

JOHN  
STUART  
MILL  
AND THE  
HARRIET  
TAYLOR  
MYTH

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H. O. PAPPE

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
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**19**

John Stuart Mill  
and the  
Harriet Taylor Myth

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Otilie followed the conversation attentively though she took no part in it.

The next morning Eduard said to Charlotte: 'She is a pleasant and interesting girl.'

'Interesting,' Charlotte replied with a smile, 'why, she never said a word.'

'Did she not,' Eduard rejoined while he seemed to retrace his thoughts, 'how very strange . . .'

—Goethe, *Elective Affinities*

Thus let thy power, which like the truth  
Of nature on my passive youth  
Descended, to my onward life supply  
Its calm—to one who worships thee,  
And every form containing thee,  
Whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind  
To fear himself, and love all human kind.

—Shelley, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*

However urgent may be the necessity for a breaking up of old modes of belief, the most strong-minded and discerning, next to those who head the movement, are generally those who bring up the rear of it.

—John Stuart Mill, *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties*

Amis, qu'est-ce qu'une grande vie sinon une pensée de la jeunesse exécutée par l'âge mûr?

—Alfred de Vigny, *Cinq-Mars*, xx

## PREFACE

I HAVE not used any unpublished source material for this study. It has been the merit of Mill's recent biographers to publish new letters and documents as well as to draw attention to some neglected writings of Mill. I have drawn freely on these sources in my text. The discovery of additional sources and years of historical enquiry may carry students further from the truth than they were at the beginning. This, I am afraid, has happened in the case of Mill's life history. Mill's new biographers have fallen under the spell of what Professor Butterfield calls 'historian's blind eye'. While acknowledging the sources recently published I have tried to relate them to the established material and to interpret them in a way which is factually correct and inherently convincing.

I have not overlooked assertions about Harriet's part in designing programmes for Mill's future work. Such assertions have been made by several of the writers mentioned in my text, and they have recently been given wider publicity by Maurice Cranston in *The Listener* of 10 September 1959. I have, however, not dealt with these points which I do not dispute. I cannot persuade myself that they carry significance beyond confirming the undisputed fact that Harriet assisted Mill in his work and took an understanding and active interest in it. Such points would supply supporting evidence for Harriet's intellectual ascendancy only if a substantial case could be made out for her *original* part in Mill's work. I have tried to show that this cannot be done.

This short study is supposed to be read as a companion volume to established authorities such as Hayek and Packe. I have not attempted to deal with the whole of the relationship between Mill and Harriet Taylor. My intention has been, as the title indicates, to dispel a myth which, I feel, threatens to distort our image of Mill's personality. Mill's personality is inseparably

connected with his thought which has been of great importance for generations and whose vital message is by no means exhausted. The questions of socialism and, in particular, of individualism are still burning problems, and it is important to free Mill's brilliant contributions to these questions from the emotional entanglement into which they threaten to fall. This is particularly desirable because, as I am trying to show, the Harriet Taylor myth could arise only from a misinterpretation of Mill's thought. My present contribution is designed to clear the way for a fuller evaluation of that decisive period in Mill's formative years which started with his discovery of Wordsworth in 1828.

I am indebted to Mr and Mrs Norman MacKenzie, Professor P. H. Partridge and Professor John Passmore for reading the manuscript. Professor O. H. K. Spate saved some search by suggesting at an early stage that the poetry quoted in Harriet's Essay revealed the rhythm of the young Tennyson. *Si parva magnis*—I trust that I shall not lay myself open to the suspicion of trying to create another myth by thanking my wife for her assistance without which this treatise could not have been written.

H.O.P.

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## THE HARRIET TAYLOR MYTH

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THE antiseptic Mill tradition has come round full circle. The purely intellectual life of the 'Saint of Rationalism' has been turned into the story of a romantic lover. Before the Mill documents, finally released from the watchful custody of Helen and Mary Taylor, became available for scholarly scrutiny, both followers and adversaries exhausted their interest in Mill by scanning his stature as a thinker. This seemed to be in keeping with Mill's own version in the *Autobiography*. This work was written as the history, in an age of transition in opinions, of the successive phases of a dynamic mind, equally ready to learn and to unlearn either from his own thoughts or from those of others; as an acknowledgment of the debts which his intellectual and moral development owed to others. The emotions and the passions were hardly invoked, except in the context of Mill's mental crisis and of 'the most valuable friendship' of his life. The crisis in his mental history was essentially the decisive step in the maturing and unfolding of Mill's personality—a process too healthy to deserve more than superficial psychological interest. On the other hand, Mill's exalted references to Harriet Taylor, his friend for two decades and (after her first husband's death) his wife for seven years, were too forbidding to invite any suspicious prying into so elevated a union. 'The figure invested with such a blaze of light', Leslie Stephen commented, 'has neither distinct form nor colouring.'<sup>1</sup> Harriet Taylor was left in the limbo to which she had been relegated by Mill's contemporaries.

However, far wider claims have been made by Mill's new biographers such as Hayek, Packe, and Mrs Borchard.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, III, 58.

<sup>2</sup> F. A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, 1951; Michael St John Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*, 1954; Ruth Borchard, *John Stuart Mill the Man*, 1957.

formidable 'political finishing mistress' (as Disraeli described Mill) has been sent back to school as an ever-adolescent disciple cleaving unto woman. Mill's extraordinary statements about Harriet's towering genius have come to be accepted at face value. According to Hayek, 'her influence on his thought and outlook . . . were quite as great as Mill asserts'.<sup>3</sup> According to Packe, 'her predominance was even more complete than he himself pronounced'.<sup>4</sup> And 'far from it having been the sentimental it was the rationalist element in Mill's thought which was mainly strengthened by her influence', Hayek concludes; and he quotes with approval an opinion by K. Hagberg depicting Mill as 'in reality a romantic' who was made by 'this woman . . . into a Radical rationalist'.<sup>5</sup> Basing his views upon a more detailed analysis of the material, Packe on the other hand asserts that 'She did not make him more romantic; rather she made him retire into his native rationalism and justify the romantic standpoints which she gave him'.<sup>6</sup> Mrs Borchard, whose story of Mill's life appeared after Packe's biography, shows Harriet as having become Mill's only guide and oracle. 'The more the unconscious source of his own intuitions dried up the more he relied on Harriet for his decisive ideas. He trusted her even against his own considered judgment . . . submitting his reason to her utterly.'<sup>7</sup>

Considering Mill's tremendous impact upon the philosophical, political, economic, and sociological thought of his own and later times—both in the English-speaking world and elsewhere—these statements are indeed formidable and sensational in the highest degree. They also fly in the face of the judgment of Mill's contemporary friends as far as they cared to comment on the problem. We are entitled to submit the evidence offered to close scrutiny, and for this I have drawn heavily on the three biographies referred to above.

The evidence consists in Mill's own statements as those of a man known to have usually been painstakingly correct and honest. It further consists in letters and documents recently

<sup>3</sup> Hayek, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Packe, p. 316.

<sup>5</sup> Hayek, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Packe, p. 131. Bertrand Russell, among recent writers, discounts Harriet's lasting impact 'in the purely intellectual realm. In that realm James [Mill] continued to reign supreme over his son's subconscious.' *Portraits from Memory*, 1956, p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Borchard, p. 91.

made public for the first time. Finally, a general evaluation of Mill's writing before, during, and after the Harriet period offers circumstantial evidence concerning the new man who is said to have emerged. As regards Harriet's own claims, they were modest and offer no clue.<sup>8</sup>

I am going to treat the complex of questions concerning Harriet's intellectual ascendancy over Mill as follows: I shall first enquire whether there was a perceptible break in Mill's intellectual penetration after he had come under Harriet's influence. I shall then scrutinize the significance of Mill's own statements on the subject. Finally, I propose tracing Harriet's imprint on the *Liberty*, on the *Subjection of Women*, on the question of the ballot, and on the *Political Economy*.

### *Partnership and Maturity*

Mill's two comprehensive works, the *Logic* and the *Political Economy*, were written before his marriage to Harriet. They are also the works upon which Harriet's influence has, on the whole, come least to bear.<sup>9</sup> In Alexander Bain's opinion Mill's work, as a great originator, was done by 1848, that is, some years before his marriage:

The two books now before the world were the main constructions that his accumulated stores had prepared for him . . . His subsequent years were marked by diminished labours on the whole; while the direction of these labours was towards application, exposition and polemic, rather than origination . . .<sup>10</sup>

Packe disagrees with this view in that he rightly rates the value and the vitality of the later writings much higher. Yet he implicitly admits that Mill's original phase had come to a close.

His two great works, the *Logic* and the *Political Economy*, he now

<sup>8</sup> Harriet had, however, taken an active part in writing the parts of the *Autobiography* which deal with Mill's and her relationship and co-operation. She also disapproved of some passages emphasizing Mill's defects. See A. W. Levi, 'The Writing of Mill's *Autobiography*', *Ethics*, 61 (1950-1), 291-2.

<sup>9</sup> *The Principles of Political Economy* was largely based on Mill's economic papers published in the 1820s and his *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* which were written in 1829 and 1830 (though not all published at the time) and which 'deserve to be studied as anticipating, and sometimes transcending, the *Political Economy*'. F. Y. Edgeworth in *Palgrave's Dictionary*, II, 756. <sup>10</sup> *John Stuart Mill*, 1882, p. 91.

regarded simply as a prologue, as an establishment of first principles. The more essential part of his task still lay before him, the application of those principles . . .<sup>11</sup>

One may well agree with Packe's higher regard for the concrete application of principles, and yet fall in with Bain's assertion that this application was not an original (though perhaps more mature) achievement. That a new note was struck was certainly the opinion, among contemporaries, of James Fitzjames Stephen who admired the *Logic* and the *Political Economy* but rejected the spirit pervading Mill's later works.

Up to a certain point I should be proud to describe myself as his disciple, but there is a side of his teaching which is as repugnant as the rest of it is attractive to me, and this side has of *late years* become by far the most prominent. I do not say that the teaching of his works on Liberty, on Utilitarianism, and on the Subjection of Women is inconsistent with the teaching of his works on Logic and Political Economy but I wish to show the grounds on which it is possible to agree with the greater part of the contents of the two works last mentioned, and even at the same time to dissent in the strongest way from the view of human nature and human affairs which pervades the works first mentioned.<sup>12</sup>

Enough has been said to emphasize a change-over from one period to another in Mill's intellectual life which also coincides with Harriet's increasing influence (however significant it may have been). On the other hand the succession of periods, as described, in a political thinker reaching the age of maturity is too natural to permit the assumption of peculiar outside influences without detailed evidence. Furthermore, Mill's official duties had, at that time, come to impinge increasingly upon the time available for his private work. In his office he had risen to the mature stage of practical and responsible decisions; the erstwhile apprentice and assistant had now to carry the heavy burden of an executive head of the East India Company, and (as generally acknowledged) he did so with devotion and brilliant success. We are faced with several important concurrent causes for Mill's more restricted and more concrete approach after his marriage. The question is too complex to permit of a

<sup>11</sup> Packe, p. 368.    <sup>12</sup> *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (2nd ed., 1874), pp. 3-4.

self-evident solution. We have first to scrutinize the pointers offered by a more detailed examination of Mill's later works.

'... unparalleled in any human being ...'

Before we go into such details another preliminary hurdle has to be taken. We have to consider the reliability of Mill's own emphatic statements regarding Harriet's role as his oracle-guide. They are too numerous and well known to justify repetition in this paper.<sup>13</sup> According to Alexander Bain, who knew the Mills intimately, Mill outraged all reasonable credibility in describing Harriet's matchless genius; Mill's statements are explained as the natural outcome of extraordinary hallucination and overwhelming passion.<sup>14</sup> To Mill's recent biographers, however, though with varying emphasis, there is nothing disproportionate in what Mill said about Harriet's attainment. It is generally recognized that Mill was uncommonly generous and appreciative in his assessment of the achievements of other people. Was he perhaps too generous in this respect? Did he credit also other influences with the very same effects which he ascribed to Harriet? If so, we are certainly entitled, failing other evidence, to discount his statements about Harriet's intellectual ascendancy.

Mill stated that the ideas developed in their joint works 'originated with her, were emanations from her mind', and so on in many variations. Compare this with the tribute he paid to the Debating Society of his youth, to Carlyle, and to Helen Taylor.<sup>15</sup> Helen Taylor's is the most intriguing case. It accounts for the puzzling asterisks in the *Autobiography* which was published in 1873 by Helen Taylor after Mill's death. In a

<sup>13</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 156-60, 194-9, 203-10, 225; Dedications of *Political Economy, Liberty, Enfranchisement of Women*; Epitaph; Hugh Elliott (ed.), *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, I, 216, 217-18; II, 357, 361, 368, 371-3.

<sup>14</sup> Bain, p. 171.

<sup>15</sup> Mill's pronouncements about what he owed to John Austin, to the Saint-Simonians, to Wordsworth, to Comte, to Tocqueville, could equally be quoted. 'His appreciation of such friends as Hare and Thornton was expressed in terms of even excessive generosity. He was always eager to recognize the merits of an antagonist, or a still obscure genius.' L. S[tephen], *Dictionary of National Biography* (Reprint, 1937-8), XIII, 398. Mill himself was aware of his proneness to overpraise which he mentioned as early as March 1833 in a letter to W. J. Fox. See Garnett, p. 104.

passage, omitted on Bain's insistence, Mill attributed to Helen's mind and powers the same qualities he had ascribed to Harriet:

. . . Miss Helen Taylor, the inheritor of much of her [Harriet's] wisdom, and of all her nobleness of character, whose ever growing and ripening talents from that day to this have been devoted to the same great purposes, and have already made [her name] better and more widely known than was that of her mother, though far less so than I predict, that if she lives it is destined to become. Of the value of her direct co-operation with me, something will be said hereafter, of what I owe in the way of instruction to her great powers of original thought and soundness of practical judgement, it would be vain to give an adequate idea. Surely no one ever before was so fortunate, as, after such a loss as mine, to draw another prize in the lottery of life—another companion, stimulator, adviser, and instructor of the rarest quality. Whoever, either now or hereafter, may think of me and of the work I have done, must never forget that it is the product not of one intellect and conscience but of three, the least considerable of whom, and above all the least original, is the one whose name is attached to it.<sup>16</sup>

It is safe to agree with Mrs Borchard that these words are amongst the most revealing Mill wrote.

Indeed, without knowledge of his relationship with Helen Taylor, one would be reluctant to evaluate his relationship with Harriet. But enough is known of Helen to make it perfectly clear that concerning her, at any rate, he was labouring under a complete delusion . . . It is safe to conclude that, if not Harriet or Helen, someone else—man or woman—would have occupied the pedestal erected in Mill's soul during his impressionable childhood.<sup>17</sup>

Man or woman indeed—or rather, man in the earlier period of his lifelong adolescence, and woman once he had experienced their more rewarding attraction. Here is his considered sum-

<sup>16</sup> Hayek, p. 268.

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit., p. 136. Mrs Borchard continues: 'Someone had to be his guiding star to whom he could submit his mind, actions, decisions. Without this guidance he was lost.' Surely this last conclusion is unwarranted and bad psychology. As *anyone* from amongst the wide circle of eligible 'guides' would do, Mill's position was a strong one, not a weak one. His danger of being lost was minimal, as he could always put up another oracle to adore. I have elaborated this in my paper 'The Mills and Harriet Taylor', *Political Science*, 8 (1956), 19-30.

mary of what the Debating Society in 1825 meant for his development:

I have always dated from these conversations my own real inauguration as an original and independent thinker. It was also through them that I acquired, or very much strengthened, a mental habit to which I attribute all that I have ever done, or ever shall do, in speculation; that of never accepting half-solutions of difficulties as complete; never abandoning a puzzle, but again and again returning to it until it was cleared up; never allowing obscure corners of a subject to remain unexposed, because they did not appear important; never thinking that I perfectly understood any part of a subject until I understood the whole.<sup>18</sup>

There is no finer and more appropriate statement of Mill's intellectual stature than this. Yet at the same time it makes short shrift of his over-generous claims for Harriet's intellectual ascendancy. Before he met her it had been Carlyle who had served as his intellectual *alter ego*. R. P. Anschutz says

. . . it would seem that Mrs Taylor played something of the same role in Mill's life as Carlyle . . . Despite the thoroughly romantic nature of Mill's attachment to Mrs Taylor, he may well have been speaking with complete honesty . . . when he told his father that 'he had no other feelings towards her than he would have towards an equally able man . . .' Each of these three—Sterling, Carlyle, and Mrs Taylor—seemed to provide some nourishment for Mill's perpetual love of loving—'the need', as he defines it, 'of a sympathising support or of objects of admiration or reverence'. And at the back of his mind there was always the terrible fear of the stifled melancholy that continually threatened to revisit him.<sup>19</sup>

Mill's generous appreciation of his other friends goes a long way towards permitting us to see Harriet in her proper perspective. To this we may add another observation. Mill's acknowledgment of Harriet's mastery was not only exaggerated, it was sometimes clearly absurd. He was determined to admire her accomplishments even before they had seen the light of

<sup>18</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 104. See also Mill's letter to Carlyle of 11 April 1833 in which he stated that 'I have been indebted [to gloom and morbid despondency] for all the most valuable of such insight as I have into the most important matters'. *Letters*, I, 42.

<sup>19</sup> 'J. S. Mill, Carlyle and Mrs Taylor', *Political Science*, 7 (1955), 74.

day. 'For me, I am certain that *whatever* she decides *will be* wisest and rightest', he wrote in 1833.<sup>20</sup> When he read a landscape sketch in the *Monthly Repository*, which he wrongly assumed to have been written by Harriet, the landscape described in the article not only became to him 'consecrated by the touch of genius', but he also trusted that the article, 'one of the most beautiful sketches in our recent literature . . . though it appeared in a fugitive publication, will be reprinted, and will hold a distinguished place among the works of the author . . .'<sup>21</sup> When he was disabused about the authorship of this sketch he remained quite undismayed. 'I have', he wrote to W. J. Fox, the editor of the *Monthly Repository*, 'the strongest wish, and some hope, that there will some day arrive a sketch of Paris, in the manner of some of your local sketches—if there does, it will be *the most beautiful thing ever written*—she has spoken quite enough to me at different times to show what it would be.'<sup>22</sup> No wonder that he had to go to great pains to explain away the comparative lack of profundity and eloquence in Harriet's essay on the enfranchisement of women which, he said, did not reflect 'even the faintest image' of her unparalleled mind and heart<sup>23</sup>—and this although he had lent a helping hand as her editor and amanuensis.

<sup>20</sup> Hayek, p. 50. Italics mine.

<sup>21</sup> Packe, p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Hayek, pp. 54-5 (22 Nov. 1833). My italics. Another instance of this sort of absurd statement will be quoted in the context of the *Subjection*. See p. 24, n. 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Dissertations and Discussions*, II, 411-12.

## HARRIET'S ESSAY AND ON LIBERTY

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It is obvious that no case can be made out for Harriet's intellectual mastery without going into the evidence as it covers individual instances of her influence on Mill's thought and work. Among Mill's recent biographers, Packe, in his generally perceptive, though not always deeply penetrating, *Life*, claims that both the *Liberty* and the *Subjection* were the working out of Harriet's early concepts. Two papers written by her at an early stage of her friendship with Mill are said to contain all the thoughts which gave to the two books their characteristic quality. 'Mill who had swung about so easily in the last few years had swung now for the last time. What her fragment on Marriage was to *The Subjection of Women*, this [essay] on Toleration was also to the *Liberty*.'<sup>24</sup> These two papers were probably written in 1832.<sup>25</sup> There was, Packe claims, a miraculous transformation.

In May 1832, when the main block of Harriet's writings started to appear, he was still her admiring teacher and she his devoted student; but this situation so easily provocative of stronger feelings was abruptly altered. Instead of teaching her, he began to be taught himself: instead of a pupil, she became his oracle and his goddess.<sup>26</sup>

Mill in later years said so himself. Was there any substance in it?

Packe, in his quest to establish Mill's conversion, points to his views in the article on 'Genius',<sup>27</sup> as well as to Harriet's

<sup>24</sup> Packe, p. 134. Mill himself never seems to have emphasized these writings of Harriet's. When Georg Brandes asked him in July 1870 'if his wife had ever written anything else than the essay edited by him' ('The Enfranchisement of Women'), Mill's answer was no. Brandes, *Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century* (English translation, 1924), p. 187.

<sup>25</sup> Hayek, pp. 57, 314, n. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Packe, p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> Published in the *Monthly Repository*, October 1832.

Essay of 1832. He depicts the Mill of before 1832 as a levelling young Radical, the advocate of votes for everyone and of schools for all. In the same breath we are told:

Nor could the appeal for individuality have stemmed from the *stern authoritarian* who, only a year before, had told Sterling 'it is good for man to be ruled: to submit both in body and mind to the guidance of a higher intelligence and virtue'; while the liberal concept of 'making every man his own guide and sovereign-master, and letting him think for himself' showed, he had said, a deplorable misunderstanding of the needs of human nature.<sup>28</sup>

It is tempting to comment that this profession of authoritarian faith may have been a rationalization of Mill's bondage to Harriet into which he was just giving himself, and which Mill's new biographers, though confessed liberals, appear paradoxically to condone.<sup>29</sup> Seriously speaking, we have to ask whether Harriet's Essay contained original ideas alien to Mill's previous line of thinking. Had he been a stern authoritarian by profession; had he advocated universal education as a means of indoctrination (teaching, not to think, but *what* to think)? Did he, later on, dogmatically discount such needs of human nature as social cohesion and loyalty to a cause? Had he ever condoned the claims of political, moral, and social conformity or of the opinion of society, that 'combination of the many weak, against the few strong: an association of the mentally listless to punish any manifestation of mental independence'?

### *Harriet's Essay Reviewed*

That these questions must generally be answered in the negative can hardly be disputed. However, we must scrutinize the form and content of Harriet's Essay.<sup>30</sup> It is an attack upon conformity and public opinion, a plea for self-dependence and self-perfection, a vindication of the autonomous individual, and a rejection of interference with others. Each person is to be his own judge and is to live in the light of his own private truth, for

<sup>28</sup> *Letters*, I, 133. Italics mine.

<sup>29</sup> With the exception of Mrs Borchard, who sees Mill under petticoat rule. She usually attempts to have it both ways, however.

<sup>30</sup> Reprinted in Hayek, pp. 275-9.

All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true,  
All visions wild and strange, . . .  
Man is the measure of all Truth  
Unto himself.

Each is to attain fineness of heart and mind through sympathy with another mind. So far the argument is clear and consistent. The last two pages, however, appear to sag. Harriet insists on a distinction between physical and moral science, and between science and art. She also qualifies her relativistic predilection for each and every individuality by inviting individuals to dwell on the beautiful and good, and to protect children by placing before their minds no examples but of the good and beautiful, and to preserve them from the spirit of emulation and competition.

Were these ideas original in themselves, or at least something which had not previously penetrated into Mill's thought? Mill himself never made any claims to originality for the truths expressed in the *Liberty*. On the other hand, his own influence springs to mind in various parts of Harriet's Essay. The ideas developed there and in Mill's article on Genius were not new to Mill at the time of writing. It is biographically wrong to attribute them to Harriet as an active influence on Mill's thought. It is also philosophically incorrect as Mill never accepted these views in the particular form of the Essay. Rees, who had first given his backing to the Packe-Borchard view, has recently acknowledged evidence for some influences other than Harriet's upon Mill's views on liberty.<sup>31</sup> While this is a move in the right direction, Rees's case is incomplete. He, like Packe, ignores Mill's articles on the same subject which preceded the article on Genius as well as subsequent ones, thus failing to establish fully the continuity of Mill's thought in this respect. More important, he has not taken into account the original source of Mill's opinions on liberty, conformity, education, and love, a source which thoroughly and predominantly pervades Mill's work. And most important, in common with the other biographers of Mill, he has failed to scrutinize

<sup>31</sup> J. C. Rees, 'A Phase in the Development of Mill's Ideas on Liberty', *Political Studies*, VI (1958), pp. 33-44. See also *Mill and his Early Critics* (1956), p. 56.

Harriet's Essay and to ask for evidence which might reveal traces of Mill's guiding hand in it as well as of its other sources.

*Mill's Articles on Genius and on Art*

Packe regards the article on Genius as the first statement of the alleged new Mill who had taken his cue from Harriet's Essay. However, the article, with its emphasis on originality, was not a beginning but the continuation of a series of papers which finally culminated in Mill's articles on poetry. He had first taken up the subject in 1828 in his debate with Roebuck in the Debating Society. He put his views on art and genius in writing in a series of articles published in the *Examiner* in 1831 and 1832.<sup>32</sup> In these articles, which may have been part of his wooing of Harriet, he developed the theme of imagination, in contrast to mere intellectual imitation, as the mark of artistic genius; without, however, making any claims to originality for these Coleridgean musings on imagination and fancy. This series of articles culminated in lavish praise for the musical achievements of Eliza Flower who had set to music, *inter alia*, poetry by Harriet and by Goethe. Mill attributed to her 'taste and sensibility of the highest order', and, somewhat rashly, judged her music written for Goethe's *Mignon* to be superior to Beethoven's. The philandering irresponsibility revealed in these articles did not prevent Mill from giving mature and responsible expression to his views on originality in his 'Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties', published in January and October 1833.<sup>33</sup>

If the article on Genius was just a link in a chain of congenial papers by Mill, it is reasonable not to attribute similarities in thought and expression to Harriet's Essay. On the

<sup>32</sup> See J. R. Hains, 'J. S. Mill's Examiner Articles on Art', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XI (1950), 215-34. The articles were much in keeping with contemporaneous utilitarian criticism; see in particular 'The Present State of Music' in the *Westminster Review*, XV (1831), 320-34. Mill's first mention of Eliza Flower's music preceded this article (probably by Bowring) by three months.

<sup>33</sup> In the *Monthly Repository*. Reprinted in *Dissertations and Discussions*, I, 63-94. Mill may have thought of Eliza Flower as a possible wife a year or two before he met Harriet. See Packe, p. 109. Eliza, a lovely and extremely gifted girl, became W. J. Fox's friend; their relationship offers illuminating parallels with that of Mill and Harriet.

contrary, these circumstances supply a first pointer for Mill's direct influence upon Harriet's thought in the Essay. The Essay was indeed a reflection, though a distorted one, of Mill's thought as it was determined by his current interests at the time, by his characteristic wedding of radical and romantic thought as well as by his Platonism.

Harriet's sharing in Mill's current interests is revealed in her references to contemporary writers in the Essay. Apart from a quotation from Fletcher, the poem quoted in the Essay is from Tennyson, whose first two volumes of poetry had been published in 1830 and 1832. Mill took a deep interest in Tennyson and was one of the first to give full public recognition to the poet.<sup>34</sup> Previously Harriet had taken enthusiastically to Browning's *Pauline* (which her friend Eliza Flower was reputed to have inspired), and she had annotated her copy with girlish exclamations of 'most beautiful' and 'deeply true'. Yet this did not prevent Mill from passing mortifying strictures on the poem. In the Essay, on the other hand, we find Harriet apparently, though uncritically, sharing in Mill's favourable attitude towards Tennyson.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the distinction made

<sup>34</sup> Tennyson's poem, quoted by Harriet, was *Oi psovtes*, a poem both Sophist and Herakleitan in its philosophy; it had appeared in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* but was not included in the final edition of Tennyson's poems. It has now been reprinted in the *Oxford Standard Authors* ed., p. 843. Tennyson had been associated with Mill's friends John Sterling and F. D. Maurice, whose special deities, as were Mill's, were Coleridge and Wordsworth, and with Charles Buller, one of the most brilliant of the utilitarians. Tennyson had been a feminist under his and the Saint-Simonian influence, yet later he proceeded to the cautious attitude of *The Princess*. Mill's appreciation of the poet (in the *London Review* of July 1835) after the disastrous reception of Tennyson's 1833 volume was 'a great encouragement' for the slow revival of Tennyson's literary reputation. See J. Killham, *Tennyson and The Princess* (1958), p. 165; Harold Nicolson, *Tennyson* (2nd ed., 1925), pp. 72, 73, 111, 154; Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir* (1899), p. 103; W. D. Paden, 'Tennyson and the Reviewers (1829-1835)', *Humanistic Studies*, VI, 4 (Kansas, 1940), 22-7; E. F. Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers . . . 1817-1851*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 20-4.

<sup>35</sup> Harriet seems to reflect W. J. Fox's almost unqualified praise of the poetry and philosophy both of Browning and of Tennyson, which he expressed in his reviews in the *Monthly Repository* in January and April 1833. Mill, on the other hand, while appreciating the poetry, rejected the underlying philosophy in both cases. See F. E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent* (1944), pp. 305-12; G. L. Nesbitt, *Benthamite Reviewing, The First Twelve Years of the Westminster Review, 1824-1836* (New York, 1934), p. 159; Hayek, pp. 44-5. Garnett, too, was mistaken in thinking that Mill rejected Browning's *Pauline* under his Egeria's influence. Garnett, pp. 98, 106, 110. There is no reason to suspect that Mill derived his interest in Tennyson originally from Harriet.

by Harriet between science and art reveals Mill as a direct influence. Apart from its well-known place in the *Logic*,<sup>36</sup> this distinction was clearly set out in the fifth of Mill's *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions*,<sup>37</sup> unquestionably written in the pre-Harriet era. But what is crystal-clear in Mill's exposition is awkwardly and opaquely rendered in Harriet's Essay. As regards the main idea of the Essay, the challenge to conformity, this may be partially indebted to Shelley, who meant much to Harriet. But was it new to Mill? And more important, is the greatness of the *Liberty* based upon the one-sided emphasis of unqualified individualism?

It goes without saying that the struggle against political and religious conformity was a vital part of the utilitarian heritage into which Mill was born. The freedom to criticize traditional truths, the rejection of opinions not backed by rationally discernible evidence, made up the core of radical philosophical thought. However, there was more in Harriet's Essay than the mere negative defence of the individual against the encroachment of authority. She was predominantly concerned with social pressure irrespective of that exerted by the ruling classes. She wished to protect the individual character of the self-dependent personality; the minority of the strong against the potential terror exercised by the majority. The utilitarians wished 'to take men out of the sphere of the opinion of their separate and private coteries and make them amenable to the general tribunal of the public at large'.<sup>38</sup> It was just this tribunal of public opinion that Harriet considered as the stumbling block to individual freedom. She extolled the eccentric who, as is well known, was dear to the heart of the Mill of the *Liberty*; on

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Mill's and Tennyson's common contacts have been mentioned in n. 34. Tennyson had early been taken up by the utilitarians as a potential radical. Fox's review was largely a reflection of Bowring's exalted praise in the *Westminster Review*, XIV (1831), 210-24. The authorship of this article is in dispute; it has been ascribed to Mill, Hallam, Fox and Bowring. I am going to deal with this question, which has no immediate bearing on the Mill-Harriet issue, in another context.

<sup>36</sup> Book VI, Ch. XII.

<sup>37</sup> *Early Essays*, ed. Gibbs, pp. 119-20.

<sup>38</sup> J. S. Mill, 'Speech on Perfectibility', reprinted as an appendix to *Autobiography*, Oxford World's Classics ed., pp. 298-9. In *The Spirit of the Age*, however, Mill treated general public opinion in the same light as the particular opinions of separate coteries (ed. Hayek, 1942), p. 62; this was written in the pre-Harriet era.

the other hand, the eccentric has appeared as a menace to modern conservative thinkers such as Bradley and Oakeshott. However, the regard for the individual personality or the eccentric was part of Mill's world before he met Harriet. Moreover, it was a view widely held at the time by romantic thinkers all over Europe as well as by certain conservatives in their reaction to the upsurge of democracy. And finally the seeming contrast between the two positions resolves itself on closer scrutiny.

### *An Exercise in Platonism*

The contemporary impact of radical and of romantic thought would be quite enough to explain Mill's attitude towards conformity and public opinion. The philosophical radicals could possibly be suspected of an ambiguous position in attacking sectarian opinion while extolling the tribunal of public opinion. While their case could be regarded as doubtful, that of the romantics was certainly not. Individuality was one of their undisputed values, and this entailed contempt for the masses and thus for the views of the majority. These ideas were, of course, not new. They had time and again been demonstrated and rediscovered in the unfolding of the western heritage. The utilitarian philosophers have been articulate in emphasizing their independence from tradition. Their onslaught on objectionable fallacies and conventions, as well as on orthodoxies, has tended to obscure their place within the stream of legitimate tradition. Mill in particular cannot be fully understood without realizing to what extent his mind was moulded by his immersion in Greek and medieval philosophy. ' . . . the modern mind owes far more to both [Socratic dialectics and, to a less extent, the school-disputations of the middle ages] than it is generally willing to admit.'<sup>39</sup> Mill was a Socratic Platonist throughout his life. And it was Plato's thought which, under Mill's guidance, came to pervade Harriet's Essay.

Mill's Platonism has been played down, if not ignored, by modern Mill scholars, with the exception of Mrs Borchard (who, however, when it comes to the point, regards the thought of the Essay as Nietzschean). Even a philosopher like Britton does

<sup>39</sup> *On Liberty* (Blackwell), ed. R. B. McCallum, p. 39.

not mention Plato in his writings on Mill, and thus debars himself from access to an essential element in Mill's position.<sup>40</sup> Shorey, however, was on safe ground when he called Mill 'perhaps the greatest of nineteenth century Platonists . . . in his combination of severe logic with a passion for reforming the world'.<sup>41</sup> Mill's Platonism explains why the Wordsworth-Coleridgean world became an integral part of his thought rather than being a completely new and alien experience. As Mill tells us in the *Autobiography* he early formed an admiration for Socrates and for the *Socratici viri*. He was seven years old when he first read six of the Dialogues. After the age of twelve he read, for the first time, some of the most important Dialogues of Plato, particularly the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Republic*—all of which he re-read repeatedly in the course of his life. His best known works up to 1834, he says, were his abstracts of several of Plato's Dialogues (*Protagoras*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and the *Apology*) which were published in 1834-5 in the *Monthly Repository* though they were written several years earlier.<sup>42</sup> These annotated translations, together with others on Plato's work, were written before Mill met Harriet and are likely to date back to the time of Mill's mental crisis. They were written 'for the writer's own satisfaction in the course of his private studies' and were 'shown after the lapse of years, to one or two friends who were unacquainted with the writings of Plato, and unexpectedly found to be interesting to them'.<sup>43</sup> There is no doubt that this reference is to Harriet, and it was probably on her wish that the abstracts were published. We also know from another source that Harriet was reading Plato in 1832.<sup>44</sup>

Harriet's Essay is indeed an essay in Platonism. Its main tenets—love and beauty, as well as the defence of the eccentric against public opinion—are taken from Plato, not less than the rejection of bookish education in Mill's 'Genius'. Public Opinion or King Nomos is the Great Beast of the *Republic*, the *Crito*,

<sup>40</sup> Apart from his *John Stuart Mill*, see also 'John Stuart Mill: The Ordeal of an Intellectual', *Cambridge Journal*, II (1948), 96-105.

<sup>41</sup> P. Shorey, *Platonism, Ancient and Modern*, 1938, pp. 231, 232. George Grote traced the *Liberty* to Plato's influence. See his *Plato*, I, 266, n. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Republished as *Four Dialogues of Plato* (ed. Ruth Borchardt, 1946).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Hayek, p. 39.

the *Apology*, the *Gorgias*. Harriet's, as well as Mill's, ideas on education are those expressed in the *Phaedrus*, the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras*, the *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Symposium*. Nearly every passage of the Essay can be traced to Plato, with the exception of the Protagoreanism in the relativist passage round the Tennyson quotations.<sup>45</sup> This passage was certainly based on enthusiasm awakened by Tennyson rather than on a misunderstanding of Plato's *Protagoras*; for Protagoras, as described by Plato, would not have countenanced Harriet's rejection of conventions and traditions. The Essay represents Harriet's meeting with Plato, whom she had come to know under Mill's guidance.

### *The 'March of Intellect'*

However, to remove all doubt, it may be advisable to enquire further into Mill's intellectual development and into the contemporary influences which went into the formation of his views. We learn from Mill himself that one of the two important changes brought about in his philosophy of life at the time of his mental crisis (of 1826-7)

was that I, for the first time, gave its proper place, among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual. I ceased to attach almost exclusive importance to the ordering of outward circumstances, and the training of the human being for speculation and for action.<sup>46</sup>

It would be tempting to quote from Coleridge and Wordsworth to illustrate this statement. However, if this would lead us too far, we may quote from Mill's letter to Sterling which Packe adduces as his evidence for Mill's having been a stern authoritarian as well as a levelling egalitarian. In this letter Mill described his visit to the Lakes where he visited Wordsworth and Southey. Mill was struck by 'the extreme comprehensiveness and philosophic spirit' which he found in Wordsworth. Here he discovered the concrete individuality of character which he, at that time, had come to oppose to the abstractness of utili-

<sup>45</sup> George Grote, though, held that Plato could be interpreted in this way. *Plato*, II, 261, and Chap. XXVI on the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>46</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 121.

tarianism. If he approved of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's brand of true conservatism, he made it equally clear in this letter that he regretted and rejected their clinging to tradition and convention. As he said in the same letter (taking up the topic of the *Spirit of the Age*)

In the present age of transition, everything must be subordinated to *Freedom of Enquiry*: if your opinions, or mine, are right, they will in time be unanimously adopted by the instructed classes, and then it will be time to found the national creed upon the assumption of their truth.<sup>47</sup>

The upshot of the matter is this: Packe strains the evidence of a short passage from Mill's letter to Sterling in a way which must appear misleading. This observation applies also to his quotation in the same context from Mill's article on Genius. Mill was closely familiar with the rejection of a levelling type of education from his intimacy with Plato, with Coleridge and Wordsworth ('those formalities to which / With overweening trust alone we give / The name of Education . . .'; 'how books . . . effeminately level down the truths to certain general notions'), and with Southey whose *Colloquies* he was fond of quoting—'a very curious and not un instructive exhibition of one of the points of view from which the spirit of the age may be contemplated'.<sup>48</sup> Harriet (in the Essay) knew only this point of view. Mill knew it in 'Genius'; but he saw also other facets of the subject, before and thereafter. '. . . I had tried to go all round every object, which I surveyed, and to place myself at all points of view . . .'<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the article on Genius was actually written to refute the pessimistic view that the contemporary 'march of intellect' was 'rather a march towards

<sup>47</sup> *Letters*, I, 6. See also the formulation in 'Civilization', 1836: 'The individual becomes so lost in the world that though he depends more and more on opinion, he is apt to depend less and less upon well-grounded opinion . . .'  
*Dissertations and Discussions*, I, 182.

<sup>48</sup> *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 3. 'In the fine arts, as well as in literature, a levelling principle is going on, fatal perhaps to excellence, but favourable to mediocrity. Such facilities are afforded to imitative talent, that whatever is imitable will be imitated. Genius will often be suppressed by this, and when it exerts itself, will find it far more difficult to obtain notice than in former times.' Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospect of Society* (1829), II, 422. See also Hazlitt's essay 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Table Talk*, Essay VIII, which anticipates the views presented in 'Genius'.

<sup>49</sup> *Letters*, I, 88 (12 Jan. 1834).

doing without intellect, and supplying our deficiency of giants by the united efforts of a constantly increasing multitude of dwarfs'.<sup>50</sup> Harriet, in the Essay, had taken up this view which had been made the subject of two articles by a writer in the *Monthly Repository*. Mill, on the other hand, set out to refute it.<sup>51</sup> He pointed out that there was no compelling necessity in the apparent decline of originality. All that was needed to release the powers of genius in modern times was a reform of education, from mechanical *cram* to imaginative and active *discovery* of truth. 'Were all this done, there would be no complaint of any want of genius in modern times.' Mill's plea was not against universal education but for a reform of educational methods. Packe is misleading in his rendering of the substance of 'Genius'. He quotes the questions asked by Mill's adversaries in the controversy as if they were Mill's own. Mill quoted these questions only in order to show them up as 'misplaced' and confining 'the discussions within too narrow bounds', namely overlooking the challenge and possibility of remedial action through educational reforms. This misrepresentation of Mill's article on Genius leads to Packe's representing Mill as a one-sided adversary of democracy. Yet while Harriet's Essay can be understood in this sense, Mill never laid himself open to the charge of doctrinaire bias.

### *The Individual and Public Opinion*

The unqualified romantic individualism adopted by Harriet in her Essay was nothing strange to Mill, who had himself gone through a romantic stage. Nor was it an original attitude to defend. Furthermore, it was never adopted in this radical form by Mill. It is irrelevant to contrast Harriet's outcries with short passages from the immense body of Mill's work. What is relevant is this: that Harriet's Essay is hopelessly one-sided in its first three pages, and inadequately imitative of Mill's thought throughout; that it is in no way comparable with Mill's method, clarity, and comprehensiveness of writing; that, and this is

<sup>50</sup> Borchardt, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> The writer in the *Monthly Repository* had equally tried to argue against this view, but had done so on inadequate grounds. See F. E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent*, 1944, pp. 321-5.

decisive, it does not foreshadow the argument of the *Liberty*, neither in the sense of providing Mill with new intellectual food, nor in the sense of recognizing the complexity of the problem or of anticipating Mill's solution.

Harriet's plea against conformity is, in intention, that of Socrates and of Pericles, of Godwin, of Shelley, of the young Coleridge, and of James Mill. Habit and custom subject the few strong individuals to the yoke of conformity.

The remedy is [Harriet says] to make all strong enough to stand alone; and whoever has once known the pleasure of self-dependance, will be in no danger of relapsing into subserviency. Let people once suspect that their leader is a phantom, the next step will be, to cease to be led, altogether and each mind guide itself by the light of as much knowledge as it can acquire for itself by means of unbiased experience.<sup>52</sup>

We are confronted by a combination of naïve belief in the 'natural virtue' of the individual once he is, in a Rousseau-ish manner, freed from conventions, with a complete absence of any attempt to follow up this thought into its political consequences. Harriet, like Southey, saw in the increased influence of public opinion the worst evil with which society was threatened. By contrast, Bentham and James Mill had at times laid themselves open to a suspicion of overestimating the merits of public opinion as a bar to the sway of vested interests. However, they were less rigid than Harriet. They, too, rejected public opinion inasmuch as it was 'uneducated' and followed uncritically such opinions of the leading classes as flew in the face of evidence or were dictated by the 'sinister interest'.<sup>53</sup> This qualification was also put forth by Mill in his earlier 'Speech on Perfectibility' in 1828.<sup>54</sup> Harriet's argument completely bypasses the difficulties inherent in the problem of liberty.

<sup>52</sup> Hayek, *op. cit.*, p. 276; the passage would read like a precis of James Mill's theory of education, if it were not for Harriet's different understanding of 'experience'.

<sup>53</sup> Bentham, 'Principles of Penal Law', *Works*, I, 377, 464, 530-1. The best statement of James Mill's position is presented in his article on 'The Formation of Opinions' in the *Westminster Review*, VI (1826), 15-16. Southey's view is best expressed in *Colloquies*, I, 233-4.

<sup>54</sup> '... education and public opinion, when they are both of them brought fairly into play and made to act in harmony with one another, are capable of producing high moral excellence . . .' *Autobiography*, p. 293.

Mill's preoccupation was how to reconcile the claims of individual freedom with the necessity for government. The utilitarian answer to this predicament had been legal reform. Mill went further; he had learnt from Plato, Comte, Coleridge, and Carlyle that a democratic majority might be as oppressive as any dictatorship—a thought which he found later most clearly expressed by Tocqueville. But Carlyle's and Comte's answers, namely government by a hero or by philosophers, appeared to lead back to conformity. They had to be rejected. On the other hand, no reasonable policy could be based upon a free-for-all for all individuals, based upon a Godwinian expectation of the withering-away of governmental compulsion. A balance had to be struck between individual liberty and interference of government, interference, that is, both to protect individual freedom and to limit it in the interest of other individuals. As regards the freedom of the individual to develop his character, it was necessary for him to meet other minds—not only by way of sympathy with one particular individual (as Harriet, in the late Godwin-Romantic tradition, allowed). It was necessary to meet other minds to examine the basis of one's own position for which intuitive certainty was not enough. All opinions had to be admitted, not because it was objectionable to suppress any urges, but because it was impossible for any individual to perfect his character as long as he failed in what Goethe had called many-sidedness. Furthermore, there were genuine conflicts revealed in the contest of opinions; half-truths which had to be accommodated and could be accommodated only when made conscious and conscientiously judged. And finally, the majority would always be inclined to suppress uncomfortable truths—such as in the case of democratic Athens and Socrates or in the case of Christ—truths, indeed, indispensable to man's further development towards moral freedom.

While Harriet's plea in the Essay was for solipsism, or rather an *égoïsme à deux*, Mill was at every step conscious of men's social and political relations as well as of the rational requirements of utility. The social relations between men sanctioned individual and collective interference. The principle of utility limited the scope and degree of such interference to the cases in which the interests of individuals collided; to the cases of

social self-protection and of the prevention of harm to others. For Mill the *Liberty* was one of his contributions to sociology and politics, which, integrated with his other contributions, made up the edifice of his life-work. Harriet's Essay, on the other hand, was a clever schoolgirl's warm-hearted, though fleeting, glimpse of one of the foundations of this edifice. How imitative of Mill's own thought it was may be gleaned from a passage from Mill written for Harriet at the same time as the Essay was written:

All popular morality is, as I once said to you, a compromise among conflicting natures; each renouncing a certain portion of what its own desires call for, in order to avoid the evils of a perpetual warfare with all the rest. That is the best popular morality, which attains this general pacification with the least sacrifice of the happiness of the higher natures; who are the greatest, indeed the only real, sufferers by the compromise; for *they* are called upon to give up what would really make them happy; while others are commonly required only to restrain desires the gratification of which would bring no real happiness. In the adjustment, moreover, of the compromise, the higher natures count only in proportion to their number, how small! & to the number of those whom they can influence; while the conditions of the compromise weigh heavily upon them in the states (?) of their greater capacity of happiness, & its natural consequence, their keener sense of *want* and disappointment when the degree of happiness which they know would fall to their lot but for untoward external circumstances, is denied them.<sup>55</sup>

### *Man the Measure of All Things*

It is evident that the philosophy of the Essay, despite the obvious traces of Mill's thought, gave only a partial description of Mill's attitude. This may be assumed to have been the reason why the Essay failed to pass Mill's censorship and remained unpublished. The Protagoreanism of the young Tennyson which was given voice by Harriet was never acceptable to Mill in its unqualified form. Though he was foremost in appreciating Tennyson's poetic gifts, he did not do so uncritically. 'All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true . . .'—this was a view

<sup>55</sup> Hayek, pp. 58-9.

which he could understand imaginatively but which he felt always bound clearly to reject. He said in his article on 'Tennyson's Poems':

It may not be superfluous to add that he should guard himself against an error, to which the philosophical speculations of poets are peculiarly liable—that of embracing as truth, not the conclusions which are recommended by the strongest evidence, but those which have the most poetical appearance;—not those which arise from the deductions of impartial reason, but those which are captivating to an imagination, biased perhaps by education and conventional associations.<sup>56</sup>

Again, in his paper on Bentham in 1838, Mill exposed Bentham's 'determination to create a philosophy wholly out of the materials of his mind, and by minds like his own . . .' as a reason for, in this respect, disqualifying Bentham as a philosopher.<sup>57</sup> The issue was given its clearest expression by Mill in his review article on 'Grote's Plato'. There he dealt with Grote's defence of the Protagorean doctrine, the *Homo Mensura* doctrine of the subjective nature of truth. Mill argued that

the truth of an opinion, even to myself, is a different thing from my reception of it as true since it implies reference to an external standard . . . a belief or opinion is relative not only to the believing mind, but to something else—namely the matter of fact which the belief is about.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, Mill agreed with Grote in condemning Plato for 'overlooking, what was completely seized by Aristotle—that the essential part of the virtue of justice is the recognition and observance of the rights of other people'.<sup>59</sup> This latter point was correctly grasped by disciple Harriet, but her enthusiasm beguiled her into disregarding the distinction between mere opinions and reasoned knowledge.

<sup>56</sup> Article on Tennyson's poems, first published in the *London Review*, July 1835. *Early Essays*, p. 266.

<sup>57</sup> *Dissertations and Discussions*, I, 353.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 354, 355, 357 (April 1866).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

## HARRIET'S FRAGMENT AND THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN

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'WHAT her fragment on Marriage was to *The Subjection of Women*, this on Toleration was also to the *Liberty*.' It is thus that Packe assesses the significance of Harriet's fragment on Marriage as equally seminal for Mill's later work as the Essay. This view was, at least temporarily, shared by Mill himself, even before Harriet had put pen to paper! Harriet's fragment was written in response to an exposition of Mill's own ideas on the emancipation of women. Here are his remarkable introductory words:

She to whom my life is devoted has wished for written exposition of my opinion on the subject which, of all connected with human Institutions, is nearest to her happiness. Such as that exposition can be made without *her* to suggest and to decide, it is given in these pages: she, herself, has not refused to put into writing for *me*, what she has thought and felt on the same subject, and *there* I shall be taught, all perhaps which I have, and certainly all which I have not, found out for myself.<sup>60</sup>

The amorous or playful absurdity of this passage is equalled only by the tragic outcry of Mill's anguished heart which precedes the reprinting of Harriet's (and his) essay on the 'Enfranchisement of Women', the other precursor of the *Subjection*. It certainly contrasts with the undisputed fact that Mill had always been a feminist and had always judged others in the light of their views about women. As he said himself in the *Autobiography*:

It might be supposed, for instance, that my strong convictions on the complete equality in all legal, political, social and domestic relations, which ought to exist between men and women, may have

<sup>60</sup> Hayek, p. 58.

been adopted or learnt from her. This was so far from being the fact, that those convictions were among the earliest results of the application of my mind to political subjects, and the strength with which I held them was, I believe, more than anything else, the originating cause of the interest she felt in me. What is true is, that until I knew her, the opinion was in my mind, little more than an abstract principle . . . I am indeed painfully conscious of how much of her best thoughts on the subject I have failed to reproduce, and how greatly that little treatise [The Subjection of Women] falls short of what would have been if she had put on paper her entire mind on this question, or had lived to revise and improve, as she certainly would have done, my imperfect statement of the case.<sup>61</sup>

In the face of such contradictory statements by Mill himself and of the far-reaching assertions of his biographers it is necessary to examine the evidence, namely the ideas put forth by Harriet, and to contrast them with Mill's early views.

Even to a sceptical reader the difference between Mill's and Harriet's contributions must come as a shock. Mill's exposition (which preceded Harriet's fragment) has that quality of eager freshness, intellectual curiosity, and 'an open loving heart' which distinguishes much of his writing in the years of his passages at arms with the Coleridgeans and the Saint-Simonians. The exposition contains most of the arguments which went into the making of the *Subjection*; it is a brilliant and equally balanced piece of reasoning and writing. If Mill had written nothing else, this paper would command a respectable place in any collection of the prose of his time. Compare this with Harriet's rather pathetic fragment. She ingenuously throws the teacher's burden back to Mill: 'If I could be Providence for the world for a time, for the express purpose of raising the condition of women, I should come to you to know the means . . .'<sup>62</sup> 'It is for *you*—the most worthy to be the apostle of all the highest virtues to teach such as may be taught, that the higher the *kind* of enjoyment, the *greater* the *degree* . . .'<sup>63</sup> The last few words of this passage foreshadow the subject-

<sup>61</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 206-7, n. 1. See also the first sentence of the *Subjection*: 'The object of the Essay is to explain as clearly as I am able the grounds of an opinion which I have held from the very earliest period when I had formed any opinions at all on social or political matters . . .'

<sup>62</sup> Hayek, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

matter of *Utilitarianism* (and of G. E. Moore's thought on the matter), but they were the reflection of Mill's thought as it had developed from his immersion in Plato's and Wordsworth's worlds. He had just expounded this insight for Harriet in his exposition:

By the higher natures I mean those characters who from the combination of natural & acquired advantages have the greatest capacity of feeling happiness, & of bestowing it. Of bestowing it in two ways: as being beautiful to contemplate, & therefore the natural objects of admiration and love; and also as being fitted, and induced, by their qualities of mind and heart, to promote by their actions, & by all that depends upon their will, the greatest possible happiness of all who are within the sphere of their influence.<sup>64</sup>

Britton, who accepts Harriet's ascendancy, adduces this further point: 'From her he derived the extreme feminism which led him to see no essential differences between the best masculine characters and the best feminine characters.'<sup>65</sup> He conveniently overlooks that this was the view propagated so forcefully by Mary Wollstonecraft (for whom the quality 'masculine was only a bugbear') as well as by the Saint-Simonians,<sup>66</sup> well known to and appreciated by Mill. There is nothing in Harriet's fragment to bear out Britton's contention; the only passage bearing upon the issue could rather be construed in a contrary sense: 'Whether nature made a difference in the nature of men & women or not . . .'<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, Mill had put the point clearly to her in his exposition: 'There is no natural inequality between the sexes . . . & if they are still far from being equal, the hindrance is . . . in artificial feelings and prejudices.'<sup>68</sup> The idea of so-called masculine and feminine qualities being germane to both sexes was connected in Mill's personal experience not only with Harriet but also with his early friendship with John Sterling, of whom he told Caroline Fox that 'in early life he had all the beautiful peculiarities and delicacies of a woman's mind'.<sup>69</sup> Yet, careful and detached as ever, Mill was not pre-

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> K. Britton, *John Stuart Mill* (1953), p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> R. Pankhurst, *The Saint Simonians, Mill and Carlyle* (1958), p. 109, *passim*.

<sup>67</sup> Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>69</sup> Caroline Fox, *Memories of Old Friends* (1882), p. 99. The idea may have come to Mill from Plato's *Symposium*. The *Hermaphrodite* and the *Androgyne* represented a traditional concept of Greek mythology. As early as 1824 Mill

pared to rely on intuitions, in this matter or any other. In 1869 he was to write that 'it is not certain that the differences spoken of are not partly at least natural ones . . .';<sup>70</sup> and in another letter written at the same time he rejected the idea of a natural moral superiority of women as resulting from the closer relationship of the mother to the child: 'I believe moral excellence to be always the fruit of education and cultivation, and I see no reason to doubt that both sexes are equally capable of that description of cultivation.'<sup>71</sup>

'. . . all the disagreeables and pains'

The few passages in the fragment which do not reflect thoughts contained in the exposition and which are peculiarly Harriet's express, objectively, the suffering of women, and subjectively, it may be ventured, that masochism of hers which has been traced by Mrs Borchard: '. . . all the pleasures such as they are being men's, & all the disagreeables & pains being women's . . .' Add to this that 'it seems now that all men, with the exception of a few lofty minded, are sensualists more or less—women on the contrary are quite exempt from this trait, however it may appear otherwise in the cases of some'.<sup>72</sup> Did this alleged lack of sensuality belong to the 'disagreeables & pains', one is tempted to ask. However, the idea as such was again taken from Mill's exposition: 'But, as I once said to you, the law of marriage as it now exists, has been made *by* sensualists, and *for* sensualists and *to bind* sensualists.'<sup>73</sup> In Mill it was an acute assessment of the legal situation as it was operative at the time (Mill admitted that the indissolubility of marriage had originally acted powerfully to elevate the position of women); in Harriet it became a travesty and rationalization of her own emotional tangle.

It is in this context that Mrs Borchard has made her contribution to our understanding of the Mill-Harriet biography. In general she accepts uncritically the Hayek-Packe version of Harriet's tremendous intellectual impact on Mill. However,

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had sharply attacked the habit of chalking out a special morality for women and of distinguishing between feminine and masculine qualities in the accepted sense. Article on the 'Edinburgh Review', *Westminster Review*, I (1824), 526.

<sup>70</sup> *Letters*, II, 213.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>72</sup> Hayek, p. 76.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

this evaluation does not prevent her from shrewdly dislodging Harriet from her pedestal. Mrs Borchard is clearly shocked that a man like Mill should be 'cleaving unto woman'. Being a woman, she is not overpowered by Harriet's *anima* (as were, I believe, Hayek and Packe). She has enough feminine earthiness to see through some of Harriet's aspirations and devices. Thus she depicts Harriet's entering upon womanhood:

Little did anyone suspect the thoughts that were hidden in the elegantly dressed, dark, small head, the turmoil that was stirring under Harriet's shapely bosom. She loved her husband and she loved the life beside him—but the facts of life had come as a terrible shock to her. What incredibly coarse and low indulgences of men were veiled by a white wedding . . .

Thus, according to the classic psychological pattern, from a marriage in which the sexual cement was missing, the misunderstood, high-minded wife was emerging.<sup>74</sup>

This is a far cry from the picture of a young wife 'very much in love' as Harriet is seen at this stage by Packe.<sup>75</sup> And here is how Harriet emerges from the dilemma posed by having to choose between John Taylor and John Mill:

After protracted negotiations she finally accepted neither man as a life companion. She was proud to be henceforth no more than a *Seelenfreundin* to both. And both men felt under the deepest obligation to her. Had she not sacrificed her social position to John?<sup>76</sup> Was she not giving up the great love of her life for her husband's sake? Both men accepted this version and position.<sup>77</sup>

She was able to dominate them both and to make them accept this domination as a sacrifice on her part. We may well admit overwhelming evidence to establish Harriet's narcissism. We may also follow Mrs Borchard in emphasizing Harriet's underlying masochism.<sup>78</sup> Yet I do not feel inclined without qualification to fall in with her assertion that 'a deep-seated masochism unfitting her for normal physical love . . . also forced her to arrange her life as a self-sacrifice, at the same time hopelessly

<sup>74</sup> Borchard, pp. 41, 42.    <sup>75</sup> Packe, pp. 117-18.

<sup>76</sup> By accepting the stigma of having (or of being suspected of having) a lover—which closed polite society to her (and Mill).

<sup>77</sup> Borchard, p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> She gives chapter and verse: see p. 66.

tangling up that of John and her husband'.<sup>79</sup> This, though it is partly true, should be qualified by the fact that, at least in Mill's case, she was a deeply satisfying companion. And it should be qualified by the insight that her aversion to sexual intercourse was not only an unprofitable retreat from reality but also animated her to find (and lead) a way back into reality in the creation and inspiration of art forms and of intellectual achievement.<sup>80</sup> Yet at the same time Mrs Borchard does not go far enough in tracing Harriet's masochism. It accounted, indeed, for Harriet's radical protest against convention and order, that protest which was so unlike Mill's circumspect and disinterested search for explanations.

Women are often prone to expressions of the most active indignation . . . By identifying themselves with the socially oppressed or the nonpossessing class, they take up a position against their own unsatisfying role . . . In the childhood history of these women we find tyrannical fathers, and their sublimated activity is unconsciously directed against those who oppressed their mothers and limited their own [development] . . .<sup>81</sup>

This certainly fits Harriet's life history, and it explains why the fragment reads like a *cri de douleur* rather than a reasoned case.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>80</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex* (1933), p. 101.

<sup>81</sup> H. Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women* (1947), I, p. 216; also pp. 165-72.

## THE CORRUPTION OF VOTERS: THE BALLOT

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THE crucial question regarding Harriet's intellectual ascendancy is that of Mill's drift into socialism. However, another question, that of the ballot, should be cleared up first. It is important in its own right, and it sheds light upon the working of Mill's mind and will thus assist us also in grasping the argument concerning socialism. 'In little things as well as great', Packe argues, 'he followed where she led. As in the choice between communism and free enterprise, he did not hesitate to change his views. He who, as a loyal Radical,<sup>82</sup> had been a protagonist of the secret Ballot, became in the *Representative Government* its chief opponent.'<sup>83</sup> It is certainly correct that Mill did change his views on the ballot, in fact, in his early draft of his pamphlet on 'Parliamentary Reform'. The question had, time and again, been discussed by Bentham,<sup>84</sup> and by James Mill, particularly in the latter's closely reasoned article in the *Westminster Review* of July 1830. Mill's own contribution in the *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, which he later incorporated in *Considerations on Representative Government*, did full justice to the arguments put forth by his father. He differed from his father's conclusion, not because he held his own view to be 'absolutely inviolable', but because he felt the spirit of the time (which he regarded as a time of transition) had sufficiently changed to indicate a different strategy. If he was wrong in this view, it was not an error in principle, but a simple error in fact. Already James Mill had emphasized the great importance of a public example being set by the rich who had the leisure to think (Plato was his favourite as he was also his son's). Mill

<sup>82</sup> Contrast this with the 'stern authoritarian', as Packe depicts Mill elsewhere, p. 133.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>84</sup> Particularly in the 'Plan of Parliamentary Reform', *Works*, III, *passim*, and in the 'Constitutional Code', *Works*, IX, 107 et seq.

himself was keenly aware of the dilemma posed by the protection which a secret vote offered equally to the selfish hypocrite as well as to the economically dependent voter. The first of these two classes would be tempted to vote contrary to the public good; the other would feel freed from constraint to please their masters—while some honest reformers might go unnoticed and miss their chance of influencing the public.

As a boy Mill was deeply impressed by the fact that there was a glaring discrepancy between his father's advanced thought and that accepted by public opinion.

In giving me an opinion contrary to the world, my father thought it necessary to give it as one which could not prudently be avowed by the world. The lesson of keeping my thoughts to myself, at that early age, was attended with some moral disadvantages; though my limited intercourse with strangers . . . prevented me from being placed in the alternative of avowal or hypocrisy. I remember two occasions in my boyhood, in which I felt myself in this alternative, and in both cases I avowed my disbelief and defended it.

But, Mill continues,

the great advance in liberty of discussion, which is one of the most important differences between the present time and that of my childhood, has greatly altered the moralities of the question.<sup>85</sup>

In subsequent years Mill returned to this problem repeatedly with regard to the ballot; the question was important as one of those to be incorporated in the later Reform Bills. The clearest formulation of his position was given in a letter to Judge Chapman in July 1858, tendering advice regarding democratic practices in Australia.

It will perhaps surprise you that I am not now a supporter of the ballot, though I am far from thinking that I was wrong in supporting it formerly. You remember, I dare say, a passage which always seemed to me highly philosophical in my father's 'History of India' when he discriminates between the cases in which the ballot is in his estimation desirable and those in which it is undesirable: Now I think that the election of members of Parliament has passed, in the course of the last twenty-five years, out of the former class into the latter. In the early part of the century there was more proba-

<sup>85</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 37.

bility of bad votes from the coercion of others than from the voter's own choice; but I hold that the case is now reversed, and that an elector gives a rascally vote incalculably oftener from his own personal or class interest, or some mean feeling of his own, the influence of which would be greater under secret suffrage, than from the prompting of some other person who has power over him. Coercive influences have vastly abated, and are abating every day: a landlord cannot now afford to part with a good tenant because he is not politically subservient; and even if there were universal suffrage, the idea of a manufacturer forcing his work-people to vote against the general policy of their class, is almost out of the question; in this as in so many other things, *defendit numerus*.<sup>86</sup>

Mill's own early views, his father's thought, his own never-faltering regard for the spirit of the time—but where does Harriet fit into the picture? When he turned against the ballot, he ranged himself in effect with the opponents of the radicals. This did not mean, however, that he shared their convictions or condoned their arguments. Did Harriet go along with him in this respect? Was she indeed capable of understanding the implications of the question? The ballot was debated in Parliament in 1854, and Palmerston led the attack against it. Harriet was gratified. Yet here is Mill's comment on her evaluation:

I wish I had seen a full report of Palmerston's speech—what was given in the *Spectator* did not at all account for your high opinion of it, containing only the commonplaces I have been familiar with all my life . . . I have not seen a single new argument respecting the ballot for many years except one or two of yours. I do not feel in the way you do the desirableness of writing an article for the *Ed[inburgh]* on it.<sup>87</sup> There will be plenty of people to say all that is to be said against the ballot . . .<sup>88</sup>

Harriet stands revealed as just a partisan; Mill emerges as the distinguished enquirer into truth. His unspecified little flattery for Harriet is combined with the same firmness of opinion to which Mill always found his way back from his (controlled) excursions into emotional fantasy.

<sup>86</sup> *Letters*, I, 209.

<sup>87</sup> *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform* was indeed not published until 1859.

<sup>88</sup> Hayek, p. 209.

## PASSAGE TO SOCIALISM

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### 'On the Futurity of the Labouring Classes'

HOWEVER, the final test of Harriet's originality and greatness is alleged to be her influence on Mill's attitude towards socialism, and in particular upon the chapter 'On the Futurity of the Labouring Classes' in the *Political Economy*. This chapter, Mill said in the *Autobiography*, was 'entirely due to her . . . it was chiefly her influence that gave the book that general tone by which it is distinguished from all previous expositions of the Political Economy . . .' This tone consisted chiefly in making

the proper distinction between the laws of the Production of Wealth, which are real laws of nature, dependent upon the properties of objects, and the modes of its Distribution, which, subject to certain conditions, depend on human will . . . I had indeed partially learnt this view of things from the thoughts awakened in me by the speculations of the Saint-Simonians; but it was made a living example pervading and animating the book by my wife's promptings . . .<sup>89</sup>

Combining the expression of his gratitude with his peculiar sincerity, he also said of Harriet's influence that

it was only one among many which were helping to shape the character of my future development: and even after it became, I may truly say, the presiding principle of my mental progress, it did not alter the path, but only made me move forward more boldly, and, at the same time, more cautiously, in the same course. The only actual revolution which has ever taken place in my modes of thinking, was already complete.<sup>90</sup>

Complete, that is, before he met Harriet. Packe and Mrs Borchard are unanimous in extolling Harriet's contribution to the *Political Economy*. 'The influence she had gradually extended over him now ended in complete ascendancy . . .'; Mill

<sup>89</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 208-10.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

meekly accepted her request to deny his main political belief, namely his rejection of socialism.<sup>91</sup> And Mrs Borchard states:

Whatever influence Mill exerted in his own time and over English history must be equally ascribed to Harriet. And the strong impetus given by his books towards socialism and the present welfare state must certainly be attributed more to Harriet than to Mill himself. Mill's *Political Economy* did more than any other single book to bring about socialism in England.<sup>92</sup>

As in the case of the ballot, we shall first have to scan Mill's previous views and his own explanations of his passage to socialism. We shall then turn to the documentary evidence of his exchange of views with Harriet at the critical period. Most important, we have to bring in question what actually was Mill's contribution to political economy and to socialism. Without understanding this crucial point, no conclusive answer can be given to the question of what impact Harriet actually made on Mill's thought. Unfortunately, this question has not been treated by Mill's recent biographers with the discernment it demands.

According to Packe, Mill started on the *Political Economy* in the autumn of 1845. After completing the manuscript, Mill rewrote the work from March to December 1847. Harriet, from Walton, took a keen interest in the process. 'Every line received her scrutiny.' She 'agreed with Mill's assessment of socialism as being chimerical, at any rate for the immediate future', but she objected to Mill's somewhat bourgeois tone which held out little hope for the poor in his description of the ultimate Utopia. 'And she insisted on his appending a further chapter, taken almost from her own lips, outlining the means for the reformation of the working classes.'<sup>93</sup> Packe ascribes to Harriet the emphasis upon the development of character by rugged and personal self-help; the rejection of Carlyle's paternalism; the insistence upon treating the labouring classes as equals (rather than dependants); upon their universal education, and upon their equal partnership in enterprise, culminating in co-operative associations. No documentary evidence for this assessment of

<sup>91</sup> Packe, p. 316.

<sup>92</sup> Borchard, p. 99. Mrs Borchard does not state what she means by connecting the author of the *Liberty* with the welfare state.

<sup>93</sup> Packe, pp. 295, 306-7.

the situation is offered by Packe, who appears to rely on and to magnify Mill's account in the *Autobiography*. It would be easy to trace the contents of the chapter back to Mill's own previous trend of thought as well as to other acknowledged outside influences. However, there is no need to go to such lengths. Mill had marshalled his thought on the subject of the labouring classes in his comprehensive review article 'The Claims of Labour',<sup>94</sup> written before he started on the *Political Economy*, and, it appears, not taken into account by Packe. This article contains all the elements of the relevant chapter of the *Political Economy*.

### 'The Claims of Labour'

'The claims of Labour have become the question of the day', Mill states; ever since (and despite) Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* 'the economic situation of the labouring classes [has] been regarded by thoughtful men as susceptible of permanent improvement'. The claims of the Chartists, the strictures of Carlyle, the Reform victory of 1832, the enquiries emanating from the Poor Law Commission, have all nourished the stream of a great social reform which has come to replace the aspirations of paternalistic benevolence. 'Such a relation [paternalism] has never existed between beings without immediate degradation to the character of the dependent class.' However,

such things are not to be dreamt of in the state of English society and opinion . . . the spirit of equality, and the love of individual independence, have so pervaded even the poorest class that they would not take plenty to eat and drink, at the price of having their most personal concerns regulated for them by others . . . in the matter of their poverty, there is no way in which the rich *could* have helped [the poor] but by inducing them to help themselves . . .

The two remedies required in the circumstances are, first, recognition of the claims of labour, and second, education. The times of feudalism and deference of the employed towards the employer are past and they must give way to concealed

<sup>94</sup> Published in the *Edinburgh Review*, April 1845; partly reprinted in *Dissertations and Discussions*, II, 181-217.

enmity unless equality can be established in their mutual relations. Mill states as his Utopia 'that of raising the labourer from a receiver of hire . . . to the position of being, in some sort, a partner in it . . . a work of co-operation, not of mere hiring and service . . .' Workers could and should become 'themselves capitalists. Not, of course, individually, but by bringing their small means into a common fund, by forming a numerous partnership or joint-stock, they could, as it seemed to them, become their own employers . . .' For any reform of the position of the labouring classes to be 'useful, it is an indispensable condition that there be a reasonable prospect of their being at some future time self-supporting'.

Such, in short, were the ideas formulated by Mill in 1845 in the 'Claims of Labour'. The chapter on 'The Futurity of the Labouring Classes' was indeed sketched out in all relevant detail before, in the circumstances, Harriet could have suggested it. All that was left to her was to suggest that the subject-matter of 'The Claims of Labour' be included in the *Political Economy*. But this falls decisively short of Packe's, and of Mill's own, somewhat ambiguous, claims.

She pointed out the need of such a chapter and the extreme imperfection of the book without it; she was the cause of my writing it; and the more general part of the chapter, the statement and discussion of the two opposite theories respecting the proper condition of the labouring classes was wholly an exposition of her thoughts, often in words taken from her own lips.<sup>95</sup>

The first part of this account is unexceptionable and likely to convey the whole truth. The second part restricts Mill's claim to one aspect only (true to his habit of carefully qualifying his sweeping general pronouncements concerning Harriet); an aspect, however, which, as we know, he had previously treated in full detail in the 'Claims of Labour', and which was, admittedly, part of the contemporary climate of opinion.

### *Harriet and the Impact of 1848*

The year 1848 marked the advent of socialism in France as a political power: a socialism which was soon to be harnessed by

<sup>95</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 208.

the democratic demagoguery of the third Napoleon. This was the year of the *Communist Manifesto* and of constitutional unrest all over Europe. And it was in the wake of the upheaval of 1848 that the Christian Socialist Movement began in England. Tocqueville immediately saw the writing on the wall, and so did his friend Mill. The first edition of the *Political Economy* was completed before the revolution. At that time socialism was still in its utopian stage and offered therefore no fit subject-matter for extensive treatment in a textbook on economics. After the revolution had revealed a wide-spread change in conditions and in public opinion, socialism became a political possibility. This made it necessary to investigate its social and economic implications. Writing to John Austin in April 1847 with regard to his work on the *Political Economy*, Mill said:

I suspect there are none [*axiomata media*] which do not vary with time, place, and circumstance. I doubt if much more can be done in a scientific treatment of the question than to point out a certain number of pros and a certain number of cons of a more or less general application, and with some attempt at an estimation of the comparative importance of each, leaving the balance to be struck in each particular case as it arises.<sup>96</sup>

This indeed was the programme to which he strictly adhered. Complaining about the misrepresentation of his views on socialism (in the first edition) by the *North American Review*, he pointed out in November 1848:

I have expressed temperately and argumentatively my objections to the particular plans proposed by Socialists for dispensing with private property; but on many other important points I agree with them, and on none do I feel towards them anything but respect, thinking, on the contrary, that they are the greatest element of improvement in the present state of mankind. If the chapter in which I mention them had been written after instead of before the late revolutions on the Continent I should have entered more fully into my opinions on Socialism and have done it much more justice.<sup>97</sup>

And in March 1852, while preparing the third edition, Mill explained to his German translator:

<sup>96</sup> *Letters*, I, 129.    <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 138-9.

The progress of discussions and of European events has entirely altered the aspects of the questions treated in those chapters: the present time admits of a much more free and full enunciation of my opinions on those subjects than would have had any chance of an impartial hearing when the book was first written; and some change has also taken place in the opinions themselves.<sup>98</sup>

But, 'even in the former editions, though I stated a number of objections to the best known socialist theories, I never represented those objections as final and conclusive . . .'<sup>99</sup> These quotations, representative of Mill's statements at the time, make it clear that what changes had occurred in his views concerned matters of application rather than of principle, and that there was ample explanation to be found for them in the vagaries of the times. Equally, when in 1871 Europe was swept by horror and fear of communism, Mill stood firm by his principles though he rejected the revolutionary methods favoured by continental socialists 'sous la direction apparente de quelques théoriciens Russes, [qui] pensent qu'il n'y [a] qu'à exproprier tout le monde, et abattre tous les gouvernements existants, sans s'inquiéter, quant à présent, de ce qu'il faudrait mettre à leur place'.<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, Mill could not be expected to quote his wife's orders as occasioning his more favourable views concerning the future of socialism. Conversely, there was no point in his seizing on a completely different set of reasons such as the changed climate of opinion and the course of political events unless they were true reasons for this change in emphasis. When the *Political Economy* was actually written in 1846 and 1847, Harriet lived

mostly at Walton, but according to her habit constantly going for short visits to Worthing, Brighton, Ryde and other places on the South Coast or the Isle of Wight, and only rarely coming to town. What time she and Mill can have spent together must have been mainly during week-ends and Mill's vacation. The first mention of the *Political Economy* in the letters of Mrs Taylor that have been

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 167.

<sup>99</sup> Letter of March 1852 to Professor Rau. *Letters*, I, 169.

<sup>1</sup> To Georg Brandes, March 1872; *Letters*, II, 335. Mill's letter of October 1872 to the Nottingham Branch of the International Working Men's Association is another brilliant statement of his position.

preserved occurs towards the end of 1847 when the book was practically finished.<sup>2</sup>

We can only conjecture about the closeness of their collaboration in the circumstances. It may not have been very close, for Packe, corroborated by Mrs Borchard, states that 'The violent change in Harriet's mind produced by the events of 1848 was a complete surprise to him'.<sup>3</sup> Packe admits that Mill was himself disposed in the circumstances 'to soften the severity of his judgments against Socialism'. But, he says, it was Harriet who 'told Mill to abolish, in the second edition, all his objections against Socialism and Communism. She demanded a complete reversal of his economic treatise in its most essential feature. And she obtained it, though the process cost him infinite pain and worry'.<sup>4</sup> This passage could appear merely burlesque, yet it strikes a note of subjective truth in that it depicts the situation as it may well have appeared to Harriet herself. It is plausible that Harriet thought in terms of a reversal of views. She was a reformer or rather a crusader with a clear vision of the virtuous and of the condemned. Her zeal must have been a personal stimulant for Mill, but it was alien to his own detached pursuit of truth rather than of the Truth.

Mill's crucial letters to Harriet on the subject of socialism date from February and March 1849, after Mill had sent the draft for the second edition to Harriet. He expressed his surprise at the inconsiderable quantity of objections raised by Harriet. The first of the objections raised referred to the status of material satisfactions as a source of happiness: Mill had originally given it the elevated status common with the philosophical radicals; later, under Wordsworth's influence, he had come to emphasize 'higher' values, and he was supported in this by Harriet. Now the pendulum was to swing once more in favour of material satisfaction as a pre-condition of the good life—without prejudice, though, to the qualifications made in *Utilitarianism*. Harriet's second objection was to the preference given on principle to individual over collective enterprise. Mill met the first objection by allowing that the communistic scheme, 'supposing it to be successful', would guarantee subsistence to all, 'and this much

<sup>2</sup> Hayek, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Packe, p. 312. Borchard, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> Packe, p. 313.

would be gained for human happiness'—a carefully qualified hypothetical compromise solution. Regarding the second objection, Mill (after all the future author, co-author with Harriet, of the *Liberty*) made it clear that Harriet had misunderstood the meaning of the (to her) objectionable passage.<sup>5</sup> This was replaced by another compromise carefully excluding any bias in favour of collective action (which Harriet had recommended): 'We are as yet too ignorant either of what individual agency in its best form, or socialism in its best form, can accomplish, to be qualified to decide which of the two will be the ultimate form of society.' No crusading this, but incorruptible Mill at his best. Thirdly, Harriet objected to Mill's condemnation of the communistic tendency to monstrous conformity after the model of a well-regulated manufactory. Again, a compromise solution eliminated the inferences drawn in detail but upheld the image of the manufactory as the paradigm of a Socialist or Owenite community.

*Mill's 'Vindication of the French Revolution of February 1848'*

While this correspondence with Harriet opened on 19 February 1849, Mill had already expressed his attitude towards the French revolution of February 1848 in his 'Vindication', which appeared in the *Westminster Review* of April 1849:

Socialism is the modern form of protest, which has been raised, more or less, in all ages of any mental activity, against the unjust distribution of social advantages . . . it is not obvious what there is in this system of thought to justify the frantic terror with which everything bearing that ominous name is usually received on both sides of the British Channel . . . But in proportion to our distrust of the means which Socialists propose for correcting the unjust inequalities in the lot of mankind, do we deem it incumbent in philosophers and politicians to use their utmost endeavours for bringing about the same end by an adaptation of existing machinery of society.<sup>6</sup>

This is said with explicit reference to Bentham's teaching. It anticipates the whole drift of the strategical alterations in sub-

<sup>5</sup> Hayek, pp. 135, 144-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Dissertations and Discussions*, II, 388, 391, 395. Mill mentions sending the 'pamphlet' to the editor, Hickson, in his letter acknowledging the receipt of Harriet's criticism of the proofs for the second edition of *Political Economy*.

sequent editions of the *Political Economy*. And it makes short shrift of the suggestion that Mill waited for Harriet's letters in 1849 to clear his mind on the impact of the Revolution.

None of Harriet's arguments, however, touched on the core of the *Political Economy*. They concerned changes of emphasis as they are natural in subsequent editions of a monumental work. These arguments are dramatized or rather melodramatized by Packe out of all proportion.<sup>7</sup> Mrs Borchard's account must be described as misleading. Her treatment of Harriet's third objection to Mill's text makes it appear as if Mill had suppressed the whole passage although only the last sentence was left out. On the second objection she does not mention Mill's substitute passage. And coming to the first objection, dealing with the effects of the communistic scheme, she omits the qualifying words 'supposing it to be successful', adding the extraordinary assertion: 'It was this version dictated to Mill by Harriet that saw through nearly a hundred reprints and made history.'<sup>8</sup> In reality, Mill's letters to Harriet reveal no worry or pain, and no surprise. There is nothing but his usual willingness to listen to arguments and to pronounce *ex cathedra* on the pros and the cons of a problem. There are flattering remarks of a general nature but no yielding to Harriet's emotional partisanship. He realized and explained to her that there was more to the problem of communism than certain changes in the laws concerning distribution and education. Looking far beyond the contemporary controversy he was able to anticipate the dilemma and the challenge of social science today:

To make people really good for much it is so necessary not merely

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Hayek, p. 136. Note also that Mill's letter of November 1848 quoted above (n. 97) was written well before the correspondence with Harriet.

<sup>7</sup> K. Britton, too, *op. cit.*, p. 36, feels that the *Political Economy*, in arousing the noble and imaginative passion of reform, fell behind Carlyle and his followers. It did, indeed; it was not meant to be a tract but a scientific treatise. Mill himself, in retrospect, stated that it was the assertion of heretical (socialist) views rather than that of his traditional radical opinions which almost alone had tended to regenerate society (*Autobiography*, p. 195). However, this passage, written with Harriet (see p. 3, n. 8) did not prevent him from carefully weighing the respective pros and cons of socialism and of private property in his posthumous 'Chapters on Socialism', *The Fortnightly Review*, CXLVII-IX (1879).

<sup>8</sup> Borchard, p. 104.

to give them good intentions & conscientiousness but to unseal their eyes—to prevent self flattery, vanity, irritability, & all that family of vices from warping their moral judgments as those of the very cleverest people are almost always warped now.<sup>9</sup>

### *A Historical Myth*

It appears fair to conclude that, from a *biographical* angle, the contention is false that Mill changed his views in obedience to Harriet's authority rather than in the light of detached and thorough investigation based upon evidence. This contention is not only biographically unsound, it can be shown to be *historically* unconvincing and *philosophically* incorrect. On the biographical plane enough has been said. However, it must also be recalled that Mill had been steeped in socialist thought before he met Harriet.<sup>10</sup> He had, in the forties, kept up his personal correspondence with Tocqueville and Comte, who insisted on 'L'apparition inévitable, et sans doute prochaine, des masses prolétaires sur la scène politique, où elles n'ont encore été qu'instruments, et où leur introduction personnelle changera nécessairement toute la physionomie des luttes actuelles'.<sup>11</sup> The doors were wide open for what little influence Harriet could have wielded.

More important, the story of her powerful intervention has tended to lend support to a historical myth, namely the myth that Mill was instrumental in bringing about socialism in England. The fact is that the *Political Economy* was as readily quoted in favour of as against socialism. Mill's aims were clearly defined in his works. Indeed, it was the main object of his work to analyse and define aims and methods. He would have been the last to subscribe to a movement unless its aims were soberly set out in detail and open to critical analysis. His general challenge was to metaphysical entities which he rightly felt had bedevilled earlier thought and still bedevilled politics, and

<sup>9</sup> Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-6.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary of these influences see my 'The Mills and Harriet Taylor', p. 26. For a detailed survey of these influences see R. Pankhurst, *The Saint Simonians, Mill and Carlyle*, 1958, and Iris W. Mueller, *John Stuart Mill and French Thought*, 1956.

<sup>11</sup> Letter dated 17 Jan. 1842, reprinted in *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à J. S. Mill* (1877), p. 17.

in particular Continental politics. What he said about the 'principles of the Revolution' (which had already aroused Bentham's ire) applies *pari passu* to 'Socialism':

... it seems to mean the political ideal of any person of democratic opinions who happens to be using it . . . It proceeds from an infirmity of the French mind which has been one of the main causes of the miscarriages of the French nation in its pursuit of liberty and progress; that of being led away by phrases, and treating abstractions as if they were realities which have a will and exert active power. Hitherto the character of English thought has been different; it has required propositions, not vague words, which only seem to have a meaning.<sup>12</sup>

What, however, it may be true to assert is that socialism in England absorbed part of its peculiar hue from the *Political Economy* as well as from the *Liberty*. In other words, it became less doctrinaire and less socialist because of Mill's impact on leaders of the labour movement. He acted as a sobering influence on the dreams of a socialist utopia and taught socialists to keep their feet on the ground. Mill's imaginative exposition of socialism in the second edition of *Political Economy* 'did not, of course, mean that, whatever his views may have been in the last years of his life, he was then a convert to Socialism'.<sup>13</sup> Socialism was then set on the road of conquering a large part of the world. Harriet even disapproved of Tocqueville 'the Stirlings Romillys Carlyles Austins—the gentility class—weak in moral, narrow in intellect, timid, infinitely conceited & gossiping . . . respectable puppets'.<sup>14</sup> If it had been for her, England would have joined in radical socialist experiments. As it was for Mill, however, socialism and liberalism entered into a peculiar marriage.

### *Mill's Contribution to Socialism*

Socialism, indeed, was on the march, not only in a sociological or political sense. Some of its aspects were a logical derivation

<sup>12</sup> *Letters*, II, 347 (4 Oct. 1872). The formulation in the particular case should mislead no one into thinking of Mill as a narrow nationalist; his criticisms of English weaknesses were no less stringent.

<sup>13</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Socialist Thought, The Forerunners*, I, 312. Cole, by the way, erred when he included Proudhon among the important socialist writers who remained unknown to Mill.

<sup>14</sup> Hayek, p. 156.

from the teaching of the philosophical radicals. Just as Marx was able to erect his edifice on the basis of classical economy, so the utilitarians found themselves face to face with conclusions inimical to the cherished system of individual enterprise. Later critics such as Myrdal have come to regard classical economic thought as a mere rationalization of metaphysical and political bias.<sup>15</sup> This is overshooting the mark. Yet it remains true that the principle of utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, entailed, in the absence of a natural identity of interests, legislative and administrative measures interfering with individual initiative. Thus the utilitarians found themselves naturally ranged on the side of reform. As far as they were predominantly doctrinaire individualists they were frightened by the course of events they had helped to set afoot. 'Thus the progress of socialism made the Radicals sick of administrative reform . . . The social democracy of the Chartists made the Utilitarian philosophers sick of political Radicalism.'<sup>16</sup> Those of their successors who thus abandoned all belief in state interference left the consistent utilitarian road. By contrast, Mill, conscious of the pitfalls both of *laissez-faire* and of socialism, kept well within the utilitarian tradition which he developed, making use of the social and economic lessons of his age. To many of the best minds of his and of the following generation, such as Alexander Bain and Leslie Stephen, he seemed to be attempting the impossible in wedding liberalism and socialism. If we scrutinize Harriet's emotional and unqualified pronouncements in favour of individualism and of socialism respectively, no bridge, indeed, appears to connect the gulf between two irreconcilable positions. Harriet's split-personality radicalism had little to commend itself even in her own time. Yet it is now widely recognized that Mill was ahead of his time and right in excluding any one-sided solution. As Sidgwick put it:

. . . there seem to be two quite distinct conceptions of . . . [Ideal Justice], embodied respectively in what we have called the Indi-

<sup>15</sup> G. Myrdal, *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory* (English translation, 1953). The criticism was first made by Comte, who based his rejection of post-Smithian political economy on its alleged metaphysical character.

<sup>16</sup> Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism* (2nd ed., 1934), p. 513.

vidualistic and the Socialistic Ideals of a Political Community. The first of these takes the realisation of Freedom as the ultimate end and standard of right social relations: but on examining it closer we find that the notion of Freedom will not give a practicable basis for social construction without certain arbitrary definitions and limitations: and even if we admit these, still a Society in which Freedom is realised as far as is feasible does not completely suit our sense of Justice. *Prima facie* this is more satisfied by the Socialistic Ideal of Distribution, founded on the principle of requiring Desert: but when we try to make this principle precise, we find ourselves again involved in grave difficulties . . .<sup>17</sup>

Court quotes a similar remark of Jevons's in 1882 as marking the turning-point between individualism and socialism;<sup>18</sup> he also quotes Mill as an early, though only vaguely noticed, forerunner of this kind of thought. Yet the fact that many contemporaries had not fully taken in the economic consequences of Mill's teaching concerning socialism goes only to show that their view was restricted by blinkers.<sup>19</sup> They were in the grip of the *Zeitgeist*. When Jevons wrote 'suddenly in the pattern socialism showed clear', only a dunce could not see it; when Mill wrote, such insight required vision and exceptional penetration. He was able to discern both the pattern 'the roaring loom of time' was weaving and the peculiar knots and perplexities woven into it. In Dicey's words, he was a teacher for an age of transition.<sup>20</sup> 'If he appears to the modern socialist as a follower of Ricardo, he would have been regarded by Ricardo's disciples as a socialist.'<sup>21</sup>

This pinpoints Mill's contribution. He was not instrumental in bringing about socialism. He was one of those who sensed its

<sup>17</sup> H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed., pp. 293-4.

<sup>18</sup> W. H. B. Court, *A Concise Economic History of Britain*, 1954, p. 253.

<sup>19</sup> H. Sidgwick, *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses*, 1904, p. 242. Sidgwick is nearly always right in his judgment and in his facts. He erred, however, in assuming that Mill had concealed the extent of his socialism from his pupils. The famous views on socialism expressed by Mill in the *Autobiography* (which, according to Sidgwick, came as a surprise to the general reader as well as to Mill's pupils) had been stated clearly in the preface to the third edition of the *Political Economy* in 1852.

<sup>20</sup> 'It is today, at any rate, perfectly clear that from 1848 onwards an alteration occurs perceptibly in the intellectual and moral atmosphere of England . . . Nor can we now doubt that this revolution tended in the direction of Socialism.' A. V. Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England* (2nd ed., 1914), p. 245.

<sup>21</sup> L. S[tephen], 'John Stuart Mill', p. 398.

coming. He taught people to keep their heads in the new social and economic situation, not to be swayed by the new nor to stem the tide, but to exercise their sovereign judgment subject to analysis and to experiential insight.<sup>22</sup> In this his peculiar achievement he did not receive any perceptible help from Harriet's individualist or socialist leanings and longings. In Durkheim's terms, socialism for Harriet was a product of science; for Mill it was an object of science. Mill was not a prophet of stern necessities. He was the first, if not to perceive, at least to enforce the lesson that, just because political economy is a science, its conclusions carried with them no obligatory force with reference to human conduct. As a science it tells us that certain modes of action lead to certain results; but it remains for each man to judge of the value of the results thus brought about, and to decide whether or not it is worthwhile to adopt the means for its attainment.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> William James assessed Mill's influence thus: 'The singular moderation which now distinguishes social, political, and religious discussion in England, and contrasts so strongly with the bigotry and dogmatism of sixty years ago, is largely due to J. S. Mill's example.' *Selected Papers* (Everyman ed.), p. 180.

<sup>23</sup> J. E. Cairnes on Mill's *Political Economy*, Appendix to Bain's *J. S. Mill*, p. 201.

## CONCLUSION

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THE wide claims made by Mill's new biographers for Harriet's intellectual ascendancy cannot be substantiated. Her early writings evince her dependence on Mill. For the later period of their partnership we have no valid evidence to show that Harriet turned Mill's mind towards new horizons or gave an unexpected significance to his thought. The specific claims made in this respect crumble under the weight of the counter-evidence, namely our minute knowledge of Mill's intellectual history. Mill's own statements about Harriet dissolve in generalities. His sympathies never blinded him to the duty of telling the whole truth as he saw it.<sup>24</sup> He combined the general exaggeration of Harriet's merits and talents with a painstaking account of the intellectual influences and events to which he was subjected. A comparison with Auguste Comte will throw Mill's intellectual sovereignty into relief. Comte's intellectual balance was upset by his *année sans pareille* with Clotilde de Vaux. She awakened in him '*l'indispensable renaissance qui devait émaner du coeur*'. He came to place the emotions not only beside, but above reason: he practically reverted to the metaphysics he had condemned.<sup>25</sup> Mill, on the other hand, never left the path of disinterested enquiry and of courageous toleration. His great love, despite his public appreciation of Harriet's worth, was essentially a matter of self-regarding tenacity of purpose. His own detailed claims for Harriet's ascendancy may reveal a de-

<sup>24</sup> L. Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, III, 243.

<sup>25</sup> Comte's statements about his Saint Clotilda, though slightly less exaggerated, are strikingly similar to those of Mill about Harriet. Clotilde's poetry and prose offer parallels with Harriet's. Mill rated Harriet's poetic genius above Shelley's while Comte, more modestly, felt that Clotilde's verses might have been envied by Petrarch. Comte combined his worship of Clotilde with that of Rosalie de Boyet and of Sophie Bliot, just as Mill gloried impartially in the genius of both Harriet and Helen Taylor. See Preface, Dedication, Final Invocation, and Appendices 2 and 3 to Comte's *Système de Politique Positive*.

voted, perhaps an anguished heart; they do not reveal a decline of intellectual judgment.

Mill without Harriet would still have been Mill. Mill married to George Eliot (or to Mary Wollstonecraft—permitting the anachronism) might have been transformed. Mary Ann Evans might have given something new to him by way of independent thought and deeper feeling. Yet, considering her equality of stature, there would have been no need for him in masochistic guilt to magnify her contribution. There certainly was no reason for her to go to similar lengths regarding her indebtedness to G. H. Lewes. But Colette, who was as modest as Mill, thought it quite right for M. Willy to appear, not only as the inspirer, but as the true author of the *Claudine* stories—that is, as long as her infatuation lasted over the years.

This is not to disgrace Harriet. True, she would not have made her mark on the world without Mill. But her co-operation with Mill was, in difficult circumstances, an early example of that husband-wife partnership which, thanks to the efforts of people like the Mills, has blissfully become frequent in our time. A partnership, not to suppress sex (as Harriet erroneously thought), but to relegate it to one aspect among many in an equal and many-sided alliance. There is every evidence that Harriet, despite her weaknesses, such as her jealousy of Mill's friends, fulfilled this role admirably, though perhaps a shade too well. She was capable of sharing Mill's battles and perplexities as well as his solitude. It was owing to her understanding and to her personality that Mill escaped the common dilemma of having to choose between or at least to keep separate Logos and Eros. Her role as a 'fellow-traveller' or 'fellow-soldier', as the perfect friend united in the object of *idem velle idem nolle*, secures her place firmly in Mill's biography. But this is no reason for elevating her secondary contribution to a primary influence in our intellectual heritage.

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