Medical History, 1995, **39**: 219-235

Illustrations from the Wellcome Institute Library

Elizabeth Gaskell and Mesmerism: An unpublished Letter

CHRISTOPHER HILTON*

Introduction

The work of Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865) is not often seen as a source for the student of medical history. However, the picture of her as a undemanding writer dealing primarily with domestic life found in Lord David Cecil's *Early Victorian novelists*[1] has now largely been replaced by an approach that recognizes her engagement with the wider social issues of mid-nineteenth century England. Critical focus in this reassessment was initially upon issues arising from economics,[2] or rather, her treatment of the apparent opposition between economic "laws" and Christian charity (the dominant theme in her "Condition of England" novels, *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and south* (1855)). Recent work has increasingly focused upon her treatment of the role of women, and upon her dual role as supportive Victorian wife and creative force in her own right, with the implied potential for conflict between these two.[3]

In the process of this reassessment details have emerged to suggest that, while medicine and science are not major themes in her fiction—where medical men or scientists occur in her work, her focus is in general upon their social position in a small close-knit society such as that of *Cranford*—it would be a mistake to assume her to be ignorant of contemporary debate in these areas. As various studies have pointed out, as a Unitarian she belonged to a tradition that saw reason and scientific experiment as instruments in the revelation of God's creation[4] and in the figure of Job Legh, the amateur naturalist in *Mary*

*Christopher Hilton, DPhil, DipArchAdmin, Assistant Curator, Western Manuscripts Department, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE

[1] Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian novelists*, London, Constable, 1934.

[2] Louis Cazamian's *Le roman social en Angleterre, 1830–1850. Dickens—Disraeli—Mrs Gaskell—Kingsley*, Paris, Bibliothèque de la Fondation Thiers, 1904, had established this as an approach considerably before Lord David Cecil wrote. It is not until the 1960s, however, that one finds this viewpoint becoming predominant in Gaskell criticism. For an overview of work on Gaskell up to and including the 1960s, see Angus Easson (ed.), *Elizabeth Gaskell: the critical heritage*, London, Routledge, 1991, and Margaret Ganz, *Elizabeth Gaskell: the artist in conflict*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1969, pp. 296–308.

[3] See, for example, Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1987; Hilary M Schor, *Scheherezade in the marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian novel*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992; or Jane Spencer, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, London, Macmillan Press, 1993. The issue is also explored in the recent biography by Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: a habit of stories*, London, Faber & Faber, 1993.

[4] See Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell: the novel of social crisis*, London, Paul Elek, 1975, pp. 13–14, or Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 7.

Barton, she created a reminder to the reader that an awareness of scientific debate need not be confined to a narrow research community.

An illustration of her engaging in a contemporary scientific debate emerges from a document, dealing primarily with the issues of mesmeric healing, recently acquired by the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine's Western Manuscripts Department; a long, apparently unpublished[5] letter from the novelist to Ann Scott, whose husband Alexander Scott (1805–1866) was the principal of Manchester's Owens' College.[6]

The provenance of the letter is not clear and probably undiscoverable. The manuscript dealer from whom it was purchased acquired it in the United States from another dealer, who has subsequently died. To discover when the letter crossed the Atlantic, to which collection or collections it has belonged and through which other manuscript dealers' hands it has passed would now probably be impossible.

The Letter's Content

The text of the letter is given in full as an appendix but it is useful to summarize it here, not least because it bears no date and must thus be ascribed a conjectural one chiefly on the basis of its content.

After a brief preamble the letter plunges straight into its main topic:

> I want to know if you & Mr Scott have ever had any experience about *mesmerism*. I have rather a dread of it altogether I *think* because I have a feeling that it *twisted* Miss Martineau's mind; but it may not be that, & it may be a superstitious feeling (& consequently a faithless one) of mine. Now I'll tell you why I want to know your & Mr Scott's opinion.

Gaskell writes that through their mutual acquaintance John Ludlow (1821–1911), one of the founders of the Christian Socialist movement,[7] she has become involved in the case of a Mrs Glover, "wife of a very good pious bookseller at Bury", who is about to be discharged as incurable from St Bartholomew's Hospital, where she has undergone an operation for "a tumour at the mouth of the womb". Upon Mrs Glover's discharge, she continues, two alternative courses present themselves. The first is to seek admission to the Women's Hospital, Soho Square, which is

> set apart for such diseases . . . & in which the house & room arrangements are comfortable *for a hospital* but wh^{ch} is attended by Dr Protheroe Smith about whose *wilfulness* in operating where there was no hope I heard stories wh^{ch} amounted to absolute cruelty . . .

The second alternative, suggested by John Ludlow, is to use mesmerism. Ludlow's views are quoted, verbatim, at some length. He sees it as

> "the fulfilment of our Lord's commands, which I find nothing in scripture to limit in point of time or circumstances, that of "laying hands on the sick", where we are told "they shall recover",—as far

[5] A section of the letter quoted in a manuscript dealer's catalogue has been reproduced in Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 230.

[6] For a précis of Scott's career see the *Dictionary of national biography* (*DNB*), eds Leslie Smith and Sidney Lee, London, Smith, Elder, 1908–1909.

[7] A summary of John Ludlow's life and work is given in the *DNB*. A more detailed consideration, albeit one which touches only in the most fleeting fashion on his relations with Elizabeth Gaskell, is N C Masterman's *John Malcolm Ludlow: the builder of Christian Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, 1963.

(& consequently a faithless one) of
mine. Now I'll tell you why
want to know you & Mr. Scott's opinion.
Do you remember a fortnight ago
our meeting at Dundee's house
they stopping to speak to Mr.
Dudlow. The "upshot" of our talk
was that I went to see a poor
woman at St Bartholomew's —
wife of a very good pious book-
seller at Bury: (our Lancashire
Bury) — known to Mr. Maurice
& Mr. Dudlow as a practically good
man: his name is Flower. Well:
his wife, — aged 33 — has suffered
ale complaints for some years.

during which they have had to
struggle hard, — but ale this time
she has been suffering from enor-
mous pains which at last became
so bad that a surgical examina-
tion was requisite. — (it was a
tumour at the mouth of the womb)
& she was taken (by Mr. Dudlow's
advice) to St Bartholomew's, where
last Thursday an operation was
performed by Dr. West. & from the
premature blood flowed instead
of water, showing it had been
neglected too long. (I must give
you all these details to enable
you to judge about employing
mesmerism, if you have any

Extract from Elizabeth Gaskell's letter to Ann Scott

as I can make it out it is simply a transmission of life and strength from one person into another, and which has certainly proved frequently efficacious in uterine diseases."

Mrs Glover's husband, Gaskell continues, is "utterly felled" by the failure of the operation performed upon his wife, and asks his friends to decide for him what should next be done. Gaskell professes herself "vexed with myself (Oh, *so* vexed!) because last week when I was at Bury I spoke to Mr Glover with a careless tone of contempt of mesmerism,—really knowing so little about it as I did", and explains that now she is writing "to get all the wisdom I can to help me to give the best judgement I can." After a short discussion of social arrangements the letter closes.

Date of the Letter

A small group of letters from Elizabeth Gaskell is held in John Ludlow's papers in Cambridge University Library (Add.7348/10/115-131) and, although not contained in Chapple and Pollard's edition of Gaskell's letters,[8] has been published in an article by Brian Crick.[9] In general, like the Wellcome letter, they are undated, and where a day and month are given no year is specified. Several deal with Mrs Glover. Two speak of her as being in St Bartholomew's Hospital awaiting an operation (Add.7348/10/117-18). A third, dating from after this operation, describes Gaskell's failure to gain any satisfactory description of a mesmerist named Mrs Wagstaff from her relations (the Stevensons) in Mrs Wagstaff's home town of Leighton Buzzard (Add.7348/10/119). The last relevant letter describes Mr Glover's plans to travel to London and "form a judgement whether the Mesmeric Hospital or that terrible Dr. P. Smith (I don't say terrible to *him*, because Dr. Smith's advice may have to be resorted to) would be best" (Add.7348/10/120). The last two clearly date from approximately the same point in Mrs Glover's case as the Wellcome letter.

The only date given by Gaskell is on the third letter described, simply "June 25th"; however, an unidentified hand has endorsed all these letters as dating from 1853. This is certainly plausible. The Wellcome letter cannot date from before 1851, when Alexander Scott became Principal of Owens' College and Elizabeth Gaskell's acquaintanceship with his wife began, and since the few letters to Ann Scott that are included in Chapple and Pollard's edition of Gaskell's correspondence, which date from shortly after their first meeting, are far more formal in style than the Wellcome letter, it is likely that the latter should be ascribed a date when they had known each other for longer. In addition, the first of the letters that deals with Mrs Glover continues a discussion of Ludlow's review of Gaskell's *Ruth* in the *North British Review* of May/August 1853.[10]

None the less, other pieces of evidence combine to suggest that perhaps the endorsement on the Cambridge letters is incorrect and that the year in which these exchanges took place was in fact 1854. Mrs Glover is mentioned in two letters to Parthenope Nightingale, the elder sister of Florence Nightingale, dating from October 1854, in a manner that makes it seem likely that these represent the next stage in the tale. On 17 October 1854 Elizabeth Gaskell writes that

[8] J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard, *The letters of Mrs Gaskell*, Manchester University Press, 1966.

[9] Brian Crick, 'Some unpublished Gaskell letters', *Notes and Queries*, 1980, **225**: 508–19.

[10] *North British Review*, 1853, **19**: 151–74.

I have never heard from the Glovers, to whom I wrote on the day I heard from Miss F. Nightingale; but then I desired them to consider with, & consult their medical man before they came to any decision.[11]

A few days later, in a letter that Chapple and Pollard conjecturally place at 20 October 1854, Gaskell writes, "I am in doubts about Mrs Glover: especially as it is after some deliberation that they send her."[12] There is no indication as to what communication Elizabeth Gaskell had received from Florence Nightingale (no letters to Elizabeth Gaskell are listed in Sue Goldie's exhaustive calendar of Florence Nightingale's correspondence[13] and those to Parthenope do not mention the case of the Glovers) or as to where Mrs Glover was to be sent. However, the involvement of Florence Nightingale would seem to point to treatment by orthodox medicine rather than mesmerism, possibly even at the Harley Street Institution for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen of which Florence Nightingale was Superintendent from April 1853 until her summons to the Crimea in late October 1854. If this course of action was adopted as a result of the deliberations described in the Wellcome letter, mesmerism being ruled out, then that letter would probably date from the first half of 1854: since Mrs Glover is described in it as seriously ill it seems unlikely that there would be a lengthy gap between the stages in her treatment represented by the letters to Ann Scott and Parthenope Nightingale.

It is of course possible that the letters to Parthenope Nightingale in October 1854 refer to the sending of Mrs Glover to St Bartholomew's for the operation described at the start of the Wellcome letter, which would place the Wellcome letter (and the Cambridge Ludlow letters) in 1855 or even later; however, there is further evidence that points to 1854. In another letter from this period, identified by Chapple and Pollard as probably written to the young Christian Socialist F J Furnivall (1825–1910)[14] and conjecturally ascribed the date of 23 March 1854,[15] she refers to visiting the chapel of Lincoln's Inn, which is where she describes meeting John Ludlow in the Wellcome letter.[16] Further, near the end of that letter Elizabeth Gaskell writes, "Thanks for telling me of the 1st of July. I hope to come . . . ", suggesting a date early in the year, and examination of the letters dating from early 1854 published by Chapple and Pollard shows that her activities in early 1854 fit those described in the Wellcome letter: she refers there to a plan that Mrs Scott and her daughter should visit the Gaskells, but warns that for the next few weeks all available beds are occupied by various guests, present or expected, and a letter to Marianne Gaskell dated 14 May 1854[17] describes just such a life of visits and entertainments. She was also definitely in Leighton Buzzard visiting her Stevenson cousins in June 1854.[18]

Various scraps of evidence thus converge to indicate a date in the opening months of 1854, just as Elizabeth Gaskell embarked upon writing *North and south*: although this cannot be completely certain, no alternative date seems convincing.

[11] Chapple and Pollard, op. cit., note 8 above, p. 313.

[12] Ibid., p. 315.

[13] S Goldie (ed.), *A calendar of the letters of Florence Nightingale*, Oxford, OMP, 1977.

[14] For details of Furnivall's life and work see the *DNB*.

[15] Chapple and Pollard, op. cit., note 8 above, p. 277.

[16] The chaplain at Lincoln's Inn at this time was F D Maurice (1805–1872), another Christian Socialist and close associate of John Ludlow (see *DNB*).

[17] Chapple and Pollard, op. cit., note 8 above, pp. 283–4.

[18] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 359.

Context

It is not intended here to do more than provide a brief background sketch of the characteristics of mesmerism in this period since they are set out in detail elsewhere, in two recently-published overviews of the whole area of hypnosis by Alan Gauld[19] and Adam Crabtree[20] and in studies of specific aspects of mid-nineteenth century mesmerism by Roger Cooter,[21] Fred Kaplan,[22] Jon Palfreman,[23] Terry Parssinen,[24] Jacques Quen,[25] and Alison Winter,[26] the latter most fully in her doctoral thesis.

In brief one may say that the technique of mesmerism was popularized in Britain in the 1830s,[27] attracting some support in the medical profession and much opposition. The latter was spearheaded by Thomas Wakley's *Lancet*—Wakley here finding himself opposed to his former ally Dr John Elliotson,[28] who was eventually, in 1838, forced to resign from his position at University College Hospital as a result of his demonstrations of mesmerism. The rejection of mesmerism by the medical profession did not prevent its dissemination during the 1840s by itinerant lecturers[29] and by publications such as Elliotson's journal, the *Zoist*;[30] Elliotson also founded the London Mesmeric Infirmary (to

[19] Alan Gauld, *A history of hypnotism*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[20] Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: magnetic sleep and the roots of psychological healing*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993.

[21] Roger Cooter, 'The history of mesmerism in Britain: poverty and promise', in Heinz Schott (ed.), *Franz Anton Mesmer und die Geschichte des Mesmerismus: Beiträge zum internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposion anlässlich des 250. Geburtstages von Mesmer, 10. bis 13. Mai 1984 in Meersburg*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 1985; *idem*, 'Dichotomy and denial: mesmerism, medicine and Harriet Martineau', in Marina Benjamin (ed.), *Science and sensibility: gender and scientific enquiry, 1780–1945*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991.

[22] Fred Kaplan, '"The Mesmeric Mania": the early Victorians and animal magnetism', *J. Hist. Ideas*, 1975, **4**: 691–702; *idem, Dickens and mesmerism: the hidden springs of fiction*, Princeton University Press, 1975; *idem, John Elliotson on mesmerism*, New York, Da Capo Press, 1982.

[23] Jon Palfreman, 'Mesmerism and the English medical profession: a study of a conflict', *Ethics Sci. Med.*, 1977, **4**: 17–66; *idem*, 'Between scepticism and credulity: a study of Victorian attitudes to modern spiritualism', in Roy Wallis (ed.), *On the margins of science: the social construction of rejected knowledge*, Sociological Review Monograph 27, University of Keele, 1979.

[24] Terry M Parssinen, 'Mesmeric performers', in *Victorian Studies*, 1977/8, **21**: 87–104; *idem*, 'Professional deviants and the history of medicine: medical mesmerists in Victorian Britain', in Roy Wallis (ed.), op. cit., note 23 above.

[25] Jacques M Quen, 'Case studies in nineteenth-century scientific rejection: mesmerism, perkinism and acupuncture', *J. Hist. Behav. Sci.*, 1975, **11**: 149–56.

[26] Alison Winter, 'Ethereal epidemic: mesmerism and the introduction of inhalation anaesthesia in early Victorian London', *Soc. Hist. Med.*, 1991, **4**: 1–27; *idem*, '"The Island of Mesmeria": the politics of mesmerism in early Victorian Britain', Cambridge University PhD thesis, 1992; *idem*, 'Mesmerism and popular culture in early Victorian England', *Hist. Sci.*, 1994, **32**: 317–43.

[27] Mesmerism had originated in Austria and France in the late eighteenth century. Accounts of the work of Mesmer himself are found in Margaret Goldsmith, *Franz Anton Mesmer: the history of an idea*, London, Arthur Barker, 1934, and Vincent Buranelli, *The wizard from Vienna*, New York, Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1975, whilst Mesmer's own account of the process is made accessible in Franz Anton Mesmer, *Mesmerism: by Doctor Mesmer (1779): being the first translation of Mesmer's historic 'Mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal' to appear in English*, London, Macdonald, 1948. Mesmeric activities in England in the 1790s, during the first phase of the technique's history, are described in Roy Porter, '"Under the Influence": mesmerism in England', *History Today*, 1985, **35**: 22–9.

[28] For a summary of Elliotson's career, see Jonathan Miller, 'A Gower Street scandal: the Samuel Gee Lecture 1982', *J. R. Coll. Physicians Lond.*, 1983, **17**: 181–91; Elizabeth S Ridgway, 'John Elliotson (1791–1868): a bitter enemy of legitimate medicine?', *J. med. Biog.*, 1993, **1**: 191–8, and 1994, **2**: 1–7; or Winter, 'Mesmerism and popular culture', op. cit., note 26 above.

[29] See Kaplan and Winter, op. cit., notes 22 and 26 above.

[30] *The Zoist: a journal of cerebral physiology & mesmerism, and their applications to human welfare*, London, H Ballière, 1843–1855.

which, it will be noted, Gaskell refers in one of the Cambridge Ludlow letters) during this period, the hospital surviving until 1865. Also in the 1840s the popular author Harriet Martineau, bedridden for some years as a result of a uterine tumour (the same complaint as that of Mrs Glover in the Wellcome letter), was introduced to mesmerism, initially by the itinerant lecturer Spencer T Hall,[31] and experienced what she described as a cure; although much later her post-mortem examination did reveal a large uterine cyst,[32] mesmerism certainly enabled her to leave her sickroom, resume normal activities and break her dependence on opiates. The publication of her *Letters on mesmerism*,[33] an account of her experiences, provoked vigorous debate in the pages of the *Athenæum*, in which the letters had initially been serialized, and in pamphlets.

Criticisms of mesmerism ranged from Wakley's assertion that it was fraudulent:

> Coffinites and herbalists, nostrum-mongers and syphilitic doctors, cancer-curers or mesmerists, professors of biology and a host of other childish nonsense and iniquitous folly,—all these, without exception, are ignorant imposters, whose sole object is to cheat and defraud the public, and gain an easy, because dishonest and disreputable livelihood.[34]

to the religious argument that this influencing of a person's will, while real, was no less than witchcraft or possession and therefore forbidden by God. This attitude surfaces in Jane Welsh Carlyle's letter to her uncle John Welsh dated 13 December 1847, in which she comments *à propos* of Harriet Martineau's *Letters on mesmerism*:

> one thing I am very sure of, that the less one has to do with it the better; and that it is all of one family with witchcraft, demoniacal possession—is, in fact, the self-same principle presenting itself under new scientific forms, and under a polite name. To deny that there is such a thing as animal magnetism, and that it actually does produce many of the phenomena here recorded, is idle . . .[35]

Writers committed to the cause of mesmerism countered such arguments by attributing the phenomena that they described merely to an undiscovered natural force; the Reverend William Scoresby, who wrote on mesmerism as a by-product of his interest in magnetism generally,[36] stated that

> so far from there being any ground for connecting Zoistic Magnetism with supernatural agency . . . the close analogy of its phenomena, with the well-known laws of Magnetism and Electricity, [brings] the subject fairly within the province of the Natural Sciences . . .[37]

Application of such "scientific" arguments to mental activity of course left mesmerists open to accusations of reductive materialism. Elliotson was responsible for a split in the Phrenological Association in 1842 through linking phrenology with mesmerism, the latter seen as implying a model of the mind that reduced mental operations to physical forces:

[31] Hall is discussed by Winter in '"The Island of Mesmeria"' and 'Mesmerism and popular culture', op. cit. note 26 above.

[32] Cooter, 'Dichotomy and denial', note 21 above.

[33] Harriet Martineau, *Letters on mesmerism*, London, Edward Moxon, 1845.

[34] *Lancet*, 1853, **ii**: 605. The passage is quoted in the *Zoist*, 1853/4, **11**: 432, with some words or phrases given additional stress.

[35] James Anthony Froude (ed.), *Letters and memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle: prepared for publication by Thomas Carlyle*, London, Longmans, Green, and Company, 1883, vol. 2, p. 21.

[36] Scoresby is the subject of ch. 4 of Winter's '"The Island of Mesmeria"', note 26 above.

[37] W Scoresby, *Zoistic magnetism: being the substance of two lectures, descriptive of original views and investigations respecting this mysterious agency: delivered, by request, at Torquay, on the 24th of April and 1st of May, 1849*, London, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849.

at the Association's fifth annual conference that year his protégé William Engledue had delivered a strongly materialistic opening speech that triggered the resignations of numerous alarmed members.[38] Martineau's *Letters on the laws of man's nature and development*,[39] written in collaboration with H G Atkinson and published in 1851, similarly took a materialistic stance and led to a permanent breach with her brother, the Unitarian minister James Martineau, as a result of his hostile review of the work.[40]

There was considerable difference of opinion amongst mesmeric propagandists on the issue of materialism and the relation of the mind or "spirit" to the body. Some, such as the *Zoist* reviewer N.E.E.N. writing about the new phenomenon of spiritualism, could hold that

> A philosopher would be justified in rejecting all this doctrine at once. We have no proof of the existence of any spirits as distinct beings in nature; they are merely imaginary beings.[41]

Mesmerism from such a point of view was a step by which the mind was brought onto the same, physical, plane as phenomena such as electricity or magnetism. Conversely, the Reverend Chauncy Hare Townshend, a friend of Dickens (the latter eventually acting as Townshend's literary executor) and a promoter of mesmerism, argued that it provided a door to a wider, spiritual reality beyond the purely physical, a mesmeric subject having "a glimpse at least of the waves of the great ocean agitated by thought eternal",[42] mesmerism thus providing "a pledge irrefragable of a future state of existence, calculated for the exhibition of those energies which are but a promise here."[43]

Gaskell's Encounter with Mesmerism

At the time that Elizabeth Gaskell may be presumed to have written the Wellcome letter, the mesmeric agitation had perhaps begun to subside a little, with spiritualism taking over as a favourite topic of discussion, although the fact that in 1851 a pamphlet could be published referring to that year's "Mesmeric Mania"[44] is an indication that it was still capable of gripping the public imagination. Setting the letter in context is a two-way process: the addition of Elizabeth Gaskell's voice to those commenting upon mesmerism contributes to our picture of that issue, whilst the introduction of mesmerism to the list of matters discussed by Gaskell adds detail to our picture of the novelist.

In the case of the former relation, Gaskell's encounter with mesmerism serves to confirm the picture already formed by recent writings on the subject rather than to challenge it in any major fashion. Both Gaskell and mesmerism might be said to occupy an ambivalent position within the social hierarchy. Gaskell's own milieu might best be described as "respectable radical". Her Unitarian background excluded her from the

[38] Roger Cooter, *The cultural meaning of popular science: phrenology and the organization of consent in nineteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 94.

[39] Henry George Atkinson and Harriet Martineau, *Letters on the laws of man's nature and development*, London, John Chapman, 1851.

[40] [James Martineau], 'Mesmeric atheism', *Prospective Review*, 1851, **7**: 224–62.

[41] *Zoist*, 1853/4, **11**: 86.

[42] Chauncy Hare Townshend, *Facts in mesmerism, with reasons for a dispassionate enquiry into it*, London, Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1840, p. 519.

[43] Ibid., p. 534.

[44] John Hughes Bennett, *The mesmeric mania of 1851: with a physiological explanation of the phenomena produced*, Edinburgh, Sutherland and Knox, 1851.

commanding heights of the established order and gave her several areas of common ground with mesmeric propagandists.

That she was aware of how her religious background placed her is indicated by some mischievous comments in her letters, such as that to the literary agent John Forster in which she admits to reservations about Charlotte Brontë's marriage to the Puseyite curate Arthur Bell Nicholls: "I am terribly afraid he won't let her go on being as intimate with us, heretics".[45] Writers on mesmerism frequently demonstrated a strong Protestantism and opposition to the Catholic church that placed them in a similar area of the Christian spectrum. The Catholic church was identified with intellectual obscurantism—the persecution of Galileo being cited as an example—whilst Protestantism was equated with reason, freedom of thought and progress. George Sandby, a frequent contributor to the *Zoist*, commented that

> [reading an opponent of mesmerism] anyone would suppose that he were reading the ignorant ebullition of some dark monk in the middle ages, rather than the sentiments of an enlightened Protestant of the nineteenth century. What is this but a revival of the same spirit that called forth a papal anathema against the "starry" Galileo?[46]

while the church historian S R Maitland (who took the position that mesmerism's effects could well be genuine but might be forbidden by Biblical laws against witchcraft and the domination of others' wills[47]) was attacked in the *Zoist* for, *inter alia*, failing to show sufficient hostility to the Inquisition for the anonymous writer's liking.[48] One might also note William Scoresby's references to "the gigantic upas tree which poisoneth the land [of Ireland]—POPERY"[49] in his anonymously issued pamphlet *Sufferings and persecutions of the Irish Protestants*.

Viewed as a community, Unitarians were also associated with an openness to change in various fields. As noted above, it was a tradition that welcomed scientific progress as a revelation of God's handiwork; a perspective maintained in Elizabeth Gaskell's own family, her husband the Reverend William Gaskell writing in the *Unitarian Herald* in 1864 that "the more we come to know of His working, the more clearly shall we see how marvellous it is, and the more profoundly be led to adore".[50] As the quotation from George Sandby in the previous paragraph indicates, mesmeric propagandists were keen to place themselves within the tradition of scientific progress to legitimate their proposing as yet unexplained phenomena. Further examples of this tactic can be found. George Barth, another of the *Zoist* circle, pointed out the tendency for ideas to be rejected by an intellectual establishment simply because they do not fit the current paradigm—"There is a fashion in science as well as in dress".[51] Sandby presented a complementary picture of researchers into mesmerism as neutral and open-minded:

[45] Chapple and Pollard, op. cit., note 8 above, p. 280.

[46] George Sandby, Junior, *Mesmerism and its opponents: with a narrative of cases*, London, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844, p. 8.

[47] S R Maitland, *Illustrations and enquiries relating to mesmerism: Part I*, London, William Stephenson, 1849.

[48] *Zoist*, 1853/4, **11**: pp. 30–45.

[49] [William Scoresby], *Sufferings and persecutions of the Irish Protestants: by a friend to justice for Ireland*, London, privately printed, 1836, p. 67.

[50] Quoted in Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 136.

[51] George Barth, *What is mesmerism? The question answered by a mesmeric practitioner; or, mesmerism not miracle: an attempt to show that mesmeric phenomena and mesmeric cures are not supernatural. To which is appended useful remarks and hints for sufferers who are trying mesmerism for a cure*, London, H Ballière, 1853, p. 2.

On the great Baconian system of induction, they are recording the experiments, the variations, the modifications, as they present themselves; and when these shall be well-established, they will come to the theory.[52]

Unitarians were also prominent in movements for political and social reform; Uglow cites their support for the French Revolution,[53] whilst nearer to Gaskell's own time Harriet Martineau, for example, was strongly associated with the rationalizing, utilitarian/Malthusian strands of thought that had led to the reforms of the 1830s. Several of Gaskell's fictions, of course, form part of the upwelling of protest at the conditions of the poor in mid-nineteenth century England (ironically, protesting against precisely those *laissez-faire* attitudes advanced in the name of reform by Martineau, among others). Similarly, mesmeric propaganda, particularly that of the circle associated with John Elliotson, is often associated with agitation for other reforms: the *Zoist*, for example, contained condemnations of animal experimentation[54] and capital punishment, the latter with the general observation that "Ferocity and barbarism still characterize our criminal law."[55]

To an extent, then, Gaskell reinforces the association of mesmerism with radicalism and reform. It would be a mistake, however, to depict her as a complete outsider. Although a Noncomformist in religion, she did not take this as erecting an insurmountable barrier between her and the established church. Ludlow and Maurice, the Christian Socialists mentioned in the Wellcome letter, were both Anglicans and the letter, of course, speaks of her meeting Ludlow at the Anglican chapel of Lincoln's Inn. Her visiting this chapel is in marked contrast to the attitude of, for example, the Quaker John Hodgkin junior (brother of the pathologist Thomas Hodgkin), whose papers, currently undergoing cataloguing in the Wellcome Institute Western Manuscripts Department (collection PP/HO), illustrate severe conscientious scruples over contributing even a few pennies, via his rent, to the chapel and thus to the established church. As Uglow notes, Gaskell had a lasting attachment to the liturgy of the established church.[56]

Mesmerism and Class

Similarly, Gaskell's position in politics favoured conciliation over class struggle: in a letter to the family friend Mary Ewart, dating probably from late 1848 after the publication of *Mary Barton* had brought her accusations of stirring up class war, she was emphatic that "No-one can feel more deeply than I how *wicked* it is to do anything to excite class against class."[57] *North and south*, the novel roughly contemporary with the Wellcome letter, is a particularly good example of this reconciliatory approach, with various oppositions—between Northern industrial squalor and Southern rural idyll, between factory-owners and

[52] Sandby, op. cit., note 46 above, p. 19.

[53] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 7–9. In these circumstances the association of mesmerism with French revolutionary radicalism would not be the bugbear that it might have been for many British: see for the latter Winter, "'The Island of Mesmeria'", note 26 above, p. 15, and Porter, op. cit., note 27 above. Interestingly, John Ludlow grew up in France, the 1830 revolution being one of his formative experiences, in a similar Protestant tradition of openness to new thought and to scientific progress (the tradition embodied by the popular preacher Athanase Coquerel). Whether Ludlow had had contact with mesmeric ideas in France is an area for further research opened up by this letter.

[54] *Zoist*, 1853/4, **11**: 251.

[55] Ibid., 1843/4, **1**: 103–5.

[56] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 310.

[57] Chapple and Pollard, op. cit., note 8 above, p. 67.

workers, and between the established church and Dissent—shown as over-simplistic, and eventually "resolved" in the marriage of seeming opposites that concludes the novel. Her position as a middle-class clergyman's wife living next to poverty and seeking to ameliorate it was, of course, precisely that of a mediator between two worlds, a channel of communication. The social class of the Glovers is not explicit in the Wellcome letter but as a bookseller and therefore a tradesman Mr Glover would presumably occupy a lower social rung than a clergyman's wife;[58] Gaskell's interest in the case, therefore, would be an instance of middle-class philanthropy such as that engaged in by characters such as *North and south*'s Margaret Hale. The position of Ludlow and the other Christian Socialists to whom Gaskell was linked at this time was similar to hers, engaging as they did with working-class poverty but from outside; indeed, as Anglicans (although Maurice, a former Unitarian, provoked considerable controversy through doctrinal unorthodoxy at various points in his career) they were closer in the religious sense to the established order than Gaskell herself.

In a parallel fashion, the radicalism of mesmerism may be seen to be overstated, by its detractors and to an extent by its supporters. Wakley's characterization of mesmerists as disreputable charlatans standing outside the pale of respectable medicine has already been shown to be misleading: as Winter notes, the medical profession had not, at this stage, defined clearly what were and were not acceptable ideas and approaches (indeed, by providing an outside element against which the profession might define itself, mesmerism contributed to this process).[59] The class origins of mesmerists were also subject to considerable distortion in opponents' propaganda that treated mesmerism as a working-class irruption into medicine. This picture is relayed in the letter by Jane Welsh Carlyle already quoted, in which she describes her encounter with "a distinguished mesmerist, who could not sound his h's";[60] similarly, the writer Elizabeth Rigby, later Lady Eastlake, noted in her diary at the time of Harriet Martineau's articles that mesmerism was an "odious, disgusting and impious business, worthily advocated by women without principle and lectured upon by men who drop their h's".[61] The allusion here was no doubt to Spencer Hall, who introduced Martineau to the topic: Hall was an autodidact and former weaver whose *Mesmeric experiences* staked a claim for the role of popular culture, specifically the itinerant lecturer.[62] Unlike conventional medicine, a "fringe" science could be practised by all rather than being restricted to the educationally and financially privileged (Roger Cooter has discussed this in his work on phrenology). Mesmerism undoubtedly *did* become just such a popular medical movement. None the less, comments such as those cited above exaggerate the working-class element amongst its publicists and practitioners. Gauld, citing a list drawn up by the mesmerist George Sandby, Junior, demonstrates that far from being social outsiders, many mesmerists occupied

[58] The minute gradations of social class are to the fore in much of Gaskell's work, and are the basis of much of the comedy of *Cranford* or *Wives and daughters*. Indeed, when medical men appear in her fiction—for example, Mr Hoggins in *Cranford*—the stress is usually not on the details of their work but upon their position, often ambiguous, within the social hierarchy.

[59] Winter, '"The Island of Mesmeria"', note 26 above, pp. 9–10.

[60] Froude, op. cit., note 35 above, vol. 2, p. 22.

[61] Quoted from C E Smith, *Journals and correspondence of Lady Eastlake (1809–1893)*, in Vera Wheatley, *The life and work of Harriet Martineau*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1957, p. 237.

[62] Spencer T Hall, *Mesmeric experiences*, London, H Ballière, 1845, p. 24: "Tell me why a Yorkshire weaver or a Northamptonshire peasant has less right than you to participate in such knowledge."

"respectable" positions within the existing social order[63] (indeed, Elliotson appears to have been an out and out snob).[64] The number of Church of England clergy involved is particularly striking; "establishment" figures, even if, as noted earlier, often associated with the end of the Anglican spectrum closer to the Protestant nonconformists.

Accounts of mesmeric investigations frequently describe a reliance upon existing patterns of authority: mesmerizers were often male and (so far as can be gathered from biographical sources) both middle-class and middle-aged, whilst subjects were often female, often younger than the mesmerist and not infrequently domestic servants. Harriet Martineau's writings unconsciously draw attention to this reliance upon existing structures of authority, stating that it was difficult for her servant to mesmerize her because "the predominance of will should be in the Mesmerist, not the patient".[65] Winter notes that Spencer Hall, when asked to explain mesmerism to Lord Morpeth, was treated as a tradesman and, once Lord Morpeth began to experiment with mesmerism himself, was used as a mesmeric subject rather than allowed to be the mesmerizer,[66] a clear indication of the way in which mesmerizing was associated with dominance.

Gaskell's ambivalent position within the social order thus mirrors that of mesmerism as a whole; its world and hers spanning the urban working class and more establishment circles such as Anglican clergy or the London intelligentsia. The work of the writers elsewhere in this article has already indicated that mesmerism, although eventually rejected by a scientific establishment in the process of self-definition, was not such a disreputable fringe pursuit as Wakley would have had it; Gaskell's involvement adds a little more evidence of this.

Gaskell's Attitude to Mesmerism

There are fleeting references to mesmerism in Gaskell's fiction. In *Wives and daughters*, for example, Lady Cumnor comments sarcastically when her husband takes the credit for events that have nothing to do with him, "you must be strongly mesmeric, and your will acted on theirs, if you are to take credit for any part in the affair",[67] whilst later in the same novel Cynthia, seeking to explain away Mr Preston's mysterious hold over her (in fact due to his possession of compromising letters), asks

> "Molly, what should you think of me if I married him after all? . . . More unlikely things have happened. Have you never heard of strong wills mesmerizing weaker ones into submission? . . ."[68]

These are flippant comments, and in isolation would indicate only that the characters and author were to be envisaged in a milieu where mesmerism was known of, a familiar concept (if not necessarily one regarded as proven) but not a major topic of discussion.[69]

[63] Gauld, op. cit. , note 19 above, p. 210.

[64] Miller, op. cit., note 28 above, pp. 183–4.

[65] Harriet Martineau, *Harriet Martineau's autobiography*, London, Virago, 1983 (offset from the Smith, Elder edition of 1877), vol. 2, p. 150.

[66] Winter, '"The Island of Mesmeria"', note 26 above.

[67] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and daughters: an every-day story*, London, Smith, Elder, 1866, vol. 1, p. 138.

[68] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 79.

[69] For the characters of *Wives and daughters* to be placed in such a milieu borders on the anachronistic —the novel is set in the 1820s, at a time when interest in mesmerism in England was virtually dormant.

However, Gaskell had many links, direct or indirect, with the *dramatis personae* of the mesmeric controversies.

She corresponded with Harriet Martineau, whom she knew not merely as a popular writer or a figure within the close-knit Unitarian community but as a member of a family with which the Gaskells were on friendly terms: her husband had been a contemporary of James Martineau at Manchester New College in York and renewed the acquaintance when Martineau taught at the college after its return to Manchester in 1840, the two families staying in close contact (although Elizabeth Gaskell found James Martineau a bore).[70] Dickens, a friend of Elliotson (to whom *Great expectations* was dedicated) and Townshend, and an enthusiast about mesmerism in his own right,[71] was an acquaintance and at the time of the Wellcome letter was Gaskell's editor, *North and south* appearing in Dicken's journal *Household Words*. Thackeray, another friend of Elliotson who dedicated *Pendennis* to the doctor, was also an acquaintance of hers. Uglow's biography notes that William and Mary Howitt, radical journalists and the publishers of Gaskell's first fiction, were enthusiastically receptive to all new ideas, including mesmerism.[72] Charlotte Brontë, a friend since 1850, had been introduced to mesmerism at the end of that year by Harriet Martineau, although she was not wholly convinced of its claims, as a letter quoted in Gaskell's own *Life of Charlotte Brontë* makes clear:

> You ask me whether Miss Martineau made me a convert to mesmerism? Scarcely; yet I heard miracles of its efficacy, and could hardly discredit the whole of what was told me. I even underwent a personal experiment; and though the result was not absolutely clear, it was inferred that in time I should prove an excellent subject . . .[73]

William Scoresby, as Vicar of Bradford, had been the immediate superior to Patrick Brontë, perpetual curate of Haworth and father of the novelists. The extent to which Charlotte Brontë may have acted as a conduit for information on mesmerism, originating from Martineau or Scoresby, is not known. Gaskell was in fact to meet William Scoresby by chance in the summer of 1855, the year after her involvement in the case of Mrs Glover; Charlotte Brontë having died in March of that year, she was assembling materials for the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* and seized the opportunity to interview Scoresby on his recollections.[74]

All these connections make it likely that she had heard mesmerism discussed and perhaps joined in such discussion. Tantalisingly, James Braid, whose writings were the origin of modern theory and terminology,[75] was, like Gaskell, a resident of Manchester;

[70] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 131–2.

[71] Kaplan, *Dickens and mesmerism*, note 22 above.

[72] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 170. Uglow also notes that they were linked to a group of working-class autodidact writers from the Nottingham area known as the "Sherwood Foresters" (ibid., p. 115): the *DNB* applies that phrase as a nickname to Spencer Hall, who came from the same area. Whether he belonged to the same group is unclear; Mary Howitt's autobiography (*Mary Howitt: an autobiography, edited by her daughter Margaret Howitt*, London, William Isbister, 1889) does not shed light on the matter.

[73] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The life of Charlotte Brontë*, London, Smith, Elder, 1857, vol. 2, p. 200.

[74] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 395.

[75] For example, James Braid, *Neurypnology; or, the rationale of nervous sleep, considered in relation with animal magnetism*, London, John Churchill, 1843, pp. xviii–xix: "I have never witnessed any phenomena which were not reconcilable with the notion that they arose from the abnormal exaltation or depression of sensations and ideas . . . [I am sure that mesmerism] results from the mind and body of the patients acting and re-acting on each other, and that it has no dependence on any special influence emanating from another."

but to what extent they may have known of one another or moved in overlapping circles remains to be discovered.

The Wellcome letter confirms that, as these personal connections would suggest, Gaskell was brought into contact with mesmerism's claims and required to assess them. It is clear from the letter that, unlike Dickens, she had not studied the issue deeply: witness her speaking to Mr Glover "with a careless tone of contempt of mesmerism,—really knowing so little about it". It is also clear that she was dubious about it. Although mesmeric propagandists sought to dissociate the phenomena that they described from the supernatural, the *effect*, as opposed to the method, of mesmerism was similar to that of traditionally described witchcraft: the placing of one person under the control of another, "under a spell". Pamphleteers criticizing the new would-be science drew this comparison frequently; one argued that

> You cure disease by electricity, or by the galvanic battery, yet these cast no spell on the man; these defile not, oppress not, the spirit of the man operated upon. But in mesmerism you cast a spell over the man, and over his spirit. For the time he is absolutely under the control of the operator. But the thing does not stop here. It is a well-known feature in mesmerism that, after a course of it, the will and spirit of the person on whom it is practised become, in an extraordinary manner abjectly and permanently subservient to the control and will of the mesmerizer, not only while in the trances but during waking hours. Yes; there has been a *spell* at work, some *spiritual* influence which does not accompany the use of medicine, nor of more natural magnetism or electricity . . .[76]

Gaskell was very fond of ghost stories[77] and it is unlikely that this aspect of mesmerism would have escaped her: her admission that she had "rather a dread of it" may well stem from this. In the accounts of mesmerism by Martineau and others, the medical is mingled with accounts of clairvoyance and allied phenomena, and this "occult" side to the activity—even if the mesmerists' claim was that their science proved that phenomena, previously thought to be mystic and magical, were the result of predictable physical laws—was such as to seize Gaskell's imagination. It may well also have been easier to believe that Martineau had been influenced permanently by some outside force: it would have provided an excuse for the strongly materialistic and atheistic tone of her recently published *Letters on the laws of man's nature and development.*

Certainly a degree of distancing herself from the subject is indicated by the inverted commas, the typographical equivalent of tweezers, with which Gaskell handles Ludlow's opinions. None the less, the promise held out by mesmerism is one that she is prepared to investigate. In particular, the medical reforms, the improvements in patients' comfort and autonomy,[78] that mesmerism offered would have struck a chord with her own social activism. Winter has written of the threat that mesmeric anaethesia presented to conventional medicine, removing pain in a fashion that the medical establishment was unable to match until the late 1840s with the introduction of ether, seen explicitly in some

[76] [F Sitwell], *What is mesmerism? And what its concomitants clairvoyance and necromancy?*, 2nd ed., London, Bosworth and Hamson, 1862, pp. 5–6. The shorter first edition of this pamphlet appeared in 1853, one year before the conjectural date of the Wellcome letter.

[77] Uglow, op. cit., note 3 above, pp. 227–8, 239, 244–5, 306–7 and 605.

[78] See Winter, '"The Island of Mesmeria"', note 26 above, p. 121, on the role of nineteenth-century medical reforms in reducing reliance upon the patient's own description of his or her experiences, and the threat to this process posed by mesmerism.

quarters as a counter to the mesmeric threat.[79] Mesmerism was also promoted as relieving some symptoms in a manner that removed the need for invasive or destructive surgery: Elliotson cited the use of mesmerism to overcome epilepsy in contrast to a surgical "cure" proposed by an American doctor, the patient "having a piece of his skull sawn out and one of his carotid arteries tied . . . remaining uncured after all".[80] George Barth, pointed out that mesmerism could pinpoint specific organs far more accurately than drugs could, and therefore increased the efficiency of treatment whilst reducing the risk of side-effects:

> The liver is affected, put blue pill into the stomach; . . . the skin is hot and dry, a diaphoretic for the stomach . . . There is something amiss somewhere betwixt the head and the feet, no matter where or what, the stomach is likely to made a receptacle for drugs. Poor stomach![81]

Behind each of these arguments was a contention that, in effect, the medical establishment bullied its patients, failing to show compassion or to tailor treatment to their needs. This, of course, is the point that Elizabeth Gaskell raises in the Wellcome letter about treatment at the Women's Hospital: a point underlined by Ornella Moscucci's statement that here Protheroe Smith aimed at "a form of moral and bodily discipline which locked poor women into a socially subordinate position".[82] In a broader sense mesmerism's protest was a parallel, in medical terms, to the protest raised at this time by Gaskell and other writers against an economic system that viewed the poor as a lumpen labour pool without individual personalities: by Gaskell in *Mary Barton* and of course in *North and south*, dating from the same period as this letter, or most famously by Dickens in *Hard times* (which preceded *North and south* as did the main serial in *Household Words*).

The letter is thus a splendid illustration of Elizabeth Gaskell's open-mindedness and tolerance. It shows her prepared to contemplate the use of a "disreputable" process, vilified by some representatives of mainstream medicine and religion, as a means to a desirable end; and prepared to concede that her *own* dislike of that idea may be based upon an irrational consideration and therefore be invalid, an intellectual humility rare in contemporary discussion of the issue. That she was prepared to set aside her own initial dislike of mesmerism in deference to the opinions of a man, of course, is another small piece of evidence to be assimilated in any treatment of Gaskell's attitudes to gender. It is the same combination of tolerance and willingness to judge ideas by their results rather than, *a priori*, by their source (and the same note of uncertainty over how assertive a woman might be) that occurs in her comments five years later on George Eliot, living with the already married G H Lewes:

> I *have* tried to be moral, & dislike her & dislike her books—but it won't do. There is not a wrong word, or a wrong thought in them, I do believe,—and though I should have been more 'comfortable', for some indefinable reason, if a *man* had written them instead of a *woman*, yet I think the author must be a noble creature; and I shut my eyes to the awkward blot in her life.[83]

[79] Winter, 'Ethereal epidemic', note 26 above.

[80] *Zoist*, 1853/4, 1: 248.

[81] G P Barth, *The principle of health transferable; or, how to obtain immediate relief from pain, and a speedy cure in disease. Addressed to all who are sick and suffering*, London, H Ballière, 1848, p. 7.

[82] Ornella Moscucci, *The science of women: gynaecology and gender in England, 1800–1929*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 85.

[83] Chapple and Pollard, op. cit., note 8 above, p. 594.

In *North and south* Gaskell articulated similar values of tolerance, making a plea for compassion and social reform whilst at the same time rejecting any simple dichotomy between evil employers and downtrodden workers, or between industrial poverty in the North and an idealized prosperous South. The desire of Margaret Hale, the central figure of that novel, to do good without adopting an entrenched position or attaching herself to either of the warring factions, is seen to be mirrored by her creator in this contemporary letter.

APPENDIX

Transcript of Elizabeth Gaskell's letter to Ann Scott

The letter is held in the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, Western Manuscripts Department, Autograph Letters Sequence. Gaskell's several insertions are placed in brackets thus < >. "Meta" is Elizabeth Gaskell's second daughter, Margaret Emily Gaskell, and "Susy", Ann Scott's daughter Susan F Scott. "Mrs Shaw" is not identified.

My dear Mrs Scott,

I do so want to see you, & Cheetham Hill is so far away,—and it is such a chance if I find you in! I think I shall try to come tomorrow—and meanwhile I want to know if you and Mr Scott have ever had any experience about *mesmerism*[.] I have rather a dread of it altogether I *think* because I have a feeling it *twisted* Miss Martineau's mind; but it may not be that, & it may be a superstitious feeling (& consequently a faithless one) of mine. Now I'll tell you why I want to know your & Mr Scott's opinion. Do you remember a fortnight ago our meeting at Lincoln's Inn <Chapel>, & my stopping to speak to Mr Ludlow. The "upshot" of our talk was that I went to see a poor woman at St Bartholomew's—wife of a very good pious bookseller at Bury; (our Lancashire Bury)—known to Mr Maurice & Mr Ludlow as a practically good man. His name is Glover. Well: his wife,—aged 33—has subdued all complaints for some years, during which they have had to struggle hard,—but all this time she has been suffering from injurious pains which at last became so bad that a surgical examination was requisite,—(it was a tumour at the mouth of the womb)—& she was taken (by Mr Ludlow's advice) to St Bartholomew's, where last Thursday an operation was performed by Dr West, & from the puncture blood flowed instead of water, showing it had been neglected too long. (I must give you all the details to enable you to judge about employing mesmerism, if you *have* any experience on the subject.) Today I receive a letter from Mr Ludlow, communicating these facts,—saying that as soon as Mrs G. is a little better she will have to be discharged the hospital as incurable, & that then two courses will be open,—one to try for admission to the Women's Hospital (Soho Square) set apart for such diseases,—over which I went with Mr Ludlow, & in which the house & room arrangements are comfortable *for a hospital* but wh^{ch} is attended by Dr Protheroe Smith about whose *wilfulness* in operating <where there was no hope> I heard stories wh^{ch} amounted to absolute cruelty,—&—Mr Ludlow suggests mesmerism as the other course,—believing <if efficacious> that "when applied in Christian faith, because it appears to me the fulfilment of our Lord's commands, which I find nothing in Scripture to limit in point of time or circumstances, that of "laying hands on the sick", when we are told "they shall recover",—as far as I can make it out it is simply a transmission of life and strength from one person into another, and which has certainly proved frequently efficacious in uterine diseases. This it has done, I believe, where all local applications of surgery & all endeavours to treat that particular disease have failed simply because it alone has power to renew the constitution itself <&> to enable it to throw off the evil. Where that is beyond cure I believe mesmerism will still greatly augment the stock of strength to grapple with it,—as well

as soothe the pain. May I ask you to consider these views, both in meditation before God, & in conversation with &c. I should say at once, that if there is any prejudice against mesmerism in the mind of any party concerned, I would rather that every available mode of ordinary treatment should be first exhausted."

So far Mr Ludlow. Poor Mr Glover writes to me to beg my opinion[.] He seems utterly felled by the shock of finding the operation unsuccessful, & the disease incurable by ordinary methods, & says his friends must decide for him. I am vexed with myself (Oh, *so* vexed!) because last week when I was at Bury I spoke to Mr Glover with a careless tone of contempt of mesmerism,—really knowing so little about it as I did. I want to try now to get all the wisdom I can to help me to give the best judgement I can. I hope I've not tired you out with my long story—& will you tell me your opinions. I shall *try* to come tomorrow,—but this afternoon I must go, all uncertain, & confess my ignorance to Mr Glover—& see what can be done to comfort him—and tonight Mrs Shaw comes *here* for a fortnight; with a baby to fill one's heart with delight,—so I may*n't* be able to come and then will you write? And moreover we want Susy to come here,—we will fetch her in the little pony carriage on *Thursday* morning next,—& then she can go home with you on Friday evening. & you'll be *obliged* to come to reclaim your child. This is the beginning of a plan I have at heart of making your children and mine *friends*. Meta is only at home till next Monday,—and till Thursday we have not even the merest scrap of a bed disengaged. Thanks for telling me of the 1st of July. I hope to come. In greatest haste

Yours affectionately

Monday mor[nin]g E. C. Gaskell