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THE DEATH OF JOHN STUART MILL

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ABSTRACT. *This article surveys the fiercely contested posthumous assessments of John Stuart Mill in the newspaper and periodical press, in the months following his death in May 1873, and elicits the broader intellectual context. Judgements made in the immediate wake of Mill's death influence biographers and historians to this day and provide an illuminating aperture into the politics and shifting ideological forces of the period. The article considers how Mill's failure to control his posthumous reputation demonstrates both the inextricable intertwining of politics and character in the 1870s, and the difficulties his allies faced. In particular, it shows the sharp division between Mill's middle and working class admirers; the use of James Mill's name as a rebuke to his son; the redefinition of Malthusianism in the 1870s; and how publication of Mill's Autobiography damaged his reputation. Finally, the article considers the relative absence of both theological and Darwinian critiques of Mill.*

John Stuart Mill was killed by his kindness to nightingales. That, at least, was the 'poetical end' ascribed to him by the secularist campaigner George Jacob Holyoake. The miasma that killed Mill might have been mitigated by fresh breezes if only he had allowed the trees clustered around his Avignon retreat to be felled; his refusal to do so, according to Holyoake, was out of admiration for the 'independent-minded birds', which would have resented undue 'interference with the privilege of their leafy home'.[1] In truth, the cause of Mill's death was more prosaic: on 5 May 1873 he suffered 'a virulent form of erysipelas'.[2] The inflammation of the skin, accompanied by fever, proved too much. His death, on 8 May, twelve days short of his sixty-seventh birthday, was not, by Victorian standards, a 'good death'.[3] There was no large family gathered around him; no profound last words; no large funeral gathering. Mill died tended only by his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor; and just five mourners attended, on 10 May, as his coffin was lowered into the French grave already occupied by his late wife, Harriet.[4] That morning, nearly 600 miles away in London a 'brief and cold

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[1] G. J. Holyoake, *John Stuart Mill: as some of the working classes knew him. An answer to a letter circulated by 'The author of the article in the "Times" on Mr. Mill's death'* (London, 1873), p. 9.

[2] H. R. Fox Bourne, 'A sketch of his life' in Fox Bourne et al., *John Stuart Mill: his life and works. Twelve sketches by Herbert Spencer, Henry Fawcett, Frederic Harrison, and other distinguished authors* (New York, NY, 1873) pp. 28–9.

[3] On the concept of the 'good death', see P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian family* (Oxford, 1996).

[4] In addition, 'A knot of locals waited respectfully at the cemetery gate'. R. Reeves, *John Stuart Mill: Victorian firebrand* (London, 2007), p. 480.

obituary notice' of Mill appeared in *The Times*.[5] It proved to be the opening shot in a bitter war of words fought over Mill's reputation and legacy in the coming months. Holyoake's rather bizarre ascription of Mill's death to an unwillingness to disturb nesting nightingales was merely one idiosyncratic attempt, among many, to assert the essential benevolence and compassion of the philosopher. In the year following his death, such humane motives were not automatically assumed.

Amidst the multitude of biographies and other partial studies of aspects of Mill's life, ranging from religion and sexual politics to his relationship with his father and his love life, relatively little has been written about Mill's posthumous reputation. Stefan Collini's study of Mill's changing place in the 'pantheon of English thought' in the period between 1873 and 1945 remains a notable exception. In the last twenty years little has been done to supplement Collini's pioneering piece; despite his limiting himself to only one aspect of Mill's reputation and making clear the potential for other, more detailed studies.[6] In particular, Collini's complaint about the relative neglect of Mill's relation to the politics of the 1870s remains valid.[7] This article begins to fill the gap by surveying, in more detail than any previous study, Mill's immediate posthumous reputation. It demonstrates the inextricable intertwining of politics and 'character' in the 1870s; the sharp divisions between Mill's middle- and working-class admirers; the diminished standing of Benthamism and the redefinition of Malthusianism within which Mill was assessed; and considers the relative absence of religious and Darwinian critiques of Mill.

There are at least four good reasons for a detailed study of Mill's immediate posthumous reputation. The first is the most straightforward: the press and periodical treatment of Mill in the months after his death provides a first 'rough draft' of all later biographical accounts. As Collini noted, to understand how Mill was read thirty or sixty years later 'we need to begin by returning to the competing assessments offered … at the time of Mill's death'.[8] Almost every later interpretation of Mill's life and thought, from Isaiah Berlin's depiction of a good but fatally flawed man, to Richard Reeves's recent characterization of Mill as a 'Victorian firebrand', can be found in the obituaries, reviews, and assessments published in the first year after his death.[9] Moreover, not only did contemporary newspapers and reviews set the template for the later historiography, but they also introduced factual errors and tendentious claims that historians have continued to recycle.

The second attraction of a study of Mill's immediate posthumous reputation is that he died at such an interesting moment in his life. It was part of the peculiar

[5] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 June 1873; *Times*, 10 May 1873.

[6] According to Collini: 'A full survey of the mutations of Mill's reputation in these years would fill several Toronto-sized volumes by itself.' S. Collini, 'From sectarian radical to national possession: John Stuart Mill in English culture, 1873–1945', in M. Laine, ed., *A cultivated mind: essays on J. S. Mill presented to John M. Robson* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 242–72, at p. 244. [7] Ibid., p. 266. [8] Ibid., p. 248.

[9] I. Berlin, *John Stuart Mill and the ends of life* (London, 1962); Reeves, *John Stuart Mill*.

arc of his public career that Mill was most politically active in the last eight years of his life, which inevitably coloured assessments of him in death. The cliché of the young radical buck tamed in middle age into an avuncular reformer and safely neutered by the time of his death was not apropos to Mill.[10] A brief period of youthful activity in the 1820s had been followed by a partial withdrawal from public life and, ironically given what was to be said in the wake of his death, Mill's reputation probably benefited from the semi-reclusive existence he lived with Harriet Taylor. In 1865, however, Mill, in his own words, exchanged his 'tranquil and retired existence as a writer of books' for 'the less congenial occupation of a member of the House of Commons'.[11] What followed, in his *Autobiography*, was a rapid-fire recollection of causes and campaigns, starkly distinct in tone from the slower paced introspective account of his life that preceded it. From the moment Mill was elected MP for Westminster the balance between Mill the philosopher and Mill the politician tipped decisively. He became embroiled in the campaigns for the Second Reform Act; argued for female suffrage in the House of Commons; published his *Subjection of women* (1869); campaigned to spare the life of the Fenian insurgent, General Burke; headed the Jamaica Committee for the prosecution of Governor Eyre; helped to defeat an Extradition Bill; lent monetary support to the secularist campaign of Charles Bradlaugh; lost a keenly contested parliamentary election to W. H. Smith; and helped to found the Land Tenure Reform Association. He became, that is, identified with questions of suffrage, sexual equality, Ireland, Empire, secularism, and land reform, and was criticized accordingly.[12] His role in the Jamaica Committee elicited death threats; his final speech, made days before his death, in which he advocated land reform, was, according to *Blackwood's Magazine*, 'one of the worst exhibitions of class hatred and animosity' ever witnessed.[13] He was, in short, more hated at the moment of death than at any other point in his career.

This, in itself, might be deemed sufficient justification for a study, but it was not only Mill's personal reputation that was in dispute: so too was the brand of liberal politics with which he was associated. *On liberty* (1859) had ridden the high-wave of English liberalism. The battles for free trade and laissez-faire appeared won, and the seventieth anniversary of the French Revolution marked a moment at which fear of the mob – recently revived by the Chartist agitation and the 1848 revolutions – could finally be laid to rest, and the Revolution itself consumed as comfortable reading in Charles Dickens's *A tale of two cities* (1859). In 1859, that is, Mill's case for individuality, dissent, and eccentricity could be calmly received. In 1873, Mill's readers were less sanguine; as the *Quarterly Review* said of *On Liberty*: 'In these days of the International, the Commune, Spanish and Irish

[10] As the *Edinburgh Review* put it: 'Contrary to ordinary experience, Mill's passions certainly became more intemperate and intolerant as he advanced in life'. Anon. [Henry Reeve], 'Autobiography', *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal*, 139 (1874), pp. 91–129, at p. 128.

[11] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* (London, 1989), p. 206. [12] Ibid., p. 219; Holyoake, *Mill*, p. 12.

[13] Anon. [Herbert Cowell], 'Liberty, equality, fraternity: Mr. John Stuart Mill', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 114 (1873), pp. 347–62, at p. 348.

Federalism, lack of eccentricity, at least in politics, is not perhaps the malady with which the World, whether Old or New, feels itself most affected.'[14] The third reason for studying the death of 'the quintessential Victorian intellectual', therefore, is that it illuminates broader trends in 1870s intellectual life.[15] In particular, immediate assessments of Mill betray evidence of the relative standing of utilitarianism, Malthusianism, Darwinism, and religious non-belief.

Fourth, scholars should be interested in Mill's posthumous reputation because Mill himself was. His will disapprovingly noted the fashion 'these days' to attempt 'to make money by means of pretended biographies' and indicated a desire to forestall any such treatment of his own life. Although a decision on publication of his autobiography, begun twenty years before, was ostensibly left to Helen Taylor's discretion, Mill's preference is clear in his instruction that, in the event of Taylor's death, William Thomas Thornton should publish within two years of Mill's demise.[16] Moreover, Mill's ardent assertion that Taylor alone was in possession of 'all papers and materials' necessary to write his life story – 'no other person has such knowledge of either my literary or private life as would qualify him or her to write my biography' – indicates his desire to invalidate any account of his life other than his own.[17] The precipitate appearance of Mill's *Autobiography*, therefore, a mere five months after his death, was deliberately peremptory, and partially successful: according to one recent biographer, Mill's *Autobiography* remains 'the greatest obstacle to writing an intellectual biography of Mill'.[18] Where Mill failed was in setting the parameters in which his life and career were to be assessed. Within forty-eight hours of his death, consideration of his reputation had slipped beyond his and his friends' control. By the time the *Autobiography* appeared in October 1873, the most salacious gossip and damaging rumours and insinuations had long since been circulated in the press.

I

It is one of the acute ironies of J. S. Mill that a man who lived most, if not all, of his life celibate was mired in sexual controversy on his death. A double-headed allegation of adultery and promoting birth control placed a question mark against Mill's character, that perennial mid-Victorian concern, in the weeks following his death.[19] The success of the allegations was testimony both to the contempt in which Mill was held by certain sections of Tory 'society' and to the disorganized

[14] Anon., 'Liberty, equality, fraternity: John Stuart Mill', *Quarterly Review*, 135 (1873), pp. 178–201, at p. 182.

[15] N. Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: a biography* (Cambridge, 2004), p. ix.

[16] On the convoluted and sporadic process of writing and re-drafting Mill's autobiography, see A. W. Levi, 'The writing of Mill's autobiography', *Ethics*, 61 (1951), pp. 284–96.

[17] 'The Will of Mr. John Stuart Mill', *Glasgow Herald*, 1 Sept. 1873.

[18] Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill*, p. xiii.

[19] See S. Collini, 'The idea of "character" in Victorian thought', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985), pp. 29–50, and S. Collini, *Public moralists: political thought and intellectual life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991).

ineptitude of his friends. Most initial assessments of Mill published on 10 and 11 May were positive, both in the national and provincial press.[20] The *Examiner* was fulsome in its praise of 'so great a man'; the *Graphic* argued that 'the range, the originality, and the precision' of Mill's writings made him 'one of the foremost thinkers of his time'.[21] The *Northern Echo* thought Mill simply the 'foremost of the modern philosophers', while *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* emphasized the loss '– not only to England – but to the thought-power of the world'.[22] Estimating his place in the pantheon, the *Liverpool Mercury* named Mill 'the ablest exponent of political economy that the world has known since the days of Adam Smith'.[23] Henry Sidgwick, writing in *The Academy*, used a different comparator: Mill was 'the best philosophical writer – if not the greatest philosopher – whom England has produced since Hume: and perhaps the most influential teacher of thought, if we consider the variety as well as the intensity of his influence, that this country has ever seen'.[24] But just as the 'republic of letters was absolutely falling into a Chinese uniformity of opinion', 'a demurrer' stepped forth.[25]

Abraham Hayward was a QC, an essayist, raconteur, and the author of the anonymous obituary of Mill that appeared in *The Times* on 10 May. He had first clashed with Mill in the late 1820s at meetings of the London Debating Society. But while Mill developed a grudging respect for an able Tory opponent, Hayward developed a grudge at having been beaten in debate.[26] In the intervening years, Hayward became a staple of 'London society' dinner parties, lauded for the louche intellect displayed in publications such as his guide to *The art of dining* (1852) and his essay on 'Whist and whist-players', and was celebrated, alongside Macaulay, as 'one of the two best read men in England'.[27] Hayward was far from reconciled to the new democratic age ushered in by the Second Reform Act, preferring to hanker after the lost 'beauty, wit, eloquence, accomplishment, and agreeability' of a politics conducted at the dining tables of the houses of Holland and Lansdowne.[28]

[20] Even *Punch* joined in the eulogies with its poem 'John Stuart Mill' praising Mill's moral character, *Punch, or The London Charivari*, 24 May 1873, pp. 216–17.

[21] 'John Stuart Mill', *Examiner*, 10 May 1873; 'Death of John Stuart Mill', *Graphic*, 10 May 1873.

[22] 'Death of John Stuart Mill', *Northern Echo*, 10 May 1873; 'John Stuart Mill', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 11 May 1873.

[23] 'Mr. John Stuart Mill', *Liverpool Mercury*, 10 May 1873.

[24] H. Sidgwick, 'John Stuart Mill', *The Academy: A Record of Literature, Learning, Science and Art*, 15 May 1873.

[25] Holyoake, *Mill*, p. 14.

[26] A. Chessell, *The life and times of Abraham Hayward, QC. Victorian essayist: 'One of the two best read men in England'* (London, 2009), pp. 23, 25.

[27] A. Hayward, *The art of dining; or, gastronomy and gastronomers* (London, 1852), was based upon two articles written for the *Quarterly Review* in 1835 and 1836. A. Hayward, 'Whist and whist-players' was included in Hayward's *Selected essays, in two volumes* (London, 1878), II, pp. 404–63, but originally appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in April 1869.

[28] Hayward, *Art of dining*, pp. 126–8. Hayward's 1869 eulogy to the late Lady Palmerston, which celebrated her as the last *grande dame*: whose 'memory will endure, indissolubly blended with one of the most brilliant episodes of the social life of England', captured the temperamental differences that predicated Hayward's attitude towards Mill. A. Hayward, *Lady Palmerston: a biographical sketch. Reprinted, by permission, from The 'Times' of September 15, 1869* (June 1872), pp. 20–1.

A conservative hostility to Mill's liberalism was only to be expected, and in his *Times* obituary Hayward dismissed Mill's views on society and government, along with his 'fanciful' views on the rights of women, as 'generally and justly condemned'. Mill was described as 'a kind-hearted man', but 'often a wrong-headed one'; he would be 'remembered as a thinker and reasoner who has largely contributed to the intellectual progress of the age', despite 'all his errors and paradoxes'. This much could be accepted as fair political excoriation. What shocked Mill's friends was the malevolence with which Hayward cast aspersions on Mill's moral character. An allusion to the relationship with Taylor, worded so as to imply an adulterous connection, sat alongside a direct assertion of Mill's participation in a 'foolish scheme for carrying out the Malthusian principle'.[29] Of the two allegations it was the latter – the suggestion that Mill was a birth controller – that gained the most attention and inflicted most damage. Not least because Hayward sealed his case with 'evidence' in the form of a fruity verse from a poem published in *The Times* of 1826, and reproduced in the obituary, in which Mill had fallen 'under the lash' of the satirist Thomas Moore:

> There are two Mr. M_lls, too, whom those who like reading
> Through all that's unreadable, call very clever; –
> And, whereas M_ll senior makes war on good breeding,
> M_ll junior makes war on all *breeding* whatever![30]

Had Mill's sympathizers been able to respond with something equally pithy and amusing they might have been able to minimize the damage. Instead, they reacted in a manner that gave oxygen to Hayward's allegations and misunderstood the changing politics of Mill's alleged Malthusianism.

The story of Mill as a birth controller was not new. Rumours of his involvement in a scheme to circulate advice on contraceptive methods had first appeared in the working-class press in the mid-1820s.[31] Hayward himself had been recounting a version of the alleged incident since at least 1832, when he suggested that J. A. Roebuck – at that time, the radical candidate in Bath – had been one of a group of 'young men' who, ten years earlier, had distributed copies of Richard Carlile's scandalous *What is love?*, by throwing them down into the areas of the houses of the poor. Despite Roebuck's denial, Hayward was still telling the tale in his chambers in 1845 and including references to 'other [unnamed] persons', one of whom was allegedly Mill.[32] The insertion of the adverb is important because,

[29] *Times*, 10 May 1873.

[30] The full poem, entitled *Ode to the goddess Ceres*, was a parody of country gentlemen who favoured the interests of landlords over 'cheap eating'. It appeared in [T. Moore], *Odes upon cash, corn, Catholics, and other matters. Selected from the columns of The Times journal* (London, 1828), pp. 14–17. The collection contained a more direct attack on the Benthamites, and a more explicit allusion to Mill as a birth controller in Moore's 'Ode to the sublime porte'. *Odes*, pp. 83–4.

[31] N. Himes, 'The place of John Stuart Mill and of Robert Owen in the history of English neo-Malthusianism', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 42 (1928), pp. 627–40.

[32] See T. Falconer, *Note upon a paper circulated by Abraham Hayward, Esq., of the Inner Temple, one of Her Majesty's counsel* (London, 1845).

despite his confident assertions, Hayward was retailing innuendo, in which much of his detail was undeniably incorrect. No hard evidence for Mill's supposed apprehension by the police is extant; and if he did circulate birth control propaganda, then it would have been the birth control handbills of Francis Place in 1823 not, as Hayward claimed, Carlile's pamphlet in 1826.[33] What made Hayward's canard incendiary in 1873 was a new conservative hostility to Malthusianism and the inept reaction of Mill's friends.

Birth control had always been a subject beyond the pale of respectability, but the aggravating factor by the 1870s was that Malthusianism, which had begun as a conservative 'antidote to hope' had transmogrified into the chief bugbear of those concerned with democracy and degeneration. This new post-Darwinian context had been announced by one of Hayward's fellow contributors to *Fraser's Magazine*, William Rathbone Greg, in an 1868 article, 'On the failure of "natural selection" in the case of man', which denounced the 'Malthusian' tendency of the middle classes to restrict their breeding.[34] Greg, who shared Hayward's animus to the Second Reform Act, and the creeping democratization it represented, objected to contraception on class grounds: it restricted the reproduction of the middle classes, and led to their being outbred by the workers. Greg expanded his assault, with a direct reference to Mill as a Malthusian, in his book *Enigmas of life* published in 1872.[35] It may have been this work which prompted Hayward to revive, yet again, the alleged incident, which had been noticeably absent at the time of the bitter 1868 electoral contest in which Mill had lost his parliamentary seat to W. H. Smith.[36] That Hayward was aware of the possibilities of a Darwinian assault on Mill's philosophy can also be seen in his mischievous opening to the obituary in which he asserted, *à la* Francis Galton, that Mill and his father offered proof of the hereditary principle.[37]

Mill's sympathizers, by contrast, displayed no awareness of this broader intellectual context and attempted a straightforward defence of Mill's morality. First into the fray was an Anglican clergyman Rev. Stopford Brooke, who used his Sunday night sermon at York Street, St James's to reproach the asperity of *The Times* obituary.[38] The newspaper ignored the censure, but Hayward sent Brooke a more detailed account of Mill's misdemeanours, which he then printed and privately circulated to an unspecified number of 'great persons'. This letter went further than the obituary and charged Mill with attempting to make converts

[33] Place's handbills are reproduced in P. Schwartz, *The new political economy of J. S. Mill* (Durham, NC, 1972), pp. 245–52. The most recent work exploring Mill's attitudes is S. Peart and D. Levy, 'Darwin's unpublished letter at the Bradlaugh–Besant trial: a question of divided expert judgment', *European Journal of Political Economy*, 24 (2008), pp. 343–53.

[34] W. R. Greg, 'On the failure of "natural selection" in the case of man', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 78 (1868), pp. 353–62. [35] W. R. Greg, *The enigmas of life* (London, 1872), pp. 59, 81n.

[36] Reeves, *John Stuart Mill*, pp. 404–8.

[37] F. Galton, *Hereditary genius: an inquiry into its laws and consequences* (London, 1869), p. 179.

[38] Brooke was a liberal Anglican clergyman who would later become chaplain to Queen Victoria, before seceding from the Church of England in favour of Unitarianism.

to 'a theory wholly disconnecting sexual intercourse from sentiment or love: in fact, brutalising it'; and further alleged that, at the commencement of his intimacy with Taylor, Mill had written a series of articles for the *Examiner* arguing for 'unlimited liberty of divorce', to justify his own adulterous connection.[39] It was this private document, rather than *The Times* obituary, that famously led W. E. Gladstone to reconsider his pledge to a memorial fund for Mill.[40]

Worse was to come when William Christie, who had known Mill for over forty years, came to his friend's defence. Christie claimed to be 'deeply impressed with the importance of Mr. Mill's reputation', but he was also driven by a lesser motive: namely personal dislike of the haughty and notoriously combative Hayward. The two men had known each other professionally for thirty years, as well as associating at the Athenaeum, where both were regulars at the whist table. Again, it was not *The Times* obituary, but the sound of Hayward 'spitefully gloating' in the Athenaeum about his success in persuading a M. Van de Weyer to withdraw his name from a committee to honour Mill which provoked Christie. Clearly discomfited by the effortlessly superior Hayward – he repeatedly protested that he was 'not afraid' of his antagonist – Christie allowed personal antagonism to cloud his judgement. He wrote to Hayward challenging the assertions in the letter to Brooke and demanding a list of those to whom Hayward had circulated it. When this was not forthcoming Christie published their exchange of letters, supplemented by a defence of Mill on the questions of birth control and adultery.[41]

This was a twofold mistake. First, Hayward was able to feign outrage that 'careless remarks at a whist-table' could be 'treasured up' by an opponent 'and reproduced in print'; such behaviour, he decried, made the confidence of society impossible and put the 'old laws of honour' at an end. Thus, as Christie conceded, an appreciation of Mill's 'giant intellect' became bound up in the 'miserable little matters' of etiquette at the Athenaeum. Second, Christie made sexual morality central to a defence of Mill's character. Rather than deny the alleged youthful birth control propagandism, Christie opted for an 'admission of what is true, a correct statement of the circumstances, and assertion of conscientiousness and purity' in Mill's motives. Mill's 'indiscretion', he argued, was the 'conscientious act' of a young man motivated by the best of intentions, but misled by the pernicious influence of an overbearing father. In 1823, the younger Mill had been but a 'boy', innocent and ignorant of 'worldly consequences'. Far from

[39] W. D. Christie, *John Stuart Mill and Mr Abraham Hayward, Q.C.: a reply about Mill to a letter to the Rev. Stopford Brooke, privately circulated and actually published* (London, 1873), pp. 8–9. Hayward was not himself necessarily illiberal on questions of marriage, see A. Hayward, *Remarks on the law regarding marriage with the sister of a deceased wife* (London, 1845), in which he developed a pragmatic and humane argument against scriptural objections and, what he saw as, unwarranted prudery.

[40] J. Morley, *The life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 3 vols. (London, 1903), II, pp. 543–4.

[41] Christie, *Mill and Hayward*, pp. 4–8, 30, 36.

Hayward's insinuations, Mill's 'life was a virgin's': 'he was entirely innocent of sexual vice'.[42]

It is hard to know what was worse: Hayward's allegation or Christie's defence. According to the latter, Mill was guilty as charged, but acted with the best possible intentions. His judgement, that is, had been faulty, but this was no more than a youthful aberration attributable to the bad influence of James Mill and his Benthamite associates. Thus Mill's reputation was saved– though not his judgement – by damning the utilitarian school from which he had emerged and of which, despite his intellectual development, he remained the enduring representative. Moreover, by constructing a defence based on the assertion that he had acted incorrectly, albeit from good motives, it became necessary constantly to assert – rather than assume – Mill's personal morality. Speculating on the date at which a philosopher lost his virginity was hardly the best way to celebrate his intellectual legacy, but was necessary to counter Hayward's suggestion of adultery. Unfortunately, this accusation was not easily dismissed.

Christie pointed out that the articles on divorce, to which Hayward referred, had never been written, Mill's offer having been declined by the *Examiner*'s then editor Albany Fonblanque. He was also able to demonstrate that there were no grounds, as Hayward had mischievously implied, to suggest that Mill favoured 'unlimited liberty of divorce', as opposed to regarding wedlock as sacrosanct until the marriage was annulled.[43] A decisive rebuttal of the adultery allegation, however, was impossible, and even to attempt it merely gave credence to the notion that something untoward might have occurred. For all that he fulminated about 'the foulest charge ever made by the foulest slanderer against a man of Mr. Mill's fame', it was impossible to prove a negative, and Christie was reduced to posing rhetorical questions – 'Was Mr. Mill not a man in whom a pure friendship with a married woman was eminently likely? Does Mr. Hayward know, and can he prove the contrary?' – and countering Hayward's salacious gossip with non-salacious gossip of his own.[44]

'Slander of a filthy nature', Christie conceded, 'generally leaves a stain', but, in Mill's case, the stain was deepened by defensive remarks about his moral and sexual probity, which could not but help (temporarily at least) to diminish an understanding of his intellectual worth. Christie did Mill a grave disservice. His assertion that Mill would have wanted Hayward's allegations 'replied to' was wide of the mark.[45] Mill himself eschewed the opportunity to answer Hayward in both 1832 and 1845; he failed to address the issue in *Autobiography*; and appears

[42] Ibid., pp. 32, 34, 9–12, 19.

[43] Ibid., pp. 13–19.

[44] 'All Mr. Mill's friends were perfectly convinced of his purity. I can tell of a reunion of some dozen of his friends of both sexes, freely discussing the matter: there was no difference of opinion among them; one gentleman, a close friend from boyhood and his close friend until death, dwelt with fervour on Mr. Mill's whole life of purity, the moral enthusiasm of his nature, and its fearlessness and simplicity. All agreed. One lively lady of well-known powers of conversation made an amusing diversion, saying, "Yes, we know it is Platonic, but that almost makes it worse. I do hate these Platonic attachments"', Christie, *Mill and Hayward*, p. 17.

[45] Ibid., pp. 5, 27.

never to have spoken about birth control with even his closest confidants: not even Christie claimed to have heard an account direct from Mill. A recent biographer was surely closer to the mark in commenting that 'Mill shared the view that most public discussions of sexuality were inevitably degrading' and he would, quite correctly, have regarded his own reputation as harmed by much of the discussion that followed his death.[46] In short, Christie's reply served only to retail the 'pigmy criticisms' and accusations in Hayward's 'horrible letter' to a wider audience, and did nothing to clear his name.[47]

II

In many ways, the Hayward–Christie spat was, as Hayward might have characterized it, a spicy hors d'œuvre to the more substantial controversies in which Mill's name became engulfed during the summer of 1873. Mill's friends, as the *Manchester Guardian* put it, were 'determined to have a free fight, not exactly over the grave, but over his cenotaph or memorial'.[48] The occasion was a dispute about membership of the Mill Memorial Committee, formed soon after his death to raise a subscription with which to honour Mill's memory; the underlying cause was an unresolved antagonism between middle- and working-class radical admirers of Mill. Headed by Thornton and Arthur Arnold, the committee had been constituted in secret with the express 'determination that none of the unpopular exponents of thought (*i.e.*, the Radicals) who might have presented themselves at a meeting, should be allowed to assist, in inaugurating the movement, lest popular peers and celebrities should take offence, and withhold their concurrence'.[49] Arnold and Thornton were successful in gaining generous subscriptions from the wealthy across the political spectrum including, to the amazement and disgust of some in the conservative press, the earl of Derby and the marquis of Salisbury.[50] The withdrawal of Gladstone, after receiving Hayward's letter, did not precipitate any significant exodus, and the committee raised sufficient money to commission J. H. Foley to produce a bronze statue of Mill, destined for a site at the western end of the Victoria Embankment, and, it was proposed, to fund scholarships in political and mental science, open to both sexes.[51]

The committee's success, however, came at the price of alienating Mill's radical and working-class admirers, and turning what should have been a

[46] Calpaldi, *Mill*, p. 116.

[47] Christie, *Mill and Hayward*, p. 30. Alexander Bain still felt obliged to rebut the birth control insinuations nine years later. See A. Bain, *John Stuart Mill: a criticism with personal recollections* (London, 1882), pp. 89–90.

[48] *Manchester Guardian*, 5 June 1873.

[49] 'The "Mill" Memorial', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 8 June 1873.

[50] The *Church Herald* asked 'what can the Earl of Derby and, above all, the Marquis of Salisbury, possibly be thinking about'? *Church Herald*, 21 May 1873. A list of subscribers appeared in *The Times*, 3 June 1873.

[51] *Graphic*, 29 Nov. 1873; *Belfast News-letter*, 20 Dec. 1873; 'The JSM Memorial', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 July 1873; 'Scraps', *Graphic*, 5 July 1873.

straightforward celebration into an unseemly dispute about openness and social inclusiveness. Thornton and Arnold's machinations, Captain Maxse told *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, were unworthy of Mill and 'a slight upon the memory of the illustrious dead'.[52] J. Charles Cox, writing in the *Examiner* on 7 June, made similar complaints: 'A committee called for the purpose of honouring the memory of such a man as Mr. John Stuart Mill should surely be above suspicion; and when that committee refuses to say how or by whom it was selected, the rumours of political jobbery cannot fail to gain credence.'[53] Maxse mooted 'The Mill Memorial Institute' as a competitor committee, 'free from the ties of party or the patronage of condescending peers',[54] but this particular ignominy was narrowly avoided. Cox's view, that 'the true adherents and reverent disciples of Mr. Mill should not attempt any counter-declaration, or try to vie with success-worshippers in the making of party-capital out of a dead man's grave', won the day.[55]

Disagreements over the composition of the committee were symptomatic of a deeper divergence among Mill's many admirers. In Holyoake's view, two distinct sets could be identified. On one side were those who simply wished to honour the power of Mill's thought; on the other, were those who cared more '*for what he thought*'.[56] This dichotomy was itself a simplification: the former could be sub-divided into those broadly sympathetic to his liberal convictions and those prepared to acknowledge Mill's intellectual ascendancy, regardless of the content of his thought. Those who honoured Mill '*for what he thought*', were drawn from a very different social group: these were Mill's working-class admirers. Some historians have argued, especially in relation to land reform, that Mill deliberately cultivated a radical working-class following in order to moderate their politics.[57] If this was so, then in their determination to exclude workingmen co-operators, secularists, and land reformers from their committee, Arnold and Thornton undid his work. Left to their own devices, this group moved with alacrity to appropriate Mill's mantle and radicalize his memory.

Leading the way were Holyoake and Mansfield Marston who, in the summer of 1873, both produced sketches of Mill's life, which stressed his 'claims upon the people as a philanthropist and friend'.[58] Both works, that is, were self-consciously set upon emphasizing Mill's radical credentials:

> His outspokenness on the the [sic] Land, [sic] Question, on the Rights of Women, on the Jamaica massacre, on the right of combination amongst workmen, on the right of labour to

[52] *Lloyd's Weekly*, 8 June 1873.
[53] 'The Mill Memorial Committee', *Examiner*, 7 June 1873.
[54] 'The Mill Memorial Committee', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 June 1873.
[55] *Lloyd's Weekly*, 8 June 1873.
[56] Holyoake, *Mill*, p. 11.
[57] G. Claeys, 'Justice, independence, and industrial democracy: the development of John Stuart Mill''s view of socialism', *Journal of Politics*, 49 (1987), pp. 122–47, at p. 141.
[58] 'The Mill Memorial Committee', *Examiner*, 7 June 1873; Holyoake, *Mill*, pp. 11–12, at p. 11n; M. Marston *The life of John Stuart Mill, politician and philosopher, critic and metaphysician, with a record of his claims upon the regards of the people as a philanthropist and friend* (London, 1873), p. 14.

be directly represented by its own chosen advocates in Parliament, has created something like a panic among the believers in the comfortable doctrine, to them, that capital should rule the roast [sic] and make all things pleasant to itself.[59]

The typographical errors in Marston's text were a by-product of its cheap and hasty production; the pamphlet sold for a penny. Marston had written at least five other biographical sketches – including studies of the Chartist Ernest Jones, 'poet, politician and patriot', and Lord Palmerston, 'the Tory in disguise' – each of which betrayed his own radical politics.[60] What gave his sketch of Mill's life added credibility was that Marston claimed to have arrived in Avignon just hours before Mill's death and to have been one of the five who attended his funeral.[61] Holyoake's sketch could not equal such poignant recollections, but he too dwelt on Mill's radical politics. There was, said Holyoake, no harm in those who wanted to erect a statue, but if Mill came back to earth, he would not visit it.[62] The view of Mill's working-class admirers was that 'Albert-memorialising' could be left to the 'titled and untitled flunkies'; the 'truest memorial' to Mill lay in promoting cheap editions of his works or subscribing to the Land Tenure Reform Association.[63]

Holyoake also took a distinct line to Christie and Mill's middle-class admirers on the question of birth control, opting for outright denial. Immersed as he was in the radical tradition, he dismissed Hayward's account as a fabulous farrago. Hayward, he claimed, had confused the views of Francis Place with those of Mill. The weakness in Holyoake's defence was that the crucial piece of evidence – a letter he claimed to have once received from Mill outlining his consistent opposition to birth control – had been lost.[64] Marston, meanwhile, refrained from directly commenting but, rather bizarrely, reproduced Moore's verse from *The Times*, before implying that it was all James Mill's fault. This, of course, echoed Christie, as did Marston's assertion – laced with double entendre – that all Mill's 'friends speak of his *virgin* purity of soul'.[65] But in Marston, character was less important than politics.

The contrary was true of the *Twelve sketches* of Mill collated by H. R. Fox Bourne as a memorial. In contrast to the determination of Holyoake and Marston to present Mill primarily as a practical politician, the *Sketches* temporized his politics with a broader appreciation of his virtues, and assertions of his moral probity. As with the Memorial Committee, working-class and radical

[59] Marston, *Life of Mill*, p. 3.

[60] The extent of Marston's literary output is not easy to verify. The title page of his *Life of Mill* refers to him as the 'author of The Lives of "Lord Palmerston," "Louis Napoleon," "Bulwer Lytton," & c'. His publisher F. Farrah, of The Strand, also listed *The true life and crimes of Napoleon III*; *life and labours of Ernest Jones, poet, politician, and patriot*; *life of Lord Brougham*; and *Life of Lord Palmerston, the Tory in disguise, the false friend of Poland, the betrayer of Hungary, the deadly opponent of Circassia, the arch-foe of the Roman Republic, and the admirer of Louis Napoleon.* But only a life of Lytton, attributed to a Mansfield *Marsdon*, appears in the British Library Catalogue.

[61] Marston, *Life of Mill*, pp. 12–14.

[62] Holyoake, *Mill*, p. 11n.

[63] 'The Mill Memorial Committee', *Examiner*, 7 June 1873.

[64] Holyoake, *Mill*, pp. 17–26.

[65] Emphasis added. Marston, *Life of Mill*, p. 13.

contributors were absent, and it was left to established associates to explore the many sides of Mill's life and work, from his writings on logic and political economy, to his enthusiasm for botany. None of the essays directly addressed Hayward's allegations, but many protested the purity of Mill's character.[66] Millicent Garrett Fawcett, for example, prefaced her chapter on Mill's 'Influence as a practical politician' with the claim that it was 'almost impossible to imagine that any one could be so insensible to the high morality of Mr. Mill's character as to suggest to him any course of conduct that was not entirely upright or consistent'.[67]

Herbert Spencer was more direct. His chapter on Mill's 'Moral character' began by observing the necessity of saying something on this subject 'because, where better things might have been expected, there has been, not only a grudging recognition of intellectual rank, but a marked blindness to those fine traits of character, which, in the valuation of men, must go for more than superiority of intelligence'. By way of a corrective, Spencer provided a thinly veiled phrenological reading from which he ascertained that 'Mill's general characteristic, emotionally considered, was an unusual predominance of the higher sentiments, – a predominance which tended, perhaps, both in theory and practice, to subordinate the lower nature unduly.' Having thus discounted any suggestion of sexual impropriety, it remained for Spencer obliquely to excuse Mill's dalliance with birth control in the same terms as Christie:

> A generosity that might be called romantic was obviously the feeling prompting sundry of those courses of action which have been commented upon as errors. And nothing like a true conception of him can be formed, unless, along with dissent from them, there goes recognition of the fact that they resulted from the eagerness of a noble nature impatient to rectify injustice and to further human welfare.[68]

Implicit in this defence, as already noted, was a criticism of 1820s utilitarians in general, and of James Mill in particular. This would have been a convenient tactic whenever Mill had died. The elder Mill, his supposed failings immortalized in a series of satirical portraits, including Dickens's Gradgrind, remained a hate figure for at least forty years after his death.[69] What gave the argument particular puissance in 1873 was the recent publication of *The personal life of George Grote* by his wife.[70] Reviewed extensively in the period between Mill's death and the publication of his *Autobiography*, this book occasioned a new wave of attacks on

[66] Fox Bourne, 'Sketch', in Fox Bourne et al., *Twelve sketches*, pp. 5–29, at p. 12.

[67] M. Garrett Fawcett, 'His influence as a practical politician', in Fox Bourne et al., *Twelve sketches*, pp. 81–7, at p. 86.

[68] H. Spencer, 'His moral character', in Fox Bourne et al., *Twelve sketches*, pp. 38–42.

[69] Disraeli, in his third novel, *The young duke* (1831), made reference to a 'young First Principles', the writer of an article on India. In this there was an element of literary licence in a wilful mixing of Mill and his father, who remained a controversial figure long after his son had been accepted as a mainstream thinker. *Liverpool Echo*, 'Mr. John Stuart Mill', 10 May 1873.

[70] Mrs [Harriet] Grote, *The personal life of George Grote: compiled from family documents, private memoranda, and original letters to and from various friends* (London, 1873).

Benthamism, which inevitably influenced assessments of the younger Mill. Tory periodicals lost no time in attacking a favourite target. The *Quarterly Review* lauded Mrs Grote's 'courage and unflinching truthfulness' in showing how her husband's 'gentle and generous nature was warped and distorted by James Mill's fanatic antipathy against the political and religious institutions of his country'.[71] The *Quarterly* was joined by *Blackwood's* in congratulating Grote on identifying 'the capital defect in James Mill's character' – 'his positive fanaticism' – before falling under the pernicious influence of an 'inexorable teacher with so much persuasive power'. All that was good about Grote, the *Quarterly* argued, represented the triumph of his natural disposition against the 'destructive' teaching of the utilitarians. James Mill, it noted, was 'a harsh husband and a stern father'.[72] Thus was the ground set for many of the negative assessments of the father–son relationship that would follow the publication of Mill's *Autobiography*.

The other book extensively reviewed in this period, which influenced posthumous assessments of Mill, was James Fitzjames Stephen's *Liberty, equality, fraternity*. Published in March 1873, just weeks before Mill's death, Stephen offered a sustained critique of Mill's argument for individual freedom in *On liberty*, and a positive argument for law and coercion as the means to protect morality and society. Arguably the attention Stephen's work received was a by-product of Mill's death; certainly, interest in the book soon faded, and it remained out of print for over a century after 1874.[73] Millicent Garret Fawcett and Lydia Becker both replied to Stephen's strictures on the 'woman question'; Becker, in particular, stridently defended Mill's *Subjection of women*.[74] Similarly, John Morley, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* in June 1873, mounted an impassioned defence of *On liberty*.[75] Not all reviewers, however, were interested in purely philosophical argument. The *Quarterly* considered Mill's 'moral courage', before concluding that he was motivated by 'no other motive than fidelity to honest conviction', albeit a mistaken one.[76]

Blackwood's was not so kind. It opened its review of Stephen by noting that a Calcutta newspaper had reassured its readers 'that there was no truth in the report that the sudden death of Mr Mill had been occasioned by a perusal of Mr Stephen's book, and his consequent remorse for having inundated society with principles and theories which stood refuted and denounced before the world'. Instant death, the reviewer implied, would have been an appropriate

[71] Anon., 'George Grote', *Quarterly Review*, 135 (1873), pp. 98–137, at p. 106.

[72] Anon., 'Life of George Grote', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 113 (1873), p. 380; Anon., 'Grote', *Quarterly Review*, pp. 98, 105, 106.

[73] J. F. Stephen, *Liberty, equality, fraternity; and three brief essays* (Chicago, IL, 1991).

[74] See also M. Garrett Fawcett, *Mr. Fitzjames Stephen on the position of women* (London, 1873), and L. W. Becker, *Liberty, equality, fraternity: a reply to Mr. Fitzjames Stephen's strictures on Mr. J. S. Mill's Subjection of women* (London, 1874).

[75] J. Morley, 'Mr. Mill's doctrine of liberty', *Fortnightly Review*, 80 (1873), pp. 234–56.

[76] Anon., 'Liberty, equality, fraternity: John Stuart Mill', *Quarterly Review*, 135 (1873), pp. 178–201, at p. 179.

response from Mill, but his ego – 'the impenetrable armour of self-confidence and disdain which sustain and benefit an advanced philosopher' – was too great for 'self-distrust or hesitation' to have ever entered his mind. *On liberty* and the *Subjection*, the reviewer maintained, rested on a mistaken view of human nature, which derived from Mill's own life experiences. The personal, that is, was both political and philosophical and for that reason Mill's forthcoming *Autobiography* was keenly anticipated: no intellect 'wanders very far from the domains of personal experience' and it was the 'exceptional nature' of Mill's experiences which rendered his arguments 'utterly indefensible'.[77]

III

'I met rather a noted alienist physician at dinner the other night', wrote a correspondent to the *Leeds Mercury* in November 1873, 'and he informed me that no one, after reading "John Stuart Mill's Autobiography" can have the least doubt that the great man laboured under mental disease.'[78] Accusations of madness were not the norm in reactions to Mill's self-constructed memorial, but there was a kernel of truth in Hayward's cruel judgement, published the following month, that no single event did more to damage Mill's reputation than his death, except perhaps the publication of his *Autobiography*.[79] Reviews of the book provided a fresh occasion for Mill's 'prejudicial enemies' 'to be even more vituperative than was seemly in an obituary'.[80] Hayward, in particular, writing in *Fraser's Magazine*, exploited the opportunity to vindicate his *Times* obituary, revel in its impact, and flesh out the details of Mill's Malthusianism. But it was less the hostility of this 'scandalously unfair' piece than the lack of enthusiasm of those who might have been sympathetic that is most revealing in the *Autobiography*'s reception.[81] Fox Bourne, writing in the *Examiner*, thought it 'an admirable sequel' to Mill's other books, but such praise was scarce.[82] The *British Quarterly* judged 'it would have been well had the Autobiography never been written'.[83] The *Pall Mall Gazette* argued that 'Mr. Mill's best friends ought to regret its publication', and noted that, even among those friends, there was 'one expression which meets with general concurrence. The book is "disappointing".'[84] Morley would not acknowledge disappointment, but he conceded, in the *Fortnightly Review*, that some readers would find the *Autobiography* 'jejune and dreary'; regret the absence of 'melodramatic incidents', 'the relish of humour or the occasional relief of

[77] Anon. [Cowell], 'Liberty, equality, fraternity', *Blackwood's*, pp. 347, 354, 352, 358.
[78] 'Special correspondence', *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Nov. 1873.
[79] Anon. [A. Hayward], 'John Stuart Mill', *Fraser's Magazine*, 8 (1873,) pp. 663–81, at p. 664.
[80] 'The lessons of Mr. Mill's autobiography', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1873; Capaldi, *Mill*, p. 363.
[81] Anon. [J. Hare], 'John Stuart Mill', *Westminster Review*, 45 (1874), pp. 122–59, at pp. 157–8n; 'Special correspondence', *Leeds Mercury*, 30 Dec. 1873.
[82] *Examiner*, 3 Jan. 1874.
[83] *British Quarterly* quoted in the *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan. 1874.
[84] 'Mr. Mill's autobiography', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 Nov. 1873; 'The lessons of Mill's autobiography', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1873.

irony'; and complain of the lack of 'literary grandeur' and 'artistic variety' in Mill's prose.[85]

Criticism of Mill's style was often proxy for criticism of his character. The austere prose and high-minded content of the text was manna to those who dismissed Mill as a desiccated calculating machine – the autobiography of a steam-engine Carlyle was to call it – and no help to Mill's friends seeking to soften harsh assessments by stressing his humanitarianism.[86] 'We can find no traces of the glowing philanthropy, the warm expansive nature, of which we have heard so much', mocked Hayward.[87] Validation as much as valediction had driven the writing of the autobiography, with Mill determined to be his own historian, honour his debts, and 'stop the mouths of enemies hereafter'.[88] This last uncharacteristically crude rubric had been expressed in a letter to Taylor, at the beginning of the writing process in 1854. In the intervening years, Mill had substantially revised or added to the text on at least three occasions but his ambition remained unchanged. The book, as published, was a history of Mill's mental development, to the almost complete exclusion of any sense of family relations or other interests. As such, it gave succour to his enemies' criticisms, compounded his friends' difficulties, and served to reinforce an extant critique of his character.

By its very existence, the *Autobiography* encouraged a blurring of the personal and the political. It focused attention on Mill's alleged egotism and exceptionalism – the uniqueness of his upbringing, which *Blackwood's* had already found at the root of his social prescriptions – and invited judgement on his personal relationships which tended to diminish an appreciation of Mill's intellectual standing. Charges of egotism are an inevitable occupational hazard for the autobiographer, and Mill's morbid introspection was said to reveal 'a great deal of calm and concentrated although unconscious egotism'.[89] Morley in the *Fortnightly* and John Hare in the *Westminster Review* objected that it was absurd to make such a complaint against a man noteworthy for his 'quality of self-effacement'.[90] But, as the *Daily News* acknowledged, Mill's 'candid self-examination', combined with his 'utter absence of affectation and self-consciousness' were easily mistaken for 'frank egotism'.[91] For the *British Quarterly* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Mill's lack of self-understanding, rather than egotism per se, was the book's central failing. All autobiography, the *Gazette* acknowledged, was partial, but it was Mill's peculiar peccadillo to have simultaneously revealed too much while, 'more commonly', leaving too many enigmas unresolved. The paradox, the *Gazette* hazarded, was resolved by the fact that 'Mill's real internal life was a

[85] J. Morley, 'John Stuart Mill', *Fortnightly Review*, 15 (1874), pp. 1–20, at p. 16, pp. 3–4.
[86] Quoted in P. F. Bicknell, 'John Stuart Mill', *Popular Science Monthly*, Nov. 1906, pp. 451–7, at p. 452.
[87] [Hayward], 'John Stuart Mill', *Fraser's Magazine*, p. 664.
[88] Mill to Harriet Taylor, 23 Jan. 1854, in F. E. Mineka and D. N. Lindley, eds., *The later letters of John Stuart Mill* (4 vols., Toronto, 1972–2005), I, pp. 137–9, letter 120.
[89] [Hayward], 'John Stuart Mill', *Fraser's Magazine*, p. 664.
[90] Morley, 'Mill', *Fortnightly Review*, 7; [Hare], 'John Stuart Mill', *Westminster Review*, p. 157.
[91] 'Mr. Mill's autobiography', *Daily News*, 18 Oct. 1873.

riddle to himself no less than to others'.[92] He had, that is, failed to present a conclusive account: the 'life of John Stuart Mill', the *British Quarterly* concurred, 'still remains to be written'.[93]

Two areas where Mill had given most detail, however, were sources of the greatest dissatisfaction, to his friends as much as to his enemies. For Tory reviewers, the inevitable focus in the early chapters on James Mill was an invitation to renew assault on a figure they considered 'the most unpractical and impracticable of men'. Hayward's acerbic depiction of a father–son relationship redolent of the scene in 'which the monstrous creation of Frankenstein reproaches his creator with having formed him in a manner to unfit him for happiness and utility' found an echo in other reviewers.[94] But where Hayward seethed, the *Daily News* and *Pall Mall Gazette* sympathized and, focusing on Mill's account of a childhood 'out of which all brightness and cheer were driven in an inexorable manufactory of mind', the *British Quarterly* thought it 'one of the saddest books ever published'.[95] By contrast, *Punch* found humour in Mill's 'terrible education', with a series of weak puns on the family surname, which included reference to the 'prodigious grinding' of the son's genius and culminated in the joke that when Mrs Mill gave birth she brought 'grist to the mill'.[96] Morley had no time for such flippancy, but neither was he prepared to endorse the *Autobiography*'s attempt to honour the elder Mill. He openly disputed Mill's assertion of his father's intellectual pre-eminence, fearing that some would regard James Mill as 'the most interesting figure in the book'. To rescue the son from the shadow of the father, Morley continued Christie's tactic of defending John by attacking James Mill. On three occasions in his twenty-page review, Morley argued that J. S. Mill's intellect was wider and more adaptable, his concept of happiness broader, and his strength 'more really impressive' than that of his father.[97]

Mill was no more successful with his homage to 'the one to whom most of all is due', Taylor.[98] Feigned outrage at Mill's 'Platonic love adventures' was a staple of the hostile reviews.[99] Hayward mocked Mill's protestations of the 'Platonic nature of this attachment' – a defence, it noted, that would not stand up in a divorce court – and took umbrage at Mill's 'degrading view of the marriage vow' which required a wife merely to be chaste while lavishing 'her best affections on a male friend'. Mill's ridiculous idolization of Taylor was confirmation of his ego: Mill was guilty of, 'Narcissus-like', 'admiring the reflected image of his own mind in hers'.[100] Mill's paeans of praise were an embarrassment even to his friends: the *Fortnightly* avoided mentioning Taylor at all, despite her centrality to Mill's

[92] 'Lessons', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1873.
[93] *British Quarterly* quoted in *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan. 1874.
[94] [Hayward], 'John Stuart Mill', *Fraser's Magazine*, pp. 671, 664.
[95] *British Quarterly* quoted in *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Jan. 1874.
[96] 'Mill and Miller', *Punch, or The London Charivari*, 29 Nov. 1873.
[97] Morley, 'Mill', *Fortnightly Review*, pp. 2, 8, 17.
[98] Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 25.
[99] 'Magazines', *Graphic*, 13 Dec. 1873.
[100] [Hayward], 'John Stuart Mill', *Fraser's Magazine*, pp. 673, 674, 675.

account; while the *Westminster* restricted itself to an acknowledgement that some would see in his praise of Taylor a character flaw of sentimentality and weakness.[101] The *Pall Mall Gazette* described the last part of the *Autobiography*, as 'a kind of hymn' to Taylor who, the *Daily News* noted, many would doubt possessed 'that perfect combination of genius and goodness, of heart and brain' which Mill described. Some, the paper noted, would say that Mill had 'yielded his critical judgement somewhat too much to the control of his emotions and affections' but, at the very least, Harriet Taylor must have been a woman of 'uncommon character' to 'so completely conquer the approval and admiration of such a man'.[102] *Punch* remained mercifully silent about Mill's alleged adultery, but the *Manchester Times* could not resist extracting some gentle humour by imagining Taylor's proposal.

'I wish I had your head, Mr. Mill,' remarked the lady, on an occasion when that gentleman had solved for her a knotty point. 'And I wish I had your heart,' replied Mr. Mill. 'Well,' said the lady, 'since your head and my heart agree so well, I am willing that we should go into partnership.'[103]

IV

The publication of Mill's *Autobiography* briefly threatened, but ultimately failed to ignite, a controversy about Mill's lack of religion. In place of the anguished apostasy of many contemporary autobiographies, Mill merely noted, in a matter-of-fact tone, that he was raised without religion.[104] This was seized on by a number of preachers as a pretext to pontificate on the importance of a religious home life. The Rev. H. T. Howowat, in his 1873 review of the year in the *Liverpool Mercury*, claimed that a perusal of Mill's 'extraordinary but melancholy book' reinforced the necessity of personal and family religious life, and attributed Mill's 'mental crisis' to his father having educated his son without Christ.[105] James Mill was also in the sights of Cardinal Cullen when, at a meeting of the Catholic Union in Dublin in May 1874, he referred to Mill's *Autobiography* for evidence of how 'bad books' supplied by a father had made the son an infidel.[106] Such remarks, however, were mild when set against the judgement made by the *Church Herald* in the days after Mill's death.

Mr J. Stuart Mill, which has just gone to his account, would have been a remarkable writer of English, if his innate self-consciousness and abounding self-confidence had not made him a notorious literary prig. His 'philosophy' so-called, was thoroughly anti-Christian;

[101] [Hare], 'John Stuart Mill', *Westminster Review*, p. 157.
[102] 'Mr. Mill's autobiography', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 Nov. 1873; 'Mr. Mill's autobiography', *Daily News*.
[103] 'A fair exchange', *Manchester Times*, 11 Apr. 1874.
[104] Mill, as he puts it in chapter II, was 'brought up without any religious belief, in the ordinary acceptation of the term'.
[105] 'The Rev. H. T. Howowat on "the past year"', *Liverpool Mercury*, 29 Dec. 1873.
[106] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 May 1874.

his sentiments daringly mischievous and outrageously wild. As a Member of Parliament he was a signal failure, and his insolence to, and contempt for, the great Conservative party was well known. His death is no loss to anybody, for he was a rank but amiable infidel, and a most dangerous person. The sooner those 'lights of thought', who agree with him, go to the same place, the better it will be for both Church and State.[107]

But while such comments excited censure from the liberal press, they failed to spark any sustained controversy or outrage over Mill's infidelity.[108]

Hayward drew attention to Mill's lack of belief in his *Times* obituary and fleshed out the accusation in his subsequent letter, which accused Mill of being 'a sceptic of common order' and 'the apostle of the philosophy' of materialism. But, as the *Church Herald* complained, even in the religious press, only the *Record* – which thought Mill a 'disciple of David Hume and the madman Comte' – possessed 'the manliness' to join in the *Herald*'s condemnation of the 'nasty infidel philosopher'.[109] The dog of infidelity, that is, barked, but few paid it any heed. The most remarkable feature of the religious assaults on Mill is their lack of resonance. Accusations of unbelief failed to impinge, to any great extent, on assessments of Mill in the year after his death. This was not due to any 'policy of concealment' on Mill's part. Linda Raeder has accused Mill of a lack of integrity in being 'less than candid in expressing his own true views', but this is misleading.[110] In the works published during his lifetime Mill certainly was careful to avoid explicit statements of his religious views. Even in private discussion, according to Alfred Russel Wallace, Mill refused to countenance theological debate.[111] But circumspection is not the same as deceit, and interested parties were able to discern Mill's non-belief. Even before the *Autobiography*'s publication, and later the *Three essays on religion* in 1874, both friends and enemies were well aware that Mill's 'mind was an absolute blank' in terms of positive doctrine.[112] This was generally seen as a cause for regret, but not condemnation.

Whereas Christie had tied himself in knots defending Mill from birth control and adultery allegations, he simply shrugged his shoulders at Hayward's charge of infidelity. Mill's materialism, he said, was well known and had even been mocked in *Blackwood's* in 1866, but it was not 'of the least consequence'; Mill's non-belief was no different to that of others in 'society', including Grote, whom Hayward had been happy to honour.[113] Indeed, it was a clergyman, Brooke, who had been the first to object to Hayward's obituary. Brooke was, as the *Record* noted disapprovingly, 'ultra broad in his preaching', but he was representative in regarding

[107] *Church Herald*, 14 May 1873.

[108] See, for example, *Figaro. A political, literary, and critical journal*, 24 May 1873.

[109] 'The late Mr J. S. Mill', *Record*, 19 May 1873; 'The Mill testimonial', *Church Herald*, 25 June 1873.

[110] L. C. Raeder, *John Stuart Mill and the religion of humanity* (Columbia, MS, 2002), pp. 19, 55. Raeder was, in part, influenced by the similar, and equally mistaken, argument made by Joseph Hamburger in chapter 4, 'Candor or concealment', of J. Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on liberty and control* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), pp.55–85.

[111] A. R. Wallace, *My life: a record of events and opinions* (2 vols., London, 1905), II, pp. 336–7; Raeder, *John Stuart Mill*, pp. 58–9.

[112] Quoted in Christie, *Mill and Hayward*, p. 24.

[113] Ibid., p. 22.

Mill as essentially Christian.[114] This type of formulation was echoed in the *Nonconformist*, the *Spectator*, and in the Baptist journal, *The Freeman*, which each praised Mill. They regretted Mill's 'failure to see the glory of the Gospel', but admired him as a follower of 'truth' and conscience.[115] The 'foundations' of Mill's philosophy and ethics were, according to the *Nonconformist*, to be rejected, but in the 'superstructure' there was much to be admired.[116] The *Freeman* even claimed that some passages in Mill's *Examination of Hamilton* 'have about them the ring of a realistic faith in God', and commended his *Logic* for the 'keen and effective exposure of the fallacy running through Mr. Hume's notorious argument against the credibility of miracles'.[117] This Christian conciliation with – or perhaps appropriation of – Mill, found an apotheosis in a poem by Joseph John Murray, published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, which began:

> My fellow-Christian! though thy heart,
> Perhaps, the name would have denied.

And predicted that Mill would ascend to heaven:

> To see God thou didst not see,
> The Christ thou didst not recognise.[118]

Mill's non-belief was, as Christie implied, a non-issue in respectable society. Gladstone's designation of Mill as 'the Saint of Rationalism' was indicative of the extent to which Mill's brand of non-belief – pious, intellectual non-belief – had long been acceptable among the intelligensia. Non-belief per se, that is, was perfectly permissible if combined with an enduring Christian morality and an avoidance of explicit social and political connotations. It was only Mill's expressions of sympathy for more disreputable figures, such as Charles Bradlaugh and George Ogder, that had proved controversial in 1868, rather than his own lack of religion.[119] In the wake of his death, as seen, Mill's more radical and working-class supporters were overwhelmingly sidelined and, concomitantly, his secularist celebrants, such as Holyoake, were swamped by Christians honouring the memory of a (Christian) moralist, unencumbered with scripture. The mindset that Nietzsche was to condemn as peculiarly English, of shedding Christian theology whilst clinging to Christian morality, was thus perfectly illustrated in the months following Mill's death.

[114] *Record*, 2 June 1873.

[115] Christie, *Mill and Hayward*, pp. 25–6.

[116] 'John Stuart Mill', *Nonconformist*, 14 May 1873.

[117] *The Freeman: A Baptist Record, and Journal of Religion, Literature, Social Science, and Politics*, 16 May 1873.

[118] J. J. Murray, 'John Stuart Mill', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 28 (1873), pp. 348–9. The poem drew favourable comment in the provincial press, which often dwelt upon its religious depiction of Mill. Murray praised Mill for his 'love of truth' and questioned his non-belief. See, for example, *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 9 Aug. 1873; *Derby Mercury*, 6 Aug. 1873; *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Aug. 1873.

[119] H. Maxwell, *Life and times of the right honourable William Henry Smith, M.P.* (2 vols., London, 1893), I, p. 141.

V

A chance encounter on a North Wales footpath in the summer of 1869 might have provided a portent for posthumous assessments of Mill. Holidaying in Caerdeon, during a short break from writing his *Descent of man*, Charles Darwin was walking a mountain path clothed with purple heather, when a woman's voice called out to him. Some sixty feet below stood the social reformer Frances Power Cobbe. There ensued a bellowed exchange concerning the merits of Mill's recently published *Subjection of women*. Darwin, Cobbe wrote to a friend, was 'greatly excited' about the book, but suggested Mill 'could learn some things from physical science', in particular, the importance of inheritance and the struggle for existence. The exchange can, as Cobbe's latest biographer implies, be read as a metaphor for the 'serious conflict' about to ensue between Darwin's biological determinism and Mill's environmentalism.[120] Darwinism, as Mill himself noted in a review of the *Descent*, was set to claim a 'universal empire', which would stretch into politics and philosophy, with potentially fatal implications for Mill's environmentalist assumptions.[121] By the end of the nineteenth century, many saw a philosophical chasm – far wider than sixty feet of mountainside heather – between Darwin and Mill: the two were seen to represent opposite poles in a nature/nurture debate, settled in Darwin's favour. Thus it became commonplace to complain that Mill's writings suffered by being pre-Darwinian. As Hugh Elliot observed in his introduction to a 1910 edition of Mill's letters, the 'most serious deficiency' in Mill's thought was that it belonged 'to the pre-evolutionary era', which rendered it irredeemably dated in 'a biologic era'.[122]

Intimations of this critique were being aired, and not just on Welsh mountainsides, even before Mill's death. A straw in the wind was a paper read by one Alfred Sanders, reported in the April 1870 edition of *Nature*, in which 'the author combated the theory of Mr. John Stuart Mill, that the mind is a series of feelings and nothing more, and that memory is an ultimate fact incapable of explanation'.[123] A much stronger hint had come with the publication of Francis Galton's *Hereditary genius* (1869). Not only did Galton's book signal the oncoming ascendancy of hereditarian over environmentalist explanations it also mischievously cited Mill and his father as evidence of inherited genius.[124] Darwin had fleshed out his remarks to Cobbe in the pages of the *Descent*. The notorious strictures on the 'Difference in the mental powers of the two sexes', in which he naturalized gender inequality, were a polite, but firm, rebuttal of the egalitarian argument in the *Subjection*. Mill was referred to directly in a footnote wherein

[120] S. Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian feminist, journalist, reformer* (London, 2004), p. 192. For Cobbe's version of the encounter see F. Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe, as told by herself* (London, 1904), pp. 487–9.

[121] Anon. [J. S. Mill], 'The descent of man', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 Mar. 1871.

[122] H. Elliot, ed., *The letters of John Stuart Mill: with a note on Mill's private life, by Mary Taylor* (2 vols., London, 1910), I, pp. xxxiv, xxxvi.

[123] *Nature: a weekly illustrated journal of science*, 28 Apr. 1870.

[124] Galton, *Hereditary genius*, p. 179.

Darwin alleged an apparent inconsistency in the *Subjection*'s suggestion that women might possess innate qualities of energy and perseverance.[125] Mill was also in Darwin's sights in the *Descent*'s consideration of 'moral sense'. Again, Darwin made innate what Mill regarded as 'acquired', and again, he identified an inconsistency, this time in the pages of *Utilitarianism* (1863), in Mill's argument.[126]

Yet far from joining the anti-Mill bandwagon, Darwinists were notable only by their absence from the ranks of Mill's critics in the wake of his death. Spencer, the most prominent of the evolutionists, openly took Mill's part in his contribution to the *Twelve sketches*, while Darwin himself showed implicit approval of Mill's *Autobiography* by imitating its remit in his own autobiography.[127] There was, as seen, a 'Darwinian' aspect to Hayward's birth control smear, but it is the relative absence of 'Darwinian' criticism that is most obvious. It is easily explained: the intellectual battle lines of the early twentieth century were not so sharply drawn in 1873. The 'hard hereditarian' views which became associated with Darwin were, mostly, a product of later eugenics and genetics; Darwin himself remained uncertain of the precise balance between nature and nurture.[128] Equally, Mill was more subtle and nuanced in his arguments than is often assumed. In the *Subjection*, for example, Mill carefully argued only for an opportunity to find out if women could flourish in a more equal environment. More importantly, a positive commonality existed between Mill and Darwin, and their respective followers.

In a letter to his second son George, written just days after the publication of Mill's *Autobiography*, Darwin urged George to take heed of Mill's example of 'never expressing his religious convictions', for fear of prejudicing readers against his ideas.[129] The comment serves as a useful reminder that Darwin and Mill were treading the same secular path, in what both feared was still a strongly theological, and thereby hostile, intellectual environment. They were men of a similar age, class, and cultural disposition; they had friends and associates in common, including Spencer and Wallace; and it was significant, although serendipitous, that their major works, *On liberty* and *On the origin of species*, had been published in 1859, on the high wave of British liberalism. Despite his apolitical image, Darwin was, as he wrote just days after Mill's death, at heart a 'Liberal or Radical'.[130] Spencer had identified this shared political sensibility in 1864 when attempting to bring Mill and Darwin together in a new weekly review, the *Reader*, which was 'probably the last attempt in Victorian England to keep together liberal scientists, theologians, and men of science'.[131] It was even more in evidence in the Jamaica

[125] C. Darwin, *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex* (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1981), II, pp. 326–9, at p. 328n.

[126] Darwin, *Descent*, I, p. 71n.

[127] The similarity was noted by early reviewers; see, for example, 'The life of Darwin', *Daily News*, 19 Nov. 1887.

[128] See A. Pichot, *The pure society: from Darwin to Hitler* (London, 2009).

[129] C. Darwin to G. Darwin, 21 Oct. 1873, *Darwin Correspondence Project*, letter 9105, www.darwinproject.ac.uk/index.php, accessed 14 Sept. 2010.

[130] C. Darwin to F. Galton, 28 May 1873, in F. Darwin, ed., *The life and letters of Charles Darwin, including an autobiographical chapter* (3 vols., London, 1887), III, p. 178.

[131] A. Desmond and J. Moore, *Darwin* (London, 1992), pp. 526–7.

Committee, an organization that, according to a recent study by Adrian Desmond and James Moore, embodied Darwin's most basic political beliefs; recruited 'Darwin's class of men'; and in which 'the jewel in their crown' was Mill.[132] Nor was it merely a case of Darwin and his fellow evolutionists sharing aspects of Mill's politics; Mill simultaneously shared something of their scientific sensibility and this was emphasized – by friends and supporters – in the wake of Mill's death: for two reasons.

The first, of course, was that an association with the authority of 'science' tended to enhance Mill's reputation. And there were genuine grounds, beyond Mill's general pursuit of a 'social science', for making the connection. As Henry Trimen, a botanist at the British Museum, pointed out in his contribution to the *Twelve sketches*, Mill was, throughout his life, an accomplished and enthusiastic botanist. He had learnt the science as a teenager, under the tutelage of George Bentham, nephew of Jeremy, and took his 'hobby' sufficiently seriously to contribute to the *Phytologist* journal throughout the 1840s and 1850s; provide samples for the definitive study of the *Flora of Surrey* (1863); and have been working on a flora of Avignon at the time of his death.[133] According to Trimen, Mill also carried botanical precepts and principles into his broader work. The sections on classification and methodology in his *Logic* would not have been possible 'had not the writer been a naturalist as well as a logician'. Darwin, for his part, admired Mill's book enough to recommend it to others, and took great satisfaction from a note praising the methodology of the *Origin* that Mill added to the fifth edition.[134] All this despite the fact that Darwin, as Trimen conceded, had rendered some sections of the *Logic* antiquated, such as Mill's objection to William Whewell's natural classification by resemblance by 'types'. According to Trimen, however, this did not undermine the essentially 'scientific' character of Mill's method.

The second reason for emphasizing Mill's scientific credentials, and especially his botanical bent, was an attempt to make him appear more human. In a life apparently lived in severe asceticism, Mill's passion for flora was one of the few accessible characteristics that could be ascribed to him. With notions of portraying Mill as a loving son or father precluded, and the subject of his wife an uneasy one, emphasizing his love of plants served a useful purpose. Mill characteristically eschewed any mention of his lifelong hobby in the pages of his *Autobiography*

[132] A. Desmond and J. Moore, *Darwin's sacred cause: race, slavery and the quest for human origins* (London, 2009), pp. 349–50.

[133] H. Trimen, 'His botanical studies', in Fox Bourne et al., *Twelve sketches*, pp. 43–8. Henry Trimen was a young botanist who worked in the botanical department of the British Museum. J. D. Salmon, *Flora of Surrey; or, a catalogue of the flowering plants and ferns found in the county, with the localities of the rarer species* (London, 1863). On George Bentham and Mill see G. McOuat, 'The logical systematist: George Bentham and his *Outline of a new system of logic*', *Archives of Natural History*, 30 (2003), pp. 203–22.

[134] 'Considering how high an authority he [Mill] is, this pleases me much, and I think you will be pleased', C. Darwin to C. Lyell, 20 July 1861. *Darwin Correspondence Project*, letter 3215 www.darwinproject.ac.uk/index.php, accessed 14 Sept. 2010. For Mill's commendatory note see his *A system of logic*, in J. M. Robson, ed., *The collected works of John Stuart Mill* (33 vols., Toronto, 1963–91), VII, pp. 498–9n.

but Marston, in particular, used botany both as a means of connecting Mill with 'his great English predecessors in the more exacting departments of thought', Sir Thomas Moore and Sir Francis Bacon, and in demonstrating Mill's essential humanity. Recent work on the class character of botany by Ann Secord suggests that the image of Mill as a botanist might have possessed an especial appeal to working-class readers.[135] Certainly, Marston's depiction of Mill returning to Avignon in the spring of 1873, 'in the midst of the political season, in order that he might see the flowers in their spring glory', only for death to deny him the opportunity to complete his 'peaceful work of love', is an image every bit as poignant as Holyoake's ascription of Mill's death to independent minded nightingales.[136]

VI

In retrospect, the controversies that engulfed Mill's name in the months after his death can appear either perplexing or jejune. Today Mill is more likely to be chided for alleged non-consummation of his marriage than he is for adulterous dallying with another man's wife. His *Autobiography*, although the source of disappointment in 1873, has long since been lauded as a classic of the genre. The machinations around the Memorial Committee can seem an ephemeral footnote, whose only enduring significance is the bronze statute that still stares out over Victoria Embankment. Meanwhile what proved the most damaging allegation – Mill's apparent advocacy of birth control – has long since been regarded as a subject for celebration. But reactions to Mill's death possess more than antiquarian curiosity. Admirers and detractors parted predictably, and reactions to his death provide an aperture on to some of the political dividing lines of the period. Tensions around the Memorial Committee were symptomatic of class tensions between middle- and working-class radicals; harsh judgements of the *Autobiography*, along with a prurient interest in alleged adultery, spoke to an enduring interest in 'character'; while the relative absence of both religious and Darwinian critiques suggests a tolerance of non-belief and the endurance of a 'common context' into the 1870s. The ascent of natural science, especially Darwinism, the obsolescence of Benthamite liberalism, and the changing meaning of Malthusianism are all apparent. Mill's life was inseparable from politics and philosophy, and so too was his death.

[135] On the working-class appeal of botany see A. Secord, 'Science in the pub: artisan botanists in early nineteenth-century Lancashire', *History of Science*, 32 (1994), pp. 269–315, and A. Secord, 'Artisan Botany', in N. Jardine, J. A. Secord, and E. C. Spary, eds., *Cultures of natural history* (Cambridge, 1996).

[136] Marston, *Life of Mill*, pp. 11–12.