



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

HARRIET MARTINEAU

Deerbrook

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Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

VALERIE SANDERS

PENGUIN BOOKS

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DEERBROOK

HARRIET MARTINEAU was born into a Unitarian manufacturing family in Norwich in 1802. When her father's business collapsed in 1829, Martineau, in her own words, 'rather enjoyed it', because it saved her from a lifetime of genteel dependence. Making herself into a professional writer, she shot to fame with her *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4): a series of twenty-four short tales exemplifying the key doctrines of the classical economists. Martineau's success enabled her to leave Norwich and set up house in London, where she was briefly part of a social celebrity culture. From 1834-6 she travelled in the United States, and publicly espoused the abolitionist cause. She remained a lifelong critical supporter of American democracy, publishing two books immediately on her return – *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838) – and later supporting the North during the Civil War. *Deerbrook* (1839) was written when Martineau wanted a change from sociological writing, and was followed by a historical novel, *The Hour and the Man* (1841), about the Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture.

In the event, these were the only novels Martineau published: she turned increasingly to non-fictional forms, especially historical narrative and journalism, becoming a regular writer of leading articles for the London *Daily News*. Apparent recovery from a long illness of 1839-45 made her a strong advocate of mesmerism; she also renounced her religious belief in *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851), co-authored with phrenologist Henry Atkinson. When her illness returned in 1855, she scribbled off a lively and outspoken *Autobiography*, but forbade publication until after her death. From 1846 until she died in 1876, Martineau lived in Ambleside in the Lake District. She never married, but described herself as 'probably the happiest single woman in England'.

VALERIE SANDERS is Professor of English at the University of Hull. Educated at Girton College, Cambridge, and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, she wrote her D.Phil on Harriet Martineau, and has since edited a selection of her letters. She has also published books

on Victorian women's autobiography, and anti-feminist women novelists. Her most recent book is *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2002). She is currently preparing a volume on Elizabeth Gaskell for the *Lives of Victorian Literary Figures* series.

Chronology

- 1802 Born in Norwich on 12 June, the sixth of eight children of Elizabeth and Thomas Martineau, a textile manufacturer.
- 1805 Birth of James, Harriet's favourite brother.
- 1810 Birth of Elizabeth Gaskell.
- 1811 Birth of Ellen, Harriet's favourite sister.
- 1813-14 Attends the Revd Isaac Perry's School, Norwich, with her older sister Rachel (b. 1800). Becomes aware of her deafness. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* published.
- 1816 Birth of Charlotte Brontë; Jane Austen's *Emma* published.
- 1817 Death of Jane Austen.
- 1818-19 Spends fifteen months at a school for girls in Bristol run by her aunt.
- 1819 Birth of George Eliot.
- 1822 Publication of her first article in the Unitarian *Monthly Repository*: 'Female Writers on Practical Divinity'.
- 1824 Death of her eldest brother Thomas, who had encouraged her writing.
- 1825-6 National economic crisis, damaging the Martineau manufacturing business.
- 1826 Death of her father on 21 June. In August she is engaged to her brother James's college friend, John Hugh Worthington, who becomes suddenly insane in December.
- 1827 Worthington dies in May. Publication of Harriet's early tales *The Rioters* and *Principle and Practice*.
- 1829 The Martineau family business finally collapses in June: daughters under pressure to find work. W. J. Fox pays Harriet £15 a year for her reviews for the Unitarian *Monthly Repository*.

- 1830-31 Harriet wins all three prizes in an essay competition run by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to present Unitarianism to Catholics, Jews and 'Mohammedans'.
- 1831 Visits James in Dublin and plans her *Illustrations of Political Economy*. Struggles to find a publisher.
- 1831-2 Cholera epidemic begins in Sunderland.
- 1832 Publication by Charles Fox of her first *Illustration, Life in the Wilds* (February), which is a resounding success. In November moves from Norwich to London. *Illustrations* appear monthly to 1834. Passing of First (parliamentary) Reform Act. Death of Sir Walter Scott.
- 1833-4 Abolition of colonial slavery. Publishes *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*.
- 1834 Publishes *Illustrations of Taxation* and *Letter to the Deaf*. Leaves for America on 4 August with her companion, Louisa Jeffrey. Passing of Poor Law Amendment Act.
- 1834-6 Travels widely in America, becoming involved in the abolitionist movement. Meets President Andrew Jackson and various congressmen, plantation-owners and writers. Makes many lifelong American friends, of whom the closest was Maria Weston Chapman, editor of Volume 3 of Martineau's *Autobiography*.
- 1837 Publishes *Society in America*.
- 1838 Attends Queen Victoria's coronation in June. Begins writing *Deerbrook*. Publishes *How to Observe Morals and Manners* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (a more personal account of her American trip).
- 1839 Publishes *Deerbrook*. Visits Europe, feels unwell in Venice, and is brought back to England suffering from the effects of an ovarian cyst and prolapsed uterus.
- 1841 Publishes another novel, *The Hour and the Man* (about Toussaint L'Ouverture), and a set of four children's stories, *The Playfellow*.
- 1844 Publishes *Life in the Sick-Room*. Mesmerized for the first time and experiences steady improvement in health.
- 1845 Visits Lake District and family in Birmingham. Publishes controversial *Letters on Mesmerism*. Breach with brother-in-law, T. M. Greenhow, over his published medical report of

- 'The Case of Miss H— M—'. Meets Henry G. Atkinson, phrenologist and mesmerist, 'whose friendship has been the great privilege of the concluding period of my life' (*Autobiography*). Begins building a house in Ambleside.
- 1846 Moves into The Knoll at Ambleside: 'the first entrance upon a home of my own' (*A Year at Ambleside*); but sets off in October on a lengthy trip to Egypt and the Holy Lands at the invitation of Mr and Mrs Richard Yates and the MP for Liverpool, J. C. Ewart.
- 1846–7 Travelling in the Middle East until June 1847. Charlotte Brontë publishes *Jane Eyre*.
- 1848 European revolutions; Thackeray publishes *Vanity Fair*. Harriet publishes *Eastern Life, Present and Past*, which argues that Christianity is no more than a stage in the long process of human theological evolution. Begins lecture series on health matters and history to local workpeople. Her mother dies.
- 1849 Publishes *The History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace 1816–1846* and *Household Education*. Launches local building society for Ambleside neighbours. First meets Charlotte Brontë, in London.
- 1850 At Charles Dickens's invitation, begins publishing short articles in *Household Words* (regularly till 1854); visit from Charlotte Brontë.
- 1851 Great Exhibition, which Martineau visits; publication (with Henry G. Atkinson) of controversial *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, a discussion of physiology, phrenology and Baconian science, which is widely interpreted as a declaration of atheism. Breaks with favourite brother James over his hostile review.
- 1852 Begins writing articles for the London *Daily News*; visit from Marian Evans (future George Eliot).
- 1853 Translates and publishes Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy*. Charlotte Brontë hurt by Martineau's critical review of *Villette* in the *Daily News*. Outbreak of Crimean War.
- 1855 Return of illness, though convinced this time feelings of malaise are caused by an enlarged heart. Makes preparations for death, including rapid writing of *Autobiography*, but does not publish it. Favourite niece, Maria Martineau, begins series

- of long visits to The Knoll to look after her aunt. Death of Charlotte Brontë.
- 1857 Indian Mutiny. Publishes *British Rule in India: A Historical Sketch*. Elizabeth Gaskell publishes her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, to which Martineau has contributed personal memories.
- 1858 Begins contributing articles (till 1868) to the *Edinburgh Review*.
- 1859 Famous article, 'Female Industry', supporting wider employment opportunities for women, published in the *Edinburgh Review*.
- 1861-5 American Civil War. Martineau supports the northern (abolitionist) cause in her editorials for the *Daily News*.
- 1864 Death of her niece, Maria Martineau, of typhoid fever. Maria's sister Jane (Jenny) replaces her as live-in nurse-companion.
- 1865 Death of Elizabeth Gaskell.
- 1869 Writes *Daily News* articles campaigning against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Publishes her collection of *Daily News* obituaries, *Biographical Sketches*. John Stuart Mill publishes *The Subjection of Women*.
- 1870 Married Women's Property Act. Death of Dickens.
- 1871-2 Publication of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.
- 1873 Declines Gladstone's offer of a Civil List literary pension.
- 1876 Dies on 27 June. Buried beside her mother in the General Cemetery, Key Hill, Birmingham.
- 1877 Publication of *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman*.

Introduction

New readers are warned that the plot is revealed here.

Yet, with all these merits – and they are great and numerous – it is not such a novel as is likely to be popular.

Edinburgh Review, July 1839

From the moment of its publication, *Deerbrook* divided critical opinion, and it has continued to do so ever since. For many (including its earliest critics), it is like a Jane Austen novel, only more philosophical; for others it looks ahead to George Eliot, but disappoints because of the flimsiness of its plotting. Yet whatever people think of it, *Deerbrook* undoubtedly stands at a crucial turning-point in literary history. It was published in 1839, at the end of a decade preoccupied with political and social reform, and at the beginning of the English novel's Victorian resurgence. Between the death of Jane Austen in 1817 and the emergence of the Brontës, Dickens, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell from the 1840s onwards, the novel seemed generally to be in abeyance. Novels continued to be published – by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Harrison Ainsworth, Disraeli and the young Dickens, for example – but these were not the great works by which the nineteenth century would subsequently be known. Harriet Martineau had herself published during this decade but *Deerbrook* was her first serious attempt at a novel of English village life, and in the event, her last.

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802, the sixth of eight children of a Norwich manufacturer who was also a Unitarian: a dissenting sect which believed in the essential oneness of God and the social duty of humanitarian reform. In keeping with these forward-thinking, liberal values, Thomas Martineau

ensured that his four daughters were sufficiently well educated to earn their own living, should the occasion arise, as it did when his business failed in 1829. Progressively deaf from the age of twelve, Harriet knew that governessing – the usual resort of impoverished gentlewomen like herself – was not a realistic option. Nor was marriage, though two of her three sisters successfully found husbands. Harriet was briefly engaged – in what remain rather mysterious circumstances – to her brother James's college friend, John Hugh Worthington, but when he died of a 'brain fever', she felt relieved that the relationship was over: 'I am, in truth, very thankful for not having married at all,' she roundly declared many years later in her *Autobiography* (I, 131).¹ She had already been earning small amounts of money by writing for the Unitarian journal, the *Monthly Repository*, and by publishing short moral tales. For an annual sum of £15, she arranged a reviewing contract with the journal's editor, W. J. Fox (a friend of John Stuart Mill and Robert Browning, among others), until, after a few years of eking out a living, she conceived the notion of illustrating the principles of political economy through a series of twenty-four short tales set in representative social communities. Despite the grudging response of publishers, she finally persuaded Fox's brother Charles to risk the venture, which contrary to everyone's expectations except her own, turned out to be a resounding success. 'The entire periodical press, daily, weekly, and as soon as possible, monthly, came out in my favour,' Martineau recalled in her *Autobiography* (I, 178).

The *Illustrations of Political Economy* turned her overnight into a celebrity, and launched her into a lifelong career in writing and journalism. Though they can now seem dull to modern readers, and their extraordinary popularity incomprehensible, they clearly caught the mood of the times, and many readers were delighted with the stories as short fictions. Moreover, they were Harriet Martineau's passport to independence. She moved to London, leaving provincial Norwich for ever, and was lionized by literary hostesses, consulted by politicians and wooed by publishers. After illustrating the precepts of political economy, she tackled the new Poor Laws and taxation; then she

went to the United States for two years and published two volumes in response to what was still to her an experimental democracy, and a further sociological book on tourism called *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838). At this point, however, Martineau decided that by way of change and relaxation, she would like to write a novel.

Her two most obvious predecessors were Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Indeed she had criticized Scott's limitations in two essays published in 1832, suggesting that he had unconsciously prepared the way for a new type of literature more morally serious than his own. To foster a novelistic frame of mind, she re-read Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1816) and *Northanger Abbey* (1818). 'She *was* a glorious novelist,' Martineau noted in her 1837 diary. 'I *think* I could write a novel, though I see a thousand things in Scott and her which I could never do. My way of interesting must be a different one.'² Nevertheless, the opening of *Deerbrook*, with the Greys eagerly awaiting the arrival of Mr Grey's cousins, Hester and Margaret Ibbotson, and Mrs Grey's subsequent speculations about the chance of one of them marrying the village apothecary, Mr Hope, clearly echoes the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, especially in Mr Grey's sardonic literalism in response to his wife's questions about Mr Hope:

'Do not you think Mr Hope thinks Hester very handsome, Mr Grey?'

'I really know nothing about it, my dear. He did not speak on the subject as he mounted his horse; and that is the only opportunity he has had of saying anything about the young ladies.' (Vol. I, Ch. I)

From Jane Austen, she clearly took the theme of matchmaking and courtship. Her initial plan was to write about two sisters in love with the same man (inspired by a similar tale, 'Old Maids' (1834), by the American novelist Catharine Maria Sedgwick), but in the event, she used the example of a family friend who 'had been cruelly driven, by a match-making lady, to propose to the sister of the woman he loved, – on private information

that the elder had lost her heart to him, and that he had shown her attention enough to warrant it'.³ Although this story later turned out to be unfounded, Martineau had identified her plot. The misunderstanding arising between Edward Hope, Hester Ibbotson and her sister Margaret, and the matchmaking Mrs Grey formed the substance of her new novel. She began writing it on her thirty-sixth birthday in June 1838.

The next difficulty arose when she tried to find a publisher. Confident that she would have no problems (she was by then a well-known writer, and Byron's publisher, John Murray, had already expressed an interest), she was shocked when Murray rejected the novel, apparently because it was 'laid in middle [class] life'.⁴ The domestic realism later associated with Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot in the mid nineteenth century was still undeveloped, and Martineau was ahead of her time. The public of the late 1830s liked 'silver-fork' novels set in aristocratic circles, or 'Newgate' novels set in the criminal underworld or anything by Dickens: 'but it was not supposed that it would bear a presentment of the familiar life of every day'.⁵ The two heroines were, after all, from Birmingham, and the hero was a country doctor. Martineau found a more sympathetic publisher in Edward Moxon, while Murray, regretting his mistake, tried (unsuccessfully) soon after publication to tempt her into clandestine serialization of her next novel. Smugly, she claims in her *Autobiography* that *Deerbrook* sold better than most novels of the time, 'two large editions having been long exhausted, and the work being still [in 1855] in constant demand'.⁶ In fact the novel sold only 788 copies in the year of publication, though it was reissued by Edward Moxon in 1843 and then by Smith and Elder, Charlotte Brontë's publishers, in a one-volume edition in 1858 and 1892. Indeed Charlotte Brontë had been one of its earliest and most enthusiastic readers, along with Elizabeth Gaskell and the future George Eliot, Marian Evans, who all professed admiration for it. 'When C. B. first read "Deerbrook",' Brontë wrote, using her pseudonym of 'Currer Bell' in a note of 1849, enclosing a copy of *Shirley* for Martineau, 'he tasted a new and keen pleasure, and experienced a genuine benefit. In his mind, "Deerbrook" ranks with the

writings that have really done him good, added to his stock of ideas, and rectified his views of life'.⁷ George Eliot, more ambiguously, was 'surprised at the depths of feeling it reveals'.⁸

The novel had a mixed reception in the periodical press. Unlike the first works by the Brontës and George Eliot, who published under pseudonyms, it appeared from the start with Harriet Martineau's own name on the title page, thereby informing reviewers that an author previously associated with 'masculine' subjects was now trying her hand at a genre more befitting a woman. This time there was no sense that she was writing inappropriately for her sex. As the *Edinburgh Review* noted, expectations ran high, and comparisons with Jane Austen were not all in the latter's favour: 'Miss Martineau has more eloquence, more poetry, more masculine vigour of style,' noted their reviewer, who also felt that Hester and Margaret Ibbotson were the most 'original' and 'true' of the many portraits of sisters in fiction.⁹ The *Athenaeum* similarly noted that Martineau's characters were of a 'higher order of mental force and spiritual attainment' than most of Austen's, though somewhat idealized, while the *Westminster Review* enthused, of her medical hero, 'Hope is the very man we should send for to bleed us in a fever'.¹⁰ While most reviewers admired her characterization and command of domestic detail, however, they were unsure what to make of the quiet setting and small-scale plot. 'No great interests are brought into play,' complained the *Edinburgh* reviewer; 'and the characters – inhabitants of a country village – belong chiefly to that highly valuable, but most unromantic and unpicturesque, portion of the community – the middle class.' These objections seem hard to credit, now that we are familiar with the Victorian novel's keen focus on middle-class life, but it was new to the reviewers of 1839, and they were not sure whether they liked it. Their dislike of the somewhat artificial plot has been a more lasting criticism. The *Westminster Review* spoke for many in regretting that events were 'not put together with much art'. In her 1877 review of Martineau's *Autobiography*, Margaret Oliphant grumbled about the 'curious unnecessary of the whole', both in relation to Hope's marriage to Hester and Enderby's misunderstanding with Margaret.¹¹ Less

grudging praise was forthcoming for her portraits of children, and what the *Edinburgh Review* called her 'morbid anatomy of human passions'.

Overall, *Deerbrook's* success – both commercial and critical – was modest rather than sensational, and Martineau followed it two years later with a completely different kind of novel, *The Hour and the Man* (1841), a fictional biography of the black Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture. By then she had become a full-time invalid. Soon after finishing *Deerbrook*, she had collapsed on a trip to Europe, and was brought home from Venice suffering from an ovarian cyst causing displacement of other pelvic organs. Retreating to Tynemouth, where she could be looked after by her medical brother-in-law, she rested until her supposed 'cure' in 1845 by mesmerism (an early form of hypnotism, sometimes known as 'animal magnetism'), when she moved to a specially built house of her own in Ambleside in the Lake District. Though she subsequently attempted one more novel in 1851, tentatively called 'Oliver Weld', she abandoned it after a discouraging response from Charlotte Brontë's publisher, George Smith, who had wanted another 'novel like "Deerbrook"', and was disturbed by the pro-Catholic implications of her latest venture.¹² After this awkward experience, she confined herself to journalism and factual reporting about Ireland, India, Birmingham manufactories, and the employment of women. This stage of her career was dominated by regular editorials for the *Daily News*, and a keen interest in the progress of the American Civil War, following her support for the abolitionist movement when she visited in 1834–6. Her illness returned in 1855, and she wrote her *Autobiography*, fully expecting to die within a few months. Instead she lived until 1876, continuing her editorial writing until 1866, but never apparently tempted to write another novel. By the time she died, she was no longer a household name, and the dramatic success she had enjoyed with her *Illustrations* seemed the stuff of legend.

Though it has been out of print for much of the twentieth century, *Deerbrook* occupies an important place in cultural history, appearing as it did at a time of widespread intellectual

and literary reawakening. The *Edinburgh Review* ran its discussion of the novel alongside articles on Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Lyell's *Elements of Geology*, an edition of the Duke of Wellington's despatches, and Mary Shelley's edition of her husband's *Poetical Works*. It was also the year in which Caroline Norton's campaign for child custody rights for mothers was successful, and the Lady Flora Hastings affair scandalized the new Queen's court. Both Lady Flora Hastings and Caroline Norton were the victims of gossip: *Deerbrook's* most urgent concern. The unmarried Lady Flora, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, was suspected of being pregnant, when in fact she was dying of liver disease; while Caroline Norton, married to a violent husband, had campaigned for years for access to the three sons he had taken away with him. Martineau's novel may seem far removed from these social scandals, but in many ways it was a product of the same gossip-driven culture. In Volume I, Chapter VI, Martineau indicates that 'having secrets' and 'mysteries' is essentially child's play, which adults should quickly outgrow, but this proves to be far from the case. She was herself, in fact, a great lover of gossip, as her private letters indicate: it is tempting to wonder whether her virulent opposition to it throughout the novel was at a subconscious level a recognition of her own weakness. With little else to occupy them, the women of Martineau's fictional village spend most of their spare time speculating about their neighbours' activities. Will Mr Hope marry Hester or Margaret? Or Deborah Giles (a village boatman's daughter)? When Hester is seen crying in the street, gossip about the cause is rife, as is discussion of the Hopes' poverty after Hope has been wrongly suspected of robbing the churchyard for bodies to dissect. Nothing he does escapes the eyes of the village gossips, although he avoids participating in their talk: he can neither vote nor marry without everyone he knows expressing an opinion on his actions. In Chapter XIII, Sophia goes round the village deliberately spreading news of Hope's engagement to Hester, and the wedding itself is a public spectacle: 'The church was half-full, and the path to the church-door was lined with gazers. Those who were obliged to remain at home looked abroad from their

doors; so that all were gratified more or less.' (Vol. I, Ch. XIV)

The worst perpetrator of gossip is Mrs Rowland, the Greys' neighbour and wife of Mr Grey's business partner. She is the Iago of *Deerbrook*, driven by a 'motiveless malignity' to obstruct her neighbours and the Ibbotson sisters who are blamed for marrying into their 'connection' so decidedly. Once Hope has married Hester, Mrs Rowland is determined to stop her brother Philip Enderby marrying Margaret. This is the weakest part of the novel, unless we regard Mrs Rowland as being the portrait of a pathological personality type. Hester herself is only slightly more balanced, with her perpetual self-doubt and suspicion of others. Her extreme jealousy of her sister makes her initially what Martineau calls a 'domestic torturer', a wrecker of family peace. Although the narrator's outburst against such people halfway through the novel employs the male pronoun, the *Deerbrook* men are all so reasonable that it is hard to believe her description fits anyone but wives like Mrs Rowland and Hester. The worst of such types, Martineau concludes, is their utter unconsciousness of other people and what they may be suffering: 'of all mortals,' she argues, 'none perhaps are so awfully self-deluded as the unamiable' (Vol. II, Ch. III). Mrs Rowland seems worse than Hester, as she actively tries to damage other people's happiness, whereas Hester confines her attacks to those within her own household. Indeed it is possible to read Mrs Rowland as Hester's 'dark double', like Bertha Rochester in relation to *Jane Eyre*: that unrepressed self who ignores social restraints and launches instinctive assaults on those she hates. Mrs Rowland is never physically violent, but she, in turn, has her double in the person of Mrs Plumstead, the village scold, whose public displays of hysteria bring uncontrolled emotion on to *Deerbrook*'s streets. It is hard to find any convincing motives for all these women's behaviour. When Hope, the great rationalist of the community, tries to explain Mrs Rowland's vindictive actions, all he can suggest is that 'Her hatred to us is the result of long habits of ill will, of selfish pride, and of low pertinacity about small objects' (Vol. III, Ch. XIII).

Was Martineau implying that hysteria and obsessive behaviour were innate characteristics of femininity itself? In her