

William Howitt

(18 December 1792 - 3 March 1879)

and

Mary Howitt

(12 March 1799 - 30 January 1888)

Nicholas R. Jones

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SELECTED BOOKS:

By William and Mary Howitt:

The Forest Minstrel and Other Poems (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1823);

The Desolation of Eyam: The Emigrant, a Tale of the American Woods: and Other Poems (London: Wightman & Cramp, 1827);

The Literature and Romance of Northern Europe: Constituting a Complete History of the Literature of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland, 2 volumes (London: Colburn, 1852);

Stories of English and Foreign Life (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853);

Ruined Abbeys and Castles of Great Britain (London: A. W. Bennett, 1862).

By William Howitt:

A Poet's Thoughts at the Interment of Lord Byron (London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1824);

The Book of the Seasons; or, The Calendar of Nature, by William Howitt, with contributions by Mary Howitt (London: Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, 1828; Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1831);

A Popular History of Priestcraft in All Ages and Nations (London: E. Wilson, 1833); republished as *History of Priestcraft in All Ages and Nations* (London: E. Wilson / New York: Reprinted for the booksellers, 1833);

Pantika: or, Traditions of the Most Ancient Times, 2 volumes (London: Whitaker, 1835);

The Rural Life of England, 2 volumes (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838);

Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in All Their Colonies (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838);

The Boy's Country-book: Being the Real Life of a Country Boy Written by Himself, exhibiting all the

Amusements, Pleasures, and Pursuits of Children in the Country (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1839; New York: S. Colman, 1840);

Visits to Remarkable Places; Old Halls, Battlefields and Scenes illustrative of Striking Passages in History and Poetry, 2 volumes (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840, 1842; Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841, 1842);

The Student-Life of Germany (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1841; Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1842);

The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany: with Characteristic Sketches of its Cities and Scenery. Collected in a General Tour, and During a Residence in the Country in 1840, 41 and 42 (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1842; Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1843);

German Experiences: Addressed to the English: Both Stayers at Home and Goers Abroad (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844);

The Life and Adventures of Jack of the Mill: commonly called Lord Othmill; A Fireside Story, 2 volumes (London: Longman, 1844; New York: Harper, 1844);

The Aristocracy of England: A History for the People, as John Hampden, Junr. (London: Chapman, 1846);

Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets, 2 volumes (London: R. Bentley, 1847; New York: Harper, 1847);

The Hall and the Hamlet, or, Scenes and Characters of Country Life, 2 volumes (London: H. Colburn, 1848);

The Year-Book of the Country; or, The Field, the Forest, and the Fireside (London: H. Colburn, 1850);

- Birds and their Nests* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1872);
- Natural History Stories for My Juvenile Friends* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1875);
- Tales for All Seasons* (London & Guildford: F. Warne, 1881);
- Tales of English Life, including Middleton and the Middletons* (London: F. Warne, 1881);
- Mary Howitt; an Autobiography*, 2 volumes, edited by Margaret Howitt, with a chapter of autobiography by William Howitt (London: W. Isbister, 1889).
- OTHER: *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book*, edited by Mary Howitt (London: Fisher, Son & Jackson, 1840-1842);
- Fredrika Bremer, *The Neighbours: A Story of Everyday Life*, translated by Mary Howitt (2 volumes, London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1842; 1 volume, New York: Harper, 1843);
- Bremer, *The Home: or, Family Cares and Family Joys*, translated by Mary Howitt (2 volumes, London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1843; 1 volume, New York: Harper, 1843);
- Bremer, *The President's Daughters; including Nina*, translated by Mary Howitt (3 volumes, London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1843; 1 volume, New York: Harper, 1844);
- Adelbert von Chamisso, *The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl*, translated by William Howitt (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1843; New York: Burgess & Stringer, 1843);
- Anders Fryxell, *The History of Sweden*, 2 volumes, translated by Anne von Schaultz, edited by Mary Howitt (London: R. Bentley, 1844);
- Emilie Smith Flygare-Carlen, *The Rose of Tistelön: A Tale of the Swedish Coast*, translated by Mary Howitt, 2 volumes (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844);
- Bremer, *New Sketches of Every-Day Life: A Diary. Together with Strife and Peace*, translated by Mary Howitt (2 volumes, London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844; 1 volume, New York: Harper, 1844);
- Bremer, *Domestic Life, or, The H--- Family*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: T. Allman, 1844);
- Christoph von Schmid, *The Picture of the Virgin*, translated and adapted by Mary Howitt (London: Wm. S. Orr & Co., 1844);
- Wilhelm Hey, *The Child's Picture and Versebook: Commonly Called Otto Speckter's Fable Book*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844; New York: D. Appleton / Philadelphia: George S. Appleton, 1850);
- C. Stoeber, *The Curate's Favourite Pupil*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Orr, 1844);
- Bremer, *Life in Dalecarlia: the Parsonage of Mora*, translated by William Howitt (London: Chapman & Hall, 1845; New York: Harper, 1845);
- Hans Christian Andersen, *Only a Fiddler! and O. T.: or, Life in Denmark*, 3 volumes, translated by Mary Howitt (London: R. Bentley, 1845);
- Andersen, *The Improvisatore*, translated by Mary Howitt (2 volumes, London: R. Bentley, 1845; 1 volume, New York: Harper, 1845);
- Andersen, *Wonderful Stories for Children*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Chapman & Hall, 1846; New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1846);
- Henriette Wach von Paalzwow, *The Citizen of Prague*, 3 volumes, translated by Mary Howitt (London: H. Colburn, 1846);
- Adalbert Stifter, *Pictures of Life*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Simms & M'Intyre, 1847);
- Alphonse de Lamartine, *Genevieve: a Tale*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Simms & M'Intyre, 1847);
- Andersen, *The True Story of My Life: A Sketch*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1847; Boston: James Munroe, 1847);
- Joseph Ennemoser, *The History of Magic*, 2 volumes, translated by William Howitt, with an appendix by Mary Howitt (London: H. G. Bohn, 1847);
- Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress*, 3 volumes, edited by William and Mary Howitt (London: Willoughby, January 1847 - June 1848);
- Bremer, *Brothers and Sisters: A Tale of Domestic Life*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Henry Colburn, 1848; New York: Harper, 1848);
- Sofia Margareta Zelow Knorring, *The Peasant and His Landlord*, translated by Mary Howitt (New York: Harper, 1848);
- Bremer, *The Midnight Sun: A Pilgrimage*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: H. Colburn, 1849);
- Bremer, *An Easter Offering*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Henry Colburn, 1850);
- Biographical Sketches of the Queens of Great Britain from the Norman Conquest to the Reign of Victo-*



The House at Uthoxtet.

Mary Howitt's birthplace (illustration from chapter two of "Some Reminiscences of My Life" by Mary Howitt, *Good Words and Sunday Magazine*, July 1885)

- ria: or, *Royal Book of Beauty*, edited by Mary Howitt (London: Colburn, 1851);
- Meir Goldschmidt, *Jacob Bendixen, the Jew*, 3 volumes, adapted by Mary Howitt (London: Colburn, 1852);
- Bremer, *The Homes of the New World; Impressions of America*, translated by Mary Howitt (3 volumes, London: A. Hall, Virtue, 1853; 2 volumes, New York: Harper, 1853);
- The Dial of Love: A Christmas Book for the Young*, compiled by Mary Howitt (London: Darton, 1853);
- Pictorial Calendar of the Seasons Exhibiting the Pleasures, Pursuits, and Characteristics of Country Life for Every Month in the Year*, edited by Mary Howitt (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854);
- Elihu Burritt, *Thoughts and Things at Home and Abroad*, includes a memoir by Mary Howitt (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1854; London: Cassell, Petter & Gilpin, 1868);
- Bremer, *Hertha*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, 1856; New York: Putnam, 1856);
- Bjornstjerne M. Bjornson, *Trust and Trial: A Story from the Danish*, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1858);
- Bremer, *Father and Daughter*, translated by Mary Howitt (London, 1859);
- Bremer, *Two Years in Switzerland and Italy*, 2 volumes, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1861);
- Bremer, *Travels in the Holy Land*, 2 volumes, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1862);
- Bremer, *Greece and the Greeks. The Narrative of a Winter Residence and Summer Travel in Greece and Its Islands*, 2 volumes, translated by Mary Howitt (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1863);

- Epes Sargent, *Peculiar: A Tale of the Great Transition*, 3 volumes, edited by William Howitt (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1864);
- Margaret Howitt, *Twelve Months with Fredrika Bremer in Sweden*, 2 volumes, includes a preface by Mary Howitt (London: Jackson, Walford & Hodder, 1866);
- Friedrich Wilhelm Hackländer, *Behind the Counter*, translated by Mary Howitt (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz / London: Sampson Low / Paris: C. Reinwald, 1867);
- Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, abridged by Mary Howitt (London: G. Routledge, 1873);
- The Religion of Rome*, translated by William Howitt (London: Balliere, Tindall & Cox, 1873).

Mary and William Howitt, now almost wholly forgotten, deserve attention for the volume and range of their work and for the degree to which they mirror the concerns of their age. Part of nineteenth-century literary life throughout Romanticism and Victorianism, this married couple reflected the transition in literary taste during these crucial decades. Provincial in background, they nonetheless reached well beyond the borders of England to the writers of Germany and Scandinavia. William was one of the first English authors to travel in and write about the newly settled lands of Australia and New Zealand. Both Howitts knew well the ever-widening range of religious ideologies, from Quaker to spiritualist to Roman Catholic. Read and admired by old-style Tories, the Howitts nonetheless lived and wrote by a reformist, even Chartist, creed fueled by sensitivity to the abuses of the old systems.

William Howitt was an indefatigable walker around England, both literally and figuratively, recording like William Cobbett in passionate outbursts of prose the complex and changing landscapes about him; William's genius was primarily encyclopedic and assertive. Mary Howitt saw and shaped her work with more focus and with a more muted tone; her poems of natural history for children, her literary ballads, and her wry and unassertive tales have an attractive sensitivity and insight, moralizing without heaviness or monotony.

The Society of Friends was the dominant influence in the early lives of both Mary and William Howitt, fostering their independence, their work for political and social reform, their libertarian activism, their spiritualism, their horror of

war. Only in opposition to Quaker codes of silence, however, did the two develop careers as prolific writers of imaginative literature. Fortunately, Mary's loquacious nursemaid told her tales of sprites and elves, and both Mary and William attended schools which, though run in the Friends manner, did not successfully suppress their voracious reading habits.

William, the elder by six years, grew up in the area of Nottingham. The son of Phebe Tatum Howitt and Thomas Howitt, a mine superintendent, he spent much of his childhood roaming the countryside he was later to celebrate in his most remembered book, *The Rural Life of England* (1838). As a youth, he was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker in Mansfield. His favorite memory of this period was a day in 1810 when he went to nearby Newstead Abbey to work on the house of his poetic hero, George Gordon, Lord Byron, who, unfortunately, was absent. On finishing his indentures William gave up cabinetwork and began to learn pharmacy on his own; though for his whole life he thought of himself as a writer, his occupation until 1836 was as an apothecary.

The daughter of Samuel and Ann Wood Botham, Mary Botham grew up in Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, where her father was active first in the iron industry and later in land surveying. She and her sister Anna (with whom she was to conduct a voluminous correspondence most of her life) attended elementary schools at home and away and shared a growing passion for reading poetry, especially ballads and Byron. She and William married on 16 April 1821. After living briefly in Hanley, where William bought a chemist's shop and ran it for seven months, they went to live temporarily with his parents. Then in summer 1822 they set up home and shop in the growing city of Nottingham, where they were to stay for fourteen years while their family grew and their literary careers began.

Mary was pregnant for nearly all of the first eighteen years of her marriage. She bore seven children (of whom only four outlived childhood, and only two outlived their mother) and lost several others by miscarriage. Even with intense dedication to family, the Howitts participated actively in the rich, though provincial, cultural life of Nottingham, increasingly contributed to national literary and reform activities, and went on frequent walking expeditions through England and Scotland.

Their first publication was a small volume of Romantic—primarily Wordsworthian—verse,



Thomas Howitt, of Heanor (William Howitt's father).

Illustration from chapter three of "Some Reminiscences of My Life" by Mary Howitt (Good Words and Sunday Magazine, August 1885)

The Forest Minstrel (1823), which was noticed well in the reviews but not at the booksellers. They began to contribute poems to the popular gift-book annuals and had soon collected enough for a second joint volume of verse, *The Desolation of Eyam* (1827). One poem of William's included in this second volume had already appeared separately—an outpouring of emotion at Byron's funeral (1824), which William attended. Most of the poems in *The Desolation of Eyam* are typical of the sort published in the annuals, nostalgic lyrics on aspects of natural history. The volume was well reviewed and sold well enough to go into a second edition.

The Howitts' real success in this vein came with *The Book of the Seasons* (1828), a kind of combination of John Clare and a farmers' almanac. It is a calendar of the months with articles on each season, mixing information and essays on natural

history (on topics such as migration of birds) with Mary's nature poems, and other literary pieces. This easygoing and thoroughly rural compilation, evoking a green England fast disappearing as the Midlands became industrialized, caught the reviewers' and the public's approving eye: Carl Woodring reports seventeen or more large editions of the work. Christopher North (John Wilson), the eccentric *Blackwood's* reviewer, reflected warmly on the Howitts' achievement; their goal, as he saw it, had been to lay before the reader each month "all the objects and appearances which the month would present, in the garden, in the field, and the waters; yet confining itself solely to those objects." His shepherd comments, "And nae insignificant aim either, sir. Hae they hit it?" To which North securely replies, "They have" (April 1831). *The Book of the Seasons* made its publisher a good deal of money,

but the Howitts gained little because they had sold the copyright to their publisher. William, feeling angry for decades after, made copyright abuse a recurring issue in his writing.

The book's popularity, like that of later books by the Howitts, seems linked to shifting taste, as the intensity of early and high Romanticism gave way to the lush tones of Victorianism. As in the annuals, nostalgia and sentiment had become all-important. The Howitts were an active part of an ever-expanding literary network of writers in a similar vein; their friends were part of the circle of Felicia Hemans, at the height of her popularity—the young editor of annuals Alaric Watts (whose son was later to marry the Howitts' daughter Anna), the musician and Germanist Henry Chorley, poets Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L.E.L.), S. C. Hall, and Allan Cunningham. In 1831, unannounced, a greater poet made their acquaintance: William Wordsworth, traveling with his family, knocked on the Howitts' door in Nottingham to ask for help in nursing his wife, stricken with a sudden attack of lumbago. The families got along well, and much later William Howitt was to write an account of his call at Rydal Mount in August 1836, when on a rainy afternoon the two Williams joined forces in an argument with a proslavery general from the American South.

In contrast to the pastoral and often precious qualities of the "annuals" group, the Howitts, with their Quaker conscience, were attentive to issues of poverty and injustice as well as to birds and flowers. Nottingham was becoming a factory town with obvious problems of unemployment and labor abuse, and in 1831 the city was the scene of disastrous rioting, including the burning of Nottingham Castle (those scenes were later to be part of one of Mary's best fictions, *Little Coin, Much Care* [1842]). William, in response to the workers' needs, began a lifelong career of outspoken political agitation; the anti-Reform coalition of peers and bishops in the House of Lords, assembled to combat the Reform Bill of 1832, incensed William to a fierce disestablishmentarian rhetoric. Readers in the national market were presumably surprised and shocked at the contrast between the bucolic *Book of the Seasons* and his next publication, the indignant *Popular History of Priestcraft* (1833). This volume traces idolatry from its phallic and orgiastic roots through its pagan, Jewish, Catholic, and finally Anglican manifestations. In tones reminiscent of Milton's St. Peter (in "Lycidas"), Howitt decries a clergy

"Lukewarm in their duties; and proudly cold in their intercourse with the poor of their flocks," and a church stubborn in "Adhering to its most absurd, and most impolitic institutions, rites, and dogmas." Howitt boldly took the fight for disestablishment to an interview with the surprised prime minister, Charles, Earl Grey, who declined to advocate the idea.

In 1834 Mary published volumes on her own for the first time, two books of verse. *The Seven Temptations* is a series of seven dramatic poems set in exotic locations such as the "north woods." In each of the poems a Satanic figure, Achzib, in various guises tempts the protagonists to sin. The attempt to delineate Byronic emotions and situations is inappropriate to Mary's basically English imagination and experience; the formality of the seven-part scheme, based loosely on Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* (1798-1812), further constricts the poems, which gained mixed reviews.

Far more successful and significant was her *Sketches of Natural History* (1834). These brief lyrics, written in a vein that Mary was to continue with *Tales in Verse* (1836) and *Birds and Flowers, and Other Country Things* (1838), were originally written for her own children; they transcend didactic juvenile poetry by displaying wit, whimsy, multiplicity, and depth. "The Stormy Petrel," surely a poem to be seen as a conscious contribution to the tradition of Romantic bird poems, uses the bird to convey mysterious knowledge normally inaccessible to humans, knowledge of storms, of wrecks at sea, and of the presence of God. With its combination of a sense of underlying violence in the world with a faith in God's control, the poem does far more than "moralize" the natural image. "The Fossil Elephant," though pre-Darwinian, brings to the reader the sense of vast time and (as yet unnamed) cataclysm that will characterize nature in Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Hardy: "And the Dragons lie in the mountain-rock, / As if for eternity!" "The Sea-gull" is an especially energetic poem, representing in the verse the raucous qualities of the wild, free, and ravenous bird. Howitt's verse, invested with urgency and excitement, takes traditionally didactic subjects—the monkey, the eagle, the nettle—and develops both their particularity and their symbolic resonances.

Her best-known poem in the juvenile vein is "The Spider and the Fly," which though saddled with a disappointingly moralistic ending, wittily

and vivaciously tells a fable of heartless entrapment and ineffective resistance:

"I'm sure you must be weary, dear, with soaring up
so high;
Will you rest upon my little bed?" said the Spider
to the Fly.
"There are pretty curtains drawn around; the
sheets are fine and thin,
And if you like to rest awhile, I'll snugly tuck you
in!"
"Oh, no, no," said the little Fly, "for I've often
heard it said,
They never, never wake again, who sleep upon
your bed!"

In the 1840s, Mary's works in verse included ballads, culminating in her *Ballads and Other Poems* (1847). Drawing on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Mary's "Old Man's Story," a story of the curse on a sea captain who has thrown a rich passenger overboard, was particularly well received. "American," a story narrated by a Quaker woman, takes a tough stance within the sentimental pioneer genre, steadily resisting the popular stereotypes of the Native American, both the bloodthirsty and the noble savage.

In the mid 1830s, both Howitts began to expect their writing to bring in income, especially after William left his chemist's shop in 1836, and they moved to Esher, in Surrey, to be nearer the London bases of the publishing industry. In 1836 Mary proudly reported the £150 she made from *Wood Leighton*, a three-volume novel based on scenes of life in Uttoxeter, where she had grown up. By 1839 Mary had signed on with Cheapside publisher Thomas Tegg for a series of thirteen short prose tales on domestic virtue. These, published over the next five years, were known as "Tales for the people and their children." One, *Love and Money* (1843), bears the subtitle "An Every Day Tale," an indication of the antiromance intentions of these narratives. They are unpretentious, straightforward, didactic narratives about the interaction of morality and economics. Employment, savings, trade, and expenditure are key themes, intermixed with the proper handling of courtship, parenthood, friendship, and other domestic themes. In nearly all cases the incidents are—perhaps deliberately—characterized by steadiness rather than excitement. Didactic structures leavened by wry observation dominate the tales, as in the double plot of *Love and Money*, where two inherently strong women, each in-

involved in a different crisis, befriend one another in order to compensate for one another's deficiencies. The steady values preached by Mary's tales are well illustrated by the elder of these characters, Ellen Morland, who saves her improvident husband from financial and personal bankruptcy by mastering the careful, patient operation of the perfume distillery he has bought and is totally unsuited to run. As she tells her younger friend, Mary Wheeler—who must learn to survive being jilted by an impetuous and undependable man—the key is in quiet efficiency:

"Such, dearest Mary," said Mrs. Morland, "has been my life; there is no romance in it; but please God only that I rightly make use of the lessons it has given me. I shall not be altogether useless in my sphere, be it large or be it small."

As admirers of Byron, the Howitts could not totally leave out Romanticism, however, and the tales are shaped with romance underpinnings—dangerous fevers, life-threatening betrayals, fiercely abusive guardians. Their position as transition pieces between Romantic and Victorian is evident in the dual focus of the last scene of *Love and Money*, where Mary Wheeler, having survived being jilted, finds security at the home of her eccentric and benevolent uncle, who was also her first music teacher. There she accepts the proposal of her new lover, a prosperous and morally upright doctor who attended her through the fever (and refused to charge a fee for it). After dinner Mary begins to play the piano for her fiancé but, being understandably nervous, bungles the Mozart. Her uncle facilitates her removal to her properly domestic place on the sofa, while he supplies the entertainment, the Romantic Sturm und Drang of his favorite composer—Beethoven:

My uncle grew almost angry, and seating himself at the piano, played magnificently. Our little parlour reverberated the almost deafening sounds, for my uncle was doing his grandest; my aunt was enchanted with his performance, and we two [Mary and her fiancé] sat side by side on the little sofa, his arm round my waist, and my head resting upon his bosom.

Along with Mary's poems for children and a few of the ballads, the tales Thomas Tegg published for Mary are among her most interesting work, and deserve more attention than they have received. She should be remembered not only as the poet of juvenile natural history but also as a fic-



William Howitt

tion writer of unusual sympathy with the systems of early-Victorian economics and family.

Perhaps William's most successful and interesting work also dates from the late 1830s. *The Rural Life of England* (1838), describing country life among rich and poor, became a favorite with readers longing to preserve "Old England"; appealing to conservative nostalgia, the book therefore oddly allied itself with that Tory squirearchy who would have hardly wanted to be bedfellows with the radical Howitt. The conservative appeal is real: Howitt mourns the passing of an older, greener age. But there is a more radical side, characteristic of Howitt's observant and sympathetic eye for poverty and injustice. As he recounts what he and Mary saw on their many long-distance rambles, the Dickensian specters of industrial ugliness intrude. For Howitt ugliness is not

merely scenic, it implies the "grinding and oppression of the poor" and the reforms that ought to ameliorate it.

Oppression and reform were the themes of a scathing work published in the same year as *The Rural Life of England*, but in an entirely different vein. *Colonization and Christianity* (1838) is a fiercely ironic critique of Christian justifications for the European spread of empire. The radical who had five years earlier attacked the established Anglican church by associating it with paganism now even more directly accuses the entire Christian religion of sordid and bloodthirsty hypocrisy:

We have long laid to our souls the flattering uncton that we are a civilized and a Christian people. We talk of all other nations in all other quarters of the world, as savages, barbarians, un-



civilized. . . We shudder at the war-cries of naked Indians, and the ghastly feasts of Cannibals; and bless our souls that we are redeemed from all these things, and made models of beneficence, and lights of God in the earth! . . . how is it that these tribes know *us*? . . . They know us chiefly by our crimes and our cruelty. It is we who are, and must appear to them the savages.

The fury of William's Quaker pacifism emerged again in his last publication. Late in life, in his long poem *The Mad War-Planet* (1871), he surveyed the modern war machine of the war of 1871 and again condemned the hypocrisy and mass destructiveness of humankind.

William's appetite for walking, observing, and reporting facts of topography and description characterizes the bulk of his extensive prose productions after *The Rural Life of England*. These include the popular and autobiographical *Boy's Country-book* (1839); *Visits to Remarkable Places*; *Old Halls, Battlefields and Scenes illustrative*

of Striking Passages in History and Poetry (1840, 1842), a two-volume sequel to *Rural Life*; the very successful *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* (1847), with its particular success in anecdotes based on Howitt's genial snooping around the homes of his literary heroes; a volume jointly written with Mary, *Ruined Abbeys and Castles of Great Britain* (1862); and the much later *Northern Heights of London* (1869), an attempt to chronicle the historical and literary geography of Hampstead and Highgate, fast disappearing under the onslaught of suburban London. His busy pen produced volume after volume; on some days, he claimed, he wrote as many as sixteen hours. When Mary and William took their family to Germany in 1840-1843, William produced three descriptive volumes on German life. When in 1852 the indefatigable (and almost sixty-year-old) William went to Australia in search of gold and adventure, the inevitable result was a series of books about the colonies, culminating in

the two-volume *History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand* (1865).

Mary's work, after the tales for Tegg, continued with a steady output of juvenile fiction and poetry, as well as an occasional work of adult fiction, such as the three-volume novel of Welsh life, *The Cost of Caergwyn* (1864). Her most significant literary contribution in later years, however, was her substantial work in translation: she translated several works from German, including the poems of Adalbert Stifter (1847), and (with William) a lengthy history of magic by Joseph Ennemoser (1847). During the Howitts' German years, Mary was learning Swedish in order to translate the stories of Fredrika Bremer, a writer of sketches and fiction of village life. Mary was to become a good friend of Bremer, working in close collaboration to translate her books without delay for eager English and American audiences. The appearance of unauthorized and competitive translations unfortunately diminished Mary's financial rewards from her extensive work on Bremer—fourteen books in all, plus one translated by William. From 1845 to 1847 Mary translated four works by Hans Christian Andersen and was the first to make his stories accessible in English. Again, circumstances—including Andersen's unpleasant personality—prevented Mary from becoming sole translator and caused her to miss out on the forthcoming vogue for Andersen's stories.

Moving gradually closer to London during their married lives, the Howitts increasingly shed provincial and Quaker manners and society. They were gregarious people, and they befriended many artists and writers whose lifestyles and literary concerns were far from those of the Society of Friends: Alfred Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, Charles Dickens, Dinah Craik, Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. William claimed to have encouraged Elizabeth Gaskell to become a writer, and consequently felt paternalistic pride for *Mary Barton* (1848), her first novel.

Mary and William were continually contributing to the burgeoning London periodical market, including Dickens's *Household Words*. Their most active periodical involvement occurred in the late 1840s, when William joined the staff of, and then invested in, the *People's Journal*, which soon folded, causing the Howitts a substantial financial loss. After this failure they founded and edited *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* (January 1847 - June 1848). The journal was dedicated to the amelioration of the life of the

working classes, with a loosely Chartist agenda and an intense interest in cooperative principles. Articles on issues of politics and welfare alternated with cultural material: the journal gave positive reviews to humanitarian writers such as George Sand, the early Anthony Trollope, and Currer Bell (Charlotte Brontë). *Howitt's Journal* collapsed after a year and a half, in part because of the intensity of the Howitts' public quarrel with John Saunders, the proprietor of the *People's Journal*, in part because of the press of new periodicals in mid-century London.

In the 1850s and 1860s, Mary and William were involved in political reform issues—in particular, abolition and woman's rights. They were active in hosting American reformers such as Lucretia Mott and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Gradually, however, as they grew older, spiritualism—including experiments with mesmerism and mediums—took precedence over their social concerns. As always, William wrote about his interests, producing *The History of the Supernatural . . . Demonstrating a Universal Faith* (1863); interest in the spiritual led him in 1870 to recognize Walt Whitman as a "great and original poet" whose work was "alive with that fresh, new, piquant, magical life that no mere poet of the world . . . has" (review of *Leaves of Grass*, *Spiritual Magazine*, January 1870).

In that same year the Howitts left England for good, to divide their time between Rome and the Tyrol. William died in Rome in 1879 and was buried in the Protestant cemetery, where Keats—whose poetry he loved—also lay. Mary, accompanied by her daughter Margaret, lived on in Europe for almost another decade. The one-time Quaker became a Roman Catholic in 1883, and received an audience with Pope Leo XIII just weeks before her death in Rome in 1888. She was buried beside her husband. Her last literary project was an unfinished autobiography, later edited and published by her daughter. Since then, except for a pair of biographical works by Amice Lee and Carl Ray Woodring in the 1950s, the Howitts—such prolific publishers throughout their long lifetimes—have been practically neglected in literary studies.

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Papers:

The Howitt papers are scattered among private collections and public libraries including those of the University of Nottingham, Harvard University, Dove Cottage, the Mitchell Library (Sydney), the National Library of Scotland, the Nottingham Public Libraries, the John Rylands Library, and the Library of the Society of Friends (London). In her biography Amice Lee (Mary Howitt's grandniece) has drawn on the family collection of Mary Howitt's letters to her sister Anna Harrison.