> Of all the personages to be encountered [in Harriet Martineau's account of her visit to America], none remains so shadowy as Miss Jeffery. She was apparently a paragon of every virtue, but no one has any more to say than that.
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> Elise Lynn Prentis, "A Retrospect of 'Western' Travel: 1834–36." In *The Courier:* Syracuse University Library Associates, Vol XI, No. 4 and Vol XII, No 1. Winter 1975, pp.3–21 (p.9).

This monograph aims to repair this omission.

AT THE AGE OF THIRTY, Harriet Martineau (1802–76) sprang to instant fame – first national, and then international – with a series of novellas entitled *Illustrations of Political Economy.* At the time, the science of political economy was the exclusive province of male theoreticians like Adam Smith (1723–90), whose *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 described the free market economy, Robert Malthus* (1766–1834), whose views on population growth remain controversial, and David Ricardo (1772–1823), who worked out *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817).

No one – not even Martineau's own mother – could imagine that a young woman might be able to get her mind around these concepts, still less write credible stories about how they worked in practice. Typical was the leading political economist of the day, James Mill; he sneered that 'if the young lady must try her hand at Political Economy, she should write it in the orthodox didactic style.'[1] Yet each of Martineau's very readable stories, which were published at monthly intervals over a period of two years, set one of the principles of political economy in a context of everyday life, making them accessible to everyone. And everyone bought them. With sales reaching ten thousand copies a month, they rivalled in popularity the serialized novels that were shortly to come from Charles Dickens.

Politicians were quick to make use of this new pen: the Chancellor, Lord Brougham, requested a series of *Illustrations*

* After Martineau became famous, she met Malthus and enjoyed his conversation.

of Taxation and then, in preparation for the New Poor Law that was passed in August 1834, he asked for a further series, *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*. HM (the abbreviation I shall use from now on for Harriet Martineau) wrote them for him at once, while still continuing to produce a fresh *Illustration* story every month. At that point, James Mill 'made the frankest possible acknowledgment [to HM] of his mistake in saying that political economy could not be conveyed in fiction, and that the public would not receive it in any but the didactic form.'[2]

Although politicians sought out HM for her advice, she was by no means a popular figure. She was too intelligent and – confident in the logic of her arguments – she expressed herself too vigorously. Women were not expected to have opinions, and certainly not to voice them in public. Because such outspokenness was socially unacceptable, women were embarrassed by her. As for men, when HM declined a state pension because she feared that she would lose her independence by it, Lord Brougham exploded: 'I hate a woman who has opinions. She has refused a pension, – making herself out to be better than other people.'[3] She remained controversial throughout her life.

HM's wide learning was gained largely through self-education. Few girls were schooled beyond the three Rs; then they were set to household tasks. Yet as early as February 1823, using the male pseudonym 'Discipulus' and writing as though she were a man, HM had argued (in the *Monthly Repository*) in favour of equal educational opportunities for girls and boys. To anyone else, the idea that women might be capable of benefitting from higher education was unimaginable. In the 1830s, 'the universities had not even contemplated the possibility of Fellows having wives; they were horrified fifty years later at the mere suggestion of girl graduates.'[4] So when HM revealed her exceptional intelligence and learning by invading the man's world of political economy, she passed for a freak. Feeling threatened, men disparaged her.

George Eliot might almost have had HM in mind when she had Mr Tulliver declare, in *The Mill on Floss,* that 'an over-'cute [i.e. very clever] woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep, – she'll fetch none the bigger price [on the marriage market] for that.' Once HM became famous, only one man ever expressed any romantic interest in her (so far as we know), and that was Charles Darwin's brother Erasmus. But he soon realized that he was intellectually outclassed. 'Our only protection from so admirable a sister-in-law,' wrote Charles,

> is in her working him too hard. He begins to perceive, (to use his own expression) he shall be not much better than her 'nigger' [i.e. slave]. – Imagine poor Erasmus a nigger to so philosophical and energetic a lady.... She already takes him to task about his idleness – She is going some day to explain to him her notions about marriage – Perfect equality of rights is part of her doctrine. I much doubt whether it will be equality in practice. We must pray for our poor 'nigger'.[5]

His prayers were answered: after a couple of years of going out and dining together, HM and Erasmus Darwin drifted apart; he remained a bachelor. HM was indeed 'over-'cute', a unique phenomenon. As Mr Tulliver complained, 'That's the worst on't wi' crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't.'[6]

In her stories, HM revealed her democratic views with limpid clarity, which made her unpopular with heads of state too. In France, Louis Philippe placed a large order for copies of the *Illustrations* and commanded that they be translated and distributed to schools throughout the country. Then he read the story called 'French Wines and Politics', which HM set during the French Revolution – and back-pedalled frantically, cancelling those plans. Another story, 'The Charmed Sea', featuring Poles who had been exiled to Siberia, similarly incensed the Tsar, who until that point had been full of admiration for the *Illustrations*: he ordered every copy in Russia to be burned, and

declared HM *persona non grata.* Austria, where a German translation was in hand, followed suit. To Mrs Marcet,* who pointed out to her the offence she was causing, HM retorted that she 'wrote with a view to the people, and especially the most suffering of them; and the crowned heads must for once take their chance for their feelings.'[7]

'I knew I was right,' she wrote, 'and people who are aware that they are in the right need never lose [their] temper.' She knew that 'people wanted the *Illustrations*' and so she was resolved that they should have them, even though 'the effort would probably be fatal to my reputation.'[8] Her fears were well founded; her reputation has indeed never recovered.

Of the heads of state who read her stories, only the young Princess Victoria remained unchanging in her admiration for HM; *Illustrations of Political Economy* were among her favourite story books; she was heard to exclaim with delight at seeing an advertisement for the *Taxation* series. She invited HM to her coronation – and HM wrote derisively about the ancient customs (and people) that she saw at the ceremony.

By July 1834, HM was – understandably – exhausted by so much writing. At this point she decided to take the rest that she had been promising herself. In her *Autobiography*, she spelled out what a *rest* meant for her; she aimed to

> break through any selfish 'particularity' that might be growing on me with years, and any love of ease and indulgence that might have arisen out of success, flattery, or the devoted kindness of my friends. I believed that it would be good for me to 'rough it' for a while, before I grew too old and fixed in my habits for such an experiment.[9]

She was a woman who 'truly lived instead of vegetated.'[10] Her words remind me of what Captain Scott wrote to his wife, on the

* Jane Marcet (1769–1858) was a major popularizer of chemistry; she also wrote a volume of *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816), intended for schoolgirls, which inspired HM when she read it in 1827.

day he died after reaching the South Pole: 'How much better has it been than lounging in too great comfort at home.'[11] They reveal the drive and determination that make HM such a unique figure. Instead of heading for the Continent, like everyone else, she decided on a two-year visit to the largely undeveloped country of America, where she would indeed have to 'rough it'.

She had expressed a desire to go there at least a year before. Like many European intellectuals, she wanted to see democracy in action, 'to witness the actual working of republican institutions.'[12] Her visit would take the form of a sociological investigation – the first of its kind. And although she later made out that she decided to write up her findings in a book only weeks after her return to England, it is clear from statements like, 'this country shall know something more than it does [at present] of the *principles* of American institutions,' that it was in fact long premeditated (and well prepared).[13] What is more, she clearly wished to dissociate herself from works like Basil Hall's 1829 *Travels in North America* and Fanny Trollope's 1832 *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Their books were highly subjective, and their snobbery roused much ill-feeling and even deep offence on the other side of the Atlantic. HM planned rather to impartially assess America by the degree to which it lived up to its declared republican intentions.* Given her indifference to the feelings of authorities, such a project did not bode well: to this day the Americans remain highly sensitive to any foreign criticism of their society and institutions.

There was also a major obstacle in the way of success. HM set out to observe 'THINGS' (as she put it), 'using THE DISCOURSE OF PERSONS as a commentary upon them.'[14] The *things* she observed were institutions of all kinds, from political ones in Washington down to local prisons and schools for deaf, blind and dumb

* Before his trip in 1842, Dickens read widely and found HM's *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* to be the best books that had been written on America.

children (an area in which America had a lead over Britain at the time).* The *discourse of persons* she aimed to collect through talking with everyone, from the President down to a black slave girl sitting at her feet. She was particularly keen to hear what women talked about among themselves as they went about their daily lives. (We might note here that Alexis de Tocqueville, who researched and published his *Démocratie en Amérique* at just this time, spoke only with educated white men, and in uncertain English at that; ever since, Americans have preferred his book to HM's because it is less critical of their society.) But from the age of twelve or so, HM had been progressively losing her hearing; by 1834, at the age of thirty-two, she was so deaf that she could understand only what was spoken directly into the cup of her speaking tube. So her interlocutor had to be close beside her; general conversation in the vicinity was lost to her. (The speaking tube had one advantage: like whispering into someone's ear, it brought a sense of intimacy, which favoured greater frankness than conversation that could be overheard.) Her deafness also made it hard for her to carry out the simple interactions associated with travel, from reserving a seat on a stage coach to enquiring the way in the street.

HM was the first high-profile woman to make no effort to hide her disability, but rather to demand acceptance on an equal footing with everyone else. To reduce the strain that her deafness put on social intercourse, she had very early taken a life-long resolution *never to ask what had just been said.* So to conduct a sociological investigation in America, she needed someone at her side who could observe, listen, select, and summarize at any

* In *Retrospect of Western Travel,* HM pointed out that deaf and dumb children 'are far more numerous than is generally supposed. In 1830 the total number of deaf and dumb, of all ages, in the United States, was 6106. Of a teachable age the number was 2000; of whom 466 were in course of education. The number of deaf-mutes in Europe at the same time was 140,000' (Volume 3, p.94).

moment she chose whatever was of interest or relevance to her purposes, at the same time as acting as her research assistant and booking agent.

There was yet another obstacle in the way of her venture: HM had lost almost all sense of taste and smell; she needed a companion with the social skill to make innocent remarks like 'Oh, don't the flowers smell nice!' or 'Oh, that's very tasty!' to compensate for her own inability to comment. In short, she needed a super-companion, a sociable and intellectual alter ego who thought like her and knew exactly what she wanted, *without being prompted*. Failing this, HM's social interactions would have been greatly curtailed and her investigation severely handicapped. As it was, Americans who disliked her opinions maintained that her deafness disqualified her from writing about their country.

So she engaged a companion of much her own age, 'Miss J', as HM called her in her *Autobiography*; I shall continue to do so, as a mark of respect and also to distinguish her from all the other women in this account. First of all, Miss J had to learn what kind of information to pick out and memorize. At that time, no method of sociological enquiry had yet been formulated: Emile Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* came out only in 1895, sixty years later. So during the crossing to America, which lasted all of forty-two days, HM drafted an essay on 'How to Observe', out of which grew her manual of methodology, *How to Observe Morals and Manners,* published 1838. Miss J must have rapidly understood and done just what was asked of her, for HM wrote in her *Autobiography,*

> Happily for me a lady of very superior qualifications, who was eager to travel, but not rich enough to indulge her desire, offered to go with me, as companion and helper, if I would bear her expenses. She paid her own voyages, and I the rest; and most capitally she fulfilled her share of the compact. Not only well educated but remarkably clever, and, above all, supremely

> rational, and with a faultless temper, she was an extraordinary boon as a companion. She was as conscientious as able and amiable. She toiled incessantly to spare my time, strength and faculties. She managed the business of travel, and was for ever on the watch to supply my want of ears, – and, I may add, my defects of memory. Among the multitudes of strangers whom I saw, and the concourse of visitors who presented themselves every where, I should have made hourly mistakes but for her. She seemed to make none, – so observant, vigilant and retentive were her faculties. We fulfilled the term of our compact without a shadow of failure, but rather with large supererogation* of good works on her part.[15]

Coming from HM, who always spoke her mind and eschewed flattery, this is praise of the highest order, unequalled throughout her published writings. She was not only the most intelligent woman of her time, she was endowed with an exceptional memory. That she should admit to 'defects of memory' is astonishing. So who was this paragon of travelling companions-cum-research assistants, and how did they meet?

Fortunately, HM let slip a 'Louisa' from time to time in *Retrospect of Western Travel*, in her *Autobiography,* and in her letters. (They have only recently been collected, for she made it a condition of corresponding with her that both parties should destroy the letters they received; and in her Will she forbade the publication of her correspondence.) So far as I know, the first to fully identify Miss J in print was Herbert McLachlan in his book about John Relly Beard (1800–76) and his descendants, *Records of a Family,* which was published by Manchester University Press in 1935. There, almost in passing, he wrote: 'the companion and friend of Harriet Martineau on her American travels' was 'Louisa Caroline, daughter of the Rev. John Jeffery of Billingshurst.'[16] I have not checked all the biographies of HM, but Vera Wheatley's

* That is, Miss J had done far more than was asked of her.

Life and Work of Harriet Martineau, which appeared in 1957, confirms this identification. In the twenty-first century, however, Miss J has been badly served by scholars who should certainly know better: in Linda H. Peterson's 2007 edition of HM's *Autobiography,* she states that Miss J was 'a daughter of Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850) whom [HM] had met in London.' It takes only a moment's research to ascertain that Lord Jeffrey had only one daughter and her name was not Louisa.* Another American scholar, Deborah Anna Logan, who has been editing HM's letters, persistently spells Miss J's name both 'Jeffery' and 'Jeffrey'.† Miss J deserves better than this; so I decided to do what no one had ever attempted before and recover what I could of her life.[17]

McLachlan was correct: Miss J's father, John Jeffery (born in December 1779) was indeed the incumbent of the Baptist – soon to become Unitarian – chapel in Billingshurst, a village seven or eight miles (12km) from Horsham, in West Sussex. His parents,

* Feeling that Prof. Peterson cannot be trusted as an editor, I have used the first edition of HM's *Autobiography* for my quotations; it has the added advantage of being freely available on the internet.

† For instance, in Logan's edition of Maria Weston Chapman's *Memorials of Harriet Martineau,* she spells the name differently on pages 497 (note 32) and 499 (note 66); in both instances she is identifying Miss J, naming her husband and daughter. To judge by Deborah Logan's collections of HM's letters, HM regularly slipped up too – but since Logan herself is inconsistent, we cannot know whether the variation is in fact hers rather than HM's. It is, after all, standard editorial practice to adopt a uniform spelling of a person's name throughout a collection of letters, correcting the writer's mistakes. Logan does not do this, nor does she discuss her decision – if it was one – to admit variation. When we remember that HM had relatives called Jeffery and was acquainted with Lord Jeffrey, this results in frequent possibilities for misunderstanding, not to say confusion. Herbert McLachlan, who is generally a reliable source, spells the name 'Jeffrey', but Jeffery Watson, who is descended from Miss J's uncle, assures me that his family has always used 'Jeffery', and I shall use it here.

John Jeffery (I)* and Ann (née Caffyn or Caffin), married at Billingshurst in 1774. They had two sons, John (II) and Richard, and four surviving daughters, of whom Eliza (born in 1789) and Ruth (born in 1796) are of interest to us here. John (II) studied for two years at the General Baptist Academy in Islington, run by the Rev. John Evans, and then returned to Billingshurst. There, inspired no doubt by his father's activity as a maltster,[18] 'he soon afterwards embarked in the brewing business on an extensive scale,' although 'a considerable portion of his time was devoted to the work of the ministry,' which he carried out 'almost gratuitously.'[19] His brother Richard and a cousin, Isaac Jeffery, joined him in building the brewery, but they overestimated the demand; by 1812 they were obliged to put the business up for sale; the associated 'large dwelling-house, suitable for a family,' was sold by auction in January 1815. Creditors were still being paid off in 1829.[20]

In the meantime, the Rev. John Jeffery had married, on 18 October 1805, Louisa Caroline Taylor, who was ASborn on 11 December 1783. She was the 'eldest daughter of William Taylor, Esq.,† of Tottenham Court Road, and granddaughter to the late Rev. Henry Taylor, well known for his celebrated defence of the Arian doctrine … and many other valuable theological pieces.'[21] She had eight younger siblings: two brothers and six sisters.

Louisa Caroline's father, William Taylor (1755–1843), had been apprenticed in silk throwing – the process of turning raw silk into twisted thread for weaving – alongside George Courtauld (I) (1761–1823), but he chose rather to develop a tinsmith and ironmongery shop and warehouse in London in association with a Mr Jones. George Courtauld, on the other hand, remained in the production of silk, without (it must be said) much success.

* I am observing the convention of distinguishing between relatives having the same name by means of roman numerals.

† The Taylors of Norwich, from whom Harriet Martineau was descended, were quite unrelated to this family.

It was his eldest son Samuel (1793–1881), who made Courtaulds a household name. In the meantime, William Taylor married Courtauld's sister Catherine, the first of a long series of alliances between the two families that is cited as a prime example of nineteenth-century economic, social and religious networks formed by inter-marriage.* William Taylor's son Peter Alfred Taylor (I) married George Courtauld's daughter Catherine (known as Kate); and William's youngest daughter Ellen married Courtauld's son Samuel. As both the Taylors and the Courtaulds had many children, the combined families formed a large community in themselves, which increased through inter-marriage from generation to generation. Miss J's mother, on the other hand, was doing her own thing when she married a clergyman quite unconnected with the Courtaulds or the Taylors (so far as I know), although he was rapidly welcomed into the extended family.

As the Taylor-Courtauld constellation is key to this story, we need to know more about it. The Courtauld silk business really started in 1816, when the young Samuel Courtauld (III) took over from his father and established a new mill at Braintree in Essex. He had done a business apprenticeship with Jones, Taylor & Co in London, and was soon joined by William Taylor's son, Peter Alfred Taylor (I), who had also trained in his father's firm; they formed Courtauld & Taylor in 1817. Although the early years were hard going, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the firm – as just 'Courtaulds' – become one of Britain's most successful textile companies, thanks especially to the fashion (fuelled by Queen Victoria in her long widowhood) for wearing black crape as a sign of mourning. By introducing innovative man-made fibres like viscose and rayon, Courtaulds survived and prospered right to the end of the twentieth century as one

* In *Thicker than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780–1920*, Leonore Davidoff prints an eloquent chart illustrating this practice in the Taylor and Courtauld families.

of the largest textile companies in the world and the principal British manufacturer of women's underwear.

In view of the history of Courtaulds, and the most favourable comments that HM later made about Samuel Courtauld (III), it is instructive to read what George Courtauld (I) wrote about him in December 1816, when he was first setting up as a mill owner at the age of twenty-three: 'Humanly speaking, Samuel can scarcely fail of succeeding; [he has] so much intelligence and caution – such indefatigable application and high principles of rectitude – with evidently honourable, open and liberal dealing.' What is more, he devotes 'a very unusual personal attention to all the minutiae of his business.' In fact, he has 'so *many* advantages that I *cannot* doubt his overcoming *all* the difficulties he may meet with.'[22] (The emphases are in the original.) Few fathers who write flatteringly of a son setting out in life can have been proved so thoroughly right as George Courtauld.

We might observe here that the Courtauld family, originally Huguenots, were Unitarians, and politically radical; so too were the later Taylors: Peter Alfred Taylor (II) became an MP and, among other things, supported women's suffrage. In the eighteenth century, there had been the goldsmith Samuel Courtauld (I) and his wife Louisa Perina (I); a silversmith herself, she ran the family business for many years after the early demise of her husband. They were the parents and grandparents of the Courtaulds who feature in this history. The Martineaus, too, were Unitarians of Huguenot origin. The love of freedom and the intelligence that they shared with the Courtaulds may well derive from this source. HM's father was also in the cloth industry, having a mill in Norwich. Unlike Courtauld & Taylor, however, Mr Martineau's business collapsed in the 1820s, leaving his family impoverished. As we shall see, Miss J was to suffer comparable misfortune.

Both the Courtauld and the Taylor families left us printed records of their lives and times. Miss J's cousin, Peter Alfred

Taylor (II), compiled and edited *Some Account of the Taylor Family*, which was 'printed for private circulation' in an edition of one hundred copies in 1875. Despite the scope of the book – which begins with the fourteenth century – and the editor's determination not to say anything personal about anyone living at the time of writing, it enables us to place Miss J among the Taylors. In the Courtauld family, randomly preserved letters were assembled by an anonymous editor and printed, again for private circulation, in 1916. The only complete set of all eight volumes of *Courtauld Family Letters* that is accessible to the public is in the British Library (and it has not been scanned). Most of my information about Miss J, prior to her visit to America, is extrapolated from the brief mentions of her in these two sources. That said, we can begin the story of her life.