In Harriet Martineau’s Footsteps

Topographical Quotations
for Walks around Ambleside

Edited and Arranged by
Michael R. Hill

A Howard’s Library Publication

Lincoln — Nebraska
Cover: The Rushbearing at Ambleside, circa 1835, from a sketch by J. Redaway.

George Elliott Howard was a distinguished historian and social scientist, a member of the second graduating class at the University of Nebraska, a nationally-recognized historian, later Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Nebraska, and President of the American Sociological Society.

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"Truly, to live in Ambleside, is like going into retreat in a former century."
—Harriet Martineau

The quotations below, liberally plucked from Martineau’s many works, provide selected textual anchors for anyone who tramps the streets and environs of Ambleside in search of phantoms of the everyday nineteenth-century village life that Martineau experienced, observed, and described. Armed with this set of quotations, a copy of Martineau’s Autobiography, her Complete Guide to the English Lakes, her essays on The Lake District, April and May in Ambleside, Our Farm of Two Acres, and a decent map, Martineau’s Ambleside springs dramatically to life for those willing, as in all good theater, to entertain a “willing suspension of disbelief.” Boldface type indicates locales or items of topographical or related interest.
—Michael R. Hill

Martineau’s Topographical Project

One of my objects . . . . was to become acquainted with the Lake District, in a complete and orderly manner . . . . [and] on my recovery, I set myself to learn the Lake District, which was still a terra incognita, veiled in bright mists before my mind’s eye: and by the close of a year from the purchase of my field, I knew every lake (I think) but two, and almost every mountain pass. I have since been complimented with the task of writing a Complete Guide to the Lakes, which was the most satisfactory testimony on the part of my neighbours that they believed I understood their beloved District . . . . Of these joyous labours, none has been sweeter than that of my first recovered health, when the Lake-land became gradually disclosed before my explorations, till it lay before me, map-like, as if seen from a mountain top . . . .

Walks Near Ambleside

In the immediate environs of Ambleside, the paths speak for themselves. For instance, every walker will explore the meadows between the town and the river, and ascend Gale Hill, behind the market-place. But he may possibly miss a beautiful walk through the woods on Wansfell, commanding the finest views of the head of Windermere, and of the mountain groups
Ambleside and Vicinity, circa 1855

beyond. Almost every path leading up from the left of the road between Ambleside and Waterhead leads into the woods: but the best is that which turns off and upwards, just opposite a group of houses, in one of which lives Dove the fishmonger. All such paths are rough and wet; but this one is full of charms when once he enters the wood. The earliest anemones abound there, and many other wild flowers: the brooks are clear and sparkling; the rocky masses which crop out above, tufted with mosses and ferns, are an endless treat to the eye; while the scene below and above is surpassingly fine; the views up both valleys and along the lake, and into its bays and coves, all alive with boats; or, in some seasons, as still as a mirror, reflecting even the distant mountain tops; and far away the clustering peaks and graduated ridges of a little world of mountains. Step by step the scene varies, as the path follows the prominences or recesses of the
hill-side. It runs above Dove Nest, and then strikes back from about the road, passing through some fields, and issuing in the land which leads down from Troutbeck to the mail road at Lowwood. This Skelghyll walk is a great favourite with residents; and it would be a pity that strangers should not enjoy it. It can be well combined with the ascent of Wansfell from Low Wood . . . . These are the walks about Ambleside.

Overview of Ambleside

[From the nearby heights], the pretty little town of Ambleside appears, nestling at the foot of Wansfell, and the valley of the Rothay opens at the gazer’s feet. On the opposite margin of this green recess, and on the skirts of Loughrigg, he sees Fox How, the residence and favourite retirement of the late Dr. Arnold, and now inhabited by his family . . . . Just under him to the left is the old church; and near the centre of the valley is the new church, –more of a blemish than an adornment, unhappily, from its size and clumsiness, and the bad taste of its architecture. Though placed in a valley, it has a spire, –the appropriate form of churches in a level country; and the spire is of a different colour from the rest of the building; and the east window is remarkably ugly. There have been various reductions of the beauty of the valley within twenty years or so; and this last is the worst, because the most conspicuous. The old church, though not beautiful, is suitable to the position, and venerable by its ancient aspect. It is abundantly large enough for the place, except for a few weeks in summer: but its burial ground, inclosed by roads on three sides, has been overcrowded. Some years ago, the state of the church-yard and the health of the people who lived near it, was such as to make the opening of a new burial-ground a pressing matter; and hence, no doubt, arose the new church, though a larger and more beautiful cemetery might easily have been formed in the neighborhood . . . .

Fever and The Churchyard

[November] is our fever month; and the fever is very threatening this year. Of all the men in the place, of those who could least be spared, John Newton was first down in it. He was to have come to me about some Building Society business, but sent one of the children to say that he was unwell, and must keep his bed for that day, but hoped to come on the next. He did not, however, In my walk before daylight, I did not now, as usual, meet him going forth, apparatus in hand, to sweep a neighbour’s chimney; or, playing with his rule, evidently meditating some building scheme. I used to think him the most active man in the place, by the way in which he went forth in the morning –cheerful, wide-awake –while some other men moved slowly, as if they care for the cold; and one, now and then, was so tipsy, that it was mournful to see his attempts to touch his hat to me, and to walk straight while in my sight. At first we were told that Newton had caught cold; but it came out in time that he had been out hunting, and that implies conviviality after the sport. It was soon evident that it would be weeks before he could leave his bed. At the same time, Edward H., a young carpenter, lay down in the fever; and for thirteen weeks his mother and sister were watching

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2 The old church, St. Anne’s, became a meeting hall until sold in the 1970s for commercial development. St. Mary’s, the new church, was designed by George Gilbert Scott (1811-78) and built between 1850 and 1854.
him night and day, getting little rest but in an easy-chair, during all that time. It was very affecting
to hear the poor fellow in his delirium, incessantly talking of the sanitary matters on which he and
his neighbours had received new knowledge. May that new knowledge do something for us before
another year; for our state this year is terrible. In D.'s, the fishmonger’s low, damp cottage, the
children are down in scarlet fever; and there are four cases of fever in houses next the churchyard
—cases with which the surgeon declares he can do nothing. In two of the houses, the lower rooms
have to be shut up on account of the putrid dribble from the burial-ground which trickles down the
walls. If we, who live in airy, dry houses, built on the rock, our wells always swimming with the
sweetest water, feel some depression from the gloom and heaviness of the season, what must it be
to those who are spending the passing weeks in the sick room . . . !

Entering Ambleside

The descent [from Kirkstone Pass] to all the Ambleside inns is steep, —past the old church,
and through a narrow street, and into the space dignified with the name of market-place, and
actually exhibiting an ancient market-cross. Half-a-dozen of the few shops of the town are in or
about the market-place; and the Salutation and Commercial Inns and the White Lion, —the
three principal inns, are all conspicuous in it. If his time in Ambleside is precious, the stranger
may use the sunset or twilight hour for seeing Stockghyll Force, while his supper is preparing. He
is directed or guided through the stable-yard of the Salutation inn, when he passes under a tall
grove of old trees on the right hand, the stream being on the left. On the opposite bank is the
bobbin-mill, the one industrial establishment of Ambleside, placed there on account of the abundant
supply of coppice wood obtainable in the neighbourhood. The stacks of wood are seen high up on
the bank; and the ivy-clad dwelling of the proprietor; and then the great water-wheel, with its
attendant spouts and weir, and sounds of gushing and falling waters. Where the path forks towards
and away from the stream, the visitor must take the left-hand one. The other is the way up
Wansfell. His path leads him under trees, and up and through a charming wood, with the water
dashing and brawling further and further below, till his ear catches the sound of the fall: and
presently after, the track turns to the left, and brings him to a rocky station whence he has full view
of the force. It is the fashion to speak lightly of this waterfall, —it being within a half-a-mile of the
inn, and so easily reached; but it is, in our opinion a very remarkable fall, (from the symmetry of its
parts), and one of the most graceful that can be seen. Its leap, of about seventy feet, is split by a
rocky protrusion, and intercepted by a ledge running across; so that there are four falls, —two smaller
ones above, answering precisely to each other, and two larger leaps below, no less exactly
resembling. The rock which parts them is feathered with foliage; and so are the sides of the ravine.
Below, the waters unite in a rocky basin, whence they flow down to the mill, and on in a most
picturesque torrent, through a part of Ambleside, and into the meadows, where they make the last
spring down a rock near Millar Bridge, and join the Rothay about a mile from the lake.
Supposing . . . that the stranger proceeds direct from Bowness to Ambleside, he will see, after
turning into the Ambleside road at Cook’s House, first, the relics of the old mansion of
Calgarth, now converted into a farm-house, but in which is still preserved a magnificently
pannelled state-apartment; and next, Ibbotsholme, on the right, the residence of Samuel Taylor,
Esq., just beyond Troutbeck Bridge. Presently he will pass, on the left hand, the gate of Calgarth,
Bishop Watson’s house, now inhabited by Mrs. Swinburne. Ecclerigg, the residence of Rd. Luther Watson, Esq., comes next: and then Low Wood Inn, Dove Nest, and Wansfell Holme, and, on the opposite shore, Wray Castle, all of which have been mentioned as seen from the lake. Clappersgate with its white houses, nestles under Loughrigg, at the head of the lake; and the Brathay valley, with its pretty little church on its knoll, opens beautifully as seen from the toll-bar. From water-head to Ambleside, there are residences, humble or handsome, on either hand. The traveller can hardly be wrong in his choice of an inn, as all three are comfortable and well served. At present there are no baths in the place; —a singular deficiency where there is so much of company on the one hand, of water on the other. The inconvenience, is, however, a subject of serious complaint; and it is to be hoped that another season will not arrive without a provision of this needful refreshment for the dusty and tired traveller, —to say nothing of the residents, who must desire it for purposes of health as well as enjoyment . . . .

Waterhead: Martineau’s Temporary Lodgings

On the day of my arrival at Waterhead, however, I had no idea of working; and the prospect before me was of basking in the summer sunshine, and roving over hill and dale in fine weather, and reading and working beside the window overlooking the lake (Windemere) in rainy hours, when lakes have a beauty of their own. My lodging, taken for six months, was the house which stands precisely at the head of the lake, and whose grass-plat is washed by its waters. The view from the windows of my house was wonderfully beautiful, —one feature being a prominent rock, crowned with firs, which so projected into the lake as to be precisely reflected in the crimson, orange and purple waters when the pine-crest rose black into the crimson, orange and purple sky, at sunset. When the young moon hung over those black pines, the beauty was so great that I could hardly believe my eyes . . . .

I began to look about in the neighborhood at cottages to let or on sale. The most promising was one at Clappersgate, at the head of Windermere, which was offered me for £20 a year. It had more rooms than I wanted, and an exceedingly pretty porch; and a little garden, in which was a tempting copper-beech. But the ceilings were too low for my bookcases, and the house was old; and it commanded no great beauty, except from the attic windows . . . .

Martineau’s Home: Building a House at The Knoll

The time was short; but land was becoming rare in the neighbourhood; and I went to see the field. One of the lots was a rocky knoll, commanding a charming view. I knew no one whom I could ask to go and bid; and I could not feel sure of a due supply of water; not knowing then that wherever there is a rock, there is a tolerable certainty of water. The other lots appeared to me to lie

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3 When Martineau first moved to the Lake District, she took temporary quarters at Waterhead.

4 See also the Appendix: The Furnishings and Library at the Knoll during Martineau’s Lifetime. Would-be visitors are kindly reminded that, as of this writing, The Knoll is a private residence.
too low for building; and I, in my simplicity, concluded that the pretty knoll would be the first and surest to sell. Next day, I found that lot, and the one at the foot of the rise remained unsold . . . .

Then came the amusement of planning my house, which I did all myself. It was the newest of enterprises to me; and seriously did I ponder all the requisites;—how to plan the bedrooms, so that the beds should not be in a draught, nor face the window nor the fireplace, &c . . . . There is not a single blunder or nuisance in my pretty house; and now that it is nearly covered with ivy, roses, passion-flowers, and other climbers, and the porch a bower of honeysuckles, I find that several of my neighbours, and not a few strangers, consider my Knoll,—position and house together,—the prettiest dwelling in the valley;—airy, gay, and “sunny within and without,” as one family are pleased to say. “It is,” said Wordsworth, “the wisest step in her life; for” . . . and we supposed he was going on to speak of the respectability, comfort and charm of such a retreat for an elderly woman; but not so. “It is the wisest step in her life; for the value of the property will be double in ten years” . . . .

Can any one wonder that I presently dreamed of living in this valley? There was no reason which I should not live where I pleased. Five years and more of illness had broken all bonds of business, and excluded me from all connexion with affairs. I was free to choose how to begin life afresh. The choice lay between London and pure country; for no one would prefer living in a provincial town for any reasons but such as did not exist for me. I love London; and I love the pure country. As for the choice between them now,—I had some dread of a London literary life for both its moral and physical effects. I was old enough to look forward to old age, and to have already some wish for quiet, and command of my own time. Moreover, every woman requires for her happiness some domestic occupation and responsibility,—to have some one’s daily happiness to cherish; and a London lodging is poorly supplied with such objects; whereas, in a country home, with one’s maids, and one’s neighbours, and a weary brother or sister, or nephew, or niece, or friend, coming to rest under one’s trees, or bask on one’s sunshiny terrace, there is prospect of abundance of domestic interest. If I chose the country, I might as well choose the best; and this very valley was, beyond all controversy, the best. Here, I could write in the serenest repose; here, I could rove at will; here, I could rest. Here, accordingly, I took up my rest; and I have never repented it, while my family and friends regard it as the wisest step I could take . . . .

I may well mention that of my sunset walks, on the few fine days, when I saw from the opposite side of the valley the progress of my house. One evening I saw the red sunset glittering on the windows, which I did not know were in. Another day, I saw the first smoke from the chimney;—the thin blue smoke from a fire the workmen had lighted, which gave a home-like aspect to the dwelling.—When the garden was to take form, new pleasures arose . . . .

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5 Martineau recalled: “When I first marked that knoll, I little thought that on it I should build my house, and that it would afford that terrace view which would be the daily delight of my life. But there now stands my graystone old English house, with climbing plants already half covering it, and a terrace wall below, inviting my fruit trees to spread themselves over it.”
One morning, the servants told me that there was a great heap of the finest sods lying under the boundary wall; and that they must have been put over during the night. It was even so: and, though we did our best to watch and listen, the same thing happened four times, —the last load being a very large one, abundantly supplying all our need. A dirty note, wafered, lay under the pile. It pretended to come from two poachers, who professed to be grateful to me for my Game Law Tales, and to have rendered me this service in return for my opinion about wild creatures being fair game. The writing and spelling were like those of an ignorant person; and I supposed that the inditing was really so, at the bidding of some neighbour of higher quality. The Archbishop of Dublin, who was at Fox How at the time, offered me the benefit of his large experience in the sight of anonymous letters: (not the reading of them, for he always burns unread, before the eyes of his servants, all that come to him) and he instantly pronounced that the note was written by an educated person. He judged by the evenness of the lines, saying that persons who scrawl and misspell from ignorance never write straight. Everybody I knew declared to me, sooner or later, in a way too sincere to be doubted, that he or she did not know anything whatever about my sods: and the mystery remains unsolved to this day. It was a very pretty and piquant mystery . . . .

Several friends planted a young tree each on my ground. Some of the saplings died and some lived: but the most flourishing is one of the two which Wordsworth planted. We found that the stone pine suited his idea: and a neighbour kindly sent me two. Wordsworth chose to plant them on the slope under my terrace wall, where, in my humble opinion, they were in the extremest danger from dogs and cats, —which are our local nuisance. I lay awake thinking how to protect them . . . .

A friend in London, who knew my desire for a sundial, and heard that I could not obtain the old one which had told me so important a story in my childhood, presented me with one, to stand on the grass under my terrace wall, and above the quarry which was already beginning to fill with shrubs and wild-flowers . . . . [O]n this occasion, I preferred a motto of my own to all that were offered in English; and Wordsworth gave it his emphatic approbation. “Come, Light! visit me!” stands emblazoned on my dial: and it has been, I believe, as frequent and impressive a monitor to me as ever was any dial which bore warning of the fugacious nature of life and time . . . .

As I am wiping the scythe at the tool-house door, I see a great commotion in my neighbour W.’s garden; and M. comes to tell me that his bees are swarming with the swarm that we are to have. Our bee-house has long been ready, and the smell of paint quite gone; and now J. is rubbing our new hive with sweet herbs and honey. There it goes, with its clean white cloth; and before I have done breakfast, it is properly placed on its stand in the bee-house, and all alive with inhabitants. I hope they will have a happy life. We have done what we can for them in surrounding them with flowers, and beds of sweet herbs; but there is a better resource for them in the mountain heather . . . .

Many things have brought you before me of late, and tonight I believe it is a very small incident which has put it into my head to write to you. I have been over Loughrigg today, (as you remember the mountain opposite my windows), and in returning found, and brought home, just such a sprig of wild currant as I got for you when you were here at the same time of the year. I
wonder I never wrote to thank you for your Representative Men. I enjoyed it highly. To say the truth, I am always (that is, at intervals) enjoying your books; and certainly the more, the older I grow. I have relished certain of the Essays more this last year than I ever did before; and the more calm and peaceful I grow with years, the more does the spirit of your writings animate and brace me . . . .

When, in the evenings . . . , I went out (as I always do, when in health) to meet the midnight on my terrace, or, in bad weather, in the porch, and saw and felt what I always do see and feel there at that hour, what did it matter whether people who were nothing to me had smiled or frowned as I passed them in the village in the morning . . . .?

On my terrace, there were two worlds extended bright before me, even when the midnight darkness hid from my bodily eyes all but the outlines of the solemn mountains that surround our valley on three sides, and the clear opening to the lake on the south. In the one of those worlds, I saw now the magnificent coast of Massachusetts in autumn, or the flowery swamps of Louisiana, or the forests of Georgia in spring, or the Illinois prairie in summer; or the blue Nile, or the brown Sinai, or the gorgeous Petra, or the view of Damascus from the Salahiey; or the Grand Canal under a Venetian sunset, or the Black Forest in twilight, or Malta in the glare of noon, or the broad desert stretching away under the stars, or the Red Sea tossing its superb shells on shore, in the pale dawn. That is one world, all comprehended within my terrace wall, and coming up into the light at my call.

The other and finer scenery is of that world, only beginning to be explored, of Science. The long study of Comte had deeply impressed on me the imagery of the glorious hierarchy of the sciences which he has exhibited. The time was gone by when I could look at objects as mere surface, or separate existences; and since that late labour of love, I had more than ever seen the alliance and concert of the heavenly bodies, and the mutual action and interior composition of the substances which I used to regard as one in themselves, and unconnected in respect to each other. It is truly an exquisite pleasure to dream, after the toil of study, on the sublime abstractions of mathematics; the transcendent scenery unrolled by astronomy; the mysterious, invisible forces dimly hinted to us by Physics; the new conception of the constitution of Matter originated by Chemistry; and then, the inestimable glimpses opened to us, in regard to the nature and destiny of Man . . . .

Rydal Mount: The Wordsworths’ Home

Mrs. Wordsworth often asked me to “drop in” in the winter evenings: but I really could not do this. We lived about a mile and a half apart; I had only young girls for servants, and no

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6 Martineau to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 25 February 1852 (from Letters).

7 James Payn recalled, “The degree of deafness, as I have said, varied; and she [Martineau] tried all sorts of remedies. No one who knew her would suspect her of anything “fast” or unfeminine, but, under the advice of some scientific person or another, she tried smoking. I had the privilege of providing her privately with some very mild cigars, and many and many a summer night have we sat together for half an hour or so in her porch at ‘The Knoll’ smoking.”
carriage; and I really could not have done my work but by the aid of my evening reading. I never went but twice; and both times were in the summer . . . .

[My acquaintance with Wordsworth] had begun during the visit I paid to the Lakes in January 1845, when he and Mrs. Wordsworth had requested a conversation with me about mesmerism, which they thought might avail in the case of a daughter-in-law, who was then abroad, mortally ill. After a long consultation, they left me, much disposed for the experiment: but I supposed at the time that they would not be allowed to try; and I dare say they were not. They invited me to Rydal Mount, to see the terrace where he had meditated his poems; and I went accordingly, one winter noon. On that occasion, I remember, he said many characteristic things . . . .

One afternoon Mr. Atkinson and I met them on the Rydal road. They asked where we had been; and we told them. I think it was over Loughrigg terrace to Grasmere; which was no immoderate walk. “There, there!” said Wordsworth, laying his hand on my companion’s arm. “Take care! take care! Don’t let her carry you about. She is killing off half the gentlemen in the county!” I could not then, nor can I now, remember any Westmoreland gentleman, except my host on Windermere, having taken a walk with me at all . . . .

The rule in our district, that each one of us thinks his own situation the best, would certainly give place to a vote in favour of Wordsworth’s, if it were not for the drawback of the long ascent to it; a serious matter to a resident much given to long walks, and apt to be very tired at the last mile. But, at this moment, that is nothing: and the scene before the eye is accepted as unrivalled, –the full survey of the Rotha Valley, with Windermere glittering at the end, surmounted by the Fromes’s Fells; and, on the right, the peep into the Rydal Pass, where the exquisite Rydal Lake juts into view . . . .

Lectures at the Methodist Chapel

This year [1848] was the beginning of a new work which has afforded me more vivid and unmixed pleasure than any, except authorship, that I ever undertook; –that of delivering a yearly course of lectures to the mechanics of Ambleside and their families . . . . I remarked now to my neighbour that it was a pity that the school-children should not learn from me something of what I had learned in my youth from Maundrell. She seized upon the idea, and proposed that I should give familiar lectures . . . . After the first lecture, which was to two or three rows of children and their school-mistress, a difficulty arose. The incumbent’s lady made a speech in School Committee, against our scheme . . . . My neighbour immediately took all the blame on herself, saying that I had not even known where the school-house was till she introduced me to it . . . . She went straight to the authorities of the [Methodist] chapel which stands at the foot of my rock, and in an hour obtained from them in writing an assurance that it would give them “the greatest pleasure” that I should lecture in their school-rooms . . . . At the second lecture, some of the parents and elder brothers and sisters of the children stole in to listen; and before I had done, there was a petition that I would deliver the lectures to grown people. I saw at once what an opportunity this was, and nerved myself to use it. I expanded the lectures, and made them of a higher cast; and before another year,
the Mechanics of Ambleside and their families were eager for other subjects. I have since lectured every winter but two; and with singular satisfaction . . . . It is rather remarkable that, being so deaf, and having never before spoken in any but a conversational tone, I never got wrong as to loudness. I placed one of my servants at the far end of the room; and relied on her to take out her handkerchief if she failed to hear me; but it always went well. I made notes on half-a-sheet of paper, of dates or other numbers, or of facts which might slip my memory; but I trusted entirely to my power at the time for my matter and words. I never wrote a sentence; and I never once stopped for a word . . . .

Workingmen’s Homes and The Building Society

The second course [of lectures] was on Sanitary matters; and it was an effectual preparation for my scheme of instituting a Building Society. In a place like Ambleside, where wages are high, the screw is applied to the working men in regard to their dwellings . . . . I showed them how they were paying away in rent, money enough to provide every head of a household with a cottage of his own in a few years; and I explained to them the principle of such a Building Society as we might have . . . . Hence arose our Building Society; the meeting to form it being held in my kitchen. A generous friend of mine advanced the money to buy a field, which I got surveyed, parcelled out, drained, fenced, and prepared for use. The lots were immediately purchased, and paid for without default . . . [T]he result is, on the whole, satisfactory, inasmuch as thirteen cottages have arisen already; and more are in prospect: and this number is no small relief in a little country town like Ambleside. The eye of visitors is now caught by an upland hamlet, just above the parsonage, where there are two good houses, and some ranges of cottages which will stand, as the builder say, “a thousand years,”–so substantial is the mode of building the gray stone dwellings of the district . . . .

The Ambleside Bobbin-Mill

The bobbin-mills round Windermere are, five mills (belonging to three establishments) at Stavely; one at Troutbeck; one at Hawkshead; one at Skelwith; and one at Ambleside . . . . That Ambleside mill was a very humble affair a quarter of a century ago. Let us see what may be found there now . . . . We pass and examine large stacks of timber and poles–beech, ash, mountain-ash, sycamore, “seal” (sallow), hazel, birch, and alder. The greater part is stacked under slated roofs; but some piles stand uncovered at present. There is timber think enough to make posts; and much of fourteen years’ growth–as large as a stout man’s leg–which is split and dressed into rails. While the circular saws and the lathes are at work, it is as well to make other things, besides bobbins; so we observe a new and much-improved kind of mangle in the old mill . . . . The circular-saws are from Sheffield. The rest of the machinery is home-made. Down in a chamber below the rest of the mill, are the cog-wheels, which are turned by the great water-wheel. There they whirl, smoothly, steadily; and between, and under them, may be seen again the clear gushing waters, and green and

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8In 2002, in Stock Ghyll Park, the remains of a dam are found. At this point began the mill race for the Horrocks bobbin mill, now holiday apartments.
grey rocks; and over them the sunny wood, where the latest bees are swinging in the last blossoms of the year. Mr. Horrox’s house is completely covered with ivy; and the fuchsia and China-rose blossom beside the door . . . . We may seem to dwell long on the natural features of the place; but there is an unspeakable charm in seeing the commonest manufacturing toil cheered and brightened by the presence of that antique and ever-young beauty, who is supposed to be mournfully displaced by the establishment of the arts of life. –We would fain convey some sense of this charm to our readers . . . .

The Stock and the Market-Place

This stream, the Stock, goes leaping, gurgling, and gushing down, overhung by trees and tormented by rocks in its channel, till it passes under the road, near the foot of the hill where we made our pause; after which it flows away in a winding course among the fields, and across the meadows till it enters the Rotha, near the Millar Bridge, which we passed on our way to Fox How. We walk over it on the road, passing the shops of S., the painter, and of the wheelwright, on the left, and of the cooper, and the confectioner, and the shoe-maker, on the right. The cooper’s shop and children are always neat, though flour and groceries are sold, as well as tubs and bowls, and rolling-pins; and though the children are many, and the mother always busy. She is a great needle-woman, to judge by the large piece of work, –the sheet or shirt, –one sees on her arm, whenever one glances at her open door. Now we are in the view of the corner, round which we are to turn into the little market-place. That corner is shaded by a dark sycamore; but before we reach the sycamore, our attention is fixed by the inn, –the Salutation, whose name is a reminder of a Catholic age, when Gabriel and the Virgin looked down on the approach of wayfarers. This is the principal inn; and the range of stables is rather imposing, and the rubbing down and harnessing of horses seem to be always going forward in the summer season. And there is the civil and good-natured host; once a stable-boy himself, as he likes to tell; now a most important man in the place, and usually out on his great flight of steps, on conferring with travellers in the area in front of his house. The next inn, the Commercial, is on our right, as we turn into the little market-place; and a third, the White Lion, shows its range of back windows opposite. Round the irregular area of the market-place are the rest of the shops; –the saddler’s, the butcher’s, the watchmaker’s, the linen-draper’s, the ironmonger’s, and the lawyer’s and carrier’s offices on the left; and on the right, the coach-office, the baker’s the milliner’s the druggist’s, and the post-office; which is also the place of books and stationary. In the midst stands the dear old market-cross,9 up its three steps,–the mouldering old stone cross, which tells of past centuries. And, casting a shadow of antiquity and solemnity over all, is the great rookery; which I make a point of passing at daybreak . . . . I like the noise of the creatures, – their amazing din in the February mornings, when they are beginning their building; but better still do I like their earliest morning flight, –a higher flight than I ever see them take at other times. I know now how to look for them. When it is still only beginning to be light with us, but when the sky takes the pearly or pinky hue which belongs to a

9 By 1899, according to Rawnseley (1902: 1-2) the old Market Cross, as well as several other Ambleside landmarks, including the old post office (“with its little room, wherein one met all the wit and talent of the neighbourhood in olden time”) had passed out of existence.
winter dayspring, I look steadily up into the sky, and presently see an immeasurable flock, just at the point of vision, sailing over the valley, –sometimes wining straight for Lady Le Fleming’s beeches, sometimes for the Ambleside elms, and sometimes wheeling round, as if they had time for another sweep abroad, and another chance of seeing the sun, before going to work upon their new nests . . . .

The post-office shop is the favourite among these, –all of which yield civil and friendly treatment. The post-mistress, Mrs. Nicholson, is a favourite with us all. The post-mistress of a little country town is always the depository of much confidence. I doubt whether anything exists, is done, or is suffered, in Ambleside, without Mrs. Nicholson being told of it: yet, never, through a long course of years, has she been charged with saying anything that she ought not. Yet, with all her discretion, she is as open-hearted as the most rash of babblers. She gives her confidence freely; but she is so innocent, so simple, and so intimately known by all her neighbours, that I doubt whether she has any secrets of her own, or ever had. I love to go there; but I keep away, if possible, at post-hours, and near the middle of the day, when she and her daughters are busy. A better time is in the early morning, before any other shop is open, when there is always one of the Nicholsons preparing the shop, and willing to serve me with postage-stamps, and spare five minutes for talking over our Building Society, or my cows, or any incident of the time. I never saw more perfect filial conduct than that of the two daughters, who, out of a family of thirteen, remain with their mother. H., the handsome and high-spirited one, and M., the delicate and diminutive and subdued one, are ladies of nature’s making, as truly as their old mother; and in nothing do they show it more than in their tender watchfulness over her. She is somewhat infirm and suffering; and they more watchful, and the more tender are they. Mrs. N. can seldom be induced to leave home; and I therefore felt it a great honour when she lately came, with her daughter H., to see my field and my cows, and take tea with me; and as they departed, I felt that never since my house was built, had truer ladies passed its doors . . . .

Our circuit will soon be completed now. We go straight on, past the White Lion, with the surgeon’s and chief shoemaker’s houses on our right, past the Royal Oak public house, past the smithy, along the highroad to Waterhead. There are a few pretty houses, set down in gardens, by the way; and one very ugly house, Fisherbeck, built for a workhouse, and looking just like it, but now let in lodgings: but the views into the Brathay valley, opening as we go, and disclosing again the little church on its height, and the overlapping hills, with the Langdale Pikes appearing last of all, engage one’s whole attention, till the lake opens full and calm, and we are at the toll-bar again . . . .

10 Lady Le Flemming’s is the present Rydal Hall, now operated as a religious retreat and conference center.


12 Margaret Nicholson. Neither Hannah nor Margaret ever married. They retired in Ambleside “after the forty-seven years they laboured for the public good and in the service of the Royal Mail” (Rawnsley, 1902: 4).
Strangers do not know the intricacies of the knolls, or how to find the little falls or windings of the streams. The drawback about the walk is that one must return by the market-place; –must slip into the town by the back way (a pleasant way enough), and pop in at the butcher’s to bespeak his mercy, –to remind him of one’s constant custom throughout the year, and ask if it is not hard that now, when we want to be hospitable, and when we believe we have provided a dinner, –sufficient, however, homely –we should find ourselves without enough to go round. We were promised a fine piece of sirloin; there comes a piece of two ribs. We had engaged a leg of mutton: there comes up little more than a shank. We had bespoken a goodly dish of trout: we are allowed only two. About the fish, the butcher smiles. He has nothing to do with that. About the meat, he looks grave. He is very sorry: but what can he do? He can only parcel out his resources as fairly as he can, and try to be sufficiently provided next year. He assures me that he has no comfort of his life at present.

RUSHBEARING DAY IN AMBLESIDE

This was Rushbearing day. The young people will probably never see a rushbearing anywhere else; for there are few places, and those extremely retired, where the custom subsists.

In ancient times, as old chronicles tell us, the parishioners everywhere brought rushes to strew the churches with before the Feast of Dedication. The stranger now looks in vain for the rushes: but the gay garlands are still carried, and placed in the church: and then, in this village, the children are entertained by Mr. H., whose gate is opposite mine. We cross the road, and enter the grounds early, that we may see the last of the preparations made. How admirably adapted the field is for such a spectacle, –two green hillsides sloping down to the level where the tables are placed! Cousins and his men are still fixing the trestles, and laying the boards which make the tables. We are not the first of the spectators to arrive: a crippled gentleman and some aged ladies are seated on chairs under the trees: and lo! over the wall beyond the lawn, and glancing among the trees, are the gay garlands, showing us that we are scarcely too soon, after all. Now the gates are thrown wide, and here they come, –the head of the procession entering, winding a little way through the shrubbery, and then turning in upon the grass, and filing off on either side the long row of tables. S. observes how like a Catholic procession it is, –how easily one might fancy one’s self looking at a Neapolitan church festival. To my eye, it looks like a Catholic procession in England; and that is all. I have been told that it was the late curate who introduced these curious symbols, –the triangle with the dove, the Virgin and child, and several more which ill befit a Protestant procession. He was at that time a Puseyite, and is now a Catholic priest: yet his handiwork among the Rushbearers remains. A lady, who has a terrible fear of heresy, asks me what I think of the show. I tell her that it seems to me curiously popish for our country and time, and inquire if it is true that the symbols I point out to here are of recent introduction. They are. I could, as I tell her, look on them with veneration, if they were a mere perpetuation of an ancient observance; but that I dread the effect of

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13 Meat supplies apparently ran short during the high tourist season each summer.

14 The last Saturday in July. The ritual started at 6:00 p.m. In 1854, the site of the ceremony shifted to the then new Church of St. Mary’s. For further description of the annual event, see Rawnsley, 1902: 1-16).
introducing a more ritual piety among children growing up in a society where the gross vices of rural life are very prevalent. Her replies are strange. First, she speaks of these symbols being good, because they are holy and venerable; and in the same breath she says it does not matter what the symbols are, as the children are too ignorant and dull to know or care anything about them. All the while, no one knows better than she, that the brothers and sisters of some who are carrying the garlands and hanging about the outside of the gates, listening to the music, and longing for the tea and the buns and the fun, but excluded because their parents have sent them to the school conducted by the Independents, and connected with their chapel. The parents declare themselves perplexed what to do, between the warm and inviting chapel and school on the right of the road, and the shadow of the church, and the great proprietors on the left: so, some of them send half their children to the church-school, and half to the other; and, if there happens to be an odd number of children, it is said by jesters that they send the middle one for six months to one school, and the other six to the other. The amazement of my young guests at such a state of things is great; but they were born and brought up amidst the enlightenment of a populous midland town, and could have no idea of the ignorance about the liberty of conscience which exists in such nooks of the island as this, were dissent is called schism, and schism is regarded as an unpardonable crime. Yet, what a lesson might we not draw from the fact of the diversities of belief within our valley! Let us see. We have High Church, Low Church, and Middle Church families; Catholics, both in and out of communion; Independents, Unitarians, Quakers, Swedenborgians, Wesleyans, Plymouth Brethren, and some who belong to no Christian sect at all. This should surely be a lesson to us all not to lord it over the humble, or connect advantage or disadvantage with modes of belief.

APPENDIX

THE FURNISHINGS AND LIBRARY AT THE KNOLL DURING MARTINEAU’S LIFETIME

From Maria Chapman’s Memorials

Harriet Martineau’s house . . . was well-furnished too; for of every thing within it one might affirm that, for the best possible reasons that thing should be there and no other, –almost every picture, object, and piece of furniture uniting elegant convenience and adornment with some family remembrance or token of friendship. The drawing-room was especially enriched by them. There was placed the collection of contemporary literature, mostly the homage of the authors. The beautiful carpet, of the time I am telling of, was the gift of her friend Jacob Bright, who procured the dimensions and had it placed in her absence, to give her a pleasant surprise. The whole furniture of the room illustrated the points of Harriet Martineau’s character by bringing to the thoughts of beholders the persons, so numerous and so various, who, separately and strangers to each other, had this one experience in common, –that they were each drawn into sympathy by one of the many sides of her powerful nature.
At the entrance, on the right, stands the marble-mounted sideboard, sent by her friend H. Crabb Robinson, the eminent English and German student, the philosopher of the Unitarians, the admired and cherished friend of so many distinguished persons of the last century, that he modestly said of himself, “Some men are famous on their own account: I am famous for my friends.” The little silver almanac was a present from her friend Mr. Darwin. The stone jardinière was given by the proprietors of a neighboring slate-quarry, on the occasion of her visit to them described in her little volume of Letters on Ireland. Richmond’s fine crayon-drawing of Harriet Martineau, of nearly life-size, the engraving from which adorns so many dwellings, placed nearly opposite the door of entrance, was a homage from himself. What touching stories ought to be told of so many another useful and ornamental object, all brought together from different nations and kindred and tongues and people; but a few more must suffice as illustrating parts of her own experience.

On the sideboard stands her brother Robert’s gift,—the household lamp that lighted the evenings. On a little table is an ebony papeterie, the gift of Florence Nightingale. The gold inkstand on another was the expression of her friend Lord Durham’s grateful appreciation of the restraining power she exercised over a riotous population. The tea-caddy was bought of a poor and suffering neighbor at its full price the day before a sale at which the rest of the furniture was sacrificed. The pretty French clock, on the centre bookcase (which covered one side of the room, filled with works principally of belles-lettres given by the authors of the day), marks the sense her family entertained of her generosity in influencing her mother to omit all mention of Harriet in her will. The Prie-Dieu of Berlin tapestry-work, begun by herself at Tynemouth, was finished and presented to her by her nieces, her brother Robert’s daughters. The statuettes, Aristides, and Niobe, were placed there by her sister and her aunt; and the square, Egyptian-modelled oaken pedestals were part of her furniture at Tynemouth. The engraving of Scheffer’s “Christus Consolator,” which she enjoyed and understood so thoroughly, was the consolation of her sick-room at Tynemouth, through the kind thoughtfulness of Miss Adelaide Kemble. Between the engraved portraits of her friends, Lord and Lady Durham, hung a pastel of one of the Norwegian Fiords (described in The Playfellow), sent her by Lady Byron.; and above it, Eastlake’s gift of his “Byron’s Dream.” The full-length engraving of Mrs. Fry was there, presented by Richmond, whose work it is. The engraving after Raphael was a token of regard from Mrs. Carlyle. In her own room hung Miss Stephen’s gift, –a water-colour by herself; –“Woodland.” The other souvenirs in the drawing-room are “Mrs. Calmady’s Children,” from her friend Evans, the artist; Goethe’s “Mignon,” from her friend Mr. Knight. The “Pet Antelopes” is from Mrs. Mackintosh; the portrait of Admiral Beaufort, a present from the Beaufort family. “Corwen Inn,” a charming oil-painting by Baker, was presented by Mr. Vincent Thompson; an engraving of Sir William Napier is from Lord Aberdare, his son-in-law; “Christ and the Tribute-Money,” from Mrs. Jameson; “A Heathery Moor” and “Waterlilies” from sister artists, the Misses Gittings; the Prie-Dieu is from her early friend and sister-in-law, Mrs. Robert Martineau. The solid reading-desk is from Mrs. Richard Martineau; the work-box, from her dear and early friend, Mrs. Ker.

The flowers and plants with which the room was always filled were also offerings from far and near.

The large photograph of Colonel Shaw . . . was sent to Harriet Martineau by his mother, Mrs. Francis George Shaw of Staten Island, N.Y. It was placed conspicuously; “and it always melts my heart,” she said, “to look at it, and think of that great deed that proved two races worthy of each other, and helped to save your land for both!”
Across the hall, to the left as one enters the house, is the study, two sides of which accommodate the more voluminous and useful of her books; probably the best woman’s library extant, –certainly the best I have ever seen, consisting of between two and three thousand volumes. They are books of art, biography, education, general literature, geography, voyages and travels, history, morals and politics, political economy, theology, and works of reference. This last department was peculiarly well chosen. There were all sorts of annuaries: and first the annual register, of a hundred volumes; American ditto and American Almanac, a present from Judge Story; the various American constitutions of nation and States; reports of the poor-law commissions, annuaries of astronomical observatories, Almanach der Gotha, annual reports of the anti-slavery societies, Gorton’s Biographical Dictionary, Biographie Universelle in eighty-three volumes, census returns of the British Empire, all the concordances and dictionaries, –Bayle’s, Johnson’s, Lempière’s, –dictionaries of all the classic and modern European languages. Then there were encyclopaedias of agriculture and essays on all subjects; books of jurisprudence and prison discipline; school-inspectors’ and sanitary books, and all possible hand-books; with Hone’s popular works, and all the useful works of reference on Ireland. The Mémoires of the French Institute were a present from Ampère. Then there were the reports of all sorts of commissioners, –on education, mining, criminal law, poor law, idiocy, and pauperism; juvenile books; and catalogues of public libraries. The purchase of these valuable works, necessary for a political writer who would fain make known what the world has been, the better to make it what it ought to be, was a great but satisfactory item of her occasional expenditure. There were all manner of books on woman’s duties and rights. Knight’s weekly volumes which she had planned with the Countess of Elgin, Biographical History of Philosophy. Hardly an eminent name of her time that is not affixed to some presentation copy. A guest deeply interested in education took pains, with her consent, to obtain a catalogue in order to be enabled to aid social-science efforts in the formation of town libraries.

On the walls hung two views of Lambton Castle, from the Countess of Elgin. In each of the twelve panels of red pine round the bay window was a cartoon of Raphael in wood-engraving, from her friend Mr. Ker. “I’ll tell you how to treat this red pine for doors and wainscoting,” she said to one who was admiring it: “varnish when new, –leave it two years, –then another coat, and you have it as you see.” The colour of the carpet and curtains, the hangings being then in red velvet with a touch of gold, were in harmony with the tint of the wood-work.

Imagine, –between globes and little stands for precious objects, with here and there casts of Clytie and the Huntress Diana, –the bay-windows, filled with geraniums, and the library-table with her chaise-longue behind it, and you have a general idea of this room, which seemed less a library than an oratory, consecrated as it was by a devotedness to the world’s welfare so instinctive as to have become unconscious; but visitors were always conscious of it, and stepped softly and spoke low, as if the place were holy . . . .

Harriet Martineau died at Ambleside June 27th 1876. She is buried with members of her family in the old cemetery at Birmingham, England.