devote yourself to this."[40] Martineau then realized she had become an authoress. Martineau maintained throughout her life that she had no natural aptitude for writing and that her talent came from her "unconscious preparatory discipline" and her translation of books from various languages.[41]

Martineau continued writing in private, for very little money, but by 1826 the Martineau family finances crumbled, and by 1829, the family's investments

[36] Ibid, 58.
[37] Ibid, 90.
[38] Webb, 91.
[39] Martineau, *Autobiography,* Vol. 1, 91.
[40] Ibid, 92.
[41] Ibid, 94.

disintegrated, leaving her destitute. Although living off of fifty pounds a year was not an easy thing to do, Martineau maintained that this unfortunate financial problem allowed her new freedom:

> I, who had been obliged to write before breakfast, or in some private way, had henceforth liberty to do my own work in my own way; for we had lost our gentility…. By being thrown, while it was yet time, on our own resources, we [the Martineau women] have worked hard and usefully, won friends, reputation and independence, seen the world abundantly, abroad and at home, and, in short, have truly lived instead of vegetated.[42]

Martineau had been in contact with the new editor of the *Monthly Repository*, W.J. Fox, who had published some of her works without pay for the past two years. Yet her changed financial circumstances led Fox to begin paying her fifteen pounds a year for as many reviews as she believed proper. Martineau now wrote in order to provide an income for herself, something that seldom occurred for women. She wrote not only because she enjoyed writing about these various topics, but also because her life depended on producing an income.

As her writing became more well-known, Martineau eventually moved to London and stayed with Fox and his wife. It was through the growing business relationship with Fox that Martineau met the most prominent London Unitarians and through these connections felt very close to the center of the excitement around the Reform Bill of 1832.[43] Through these contacts and the encouragement of her brother James, Martineau began writing one of her most famous works *Illustrations of Political Economy*. The publication of this series launched Martineau's career on the national scene.

[42] Martineau, Vol. 1, 108.
[43] Webb, 98.

Prior to its publication, Martineau feared *Illustrations* would never see the light of day, yet she believed the book would have a great influence on the masses and assist them in managing their own politics, perspectives and finances. An agreement with her publisher forced Martineau to find one thousand subscribers to the monthly publication. In a brilliant move, she sent a circular describing her work to all members of both houses of Parliament. The sales for *Illustrations* swelled, needing to her publisher to produce nearly five thousand prints of her work, and influenced Martineau to pursue her literary interests.[44]

One of the key aspects and concerns for Martineau in writing *Illustrations of Political Economy* was to find a more productive and efficient way for people to live. She presented the ideas of Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith and other major political economists in terms all people could understand. This sentiment was a running theme with Martineau, who constantly described her urge to write a book because it needed to be read: "I wrote because I could not help it. There was something that I wanted to say, and I said it: that was all. The fame and the money and the usefulness might or might not follow. It was not by my endeavour if they did."[45] Even when *Illustrations* received poor reviews, Martineau had not been ashamed of her work. It opened the door for her to continue to publish works she thought were necessary for society, and it was a new opportunity for any woman in the nineteenth century.

One of the stories, "Demerara," discussed the economic problems caused by the use of slaves. Martineau viewed slavery as a poor economic institution for several reasons, including the lack of investment slaves had in their work, the lack of

[44] Thomas, 10.
[45] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1, 399.

productivity caused by poor living conditions and the expense of slave labor. She claimed that the "supply of slave labour does not rise and fall with the wants of the capitalists, like that of free labour, he employs an occasional surplus on workers which could be better done by brute labour or machinery."[46] Through well-developed observations such as this, *Illustrations* became a thirty-four volume series that put Martineau on the international scene.

By age thirty, she had found who she was: "I had… ascertained my career, found occupation, and achieved independence; and thus the rest of my life was provided with its duties and interests."[47] Martineau had found her career in writing about political issues for the general public. Martineau, unlike many writers, was not concerned about whether her work was popular or memorable; if her work reached her intended audience, which was the general uneducated British public, she had accomplished what she set out to do. Yet after *Illustrations'* popularity, Martineau found it difficult to keep up with the growing demand for her work. "I could not expose myself to the temptation to write in a money-getting spirit; nor yet to the terrible anxieties of assuming a position which could be maintained only by excessive toil."[48] Martineau wanted to write on topics she believed were crucial to society, not on those her publishers thought would sell. After a great deal of exhaustion in writing her thirty-four volumes, Martineau decided a break was needed.

[46] Harriet Martineau, "Demerara" in *Illustrations of Political Economy*. 3 vols. London: C. Fox, 1834, 142.
[47] Martineau, Vol. 1, 137.
[48] Ibid, 188-189.

She feared that she was growing too accustomed to luxury and to "an exclusive regularity in the modes of living,"[49] and so she desired to 'rough it' in America for a considerable time. She lived in America for two years, arriving in 1834 and returning to Britain in 1836. She was interested in observing two facets of American society, its republican form of government and the use of slaves and to record her observations in a systemic rather than impressionistic way.[50] Martineau wanted to learn about America, to witness the ways in which this society maintained itself socially and politically.

Martineau's anti-slavery opinions did not get in the way of her travels throughout the United States. She spent two years touring the country, seeing all aspects of our society. She spent time in Washington, D.C., had dinners and conversations with high-ranking officials, and toured the plantations in the South. Martineau felt a strong connection with some of the slave-holders, understanding that many were following in the family business. Many slave-holders hoped to change Martineau's beliefs about slavery, yet they were unsuccessful. Martineau returned to the North with the same anti-slavery sentiments she had left with, even though she came to understand slavery as a moral, as well as economic problem.

Her travels to the United States made Martineau an eyewitness of the treatment and condition of the slaves in America. Once she returned to Britain she published her first American book, *Society in America* (1837). She wrote about slavery in the United States since it was an issue she felt every Briton should stand up against. *Society in America* became a popular book in both Britain and the United States in part because Martineau unlike women, who had previously written about slavery, described her own

[49] Ibid, 391.
[50] Thomas, 33.

first-hand impressions. From the slaves on Southern plantations to those who worked in the homes of United States congressmen, Martineau showed in *Society in America* the oppression of these peoples' human rights.

Later in the year, Martineau's publisher requested that she write a second book on America that would have "more the character of travel, and be of a lighter quality to both writer and reader."[51] *Retrospect of Western Travel* was published in 1838 and was even more successful than *Society in America.* Yet, as much as the reading public enjoyed *Retrospect of Western Travel*, it was not a book that Martineau liked. "I care little about this book of mine. I have not done it carelessly. I believe it is true: but it will fill no place in my mind and life; and I am glad it is done."[52]

It was after the publication of these two works that Martineau decided to take a step toward a very typical form of female writing. She tried her hand at pure fiction writing, although she still examined social aspects within her fiction. Martineau's fiction focused on the middle-class life, and the way in which social life was constructed. According to Martineau, her novel, *Deerbrook* (1839), had a large circulation, more than novels usually obtain.[53] Nonetheless Martineau was not remembered for her novel, but rather for her nonfiction work.

Martineau spent much of the early 1840s in the sick-rooms in the city of Tynemouth, in an effort to recuperate from her lifelong invalidism. She continued to write and publish while she was there; she spent time meditating on her views of religion. Her writings after her recovery in Tynemouth take on a more religious tone, which also might be attributed to her travels to the Middle East in 1847.

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[51] Ibid, Vol.1, 404.
[52] Ibid, Vol. 1, 409.
[53] Ibid, Vol. 1, 414.

In 1846, after her recovery, she spent time with the Yates family in Liverpool. Mr. Yates had constantly spoken about traveling to the East, and renewed that conversation with Martineau. He questioned: "Now, seriously, -- will you go with us? Mrs. Yates will do everything in her power to render the journey agreeable to you; and I will find the piastres [monetary unit of Egypt]."[54] At first Martineau did not agree to Mr. Yates' offer, yet after speaking with her brother James, she concluded that this trip would be a privilege. "I had little idea what the privilege would turn out to be, nor how the convictions and the action of the remnant of life would be shaped and determined by what I saw and thought during those all-important months that I spent in the East."[55]

Martineau knew before she left that this trip would change her in some way, although she was not sure exactly how she would be affected. Biographers who have examined the reasons Martineau traveled to the East, find it surprising she would be willing to travel at someone else's expense.[56] Yet, "evidently the open and unreserved nature of Yates's offer combined with her own sense of the uniqueness of the opportunity to persuade her that this was not the time to be stubbornly independent."[57]

As with her American travels Martineau claimed to have no ambition to write about her experiences once she returned to Britain, but continued to take comprehensive notes of her travels throughout Egypt and Palestine. Martineau wrote *Eastern Life: Present and Past* (1848) when she returned to Britain in 1847, and maintained throughout her life that it was one of her greatest works. Although she insisted that *Eastern Life* was a simple travel book, it is evident that the journey was of a high personal significance for

[54] Ibid, Vol. 1, 531.
[55] Ibid, Vol.1, 536.
[56] As Thomas writes, "given Martineau's intense independence in matters of personal finances, it is somewhat surprising she agreed with such alacrity to allow Yates to finance her journey." Thomas, 47.
[57] Ibid, 47.

Martineau by the way it provided her with a concrete medium for examining her religious beliefs.[58]

Martineau had hoped that *Eastern Life* would circulate widely with the "less opulent class," whom she believed would be more sympathetic to the book's contents: the various descriptions of the four main religions. And although, after the publication of the book, many people came out against the religious views Martineau expressed, she never backed away from her original belief that this book needed to be published. [59]

After Martineau's return to Britain, she continued to write and publish a vast amount of work, including contributions to Charles Dickens's magazine *Household Words*. In 1851, she traveled to Birmingham to write on cloth manufacturing and published three articles in regards to that industry. One of the next important tasks Martineau happily accepted was to translate Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy. She had wanted to take on this work for years, but publishers had failed to stand behind her; that is, until 1852. Martineau published this work in 1853 and considered it another of her great works. Later in the 1850's Martineau was asked to write a series of articles for *London's Daily News*, and this came at an opportune moment, as *Household Words*, owned by Dickens, did not allow Martineau to publish any of her feminist ideas. It was a magazine she no longer wanted any connection with.

By 1855, Martineau had seen several doctors in London who believed she was very near death. They diagnosed her with an enlarged heart, which was "too feeble to do its work."[60] She was not terribly distraught with by news that any hour could bring along her demise; in fact she found it freeing to know that she could now consider herself on

[58] Ibid, 49.
[59] Martineau, Vol. 2, 38.
[60] Ibid, Vol. 2, 102.

'holiday.' During this period she discussed how she saw the world continuing on without her and the ways in which the world had changed while she had been a part of it. Martineau did not die that year; in fact she continued to avidly write throughout the 1860s and into the early 1870s. Yet it is in 1855 that her *Autobiography* ends and we no longer gain the glorious insight to Martineau's life for her last twenty-one years.

The work of Harriet Martineau spans nearly fifty years and covers a multitude of issues and because of this we cannot examine her strictly from a feminist perspective. Instead, Martineau needs to be seen at the intersection of three other moments in the nineteenth century. Her Unitarian upbringing influenced Martineau's liberal and radical thought and should be seen as one of the early motivators for her activist writing. The ability to travel throughout the British Empire offered Martineau the opportunity to witness slavery and to evaluate her own beliefs on the institution in both the United States and the Middle-East. Martineau was influenced by all of these different aspects of her life prior to her strong feminist writings in the 1840s through the 1860s.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE FEMALE ABOLITION MOVEMENT AND MARTINEAU'S PLACE WITHIN

The story of the emancipation of American slaves and the role of Britons in abolition has been told from numerous viewpoints, with various case studies, examining a multitude of different factors.[61] Scholars have done their best to understand the different aspects of the many abolitionist movements and events that helped free African slaves in the nineteenth century from persecution in the Caribbean as well as in the United States. As historians focus on the participants of the Abolitionist movements, one cast of characters that have continued to remain partially obscured are the female abolitionists. Women such as Harriet Beecher Stow, Hannah More, and Harriet Martineau had witnessed the atrocities of the institution of slavery and chose to stand against it. Travel to places where slavery was practiced offered women like Martineau a particular feminist perspective on nineteenth-century slave systems.

Women travelers to the United States from Britain were particularly able to break the bonds of domesticity and enter a new public role. For Clare Midgley the viewpoint of the Anti-Slavery Associations is the only clear way to examine the abolitionist movements, yet to understand how one woman could shape the events and the public's response to slavery we need to examine the work of Harriet Martineau. Martineau stood outside the Anti-Slavery societies, and while still being a member, did much of her work outside the scope of these institutions. Martineau traveled to the United States and witnessed the treatment and condition of slaves in the American South, and through

[61] From scholars such as Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944 to Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*, London: Routledge Press, 1992 show a dynamic range of ways in which to examine emancipation and abolition.

writing in a variety of genres, including fiction, travelogue and journalism was able to take a prominent position in the anti-slavery campaigns.

## The Role of Women in the Abolition Movement

Several scholars have focused on the various abolition movements that took shape during the nineteenth century, these studies generally focus on the role of men in the anti-slavery campaigns. Clare Midgley shifts this focus away from strictly abolition movements to the role of the woman in these campaigns. Midgley is able to show a shift in women's relationship with society, as they break away from domesticity to a more public role. Midgley explains how women began to participate in the public sphere and what influence these women had on their society both locally and nationally. She also examines several anti-slavery associations and explores how these societies, both local and national, helped to develop distinctive female approaches to campaigning during the late eighteenth – and early nineteenth centuries. Midgley also shows how the formulation of feminist perspectives on issues such as anti-slavery policy and ideology were also connected to the membership and initiatives of these anti-slavery associations.[62]

Women had been involved in the anti-slave trade campaigns since the 1780s yet they only played a supporting role in these early reform movements. While William Wilberforce pushed his anti-slave-trade bills through Parliament in the late-eighteenth century, women did their part by abstaining from slave-grown produce and passing out

[62] Clare Midgley. *Women Against Slavery: The British Campiagns, 1780-1870*. London: Routledge Press, 1992, 3.

anti-slavery pamphlets.[63] These early roles set the stage for women to later participate in a more public way in anti-slavery campaigns.

Women writers, even early in the abolition movement, had the high ambitions of influencing Parliament with their writing. After all, they had been watching men such as Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce do the same thing in the 1780s and 1790s, so why could it not work for them? Members of Parliament and even other upper- and middle-class men, however, saw women participants as philanthropic actors, who were more concerned with feeling good about their own lives than with truly trying to reform society. Men tended to regard women in more of a supporting role in the anti-slavery and anti-slave trade campaigns, and many women were seen merely as participants in the abstention campaign, where they would be able to impact their households the most. It was this dynamic that feminist thought began to emerge with the abstention campaigns; it was a time when women were beginning to see that they were able to make an impact on society through what they refused to buy. And by seeing they could influence society, they desired a greater role and more rights for themselves.

The abstention campaign, which involved the refusal to eat anything slave grown, has been examined by nearly every scholar of the abolition movements yet it is seen as a movement that was never able to make a large impact on Parliament. It never had the influence many people had hoped it would. The abstention campaign was based on the principle of refusing to eat or buy anything slave-grown. Women hoped this would show

[63] Midgley explains that many of these pamphlets distributed by the Anti-Slavery Society included printed annual reports which gave information on the developments in the West Indies, on progress in the anti-slavery cause, and on their own anti-slavery perspectives and activities. The Anti-Slavery Society also spend £498 of the £908 it raised on the production of workbags containing sets of anti-slavery documents, these workbags contained tracts which were sewn from East India Cotton, silk or satin, thus avoiding the use of slave produce. (Midgley, 57)

the companies who produced and purchased these slave-grown commodities that the British public would no longer support the institution. The abstention campaign had its drawbacks and was seen by many as 'fashionable' and not statement-making. Middle- and upper-class women used it as a way to delicately participate in the abolition. In contrast, artisan women supported abstention due to her radical enthusiasm for abolition.[64]

This campaign was also an example of the sexual division of labor within the abolition movement; women focused more on individual, domestic and consumer-based aspects of the abolition campaign, which centered on issues of individual responsibility and morality. Men, on the other hand, were more focused on the question of economic policy and the possible problems with the economy that abolition could create.[65]

As female participation slowly evolved from abstaining against slave-grown products, the members of female anti-slavery societies grew in number through social networking and word of mouth. The subscription accounts for the magazine *The Abolition Society*, first published in 1788, indicate that it had a small female demographic, only about ten percent. Yet, only quarter of the female subscribers had connections to male subscribers. This suggests that women made the choice to support abolition independently of their male relatives.[66] These subscribers were more aristocratic women, since the publication rates were too high for large scale working-class support.

Middle-class women began to take a more pronounced stand against abolition during the 1830s and 1840s. These radical women did not focus solely on abolition but

[64] Ibid, 39.
[65] Ibid, 60.
[66] Ibid, 17.

on education for young girls, as well as poor relief. Middle-class women felt it necessary to include reforms for working-class families since these women's relationship with the less affluent class had always been one of philanthropic benefactor or employer. Working-class women did participate in the anti-slavery associations although due to their inferior social standing made it difficult for middle-class women to see them as equal members of the association. Although working-class women were not seen as equal members in the female anti-slavery societies, there was still widespread support from these working women. This is evidenced by Midgley, in the huge numbers of women who expressed support for the boycotts and signed petitions.[67]

Women in anti-slavery associations, such as the London Female Anti-Slavery Society, still found it difficult to gain a strong foothold within nineteenth-century British society. Women, whether middle- or working-class, still had to fight against their subordinate status in comparison to men, including their brothers, fathers, and husbands. Yet they did not allow this marginalization to hinder their efforts to shed light on the condition of slaves. Activism by British women for better treatment of slaves, particularly slave women, was seen as consistent with a woman's proper role in society, and their position within the household. Women activists claimed that it was slavery that prevented slave women from taking proper care of their children and that it was slave holders who mistreated pregnant women and forced the sick and infirm to work.[68] These claims, described in detail by magazines such as the *Christian Lady's Magazine* and *Macmillan's Magazine*, gave women a true cause to stand behind. It was this social role

[67] The estimated 100,000 women who signed the Wesleyan Methodist anti-slavery petitions in 1833 belong to a denomination of which it has been calculated that around 62.7 per cent of members came from Artisan families. In Derby, the local newspaper reported that nearly every adult female signed the petition of 1833. (Midgley 84-85)
[68] Ibid, 95-96.

of women and feminine character which were closely related to the particular concern women activists showed for the sufferings of women and the disruption of family life under slavery.[69]

It was not just gaining a more public role within society that women needed in order to make a place for themselves, women were usually under-educated in comparison to their male relatives. In nonconformist families, a brief education was given to young girls. Midgley suggests that for Unitarian women, raised in a demonization which stressed freedom of thought, independence and individual autonomy, and which pioneered education for women, they were encouraged, and felt motivated, to subscribe to the Manchester society in their own right rather than letting their husbands or fathers act as their representatives.[70] This created an environment conducive to women's participation in abolition, at least in Manchester. This atmosphere was created by a committee of radical Unitarian merchants whose perspectives on public campaigning and gender relations provided scope for female participation.[71]

Early abolition societies such as the London Female Anti-Slavery Society were sex-specific. This indirectly drew attention to the sexual division of labor in the anti-slavery movement. According to Midgley, "It was a division which, while in some ways limited women's participation, in others expanded its significance through fostering the development of distinctive female perspectives and specialized forms of activities."[72] In these early associations, participation and membership came through women's own networking and initiatives. The early female abolitionists used connections with other

[69] Ibid, 95.
[70] Ibid, 19.
[71] Ibid, 23.
[72] Ibid, 45.

women in their social circles to increase the membership and reach of abolition associations.

Women played an important role in these campaigns by serving as petitioners for the two largest expressions of national public opinion against colonial slavery, abstention as well as diffusing large quantities of information and rousing public opinion. These petitions were relatively few in number but, according to Midgley, "were significant because they did not simply add to the total mass of calls for the abolition of slavery. Many were distinguished by their articulation of concern for the suffering of slave women."[73] Whereas the campaign for the slave trade affected both male and female slaves, the call for emancipation needed to emphasize the drastically different treatment of the male and female slaves. Female abolitionists were very keen on describing the ill treatment of female slaves by their masters, thereby arousing public opinion against the views of anti- and pro-slavery ones. As the abolition movement continued, and more women became increasingly upset with the horror of physical and sexual abuse of enslaved women, more middle-class women used those tones to dominate the style in which they wrote about slavery during the abolition movement.

## Harriet Martineau and the Abolition Movement

As descriptions of the treatment of slaves began to appear in the press during the 1820s and 1830s, women's anti-slavery activism began to develop and grow, particularly among the middle classes. A large portion of the late-eighteenth-century reformers and petitioners were upper-class, aristocratic women, who had a great deal of time to devote to philanthropy, as well as the campaigns, since none of them needed to worry about a

[73] Ibid, 67.

source of income. During the early 1830s and 1840s, the anti-slavery movement began to appeal to the middle-classes. It was the "typical, middle-class radical nonconformists" who supported immediate emancipation, free trade and universal suffrage.[74] To a large extent, many of those middle-class supporters of immediate emancipation came from manufacturing towns, such as Norwich and Manchester. They were wealthy enough to spend money on causes they deemed necessary and worthy. Working class support came later, according to Howard Temperley, "it was not until the 1850s that any attempt was made, and then only a half-hearted one, to mobilize working-class support."[75] Throughout the early Victorian period, the chief actors in the anti-slavery movement were the middle-class radicals, reformers and nonconformists, who pushed hardest for a greater public outcry and more reforms in the British Parliament and the United States Congress.[76]

It was in this world that Harriet Martineau was raised and learned about causes that would shape her travel writing and political advocacy. Through her writings on slavery Martineau began to make a name for herself as a radical reformer. Her early radical writings were published in the *Monthly Repository*. W.J. Fox, who became one of Martineau's closest friends through her life, and was a leader in the Unitarian faith, was the editor of the periodical. Under Fox's editorship the magazine developed into what

[74] Ibid, 77.
[75] Howard Temperley. *British Antislavery, 1833-1870*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972, 73.
[76] As seen in *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (published in 2009), all of the anti-slavery publications seem to have begun publishing a great deal of anti-slavery rhetoric in the late 1850s and early 1860s as the troubles between the Union and the Confederacy in the United States began to heat up. Even Harriet Martineau according to *The Dictionary*, did not begin writing her anti-slavery articles until the late 1850s. Publications such as *The Leeds Intelligencer, Leeds Mercury,* and *Macmillian's Magazine*, all began their anti-slavery movements in the late 1850s. This can lead us to believe that much of the anti-slavery writing before this period was confined to the anti-slavery societies' pamphlets and newsletters, of which are difficult to find.

historians have called a "literary periodical of more general interest, in which reviews and poetry became more prominent," versus the early versions of the magazine that were based more in "radical nonconformist politics with theological controversy."[77] These early writings, which Martineau wrote anonymously and without pay, helped her to understand the literary world and gave her the courage and knowledge to begin her famous work *Illustrations of Political Economy*. This serial periodical thrust Martineau onto the national scene and gave her more freedom to write on a variety of topics.

*Illustrations of Political Economy*, was a quarterly serial ublished in 1832 composed of stories designed make the concept of political economy understandable to the masses. The series was a massive success, going through five printings within its first year, something the publishers of *Illustrations* had not been prepared for.

Published in the second of nine volumes of the publication, the story "Demerara" focused on the relationship between the slave-holder and the slaves, but more importantly it focused on the question many were pondering during the anti-slavery movements: which was a wiser economic choice, free or slave labor? Martineau's conclusion was the free labor was undoubtedly more economical than enslaved labor. This story became one of her most well-read stories, and was the pedestal on which Martineau began her anti-slavery campaign. Many of Martineau's biographers classify 1832, the year "Demerara" was published, as the moment Martineau began to make her stand against slavery public.

Martineau, although a loud voice in the anti-slavery debate, was not known to be an official member of any of the anti-slavery associations that Midgley is concerned about. There are references to Martineau attending anti-slavery meetings in both Britain

[77] Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, eds. *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism: In Great Britain and Ireland*. London: Academia Press, 2009, 424.

and the United States, yet an actual membership log of any of these associations does not list Martineau as a member. This is perhaps a reason that Martineau has been so frequently left out of much of the abolition scholarship, she does not fit easily into a specific category of abolitionist.

There were two major avenues women in the 1830s and 1840s were able to take in order to participate in the anti-slavery campaigns. The first was women's ability to promote immediate abolition through boycotts of slave-grown sugar and other goods with a passionate and rational argument, which showed national leadership that women were going to be an important part of the anti-slavery campaign.[78] The second form of participation was travel, particularly to the slave-ridden areas of the world, including the West Indies and the United States. Single female travel was still in its infancy during the 1830s and 1840s, yet several women including Martineau traveled across the Atlantic to witness slavery for themselves.

## Travel Writing and Female Abolition

Traveling abroad had been a more aristocratic pastime in earlier centuries, yet with the rise of the middle class during the Victorian period, more people were able to travel. For Martineau hearing about slavery in the West Indies and the United States was not enough, she wanted to witness the institution herself. Due to improvements in transportation and an increasingly wealthy middle class, many people who would have been unable to afford to travel in the eighteenth century were able to do so in the nineteenth century. This included women like Martineau. According to Billie Melman, "travel was a middle-class phenomenon. Women's travel exclusively so. No longer

[78] Midgley, 116.

aristocratic, or 'gentrified', a part of the nobleman's *grand tour*… was becoming a distinctly *bourgeois* practice."[79] The rise of the middle class and the wealth that they brought with them, gave them the ability to travel just as the aristocracy had done in centuries earlier, yet it was still considered inappropriate for a single woman to travel along without an escort or protection.

Travel for these families, and even single women, include travel to mainland Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and of course, the United States. Travel to the United States tended to be different than travel to other areas of the world. Travelers to mainland Europe tended to go for 'holiday' and to experience places they had heard or read about, but usually had no specific mission while they were abroad. Travel to the United States attracted a different type of traveler. Expeditions to the United States attracted three different kinds of travelers: the immigrant, the tourist, and the reformer. Harriet Martineau went to the United States as a reformer who wanted to witness various aspects of American life and culture.

Martineau was the first of many single women to travel across the Atlantic Ocean on behalf of the anti-slavery movement. Other women such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) would follow in Martineau's steps and travel across an ocean in order to understand the institution of slavery, with the later goal of intentionally speaking out against the institution. Single British women of this period were able to devote a large portion of their time and energy to the anti-slavery movement and made the transatlantic abolitionist network a major focus of personal lives and friendships.[80] These

[79] Billie Melman. *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle-East, 1718-1918*: *Sexuality, Religion and Work*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992, 35.
[80] Midgley, 133.

women who were not married had the ability to go out and create the connections that would make the Female Anti-Slavery associations more successful.

Harriet Martineau traveled to the United States in order to learn about the Republican form of government she had heard about and to witness slavery for herself. Martineau claimed she traveled to the United States to "learn, not to teach."[81] According to Midgley, Martineau did not go to the United States on an anti-slavery mission; nevertheless slavery became her major preoccupation during her two-year stay in America.[82] Martineau spent two years traveling along the Eastern Seaboard, stopping in places such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. Martineau also spent a great deal of time in the Southern United States, spending time with the slave-holders in an effort to gain a better understanding of the slaves' role in Southern culture and to witness the slave-owners' treatment of their slaves.

Martineau had claimed she would listen equally to both pro- and anti-slavery points of view. And although many Southerners already knew Martineau's stance on slavery, since they had read "Demerara" they hoped they might convert her, but according to R. K. Webb, slavery had become so vital a principle to Martineau she would not give in.[83] Martineau knew about citizens imprisoned for expressing opinions similar to those she expressed in "Demerara."[84] As Martineau continued her travels in the United States, she tried to remain as neutral as possible, but it was becoming more well-known she was traveling, and more American citizens were becoming displeased that an Abolitionists was traveling around the South. By the time she reached Boston for the

[81] Harriet Martineau. *Autobiography*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1877, Vol. 1, 336.
[82] Midgley, 130.
[83] Webb, 153.
[84] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 341-342.

second time in 1835, various newspapers were threatening her: "From Boston, the abuse of me ran through almost every paper in the Union. Newspapers came to me from the South, daring me to enter the slave states again, and offering mock invitations to me to come and see how they would treat foreign incendiaries. They would hang me: they would cut my tongue out, and cast it on a dunghill and so forth."[85] This is just one example of the South's opinions of Martineau. Martineau's life was threatened on multiple occasions for her abolitionist ideals and her anti-slavery rhetoric. Regardless of the threats she was adamant that she would write about her experiences in the United States; "…I wrote because I could not help it. There was something I wanted to say, and I said it: that was all."[86]

There were other female abolitionists, such as Elizabeth Pease and Anne Knight, who followed in Martineau's footsteps by publishing their views about slavery, within the Female Anti-Slavery societies. Although these two women never traveled to witness slavery for themselves, they used second-hand testimony to write pamphlets and anti-slavery articles for the Societies. Martineau was different from the majority of female abolitionists by witnessing slavery for herself and what developed from women traveling and writing about what they witnessed was a relationship between the female abolitionists of Britain and their counterparts in the United States. The network between these two groups helped form a stronger alliance between the two countries and their fight to destroy the institution of slavery. "British women's aid to American abolitionists took the form not only of major donations to anti-slavery bazaars, but also of the exertion of moral pressure through the dispatch of anti-slavery addresses which made use of the

[85] Ibid, Vol. 1, 362.
[86] Ibid, Vol. 1, 399.

language of sisterhood to call on American women to use their influence to bring about the end of slavery."[87] Together these groups of women were becoming strong opponents to the slave-holders and southern attitudes towards slavery.

Martineau took advantage of not being married or having to stay within 'proper social roles' and traveled to the United States for her own purposes. She maintained her radical views regardless of the pressures put on her. By traveling Martineau was able to see the institution of slavery with her own eyes, without needing to take the words of the British press. Martineau stood her ground and would not allow the more powerful slave-holders of the American South or the more powerful British male writers to influence her beliefs. She maintained that women had the ability to witness slavery for themselves, and that it was their duty as well to take a stand against an institution they deemed immoral. Writing and travel for Martineau provided a space for independent expression and the development of her own particular brand of feminist abolition.

Travel writers such as Martineau added fire and respectability to the anti-slavery movement. Her description of the slaves is one of sympathy and sadness, while her portrayal of the slave-holder is one of anger and contempt. Martineau's work, according to Howard Temperley, "substantially increased the stature of American abolitionists in the estimation of observers sympathetic to the cause."[88] Martineau's writings, which will be discussed in depth in later chapters, contained the most powerful denunciation of anti-slavery of the time.

[87] Midgley, 132.
[88] Temperley, 192.

Martineau's writings, found in many of the numerous magazines and periodicals of the nineteenth century,[89] both in Britain and in the United States, gave both middle- and working-class families the opportunities to read about slavery, and Martineau hoped they would form their own opinions. Martineau was a writer who knew her audience and made a point to write in a style the public would be able to understand.

Although the anti-slavery societies, particularly the London Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, did a great deal to educate the masses about slavery and the treatment of slaves, it is women such as Martineau, who took a solid stand against the institution and put her name very proudly on the side of emancipation, that educated the general public on slavery. Martineau was one of the most influential women in the emancipation movement both with the anti-slavery societies, of which she was a member, and more importantly through her writing. Her writings on slavery were published in several editions and spread across Britain as well as into the United States.[90] Martineau set the stage for other women to take a stand and write against the institution of slavery without the fear of being repressed.

With her early opinions of West Indian slavery, written about in "Demerara" already fully-developed Martineau traveled to the United States, and witnessed a different type of slavery. She was a radical woman, with a hope of reforming society both at home

[89] Martineau wrote for various periodicals throughout her life. The publications that published her anti-slavery writings both in the United States as well as in Britain included: The *Spectator*, The *Liberty Bell*, London's *Daily News*, The *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and *Once A Week*.

[90] Martineau's writing including *Society in America*, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, "The Martyr Age of the United States" and various other publications crossed to America as well as Europe. Martineau wrote for British periodicals such as the *Spectator*, and the *Westminster Review*, as well as for American periodicals, including the *Liberator*. "The Martyr Age of the United States" became the first full-introduction for the general public to the work of the Abolitionists in America (Webb, 161). In America, William Lloyd Garrison, one of the most prominent American Abolitionists reprinted extracts from *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* in the *Liberator*, and the American Anti-Slavery society printed two-thousand copies of the "Martyr Age". (Midgley, 131).

and abroad, living in a world where women were permitted to do very little outside of the home. Martineau's marriage of travel with political advocacy writing offered a radical vision of reform that pushed the boundaries of both feminists and anti-slavery activism.

She entered the slavery debate through the lens of political economy, yet by 1834 she was witnessing slavery for herself in the American South. This brought about a drastic shift in Martineau's analysis of slavery; her views against slavery shifted from an economic to a moral issue. Her writings that were published after her exploration of America show this more moral argument of the institution than the economic argument in "Demerara." She is known for writing two books from her travels to America: *Society in America* (1836) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1837). In both of these volumes Martineau follows her travels and gives her blunt opinion of the events she witnessed and participated in. By examining the working conditions of the slaves, their demeanors as well as the living conditions of these people, Martineau began to ground her argument against slavery in terms of moral obligation. These books have a very different tone and direction than her first attempt at anti-slavery writing. Through Martineau's travels to America, she gained more authority as an abolitionist writer than many of the women who were writing about the institution for the anti-slave societies from a distance. We remember Martineau's writings about the slaves because we are understand her insights observations of the institution, rather than second-hand information and opinion. Martineau brought with her writings a sense of experience and clout that many anti-slavery writers lacked during these campaigns.

# CHAPTER THREE

## MARTINEAU'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT ANTI-SLAVERY WRITING AS POLITICAL ECONOMY

Men and women of the 1830s found it their duty to comment, criticize and change aspects of their society they felt were unjust through institutional and individual advocacy efforts. One of these many campaigns was the movement to end slavery. Harriet Martineau found her voice in the abolition movement of the 1830s and 1840s through writing and travel experiences that defined her own brand of political advocacy.

A particular influence on Harriet Martineau was her support of the Reform Bill of 1832. During the early 1830s Martineau lived under the roof of W.J. Fox, the founder of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the editor of the *Monthly Repository*. This magazine was one of the first periodicals to publish Martineau's writings. In this magazine she published works such as "Hope of the Hebrews," "Essential Faith of the Universal Church," "The Faith as Unfolded by Many Prophets" and "The Faith as Manifested through Israel," which focused on the way Unitarianism was to be presented to Catholics, Jews and Mohammedans, according to Martineau.[91] These articles focused on her Unitarian faith, but gave her a glimpse into the publishing world. While Martineau lived in London, Fox introduced her to prominent Unitarian thinkers and she also felt as if she was close to the center of the excitement around the Reform Bill.[92] Martineau found herself being drawn to a more liberal and radical society, and she began

[91] Harriet Martineau. *Autobiography*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, Vol. 1, 1877, 114-116. These articles were published in the late 1820s and early 1830s, just before Martineau began her work *Illustrations of Political Economy*.
[92] Robert Webb. *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, 98.

to focus her writing more on issues that would influence the public on topics concerning social reform.

Martineau began to investigate political economy, a topic she had always held close to her heart. She had first realized precisely what "political economy" was in 1826 when she borrowed a book from her sister's neighbor. The book was *Conversations of Political Economy*, and Martineau explained, "I took up the book, chiefly to see what Political Economy precisely was, and great was my surprise to find I had been teaching it unawares in my stories of machines and wages,"[93] which were published in the late 1820s by Houlston Press. The economic problems Martineau had seen in Norwich provided her with personal insights into the problems of industrialization. Once she moved to London, she began to study political economy. In her systematic study of political economy she found that the science fit perfectly into her fundamental intellectual interests.[94] Martineau saw industrialism as a positive good for society, but believed that the working classes were unprepared to deal adequately with the rise of industrialism and new class configuration. Martineau wanted bold, positive, radical measures to end labor unrest and believed that political economy held the answer.

Martineau believed, according to biographer Robert Webb, that "if people wanted a better state of things, if they wanted reform, they had to begin by informing themselves, by learning principles of political economy so that their interests, governed by those principles, would be properly looked to by government."[95] She saw that people wanted to change society and participate in the government, but they were not educated or informed enough to do so. Political Economy in the nineteenth century was understood

[93] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 105.
[94] Webb, 108.
[95] Ibid, 108.

and available to only the aristocracy and Parliamentary elite in Britain. Martineau believed the information these thinkers distributed needed to be heard and understood by the masses. Martineau came up with an idea to write a series of short stories that would all have different principles of political economy at their core. She wanted to "bring the science down to an assimilable level for the general mass of people."[96] She wanted her publications to be understood by all levels of society no matter their previous education or knowledge.

Martineau spent most of 1831 and early 1832 finishing her first volumes of *Illustrations of Political Economy*. Yet, this series was almost never published. Martineau's publisher demanded Martineau get nearly one-thousand subscriptions in order for him to publish the work, an amount Martineau felt was nearly impossible to achieve. Martineau was becoming disheartened, "I thought of the multitudes who needed it [this work], - and especially the poor, - to assist them in managing their own welfare."[97] Nonetheless, Martineau continued to work for subscriptions until she had a brilliant idea. Martineau sent an excerpt of *Illustrations* to every member of both houses of Parliament, which as Martineau describes: informed "our legislators that a book was coming out on their particular class of subjects."[98] Once these copies reached the hands of the Parliament members, Martineau's subscription rates skyrocketed. The publisher was amazed that after the first round of publishing he had no copies left, and he would need to print two to five thousand more copies.[99] *Illustrations of Political Economy* placed

[96] Ibid, 119.
[97] Martineau, *Autobiography,* Vol. 1, 130.
[98] Ibid Vol. 1, 133.
[99] Ibid, Vol. 1, 135.

Martineau on the national scene, and gave her writing more authority and sway among the public and government.

She used a variety of major economic theorists such as Thomas Malthus, and Adam Smith to form the basis of her short stories for *Illustrations,* which was published in three long volumes each containing three short stories. Martineau used those concepts, which could be difficult to understand, and through using examples the masses would be able to relate with, Martineau was able to inform the public on political economy. Using this format allowed Martineau to gain a stronger place in the publishing world by adapting a genre acceptable for women in the nineteenth century. Martineau examined political economy in order to explore the relationships between political and economic institutions and processes using the science of society.

Martineau's use of fiction to advocate this political program is an important course of action she took. Instead of writing about her contemporary world, in the same manner that Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus would have, Martineau chose to use fiction to examine the same topics. There are several reasons Martineau might have chosen fiction instead of nonfiction. She knew that it would be more acceptable in the nineteenth century for a woman to be writing a fictional story, as well as understanding that for the educated masses who would be interested in reading *Illustrations of Political Economy*, it would be much easier for the public to understand the concepts and ideas she was trying to emphasize.

In *Illustrations of Political Economy*, Martineau addressed the problem of labor and production and came up with solutions. According to Martineau's own autobiography, she accompanied theses stories with remedies "which great natural laws

of Society put into power, - freedom for bringing food to men, and freedom for men to go where food is plentiful; and enlightenment for all that they may provide for themselves under the guidance of the best intelligence."[100] Martineau wanted to show that the science of political economy offered new ways of understanding the relationship between the economy and labor.

## Demerara, *Illustrations of Political Economy* and the British Sugar Colonies

In the vast amount of research conducted on the British Empire and slavery, Demerara rarely, if ever, is discussed. Other British sugar colonies, such as Jamaica, Barbados and the West Indies are used more frequently and discussed in depth.[101] The importance of these sugar colonies should not be underestimated merely because Martineau did not discuss them. These other colonies were critical to the prosperity of Britain's economy and industry in the nineteenth century, without which the expanse and power of the British Empire might have faltered. It is possible Martineau chose to set her fictional story in a location of which little was known in order to educate the public. Even today, information on Demerara is scarce. Martineau's goal would not be simply informing the British public on political economy but enhancing their knowledge of the British Empire as well.

The reason Martineau set her story in Demerara could be two-fold. The word 'Demerara,' as seen in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to a region in Guyana and it is a kind of raw cane-sugar. Martineau used a location whose name is almost

[100] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 159.
[101] Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects* is an important work in regards to slavery, abolition and the work of Missionaries in Jamaica and the West Indies. Even Philippa Levine's *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*, mentions Demerara once by referencing the date slavery was abolished.

synonymous with sugar, a fact many Britons of her day would have recognized more quickly. By using "Demerara" Martineau is not only referencing the location of her fictional story, but also the commodity of the region. In doing so, she sets her argument in a purely economic frame with the hope of joining the notions of raw production and consumption for her readers. Although this location was not discussed by contemporaries or by historians today, this was still a critical location which had its share of uprisings throughout its slave history.

Martineau used Smith's notions to outline the anti-slavery rhetoric in her first anti-slavery piece, "Demerara." It is important to realize Smith's theories of political economy in order to understand the effect and impact of Martineau's discussion of slavery in Demerara. Adam Smith, who wrote his *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, believed that the colonies were a burden to the British government. "Smith proposed the novel idea of an international division of labour and a competitive marketplace within and between nations that would determine the terms of this division."[102] He understood a good economy as one based on free labor, not on slave labor, and wanted to ensure that exploitation of the workers did not occur. For Smith, slavery was not a moral issue; it was a poor financial decision and bad for the economy.

Martineau wanted to merge the notions of production and consumption, as well as illustrate the benefits of free labor. She used the theories of Adam Smith to provide a framework for her story, but used this exotic location, nearly unknown to Britons of the period. In using this location she was able to emphasize not only the growth of the

[102] Hall, Catherine. *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 28.

Empire and to educate the public on such a place, but also to refer to the main product the story revolved around.

## "Demerara"

The story "Demerara," discusses the complex argument of forms of labor and capital. She wrote this story in 1832, a year before the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833. It would have been possible for Martineau to see that emancipation for West Indian slaves would not be far away, but it is clear through "Demerara" that Martineau was a very strong advocate of this act. Taking Adam Smith's idea, that free labor is more economically efficient than slave labor, Martineau placed this concept at the center of a fictional story.

In "Demerara" Martineau examined the treatment and condition of slaves to show why un-free labor was not conducive to an effective economic system. The fictional story revolves around young Alfred, who returns to the country of Demerara after receiving an education in Britain.[103] He returns to his family home to witness slavery in a new light. Through the actions of Alfred his father, Mr. Bruce and a second slave-owner, Mr. Mitchelson, witness the difference in work ethic of the slaves when they are treated as free laborers instead of slaves.

On Alfred's first trip onto the plantation after his return from Britain, he witnesses slaves being forced to work in hard, damp conditions. When he asks the overseer of the slaves if these conditions are typical, the overseer replies that the slaves enjoy the whip more than the fog, since they were made to live in sunshine.[104] Alfred takes this to mean

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[104] Martineau, *"Demerara,"* 6.

that the slaves, seen by the overseer as lazy people, needed the use of the whip in order to compel them to work on foggy mornings. It is this incident that makes Alfred's mind turn towards the question of the productivity of slave labor.

Alfred's belief that slave labor is less economically viable than free labor is reinforced when he talks with a slave who worked on a neighboring plantation. The slave, Cassius, has been selling home grown vegetables in order to pay for his freedom, or "ransom" as it is called by Martineau. Alfred makes a comment to Cassius regarding his work ethic – Cassius appears to work much harder in his own small garden, than in his master's field. Cassius looks to Alfred and asks: "Why should I be industrious for him? And as for telling the truth, I will do it when it helps me get my ransom; but if telling the truth hinders my being free, I lie to myself when I tell the truth…"[105] Through this interaction Alfred and the reader, are able to understand that Cassius is so preoccupied with receiving and paying for his freedom that little else matters to him, including telling the truth to his masters if it would impede gaining his freedom.

This is an important moment in the story for Alfred. Hard work comes only as the result of the possibility of slaves gaining their freedom. Alfred sees this as quite different from English workers, who take pride in their work and were not preoccupied with the questions of freedom.

As Alfred continues to gain a clearer understanding of slave motivation and work ethic, he hopes to conduct an experiment in which he can determine which type of labor is more economical to the plantation owners: slave labor or free labor. Alfred's experiment comes to fruition after Mr. Mitchelson's mill was destroyed by bad weather. Alfred requests to be put in charge of the project to repair the mill with some of

[105] Ibid, 36-37.

Mitchelson's slaves. The carpenter tells Mitchelson that with the available slaves the mill could be repaired in sixty days; Alfred questions how long it would take free laborers to complete the task. The carpenter replies that with free labor the mill could be repaired in twelve to fifteen days. Mitchelson finds this unbelievable and allowes Alfred to set the working conditions for the slaves sent to repair the mill. Alfred employs the slaves, just as he would have employed English free laborers. He promises to pay the workers' wages, provide them with warm clothing for cold mornings and cool evenings, and an ample provision of meat, bread and vegetables.[106] Through these changes Alfred creates a very motivated and efficient work force.

This drastic change in the attitude of the work force is evident when Alfred's father, Mr. Bruce, stops by to see the progress. He is shocked when he arrives at the mill when he hears the workers laughing and talking. "The first sounds he heard was a hum of voices, some singing, some talking, some laughing; for negroes have none of the gravity of English labourers. When they are not sullen they are merry; and now they showed that talk and mirth were no hindrance to working with might and main."[107] For Alfred's father, it is the first time he witnesses the work ethic of slaves treated as free men rather than fixed capital.

> 'Labor is the product of the mind as much as the body; and to secure that product' Alfred told his father, "We must sway the mind by the natural means, - by motives. A man must learn to work from self-interest before he will work for the sake of another; and labouring against self-interest is what nobody ought to expect of white men, - much less of the slaves.[108]

[106] Ibid, 66.
[107] Ibid, 67.
[108] Ibid, 70.

Alfred understands that employees will work better for their employer if they have vested self-interest, such as earning wages in order to pay for their food and housing. Slaves, Alfred explains, know their conditions will never change regardless of how hard they work. Because of that, slaves have been termed lazy since they have no reason to put their full effort into their work on the plantations. "I doubt whether any slave believes that his comfort depends on the value of his work," Alfred says to Mr. Bruce, "At any rate, he often sees that they do not. And this difficulty will forever attend the practice of holding labourers as fixed capital."[109]

Alfred's experiment attempts to show his father that workers who are free, employed and have a vested interest are happier and better workers. His father, however, continues to argue slaves have no ingenuity. Alfred scoffs, pointing out the ingenuity of slave designed dwellings on the plantations, and their skill in certain sports. According to Alfred, the slave-owners will never possess the faculties of the slaves, since the slave-holders can only purchase the limbs of their slaves, never their minds."[110] The mind will always belong to the man. Slaves, Alfred argues, will only work half-heartedly for the slave-owners, while the free laborer will put his whole mind and effort into the job assigned to him as an employee.

> The free labourer had every inducement to manage his field or other possession frugally, and to husband whatever produce he may obtain. You need only look into the state of our slave acres, to see how different the case is there. The cultivation is negligently performed, the produce stolen or wasted, so that we reap scarcely a third of the natural crop. In

[109] Ibid, 71.
[110] Ibid, 72.

> both cases, the master pays the subsistence of the labourer, but the slave-owner pays in addition for theft, negligence and waste.[111]

In "Demerara" the solution Alfred has for the efficiency and productivity of the slaves is the most important section of the story. It illustrates that there are solutions to slave labor in which free workers can be more productive than slaves. Martineau spends a great deal of time on the conversation between Alfred and his father, Mr. Bruce, when they discuss how much greater the productivity of the slaves can be when they are treated as free laborers and paid wages. As Alfred says to his father:

> …and we, father, can never guess from looking at a negro sulking in the stocks, or tilling lands which yield him no harvest, what he may be where there is no white man to fear and hate, and where he may reap whatever he has sown. Happily there are some who have been to Liberia, and can tell us what a negro may become.[112]

There is potential in the "Negro" that Martineau hopes can make him work much harder so long as he had the vested interest to do so.

Through examining the treatment and conditions of slaves in Demerara, Harriet Martineau used the principles of political economy to point out the untenable nature of slavery in a modern global economy. Alfred is Martineau's mouthpiece throughout the story. She was very adamant that slaves were not an effective work force for the Demerara or any other place. Martineau saw slave-labor as unproductive, as seen when Alfred and his father compare two different groups of laborers working. One group were the slaves working in the fields, bending over the ground and to all appearances barely moving, silent, listless and dull. A bit further away were Alfred's workers who were

[111] Ibid 73-74.
[112] Martineau, "Demerara," 140.

"busy as bees and had a cheerful hum."[113] Martineau saw this contrast as the most impactful picture she could paint of the two different forms of labor.

Through the way in which Martineau illustrated the treatment and working condition of the slaves in Demerara, in this text she was not primarily concerned with making a moral argument as she would later make. Instead, she used the principles of political economy to argue against slavery in an industrial economy. Martineau concludes her story with a general summary of her three main arguments. After all, Martineau was appealing to the general reader who had for the most part not read much political economy. Her main emphasis is to critique the concept of property. Property, she says is held by conventional, not natural right, - "man has no right to hold man in property."[114] She also believes that if both parties have not agreed, the law will not secure this property.

Martineau's final conclusion of her story, states her argument and her opinion concisely. "A free trade in sugar would banish slavery altogether, since competition must induce an economy of labour and capital; i.e., a substitution of free for slave labour."[115] It can be argued that Martineau sees this issue in two different ways. Firstly, slave labor would never be as efficient, productive, or economically efficient as free labor, hence, the slave-holders should rid themselves of this type of labor and have a more productive plantation on the efforts of free laborers. Secondly, she seems to believe that because free labor is clearly the better choice then slavery is doomed to failure. Yet she might also understand that an institution as deeply rooted in British as well as American culture could not be easily dismantled.

[113] Ibid, 70.
[114] Ibid, 141.
[115] Ibid, 143.

In *Illustrations*, Martineau self-consciously chose to write in a feminized genre. For women during the nineteenth century, fictional stories and novels offered an accessible way to publish political opinions without being considered too radical to be read. Martineau wanted to write a story that would appeal to the masses, and one the masses would be able to understand. Writing a fictional story that advocated against slavery helped Martineau establish herself as a new voice in political economy in Britain.

The publication of *Illustrations of Political Economy* put Martineau on the national scene, making her a household name. In 1837, just before the coronation of Queen Victoria, Sir John Conroy, an employee of the new Queen's household, came with a message for Martineau. He acknowledged the usefulness of Martineau's books to the Princess, and afterwards "I heard more particulars of the eagerness with which the little lady [Victoria] read the stories on the first day of the month."[116] Martineau's works impacted a multitude of people, from the middle and working-class people who were able to understand her economic concerns in regards to labor, to the upper echelons of society who also found Martineau's works useful. She had a monthly sale of nearly 10,000 copies and readership of perhaps twelve or fifteen times that number.[117]

Although Martineau argued primarily against the economics of slavery and made no moral argument about the institution, it was clear to Martineau, as well as her readers and publishers, after the publication of "Demerara" that Martineau found slavery abhorrent. She declared in her autobiography that by 1832, and the publication of "Demerara" she was "satisfied that slavery was indefensible economically, socially, and

[116] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 417.
[117] James Burns. "From 'Polite Learning' to 'Useful Knowledge'." *History Today* 36, no. 4 (1986), www.historytoday.com/james-burns/polite-learning-useful-knowledge (accessed 14 August 2011).

morally."[118] As we shall see, however, Martineau was retrospectively re-writing history, for the moral objection would come only after her journey to American and in her publications *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel.*

[118] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 336.

# CHAPTER FOUR:

# MARTINEAU IN AMERICA

The story "Demerara" in *Illustrations of Political Economy* focused on the business side of slavery, explaining that slavery was simply a poor business choice of plantation owners. This would be the only piece of writing about slavery in which Martineau would take an economic viewpoint; the majority of her other anti-slave writings would focus on moral, and political issues surrounding the institution.[119] It was Martineau's travels and her ability to be an eyewitness to slavery in America which shifted her opinions and gave her an authority within both British and American societies. This was an important shift in Martineau's way of thinking. Martineau was coming from a country which had abolished slavery in 1834, giving Martineau the moral high ground in her anti-slavery publications. After her visit to America her understanding of slavery primarily as a problem of political economy gave way to morally inspired arguments against the institution.

Martineau found her clearest voice as an anti-slave advocate through the experience of travel in America. She had previously written religious articles for Unitarian periodicals and, of course, *Illustrations of Political Economy*. From this point forward Martineau's work would consist mainly of non-fiction. From her travels to America Martineau published two books that became popular on both sides of the Atlantic: *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). These two travelogues gave the readers a descriptive account of where she traveled while in

[119] Martineau's other anti-slavery texts include: *Society in America* (1837), *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), and the *Martyr Age of the United States* (1839), as well as a series of periodicals and letters she wrote throughout the 1830s through the 1860s.

America and the people she encountered while in the United States. It is through these two books we can glean how Martineau witnessed American slavery and are able to understand just why she shifted her focus from a political based argument against slavery to a moral one.

## Motivations for Martineau's Travel

Harriet Martineau entered the slavery debate at the right time, not only were the 1830s and early 1840s the beginning of the American slavery debate, but also it was when the working-class press was striving to raise the question of democracy and freedom within the United States and Britain. It was also the time when there was an organized Radical party in Parliament which had the ambitions of bringing about social change.[120]

Martineau spent the years 1834 to 1836 exploring the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. She lived in the country continuously throughout the two years, although never staying in one place for a long time. She ventured from the northern cities of Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., to the southern states exploring their cities and rural areas. She wanted to see the United States for everything it claimed to offer, including its culture and its society. One of the key elements of American society Martineau was interested in was slavery. The institution which was initially introduced by the English was elevated to a business in which humans were merely a commodity by the time of Martineau's visit.

Martineau had her own idea of what the society of America would look like, a lush wilderness still being explored in its Western parts and a nation where men were created equal. Yet the land she explored was drastically different from the one she

[120] Webb, 138.

imagined. "To radicals" argued R.K. Webb, "America was either the land of promise or, more judiciously, the test of their ideals. Many middle-class radicals particularly had fault to find, with slavery, the tariff, or American manners, yet they kept high hopes, admired American institutions, and hoped to copy those they liked in Britain."[121] She understood that the United States was still a land defining itself; nonetheless she was surprised to see its lack of care for basic human rights of its citizens. Martineau claimed that she traveled to America only as a student of American culture and society; though with her reputation as an anti-slavery writer some people were skeptical. Even prior to landing in the United States Martineau was questioned on board the ship as to her reasons for traveling to the United States. Martineau went to observe American society, keenly aware that many Americans were already familiar with her views, since *Illustrations of Political Economy* had been a popular publication in the United States.

Martineau claimed that after the success of *Illustrations of Political Economy*, her life in London became a whirlwind of special events, speaking engagements, and dinners. Yet, Martineau never seemed quite content with all the attention she was gaining from the success of her series. In 1834, a friend of Martineau, Lord Henly, suggested that Martineau go to America. Martineau explained the reason for her trip to America, as a way for her to 'rough it' and to educate herself on American society. She traveled to the United States for several reasons, not the least of which was her own curiosity about seeing American culture.

She wanted to travel, she said, to take a holiday, not for indulgence but improvement. Yet once Martineau would reach the shores of America her travels would

[121] R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, 134.

primarily be aimed at understanding the ways the society of the United States could improve.[122] She believed that she was becoming too accustomed to a life of luxury in England, particularly after the publication of *Illustrations of Political Economy*, which had made her a very popular woman and writer. Martineau claimed that a variety of publications earned her about £10,000, all she needed to live on for the next twenty-five years.[123] "To a certain extent," Martineau wrote in her *Autobiography*, "my travels to America answered my purposes of self-discipline in undertaking them. Fearing that I was growing too much accustomed to the luxury, and to an exclusive regularity in the modes of living, I desired to 'rough it' for a considerable time."[124] Martineau did not want to become so comfortable with her life, before she "grew too old and fixed in my habits for such an experiment."[125]

In the nineteenth century, America had a great deal to offer a traveler from Britain. She could witness the republican form of government, see how slavery functioned within this republican society, as well as get away from the 'luxuries' of London life. Martineau claimed that she "had a strong curiosity to witness the actual working of republican institutions"[126] which included the question of citizenship in a society that condoned slavery, and the way in which the government treated its citizens.

Martineau was adamant that she wanted to be an unbiased observer of American society and institutions. She claimed, "when I was questioned about my opinions of

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[122] Webb, 133.
[123] It is not known precisely how much money came from the publication of *Illustrations of Political Economy* alone. Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 202.
[124] Ibid, Vol. 1, 391-392.
[125] Ibid, Vol. 1, 330.
[126] Deborah Anne Logan, ed. *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War by Harriet Martineau*. DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002, 10.

American institutions, that I went to learn, and not to teach."[127] She set out to observe American society and record her observations in a systematic rather than impressionistic way.[128] Martineau did not use abstract examples while describing slavery; instead she used concrete descriptions of the institutions through the extensive use of personal interactions with American citizens. Yet, Martineau was also aware that there were going to be aspects of America she would not agree with, and slavery is the prime example of that mindset.

Martineau understood that slavery was a logical business choice for a large portion of Southern plantation owners in the United States, and she also realized that her opinions in "Demerara" could affect the way in which she was accepted, or not, within Southern society. Martineau believed that every country had grown organically according to historical circumstance. "The Enlightened traveler, if he explores only one country, carried in his mind the image of all… [He must learn that] every prevalent virtue or vice is a result of the particular circumstances amidst which the society exists."[129] While Martineau did not travel in order to change American Southern society and coax them away from buying, selling and maintaining slaves,[130] slavery nonetheless became a main preoccupation for Martineau during her two year stay.

Although Martineau did not leave Britain intending to focus solely on slavery, she did hope to witness how American society functioned and the different groups and their characteristics within society. Martineau was not naïve enough to believe that there would not be differences between the slave-holding society in the American South and

[127] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 336.
[128] Gillian Thomas, *Harriet Martineau*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985, 33.
[129] Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishing, 1968, 8.
[130] Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns: 1780-1870*. London: Routledge Press, 1992, 130.

the abolitionists in the American North. She hoped to gain a better understanding of these differences through her travels.

She made a clear statement prior to her departure from Britain that she had no immediate intentions of publishing any work on America, although Martineau was continuously writing in her journals of every experience she encountered. Martineau's original main goal had been to strictly observe society, although as a published authoress it is quite possible that this was a strategic statement in order to gain a more authoritative voice in her writing. By claiming she had no intentions to write, when her travelogues were published there was sense of dire need for the information coming from the British public, since what she observed was important enough for Martineau to have written about it. It was not until after Martineau had returned to Britain in 1836 and she had looked over the journals she had kept while abroad, that she publicly decided to write *Society in America*,[131] as a way of outlining and describing what she had observed.

As she explained in her *Autobiography*, "one subject remains nearly untouched in those books [about America], and on that alone I propose now to speak… [and my] own personal connexion with the great controversy on negro slavery which was just then beginning to stir the American community."[132] Martineau had a broad range of choice in terms of topics she could focus on in her travelogues. These included the legal rights, or lack thereof, for women both on the Southern plantations, who Martineau claimed did not approve of slavery but could do nothing about it, and the women in the urban North, who could do nothing more than protest against slavery, or on the ways in which the American

[131] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 330.
[132] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 333.

Republican government functioned. While Martineau did touch on several of these topics in *Society in America,* her main focus was on the institution of slavery.

Through Martineau's travels to America she established authority as a direct observer, as she came into contact with slaves, abolitionists and slave-holders. She spent time with all three different groups while in the United States and was able to form strong opinions about these different constituencies. According to Webb, "she talked with people from all levels of society, and was impressed by some conversations she had with people of little formal education and no position."[133] Yet through these experiences she wrote from a position of authority as an eyewitness observer of both slavery and American society. Unlike Martineau, many nineteenth-century writers critical of slavery in the United States had not traveled to the country. This experience added weight to Martineau's critique when her book *Society in America* was published in 1837.

In her *Autobiography* she wrote: "What I witnessed in America considerably modified my views on the subject of Property; and from that time forward I saw social modifications taking place which have already altered the tone of leading Economists, and opened a prospect of further changes which will probably work out in time a totally new social state."[134] Martineau's travels to America gave her two different insights into the institution of slavery. Firstly, she was revised her theories in economics and it opened her mind to further changes that would economically occur in America. Secondly, her trip to America also opened her mind to the notion that slavery was not only an economical issue but also a moral issue. It is important to root her moral sentiments against slavery in her travels because had she already strong insisted that

[133] Webb, 145.
[134] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 175.

slavery was a moral problem she would have published her anti-slavery sentiments in a moral tone versus one of political economy.

Instead, Martineau found her strongest outlet to discuss slavery in the early 1830s was in the context of political economy and not in terms of ethics or morality. After her travels, Martineau did not completely disregard her previous economic stance against slavery, but instead chose to concentrate on the more moral argument against it.

## Harriet Martineau: The Female Travel Writer

Those who had the motivation, as well as the funds, to travel had a certain level of status within both British and American society due to their knowledge of foreign lands. Although many prominent writers and enlightened thinkers such as John Stuart Mill believed this foreign knowledge to be false knowledge,[135] there were others who believed that travel writing offered an accurate portrait of a foreign society. Martineau understood her power as a travel writer, and seeing the influence of her earlier works she knew that she could influence individuals through her observations. One of the foremost experts on Martineau's writings, Deborah Logan, writes that Martineau can be "characterized as a social-problem writer eager to address all sides of an argument from a variety of ideological perspectives."[136] This could be seen in the way Martineau determined solutions for the poor economic use of slaves in "Demerara." She also had the same attitude when it came to addressing and analyzing American society.

[135] J.S. Mill is seen throughout Martineau's biography to be someone who had consistently questions Martineau's ability to accurately describe the reality of her travels. See, Martineau, *Autobiography*¸ Vol. 1, 129.
[136] Logan, 83.

Martineau claimed that she had no intention of writing a book on America, even prior to her travels. One of Martineau's publishers, questioned her about this prior to her departure from Britain. "I told him, as I had told others, that I knew nothing of any American book, and that I was going to the US with other objects, - the first of which was to obtain rest and recreation."[137] Yet Martineau found herself keeping detailed journals of her visits to the various American cities and her personal interactions. While in the South she pledged to make it understood that she was not going to be silenced on the issue of slavery. Martineau declared that if she *was* ever going to publish her experiences in the American South, then she would not publish names or facts which would draw attention to specific individuals. But it must not be forgotten "that I had written upon slavery, and that I should write on it again, if I saw reason."[138] Martineau wanted no personal injury to come to any of the slave-owners, since she had appreciated their good graces in allowing a known abolitionist to stay at their home.

Martineau made it clear that she would listen to both sides of the slavery debate. She hoped this would diffuse some of the animosity which was attached to her name after the publication of "Demerara." "I steadily declare my intentions to hear, when opportunity offered, what the Abolitionists, as well as others had to say for themselves…."[139] Martineau made a conscious effort to remain as openly neutral as possible, particularly when it came to the issue of American slavery. She also realized that being an articulate female traveler, she gained a sense of power and authority.

Martineau realized that as a writer she had the power to influence other abolitionists. She wanted to clarify that while the slave-holders did commit a moral

[137] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 330.
[138] Ibid, Vol. 1, 342.
[139] Ibid, Vol. 1, 338.

crime, they were not monsters. She classified many of the slave-owners as her personal friends, which differed from other anti-slavery publications in America. "My feelings were very different from theirs [the American Abolitionists] about the slave-holders in the South; - naturally enough, as these southern slave-holders were nothing else in the eyes of abolitionists, while to me they were, in some cases, personal friends and in more, hospitable entertainers."[140] Martineau may have not condoned the business of the slave-holders but she did not want them to be harmed either.

Martineau had tried to maintain an unbiased perspective while in the South. Nonetheless, she was an abolitionist, particularly once she witnessed the atrocities of slavery for herself, as well as the treatment of abolitionists in America. "I really desired to see the working of the slave system, and was glad that my having published against the principles divest me altogether of the character of a spy, and gave me an unquestioned liberty to publish the results of what I might observe."[141] Coming back to Britain in 1836, Martineau felt a great need to publish her observations of American slavery and to show Britain as well as America the problems she saw with the institution of slavery. Martineau wrote in her *Autobiography*, "I wrote because I could not help it. There was something I wanted to say, and I said it."[142] Martineau had never been afraid to speak her mind, and she was not going to be silent on an issue as important to her as slavery.

Once Martineau returned to Britain and decided to write about her travels, she held nothing back. In a letter to friend Abby Kelley in 1838, two years after her return from the United States, Martineau wrote:

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[140] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 3, 151.
[141] Ibid, Vol. 1, 230.
[142] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 399.

> But I must remind you that, in bearing my testimony in print against slavery, I have incurred no risk or discredit. Here, public sentiment is wholly with me on this subject. The only sacrifice I had to make was of the good opinion of some of my friends in America; and I cannot trust that the time is not far distant when they will forgive and agree with me.[143]

Martineau was aware in Britain that her observations needed to be made public regardless of the repercussions. Her motivations to write about her travels came from her desire for public knowledge. It was this motivation, whether Martineau would admit it or not, that made her such a keen observer of American culture and society.

By 1838 Martineau had published two travelogues on her trips to America that focused on American society. These publications would allow her to claim authority on the slavery debate. Martineau understood that many women were aware of the power they possessed to write, which had great potential to arouse public feeling to the extent of influencing events in the Parliamentary sphere from which women were excluded.[144] The knowledge that women could possess this power by writing about topics in which they had authority allowed Martineau to write two popular books on American society and culture.

## Martineau's American Travelogues: *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel*

*Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* offered a new departure in Martineau's career as a writer. In these two travelogues she described travel around the United States, what she saw and did in various cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., as well as the various groups and types of people she came in contact with throughout the country. According to Webb, Martineau maintained that "Traveling

[143] Harriet Martineau to Abby Kelly, 20 June 1838, quoted in Logan, 42.
[144] Midgley, 32.

is a serious business. There can be no work more serious than reporting the important things that happen in the world."[145] For Martineau, her task in writing about America included recording what she witnessed with the greatest possible clarity and honesty. The traveler must have "an enlightened understanding of American society, and, most important of all, must possess the principles which may serve as a rallying point for his observations, and without which he cannot determine their bearings, or be secure of putting a right interpretation upon them."[146] Martineau saw the interpretation of American society as just as important as her observations were. A misinterpretation of society could be just as costly to a travel writer as a false observation.

Martineau embraced the stance of a humanitarian crusader against slavery. "I had long before published against slavery, and always declared my conviction that it was a question of humanity, not of country or race; a moral, not merely political question; a general affair, and not one of city, state, party or nation."[147] Although Martineau's early publication "Demerara" focused on the economics of slavery, Martineau now declared she had always hoped her anti-slavery writings would be seen as the work of a humanitarian advocate, not a political economist. She argued that the slave-holders in America were from aristocratic families once called upon to lead but now no better than harassing oppressors. The moral high-ground, she believed, belonged to those nations who condemned slavery, arguing that other nations did not want to associate with a slave nation such as America, which was negatively effecting its reputation around the world. Martineau also maintained that slavery was oppressing personal and human rights.

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[145] Webb, 162.
[146] Ibid, 162.
[147] Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*. New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1969, Vol. 3, 156.

Martineau hoped that through her writings the despicable actions of the slave-holders and the persecution of the slaves would be clearly understood. As she wrote to Fox: "I became fully convinced that I could not live for any other purpose than ascertaining and avowing truth; and the witnessing and being implicated in the perils and struggles of the abolitionists in the present martyr age of America has, of course, strengthened my convictions."[148]

Along with these two popular travelogues, Martineau also wrote a large amount of anti-slavery articles from the early 1840s through the 1860s. These articles were for both American and British periodicals, such as the *Liberty Bell*, the *Spectator* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard.* The large amount of publications produced in the 1850s, show that Martineau saw the growing conflict between slave-holders and abolitionists. As with all of her writing, Martineau hoped these publications against slavery would help the United States choose to emancipate their slaves.

## The Lowering of a Slave-Holding Republic

The political question Martineau worried considerably over was how the institution of slavery affected the national character and the strength of the Union. In an article written in 1858, Martineau considered how slavery impacted the politics and reputation of the United States: "The existence of slavery in their nation is their misery and shame. It has lowered their reputation, degraded their national character, barred their progress, vitiated their foreign policy, poisoned their domestic peace, divided their hearts

[148] Letter to W.J. Fox, 13 May 1837, published in Logan, 5.

and minds; and may ultimately explode the Union."[149] Even prior to the official start of the Civil War in 1861, it was possible for Martineau and other Abolitionists to see that this debate over slavery was not going to end peacefully, as it had done in the British Parliament in the 1830s; for America, it was going to be a brutal battle.[150]

By the 1830s, anti-abolitionists had already resorted to violence in order to quiet the abolitionists ideas that were circulating around the country. Martineau heard about riots in Boston before and during her journey in the United States. While she was still onboard the ship, passengers were questioned whether George Thompson was also on board. They answered he was not. The pilot declared "that this was well, as he could not have been landed without the certainty of being destroyed within a week – the Abolitionist riots in New York having taken place just before."[151] These riots stemmed from anti-slavery sentiment in the Northern cities, which at this time was not fully felt by all living in the North. In the 1830s, the North was not yet fully against the institution of slavery, and many pro-slavery groups tried to quiet the abolitionists during these years. Martineau interpreted the riots as evidence that the institution of slavery was internally destroying the United States. Riots between the abolitionists and the slave-holders divided the nation, weakening the United States at home along with its position in the world.

This growing violence had begun to overtake America in the 1830s. The violence and "terrorism," as Martineau described it, demonstrated an absence of liberty in the

[149] Martineau, "The Slave Trade in 1858," published in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1858, republished in Logan, 271.
[150] Martineau understood that without the destruction of the Confederacy in America, the institution of slavery would never be abolished. And after traveling to the United States, she witnessed the Southerners adoration of their traditions, hence she knew the destruction of that institution would come at a great cost.
[151] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 1, 38.

young republic. According to Martineau in *Society in America*: "More than one innocent person had been hanged, and the device of terrorism has been so practiced as to deprive the total number of persons who avowedly hold a certain set of opinions, of their constitutional liberty of traversing the whole country."[152] The attacks against those who had unpopular opinions found it difficult to maintain their own liberty, and participate in society. Martineau also understood that if America's own citizens were not protected by the government, she would not be protected either. She had already been told that there were those in prison for having opinions similar to those found in "Demerara."[153]

As a British woman, who had published anti-slavery views, Martineau knew that her safety in America could not be promised. This she understood and accepted, but what seemed to worry her more was the lack of protection provided for American abolitionists. She had heard of them being hung, mutilated and hunted without any hindrance from the American government. According to Martineau, "it is only necessary to look at the treatment of the abolitionists by the South, by both legislatures and individuals, to see that no practical understanding of liberty exists there."[154] Although, here she was referring specifically to the American South, this problem also existed in the North. Martineau actually found herself in the center of a riot in Boston in 1835, when it was found out she would be attending an abolitionist meeting.[155] Treatment of abolitionists was violent and brutal in the American North and South.

> People had, of course, been familiar for long enough from newspapers and travellers' accounts with this discrepancy between Americans' protestations of liberty and their holding of several millions of their populace in bondage, but the image which…was now presented was

[152] Martineau, *Society in America*, 236.
[153] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 341.
[154] Martineau, *Society in America*, 236.
[155] This event is described in more detail in *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 3, 151-158.

> essentially novel. The US was in turmoil, where not only Negroes but decent white people went in fear of their lives, where Northern proslavery mobs roamed the streets burning churches while the agents of law and order stood passively by.[156]

While the United States government seemed to be aware of these problems, little was done to remedy the situation.

The government of the United States during the 1830s had the intention of showing that theirs was a country in which anyone could immigrate and become successful. Yet a more liberal government was necessary in order to attract the British and other Europeans to this country. The growing reform culture of Britain during this period, stressed a more liberal and radical government, and as radical and liberal Britons traveled to the United States, this was the type of government they expected to encounter. As abolitionist historian David Turley argues:

> As spokesmen and activists for antislavery became more attached to the liberal side in British politics some of them were aware of a further reason for working to overthrow American slavery; if American democracy was to offer an attractive image of the more popular political order towards which reformers wanted to move Britain it was urgent the stain of slavery be removed from American life.[157]

Britons wanted a more liberal government in America, but realized that within the current conservative American government slavery would not be abolished. This led to a lessening of enthusiasm for Britons and other Europeans to travel and immigrate to the United States. For Europeans the United States was tainted with African blood. Britons and Europeans alike did not want to encourage this type of institution.

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[156] Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972, 28.
[157] David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860*. London: Routledge Press, 1991, 197.

While Martineau stayed in Washington, D.C. during 1834, she noted that "the slavery question will probably be the point on which the next election will turn."[158] As an outside observer to American politics, Martineau was able to conclude that ridding the country of slavery was not the prerogative of the current President, but the guaranteed continuation and escalation of this problem in later years would either force the election of an anti-slavery president or anti-slavery legislation to emancipate the slaves and abolish slavery. Martineau was very aware that the survival of the United States rested on the abolition of the institution and on the freedom of its citizens.

## Slavery and the Aristocracy in America

Southern slave-holders were the wealthy land owners of their day, the American elite. Martineau saw these slave-holders and the American equivalent of the British aristocracy. The class argument against slavery in Martineau's eyes does not focus solely on the lack of rights and low social class of the slaves, but also on the shift in the appearance and attitudes of the class of the slave-owners.

Prior to the nineteenth century, slave-owners were considered aristocrats; they were those with wealth and power in American society, and they also were educated. As Martineau traveled through the American South in the 1830s, she witnessed a different type of slave-owner, one who lacked the gentlemanliness and refinement that she was used to seeing in British aristocrats. In an article for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1858, she described this as a shift due to the effects of the institution of slavery:

> Instead of the cultivated aristocracy of the old slave States, who exemplified for the moment the ordinary plea for an oligarchical

[158] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 1, 257.

> system…we now see a race of bullies, ignorant of books and of life, and unskilled in all gentle arts and high-bred manners. This is immediately owning to the presence of slavery, not only from the immorality and coarseness which grow out of the institution, but from the necessary restriction of the press, and discouragement of liberal thought and speech.[159]

The slave-owners Martineau came in contact with during her two years in America no longer up-held aristocratic values. Martineau blamed this shift entirely on impact of slavery into their lives.

In Martineau's observations of slavery, the loss of the gentlemanly class was important to her arguments against the institution of slavery. The aristocracy was still powerful in nineteenth-century Britain, although the manufacturing class was quickly acquiring similar amounts of wealth and power during this time. Nonetheless, Martineau understood the aristocracy as playing a central role in civic and cultural life. While in Washington, D.C., Martineau dined with some members of the elites, "among the pleasant visits we paid were dinners at the President's, at the house of Heads of Departments, at the British Legation, and at the southern members' congressional mess."[160] These people she dined with were considered the social elite of American society at the time, much like the Parliament members with whom she socialized with in London after the success of *Illustrations of Political Economy*. While Martineau continued her travels through America she claimed to witness a change in aristocrats from the North and the South. In the South, Martineau recoiled at the embrace of slavery by this class, claiming that the slave-owners were men who had lost the education and sense of fair-mindedness that should accompany their social status.

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[159] Martineau, "The Slave Trade in 1858," *Edinburgh Review*, 1858, quoted in Logan, 206.
[160] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 1, 250.

The immorality and coarseness of slavery caused the slave-owners to become nothing short of bullies, unskilled and uneducated property managers picking on the men and women who could do nothing to defend their lives or rights. Martineau also believed that the responsibility that came with being aristocratic men, gentlemen of their country was destroyed by the ownership of slaves. As she puts it, "Slave-holders are not just-minded men, where their labourers are concerned."[161] The gentlemanly qualities were lost as slavery grew in the United States.

According to Martineau's observations of the American slave owners in the 1830s, she saw their need for absolute power over their slaves. This position was something Martineau believed most individuals could not maintain without the use of intimidation. In *Society in America*, she described the use and fear of this type of authority, which the slave-holders possessed over their slaves:

> There are doubtless many masters who guard the comfort of their helpless Negroes all the more carefully from the sense of the entire dependence of the poor creatures upon their mercy: but, there are few human beings fit to be trusted with absolute power: and while there are many who abuse the authority they have over slaves who are not helpless, it is fearful to think what may be the fate of those who are purely burdensome.[162]

In Martineau's remarks of absolute power she emphasized that the slave-holders are not fit to be trusted with this power. She claimed that absolute power corrupts anyone, as seen in the cases written by Olaudah Equiano and Harriet Beecher Stow.[163] In this case, slave-holders are unique only in that the institution gives them absolute power and thus corrupts them. The men, and in some cases women, are morally destroyed by the

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[161] Martineau, "The Slave Difficulty in America," *Once a Week*, 1 February 1862, quoted in Logan, 184.
[162] Martineau, *Society in America*, 317-318.
[163] For more examples of absolute power corrupting slave-holders see: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equinao*. Bostson: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Viking Press, 1982.

instution by becoming brutes. These "aristocracts" no longer cared about education, or manners – even willing to be brutal to other whites as well as to blacks.

The failure of the slave-holders to maintain aristocrat values and manners in Martineau's eyes showed not only the way in which slavery negatively affected American society, but the way in which it had made the individuals of society less refined. Bullies in both American and British society were common not only along the streets of London, and Boston, but now in the American South; they dressed well, had wealth and used their power irresponsibly.

## An "Immoral Institution"

As Martineau traveled along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, she had the opportunity to witness slavery on American plantations. As an eyewitness to this "immoral institution," as Martineau called it, she was able to gain a better understanding of slave-holders complete disregard for what she called the "human rights" of slaves.[164] As she wrote in *Society in America*, "One of the absolute inevitable results of slavery is a disregard of human rights, an inability even to comprehend them."[165] It is through the argument of human rights and oppression, that Martineau made the case that slavery had a moral as well as political cost.

An 1864 article she wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* described the blatant disregard for slaves' human rights: "Blacks were killed on the merest suspicion, and whites were lynched or shot: strangers were punished by the roadside and in market-places, neighbours, and even intimate friends were challenged, warned, beaten, banished

[164] Both of these concepts Martineau first publicly discussed in the chapter "Morals of Economy" in *Society in America.*
[165] Martineau, *Society in America*, 233.

or killed in duels, on some supposition of an offence against slavery."[166] Martineau continued to be aware of the treatment of the white abolitionists as well, realizing that these were threats that could have been imposed on her if she were imprisoned by pro-slavery groups. Yet, she disregarded her own welfare in order to spend more time in the South with the hope of witnessing the condition of slaves, and in some cases have a conversation with them, to truly understand the human costs of the institution of slavery.

Martineau spent a great deal of time in the South with both slave-holders as well as slaves. She tried to understand the reason for owning and maintaining a slave plantation, explaining that

> It must be remembered that the greater number of slave-holders have no other idea than of holding slaves. Their fathers did it: they themselves have never known the coloured race treated otherwise than as inferior beings, born to work for and to teaze the whites, helpless, improvident, open to no higher inducements than indulgence and praise; capable of nothing but entire dependence.[167]

Martineau understood, and wanted to explain to other abolitionists, that slavery must be considered in a historical context, and that not all slave-owners understood the grievous errors they were committing. Instead, slave-owners were merely upholding a family tradition, as Martineau understood it. She did not fault the slave-owners for continuing the tradition of owning slaves, but she did condemn them for the harsh treatment which they could control. As Martineau sat in the home of a Southern slave-owner and his wife, she recollected a moment with the hostess of the house:

> Your hostess comes in at length; and you sit down to work with her: she gratifies your curiosity about her 'people;' telling you how soon they burn out their shoes at the toes and wear out their winter woolens, and tear up

[166] Martineau, "The Negro Race in America," *Edinburgh Review*, 1864, quoted in Logan, 301.
[167] Martineau, *Society in America*, 220.

> their summer cottons; and how impossible it is to get black women to learn to cut out their clothes without waste, and how she never inquires when and where the whipping is done, as it is the overseer's business, and not hers. She has not been seated many minutes when she is called away, and returns saying how babyish these people are, that they will not take medicine unless she gives it to them; and how careless of each other, so that she is obliged to stand by and see Diana put clean linen upon her infant, and to compel Bet to get her sick husband some breakfast.[168]

The slave-owner's wife was not concerned about her treatment of the slaves, since she clearly saw them as inferior and incapable people. She was also not concerned about how the slaves were disciplined, explaining that is was the overseer's job and not hers to control them. Martineau let the slave mistress speak for herself, allowing her description to condemn the very institution she claimed to support. It is also important to note here the economic arguments which are seen here are similar to the arguments Martineau made in "Demerara." The owner's wife commenting on the laziness of the slaves, is similar to the way the overseer in the beginning of "Demerara" describes the slaves attitudes to Alfred.

Martineau cast her observations in comparison with working conditions in England. She compared a Negro woman pushing through the field, explaining how different it is from an English woman in the turnip field. "In her pre-eminently ugly costume, the long scanty dirty woolen garment, with the shabby large bonnet at the back of her head, the perspiration streaming down her dull face…a more hideous object cannot well be conceived."[169] The slaves, Martineau claimed, were in a far worse condition than the laborers back in Britain, due to their degraded working conditions to ill-kempt bodies.

[168] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 2, 47-48.
[169] Ibid, Vol. 1, 53.

As she continued her journey throughout the South, these personal interactions with slaves and slave-holders shaped her narrative. This was different from other approaches travel writers had taken in the past. Martineau wrote in *Retrospect of Western Travel*, "I never lost the painful feeling caused to a stranger by intercourse with slaves. No familiarity with them, no mirth and contentment on their part ever soothed the miserable restlessness caused by the presence of deeply-injured fellow-being…. He suffers, and must suffer from this, deeply and long, as surely as he is human and hates oppression."[170] She saw this disregard for human rights and the oppression of slaves, and chose to take the moral high-ground in her writings against the institution of slavery.

Martineau spoke with particular strength against the personal oppression inflicted on slaves by their owners. "The personal oppression of the negroes is the grossest vice which strikes a stranger in the country. It can never be otherwise when human beings are wholly subjected to the will of other human beings, who are under no external control than the law which forbids killing and maiming; - a law which it is difficult to enforce in individual cases."[171] This vice of slavery, Martineau was able to see for the first time in American slavery. She saw the slaves lose hope and resign themselves to being nothing more than a possession of their owners.

While in the South, Martineau attended a slave-market, which she described as a place every traveler should witness in order to understand the atrocities of slavery. One woman who was on the selling block stood out due to the look of shame and despair on her face.

> She hung her head low, lower, and still lower on her breast, yet turning her eyes incessantly from side to side, with an intensity of expectation which

[170] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 1, 232-233.
[171] Martineau, *Society in America*, 223.

> showed that she had not yet reached the last stage of despair. I should have thought that her agony of shame and dread would have silenced the tongue of every spectator: but it was not so.[172]

The oppression of slaves, by the slave-owners as well as American society and the disregard for their suffering was unacceptable to Martineau and she was not afraid to let it be known when she returned to Britain.

Witnessing of the personal oppression of the slaves and the blatant disregard for their human rights led Martineau to rethink her approach to slavery. Even while writing "Demerara" it is possible to see that Martineau did have some sense of the immoral aspects of slavery, but it was not until she was able to witness the institution for herself in America that she fully understood the immorality of the slavery and pushed even harder for emancipation of its victims and its abolition.

The timing of Harriet Martineau's journey to the United States was ideal for the development of Martineau's thinking about slavery. She believed she was able to see the true America, with the fight between the slave-holders and the abolitionists just beginning to take shape. In seeing this early fight against slavery, Martineau's previous viewpoints about slavery seem to have shifted during her two-year stay in the United States.

There is no solid evidence to show what Martineau would have thought of America prior to her journey to its shores, and although her travels there are Martineau's first ventures out of Britain, it can be inferred that she expected to find a country similar to Britain. Yet, she found the United States quite different from England. Martineau had

[172] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 2, 84-85.

expected to find slave-holders, and although she did not approve of their methods, she found herself becoming close acquaintances with many. One quality of Martineau that is fascinating for a woman in the nineteenth century was she never held back her opinions of what she found to be immoral. In *Retrospect of Western Travel* she writes, "We [the slave-holders and herself] never quarreled, while I believe we never failed to perceive the extent of the different opinions and feelings between us. I met with much more cause for admiration in their frankness than reason to complain of illiberality."[173] Martineau knew that as an abolitionist she would never condone slavery, but she realized she could still understand the slave-holders reasoning for having slaves. She illustrated in her *Autobiography*, "I was, in short, though an English Abolitionist, quite unaware of the conditions of Abolitionism in America."[174]

She had written "Demerara" to discuss slavery from a perspective of political economy. As she began to witness slavery in America, her views altered from an economic viewpoint, that slavery was not good for the economy, to a moral, political and class debate against the institution. It can be said that Martineau had hoped her writings against slavery would bring the American and British people together to end the institution of slavery in the United States. Martineau had seen in 1833 the coming together of British society to end slavery in its colonies and had understood that through the solidarity of British society in the late eighteenth century, the elimination of the slave trade eventually passed in Parliament. It is possible that Martineau had hoped for a similar solidarity of American society in order to abolish slavery. Martineau wrote in a letter in 1845, "I wish I could adequately express my sense of the duty of everyone

[173] Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol. 2, 67-68.
[174] Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 345.

interested in the cause of the Negro – of human freedom at large – to read and deeply mediate this piece of history."[175] It was the duty of all to read and understand the atrocities of the slave-holders and the oppression of the slaves, and make an effort to end this inhumane institution. Martineau made an effort to bring these stories to life with the publications of her travelogues *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel*, in which she outlined the issues with slavery in three arguments.

First, Martineau argued that slavery degradated the aristocratic class of the slave-holders. Plantation and slave-owners prior to the nineteenth century had been considered well-educated, civilized gentlemen. The slave-holders that Martineau came in contact with, she considered no better than bullies in their treatment of the slaves. These slave-holders lacked the education and justice that had gone along with the aristocratic upbringing of their ancestors.

Second, the political argument against slavery posed by Martineau regarded the world's perception of a slave-holding United States. According to Martineau, the reputation of the United States was in a downward spiral due to its acceptance of a slave-holding class. Other nations refused to do business with America in an effort to condemn the United States for participating in slave labor. By the 1830s most other European nations had abolished the slave class in their countries and had created nations based on free labor. America's reputation, according to Martineau, was of an inferior country that could not function without the use of their slaves.

The last of Martineau's major arguments against slavery was against the poor treatment and conditions of the slaves. Martineau's morality debate examined the disregard for human rights of the slaves, and the oppression of them by their owners. The

[175] Martineau, "Harriet Martineau to Elizabeth Pease," *The Liberty Bell*, 1845, quoted in Logan, 86.

slaves were treated with violence and torture, which was seen as an acceptable treatment by the slave-holders. In contrast, Martineau saw the slaves as strong, independent people who were not given the opportunities to succeed in American society. She believed that runaway slaves were the epitome of Social Darwinism, since they were the best example of survival of the fittest.[176] Martineau saw the ingenuity and courage of the runaway slaves, as crucial characteristics that slave-holders refused to observe. She saw slaves as a group who used their strength and their intellect to survive an oppressive institution and deserved the chance for freedom and achieve their own personal success in America.

These arguments gave Martineau's writings a greater power and authority in both America and Britain in the 1830s and 1840s. Many of Martineau's arguments were used into the 1860s once the American Civil War broke out, a war Martineau had seen thirty years earlier as inevitable. According to Clare Midgley, "the origins of the anti-slavery debate in Britain lie not only in the relationship between enslaved Africans and British society of who a small number became a part, but also in the transatlantic connection between white Britons and North Americans."[177] Martineau was a part of this transatlantic connection which brought many of the anti-slavery debates from British to American abolitionists. Together the British anti-slavery associations, several publications by Martineau and the American abolitionists fought for the emancipation of the American slaves, and brought their problems to the attention of the rest of Britain and America.

[176] Logan, 295.
[177] Midgley, 14.

# CHAPTER FIVE:

# CONCLUSION

For women in the nineteenth century, establishing authority as a writer did not come easily. Female writers found their greatest success in fiction writing often eschewing direct engagement with contemporary political, economic or social issues. Martineau knew she could write from an early age and was encouraged by her brother to choose writing as a career. Martineau's identity as a Unitarian radical compelled her to write on diverse political and social issues from the beginning. But it was not only the types of publications that Martineau wrote that gave her an authority among her readers; it was the fact she had been a traveler. Travel writing itself gave women a new sense of authority than had been previously available to them. According to Maria Frawley, "Travel enabled women to create connections and establish authority with a part of English culture that prior to travel had evaded them because they lacked education that decreed cultural authority."[178] Martineau was a woman who, through her travel writing, established a writerly identity that necessarily engaged contemporary political and social issues.

In the nineteenth century a large number of women supported the abolition of slavery. They showed their enthusiasm for the cause by joining anti-slavery societies in the United States as well as in Britain.[179] Who knows if the writings of Harriet Martineau on slavery would have any effect on British or American society had she never traveled to the United States? Nonetheless, Martineau visited the United States and had the

[178] Maria Frawley, *A Wide Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England.* London: Associated University Press, 1994, 24.
[179] There were specific female anti-slavery societies in cities in England including London, Manchester, and Birmingham as well as in the United States such as Boston, New York and Washington, D.C.

chance to see slavery with her own eyes. Few other women and men traveled to the United States for the specific purpose of observing and understanding American society making her account stand out among female abolitionism and the abolitionist cause more generally.

As many women were not permitted to join the debates in Parliament or have their voice heard, writing offered Martineau a particular kind of authority. Her ability to publish popular travelogues gave her opinions authority. According to Frawley, "Travel enabled them [women] to voice opinions not just as English women but as citizens of this world, as people who were interested in and could learn from other lives, histories, and cultures – and as people who could write authoritatively about these cultures."[180] Through her observation of slaves, slave-holders and abolitionists of the United States, Martineau gleaned important details about American culture and the attitudes of its citizens. Yet through her opinion as a 'citizen of this world' as Frawley called her, Martineau felt it her duty to write. She stood behind her anti-slavery sentiments even when her own life was threatened by pro-slavery groups. Nonetheless, she never wavered in her convictions about slavery, and throughout her life Martineau maintained her abolitionist sentiments.

Martineau's two anti-slavery publications as well as many of her anti-slavery writings which she continued to publish into the 1860s came to be understood as valuable and important texts. Influential British writers such as Charles Dickens and J.S. Mill were readers of Martineau's, even though their sentiments did not always align with

[180] Frawley, 41.

hers.[181] In 1837, Martineau was an invited guest to the coronation of Queen Victoria, who had long admired her works.[182] That same year, *Society in America* was published in London by Saunders Press, in New York by Saunders and Otley Press, and in Paris by Galignani Press. Though publication statistics are not available, the fact that this book was published in three major cities shows the widespread appeal of Martineau's work.

The popularity and availability of Martineau's work, illustrates that through her opportunity to be an observer of American society this gave her publications an authority not enjoyed by many other female abolitionists. The work of abolitionists such as Elizabeth Pease and Anne Knight, and especially their writings for the British anti-slavery societies were not published and well-known as Martineau, whose travel writing represented an eyewitness account of the horrors and errors of slavery. Her hope was that through her publications she could influence the American public, who together would stand up and combat slavery.

## From a Political Economy to a Moral Slavery Debate

Martineau's early writing career began by taking on religious articles for small Unitarian journals. These articles defined much of Martineau's early career, and set the stage for her famously popular series, *Illustrations of Political Economy*. The series by Martineau gained her much attention from members of Parliament as well as the soon-to-be Queen, young Victoria. This important opportunity for Martineau allowed her to write a series in a manner the general public would understand and relate.

[181] In 1850, Mill wrote an article entitled "The Negro Question" condemning the institution in the United States.
[182] Martineau, *Autobiography,* Vol. 1, 419.

Throughout *Illustrations of Political Economy* Martineau took authors such as Malthus, Mill, and Smith and explained their concepts in general and highly accessible terms. Using a fictional story, considered a 'proper' writing genre for women at the time, helped foster her acceptance by the publishing world as well as the public. One of the sections that garnered much attention was Martineau's chapter on slavery. "Demerara" focused on the problems with slavery from a viewpoint of business and economics. Presenting the economic liberalism of Adam Smith in a fictional story of a slave-owner and his son, Martineau made these ideas easily accessible to the British public.

At first glance "Demerara" shows the moral costs of holding and owning slaves, yet Martineau focused more on the business aspect of slavery. Through the fictional story of Alfred and a few particular slaves, Martineau showed how inefficient and non-profitable slavery was in comparison with free labor. Her best example was the juxtaposition of a group of slaves treated as free laborers and earning a wage in contrast with slaves working in the fields of a plantation owner. Martineau writes that "where labour is not held as capital, the capitalist pays for labour only… where the labourer is held as capital, the capitalist not only pays a higher price for an equal quantity of labour, but also for waste, negligence and theft."[183] Martineau explained that slavery was not only unprofitable, but free laborers were more efficient and productive workers.

"Demerara" made the point that slavery as an institution was bad for business. Yet, as she finished "Demerara" Martineau gave a brief glimpse into her future arguments on slavery. By the time of publication she understood slavery as a poor business choice, then traveled to the United States to learn more about slavery and to see the institution in practice.

[183] Martineau, "Demerara," 142.

Martineau arrived in America hoping to learn about its society as well as its fundamental attitudes. What she found was an eye-opening experience. She discovered in America, that society still openly displayed slavery and the slave-holders were anxious to show her the way they treated their slaves. "It was common to show strangers how any slave would, however black, change colour and tremble at a loud tone or angry word from master or mistress…."[184] Her attitudes towards the slaves became visible in her two publications on America, *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838).

In both of these publications Martineau took a different approach against slavery than she had in "Demerara". Instead of examining slavery from its economic aspects, Martineau focused on three facets of slavery: the political, the social, and the immoral characteristics of the institution. Martineau observed the slave-holders in the North and South, and came to the conclusion that they had lost their educated, gentle, and aristocratic veneer, and instead had become little more than tormenters. Martineau argued that slavery diminished the international standing of the United States. It was not only the institution of slavery that affected the reputation of the United States; it was also the behavior and violence of the abolitionists and pro-slavery groups that led other countries to hold the United States in lower esteem. Other countries, including Britain, would come to the conclusion that they no longer wanted to be associated with a slave-owning country, nor a country which was doing little to end the harsh treatment of the slaves or emancipate them in any way.

[184] Martineau, "The Negro Race in America," *Edinburgh Review*, 1864, quoted in Logan, *Writing on Slavery and the American Civil War by Harriet Martineau*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002, 298.

Martineau became best known for her moral argument against slavery in her American writings. The moral debate was taken up by many abolitionists in Britain as well as in America during the nineteenth century. The difference in Martineau's writings was her ability to witness the treatment of the slaves first-hand, whereas many other abolitionist writers used second-hand information to form their opinions. She described the way in which the slaves were forced to live and work for their food, as well as the complete degradation of human rights in the United States. In *Retrospect of Western Travel* Martineau described a young slave girl in Washington, D.C.:

> She was bright-eyed, merry hearted child, - confiding, like other children, and dreading no evil, but doomed, hopelessly doomed to ignorance, privation, and moral degradation. When I looked at her, and thought of the fearful disobedience of the first of moral laws, the cowardly treachery, the cruel abuse of power involved in thus dooming to blight a being so helpless, so confiding, and so full of promise, a horror came over me which sickened my soul. To see slavery is not to be reconciled with slavery.[185]

In traveling to America and witnessing these horrors, Martineau came to the conclusion that slavery needed to end as had happened in the British Empire in 1833. Readers related to Martineau's writings, imagining themselves as travelers witnessing slavery. Clare Midgley illustrated this point by explaining that in the late 1830s, campaigners against slavery represented the institution as a religious and moral debate rather than political issue which made it possible for more women to assert that anti-slavery lay in the sphere of religiously inspired philosophy, which was an area of public activity women had already established as an acceptable extension of their domestic duties.[186]

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[185] Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1969, Vol. 1, 233.
[186] Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*. London: Routledge Press, 1992, 93-94.

Martineau's moral argument against slavery was influential to the abolitionists and public in both Britain and the United States. Her initial anti-slavery sentiments had already been understood though her publication of "Demerara" in 1832, but her stance on slavery shifted once she witnessed the institution. Being an observer of slavery forced Martineau to shift her beliefs that slavery was not only a poor economic choice for any plantation owner it was also an immoral way to understand property. Martineau saw slavery as the degradation of human rights and the oppression of the human spirit. And through the publication of *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Martineau illustrated to the British public the true problems behind slavery, and opened their eyes to the horrors being inflicted on American slaves.

## The Context of Harem Slavery

Martineau's anti-slavery stance defined her early work as a travel writer. Yet, the scholarly work completed on Harriet Martineau has tended to focus around a single set of her later writings, those of her later travels to the Middle-East (1847) and her views of the Middle-Eastern harems she encountered on her trip. Historians have focused on her publication, *Eastern Life: Present and Past* (1848), as a defining work on Martineau's slavery campaigns and debates. Yet, none of these scholars including Billie Melman, Nancy Stockdale or others have read this book in the context of Martineau's work as an abolitionist travel writer in America. She had witnessed the poor conditions of many American slaves in the 1830s, and now in the 1840s Martineau had the opportunity to see what she considered as another form of slavery, the harem. In many of these historical works on harem slavery Martineau's views of the culturally accepted institution are

examined in depth, yet they are not considered as anything more than a new-found distaste of slavery. Martineau published her views and perceptions of slavery ten years prior to her Middle-Eastern travels. She had already witnessed American slavery and condemned the institution, and now she extended her anti-slavery sentiments to the harem.

Martineau seemed more hesitant to witness harem slavery than she had been to witness American chattel slavery. In *Eastern Life* she described advice she was given by friends before leaving for Egypt and Palestine:

> Before I went abroad, more than one sensible friend had warned me to leave behind as many prejudices as possible; and especially on this subject, on which prejudices of Europeans are the strongest. I was reminded of the wide extent, both of time and space, in which Polygamy had existed; and that openness of mind was as necessary to the accurate observation of this institution as of every other.[187]

Martineau understood that she would be coming in contact with other institutions of which she might not approve or fully understand, such as her encounter with American slavery ten years earlier.

She witnessed two different harems, one in Cairo and the second in Damascus. The way she described these women is eerily similar to the way in which she described American as well as Demerara slaves: "I noted all the faces well during our constrained stay; and I saw no trace of mind in any one except in the homely one-eyed lady. All the younger ones were dull, soulless, brutish or peevish."[188] People being 'soulless' and 'brutish' were the same words Martineau used in "Demerara" when she described the

[187] Deborah Logan, ed. *Harriet Martineau's Writings on the British Empire*. London: Pickering and Chatto Press, 2004, Vol. 2, 252. (These volumes edited by Logan, contain within it Martineau's *Eastern Life: Present and Past.* I will be citing Logan's edition since this was available to me at the time. Page and volume numbers from Martineau's original publication therefore will vary.)
[188] Ibid, Vol. 2, 256.

faces of the slaves forced to work, while Alfred's slaves worked on the mill as free-laborers. Mr. Bruce, Alfred's father the slave-holder, saw the slaves as "silent, listless and dull"[189] while they worked in the fields. These same terms are also used when Martineau saw the looks of the slaves in the Southern slave-markets as well as on the plantations. As she concluded: "I shall need no reminding of the most injured human beings I have ever seen, - the most studiously depressed and corrupted women whose condition I have witnessed."[190] These 'depressed and corrupted women' are described in the same sorrowful tone which Martineau used to illustrate the slaves of the United States. For her, these women in the harem were treated no better than American slaves; they were similarly as pitiful and degraded as each other. And like the American slaves who will never know happiness while they are property, the harem women will never have happiness or peace while they are forced to live in a man's harem.

Martineau's critique of the harem needs to be understood as an extension of her earlier anti-slavery sentiments rather than as a transparent Orientalist text.[191] She used much of the same language to describe the women in the harem to the slaves in America and felt a similar disgust for both uses of humans as property. In *Eastern Life*, Martineau said that the harems left "an impression of discontent and uneasiness," while in *Retrospect of Western Travel,* she explained that slavery was a "weight pulling at your heart-strings."[192] Martineau saw these two types of slavery as examples of personal

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[189] Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy, Vol. II: "Demerara"*. London: C. Fox, 1834, 70.
[190] Logan, *Writing on the British Empire*, Vol. 2, 262.
[191] Edward Said's theory of Orientalism needs to be noted here, when describing attitudes of the travelers of the nineteenth century. (Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979). This theory describes the notion that travelers to the Middle-East, India, Africa and other nations as well during Britain's colonization era believed the natives inferiority, and an 'other' in the eyes of the Western world, in all aspects of their lives, from their education to their cultural beliefs.
[192] Ibid,, Vol. 2, 256 and Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Vol .2, 91.

oppression and a disregard for human rights, which cannot be set aside but instead must be abolished.

Martineau saw the women entrapped in the harem as nothing more than the property of their husbands' who are constantly watched. These women were watched in a similar fashion as the slaves in America, by their 'overseer'. The concept of the 'overseer' is apparent in Cairo when the women of the harem believed Martineau and her travel companion, Mrs. Yates, were neglected because they do not have male chaperones. "Everywhere they pitied us European women heartily, that we had to go about travelling and appearing in the streets without being properly taken care of; -- that is watched. They think of us strangely neglected in being left so free, and boast of their spy systems and imprisonment as tokens of value in which they are held."[193] The variation in the way Martineau and the women of the harem understood being watched were drastically different; for Martineau she was referring back to the concept of slave overseer in America. Without the earlier observations of slavery in America, Martineau might have considered this type of 'spy system,' more similar to having an escort while walking around London.

These women were forced into a life they had not asked for the same way the African-Americans were forced into slavery and Martineau also saw that there was no way for the harems to be abolished without the abolishment of polygamy. This is similar to the statement Martineau made in an article for the *Edinburgh Review*, stating that so long as the Confederacy existed in America, so would slavery.[194] Martineau saw these

[193] Logan, *Writing on the British Empire*, Vol. 2, 255.
[194] Martineau, "The Negro Race in America," 1864, quoted in Logan, *Writing on Slavery*, 313.

links between the treatment and condition of American slaves and hoped there would be a way she could combat both institutions.

Another similarity between the two forms of slavery Martineau perceived was both institutions could not be abolished without the destruction of larger, more culturally prevalent institutions. In the case of the United States, Martineau believed that only with the destruction of the entire Southern Confederacy could slavery be abolished, and the slaves emancipated.[195] In the Middle-East, she saw the institution of polygamy would need to be abolished if harem slavery could ever be discontinued. "Neither the Pasha nor any other human power can abolish slavery while polygamy is an institution of the country…."[196] It is not known precisely how plausible Martineau felt either of these possibilities were, nonetheless, her views of how slavery needed to be abolished and how critical she believed the ending of slavery was in both locations was evident.

She used her authority as a writer to inform the public on the treatment and condition of both American slaves, and the women in the harem. Yet, it must be realized that Martineau wrote a great deal more on American slavery than she ever wrote about the harem. It should be considered that because of this large amount of text against American slavery, Martineau felt this institution was more negligent of its participants and should be abolished first and foremost.

To ignore Martineau's anti-slavery views and arguments from the 1830s would be placing her later harem critique out of context. Scholars from all schools including history, literature and women's studies, have examined Martineau's few pages of harem description and have made broad generalizations about her findings. Not a single scholar

[195] Martineau, "The Negro Race in America," *Edinburgh Review*, 1864, quoted in Logan, 313.
[196] Logan, *Writing on the British Empire*, Vol. 2, 258.

I have found had placed any of her opinions of the harem in an earlier context, explaining that most, if not all, of her conclusive ideas came from her gender and middle-class upbringing and lifestyle. As Billie Melman explains: "Martineau's vocabulary discloses her sensibilities as a middle-class radical… sensibilities which shaped and directed the discussion on travel…."[197] Even Martineau's biographers including Gillian Thomas and Robert Webb give no credit to Martineau's earlier American anti-slavery writings in forming any of her later views on the Middle-East. It seems inconceivable to neglect the time and effort Martineau had spent on these anti-slavery debates, and award not a single word to her earlier works. It was through the lens of her travels to American and witnessing of slavery that she ultimately viewed the harem.

## Harriet Martineau: Travel Writer and Abolitionist

For many women, travel was not just a way to emancipate others; it was a way to free themselves. While Martineau wrote about the emancipation of the slaves in the United States, through her ability to travel Martineau gave herself freedom. Travel itself was an emancipatory activity, allowing women to create and write about their own opinions and create their own ideas about the world. According to Billie Melman, most of the sixty-three percent of the married travel writers could not make a living and a life for themselves in Britain, travel opened up career opportunities and offered degrees of freedom.[198] Although Martineau had already been a successful writer in Britain, and was able to make a sustainable income, her travel writing gave her other opportunities.

[197] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle-East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992, 245.
[198] Ibid, 307.

Her writings on both the United States and the Middle-East, allowed Martineau to take issues close to her heart and use her eyewitness accounts to clarify her attitudes. Martineau had already published anti-slavery remarks as early as 1832, prior to her travels to the United States. Yet, after witnessing slavery and the slave-holders attitudes towards their slaves, Martineau felt an even stronger attachment to the slavery debate and felt that without writing and publishing her observations and conclusions about these different groups within American society, she would be doing humanity a disservice. For Martineau, this opportunity to travel to America and observe the institution of slavery, gave her publications a strong sense of authority and purpose.

Unlike many of the female anti-slavery writers of the nineteenth century in Britain, Martineau had seen slavery first-hand. Many women, who wrote against slavery, used second hand information from those who had seen slavery and from reading the accounts of others. Martineau's writing in contrast clearly explained the oppression of slaves, the un-gentlemanly attitudes of the slave-holders and the poor reputation the United States was cursed with while slavery ran rampant on its soil. These travels freed Martineau to write what she pleased and gained public acclaim for these publications.

Martineau accomplished similar means through her publication on the Middle-East. Martineau like many other travelers used the Bible as their guidebook while traveling through the lands spoken of in the Old and New Testaments.[199] She did not only witness the Middle-East as a place to study an orientalized past, as many other travel writers did in this period,[200] but she also used her earlier travel to influence the way in

[199] Nancy Stockdale, *Colonial Encounters among English and Palestinian Women, 1800-1948*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2007, 32.

[200] Other nineteenth century female travel writers explained the people of the Middle-East as never having evolved from the stories of the Bible. These natives dressed similarly to those in the Bible, and acted the

which she understood the harem. While many other female writers who wrote on the Middle-Eastern harem, very few described it as a type of slavery, which it is clear Martineau believed it was. Through the similarities in the way Martineau described both the harem and American slavery, it is evident that there was a sense of the commonality between the two institutions.

Martineau would have written about these issues whether she gained acclaim for her works or not. Her ethic in regards to writing was to write about issues that she believed in. In her earliest writings this came in the form of writing about the Unitarian faith, and then it progressed to writing about enlightened economic thinkers and their ideas in *Illustrations of Political Economy*. She continued to write against slavery up until the 1860s, hoping to encourage American President Lincoln to continue the fight against slavery: "There are writers among us who have seized the opportunity of President Lincoln's Proclamation to write sensational articles, evolving their images of horror from the depths of their own consciousness of the passions of the white towards the negro."[201]

Martineau wrote countless more articles on topics such as household manners and fiction including *Deerbrook*. In the 1860s, Martineau paired with data from Florence Nightingale, wrote several articles about the Contagious Disease Acts.[202] She wrote for more than fifty years, from her earliest writings in Norwich in the 1820s to her final writings, including her own *Autobiography* in the 1870s. Her writings were influential to

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same way. Women such as Lady Hester Stanhope, Sophia Lane Poole and Mary Eliza Rogers, all described the people of the Middle-East from an Orientalist viewpoint.

[201] Martineau, "Emancipation Proclamation," *London's Daily News*, 10 October 1862, quoted in Logan, *Writing on Slavery*, 119.

[202] The Contagious Disease Acts were a series of British legislation which were aimed at protecting men in the British Armed Forces from contracting sexually transmitted diseases. These acts became a feminist cause due to the police detaining and inspecting any woman suspected of venereal infection, and it was claimed that innocent women were forced to undergo humiliating inspections at the hands of the police.

various groups within British and American society. Webb explained: "Her latest books (there was always a latest book) were topics of dinner-table conversations in polite society; she was a controversial traveller and a celebrated medical case; someone in a crowd being harangued in the thirties thought it worthwhile to shout her name, so the crowd must have known it."[203]

A writing career spanning fifty years showed a woman who was adamant in her beliefs and perceptions and refused to allow a single soul to deter her ambitions in writing for the public. Vera Wheatley described the manner in which Martineau wrote, "She depicted men and women, and her political and sociological views in her own fashion which meant that she had only one ambition, as far as the actual writing went, and that was to convey to her readers, not in the shortest possible manner… but in the simplest, clearest words, what she wished them to understand."[204] The goal of Martineau's career was to inform a public that had been previously left out of the political and economic conversations. Her writings allowed the general public to understand the issues of their day. Martineau always wanted her publications cheap enough to reach all classes of British society, and in doing so, made her a social advocate and voice for Britons.

The publications of Martineau's travel writings affected a great amount of people throughout the nineteenth century. She made "Englishmen and a good many Americans, whether from respect or contempt or merely amusement, aware of her views and prescriptions."[205] Martineau cared little for reviews of her work, particularly since she

[203] Webb, 361.
[204] Vera Wheatley, *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau*. Fair Lawn, NJ: Essential Books, Inc, 1957, 395.
[205] Webb. 362.

understood the reviewers as less educated on the topic than she was. The aspiration for her works was to reach the minds of others. As Wheatley illustrated, "her pen was hardly ever in her hand merely for her own delight, but almost always for the benefit of others."[206]

Harriet Martineau died in 1876 from bronchitis and other ailments that had followed her through her incredible life, and she has left a remarkable legacy behind. James Payn, a friend of her niece Jane, wrote in that same year, "I have known all the famous women of our time, or about all, and I think that, taking her character all round, your aunt was the greatest among them."[207] Martineau had a loyal following of both Britons and Americans who had worked closely by her and had been influenced by her work.

Martineau was an extraordinary woman who was remarkable in an ordinary way. She found her voice in describing social ills, and through the only means available to her, the pen, she made a living influencing society. Martineau never stepped out her bounds as a woman, and worked within the limits to provide an education and information to those who could find it in no other place. Her career as a writer spanned half a century influencing students and scholars through her meticulous observations in her travelogues and her passionate ambition to abolish slavery. She wrote with the ambition to help society, and through many of the dear thoughts sent to the Martineau family after her death, she succeeded.[208]

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[206] Wheatley, 396.
[207] Letter quoted in Wheatley, 391.
[208] Lady Strangford, the daughter of Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort wrote to the Martineau family in 1876: "The knowledge that she was there at Ambleside, still with us, full of human sympathy, with the ever-bright feeling and the ever-warm heart, was a reality which took the place of seeing her…. I do not suppose I ever knew the day when I did not wish to resemble her…. I am very thankful to have had her; and I do not believe the like of her comes in one, or indeed in many centuries." Quoted in Wheatley, 390.

## Harriet Martineau: In Retrospect

It is impossible to fully understand the extent of Martineau's influence on nineteenth-century British culture and society since there are no statistics on her publications, or on how often her works were cited by other writers and activists of her day. Yet through the knowledge that Martineau was a household name, and that her writings were published in several countries, including America and France, we can understand that her influence did span a great distance. It was more than her feminist writings that gained her much popularity as well; her work on travel and slavery showed that she challenged bigger global issues of her day.

Her writing can help scholars understand the period of the 1830s and 1840s. While many women of this period who participated in the anti-slavery movement did so through working closely with the Anti-Slavery Associations, Martineau was rare by working outside of these groups. Although she participated in attending several anti-slavery meetings, she never published for the Associations' pamphlets or officially became a member. This could be an important reason that Martineau has been left out the anti-slavery conversation among scholars, she seems to be in a league of her own.

Martineau's work shows the modern reader the way in which a woman of the Victorian period could publicly speak out against institutions that were immoral with an accepted authority on the issue, while still maintaining a feminine persona. Martineau's writings also illustrate how women could travel throughout the Empire without the need to be married or attached to any man. She was one of small group of women who were able to independently afford travel. Martineau can easily be considered a modern woman in Victorian Britain.

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