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THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MRS. GASKELL'S NOVELS

By

Andrew Hart

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Preface

My purpose in making this study is twofold. First, I hope to add to the fund of available information concerning Mrs. Gaskell's writings by presenting a detailed account of the critical reception tendered her major works by the periodical reviewers. Secondly, by studying the reaction of the reviewers toward her social novels, I hope to gain insight into the general attitudes of the Victorians toward social, moral, and political problems of their day.

For the most part, I have confined my investigations to those reviews which dealt with a single work, and which appeared shortly after publication of the work they discussed. However, when a particular book received very little or no attention from the reviewers, I have included material taken from general estimates of her work, nearly all of which appeared after her death.

I have preceded the discussion of the reviews themselves with a brief sketch of Mrs. Gaskell's life, giving particular attention to the more important influences which helped shape her work. Such a brief sketch cannot, of course, be regarded as serving the purpose of a full-length biography. Its only function is to furnish a general background for the studies of the reviews. The studies are not arranged chronologically

in order of the appearance of Mrs. Gaskell's novels; rather, those dealing with a particular type of work, such as the social novel, are grouped together.

I am grateful to Dr. Orbeck for suggesting the topic, and to Dr. Rust for assisting me in the actual writing of the thesis.

A.V.H.

Backgrounds and Influences Upon Mrs. Gaskell's Writings

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born September 29, 1810, in London. Her father, William Stevenson, had been a Unitarian minister, but had given up his post because of scruples against preaching for money, an action which his daughter later utilized in her characterization of Mr. Hale in North and South, who, like Mr. Stevenson, gave up his pulpit for ethical reasons.

After leaving the ministry, Stevenson sought unsuccessfully to make a living as a scientific farmer, then as a boardinghouse keeper. After these attempts at making a living had failed, he became editor of The Scots Magazine, at the same time contributing to The Edinburgh Review and tutoring at Edinburgh University. It was there that he met and married Elizabeth Holland, a woman of well-to-do Unitarian antecedents. In 1806, through the influence of the Earl of Lauderdale, he was appointed Keeper of the Records of the Treasury and moved his family to London. The move, however, didn't mean the end of his literary career. Even after his children were born he continued to do literary research, and wrote articles on such topics as scientific agriculture, surveying, and classical learning. Just what specific effect her father's literary activities had

upon Elizabeth would be difficult to say. Certain it is that the literary and cultural atmosphere she grew up in did nothing to inhibit her own writing activities, and it is equally certain that she must have shared something of her father's taste for research, else she could never have carried out the patient search of old records in connection with the writing of Sylvia's Lovers and The Life of Charlotte Bronte.

When Elizabeth was thirteen months old her mother died, and an Aunt, Mrs. Lumb, took the child to live with her at Knutsford. This small, old-fashioned village, where Elizabeth spent the remainder of her childhood, figures in many of her stories, notably as Cranford, and as Hollingsford in Wives and Daughters. Its buildings, inhabitants, and many events which took place within its environs appeared in her works so vividly drawn that persons familiar with Knutsford had no difficulty in recognizing the originals.

In 1827, news came that Elizabeth's brother John, a lieutenant in the merchant service, had disappeared at sea, and that her grief-stricken father was ill and needed her. She returned to him and remained until his death in 1829. This brother later appeared in North and South as Frederick Hale, Margaret Hale's brother, a sailor who had been involved in a mutiny aboard one of the King's vessels and had later taken refuge in Spain.

In September, 1829, Elizabeth returned to Knutsford, but soon left it to live at the home of the Reverend William Turner at Newcastle-on-Tyne with a view of preparing herself for teaching. This experience she later drew upon in Ruth, Mr. Turner and his household probably being the originals for Mr. Benson and his household. Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell called Ruth her "Newcastle story." After some two years in the Turner household, she, together with Mr. Turner's daughter Ann, left for Edinburgh in order to escape a cholera epidemic that had broken out in Newcastle. They remained there only a few months, then went to Manchester on a visit to Ann's sister, wife of the Reverend John G. Robberds, minister at the Cross Street Unitarian Chapel.

It was here that the future authoress met her husband-to-be, the Reverend William Gaskell, also a guest at the Robberds's home. A courtship began which culminated in their marriage on August 30, 1832. There is not the slightest doubt that her husband had a profound influence upon her work. In many respects he closely resembled Mrs. Gaskell's father. He was not only a minister, but a scholar as well. From 1846 to 1852 he was professor of English history and literature at Manchester New College and later a lecturer in English literature at Workingman's College and Owens College. He studied and wrote articles on the Lancashire dialect, and it is quite

possible that this interest in dialects is responsible for Mrs. Gaskell's accurate and extensive use of them in her works.

After their marriage, the young couple left for a honeymoon near Festiniog, Wales, later to be used as the setting for portions of Ruth, as well as for several of the short stories. Afterwards they settled in Manchester, where their children -- six in all -- were born. The children's invluence as well as that of Victorian sentimentality, is seen in the many tender scenes involving babies and youngsters, which dot the pages of her works.

As the wife of a Unitarian minister, Mrs. Gaskell moved in the most cultivated, intellectual circles in Manchester, and consequently met many leading personages of the time. She met and talked with prison reformers, Christian Socialists, and Abolitionists, as well as notable literary figures, thus coming into contact with many of the most important ideas and movements of the day. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that she should have become interested in the problems caused by the rise of an industrial economy. These problems had resulted in a number of literary productions prior to the publication of Mary Barton in 1848.

In 1840, Mrs. Frances Trollope had written Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy, a book dealing with industrial

conditions in Mrs. Gaskell's own Manchester, in which she contrasts the life of a factory boy adopted by a rich manufacturer, with the poverty-stricken lot of his mother and brother. Two other, more important, works were Disraeli's Coningsby and Sybil, published respectively in 1844 and 1845. The first centered upon political ideals and alignments rather than social conditions, but the second dealt directly with class relations, although it didn't discuss the cause of industrial misery and hinted only vaguely at remedies. In the realm of non-fiction, Harriet Martineau had in 1834 written a nine volume Illustrations of Political Economy which dealt with some aspects of the social problem, but probably the most important works were those of Thomas Carlyle. In 1839, he published Chartism, dealing with what he called the "Condition of England Question" and denouncing the laissez-faire philosophy. He condemned the violence of the Chartist demonstrations, but he nevertheless saw the justice of their revolt and the inadequacies of the reforms already accomplished. In Past and Present, published in 1843, he again attacked existing conditions. He depicted the shocking misery of the masses; he deplored the indifference of the more fortunate classes, leaders who had failed to lead, and he reviled the campaign oratory of the politicians.

Carlyle proposed no simple remedy for these evil conditions; rather, he tried to awaken the dormant conscience of the people.

Just how much influence these various works had upon Mrs. Gaskell is difficult to say. As a member of the leading intellectual circle in Manchester, it is likely that she was aware of the work of Mrs. Trollope and Disraeli,[1] and the fact that the 1848 edition of Mary Barton contained a Carlyle quotation as a motto indicates that she had read at least some of his works. It is also known that she read Sir James Kay Shuttleworth's report to parliament, The Unsanitary Horrors of Manchester, and an 1830 Sadler work, the Petition for a Ten Hour Day, which brought instances of the exploitation of factory workers to the attention of parliament.

Mrs. Gaskell herself, in the preface to Mary Barton, tells us that firsthand experience with conditions in Manchester was the motivating force behind the novel. Living in the city, she learned to feel a deep sympathy with the careworn men thronging its busy streets, men who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations of work and want, tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men. She tells how this sympathy opened

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[1]William Minto, writing in the Fortnightly Review for Sept. 1878, attempts to show that Mary Barton was inspired by Sybil.

to her the hearts of one of two of the more thoughtful among them, how she saw that they were angry and irritated against the prosperous, especially against the masters whose fortunes they had helped to build, and how they were possessed by a strong belief that the miseries and privations they suffered were the result of the injustice and hardness of the rich, whose smooth and seemingly happy lives seemed to increase the anguish caused by their own miserable existences. She saw the thoroughness of this belief manifested from time to time in acts of deadly revenge, and the consequences were so bad for all that the more she thought on them the more anxious she became to give utterance to the "dumb agony" of the people who seemed to be "in a state wherein lamentations and tears were put aside for curses" and where the hand appeared ready to strike the objects of its hatred.[1] In 1845, her only son, Willie, died of scarlet fever, and it was in an attempt to ease the grief caused by his death that she began the actual writing of the novel which was published in 1848.

As a result of Mary Barton's success, Mrs. Gaskell found herself suddenly famous. She met such personages as Dickens, the Carlyles, Thackeray, and Charlotte Bronte. None of these persons had much direct influence

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[1]Preface, dated October, 1848, to the original edition of Mary Barton.

upon her work, although in a sense Dickens might be said to have influenced its form and artistic quality, since he offered her an opportunity of writing for his magazine, Household Words, which she accepted, an acceptance which made all the work she intended for publication in it subject to the restrictions and limitations of magazine fiction. Her relationship with Charlotte Bronte was important in that it led to her later writing of The Life of Charlotte Bronte, which is recognized as a classic example of biography.

In December, 1851, there appeared in Household Words a short idyllic sketch called "Cranford," which dealt humorously with the lives and foibles of certain feminine inhabitants of a small village. Mrs. Gaskell intended to develop this idea no further, but Dickens, struck by the gentle, ironic humor of the piece, persuaded her to do others in similar vein. She complied, turning out seven more by the middle of 1853. These sketches she then collected, rewrote a few sentences to insure continuity of theme, and had them published in book form later that same year under the title of the earliest. As has been stated before, these sketches were based upon material drawn from Mrs. Gaskell's early life in Knutsford. Because of its gentle, ironic

humor blended with pathos and its timelessness, Cranford has remained Mrs. Gaskell's most popular work.

With the publication of Ruth in January 1853, Mrs. Gaskell returned to the realm of the social novel. This book exemplifies Christianity as it should be applied to life and is a plea for the single standard of morality for men and women for a change in the attitude of society toward misconduct in men. It vividly contrasts the ideal Christian, Thurstan Benson, with Mr. Bradshaw, the narrow, dogmatic, unforgiving, conventional Christian and leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that Mrs. Gaskell preferred the former. A number of influences have been discovered. The title was possibly suggested by George Crabbe's story of Ruth in Tales of a Hall, with which Mrs. Gaskell was familiar, and which has several elements in common with her work, while part of the action takes place in Wales, where Mrs. Gaskell spent her honeymoon. It is very possible that she first became interested in the problems of women who had been seduced and deserted through actual contacts she might have had with them as a minister's wife. Sir Adolphus Ward, in his introduction to Ruth in the Knutsford edition of Mrs. Gaskell's works, tries to show that the whole novel is a chain of ideas growing out of the death of Mrs. Gaskell's son, and not an effort to deal with moral problems. This supposition has, however,

been generally discredited.

North and South, her next full-length work, was in effect a sequel to Mary Barton, although it concerns itself with an entirely new set of characters, and even the town where the action takes place is disguised under a fictitious name, Milton Northern. During the years that had elapsed since Mary Barton was published, conditions had generally improved. In 1846, the Corn Laws were repealed, allowing foreign grain to be shipped into England practically duty-free, thus enabling the working classes to purchase bread at much lower rates. The social legislation passed by a parliament becoming increasingly aware of the necessity for taking legislative action if long-standing abuses were to be corrected, had somewhat improved the conditions under which the workmen lived. Add that prosperity prevailed at the time and it is easily seen that the period as a whole was more conducive to a thoughtful study of industrial conditions than was that of Mary Barton.

Mrs. Gaskell, seeing these changes for the better, was more inclined to present a sympathetic picture of the mill owner than she had been previously. She had had many opportunities to see his side. As we shall see later, Mary Barton had called forth many changes

that she had misrepresented the employers. She listened attentively to all these arguments and her views regarding factory owners began to change. As a result, North and South spoke primarily for the manufacturer rather than for the worker.

This novel, in contrast to Mary Barton, attracted no critical notice. The reasons for the indifference with which it was received are not difficult to ascertain. In the first place, the fact that it showed the manufacturer in a better light lessened the chances that it would be attacked by the predominately pro--employer periodicals. In the second place, a number of other social novels had been written since Mary Barton and the reviewers would not be so likely to take notice of one more as they would of a pioneer work. And finally, the revolutionary movements on the Continent had drawn the attention of the public away from industrial disputes.

The Life of Charlotte Bronte, the next important work by Mrs. Gaskell, was published in 1857. Mrs. Gaskell first met Charlotte in 1850, and a warm friendship soon sprang up between them. Between the time of their first meeting and Charlotte's death in 1855, the two writers exchanged many letters; Charlotte visited Mrs. Gaskell three times, while the latter was a guest at Haworth once. After Charlotte's death, her father,

desirous of correcting numerous misstatements about his daughter that had appeared in obituary articles, asked Mrs. Gaskell to do a biography that would counteract the falsehoods with facts. Mrs. Gaskell accepted the commission. In order to make sure that her work would be as accurate as possible, she went to primary sources for her material. She wrote and visited Charlotte's lifelong friends, her schoolmistress, her publisher, her literary agent, and even the Brussels school-teacher, N. Heger, at whose school Charlotte had studied. From these people she obtained not only anecdotes, but also much early Bronte correspondence. Finally, she interviewed old family servants, the neighbors at Haworth, and Charlotte's father and husband. She let Charlotte tell her own story through her correspondents, and added only a few chapters at the beginning dealing with Charlotte's antecedents and youth, besides the necessary connecting links between chapters. As has been previously suggested, she may very well have gained her penchant for such research from her father.

During the six years that elapsed between the publication of the biography and Sylvia's Lovers, her next long work, in 1863, Mrs. Gaskell wrote but little, a partial reason for this literary inactivity being that she began collecting materials for the novel in 1859. Once again she went to primary sources, spending part of a summer in

Whitby, a town which had been a center of the press-gang activities dealt with in the novel, talking to old inhabitants who furnished many anecdotes about them. She also investigated the literature on the subject at the British Museum, as well as that in the admiralty records. Finally, she spoke with numerous authorities on press-gangs. So carefully did she go about securing information that no error has ever been detected in her data concerning historical and naval events, a high tribute to the quality of her research.

Wives and Daughters, her final novel, began appearing in the August, 1864, Cornhill Magazine, and the last installment, which on account of her death lacked a chapter or two of being complete, appeared in the January, 1866, issue. It is the only full-length novel in which Mrs. Gaskell drew from the aristocracy for her characters, although in a previous work of novelette length, "My Lady Ludlow," she had done so.

Mrs. Gaskell's early years at Knutsford had an influence upon this work; Lord and Lady Cunmor are modeled after Lord and Lady Egerton, who lived at Tatton Park, near Knutsford, while the beginning of the work is an exact description of the garden parties given at Tatton Park for the village school-teachers. It is thought that the early life of Molly, the heroine of the work, is a reflection of Mrs. Gaskell's own childhood. She said that the time

she spent at her father's after his second marriage was very unhappy, and Molly's grief when she hears of her father's engagement is so realistic and handled with such sympathy that it is almost impossible to believe it is not based upon Mrs. Gaskell's own experience.

Mrs. Gaskell died very suddenly November 12, 1865, while taking tea at her home in Alton, Hampshire. Although she had apparently been in perfect health, there is some evidence that she felt all was not well, since only three weeks earlier she had expressed fears she might not live long enough to do anything with a plot she had just been given. She was buried in the yard of Knutsford's Unitarian Church; the large number of Manchester citizens who journeyed there to pay final tribute eloquently attested to the esteem in which she was held by the people of that city.

Mary Barton

As has been previously stated, this novel deals with conditions in Manchester. The period covered is the "hungry forties," a time of acute distress in the industrial districts. John Barton, a steady and thoughtful, although rather improvident, worker is one of the sufferers, and the conditions of squalor and starvation under which he is forced to exist have made him into an active and embittered unionist. A group of workmen, driven to desperation by these conditions and by the indifference of parliament to their plight, decide to kill one of the employers, young Henry Carson, as a warning to his class. Lots are drawn to determine who shall carry out the murder and Barton is chosen. Meanwhile, Barton's daughter, Mary, has attracted the admiration of Henry Carson. She has become so flattered by his attentions and so enamoured with the idea of making a grand marriage that she has rejected Jem Wilson, her former lover, a man belonging to the working classes.

Later, however, she has come to realize that her real love is for Jem, and has broken off her relation with Carson, who, she discovers, has no intention of marrying her. At this juncture, Carson is shot and Jem, who has been seen quarreling with him over Mary, is arrested and brought to trial for the murder. Mary discovers that her father is the murderer, and it is only through her success-

ful efforts to track down and bring into court the sailor who can account for Jem's whereabouts at the time of the trial that Jem is saved. John Barton, conscience-wracked and dying, confesses his guilt to the revenge-seeking father of Henry Carson, who finally forgives him just before he dies.[1]

The reviews which greeted the publication of Mary Barton were almost without exception equal mixtures of high approval and severe censure. The praise was generally elicited by the artistic merits of the work, while the condemnation was chiefly leveled at the pictures of industrial conditions and worker-owner relations presented by the novel.

Nearly all the reviewers recognized that the novel, published anonymously, was the work of a woman. They saw that it had higher pretensions than an ordinary novel, that it aimed not only at a "definition of the joys and sorrows, loves and hates of our common humanity," but also professed to give a picture of the "feelings, opinions, characters, and social conditions of a particular class of people."[2] It was praised for the vivid

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[1]The book summaries included in this thesis are expanded versions of those appearing in The Oxford Companion to English Literature.

[2]William Rathbone Greg, "Review of Mary Barton," Edinburgh Review, LXXXXIX (April, 1849), 402.

descriptions of nature with which it is sprinkled, complimented because of its excellent construction which permitted the incidents of the tale to "flow so easily and naturally out of each other with the progress of the narrative,"[1] Mrs. Gaskell's humor also came in for some attention, it being noted that there were "passages where the humor and the pathos are intermixed and pass into each other."[2] The passage dealing with John Barton's account of his deputation to London was cited as an example. The reviewers recognized the dialect as "giving a peculiar raciness to the speech of shrewd and earnest men, and diffusing a warm local hue ... over the whole narrative."[3] One reviewer[4] thought that the many cottage scenes depicted with such "touching simplicity and force" were derived, at least in part, from actual observation by the author.

Of all the artistic aspects of the novel, the one most discussed was character delineation. Even the minor figures were said to be "touched with the fidelity of a Daguerreotype."[5] Much interest centered in the

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[1]J. J. Taylor, "Review of Mary Barton," The Prospective Review, V (Feb., 1849), 41.

[2]Ibid., p. 46.

[3]Ibid., p. 43.

[4]"Review of Mary Barton," British Quarterly Review, IX (Feb., 1849), 131.

[5]"Review of Mary Barton," The Athenaeum, (Oct. 21, 1848), 1050.

portrayal of Esther, the prostitute aunt of Mary, who was said to be "drawn with a fidelity and truth really terrible," and in old Alice, the servant whose "unconscious goodness, her faith in a God never forsaking her, her unselfish devotion to the service of others, her gratitude for the smaller mercies ..." were "truly delightful."[1]

The leading character, Mary Barton herself, naturally came in for much critical comment. Most of the reviewers puzzled over and regarded as an artistic flaw the strange combination of unlike elements in her nature, the "pure" element that was in love with Jem Wilson and the "impure," flirtatious element which for a time allowed her to carry on an affair with young Carson, the millowner's son, and blinded her to the real merits of Jem.

The character of John Barton was handled rather severely by some reviewers, who wondered that a man of his character and intelligence should know nothing of economics, should have been so improvident in prosperous times as not to save a cent, and should have participated in such an affair as the murder plot.

One reviewer[2] noted that the melodramatic parts, the fire at Carson's mill, the pursuit of the ship containing the witness whose testimony would save Jem Wilson from the gallows, and the scene in which the witness appeared at the

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[1] J.J. Taylor, op. cit., p. 42-3.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

trial, were not those furnishing "the clearest proof of genius, because they were too commonly met with in purely melodramatic writings." Several complained that the number of deaths, eight not counting the murder, was excessive.

Without a single exception the reviewers stated their belief that Mrs. Gaskell presented a one-sided and erroneous picture of conditions existing in industrial towns and of the relationship between masters and workers, although they attributed the supposed errors to insufficient familiarity with the facts for the country as a whole, rather than willful misrepresentation.

Because the review by William Rathbone Greg[1] contains all the arguments present in the others, as well as a few not presented elsewhere, I shall base my summary of the criticism leveled at the picture of social conditions given in Mary Barton upon it alone. It should be kept in mind, however, that nearly everyone of these arguments were offered by several critics.

Before he began his criticism, he complimented Mrs. Gaskell upon the accuracy with which she had depicted what Monckton Milnes had called "the sacred patience of the poor," their meek submissiveness as shown in George Wilson and old Alice.

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[1] Edinburgh Review, LXXXIX (April, 1849), 402-435.

The first representation which Greg believed to be wrong was the one Mrs. Gaskell made in her preface in which she disclosed an animosity against masters to be common among the workers. He felt that although there did exist a considerable amount of "hard feelings," it was exceptional, not general-local, limited and transient -- and certainly not entertained by the working populace at large." Further, he thought that such hatred was becoming "more and more exclusively confined to the irregular, dissolute and discontented ex-workmen who form the acting staff of trades' -unions and delegations,"[1] and was directed only at "the meanest of employers." He remarked that contrary to the impression given by Mrs. Gaskell's novel, there was a feeling of kindness existing between workers and owners, and that the owners did not entirely neglect the welfare of their workers. In support of this contention he pointed to the large number of charities, such as hospitals and infirmaries, that existed in Manchester, and stated that during periods of unemployment in 1842 and 1847 soup kitchens gave daily relief to thousands.[2]

Greg doubted whether times really had been as difficult as Mrs. Gaskell indicated. He felt that not only had

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[1]Ibid., p. 412.

[2]Greg, op. cit., p. 425.

employment been generally steady and regular, but that wages had been comparatively very high. He noted that due to the light, easy nature of the work in textile mills, several individuals from a single family could be employed, and that the earnings of such a family would sometimes reach 100 pounds per year.[1]

Many of the workmen's difficulties sprang from their own faults, Greg thought. He characterized many of them as shiftless and improvident persons who spent money as fast as they got it, without putting by a single penny for a "rainy day," and cited John Barton's spendthrift habits as an example. Next to their careless, improvident ways, he felt that the characteristic which caused them the most suffering was their want of moral courage, of resolute, individual will. Because of this defect, the group sometimes fell under the control of minorities. He believed that most strikes (as well as other disorders which increased the workers' misery) were fomented by these minorities against the wishes of the majority.[2]

The reviewer took Mrs. Gaskell to task for countenancing the double error of believing that labor is a curse and that the poor only are ordained to toil. He felt that labor is a blessing to which man owes the progress he has made and to which he will owe any progress made in the

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[1] Ibid., p. 417.

[2] Ibid., p. 423.

future. In denying that the poor have any reason to complain of excessive toil, he commented on the far harder mental toil of the student, lawyer, statesman, and scientist.[1]

The notion that the poor should look to the rich or to the legislatures rather than to themselves for help was attacked strongly by Greg, who believed that each worker must look to himself for aid, that only through the exercise of his own intellect and virtues could he hope to rise in the social scale. Greg believed that for a person to improve himself in this manner he first needed "a better education to give purer tastes and higher aims -- strength and sense to resist present temptation -- the courage to differ from (his) associates, and to pursue unflinchingly (his) chosen course."[2]

Greg discussed at some length the question of wages and profits, and their fair distribution between workers and owner. His contention was that the wage the worker received was actually just as much profit as the owner's share of company income, but that the worker got his in fixed amounts at stated intervals to meet expenses as they arose, which he, unlike the capitalist, couldn't otherwise do. In support of his belief that the profits of the owner aren't ordinarily too large, Greg cited the risks they ran

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[1] Ibid., p. 424.

[2] Ibid., p. 421.

and mentioned several instances where manufacturers had gone broke during periods of depression.

In discussing the possibility of cooperative ownership of factories by workers, the reviewer said that if it was true that the workers were receiving a fair share of the profits in the form of wages, then the only way they could become sharers in annual profits would be by foregoing a certain portion of the money paid periodically as wages. Greg wondered what the workmen would do in years when the factory operated at a loss. He said that not only would the workers draw lower wages during such a year but they would find themselves in debt at the end of the year, rather than with a profit showing. Furthermore, the problem of determining fair shares for drunken, shiftless workers and for those who quit to work elsewhere would be difficult to solve. On the whole, Greg felt the system of profit distribution through wages, as it then existed, to be the most practicable.[1]

That the reviewers were right in contending that Mary Barton had higher pretensions than an ordinary novel cannot be doubted, since Mrs. Gaskell herself admitted in the preface that her aim was no less than "to give some utterance to the agony" which from time to time convulsed the working people. They were also acute in recognizing the skill with which Mrs. Gaskell depicts nature, a skill

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[1] Ibid., p. 426-32.

which almost every modern critic discussing her works finds it necessary to dwell upon at some length. The humor at times delicately blended with pathos which the reviewers recognized in this novel can be regarded as pointing toward the more fully developed examples of the type to be found in Cranford. The accuracy of her reporting of dialectal forms is attested to by the extent to which the English Dialect Dictionary relied on her and her husband's work in illustrating Lancashire usage.[1]

Although contemporary opinion would agree with the early reviewers that Mrs. Gaskell's depiction of character is on the whole excellent, it would disagree with the opinions expressed about certain specific portrayals. The Esther whom the critics of a century ago declared to be drawn with a terrible fidelity and truth seems to the modern reader to be a most unreal stock figure, a minister's wife's conception of a street-walker. The character of Alice is still considered by many critics to be a finely drawn portrait of a servant, but to some persons the unconscious goodness, the faith in God, the unselfish devotion to others and the childlike innocence add up to a person too good to be true.

The character of John Barton makes a better showing today than it did at the time Mary Barton was published.

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[1]Gerald Dewitt Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell, Yale University Press., New Haven, 1929, pp. 154-5.

His change from a man of simple and trusting faith, one who looked with a friendly eye upon his fellow-man, to a person whose mind became so warped and embittered by adversity that he could consider murder itself as an act of justice, being regarded by a modern critic as done with "marked ability rarely shown in a first creation."[1] Incidentally, this early trusting, optimistic nature might, in part, explain his failure to save during periods of prosperity. As for Barton's willingness to commit murder, it can easily be imagined that the calamities which he had experienced, plus the fact that the world seemed to condone, even approve, the injustice of a moral standard that allowed many to starve while a few prospered, should lead to a perversion of other moral standards in Barton's mind. The fact that this approval was based upon current economic doctrine would account for Barton's failure to treat the economics of his day with the respect to which the early reviewers thought it was entitled.

Mary Barton's confused emotions in connection with Jem Wilson and young Carson might be laid to female "changeability," but there is an even better explanation. We must remember that Mary was exposed to all the poverty and horror that existed in the Manchester of her day. Carson to her represented a chance to escape the drudgery of her

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[1] Ibid., p. 28.

position, to enter into the world of luxury -- or jewels and carriages and beautiful homes. Is it any wonder then that she became temporarily blinded to the good qualities of Jem?

The answer to the charge that Mrs. Gaskell had misrepresented conditions in industrial towns and the relationship between factory-owner and workman can be found in such a book as J. L. and Barbara Hammond's The Age of the Chartists.[1] This book, fully documented with the reports of many commissions of inquiry appointed by parliament to investigate conditions in factories and industrial towns, reveals that Mrs. Gaskell's portrayal is essentially correct.

Housing was extremely bad. Since there were no building restrictions of any kind, landlords, in order to get the greatest possible number of houses on a given plot of ground, jammed buildings as closely together as they could, putting in an absolute minimum of narrow, crooked roads. The houses in one of the newer sections of Manchester were described[2] as being of the most superficial character, having walls only half a brick thick and no cellars or foundation. They were built back to back, without ventilation or drainage, and formed courts with a pump at one end and a privy at the other, serving perhaps twenty houses. Other, older sections of the town were thickly crowded with basement dwellings which sometimes measured

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[1]Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1930

[2]Ibid., p. 80.

no more than eight feet square and six feet high. Because of a tax on every house having more than eight windows, windows were few, ventilation was poor, and health hazards correspondingly increased. Usually the cellar house and often other dwellings as well were unprovided with privies and refuse of all kinds went into the street. Streets in Manchester were theoretically cleaned once a week, but we must remember that by "street" was meant only those thoroughfares dedicated to the public. Courts and alleys were not cleaned at all, and undedicated ones only occasionally. It is not surprising, therefore, that a survey of the Manchester area by the District Boards of Health during an 1832 cholera epidemic should show that in 352 out of 687 streets visited there were heaps of refuse and stagnant pools.[1] A survey of factory conditions will show that the work was far from being "light and easy" as Gred stated, even though some of the worst abuses had been done away with. These abuses had been uncovered by a number of parliamentary investigations of industrial conditions, notably that conducted by the Sadler committee in 1832. The committee uncovered instances of young girls being made to work as many as nineteen hours a day in a textile "rush" season; of workers who were no more than five minutes late for work being fined or "docked" a quarter of a day's pay; of brutal

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[1] Ibid., pp. 93-95.

beatings administered by factory overseers to girls who fell behind in their work or who made small blunders. In one instance a girl's back was "beat nearly to a jelly" because she was aiding a fellow worker during a short lull in her own work. Conditions in other industries and occupations, notably mining, were found to be as bad or even worse.[1]

Such evidence was largely responsible for the passage of the Factory Act of 1833, which introduced inspection of factories. This act was superseded eleven years later by the Factory Act of 1844. This piece of industrial legislation, the last important one prior to the publication of Mary Barton, reduced to six and one half the number of working hours a day for children between the ages of eight and thirteen, and limited this work period to either the morning or afternoon. However, children could be worked ten hours a day on alternate days. Young persons -- those between the ages of thirteen and eighteen -- were to work no more than twelve hours a day on week days and nine on Saturday. Dangerous machines were to be screened; a physician's report was to be made out for every accident that occurred, the physician himself investigating the accident; schooling was to be provided for factory children at the employer's expense; and a

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[1] A. E. Bland, English Economic History, Select Documents, London: Bell, 1921, pp. 831-2, (Report of Committee Factory Children's Labour, (XV) p. 192ff.)

number of half-holidays were to be granted annually.[1] However, even with the improvements provided for by this legislation, Victorian working conditions were extremely bad.

It might be well for us to examine at this point the education available to the young of the working classes at this period. In 1934 the Statistical Society of Manchester, formed to start an inquiry into the state of education in that town, discovered that compulsory education for children existed only on paper. There were available eighty-four Sunday schools at which they might be taught to read after a fashion, and in ten of these schools they might learn writing. In the Dame schools they might learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, with grammar and geography added for an extra penny a week. The schools depending on public subscription were in a sense the worst of them all. In these schools, through the use of monitors, student teachers who had themselves only recently learned the lessons they taught, two masters could handle a thousand pupils. Lessons were learned by rote. The monitor would ask questions in a certain sequence and the pupils would repeat the answers until they knew them by heart. If, by chance, the questions were then asked out of sequence, chaos ensued, the pupil still answering the original sequence.[2] One can easily see that the "better education

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[1] Ibid., pp. 612-14 (Factory Act of 1844 (Statutes 7 and 8, section 15))

[2] Hammond, op. cit., pp. 168-176.

to give purer tastes and higher aims" was not to be obtained without drastic revision of the school "system" as it existed in that day. Neither were purer tastes to be gained by the worker through visits to libraries, museums, and botanical gardens. These institutions either did not exist or were closed on holidays and Sundays, the only times when workmen could visit them. Even recreation was denied them, since playgrounds and commons had been to a large extent enclosed and crowded out by tenements.

Such conditions undoubtedly accounted for much of the shiftlessness which Greg mentioned as a characteristic of many persons belonging to the working classes. With cultural and recreational outlets closed to them, and with a mockery of an education, they found refuge for their suffering only in the gin-shops, where, for a few pence, they could purchase temporary forgetfulness of their miserable lot. As for the contention of Greg and others that only the worst elements of the working class hated the owners and that such a feeling was exceptional and not general, one has only to point to such rebellions as the Luddite riots, the Spa Fields riots of 1816, the Manchester Massacre of 1819, and the Chartist movement which culminated in the abortive demonstration of 1848, to confute it. It is true, however, that many manufacturers had their workers' interests as well as profit-making at heart. Mr. Edmund Ashworth, for example, sponsored a housing project for his workers,

building cottages containing a living room 15 by 9 feet, a back kitchen the same size, and three bedrooms over them.[1]

In contending that workmen should look to themselves rather than to the rich or to parliament for help, the reviewers overlooked a number of important considerations. In the first place, the handicap of living under the conditions described above presented grave obstacles to self-help. The employer, it is also important to remember, did not himself depend entirely upon self-help. He organized manufacturers' associations which he used to further his interests, and entering into politics, became a dominant political force in the country, promoting legislation favorable to capitalism. In other words, the manufacturers were guilty of the same activities regarded as so reprehensible when attempted by the laboring classes. But even if each factory-owner had been content to stand on his own two feet, the individual worker would still have been at a tremendous disadvantage in bargaining with him. The manufacturer would merely have had to state his terms, however unfair to the employee they might be, and the only course open to the employee would have been to accept them or

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[1] Ibid., pp. 81-83.

seek another job. Under such circumstances, the laborer had no choice but to follow the example set by the manufacturer, to organize unions and seek aid through political action.

Greg's arguments to show the impracticality of cooperative ownership appear fallacious on several grounds. In the first place, they assume that the workmen were getting their fair share of profits -- i.e. wages -- an assumption decidedly open to question, in view of present-day real wages of workers as compared to the real wages of a century ago. Greg apparently envisioned a cooperative company with one large-share owner plus many other owners whose incomes were about equal to those of workers of the time. If this were the situation, and if Greg's assertion that the worker was getting a fair share of the profits were correct, then his argument might be valid. But if a group of men actually formed a cooperative, it is more than likely that they would hold more or less equal shares in the enterprise, in which case the profits, over and above wages, which would normally go to one man would be split into many shares, thus increasing the income of each individual shareholder very substantially. To make this point more clear, let us give a greatly simplified example. Let us assume that a mill employs one hundred men at an average wage of one pound per week, the owner's profits being fifty pounds per week. Under a cooperative set up with each

worker holding equal shares, the fifty pounds per week that in the above case went to the owner alone would be divided among the one hundred workmen. Each workman under the cooperative set up would thus be getting fifty percent more income than the man working under the old system. Of course the workers might hire a trained administrator to perform the duties formerly carried out by the owner, but even in this event his salary would not be expected to be as large as were the profits formerly going to the owner. The problems of labor turnover and drunken, lazy workmen would be of much less importance in a cooperative enterprise than in a conventionally owned factory. After all, there is much less likelihood that a man having a share in a business will quit and go to work somewhere else, than that a man whose only connection with his job is his pay envelope will do so. Drunken, lazy workmen would probably be almost non-existent in cooperative setups such as the above, since it is unlikely they would be able to save enough money to participate in the first place. In conclusion, it is probably unnecessary to point out that the chief evidence of the unsoundness of Greg's argument is the existence of thousands of flourishing cooperatives in continental Europe and his own Britain.

North and South

This novel not only deals with conditions in industrial towns in England but also contrasts the industrial areas with rural southern England. Margaret Hale, a girl who has lived in London and in a quiet parsonage in the south of England and who is thoroughly imbued with the common prejudices against trade of every sort, accompanies her father, who has given up his pulpit for doctrinal reasons, and her ailing mother to Milton-Northern, a grimy industrial town. Here, she comes into contact with the workers and their employers, and in particular with John Thornton, a stubborn, hard-headed leader of the employers. In spite of Margaret's advocacy of a more sympathetic attitude toward the workers, Thornton is fascinated by her beauty and proud bearing. At this point a strike breaks out, and the courage with which Margaret acts to protect Thornton from a dangerous mob of strikers leads him, from a misunderstanding of her motives, to propose to her, and her refusal hurts him deeply. An incident then occurs which further widens the breach between them. Thornton sees Margaret under equivocal circumstances with an unknown man, in reality her brother Frederick, a fugitive who has secretly returned hom to visit his dying mother. She, in order to protect Frederick, who is in danger of arrest, is forced to lie and say that she has been with no man, and this denial intensifies Thornton's suspicions.

Margaret now discovers from her unhappiness at being degraded in Thornton's eyes, that she is in love with him. Meanwhile, the fortunes of the two have changed. Margaret has inherited a considerable sum of money, while Thornton has been brought to the brink of ruin by the strike. His misfortunes have, however, taught him the need of more humane relations between workers and owners. They meet in London, where Margaret has gone to live, and she is able to clear up the misunderstanding over Frederick, who has by this time escaped safely from England. He again proposes, and this time is accepted.

North and South, unlike Mary Barton, attracted pfactically no critical notice when it was published. This lack of attention was probably occasioned by the change of industrial conditions that was described in the introductory section. Since there are no reviews available dating from the time of the novel's publication, material has been used that appeared somewhat later, some of it in general appraisals of her work.

The comments upon North and South were much more uniformly favorable than those which greeted Mary Barton. Mrs. Gaskell was regarded with high approbation for her attempts to show that the "higher elements" in the man of business hadn't all been trodden down in the race for wealth; that he was capable of understanding the man of speculation,[1] and that he had idealistic hopes for man's improvement

through the mastery of the material world by means of science and technology.[1]

The characters came in for a great deal of praise; the subordinate ones were said to be touched with "force and distinctiveness,"[2] while G. B. Smith characterized Margaret Hale as "one of the most charming personages in fiction," and a girl who was "cast in a heroic mold." "Sweetness without too much sentimentality; strength without losing any of her femininity" -- these were called her most prominent characteristics.[3] The same writer commented upon the way she could act quickly when rapidity of action was necessary, and cited as an example the occasion when she threw her arms around Mr. Thornton to shield him from the wrath of his striking workmen, and by doing so endangered her own life. Minto felt that it was a deliberate degradation of Margaret's character to put her into circumstances where she was forced to tell a lie in order to save her brother's life, and took Mrs. Gaskell to task for resorting to such a "tricky expedient for arousing interest."[4] Though Thornton was recognized

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[1]William Minto, "Mrs. Gaskell's Novels," Fortnightly Review, XXX (Sept., 1878), 353.

[2]Ibid., p. 407

[3]Minto, op. cit., p. 406.

[4]Ibid.

as being a well-drawn character, he did not arouse the admiration of the critics as did Margaret. He was thought to be "too cold and self-sustained" for a woman such as she, although it was conceded that she was probably able to see good qualities beneath his rugged exterior.[1] The ending of the story was criticized for appearing hasty, while the reasons behind Mr. Hale's giving up his pulpit were said to be too vaguely presented.

No critic commented adversely upon the structure of the novel, and yet it is quite apparent that it contains numerous flaws. Not only is the motivation behind Mr. Hale's resigning from the church too hazy, but Frederick's visit to Margaret and her father is also made too much of. There is much discussion of his impending secret visit, but when he finally comes all he does is complicate relations between Margaret and Thornton, then passes out of the picture.[2]

Contemporary opinion seems to agree pretty much with the earlier estimates of characters in the novel. The writer is inclined to agree with the reviewers in their opinions of the characters, but would add that the dialogue of Margaret, like so much of the feminine dialogue in Victorian novels, is stilted and artificial, as well as being far too melodramatic. Granted that the speech of the Vic-

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[1]Smith, op. cit., p. 208.

[2]Gerald Dewitt Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1929, p. 69.

torians was more flowery than our own, it is still hard to conceive of a real person of that era saying, "let them insult my maiden modesty as they will, I walk pure before God!" as Margaret is made to after her encounter with the strikers.

It is difficult to see how the lie that Margaret told degraded her character in the least. Few persons would deny that a lie told for the purpose of taking an unfair advantage of the person to whom it is told degrades the character of the teller. But Margaret's lie was not of this type. She gained nothing, nor did she expect to gain anything, from Mr. Thornton through her falsehood. Her only purpose was to insure her brother's safety, a motive surely not to be condemned. Viewed in this light, the lie is no more worthy of censure than the "tall story," another type of falsehood which aims at harming nobody. If anything, Margaret is to be complimented for daring to take an action she knew would lower her in Mr. Thornton's estimation.

In this novel, Mrs. Gaskell presented the same solution for misunderstanding and strife between worker and factory-owner -- creation of a better understanding through closer contact between individuals of both groups -- as she did in Mary Barton. However, when it came to implementing the doctrine through concrete action, all Mrs. Gaskell could suggest was the establishment of a community dining hall at Mr. Thornton's factory, where food might be cooked in large quantities and sold cheaply to the men.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to prove that Mrs. Gaskell's remedy would not work if it could be applied, but there are certain obstacles which would weaken its chances for success. It is apparent that any plan for aiding the worker and improving his lot short of replacement of capitalism with some other economic system must insure that the worker's share of the money which industry divides into profits and wages must be increased. Since any such increase, unless compensated for by improved machinery, better production methods, or some other means, must necessarily decrease profits, management has a very powerful motive for not wanting "to get together" with labor. This fundamental conflict between labor and management was in Mrs. Gaskell's day, still is, and will probably always be, the great weakness of her plan.

Ruth

Ruth, Mrs. Gaskell's second novel, is, like Mary Barton, a special novel, but it deals with the ethical problems raised by seduction and illegitimacy rather than with those resulting from the industrial revolution. Ruth Hilton, a young and innocent orphan and dressmaker's assistant, is seduced by Henry Bellingham. His mother discovers the relationship and persuades him to desert Ruth. Alone and friendless, she is found by Thurstan Benson, a dessenting minister, and his sister, Faith, and taken into their home after her child is born. Benson, at his sister's insistence and in order to lighten Ruth's burden, advises her to pose as a widow, and in that character she obtains employment in the house of the tyrannical Mr. Bradshaw. Here she remains for several years as governess, on good terms with everyone especially with Jemina, Mr. Bradshaw's daughter. However, Mr. Bradshaw learns her past history, and in spite of the protests of Jemina, dismisses her from her teaching job and publishes the news abroad. The next two years Ruth lives in misery, as her opportunity for teaching has gone and she can earn but a pittance with her needle. Finally, she decides to become a nurse. By her devoted service to the sick, she gradually wins over the people who have previously shunned and condemned her. A terrible fever breaks out and Ruth becomes town heroine by taking over the post of matron of

the fever ward when the other nurses refuse the job. Here, while nursing her former lover, Bellingham, who has previously by chance re-met Ruth and has successfully proposed marriage to her, she herself is stricken with the fever and dies. It has been said[1] that when Ruth was published it created a greater stir than did Mary Barton, the prudish and the ignorant finding in the work only indenency. This violent reaction is not, however, reflected in the reviews, which, though far from expressing unqualified approbation, were nevertheless generally friendly.

The quietness and sobriety of its style, as compared to that of Mary Barton was commented upon numerous times. The treatment was characterized as "thoughtful and tender," with no "exaggeration or impassioned denunciation."[2] and with a rare unity which kept the story moving "resistlessly towards the end."[3] Mrs. Gaskell's "imaginative approach to nature" received much favorable comment, and a number of descriptive passages were quoted as illustrative of her ability to catch a vivid scene.[4] Her handling of dramatic

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[1] Ibid., p. 57.

[2] George W. Curtis, "Villette and Ruth," Putnam's Monthly, 1 (May, 1853), 539.

[3] Ibid., p. 537.

[4] "The Story of Ruth," Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, XX (April, 1853), 217.

scenes was said to be excellent: Ruth's abandonment by Mr. Bellingham, her rescue by Thurstan Benson and his sister, and their return to the Benson home were singled out for special approbation.[1] The theme of Ruth was said to be greater than that of Mary Barton, since the latter dealt with more or less transient phenomens while the former dealt with a more eternal problem, the regeneration of a "fallen woman."[2]

Mrs. Gaskell's powers of characterization did not escape the reviewers. Sally, the Bensons' servant, was described as "racy, full of human, womanly heart and womanly prejudice,"[3] and was more than once singled out as being the best drawn in the book. Ruth's character, understandably enough, was discussed more thoroughly than that of any other person in the novel. Much was made of the fact that at the time of her escapade she was an innocent girl, ignorant of the meaning of her behavior, and therefore could hardly have been a sinner. "Only when higher morality is inculcated by the example, love, and devotion of Mr. Benson and his sister does Ruth realize that the period she spent with Bellingham was one of sin," and bears the "life-long penance of self-abasement always as the just wages of her fault." The very consequences

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[1](Review of Ruth) The Athenaeum, (Jan. 15, 1853), 77.

[2](Review of Ruth) The North British Review, XIX (May, 1853), p. 164.

[3]The Athenaeum, Ibid., p. 77.

of her fault were said to have made a Christian out of her. The sense of responsibility to her child after he was born, the feeling of the wrong she had done to him coupled with the joy he brought her -- these were held to be "the means of her sanctification."[1]

The "rigid, bloodless anatomy...which is called Mr. Bradshaw"[2] came in for much condemnation. Not one critic had a favorable word to say of him, but all united in declaring his conduct to be the very antithesis of Christianity.

Nearly all the critics found fault with Mrs. Gaskell for portraying Benson as a man who deliberately told a lie, passing off Ruth as a widow. They found it hard to believe that an actual minister would be guilty of such an act, and felt that it injured the character of Benson quite badly. One reviewer,[3] however, took comfort in asserting that Mrs. Gaskell could hardly be charged with lax morals, since Benson was severely punished for his lie.

The question of whether Ruth had done right in refusing the offer of marriage which Bellingham made her came up in one review.[4] The critic argued that the offer meant Bellingham wanted to atone for his wrong and that for her not to allow him to do so was in itself a sin.

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[1] North British Review, ibid., 152-55.

[2] Curtis, op. cit., p. 538.

[3] (Review of Ruth) The English Review, XVIII (April, 1853), 193.

[4] The Athenaeum, ibid., p. 78.

He further argued that Ruth had no positive proof Bellingham would corrupt their child, that he might as easily be regenerated by it.

Numerous interpretations of the moral purpose of the novel were put forward. It was said to be no more than the "old tale and often told of a woman's fall and man's desertion" and of the "process by which the sin is expiated."[1] Another reviewer[2] felt it taught that the difference between those who commit and those who do not commit "certain offenses against God and man" was to be found in circumstances rather than in the persons themselves, and that we should never jump to conclusions concerning the enormity of the offense without also taking into account the circumstances surrounding the temptation. He went on to suggest that it was want of charity toward persons who, like Ruth, erred through ignorance that turns them into habitual sinners. The reviewer for Tait's Edinburgh Magazine[3] expressed almost identical sentiments, and severely condemned the Bradshaw brand of Christianity which "damns and persecutes the fallen, even when the fault was done in ignorance, weakness

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[1] The English Review, ibid., p. 193.

[2] "Contemporary Literature," Bentley's Miscelleny, XXVIII (Feb., 1853), 237.

[3] "The Story of Ruth," ibid., p. 219.

and indiscretion." He also condemned the society which will shun a woman who engages in a clandestine love affair, but which will condone and even smile at the man's actions. He maintains that the "monstrous disproportion of the punishment as visited on the two sexes, has no reasonable ground." Two other interpretations of the moral purpose of this novel are worthy of mention. The first[1] stated that the purpose of the novel was to show that unchastity "is above all the loosening of the family bond -- a treason against the family order of God's world," and that the "restoration of the sinner" consisted mainly in the renewal of that bond, the realization of that order. The second declared the story was meant to show that a woman can be rehabilitated only "through the means of women, who, noble and pure in their own lives, can speak with authority" to those who have gotten into difficulties.[2]

The reviewers made a number of minor criticisms of Ruth. The scene in which Ruth tells her son Leonard that he is illegitimate and the one which immediately follows describing his reaction to this information were criticized as being too exaggerated and melodramatic, the comment being made that a child of eleven couldn't have grasped the significance of such a disclosure.[3] Finally, the length of the work and the undue importance given to the romance of Jemima, Mr. Bradshaw's daughter, and Mr.Farquhar

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1(Review of Ruth) North British Review, ibid.,p.155.

2"Ruth and Villette", The Westminister Review, ibid., 483-4.

3Ibid., p. 485.

were adversely commented upon.[1]

It is apparent that no reviewer grasped the full moral purpose of the work, although nearly every one was able to see part of it. The story is that of a girl who is seduced and deserted, but it is certainly more than that. It makes the point that "circumstances alter cases" and definitely attacks the narrow pharisaical Christianity represented by Mr. Bradshaw while exalting the true Christianity exemplified by Thurstan Benson. Finally, it is an attack on the double standard of morality. It is difficult to see, however, how it can be considered as showing that a woman can be rehabilitated only through another woman: Thurstan Benson, after all, was the only person who was spontaneously willing to help Ruth after her desertion by Bellingham; he had to convince his sister that he was doing the right thing and he unflinchingly took the very serious step of lying about her past to save her from the sneers of his neighbors. To be sure Ruth had many women friends who stood by and helped her, but Faith Benson, as we have already said, only followed her brother's lead in offering assistance, and Jemima was called upon to defend her only after they had been acquainted for a number of years, during which time she had come to know and fully appreciate Ruth's fine qualities. Whether she would have come to Ruth's assistance under the same circumstances that Thurstan Benson did is decidedly open to question.

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[1](Review of Ruth) North British Review, ibid., p.160.

Mrs. Gaskell tried hard to convince her readers that sin could be expiated through good works and repentance, but in the end, and in spite of the fact that she had strongly condemned the conventional Christian morality of Mr. Bradshaw, she herself invoked a conventional maxim, "the wages of sin is death" and killed her heroine off. The moral was made even more explicit by virtue of the fact that the agent responsible for bringing about her death was Bellingham, the man with whom she had sinned. There are a number of reasons why such an ending is extremely unsatisfactory. For example, one can argue that the outcome depicted by Mrs. Gaskell is very unrealistic. Not only is the penalty for adultery not death (except in those infrequent cases when the girl becomes pregnant as the result of the relationship and dies in childbirth or because of the after-effect of an abortion, or when the injured person seeks and gets fatal revenge -- as a man who avenges his "honor".) but in the vast majority of cases there is no penalty at all. If we neglect the element of unreality and regard the work as a tragedy, the ending is still unsatisfactory. In a tragedy, every situation must come about as an inevitable consequence of what has gone before. In Ruth this does not happen. The events at the end of the book take place as a consequence of the lie told by Thurstan Benson. But the consequences of the lie are by no means

inevitable. It was only by chance that Mr. Bradshaw found out the truth about Ruth and fired her; hence, the subsequent nursing career which led to her death is also the result of chance, rather than the inevitable consequence of her affair with Bellingham, as Mrs. Gaskell, consciously or unconsciously, would have the reader believe.

There is no need to enter into a discussion of the lie told by Thurstan Benson; it belongs to the same class as the one told by Margaret Hale in North and South, and the same statements apply to it as applied to the former.

Sylvia's Lovers

This work, Mrs. Gaskell's only historical novel, deals with the activities of the press-gangs during the latter part of the 18th century. Sylvia is the daughter of Daniel Robson, a farmer on the Yorkshire coast, who has been a sailor and smuggler and who bears a bitter grudge against press-gangs. Sylvia is deeply loved by her cousin, Philip Hepburn, a rising young clothing merchant, but she doesn't love him. She is in love with Charlie Kinraid, a dashing young sailor who is a local hero because of the courage he has displayed in resisting a press-gang. Philip, on his way to London on business, sees Charlie seized by a press-gang, and takes a message from him to be delivered to Sylvia. By the time Philip returns from London, Sylvia is mourning Charlie as dead, for his cap has been found along the seashore and he is believed drowned. Philip witholds his knowledge of Charlie from Sylvia. Meanwhile, Sylvia's father leads an attack upon a press-gang which has its headquarters in a village inn, and is hanged for his part in the affair. Philip persuades the grief-stricken Sylvia to marry him. A year later, after a child has been born to them, Charlie returns and Philip's treachery is revealed. Sylvia denounces Philip, and he flees town and enlists in the marines. Charlie also leaves town after Sylvia, though admitting her love for him, refuses to see him again. At the siege

of Acre, the two men meet again, Philip saves Charlie's life, but is badly wounded himself. Broken in health and so disfigured that Sylvia cannot recognize him, he returns to the village to be near her and his child. Sylvia meanwhile has learned that Charlie married within a few weeks after leaving her and has forgiven Philip. She and Philip are finally brought together but he is on his deathbed and there is time only for mutual forgiveness before he dies.

Sylvia's Lovers, like North and South, was not reviewed when it first appeared. The reasons for this neglect are somewhat difficult to ascertain, but it is probably chiefly due to the fact that the work is non-controversial.

The few writers who, in the next few years, did mention Sylvia's Lovers had nothing but praise for it, and one[1] rated it as the best novel that Mrs. Gaskell ever wrote. Once again Mrs. Gaskell's powers of scenic description were recognized; one critic made the important observation that these descriptions of nature were primarily didactic in purpose. They were presented "not to touch our imagination" but rather to "show us people and how they live in their setting."[2]

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[1]"Mrs. Gaskell's Novels," The Literary World, XIII (July, 1882), 217.

[2]Minto, "Mrs. Gaskell's Novels," Fortnightly Review, XXX (Sept., 1878), 358.

Although the critics recognized that there was "a distinct and perfect naturalness about every character in the book,"[1] they quite naturally gave almost all their attention to Sylvia herself. She was recognized as being no ordinary portrait. In spite of the fact that she was a "charming rustic lass" with a sweet warmheartedness and sympathy," the imperfections in her character, for example, obstinacy, as shown in her refusal to learn to read, were pointed out. However, the critics felt that these touches of human weakness served to "make Sylvia a part and parcel of that common race to which we all belong," and to keep her from being exalted "up to a sphere into which so many heroines are translated, but which none of the living women ever attain."[2]

Several of the writers had some comment to make about the artistic powers Mrs. Gaskell displayed in Sylvia's Lovers. The reviewer for The Literary World was impressed by the "display of tragic power" in the novel, and stated that the story was not injured but rather gained in life-likeness by being told at length. He also remarked favorably upon the way the story's interest was sustained throughout and increased gradually to the close.[3]

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[1] "Mrs. Gaskell's Novels" The Literary World, ibid.

[2] G. G. Smith, "Mrs. Gaskell and her Novels," Cornhill Magazine, XXIX (Feb., 1874), 191-192.

[3] "Mrs. Gaskell's Novels," The Literary World, ibid.

Smith, writing in the Cornhill Magazine, noted that the novel showed Mrs. Gaskell's artistic powers were maturing. He cited as evidence her greater grasp of both character and expression, the perfect delineation of life on the northeastern coast, the graphic manner in which the story of the press-gang is told, and the unexaggerated presentation of the horrors attending press-gang operations.[1]

Sylvia's Lovers, although usually dismissed by earlier critics with a few short sentences, has later come in for more attention. A modern biographer[2] agrees that there is better technique displayed in this novel than in any of Mrs. Gaskell's earlier works. He praises the way she leads up to the climax, Philip's decision not to tell Sylvia that her lover, Charlie Kinraid, has been captured by the press-gang, and then works out the rest of the story "with masterful skill and with no turning aside from the direct action." He notes also that the changes in Sylvia and the growth in her character are perfectly marked, every change being accounted for.

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[1]B. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 206/

[2]Gerald D. Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp. 119-128.

Wives and Daughters

Wives and Daughters, the last of Mrs. Gaskell's novels, is written in a much lighter vein than any of the others. Mr. Gibson, the simple, hardworking doctor of the little town of Hollingsford, is a widower when the story begins. He has a daughter, Molly, an honest, unselfish girl who is devoted to her father. In order to give his daughter the benefits of a "mother", as well as to please himself, Dr. Gibson marries a widow, Mrs. Kirkpatrick, formerly a governess in the nearby home of Lord Cunmor. The new Mrs. Gibson is a superficially attractive woman, but she has all of the vices of a shallow, selfish nature. The marriage of her father does much to spoil Molly's previously happy life, but she does her best to accept the new situation. Her lot is improved when Mrs. Gibson's own daughter, Cynthia, a fascinating girl without her mother's vices but also without Molly's capacity for deep love, returns from the continent where she has been educated. She has entangled herself, when sixteen, with Mr. Preston, Lord Cunmor's clever but ill-bred agent, from whom she has borrowed money and has in turn given a secret promise to marry him. Since making the promise, however, she has come to hate him. Another family figures prominently in the story: Mr. Hamley, a hot-tempered but good-natured old squire; his gentle wife, and their two sons, Osborn and Roger. The parents have high hopes for the future of

the handsome and clever Osborne, whom they envision distinguishing himself at Cambridge and afterward making a brilliant marriage. But he fails miserably in his studies and secretly marries a French governess. As a result, he becomes estranged from his father. Osborne's health fails and he dies, leaving a baby son, and the father realizes too late that he was overly harsh in his treatment of Osborne. Roger, the younger son, though lacking his brother's outward charm, is made of sterner stuff. He reaps academic honors and becomes an eminent man of science. The Hamleys are devoted to Molly, who falls in love with Roger. Roger at the same time falls in love with Cynthia, who in spite of her engagement to Preston, accepts him without loving him. Cynthia, however, soon realizes that their characters are incompatible, gives Roger up, and marries a man more suitable to herself, after Molly has liberated her from Preston. There is a promise of a happy ending when the unfinished work closes, for Roger has become aware of Molly's good qualities and will evidently marry her.

Wives and Daughters received as little attention from the reviewers when it appeared as did Sylvia's Lovers. One review appeared in The Nation early in 1866; the remainder of the remarks in this section come from general

appraisals of her work which appeared later.

The length of the work, its "quietness of interest," and the great amount of detail presented were mentioned[1] as qualities which might cause many readers to lay the book aside as dull, but these features were nevertheless defended as leading the reader to a "realization of the central ideal" of a character, as enabling him to know the character more intimately because of an acquaintance with the minutiae of his daily life. The moral atmosphere of the work was regarded by the reviewer as "sweet, bracing, invigorating," and the human feeling as "good and kind throughout."[2]

The characters in the novel were acknowledged to be well-portrayed, but a certain element, perhaps best described as a "generalization of character" was noted, which, although it permitted the reader to have an intimate acquaintance with them, prevented him from getting to know them as well as he might know Jane Eyre or Adam Bede.[3]

Molly Gibson was held to command a slighter degree of interest than the companion figure of Cynthia Kirkpatrick

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[1]"Wives and Daughters," The Nation, II (Feb., 1866), 246-7. [2]"The Works of Mrs. Gaskell," The British Quarterly Review, XLV (April, 1867), 424.

[3]David Masson, "Mrs. Gaskell," Macmillans Magazine, XIII (Dec., 1865) 153-6.

since Cynthia had a greater genius for fascination,[1] Cynthia's prejudice against a husband who would "keep her always on moral tiptoes, straining to more purely good than complex nature meant her to be" elicited sympathy from at least one reviewer, who was apparently aware that she couldn't help being a flirt and breaking men's hearts.[2] The reviewer for The Nation felt that the "strongly marked, masculine, middle-aged" men, Dr. Gibson and Squire Hamley, were as "forcibly drawn as if a masculine hand had drawn them" but felt Osborne Hamley to "hardly more than a suggestion." In contrast, another reviewer[3] thought Hamley was one of the most abiding impressions left upon the memory. Comment was made upon Mrs. Gaskell's portrayal of aristocrats and the aristocratic life, the reviewer stating that her aristocrats were human beings and not "mere eccentricities and monstrosities," and that her glimpses of aristocratic life were true.[4]

Oddly enough, no reviewer mentioned the element of humor in Wives and Daughters, and yet the work shows Mrs. Gaskell's humor in its happiest phase. Cranford has often been called her most humorous work, but there the humor is too deeply tempered with pathos to be considered pure. On

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[1] The Nation, ibid., p. 247.
[2] The British Quarterly Review, ibid., p. 425.
[3] G. B. Smith, op. cit., pp. 191-2.
[4] Ibid., p. 209.

the other hand, the whole theme of Wives and Daughters is happy, cheerful, and optimistic. There is not a single figure in the story that could be called truly tragic; even though Mrs. Hamley and Osborne Hamley die, their deaths are normal and do not detract from the happy progress of the story. The excellence of the novel is attested to by the fact that those present-day persons who know Mrs. Gaskell's works most intimately rank it second only to Cranford -- which is, properly speaking, not a novel at all -- in merit. At least one critic holds that it shows Mrs. Gaskell not only as a great portrayer of character but as a master technician, and that it lifts her to a level with such other great novelists of the nineteenth century as Austen, Thackeray, and Dickens. Taken as a whole, the novel may be said to rank with the best comedies of English fiction.[1]

[1] Sanders, op. cit., p. 138.

Cranford

Cranford, today the most popular of Mrs. Gaskell's works, received practically no critical notice when it first appeared in book form. Only one periodical, The London Daily Times, reviewed the book upon its publication. All other comments appeared in general estimates of Mrs. Gaskell's work, most of which were published after her death.

The reaction of the critics was practically one hundred percent favorable. One[1] commented upon the qualities of the work, declaring that although Mrs. Gaskell had written many things having greater power and more interest than Cranford, she had produced nothing that would better bear constant re-reading. He also mentioned the rich humor of the work and its "warm, genuine, womanly kindness." Still other reviewers took note of the humor. Another[2] characterized it as "delicious," and felt that its combination with a "calm and yet flowing" style produced a work whose distinguishing features were "ease and humour." The element of pathos is mentioned more than once. The reviewer for Colburn's Monthly Magazine[3] conceded that

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[1] "The Works of Mrs. Gaskell," The Quarterly Review, XLV (April, 1867), 411.

[2] G. B. Smith, "Mrs. Gaskell and Her Novels," Cornhill Magazine, XXIX (Feb., 1874), 200.

[3] "The Author of Mary Barton," Colburn's New Monthly Magazine, CV (Dec., 1855), 432.

the pathos might be "less demonstrative than in the other tales," but felt, nevertheless, that its "natural and unstrained character merits particular attention." Smith[1] expressed his belief that the pathos displayed in the work would fully stand comparison with that in others of Mrs. Gaskell's works.

Most of the discussion centered around the characters in the work. The statement of one reviewer[2] that anyone who has ever read Cranford "knows the inhabitants of that little sleepy town as well as if he had been in the habit of paying visits there for years" bears eloquent witness to Mrs. Gaskell's delineation of the characters. Smith singles out two characters for special mention. One was Mr. Hoggins, the village doctor, who refused to change his "coarse" name to something more genteel, and who, "careless of his own interests," disclaimed any relationship to the Marchioness of Exeter, whose name was Molly Hoggins. The other was Mrs. Forrester, who, because to admit being poor was considered a disgrace, made desperate attempts to conceal her poverty from her friends, although she knew they were equally poor and were, in their turn, trying to conceal their true condition.

The "kindly underlying moral" of the work did not

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[1] G. B. Smith, loc. cit.

[2] David Masson, "Mrs. Gaskell," Macmillan's Magazine, XIII (Dec., 1865), 154.

escape Minto's[1] notice. He declared that the "makeshifts and affectation of decayed gentility" had long been a favorite subject for ridicule, but that Mrs. Gaskell, while not inferior to Jane Austen herself in the power of making her readers laugh at the foibles of old ladies, took care to emphasize their good qualities. He gave as an example of their kind-heartedness the efforts they made under the leadership of the "prying, man-hunting, tart Miss Pole" to raise a fund which would be contributed "in a secret and concealed manner" to aid their impoverished friend, Miss Matty.

One critic[2], commenting upon the sort of reader that Cranford appealed to, said that it was a prime favorite with "those cultivated people who can do without plot or incident" and who can "relish the humour of the book and its charming ease of style."

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[1] Minto, op. cit., p. 336.

[2] "Mrs. Gaskell's Novels," The Literary World, ibid.

The Life of Charlotte Bronte

The Life of Charlotte Bronte, Mrs. Gaskell's only important work outside the field of fiction, was the last one which elicited a great deal of comment and criticism from the reviewers. The reasons for the attention it received are not difficult to ascertain. The Bronte sisters' work had taken England by storm, Charlotte's Jane Eyre in particular being highly successful. Hence, it is not surprising that there should have been a great deal of interest displayed in the life of the young authoress. Further, the biography was controversial in at least two instances. It presented an unfavorable view of Cowan Bridge School where Charlotte and her sisters had spent some very unpleasant months during their childhood, months of ill-treatment which Charlotte believed was responsible for the death of two of her sisters. Mrs. Gaskell's remarks about the institution led the Reverend Carus Wilson, who had figured in the affair as the school's chief administrator, to protest. His friends rose to his defence and he started an action in court, but others maintained the truth of Mrs. Gaskell's statements and the affair ended in a draw. The other controversy had to do with statements made concerning Branwell Bronte's relations with a Mrs. Robinson, in whose home he had been a tutor. Mrs. Gaskell, relying upon unsupported statements made by Charlotte Bronte, asserted

that Branwell had been seduced by Mrs. Robinson. She did not use Mrs. Robinson's name, but indicated her identity so clearly that anyone familiar with the history of the Bronte family couldn't help knowing who was meant. Mrs. Robinson began a court action against Mrs. Gaskell, and when the latter attempted to find evidence to back up her statements, she not only failed but saw that everything pointed to their falsity. The result was that Mrs. Gaskell apologized publicly to Mrs. Robinson through an advertisement in The Times.

One might expect that those reviewers who were inclined to side with Mr. Wilson in the Cowan Bridge controversy would censure Mrs. Gaskell quite severely because of her unfavorable picture of the institution and its head. To be sure, she was taken to task by them, but the bitterest attack of all was one which did not mention this controversy at all. The reviewer[1] making it charged that she was "by no means clear of the charge of considerable indifference to the injunction of the Ninth Commandment," and cited her "gross distortion" of the relationship between Branwell and Mrs. Robinson as corroborating evidence. He went further, saying that Mrs. Gaskell's taste "was by no means refined" and that the moral influence of her novels was "to say the least, very doubtful." Finally, he attacked

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[1](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte), The Christian Observer, LVII (July, 1857), 487-90.

her religious orthodoxy, saying that there was little evidence to show she "embraced the whole religion of the New Testament" and advancing the opinion that she accepted only so much of it as she saw fit and was more inclined to be rationalistic than orthodox.

Such a review not only displays poor taste but also displays at least one example of erroneous reasoning. Granted Mrs. Gaskell presented false charges that were harmful to the reputation of Mrs. Robinson, it does not necessarily follow that she deliberately lied. Had the reviewer not been overly anxious, as he apparently was, to attack the character of a person whose religious and moral views were less hidebound than his own, he might have reflected that Mrs. Gaskell's charges could conceivably have been based upon faulty information and not on any deliberate desire to deceive. The preoccupation of the Victorians with religious questions that is reflected in this attack upon Mrs. Gaskell's religious views seems to the modern reader to be quite as pointless as the long debates held by the medieval schoolmen on such questions as "how many angels can dance on the point of a needle?" Hence, he cannot help regard almost with amusement the charges leveled against Mrs. Gaskell's orthodoxy. But regardless of their importance or unimportance, the fact remains that the comments were irrelevant to the consideration of the book under scrutiny, and classifiable as invectives.

The style of the biography elicited much favorable comment. The reviewers recognized that Mrs. Gaskell had spared no pains to draw a "faithful and true portrait of a friend," and saw evidence of her warm sympathy with Charlotte's works and character in her refusal to criticize and her willingness to let the facts of Charlotte's brief career speak for themselves. Her excellent description of the "wild place, the rough, primitive state of society in which the subject of her biography was cradled" was noted by one reviewer.[1] Mrs. Gaskell's inclusion in the biography of letters containing "private conversation of still living people" was criticized by one reviewer who, although admitting that she had used discretion, nevertheless felt that such a procedure furnished precedent for others who "might not prove so fastidious."[2]

Only one reviewer[3] attempted a reasonably detailed interpretation of Charlotte's character, using Mrs. Gaskell's biography as a basis. The seriousness of the life depicted was the first thing that struck him. Its qualities of earnestness, truth, conscientiousness, and habitual self-

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[1](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte,) The Athenaeum, (April 4, 1857), 427.

[2](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte,) The Living Age, LII (June, 1857), 780.

[3](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte,) The Christian Remembrancer, XXXIV (July, 1857), 87-145.

sacrifice aroused his respect and admiration. He was aware, however, that side by side with these good qualities existed defects of equal magnitude. One of these defects was Charlotte's reticence. This he classified not as shyness, which he said would please if it could, but as reserve, which doesn't care whether it pleases or not. Charlotte's reserve, he remarked, like the reserve of sll persons, is selfish. It exalts, for selfish reasons, those whom it takes into its confidence, while degrading and disparaging those whom it rejects. Charlotte manifested her reserve, the reviewer said, by not fraternizing with or feeling any general obligation to society, and by her non-hesitancy in making a simple business-like use of it. He said that rather than let her heart go out to others, she brooded over her wrongs, studied her oppressors, and impaled them in her books. Time, he remarked, never "softened a difference or a prejudice in Miss Bronte," but "hardened dislike into antipathy, opposition into rancor." He conceded her letters showed that she had the ability to make friends, but said they exhibited a "strange mistrust for one so young in the stability of the tie." The reviewer advanced a theory which accounts for some of Charlotte's traits. He felt that she was out of balance, because she had a masculine mind in a weak, nervous, body. Because her mind was prevented from carrying out its impulses by the weakness beyond endurance

by its efforts to obey the mind, became more racked and feeble than it would otherwise have been.[1]

Other reviewers arrived at more favorable estimates of Charlotte's character. One[2] characterized her as being "truly good," having "genuine benevolence" and "true charity," and harboring "no real bitterness in all her distrust of society," while another[3] mentioned with approbation her "unconquerable will" and the sense of duty to which everything in her life was subordinated."

Since the biography was chiefly concerned with Charlotte Bronte, the reviewers confined themselves mainly to analyses of her personality, although the characters of Emily and Branwell also came in for a certain amount of attention. On the whole, Emily received harsher treatment at the hands of the reviewers than her sister. One[4] characterized her as being "reserved to the utmost degree, obstinate and contentious" citing as evidence for this opinion an instance when the sisters lost money in a railroad investment because Emily wouldn't accede to her sisters' wish to sell their shares of stock. Several referred to her almost pathological shyness, stating it showed evidence of a diseased mind.

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[1]Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[2](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte) The Living Age, LIII (June, 1857), 780. (Reprinted from The London Examiner, April 11, p. 228-9)

[3](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte) The Living Age, LIII (June, 1857), 394.

[4](Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte) The Living Age, LIII (June, 1857), 778.

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the critics considered Branwell as beneath contempt. Several reviewers felt that the coarseness of the men depicted by the Bronte sisters in their novels could be traced to Branwell. Branwell, they said, was the only man the sisters saw anything of; therefore he, with all his coarseness acquired in a life of debauchery, would be the model for any men appearing in the novels.

Most of the reviewers appear to have believed that the picture of conditions at Cowan School presented by Mrs. Gaskell was essentially correct. One[1], however, characterized Charlotte's depiction of the Reverend Wilson as exaggerated"portrait painting" and expressed the opinion that if Charlotte had known the impression it would convey, she would have "greatly modified or altogether blotted out the caricature she had sketched." Still another[2] felt that Charlotte shouldn't have let the episode rankle in her mind for twenty years without a softening in her attitude toward the institution.

In commenting upon Mrs. Gaskell's handling of the Branwell-Mrs. Robinson episode, one reviewer[3] stated that

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[1]Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte, The Christian Observer, LIII (June, 1857), 489.

[2]Review of the Life of Charlotte Bronte, The Christian Remembrancer, XXXIV (July, 1857), 104.

[3]Ibid., p. 95.

her reliance upon the unsupported statements of Charlotte and her subsequent rashness in using the information without taking the simplest and easiest means of ascertaining the truth could only lead to a general loss of confidence in the biographer. Both the tone and the mode of Mrs. Gaskell's final apology came under attack by another reviewer[1] who expressed the opinion that a formal apology presented through an attorney, was not the mode in which "a lady of Mrs. Gaskell's high character ought to retract the accusation." About half the reviewers who commented upon the episode accepted Mrs. Gaskell's version of it as correct.

In closing the discussion of the biography it is only necessary to say that the work has enjoyed a very high reputation ever since its publication, being popular with both scholars and general readers. After Cranford, it is the best known and most widely read of her works. Clement K. Shorter placed it next to Boswell's Life of Johnson and Lockhart's Life of Scott in merit, and held that these two were greater only because the authors had greater subjects to deal with. Many critics agree with him. Such praise is more than sufficient to establish a position for Mrs. Gaskell in the front rank of English biographers.[2]

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[1] "Mrs. Gaskell's Recantation," The Living Age, LIV (Sept., 1857), 721-3.

[2] Gerald De Witt Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 103.

Conclusion

From our consideration of the reviews of Mrs. Gaskell's social novels, it is apparent that the concept of individual morality played a much larger role in Victorian thinking on moral questions than it does in the moral thinking of the man of today. The remarks by William Rathbone Greg, in his review of Mary Barton, that the want of moral courage, of resolute individual will causes most of the suffering of the working classes, and that only through exercise of their own intellect or virtues can they hope to rise in the social scale, certainly minimize the part which society plays in the individual's moral development. His adverse comments upon labor unions are in part, also a reflection of the prevailing distrust of a social morality, although, as will be pointed out later, there are also other reasons for this unfavorable attitude.

As a matter of fact, the Victorians of Mrs. Gaskell's day were obsessed with the question of morality in general to an extent which today seems to border on fanaticism. Now fanaticism of any sort tends to produce certain common results. The fanatic, of course, unshakably convinced that his viewpoint is the only correct one, becomes extremely intolerant of viewpoints which differ only slightly from his own. Thus, when the greatest proportion of a country's population is fanatically concerned with morals, it may be expected that the moral code will be narrow and bigoted,

that the population as a whole will be unable to distinguish between different degrees of moral trangression, and that any transgression will be severely dealt with. The rigid moral outlook which prevailed among the Victorians is illustrated by the comments which the reviewers of Ruth made concerning Thurstan Benson's lie. As has already been pointed out, there is a great deal of difference between a lie told to deceive others in order that a laudable end may be achieved, and one told to deceive others in order to take advantage of them. The reviewers' failure to see that Benson's lie belonged in the former category is a reflection of the intolerant Victorian moral code. Narrow as this moral outlook was, however, it would be a mistake to think that no tolerance at all existed. The fact that Ruth, because of her ignorance of the significance of her behaviour, was not condemned by the reviewers for her affair with Bellingham, shows that there existed a certain degree of tolerance.

The criticisms of Mary Barton reveal that Victorian periodicals were strongly procapital, and that they should be so is not surprising when we consider certain facts. In the first place, the reading public served by the periodicals was largely made up of middle-class tradesmen and manufacturers whom the publishers dared not risk displeasing. On the other hand, since most persons belonging to the working class were illiterate or could read only a

little, and since those who were capable of understanding the periodicals could not afford to buy them anyway, the publishers did not have to fear offending them. It must not be forgotten either, that the publishers themselves belonged to the classes they supported. Then as now it was impossible to start a magazine or newspaper without considerable capital, and capital was to be found only in possession of those classes whose interests conflicted with those of the working classes. Therefore, anyone who began publishing a periodical was likely to have views similar to those of the reading public he served.

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