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The Thirty-fifth George Eliot Memorial Lecture, 2006- Glimpses of Life at 142 Strand

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THE THIRTY-FIFTH GEORGE ELIOT MEMORIAL LECTURE, 2006

Delivered by Professor Rosemary Ashton

GLIMPSSES OF LIFE AT 142 STRAND

1. *John Chapman and the Strand in 1847*

On 24 July 1847 the following advertisement appeared in the weekly periodical, the *Athenaeum*:

MR CHAPMAN, Bookseller and Publisher, begs to announce that he has REMOVED his Business from 121 Newgate Street, to more spacious premises on the South side of the STRAND, No 142, a few doors West of Somerset House; and requests, therefore, that all communications may be forwarded to the latter address.

For the next seven years John Chapman's 'spacious premises' – consisting of the bookselling business and publishing house, his family home, and rooms for literary lodgers – was the chief place of resort for writers with a book to publish which was in any way radical or unorthodox.

The move to the Strand was significant, signalling Chapman's arrival in the heart of London to take up residence in a handsome house on the city's most famous street. Just after Chapman moved in, John Tallis, a bookseller and publisher, issued a second edition of his *London Street Views*, a set of cheap, handy booklets, each containing detailed drawings of the buildings in a particular area of London. He had first issued eighty-eight of these booklets in 1838-1840; they measured approximately nine inches by five, had a pale green paper cover, and showed the engraved elevation, beautifully line-drawn, of London's buildings. The *Street Views* cost 1½ each.¹

Tallis's revised and enlarged edition of 1847 included five separate plans covering the Strand, the longest street in London and the city's main east-west thoroughfare. The recently completed Trafalgar Square marked the beginning of the Strand at its western end, while Temple Bar formed the eastern boundary with Fleet Street. 142 Strand features in the section which includes Somerset House, nine houses east of number 142 on the south side near Temple Bar.

The Strand had long been one of the most important of London's streets. From the middle ages until the later seventeenth century its south side was lined with mansions built for lords and bishops who found its easy access to the Thames invaluable when they visited London from their country estates in order to attend Court or Parliament. Their gardens ran down to the river, where boats were moored ready to take them to Westminster. Britain's kings and queens progressed not only up the river but also up and down the Strand. John Evelyn noted one momentous procession in his diary on 29 May 1660, when Charles II returned from exile in Flanders to be restored to the throne. His way to Westminster lay through the City of London, where he was greeted by 'the mayor, aldermen, and all the companies in their liveries, chains of gold, and banners', and 'lords and nobles clad in cloth of silver, gold, and velvet', the whole procession lasting eight hours, according to Evelyn, who 'stood in the Strand, and beheld it,

and blessed God'.²

In the nineteenth century the Strand retained its importance as the geographical link between Court, Parliament, and Westminster Abbey in the west and financial centre, heart of the legal establishment, and St Paul's Cathedral in the east. But the character of the street had changed. The grand mansions along the south side decayed and were demolished, as courtiers chose from the later seventeenth century to build their London homes in Whitehall and St James's, close to Parliament and the Court. By the mid-nineteenth century only two great houses remained on the Strand, Northumberland House near Trafalgar Square and Somerset House. Of these two, only Somerset House still stands.

By 1847 the Strand had become London's foremost shopping street. Tallis's plans give a sense of its variety; here are shoemakers, watchmakers, tailors, wax chandlers, tobacconists, umbrella makers, cutlers, linen drapers, pianoforte makers, hatmakers, wigmakers, shirtmakers, mapmakers, lozenge manufacturers, and sellers of food of all sorts, including shellfish, Italian oil, and Twining's famous tea, sold at number 216, near Temple Bar. Warren's Blacking Manufactory was at number 30, on the south side. The name struck lifelong horror into Dickens, who in 1823 was sent, aged eleven, to work in its shabby namesake round the corner near the river for six shillings a week when his father got into debt. He never forgot the humiliation of his four months at Warren's, and reproduced it feelingly in *David Copperfield* (1849-50), in which young David endures a similar experience at Murdstone and Grinby's wine warehouse.

Further east, at numbers 101-2, was Ries's Grand Cigar Divan, a resort for gentlemen both respectable and bohemian who wanted a quiet place to smoke or play chess. Dickens's rival Thackeray, who was both respectable, by virtue of his family and education, and bohemian, by inclination and habit, frequented a number of such all-male establishments on or near the Strand. It was he who popularized, in *Vanity Fair* (1847-8), the term 'bohemian' to mean, in the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*,

a gipsy of society; one who either cuts himself off, or is by his habits cut off, from society for which he is otherwise fitted; especially an artist, literary man, or actor, who leads a free, vagabond, or irregular life, not being particular as to the society he frequents, and despising conventionalities generally.³

Thackeray's chief fictional *alter ego* Pendennis in the novel of the same name, published in 1850, is a regular at 'the Back Kitchen', an amalgam of several clubs and 'dives' on or near the Strand at which Thackeray was a frequent visitor along with his colleagues on *Punch* magazine. All these establishments offered entertainment of a *risqué* kind. The Cider Cellars on Maiden Lane, described by another contemporary, the theatrical man-about-town John Hollingshead, as a 'harmonious sewer', specialized in 'flash' or bawdy songs and ballet girls. Evans's supper rooms in Covent Garden, or 'the Cave of Harmony', as Thackeray renames the establishment in *The Newcomes* (1853-5), were famous for the piquant contrast between the raucous singing of the post-theatre clientèle and the angelic voices of choirboys hired to entertain them. And the Coal Hole, on the Strand itself, positioned exactly opposite Exeter Hall, famous for its huge meetings of reforming and evangelical groups, including the Temperance League, had as its main attraction naked or near-naked women arranged in

‘tableaux vivants’.

The ‘bohemian’ set consisted of young (or youngish) men of varied backgrounds and education set loose in London to pursue a career. They gathered mainly in the Strand because many were journalists, working for some of the thirty or so newspapers and magazines which had their offices on the Strand or one of the roads leading off it;⁴ others were fledgling lawyers who lodged in bachelor chambers in the Inns of Court, just off Fleet Street. A number of theatres were situated in the Strand-Covent Garden area; attendance at a play, opera, or concert could be followed by a visit to one of those late-night entertainments at the restaurants, pubs, and supper rooms close by.

Some of these men were radical in their social and political views. Thackeray himself was equivocal in these matters, never campaigning overtly for political reform and keeping his religious scepticism to himself. In June 1851 he confided to Chapman on a visit to 142 Strand that though his religious views were ‘perfectly *free*’, he did not ‘mean to lessen his popularity by fully avowing them’, as Chapman puts it in his diary for 14 June.⁵ Of Chapman’s other regular visitors, most were radicals but hardly any could be described as bohemian. Even Chapman himself, who kept a lover at 142 Strand in addition to his wife and children, was no urban gipsy or vagabond, but a man who worked hard, loved his children (if not his wife), and took himself seriously as a radical thinker.

The people among whom Chapman moved had a number of attributes in common with Thackeray’s bohemians. Chapman’s friends were writers, many of them journalists; they were mainly young and mainly poor. Unlike the bohemians, however, some of them were women, and none of them – ranging from Marian Evans, before she became famous as George Eliot, to Unitarian leaders like James Martineau and his redoubtable sister Harriet, American authors and visitors including Ralph Waldo Emerson, the as yet unknown social philosopher Herbert Spencer, and the young scientist Thomas Henry Huxley, later to be Darwin’s colleague and supporter – could possibly be described as idle saunterers or frequenters of taverns in the small hours. G. H. Lewes, whom Chapman introduced to Marian Evans in 1851, was the nearest to a bohemian among Chapman’s friends and colleagues. He consorted with the *Punch* writers and was well known in London’s literary circles for his ‘open’ marriage. His miscellaneous journalism included many light-hearted sketches and dashed-off articles, but he also wrote serious books and essays on English and European literature, philosophy, history, and science; in 1854 he settled into a happy, monogamous, and lifelong relationship with Marian Evans.⁶

Number 142 itself, built about 1690, had been a tavern and coffee house, the Turk’s Head, since at least 1815. The building was good-looking and imposing, being one storey higher and several feet wider than its immediate neighbours. It was taken over in 1832 by John Wright, a wine and spirit merchant, who extended it even further. In May 1832 Wright advertised in *The Times* the sale of the wine stock and furniture of the Turk’s Head ‘in consequence of very extensive improvements being contemplated in the premises’.⁷ He commissioned the well-known architect John Buonarotti Papworth to rebuild the house on a grand scale. Papworth’s drawings of 1832 show that he retained the neo-classical style of the front elevation, while altering the rest of the building, which led back some distance from the Strand to look over the terrace of Somerset House at the back – the inner buildings of Somerset House stretching

westward behind its Strand neighbours, then as now, as far as Waterloo Bridge. The ground floor plans show Wright's wine shop at the front, a wine bar in the middle, and a large parlour at the back. In the basement, which extends under the pavement at the front, is the wine cellar, together with kitchen, scullery, larder, and 'maids' WC'. The upper floors – three of which are outlined in Papworth's design, though four were eventually built – are three rooms deep. With three windows across the front, the building is wider than its immediate neighbours, as well as taller, and while it has a long dark corridor along the side adjoining number 141, the plans show three side windows towards the back of the building on its eastern side, where the house extends further back than its other neighbour, number 143.⁸ Chapman's daughter Beatrice later remembered that the middle room on each floor, between the back and front, was lit by a glass skylight at the top, with glass panels in the ceilings of each of the middle rooms passing the light down to the lower floors.⁹

The complete reconstruction of this large building was so ambitious that it took several years to complete. It was not until May 1838 that Wright could announce in the newspapers that the Turk's Head Coffee House and Hotel had reopened for business, 'rebuilt and furnished at a very considerable expense, with a view of affording superior accommodation' including a coffee room, private sitting rooms and bedrooms. That summer Wright placed advertisements in *The Times* for venison suppers, turtle soup, and 'the finest Rhenish' wines.¹⁰ But Wright, like Chapman after him, overstretched himself financially. According to John Timbs, describing club life in London in 1866, the 'very lofty handsome house' had cost £8,000 to rebuild; 'it was opened as a tavern and hotel, but did not long continue'.¹¹ In 1845 Wright was named as a bad debtor in the celebrated bankruptcy case of the wine merchants Reay and Reay; he owed the Reays £31,000 for the fine wines he stocked in his cellar. Wright struggled on at 142 Strand, paying an annual rent of £230 and rates at a rateable value of £195 – nearly twice as much as his neighbours – until his death in January 1847.¹² (According to a Chapman family tradition, probably fanciful, Wright hanged himself in his despair.¹³)

Chapman took over the house in July 1847. He was expanding his business, and was sufficiently optimistic about his prospects to place his large advertisement in the *Athenaeum* in July 1847, with another in *The Times*,¹⁴ and also to pay whatever Tallis charged to include the proprietor's name in his enlarged edition of *London Street Views*, issued in the second half of 1847. 142 Strand appears there with 'JOHN CHAPMAN, BOOKSELLER AND PUBLISHER' printed above the line drawing of the front of the building.

2. Marian Evans at 142 Strand in 1851

Spring 1850 saw Mary Ann back in England after a journey to Geneva following her father's death, but still unsure what to do and where to go. She spent some weeks living with each of her married siblings in the Midlands. Though her sister Chrissey was welcoming, she was preoccupied with her husband and children. Isaac, the model for the unforgiving Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, was hostile. He was embarrassed and irritated by his younger sister's religious unorthodoxy, intellectual precocity, and general desire to be independent. As she wrote ruefully to Sara Hennell from his house in Coventry on 11 April, some 'envious demons' had driven her 'across the Jura to come and see people who don't want me'. She was determined, she said, to pack a carpet-bag and become 'a stranger and a foreigner on the earth'.

Then, climbing down from such melodramatic heights, she asked Sara to find out what Chapman charged for lodgings at 142 Strand. She knew Chapman from several visits of his to Bray in Coventry; he had published her translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* in 1846. For the time being, the Brays rescued her from her uncongenial relations by inviting her to spend the summer with them. After a visit from Chapman in October, she went for two weeks to the Strand as a trial run for a longer stay, returning to the Midlands at the beginning of December with the intention of taking up residence permanently at number 142 in January 1851. At one of Chapman's regular Friday evening gatherings on 29 November she met Eliza Lynn, a 'literary lady', she told the Brays, whom she wished to emulate by making her way in London, supplementing the £90 a year inherited from her father by translating and reviewing.¹⁵ Chapman was soon negotiating to buy the radical *Westminster Review*, and it was agreed that Marian, as she now called herself, would be his editorial assistant. She still used the name Mary Ann when writing to members of her family, while to the Brays and Sara Hennell she went by the nickname 'Pollian', but on her move to London in January 1851 to pursue a journalistic career she chose the more adult name Marian.¹⁶ As it happens, the letter in which she did so, written from the Brays' home in Coventry to Chapman in April 1851, was an attempt to put an end to an embarrassing quarrel between herself and the two female inhabitants of 142 Strand, Susanna Chapman and Elisabeth Tilley. The disagreement might have ended the *Westminster Review* partnership with Chapman before it had properly begun, with incalculable consequences for her future personal life and public career, if not for his.

1851 was probably the most important year in the life of both Chapman and Marian Evans. He bought the *Westminster Review* and gathered round him an extraordinarily talented group of writers; she gained writing and editing experience which proved invaluable for her later career as a novelist, as well as extending her social circle beyond that of the Brays and meeting, through Chapman, the man with whom she would share her life. It happens that Chapman's diary for 1851 survives, where all the others except that for 1860 have disappeared.¹⁷ So often visible only in glimpses from the letters of his authors, Chapman lays himself bare in these diaries, which are almost Pepysian in their frankness and detail. We know at every turn what Chapman was feeling during 1851.

What he was feeling on 1 January as he took stock of the year just gone by was this:

I open the record of this new year with a sad retrospect of the last one, – sad in regard to the trying difficulties I have gone through pertaining to my business, sad in regard to the wretchedness I have endured through my affections, sad that I have wasted much time and seem to have made no intellectual progress, – and saddest of all that I have made *others* sad, and have not at all profited by this year, in the very vigour of my manhood, to become a better man.¹⁸

The business troubles had to do with his loss of advantage over other small publishers during 1850 after the bumper year 1849, when he had been the American publisher George Putnam's chosen importer and co-publisher of American books. Whereas he had about one hundred and forty books on his 1849 list and was able to take out eye-catching advertisements in the *Publishers' Circular*, the number went down to below seventy in 1850, with a severe retrenchment in advertising to match.

The disappointment at his lack of intellectual progress reveals an important aspect of Chapman's character. Like Dickens and Lewes, to name but two of his acquaintances who made their way in the Victorian world of letters by their own efforts, he had none of the advantages, social or intellectual, of a university education. He taught himself by reading widely and keeping up with advanced thinking in philosophy, theology, history, and science. It was his aspiration to contribute to his age's progress and to his own reputation by succeeding as an original thinker and writer, though he was obliged in the end – partly in response to the tactful but firm comments of Marian Evans – to accept that his talents lay more in enabling others to make their contributions to original thinking than to do anything useful by his own pen. Nonetheless, he could not resist spending time and energy engaging in epistolary discussions with authors who found his thinking muddled. The leading Unitarian preacher and writer James Martineau, for example, though pleased that Chapman was taking over the *Westminster*, confessed in June 1851 that if Chapman were to edit the *Review*, it would be 'conclusively ruined':

He is an enterprising Publisher and a clever man: but it is his misfortune that he does not know his own limits; and is ambitious of a literary function, for which he is not qualified.¹⁹

The references in Chapman's diary to the wretchedness he has suffered through his 'affections', the making others sad, and the regret that 'in the very vigour of my manhood' – he would be thirty on 16 June 1851 – he had failed to become a better man, all relate to his sexual relationships. His wife Susanna is mentioned in negative terms throughout the diary. She is said to be conventional in her religious views, unfairly jealous of the children's governess and Chapman's mistress Elisabeth Tilley, and now of Marian Evans too. Chapman complains of her importunate requests for him to share her bedroom, which he does for a while, 'with a struggle', from 2 May.²⁰ Susanna's greatest disadvantage was her age. 'Susanna's birthday', Chapman notes on 27 August. It was her forty-fourth. Under the same date he records that he has twice had sexual intercourse with Elisabeth Tilley during the previous night. The running total of these occasions, noted meticulously throughout the diary, had now reached fifty-four since the beginning of the year.²¹

Susanna, though understandably jealous of Elisabeth, seems to have been more or less reconciled to the domestic triangle, claiming her marital rights from time to time and causing arguments sometimes, but generally putting up with a situation she could do little to change.²² On one occasion, 19 May, Chapman describes an angry outburst to which he responded, unusually for him, with sarcasm:

I proposed to buy an Iron Safe for the business which was met by a torrent of invective about my 'reckless extravagance'. She was silenced by my remark that I thought she had better assume the management of the business in order to ensure having matters ordered conformably to her views.²³

Chapman did not love his wife; he did not believe that unhappy marriages should be indissoluble, though the law decreed so. His simple solution was to follow his own desires with Elisabeth (and in 1859 with another young woman, Johanna von Heyligenstaedt), and to promote, in his publications and in the *Westminster Review*, advanced opinions on marriage as

on other subjects. He eventually parted from Susanna in 1863 and lived in Paris from 1874 with a second 'Mrs Chapman'.²⁴ For the time being, though, he lived at 142 Strand with Susanna, his children Beatrice and Ernest, some clerks, and several paying guests, with Elisabeth acting as governess to the children and housekeeper to the establishment. A few of Chapman's circle knew of the arrangement, but most did not. It is inconceivable that devout Unitarians like James Martineau would have published with him if they had known, or that a respectable elderly bachelor such as Henry Crabb Robinson – who often recorded scandal and gossip in his diary, resorting to shorthand for the purpose – should have visited Chapman's soirées regularly. Robinson never jotted down any suspicions about Chapman's domestic circumstances.²⁵

Marian Evans, however, entering the household in January 1851, soon became aware of the sexual tensions and found herself adding to them before long. On Wednesday 8 January, according to the diary, Chapman met her at Euston Station at 3 pm. The very next day finds Chapman recording, in one of many passages scored out at an unspecified later date:

Had a very painful altercation with Elisabeth the result of her groundless suspicions hence I have been in a state of unhealthy excitement all day. She gave notice at the dinner table that she intended to leave in the Autumn.²⁶

Since Elisabeth had nothing to fear from poor Susanna in the way of attracting and keeping Chapman's attention, it is clear that she was jealous of the new female arrival. Though Marian was plain-looking and in that respect hardly a rival for Elisabeth, she was formidably clever. Her approval of Chapman's ideas and plans flattered his sense of his intellectual abilities, with the result that this socially gauche young woman of thirty-one quickly upset the fragile balance of the household. Chapman played one woman off against the other, with Susanna siding on the whole with Elisabeth as the devil she knew. There were tiffs and arguments about the piano Chapman helped Marian to choose, especially as he was soon spending hours in her room listening to her play Mozart. Then he began to take German lessons from her, which caused an outburst from Elisabeth. On 22 January there was a silly business about which of the three women was to accompany Chapman on a walk.²⁷ Marian returned to Coventry to stay with the Brays while Chapman worked at persuading Susanna and Elisabeth to accept her return to the Strand in the autumn as his assistant on the *Westminster Review*. He and Marian corresponded all summer about the *Review*; she advised him on how to handle the inevitable questions about the editorship:

With regard to the secret of the Editorship, it will perhaps be the best plan for you to state, that for the present *you* are to be regarded as the responsible person, but that you employ an Editor in whose literary and general ability you confide.²⁸

This plan suited Chapman, with his literary ambitions; it also suited Marian, who enjoyed anonymity, partly from natural diffidence and fear of failure, and partly because female editorship was unheard of at this time. Though fated often to be controversial in her views and actions, she had no desire to thrust herself into the public eye or shock the conventional.²⁹ Perhaps she was born some generations too soon. Her early loss of faith, her pursuit of an independent career, and soon her courting of social exile by living with a married man occurred at a time when divorce was difficult or even impossible to obtain.

It was fortunate that Chapman was able to persuade Susanna and Elisabeth to accept Marian Evans once more at 142 Strand. After the busy summer of correspondence between London and Coventry about Chapman's plans for the *Westminster Review*, Marian returned to London permanently on 29 September 1851. For the next three months her letters, and Chapman's diary where it has not been cut, give a sense of the excitement, hard work, and fun of life at number 142. Chapman gained the support of an intelligent and witty woman whose organ of conscientiousness more than made up for the deficiency in that region which George Combe, the Edinburgh phrenologist and supporter of the *Westminster Review*, had observed in Chapman himself. Marian threw herself into the job of negotiating with contributors, using her powers of persuasion where necessary, as with Combe, and even on occasion drafting the outlines of a subject for the designated contributor, as in the case of a long-planned article on Christian ethics by James Martineau.

Marian's role brought her into contact with all the progressive writers of the metropolis. Her letters to her good friends the Brays ring with the joys of her new London life. Though she was in a sense only a backroom figure, her intellectual command of a wide range of subjects soon won her the respect and admiration of people – mainly men – far more prominent than she was at the time. Her stay at 142 Strand launched her career; though her novel-writing was not to begin for another five years, the unconscious preparation for it began with her shrewd accounts to the Brays and Sara Hennell of human nature as she encountered it in London and with the articles she wrote for the *Westminster Review*. Chapman could not have managed without her. His negotiations with subscribers to the *Review*, his continuing publishing business, and the large amount of visiting and being visited which he undertook in the interests of both concerns, not to mention his love of socializing for its own sake, would have defeated even a man of Chapman's energy if he had not had an active and decisive lieutenant.

During her first week back, number 142 was full of visitors. Chapman's diary for 29 September 1851 noted the arrival (from Manchester) of Dr Hodgson and his wife as well as that of 'Miss Evans'. A few days later Hodgson accompanied Chapman to visit W. J. Fox, the radical politician who had contributed to the *Review* in its earliest years after Jeremy Bentham and James Mill had founded it in 1824. They 'had a long conversation with him on the educational movement', Chapman recorded. Fox agreed to write the article on 'National Representation' for January 1852, on condition that Chapman supplied him with the facts. On Sunday 5 October Marian joined Chapman and the Hodgsons at dinner in the Camberwell home of William Ellis, an educational reformer and close friend of George Combe.³⁰ Ellis had been an associate of Bentham and the Mills; like Fox, he had contributed articles to the original *Westminster* in the 1820s. A wealthy businessman, he founded and supported several schools intended to educate working-class children on the Socratic method (and without resort to corporal punishment).³¹ Marian's first impression of him, as recounted to Charles Bray, was that he was 'very good, but a bore'. She revised her opinion a few days later, when Ellis attended one of Chapman's soirées; 'Mr Ellis was more agreeable – really witty', she told Sara Hennell on 9 October.³²

Wednesday 8 October was a red-letter day for Chapman. In the morning he completed the purchase of the *Westminster Review* from William Hickson by paying the agreed sum of £300. That evening he held his soirée, attended by Ellis, the Hodgsons, the economist Joseph Kay,

the celebrated Edinburgh scientist Sir David Brewster (inventor of the kaleidoscope), and the Swedish novelist Frederika Bremer, who was staying at number 142 on her way home from a successful visit to America.³³

Marian first reported to Bray her disappointment in this famous Swedish woman:

I don't know how long Miss Bremer will stay, but you need not wish to see her. She is to me a repulsive person, equally unprepossessing to eye and ear. I never saw a person of her years who appealed less to my purely instinctive veneration. I have to reflect every time I look at her that she is really Fred[erik]a Bremer.³⁴

After talking to her at the party, however, Marian withdrew her first harsh impression, conceding that

Miss Bremer was more genial than I had seen her – played on the piano and smiled benevolently. This morning at breakfast, she told me a very pretty story – all the prettier for her broken English... Altogether I am beginning to repent of my repugnance.³⁵

Such guarded and critical initial responses to new acquaintances, softened by subsequent meetings, occurred several times as Marian absorbed new experiences at a fast rate. It happened with Ellis, with Frederika Bremer, and, at least as far as physical appearance was concerned, with Lewes when she met him on 6 October. She fired off daily letters to her friends in Coventry, giving rapid sketches of the people who came and went at 142 Strand.

One of Chapman's house guests was Rufa Hennell's father Robert Brabant, a self-important doctor and Biblical scholar whose personal acquaintance with David Friedrich Strauss had led to Rufa beginning the translation of the *Life of Jesus* which Marian took over on her friend's marriage to Charles Hennell. Marian's sharp comment to Cara on 3 October 1851 that 142 Strand was 'only just exorcised of Dr. Brabant' can be explained by an episode which had followed Rufa's wedding in November 1843. Having acted as bridesmaid, Marian was invited to stay at Dr Brabant's Wiltshire home as a kind of replacement daughter.³⁶ She had been delighted by his flattery of her learning, but unfortunately the doctor's blind wife and vigilant sister-in-law found the relationship inappropriate and Marian's visit came to an abrupt end. Marian herself confided in Chapman about the embarrassing episode, as did Rufa, who blamed her father.

Chapman, thus taken into the confidence of the two young women, wrote down the story in his diary in June 1851:

Mrs Hennell [Rufa] repeated exactly what Miss Evans had told me previously as a great secret... that in 1843 Miss Evans was invited by Dr Brabant... to visit his house and to fill the place of his daughter (then just married)... she went, the Doctor liked her extremely, and said that so long as she had no home she must consider his house as her permanent home. She in the simplicity of her heart and her ignorance of (or incapability of practising) the required conventionalisms gave the Doctor the utmost attention; they became very

intimate, his Sister in law Miss S. Hughes became alarmed, made a great stir, excited the jealousy of Mrs Brabant... Miss Evans left. Mrs B. vowed she should never enter the house again... Mrs Hennell says Dr B. acted ungenerously and worse, towards Miss E. for though he was the chief cause of all that passed, he acted towards her as though the fault lay with her alone. His unmanliness in the affair was condemned more by Mrs Hennell than by Miss E. herself when she (a year ago) related the circumstances to me.³⁷

The account gains piquancy from the fact that Chapman had himself recently been the object of Marian's romantic enthusiasm in circumstances which were similar in terms of his encouragement of her attention, though different in that Chapman was a handsome young London publisher with a free attitude to love and marriage, not a respectable elderly scholar living in Devizes. Marian's remark to Cara about the house being 'exorcised' of Dr Brabant represents an understandable feeling of vengefulness towards the conceited man who had made a fool of her eight years earlier. Eliza Lynn, who found herself in the same situation as a flattered young guest at Devizes in 1847, took her revenge on Brabant in an autobiographical novel of 1885, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, in which she refers sarcastically to 'the learned and fastidious Devise'. She adds, expressing, not for the first time, her jealous disapproval of George Eliot:

Dr Devise was a man who had extreme fascination for some people. One of our greatest celebrities, when in the Ugly Duck stage of her existence and before she had joined her kindred Swans, had wanted to dedicate her life to him.³⁸

Despite her feelings of resentment towards Dr Brabant, Marian was polite to him for Chapman's sake, as he was likely to be a subscriber to the *Westminster Review*. Before returning to the country Dr Brabant 'very politely took me to the Crystal Palace'.³⁹

3. A new lodger at 142 Strand in 1852

Chapman took on a new office helper for the *Westminster Review* in the autumn of 1852. This was a young man of twenty called William Hale White. He was in flight from a proposed career in the ministry, in his case not in the Church of England but in the independent Congregationalist church. Born in Bedford in 1831, the son of a radical nonconformist bookseller, Hale White was brought up as a member of the town's Bunyan Meeting. The sect practised public expressions of conversion in front of the whole congregation. Hale White's father, William White, was liberal and gave up his Calvinism in 1851 after reading and admiring Carlyle's works advocating a non-denominational spirituality; but the son had first to go through the boyhood misery of fearing himself damned and enduring with strong feelings of guilt a sham 'conversion' in the meeting house, then being sent to a theological college in Hertfordshire, and finally, in 1851, beginning a course of training as an Independent minister at New College in the St John's Wood area of London.⁴⁰

Here Hale White, though fearful and ultra-sensitive, rejected the theological bullying of his teachers. With two other students he rebelled against the Principal's strict interpretation of scripture. In his work of autobiography-as-fiction, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, published anonymously in 1881, he gave full vent to the resentment he felt about this defining

episode in his life:

We used a sort of Calvinistic manual which began by setting forth that mankind was absolutely in God's power. He was our maker, and we had no legal claim whatever to any consideration from Him. The author then mechanically built up the Calvinistic creed, step by step, like a house of cards. Systematic theology was the great business of our academical life....

So it came to pass that about the Bible... we were in darkness. It was a magazine of texts, and those portions of it which contributed nothing in the shape of texts, or formed no part of the scheme, were neglected. Worse still, not a word was ever spoken to us telling us in what manner to strengthen the reason, to subdue the senses, or in what way to deal with all the varied diseases of that soul of man which we were to set ourselves to save. All its failings, infinitely more complicated than those of the body, were grouped as 'sin', and for these there was one quack remedy. If the patient did not like the remedy, or got no good from it, the fault was his.⁴¹

For rebelling against this doctrine, Hale White and his fellow students were expelled in March 1852. Hale White was supported by his father, who wrote and printed a pamphlet in his defence, *To Think or Not to Think*, and who received a letter from Charles Kingsley, supporting White's stance but expressing an anxious wish that young men like his son would stay within the Christian tradition and not be swept into the arms of Straussism, Transcendentalism, or 'Mr John Chapman's *Catholic Series*'.⁴² This was a reference to Chapman's series of philosophical and religious works; 'catholic' was meant in its non-denominational sense of open-minded, but the title was unfortunate given the furore which surrounded J. H. Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845 and the re-establishment of a Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850.

Hale White was never swept into the arms of Chapmandom, but it was Chapman who helped him find his feet. At first, as he recalled, Hale White was 'adrift, knowing no craft, belonging to no religious body, and without social or political interest'. In September 1852 he got a teaching post at a school in Stoke Newington, but stayed only one night, during which he suffered a fit of terror and loneliness which made him give up the job before he had begun it. He escaped to a friend's house in north London.⁴³ It was at this point, in October 1852, that Hale White was taken on by Chapman and became Marian Evans's fellow lodger at 142 Strand. He wrote about this episode in his life several times, first in a convolutedly oblique form in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*; then in a newspaper article protesting at John Cross's over-tireticed biography of George Eliot (*Athenaeum*, November 1885); in another article responding to the news of Chapman's death (*Athenaeum*, December 1894); in an essay for the *Bookman* in 1902, 'George Eliot as I Knew Her'; and finally in the autobiographical notes he wrote for his children near the end of his life, which they published as *The Early Life of Mark Rutherford* in 1913, just after his death. The last two accounts, written long after the deaths of both George Eliot and Chapman, are the most frank in their description of Chapman and his establishment, though they make no mention of Elisabeth Tilley or her role in Chapman's life, which Hale White may not have known about. He did know, however, that Chapman held liberal views on

marriage and divorce, for Chapman made no secret of them.

In the wake of the schoolmastering fiasco, Hale White had thought of trying for work with a publishing house. After visiting several publishers without success, he called at 142 Strand. He knew that Chapman published and sold 'books which were theologically heretical'; this may well have been attractive to someone recoiling from an unforgiving religious creed. The autobiographical notes describe the encounter with Chapman:

As the New College council had tested my orthodoxy, so Chapman tested my heresy and found that I was fit for the propagandist work in No. 142 and for its society. He asked me if I believed in miracles. I said 'Yes and no'. I did not believe that an actual Curtius leaped into the gulf in the Forum and saved Rome, but I did believe in the spiritual truth set forth in the legend. This reply was allowed to pass, although my scepticism would have been more satisfactory [to Chapman] and more useful if it had been a little more thorough.⁴⁴

Hale White moved into a room at the top of the house; as he remembered in his *Bookman* essay on George Eliot, she had 'a dark room at the end of a long dark passage', while his own room, 'the quietest I have known in London, or out of it, was over hers, and looked across the river to the Norwood hills'.⁴⁵ He found Chapman, or 'Wollaston', as he called him in the fictionalized account by 'Mark Rutherford',

a curious compound, materialistic yet impulsive, and forever drawn to some new thing; without any love for anybody particularly, as far as I could see, and yet with much more general kindness and philanthropy than many a man possessing much stronger sympathies and antipathies. There was no holy of holies in him, into which one or two of the elect could occasionally be admitted and feel God to be there. He was no temple, but rather a comfortable hospitable house open to all friends, well furnished with books and pictures, and free to every guest from garret to cellar. He had 'liberal' notions about the relationship between the sexes. Not that he was a libertine, but he disbelieved in marriage, excepting for so long as husband and wife are a necessity to one another. If one should find the other uninteresting, or somebody else more interesting, he thought there ought to be a separation.⁴⁶

It is an intriguing sketch with its secularized use of the terminology of the discarded theology – 'the elect', 'temple' – and its summing up of what Chapman was like – open, welcoming, undogmatic, and yet a man of surprisingly cool feelings towards the individuals in his family circle.

At first Hale White worked on the *Westminster Review*, correcting proofs among other things. Then Chapman gave him a task which, with his extreme reticence and quickness to take offence, he loathed:

I was soon taken off the *Westminster*, and my occupation now was to write Chapman's letters, to keep his accounts, and, most disagreeable, to 'subscribe'

his publications, that is to say, to call on booksellers and ask how many copies they would take.⁴⁷

He stuck it out until February 1854, hating his lowly status, worshipping Marian Evans for her kindness and her cleverness, but remaining almost invisible to her – there are no references to him by name in her extant letters. In the *Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* he tells a possibly made-up or at least elaborated story of Mark Rutherford making a mistake over the number of books he was to sell and misunderstanding the content of a letter he had been asked to write for ‘Wollaston’. He falls ‘a prey to self-contempt and scepticism’. In this state of mind he goes to ‘Theresa’s’ (Marian Evans’s) room to read proofs with her. When she discovers another mistake by him, he faints, awaking to find Theresa sponging his face with cold water. He unburdens himself to her, telling of his overwhelming sense of failure and ‘sobbing convulsively’ in her lap.⁴⁸ Whether this actually happened or not, Hale White never forgot Marian’s kindness towards ‘a mere youth, a stranger, awkward and shy’. He was determined to correct Cross’s depiction of her at her death as a remote sibyl; hence his article in the *Athenaeum* in 1885, in which he remembers her in her 142 Strand days as ‘one of the most sceptical, unusual creatures I ever knew’. He describes her sitting in her dark room, ‘with her hair over her shoulders, the easy chair half sideways to the fire, her feet over the arms, and a proof in her hands’.⁴⁹

By the end of 1853 Marian Evans, though still running the *Westminster Review* with Chapman, had moved out of 142 Strand into lodgings of her own, and Hale White had no desire to stay either. He recalled that Chapman offered him a partnership in the business, which he wisely declined, and he left number 142 in February 1854 to take up a clerkship in the Registrar-General’s office just along the road in Somerset House. Despite the proximity of his new place of work, it was the last he saw of Chapman and also, to his ‘lasting sorrow’, of Chapman’s adored female assistant.⁵⁰ She, of course, was about to take the first great decision of her life, to live with Lewes as his wife, a choice without which – who knows? – she might not have made the other great decision of her life, to write novels under the name George Eliot.

Notes

- 1 See *John Tallis’s London Street Views 1838-1840, together with the revised and enlarged views of 1847*, ed. Peter Jackson (London, 1969), editor’s introduction, pp. 9, 10, 17.
- 2 *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E. S. de Beer, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1955), III, 246. (I have modernised the spelling in my quotation.)
- 3 See Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847-8), ed. John Carey (London, 2001), p. 765.
- 4 Tallis’s 1847 plan lists twenty-three newspaper and periodical offices on the Strand; another half-dozen were located on streets leading off the Strand, such as Wellington Street and Catherine Street.
- 5 See Chapman’s diary, 14 June 1851, Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman, with Chapman’s Diaries* (London, 1940, reprinted with additions, 1969), p. 179.

- 6 For Lewes's life and career, see Rosemary Ashton, *G. H. Lewes: A Life* (Oxford, 1991, reprinted 2000).
- 7 *The Times*, 17 May 1832. For the history of the house since the seventeenth century see *Tallis's Street Views*, p. 222; Hugh Phillips, *Mid-Georgian London: A Topographical and Social Survey of Central and Western London about 1750* (London, 1964), p. 170ff; Bryant Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the 17th, 18th, and 19th Centuries* (London, 1963), p. 616.
- 8 J. B. Papworth's architectural drawings for the rebuilding of 142 Strand, dated 1832, are in the RIBA British Architectural Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (ref. PB 1313 PAP [125] 1-5). I am indebted to Charles Hind, Assistant Director (Special Collections) of the Library for his help in locating and interpreting the drawings.
- 9 'Stories of the Little Mother', p. 2. This is an account by Annie Chapman, Beatrice's daughter, of her mother's reminiscences, copied in typescript by the late John Wallis Chapman, Chapman's great-grandson, and used in his article 'John Chapman's Children', *George Eliot Fellowship Review*, X (1979), 11-13. Ina Taylor also quotes from the typescript in *George Eliot: A Woman of Contradictions* (London, 1989), p. 84. I am indebted to Ms Taylor for letting me have sight of the typescript.
- 10 See *The Age*, 27 May 1838; *The Times*, 20 June, 30 July, 1 August 1838.
- 11 Timbs, *Club Life of London*, 2 vols. (London, 1866), II, 95.
- 12 *The Times*, 4 July and 27 November 1845 and 6 January 1847. Records at the Westminster Archives Centre show that Wright paid the rates for 142 Strand from 1832 until his death in January 1847.
- 13 The story of Wright's 'suicide' is in 'Stories of the Little Mother', p. 1.
- 14 *Athenaeum*, 24 July 1847, p. 778; *The Times*, 27 July and 11 August 1847.
- 15 George Eliot to Sara Hennell, 11 April 1850, and to Charles and Cara Bray, 30 November 1850, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954-78), I, 334-5, 337.
- 16 See Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London, 1996), p. 19.
- 17 For the story of the discovery of the diaries for 1851 and 1860, see Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, pp. ix-x.
- 18 Chapman Diary, 1 January 1851, *ibid*, p. 123.
- 19 James Martineau to W. E. Hickson, 15 June 1851, MS Hickson Papers, copy in Devon Record Office.
- 20 Chapman Diary, 21 and 26 April, 2 and 17 May 1851, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, pp. 157-8, 159, 162, 166.

- 21 Chapman Diary, 27 August 1851, *ibid.*, p. 205; see also p. 125 and n.
- 22 Chapman Diary, 24 May, 21 June, 13 September 1851, *ibid.*, pp. 170, 181, 209.
- 23 Chapman Diary, 19 May 1851, *ibid.*, p. 167.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 254, 116.
- 25 Henry Crabb Robinson's MS diary at Dr Williams's Library breaks into shorthand occasionally to record some financial or sexual scandal, but never in connection with Chapman.
- 26 Chapman Diary, 9 January 1851, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, p. 129. Haight explains in his introduction, p. ix, that some pages have been cut out, while others have been heavily overscored, possibly by Chapman himself. Some, though not all, of these deleted passages have been recovered by modern photographic techniques.
- 27 Chapman Diary, 11, 12, 13, and 22 January 1851, *ibid.*, pp. 130-5 *passim*.
- 28 George Eliot to Chapman, 9 June 1851, *The George Eliot Letters*, VIII, 23.
- 29 See Ashton, *George Eliot*, pp. 6, 381-2.
- 30 Chapman Diary, 29 September, 4 and 5 October 1851, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, pp. 215-16.
- 31 For an account of William Ellis's career, see W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*, 2 vols. (London, 1967-8), I, 326-41.
- 32 George Eliot to Charles Bray, 6 October, and to Sara Hennell, 9 October 1851, *The George Eliot Letters*, I, 365, 368.
- 33 Chapman Diary, 8 October 1851, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, pp. 217-18.
- 34 George Eliot to Charles Bray, 8 October 1851, *The George Eliot Letters*, I, 366.
- 35 George Eliot to Sara Hennell, 9 October 1851, *ibid.*, I, 367.
- 36 George Eliot to Cara Bray, 8 November 1843, *ibid.*, I, 164.
- 37 Chapman Diary, 27 June 1851, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, pp. 185-6.
- 38 Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, 3 vols. (London, 1885), I, 288-9. See Ashton, *George Eliot*, pp. 48-9.
- 39 George Eliot to Charles Bray, 4 October, and to Sara Hennell, 13 October 1851, *The George Eliot Letters*, I, 364, 368.
- 40 See *The Early Life of Mark Rutherford (W. Hale White)*. *By Himself* (London, 1913), pp. 37-8, 46-7, 56-63.
- 41 [William Hale White], *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), ed. Don Cupitt

(London, 1988), pp. 19-20.

42 *Early Life*, pp. 66-77.

43 *Ibid*, pp. 79-81.

44 *Ibid*, pp. 82-3; a more elaborate version of the meeting is given in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, pp. 104-5.

45 'George Eliot as I Knew Her', *Bookman*, August 1902, p. 159.

46 *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, p. 107.

47 *Early Life*, p. 83.

48 *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, pp. 112-14.

49 'George Eliot as I Knew Her', p. 159.

50 *Early Life*, pp. 83, 88.