

Harriet Martineau's Empiricism

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The *Illustrations of Political Economy* was a series of fictional tales written by Harriet Martineau and published in twenty-seven monthly installments beginning in 1832 with the goal of making the subject of political economy accessible to the public. Each of the twenty-four tales ran a little over one hundred pages and concluded with a “Summary of Principles illustrated in this volume.” The series was extremely popular; monthly sales numbers were at one point several times those of Dickens’s novels, and it did not take long for the tales to be translated into Dutch, German, Spanish, French, and Russian (Snyder 2006: 3; Logan 2004: 35). The success of the series won the approval even of those economists, such as James Mill and J. R. McCulloch, who had originally been skeptical of her idea of using fictional tales to illustrate economic principles (Blaug 1958: 130).¹ Given its generic and disciplinary innovativeness, it is not

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1. It should be noted that, along with this unprecedented popularity, the series also generated a considerable amount of controversy in England and abroad. Jane Marcet was alarmed when she began reading *French Wine and Politics*, fearing that its depiction of events in France would alienate the French king, who until that point had been enjoying the series. The *Illustrations* also led to Martineau being barred from entering Austria and Russia (Huzel 2006: 88). In England, the *Illustrations* and Martineau herself were frequently attacked in the Whig, Tory, and radical periodical presses. Many of these attacks were subtly or blatantly sexist (70–74). As

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surprising that the work has attracted the attention of academics from a variety of fields ranging from feminist scholars to economic historians. Underlying much of this scholarship is a general understanding of the series as a work that spoke effectively to its immediate audience but soon became obsolete along with the conception of political economy it popularized. I intend to complicate this understanding by showing how Martineau's tales anticipate and accommodate important methodological criticisms of what was the dominant school of economic thought at the time when she was writing.

The tales that compose the *Illustrations* take place in a wide range of geographic and historical settings and feature a variety of complex characters and conflicts. However, most of them follow a fairly similar narrative structure. *Homes Abroad*, for example, written to illustrate the principles of colonization, opens with a description of the devastating poverty of Kent. The plot then follows Mr. Castle, a man reduced "without fault of his own . . . to the very verge of pauperism," and his similarly industrious but out-of-work son and daughter, Frank and Ellen, as they decide to emigrate to the Australian colony of Van Diemen's Land (Martineau 1832b, 4:3, 9, 16). Jerry and Bob, Castle's disowned sons from another marriage, also emigrate to Van Diemen's Land, but as transported convicts (4:46). The wealthy and influential Mr. Fellows, meanwhile, debates the clergyman Mr. Jackson, with Jackson defending emigration while Fellows contends that his home colonization scheme of converting wasted land to a "people's farm" is superior (4:27). As the narrative unfolds, the emigrants prosper in Van Diemen's Land, and Fellows eventually begins to encourage others to emigrate following his alternative scheme's relative lack of success (4:119).

The other tales in the series make use of the same basic formula; the characters and their economic dilemmas are introduced, a few characters debate or discuss the operative economic questions, narrative events reveal who is correct, and the tale concludes with a summary of principles. *Homes Abroad* illustrates the merits of voluntary colonization relative to home colonization and penal colonization, suggesting on multiple occasions that the prosperity of transported convicts, often exceeding that of voluntary emigrants, is hardly an incentive to obey the

James Huzel (2006: 74) explains, "It was bad enough to disseminate the ideas of the detestable Malthus. It was even worse, in the eyes of her critics, that such sentiments should stem from a woman's pen."

law (Martineau 1832b, 4:46, 84). Each tale illustrates a different set of principles. *Messrs Vanderput and Snoek*, set in seventeenth-century Holland, illustrates the desirability of free trade. *The Charmed Sea*, which follows a group of Polish exiles in Serbia, is an illustration of the principles of currency and exchange. The tales were frequently praised for their literary and aesthetic qualities, so it is not surprising that there were readers like Mary Mitford who could derive enjoyment from them while ignoring their economic lessons (Sanders 1986: x, xiii; Logan 2002: 17; Webb 1960: 119–20). Certain narrative tendencies suggest Martineau was at times willing to prioritize realism over didacticism.² While some of the characters aligned with incorrect economic action are foolish or vicious, others are simply misguided; Mr. Fellows in *Homes Abroad*, for example, is more than happy to change his position when faced with new evidence. Moreover, many of these tales are quite bleak, containing scenes of acute and sometimes grotesque suffering and despair, and the ending does not always bring about an end to the affliction.³ At the outset of *The Moral of Many Fables*, the final installment of the series, Martineau acknowledges that the “melancholy” nature of the tales was the most common criticism they received (Martineau 1832b, 9:1). Yet, the *Illustrations* are also imbued with a steadfast confidence that humankind will grow more prosperous with time, that bad policies will be defeated, and that there are feasible solutions to most economic woes (1:28, 89, 90, 124; 7:91).

2. I use the word *realism* here in the broad sense of the term. It is not meant to carry the more specific connotations it might have in literary studies discourse. However, it is worth noting that Martineau wrote a considerable amount of literary fiction throughout her career, much of which was well received by her contemporaries (Sanders 1986: xi). She was also a literary critic with a well-developed sense of what novels should be expected to do and what they could achieve. Her views on fiction can be seen in her two *Edinburgh Review* articles on Sir Walter Scott (1832a, 1833) that were published around the same time as the *Illustrations* and in the article on Catherine Ann Sedgwick (1837) that she wrote for the *Westminster Review* a few years later. For an understanding of the *Illustrations* as literary works and their significance in the history of the English novel, see Sanders 1986 and Kovačević 1975.

3. There is an episode in *Life in the Wilds* in which a young, innocent, good-natured boy dies of a bite from a poisonous snake (Martineau 1832b, 1:66). This event lacks a direct connection to the economic arguments being advanced. It is possible that the reputation for bleakness owes something to the fact that in addition to the economic hardship depicted, many tales also contain seemingly gratuitous misery. Another example is in *Ella of Garveloch*, in which Ella's developmentally disabled younger brother Archie is beaten mercilessly with a cane and then locked in a dark room by their landlord's steward, Callum (2:56). Archie barely survives the night (2:57).

A variety of explanations have been offered for the tremendous popular success of these tales. Caroline Roberts (2002: 14–15) suggests that while “the theoretical language of male political economists seemed boring and obscure,” Martineau made economic theory “comprehensible to the average reader” by presenting it through narrative.⁴ The timing of their publication also likely played a significant role in their popularity. Laura Snyder (2006: 269) attributes the high demand for the series partly to the fact that it was published at a moment when England’s increasing wealth disparity and the intense suffering of urban and rural laborers made it “important practically as well as intellectually to define the science of political economy, and to determine whether and to what extent the science could be applied to solve the problems faced by society.” Elaine Freedgood (1999: 213) argues that the success of *Illustrations* owed much to its ability to provide middle-class readers with a comforting depiction of economic pain as an essentially preventable result of unsound policies and bad individual decisions. By depicting economic hardship in this way, the tales offered a sense of closure and optimism rarely found in economic treatises or industrial novels (225). Due to whatever combination of these factors, Martineau’s own adamant assertion that “the people want this book, and they *shall* have it” was ultimately proven correct (quoted in Logan 2002: 15).

What critics have found just as notable as the incredible popularity of the *Illustrations* is its “inability to stand the test of time.” As Logan (2002: 17) explains, such critics have contended that the series’ “subject matter and didactic style are anachronistic.” Martineau herself does not seem to have altogether disputed this assessment. Reflecting on the project twenty years later in her *Autobiography*, she claims that she could not bear to look back at the *Illustrations*, expecting that if she did she would be disgusted by its “bad taste and metaphysics in almost every page” (Martineau [1855] 1983, 1:258). While she cannot recall writing *For Each and for All*, she supposes “it must have contained the stereotyped doctrine of the

4. A number of scholars have read the series through a feminist lens. Lana Dalley (2010: 104), e.g., contends that the project itself was an avenue for Martineau to participate in a discourse generally perceived as masculine by framing economic theory within domestic fiction and emphasizing the parts of it that relate most directly to felt human experience. Ella Dzelzainis (2010: 120), going a step further, claims that “Martineau was in fact actively and consciously inserting her feminist account of political economy into the *Illustrations*.” According to Dzelzainis, Martineau espouses William Thomson’s Wollstonecraftian feminism against James Mill’s conservative gender politics, even as she employs Mill’s economics against Owenite socialism (123).

Economists of *that day*" (1:232; emphasis mine). With respect to political economy more generally, she would write that

I believe I should not have been greatly surprised or displeased to have perceived, even then, that the pretended science is no science at all, strictly speaking; and that so many of its parts must undergo essential change, that it may be a question whether future generations will owe much to it than the benefit (inestimable, to be sure) of establishing the grand truth that social affairs proceed according to great general laws, no less than natural phenomena of every kind. (2:245)

The English historical economist, and critic of Ricardian political economy, John Kells Ingram, would quote this passage in his 1878 address, *The Present Position and Prospects of Political Economy*. "Here is a conclusion," Ingram (1878: 9) says of her statement, "resting essentially on intellectual, not moral, grounds; and I presume Professor Jevons will not explain it as a result of ignorant impatience." Such dissatisfaction with the current understanding of economic principles, Ingram believed, would be difficult to dismiss coming from the author who had built her literary reputation upon her aptitude for teaching them.

Ingram was not the only one to associate the tales with a conception of political economy that he believed was becoming increasingly less tenable. In an essay tracing and assessing the legacy of historicist criticism of classical economics, A. W. Coats alludes to the decline of popularization projects like Martineau's *Illustrations* as one of the few developments in nineteenth-century political economy for which the historicist critics could properly be given credit. He argues that, while the historical economists made few substantial "positive contributions" to economics, some classical economists had sometimes relied excessively on deduction from generalized abstractions in the way that their historicist critics accused them of doing and that popularizers had often magnified this mistake (Coats 1954: 144).⁵ Coats references Alfred Marshall's assertion in 1897 that the more dogmatic tendencies of some of the early Ricardian economists had been checked insofar that "never again will a Mrs. Trimmer, a Mrs. Marcet, or a Miss Martineau earn a goodly reputation by throwing them into the form of a catechism or of simple tales, by aid of which any

5. Coats uses the term *historist* where I use *historicist*, which seems to be the more recently adopted term. It refers to the same cluster of economists defined by their methodological criticism of classical, and particularly Ricardian, political economy.

intelligent governess might make clear to the children nestling around her where lies economic truth” (quoted in Coats 1954: 144). Mark Blaug similarly suggests that the tales were an embodiment of precisely the kind of economic thinking with which Ricardian political economy’s critics took issue. He argues that the chief contribution of the tales to the public perception of political economy was to provide “easy answers to difficult questions” and that “by depriving Ricardo’s critics of a receptive audience, the *Illustrations* played a significant role in holding back the reaction to Ricardian economics” (Blaug 1958: 139).

The common premise in many of these critical conversations is that Martineau’s political economy was a simplistic kind of popular Ricardianism that would later be discredited. Such an assessment risks overlooking the profound influence of Malthus on Martineau’s political economy and her significant commonalities with the inductivist and historicist critics of the Ricardian system who were partly inspired by Malthus. While the centrality of Malthus’s population principle to Martineau’s understanding of economics has long been recognized, the influence of his views regarding scope and methodology on her *Illustrations* has not been sufficiently explored. Because these questions of scope and method were a critical area of disagreement between Malthus and Ricardo and were at the core of later inductivist critiques of Ricardian political economy, reading the tales within the framework of this debate can complicate the conventional understanding of the *Illustrations* as the embodiment of popular Ricardianism. If the *Illustrations* “depriv[ed] Ricardo’s critics of a receptive audience,” as Blaug argues, I suggest their ability to do so owes something to the ways in which they anticipate and integrate many of the arguments of these critics into her exhibition of economic principles. Some readers have identified ways in which the tales portend later developments in Martineau’s writing career and in economic discourse more broadly. Logan (2002: 17), for instance, has argued that “the *Illustrations*’ great innovation lay in bridging two crucial genre gaps: first, by joining ‘silver fork’ with working-class concerns and clarifying their economic interdependence and second, by demonstrating that theory (principles) and practice (fictional narrative) are similarly interdependent.”⁶ This latter point is particularly noteworthy, because one of the key

6. Logan’s point about the tales clarifying the interdependence of the different classes of society is also relevant to the debates between Ricardian economists and their historicist critics. In Ricardo’s conceptualization of class relations, only the landlord benefited when food was

components of historicist criticism of Ricardian economics was precisely that it consisted of theory that seemed, to them, entirely divorced from or even at odds with practice.⁷

I argue that Martineau's vision of the scope, nature, and method of political economy strongly resembles early inductivist critiques of classical economics and that the *Illustrations of Political Economy* should be read as anticipating the concerns and priorities of the English historical school. Both the process by which she conducted research for the *Illustrations* and the process by which her characters learn economic lessons resemble the inductive process that the Cambridge inductivists and later the English historical economists posited as an alternative to the abstract and deductive method of the classical school. Moreover, many of the characters in these tales who fail to understand political economy make the same kinds of methodological errors that the inductive and historical economists would accuse the classical school's proponents of committing. These tales also reveal how cultural, religious, and historical forces influence economic life and economic decision-making, suggesting that, as the inductive and historical economists often argued, understanding these forces was essential to arriving at a true understanding of

scarce and did not benefit when it was cheap. Radicals particularly liked this conceptualization because it bolstered their arguments against aristocratic privilege (Snyder 2006: 276–78). Richard Jones, by contrast, wanted “to show the interconnectedness of all classes of society” (286). H. C. Carey's allegation that Ricardian economics turned men toward socialism owing to the way it presented class relations would reappear with some consistency in the writings of English historical economists (Koot 1987: 34). “Had [Ricardo] been an English Lassalle or Karl Marx, and his main object to sow enmity between capital and labour,” Leslie (1879: 26) argues, “he could not have devised a doctrine better adapted to the purpose.” Martineau's tales tend to present the interests of the different classes of society as compatible rather than conflicting. Her treatment of rent in *Sowers Not Reapers* and elsewhere suggests that the prosperity of tenants and society in general tends to benefit landlords, partly because if rents are nominally lower, landlords are more likely to receive the whole of them (Martineau 1832b, 7:148, 9:47).

7. The terms *inductivist* and *historicist* refer to essentially the same set of critiques of Ricardian political economy. The main difference between the two terms is chronological; the English historical school refers to a group of economists who wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hence, the term would be somewhat anachronistic if applied to Malthus, Jones, and Whewell, although the historical economists did view Malthus and Jones as practitioners of what they called the “historical method.” For a sense of how the English historical economists saw their own work in connection with previous economists, see Leslie 1875. I use both terms together a few times to indicate the value of considering the two groups of thinkers together, and afterward I use them somewhat interchangeably while trying to be mindful of the chronological distinction. Similarly, I mainly use the term *political economy* to refer to the subject of economics the way it was referred to at the time, while occasionally using the term *economics* to avoid repetitiveness.

political economy. The ultimate effect of these features of the *Illustrations* is an economic argument that advances the principles of the classical school of economics while promoting a broader vision of the subject more consistent with that of the inductivist critics of that very school.

1. Thomas Malthus, Richard Jones, and the Inductive Method in Political Economy

The tension between inductive and deductive approaches to understanding human societies existed in English philosophy even before the rise of classical political economy. Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow (1983: 21) have identified in mid-eighteenth-century thought a clear distinction between “on the one hand, proceeding deductively from the laws of human nature, and, on the other, arguing inductively from the evidence of the historical record.” This mid-eighteenth-century desire to subject morality and politics to scientific treatment gave rise to two well-defined methodologies. One involved “emphasizing the lessons or maxims that could be drawn, more or less systematically, from historical experience, the other concentrating on those constant ‘springs’ of human nature, those psychological propensities that seemed not to vary greatly across time and place.” Often these methodologies were considered mutually complementary (14). In *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, for example, Dugald Stewart ([1792] 1802: 225) warns that if “men of abstraction” are not careful, their proclivity toward abstract reasoning can hinder the ability to make practical use of knowledge. Meanwhile, on the matter of politics, he criticizes those who “consider the actual institutions of mankind as the only safe foundation for our conclusions, and think every plan of legislation chimerical, which is not copied from one which has already been realised,” arguing that those who recognize that “in many cases, we may reason safely *a priori* from the known principles of human nature, combined with the particular circumstances of the times” are practicing a far superior method (235–36). If those in this latter group exercise a proper degree of caution, their conclusions are just as much founded upon experience as those of the “political empiric” (236). Stewart essentially argues that while some thinkers err on one side or the other, an effective synthesis of the two processes is highly important and perfectly feasible.

It was in the disagreements between Malthus and Ricardo that the tension between these two methods first became the source of a nearly century-long debate among political economists. Malthus’s *Essay on the*

Principle of Population (1798) would become famous for his argument that population, left unchecked, would outgrow food supply, but what initially provoked him to write it was his skepticism of William Godwin's and the Marquis de Condorcet's utopian ideas about human progress. Primarily, but not exclusively, he objected to their belief that, in the absence of unjust institutions, human rationality would eliminate vice, sexual passion, and even mortality. He also felt that their methods of reasoning lacked scientific rigor (Winch 1996: 230). In their disregard for Newtonian science, his opponents erred in assuming "that what was true to some extent was true to an unlimited extent" (244, 245). Malthus's distrust of any approach to the study of society not sufficiently grounded in science and empiricism is apparent throughout his critiques of his opponents.

It is clear from the *Essay* why the historical economists would later view Malthus retrospectively as a practitioner of the historical or inductive method. Rife with appeals to observation, experience, history, and statistics, the *Essay* looks ahead to inductivist and historicist economic writings. Malthus ([1798] 2008: 96) argues that "the moment we leave past experience as the foundation of our conjectures concerning the future, and still more, if our conjectures absolutely contradict past experience, we are thrown upon a wide field of uncertainty, and any one supposition is then just as good as another." He considers the population principle to be confirmed by "experience, the true source and foundation of all knowledge" (14). In order to demonstrate that the increase of population depends upon the presence or absence of misery and vice, he gives a detailed account of how long it took the population to double in various parts of the United States (47–48). He is also quick to note instances in which the data or historical record with respect to a specific area of interest is in some way inaccessible or incomplete (20, 29, 35). The arguments of his opponents, by contrast, lack any empirical basis: one theory of Condorcet's looks good "upon paper" but is revealed to be faulty "when applied to real life;" Godwin "relies too much on general and abstract propositions which will not admit of application," and the way he tries to overcome the population issue reveals his lack of attentiveness "to the real state of man on earth" (64, 74, 76). As we know "from experience" that plants and animals cannot grow infinitely large or take on any shape in spite of the powers of selective breeding, we should assume humans to be bound by similar limitations (71).

The methodological convictions that Malthus conveys in his *Essay* anticipate his later economic writings and his disagreements with Ricardo.

Two decades after the *Essay* was first published, Malthus would write *Principles of Political Economy* (1820), the introduction to which sets out his presuppositions regarding scope and method. Because political economy deals with “so variable a being as man” and “so variable a compound as the soil,” even those of its propositions that allow very few exceptions resemble “the great general rules in morals and politics” more closely than they resemble those of mathematics (Malthus [1820] 1836: 1). A failure to recognize this fundamental truth about the subject is, according to Malthus, responsible for a great many errors (6). His objective, in *Principles*, is to render political economy’s rules fit for practical application “by a frequent reference to experience” (16). Ricardo considered such an approach misguided. He would maintain that political economy, properly understood, was “a strict science like mathematics” (quoted in Snyder 2006: 271). Being such a science, it would need to begin with “axioms of ‘universal’ experience about human and physical nature” (271). He once wrote to Malthus, “If I am too theoretical (which I really believe is the case), you I think are too practical. There are so many combinations and so many operating causes in Political Economy that there is great danger in appealing to experience in favour of a particular doctrine, unless we are sure that all the causes of variation are seen and their effects duly estimated” (Ricardo 1887: 96). While Ricardo believed that in order for economics to work as a science it was necessary to begin with axiomatic principles, such as “Men desire to obtain as much wealth with as little effort as possible,” Malthus thought it was entirely possible to understand human motivation and the various factors influencing economic behavior in more detail (Snyder 2006: 271, 274).

By 1820 Ricardian economics was already attaining a kind of orthodox status, Malthus’s attempt to combat this trend by publishing his own *Principles* that year notwithstanding (Snyder 2006: 272). In some ways, Malthus’s economic writings would continue to be influential.⁸ However, when it came to the scope, nature, and method of political economy, it was Ricardo’s logical, deductive approach to the science that became the standard. Remaining critics of the Ricardian approach would seek out

8. The theological dimensions of Malthus’s economic thought made it well suited to be taken up by writers on Christian political economy such as Thomas Chalmers. His population principle played an important role in debates about poor law reform, was an accepted component of mainstream economic theory until at least mid-century, and, perhaps most famously, was credited by Darwin for helping him discover natural selection.

Malthus's endorsement, not always successfully.⁹ Richard Jones and William Whewell, two of the founders of the Statistical Society of London and members of a coterie known as the Cambridge inductivists, would be among the first critics of Ricardian economics to take partial inspiration from Malthus. While they did not share all of his views, they saw his inductive methodology as the correct way to conduct economic study and agreed with his premise that political economy should be "ethical" in nature, resembling moral and political philosophy (Winch 1996: 287).¹⁰ They felt that the dominant mode of economic study was not sufficiently connected to the world they saw around them and the way institutions such as rent actually operated.

The Cambridge inductivists believed that the excessively abstract and theoretical nature of Ricardian political economy prevented it from being particularly useful in understanding these problems and was at least partly responsible for the subject's lack of popularity with the public (Jones 1831: xviii). Like Malthus's criticism of Godwin, Jones's critique of Ricardo suggested that simply looking at the world would be sufficient to reveal the shortcomings in his opponent's theory (vii). He considered Ricardo's method to be plagued with "almost every possible fault to which inattention to facts, and a perverse abuse of the mere reasoning faculty can give birth" (xii). Jones's process, by contrast, was premised on the idea that "in political economy, maxims which profess to be universal, can only be founded on the most comprehensive views of society" and that widely applicable economic principles could "be learnt only by an appeal to experience" (xv). He also believed that there was no lack of excellent material ripe for study both in the present age and in the historical record, from which accurate principles could be derived (xxi). In effect, Jones

9. As Winch (1996: 248) has noted, "Malthus was to prove as tenacious in curbing the excessive zeal of his admirers as he was in answering his critics." N. B. de Marchi and R. P. Sturges (1973: 379) have observed that compared to Jones and Whewell, "Malthus appears almost as a defender of Ricardo's abstract reasoning." The correspondence between Malthus and Whewell reveals that while Malthus "readily agreed that Ricardo had sometimes erred in his deductions and had dwelt too exclusively upon single causes" and could appreciate Jones's and Whewell's agreement with him on these points, he stopped somewhat short of aligning himself with them (386).

10. Jones and Whewell were by no means consistently staunch Malthusians, particularly when it came to population and poor law reform (Snyder 2006: 291, 295). On the population principle, Jones (1831: xxxiii) considered it "an error to suppose that the consequences of this power of increase present any real obstacle to the permanent ease and happiness of any class of society."

would adapt Malthus's side of the Malthus-Ricardo debate over scope and method into a set of critiques to which classical economists would spend the next seventy years responding.

Jones's writings were one of several sources of inspiration for what ultimately came to be known as the English historical school of economics (Koot 1987: 34).¹¹ John Kells Ingram and Cliffe Leslie, often considered the school's founders, were products of the Dublin Statistical Society that was initially created in 1847 with the improvement of the economic condition of Ireland as its aim (63). The English historical school took inspiration from a variety of sources including Richard Jones, the German historical school, and Comtean positivism.¹² Their critique of mainstream political economy on historicist grounds would also derive renewed strength in the 1860s from a broader surge of historicism that was leaving a powerful mark on all human sciences. Leslie is known to have been directly influenced by the historical jurisprudence of Sir Henry Maine, whose *Ancient Law* (1861) would go through eleven editions in the twenty-five years following its publication and would have an

11. Assessments of the overall importance of the historical schools to the growth and development of the subject of economics and the ultimate value of its contributions vary. Cardoso and Psalidopoulos (2015: xix) conclude that "economics did not become a historical science, but the historical school made important contributions to the understanding of the problems dealt with by politicians and economists." Koot (1987: 211) argues that, with respect to England, "the true importance of the historical economists was their insistence on the necessity of inductive research and the continual need for cross-fertilization between economic theory and economic history in the education of those who study economics." Like many others, he credits the English historical school with putting an end to the more dogmatic tendencies of early classical economics but considers their role in the formation of the discipline of economic history their most substantial accomplishment (Coats 1954: 152; Koot 1987: 3). Coats's verdict is somewhat less charitable. He suggests that classical political economy's historicist critics ultimately provided little of value to the subject; they greatly underestimated the importance of deduction in economic reasoning and lacked any kind of theoretically sophisticated alternative to the method they attacked (Coats 1954: 152). Earlier writers in the classical tradition had already "vigorously stated" the frequently asserted claim of the historicist critics that theoretical propositions are only valid given certain conditions (148). As Collini, Winch, and Burrow (1983: 263–64) point out, Leslie's arguments against orthodox political economy sometimes "amounted to a denial of any autonomous economic theory," but none of his writings provide a clear idea of any systematic alternative.

12. The German historical school, in spite of its significant influence upon economic thinking in Europe and America, is generally believed to have had a more modest influence upon the English historical school (Cardoso and Psalidopoulos 2015; Coats 1954: 145). Coats (1954: 145) considers Comte to have been the main Continental influence upon the English historical school, mainly through his influence upon Ingram and William Cunningham. Koot (1987: 32) considers the American social scientist H. C. Carey to have been a significant influence.

influence that would extend far beyond the domain of jurisprudence (Collini, Winch, and Burrow 1983: 210). Leslie, Ingram, and their followers advocated for what they called the “historical method” in political economy. Like the Cambridge inductivists and the German historical school, they viewed political economy as an inductive rather than a deductive science and considered it a mistake to attempt to study economic life in isolation from religion, culture, morality, and other factors that influence economic decisions. The challenge they advanced to the validity of classical economics was, according to Winch (1996: 414), the “most serious challenge” English political economy faced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The proper roles of induction and deduction and the correct relationship between facts and abstract theories in philosophical reasoning was a topic that Martineau had extensively considered even before she began writing the *Illustrations*. In a series titled “Essays on the Art of Thinking,” published in the *Monthly Repository* in late 1829, she argues that “to habituate the mind to follow the inductive method in all researches, is the first general rule which the lovers of truth should ever keep in view” (Martineau 1836: 73). Many philosophical errors can be attributed, she claims, to a tendency to “form a theory” and proceed to “make all circumstances bend to it, and all our observations go to support it” (71). Before Francis Bacon showed people that “the right method of discovering truth” was “to bring together an accumulation of facts previous to the formation of a theory,” philosophers with competing theories were unable to determine who was correct because they would all seek facts in support of their theories and none would fail to find such facts as could be construed to provide such support (72). This conviction that the correct way to arrive at the truth was to begin with observation and induction and to determine facts before theories is one that Martineau shared with Malthus and his inductivist followers. A close study of the tales in the *Illustrations* reveals that they advance a conception of political economy informed by this philosophical empiricism. They champion a way of learning economic principles through careful observation of economic activity in action, and they cultivate an understanding of the complex moral, religious, and cultural forces that shape economic life and economic activity. What results is a complex pedagogy whereby the laws of economics are shown to be discernible through the very inductive processes for which the classical school’s historicist critics frequently advocated. Hence the series of tales that did so much to popularize classical political economy was

simultaneously anticipating the historicist critique that classical economists would spend the next several decades confronting.

2. The Inductive Practices of Martineau and Her Characters

There has been much discussion regarding the role that different economists played in shaping Martineau's perspective on political economy and the way she presents the subject in the *Illustrations*. Martineau herself said very little explicitly about the matter. In the preface to *The Moral of Many Fables*, she declines to discuss which specific authors influenced different aspects of the *Illustrations*, arguing that "when the woodsman finds it necessary to explain that the forest is not of his planting, I may begin to particularize my obligations to Smith and Malthus and others of their high order" (Martineau 1832b, 9:v). Years later, in her *Autobiography*, she would recall gathering together "all the standard works on the subject of what I then took to be a science" without elaborating any further (Martineau [1855] 1983, 1:191). James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) is widely believed to have been the source of the economic principles themselves, in part because the summaries for a number of the tales are taken "practically *verbatim*" from the *Elements* (Vint and Funaki 2017: 50; Webb 1960: 116). Blaug (1958: 131) considers it fair to classify her as a "disseminator of Ricardian economics" on account of this reliance on Ricardo "à la James Mill." However, this does not mean that the presentation of the subject in its totality was thoroughly Ricardian. Webb (1960: 117) argues that when it came to application of these theories she was more influenced by "her inbred manufacturer's radicalism" than by anything she drew directly from the political economists. Some scholars have suggested that she owed a greater debt to Malthus and Smith than she owed to Mill and Ricardo (Dzelzainis 2010: 121). Huzel (2006: 57) considers it particularly noteworthy that in the passage from *Moral of Many Fables* expressing her unwillingness to particularize her influences, she still mentions Malthus by name. I contend that in the way that they depict the acquisition of economic knowledge and in their holistic depiction of economic life, the tales themselves also attest to Malthus's profound influence.¹³

13. It seems that in some cases the political economists themselves simply appreciated popularization for what it was and did not necessarily look for popularizers to take sides on such debates within the subject. Ricardo once wrote in a letter to Malthus, discussing the publication

The significance of these questions about the relative influence of the different economic thinkers on her philosophy lies in the substantial differences between the way that Smith and Malthus treated political economy and the way that Ricardo and his immediate successors treated it. Leslie and other historical economists would consider Smith and Malthus to have been practitioners of the historical method, as opposed to the abstract or “deductive” method they associated with Ricardo, James Mill, Nassau Senior, and J. R. McCulloch (Leslie 1875: 100). In trying to make sense of Martineau's economic ideology and her major influences, the strength of her connection to Malthus on both an intellectual and personal level is significant.¹⁴ She would write in her *Autobiography* that “a more simple-minded, virtuous man, full of domestic affections, than Mr. Malthus, could not be found in all England” and that Malthus “did more for social ease and virtue than perhaps any other man of his time” (Martineau [1855] 1983, 1:209, 211). She highly enjoyed his company, she defended his reputation, and interestingly enough, he was the only person she could hear “quite easily” without her ear trumpet. She also recalls being told by him that he desired to meet her in person because while many proponents of his ideas did a poor job of advocating for them, “my tales had represented his views precisely as he could have wished” (1:327). That Malthus himself found her articulation of his ideas so effective shows how strong his influence upon her economic thinking was. Moreover, given that Martineau's views on political economy had in some respects changed by 1855 when she wrote her *Autobiography*, it seems particularly significant that in spite of these changes she still had unreservedly positive things to say about Malthus, both as a person and as a political economist.

Malthus died while Martineau was in America, but she would later comment that since her return from America she had visited Haileybury,

of a second edition of Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816), that “I have given her my opinion on some passages of her book, and have pointed out those which I know you would dispute with me. If she begins to listen to our controversy, the printing of her book will be long delayed; she had better avoid it and keep her course on neutral ground. I believe we should sadly puzzle Miss Caroline, and I doubt whether Mrs. B. herself could clear up the difficulty” (Ricardo 1887: 132–33).

14. It has been noted that in spite of Malthus's deep influence on Martineau, there were nonetheless important differences between his policy positions and hers (Vint and Funaki 2017: 58; Huzel 2006). Huzel identifies and discusses several specific ways in which Martineau differed from Malthus: she advocated reform rather than abolition of the poor law, she saw more potential in emigration as a way to address overpopulation, and as a staunch proponent of free trade she opposed the corn laws (Huzel 2006: 66, 68, 69).

where “Professor [Richard] Jones was the very able successor of Mr. Malthus in the Chairs of Political Economy and History” (Martineau [1855] 1983, 1:329). It is unclear how thorough her knowledge of Richard Jones’s works was. His *Peasant Rents* (1831) was published about a year before the *Illustrations* began serialization. To whatever extent she was familiar with Jones’s extensive criticism of Ricardian political economy, she does not appear to have taken any issue with it, and for her to refer to him as Malthus’s “very able successor” was certainly high praise given her esteem for the latter. It is noteworthy that Martineau’s strongest personal and intellectual affinity was with the classical economist whose methodology inspired the inductive and historical economists and that his successor, who was primarily known as an inductive critic of Ricardian economics, also had her endorsement.

In contrast to the brevity with which she describes the sources she consulted for economic principles, Martineau’s account of her other source material is marvelously elaborate and specific, and it reveals just how eclectic her research for the *Illustrations* was. She discusses travel books she read, people she contacted for statistics, personal interviews, and blue books (Martineau [1855] 1983, 1:197). Some of the information for *Cousin Marshall* was obtained by a brother who was a workhouse guardian and a lady who had a deep interest in the subject (1:218). For *French Wine and Politics*, “the scenery was furnished by books of travel obtained from the Public Library, and of farming by the late Dr. Rigby of Norwich.” She read “McCulloch’s ‘Highlands and Islands of Scotland’ for the two Garveloch stories” (1:197). In some cases her research for the tales involved traveling to the locations in which they were set. Her research for *The Loom and the Lugger*, for example, involved spending multiple days in Beachy Head getting all the information she could from a farmer and one of his daughters (1:242). During this trip, she learned much about smugglers and smuggling (1:243). It is clear that she saw such geographically and culturally specific information as essential to her mission to provide an accurate depiction of the laws of political economy in action. Where direct, firsthand observation was not practicable, secondhand accounts from travel books or stories from personal interviews had to suffice.

Her research for *Cinnamon and Pearls* is perhaps the most impressive example of this latter method. A friend managed to connect her with Sir Alexander Johnston, who had been a chief justice of Ceylon, where the tale is set. Martineau recalls Johnston coming to her door “with his carriage full of books, prints and other illustrations, affording information

not to be found in any ordinarily accessible books.” In addition to Johnston, “there was Holman, the blind traveller, and Captain Mangles, and two or three more” (Martineau [1855] 1983, 1:246). Nor was *Cinnamon and Pearls* the only tale for which knowledge was obtained through such means. For *Vanderput and Snoek*, she was able to arrange a meeting with the late British consul at Rotterdam, who “gave [her] all imaginable information about the aspect and habits of the country and people” (1:241). It is evident that when traveling to specific settings was not possible, she found it important to get information about them through other means, whether that meant reading, interviewing people with ample firsthand experience, or both. The cases of *Cinnamon and Pearls* and *Vanderput and Snoek* demonstrate the extent to which she was willing to go to ensure that her knowledge of the time and place in question was sufficiently deep and thorough.

While the composition of the tales was an exercise in the kind of careful ethnographic study that the historical economists advocated, the same largely inductive processes play an important role within the tales at the level of plot and character. Martineau's wisest and most virtuous characters frequently make direct reference to observation and experience as the chief sources of economic knowledge, and they sometimes note natural experiments when they occur. In a discussion between Mr. Stone and the captain toward the beginning of *Life in the Wilds* for example, Mr. Stone remarks that following the raid of their settlement they seem to have returned to “a primitive condition of society.” The captain responds that they have retained “the intelligence belonging to a state of advancement.” Mr. Stone then suggests that this fact makes their present situation “too good an opportunity to be lost of observing what the real wealth of society consists of, and what the unassisted labour of man can do towards producing that wealth” (Martineau 1832b, 1:22). The narrative circumstances that allow for such convenient learning experiences are sometimes unusual, but when they occur the characters are quick to recognize the opportunity.

Life in the Wilds also features a smaller case study within this larger experiment in the form of a group of children building bows and arrows. In the chapter titled “Many Hands Make Quick Work,” Mr. Stone asks the captain if he has observed the weapons industry of the children. He proceeds to explain how from a starting point of each child attempting to make a bow entirely on their own, they noticed the insufficiency of such an approach and began trading tasks with one another in order to create a

kind of division of labor. As a result, “instead of wounding themselves and spoiling their materials and losing time by going from one kind of work to another, they each did what he could do best, and thus made a great saving of time and labour” (Martineau 1832b, 1:77). To drive the point home further, Mr. Stone explains how the women of the community have also “divided their labour according to their talents or habits, and daily find the advantages of such a plan” (1:78). The example of bow and arrow construction in the first tale of the series suggests that even children are easily capable of quickly discerning certain economic laws from experience.

Other tales promote similar methods of answering more complex economic and moral questions. In *Briery Creek* one of the central characters wonders aloud to another, “How long will the two parties go on disputing whether luxury be a virtue or a crime?” and the other answers, “Till they cease to float themselves on the surface of morals on the support of old maxims of morality; till they look with their own eyes into the evidence of circumstance, and learn to make an *induction* for themselves [emphasis mine]” (Martineau 1832b, 8:86). According to Arthur and Dr. Sneyd, the speakers in this exchange, it should be apparent that luxury is vicious when the money spent on it comes out of what would otherwise have sustained one’s laborers. This discussion is more explicit about the process by which economic knowledge is acquired than those in *Life in the Wilds* in that it invokes observation and induction as important steps.

Demerara takes this emphasis on observation and induction even further, to the point of relying upon a controlled experiment to demonstrate its main principle. This tale is about Alfred and Mary Bruce, a brother and sister who, having been sent to England for their education at ages six and seven, return to their “good-hearted” but not “very clear-headed” father’s plantation in the West Indies after a gap of fourteen years (Martineau 1832b, 2:14). When Mr. Mitchelson’s dam bursts, Alfred seizes the opportunity to demonstrate in practice the superiority of wage labor to slave labor. To do this he gains permission to set some of the slaves to work as wage laborers alongside others still laboring under the slave system (2:66). Using his preferred system, he finishes repairing the dam on schedule, and his father can finally see with his own eyes why one system works so much better than the other (2:80). This tale, perhaps more explicitly than any other, showcases the inductive nature of economic pedagogy. Mr. Bruce, having been immersed in the slave system of labor, had nothing to compare it to. Having never left the bounds of his own plantation, he had never had the opportunity to see a better way of planting. It is only when

Alfred sets a large-scale experiment before him that he is able to understand the superiority of the wage labor system. This demonstration changes his perspective in a way that the theoretical arguments with his son, in an earlier chapter of the tale, cannot. By featuring such an experiment, *Demerara* takes one step further what all the others attempt to show: that economic wisdom is most effectively obtained through observation of economic principles in action and experience of their effects.

Frequently, the characters who have suffered from bad economic decisions and government policies are set up as the ideal authorities and teachers of the economic lessons to be gleaned from these policy failures. The conclusion of *Cinnamon and Pearls* is a prime example of this theme. In the penultimate chapter of this novella, Martineau's protagonist is at the end of a long struggle with the British imperial system in Ceylon. On his deathbed, Rayo "drew sharp and brief inferences respecting the philosophy of colonization, which might have been worthy the ear of a British parliament, if they could have been echoed so far over the sea" (Martineau 1832b, 7:102). This is a recurring theme in the *Illustrations*; generally, those who suffer the brunt of bad policy understand its flaws most keenly in contrast to those who philosophize without direct reference to the phenomenon they discuss.

While the bad-policy makers in parliament are kept offstage in *Cinnamon and Pearls*, other tales furnish a closer depiction of their obliviousness. In *A Tale of the Tyne*, for example, Martineau provides an acute display of the fatuity of one such character in Mr. Otley, who goes around extolling the policy of "compelling every merchant ship to have so many apprentices and no more, and the advantage of keeping businesses within bounds by allowing the corporations of towns to regulate the number of apprentices." Meanwhile, he "seemed to have no leisure for observing what was before his eyes" (Martineau 1832b, 7:80). Like other characters who support bad economic policies, Mr. Otley is depicted as incapable of seeing what is right in front of him and making a proper induction from such information. This disconnect between his mental conceptualization of policy and the plain evidence of its actual negative effects is glaring to those actually experiencing those effects.

The implicit argument that, to the people most directly affected by good or bad economic policies and practices, economic principles really would be this clear and obvious merely from observing the world around them seems to have been an argument about which Martineau anticipated some skepticism. In the preface to *Vanderput and Snoek* she responds to

such doubts regarding whether the seventeenth-century Dutch could really have been such eloquent free-trade advocates:

Every restriction imposed by the jealousy of those from whom they derived their imports was an unanswerable argument to them in favour of perfect liberty of exchange. As their herrings and butter were universally acknowledged to be the best herrings and butter in existence, and yet were not enough for the perfect comfort of the Dutch, the Dutch could not resist the conclusion, that the less difficulty there was in furnishing their neighbours with their incomparable herrings and butter, in return for what those neighbours had to offer, the better for both parties. (Martineau 1832b, 6:vi)

Martineau thus criticizes the notion that there is something inherently anachronistic about putting eloquent free-trade advocacy in the mouths of those who lived a century before the writings of Adam Smith. The broader implication is that awareness of the workings of economic principles originates in reactions to and reflections on lived experience. In the next sentence, she refers to the Dutch as “naturally enlightened advocates of free trade.” This natural enlightenment is an apt description of what happens in most of the *Illustrations*, where the most clear-minded characters become wise about economic principles from reading the workings of the world around them.

3. The Hag and Her Threat of Leprosy: Religion and Economic Law in the *Illustrations*

A first-time reader of Martineau’s *Illustrations* would likely be surprised by the considerable amount of religious content in them. In *Life in the Wilds*, the tale with which the series begins, the main protagonist and voice of economic wisdom is a chaplain whose first action following the raid of the settlement, which leaves them all destitute, is to gather everyone together to “[address] God in a spirit of resignation for what they had lost and of thankfulness for what remained” (Martineau 1832b, 1:7). He eventually begins giving regular sermons again, and as soon as they have the means to do so he ensures that people have Bibles (1:115). The decision to foreground the perspective of a chaplain in the opening illustration and to make a single character both the religious leader and the primary teacher of economic lessons initiates a thematic preoccupation with religion that persists throughout the series. *Vanderput and Snoek*, for example,

is written to illustrate the principles of trade, but it also contains several extended and weighty conversations on the nature of the afterlife and the question of how to reconcile illness, pain, and death with God's benevolence. *The Charmed Sea* is an illustration of the principles of currency and exchange, but it also features a character named Sophia who struggles persistently with religious doubt and disbelief in the afterlife before her spiritual reawakening at the end of the tale (5:36, 100). This focus upon religion is not atypical for Martineau; many of her earliest works, just preceding the *Illustrations*, were for a Unitarian periodical and were religious in nature. Yet, at times, these religious themes interact with the economic principles in interesting ways that have a significant effect on how these tales represent the science of political economy.

Historicist critics of classical economics often argued that it was misguided to attempt to study economic activity in isolation from the various national, cultural, religious, and moral forces that influence human behavior. In the *Illustrations* the decisive impact of religious doctrines and customs on economic decisions is perhaps the most consistent, though not the only, way in which Martineau seems to endorse this broader conceptualization of economic action. Given that the English historical school of economics is considered to have begun with Leslie's work on Ireland's problems and his conviction that classical economics did not provide satisfactory solutions to them, it is fitting that Martineau's *Ireland: A Tale* would be the best exemplification of her anticipation of English historical economic concerns (Koot 1987: 32). Not only does *Ireland* show distinctly the importance of understanding the religious context in which economic decisions take place, but it raises even broader questions about the relevance of time and place when attempting to make sense of economic problems. However, *Ireland* is just one of the several *Illustrations* that convey the message that economic life does not operate in a national, cultural, or historical vacuum.

Briery Creek partly resembles *Vanderput and Snoek* and *The Charmed Sea* insofar as it contains fairly deep and extensive theological discussions. Martineau admits that in this tale she indulged her admiration for the eighteenth-century theologian, scientist, and philosopher Joseph Priestley by making its hero, Dr. Sneyd, a fictional representation of him (Martineau [1855] 1983: 1:254). *Briery Creek* is an illustration of the principles of individual consumption. Dr. Sneyd's innocent pleasure in astronomy is contrasted with the luxurious expenditures of the abusive libertine, Mr. Temple. Temple's love of luxury leaves his laborers unpaid, bankrupts

his estate, and ultimately prompts him to turn to embezzlement. At one point in the tale, Dr. Sneyd and his son Arthur discuss whether a walk to church through green pastures is preferable to a walk to church through paved streets where there are tokens of “struggle for subsistence” (Martineau 1832b, 8:89). Dr. Sneyd argues, “It is indeed a halting faith which dreads as common that which God has cleansed and sanctified . . . and no path to the sanctuary is more sacred than another, while there are traces of human beings by the way” (8:92). *Briery Creek* differs from *Vanderput and Snoek* and *The Charmed Sea* in that the theological teachings of Dr. Priestley, through Dr. Sneyd, tie directly into the economic discussion about when luxury becomes a vice.

The economic and the theological lessons conveyed in *Briery Creek* revolve around the spuriousness of religion that is divorced from the material concerns of humankind (Martineau 1832b, 8:92–93). Martineau presents religious expenditure as one subcategory of luxury. Luxury is not wrong in itself, but it becomes pernicious when funds allocated to it take away from the ability of those in the community to sustain themselves. Nor does she present this problem as merely theoretical. The chapter following Dr. Sneyd and Arthur’s dialogue on luxury spending and their theological discussion begins with the discovery that Temple is constructing a massive chapel on his lands. A short time later Dr. Sneyd and his wife are introduced to the Hessledens. Mrs. Sneyd, following this meeting, cannot understand why so many strict religious people dress so luxuriously. Of Mrs. Hesselden, she wonders, “Here is this lady, infinitely scandalized, I perceive, at our having introduced dancing, dressed after such a fashion as our maidens never saw before.” She notes that if said maidens begin wasting money on such extravagant clothing that would otherwise go into subsistence or “substantial comforts,” Mrs. Hesselden’s bonnet shall be to blame (8:106). In this tale, the theologically correct thing to do and the economically correct thing to do are one and the same. Part of the argument, in fact, is that religion fails its proper function when it stands aloof from the material well-being of the people. As Sneyd argues, “What is the value of faith, if it cannot assimilate all things to itself? And as for Christian faith, where and amidst what circumstances did it arise?” (8:91). But if good theology and good political economy follow the same course, it would follow that religious institutions influence economic life and that understanding religious mores and institutions is essential to understanding economic action, a possibility that other tales explore more fully.

The religious matter in *Cinnamon and Pearls* is a particularly rich and complex case because both Christian and pagan precepts frequently affect the economic decisions of the characters. At one point, Rayo's wife, Marana, is considering selling her highly coveted right-hand conch shell to Alice, the daughter of a British agent, "but when the idea arose of the hag and her threat of leprosy, and of the curse which might now pursue Rayo, she doubted whether anything could be more important to her than this charmed shell" (Martineau 1832b, 7:62). Such fears operate alongside frequent chastisement from Father Anthony, who tells Rayo that he should not be taking any pearls for himself because they belong to the East India Company, and "God gave them into the hands of those who possess them; and He will be angry with any who take them away by fraud or violence" (7:7). Father Anthony's teachings on this subject contrast with Rayo's own sense of the inherent wrongness of the people who dive for the pearls being kept bare of most necessities of life "that a few, a very few, may engross a resource which should enrich the many" (7:20–21). Both Christianity and paganism in this tale provide a context for understanding what these characters do with the goods they obtain.

Ireland provides an even deeper look at the impact of culture and religion on economic behavior and shows more clearly than just about any other tale the inseparability of religious and economic life and the futility of attempting to understand economic phenomena apart from culture and religion. The tale is rife with economic lessons that have a clear religious component. Most significantly, the characters are taught to view it as a sin to lack faith in the Lord's caretaking, yet the events of the tale show how unwise and economically ruinous it can be to adhere to this teaching. Father Glenny claims he forgives Dora the *sin* of distrusting the Lord with regard to the matter of her father's rent, yet as soon as she arrives home from that visit with Father Glenny, her lack of trust proves to have been perfectly well founded (Martineau 1832b, 3:17–19). Dora's husband, Dan, seems to have taken this doctrine of implicit trust in Providence even more to heart and in a way that is shown to be potentially detrimental. Once Dan marries Dora and bids successfully for some land, Henry asks him, "How would you have managed, if you had had the girl without the land?" Dan does not have an answer to this question. He is not sure "what Providence's other way of providing for him and Dora would have been" (3:32). Following the religious doctrine against distrusting Providence, he did not have a plan for what to do if Providence did not ensure that his gamble would pay off. These glimpses, throughout the tale, of how

religious teachings influence Dan and Dora thus reveal how religious doctrines shape economic decisions and hence how religious context is essential for understanding a country's political economy.

While Father Glenny is not one of Martineau's villainous characters, she does leave open the possibility that perverse incentives could be having a negative impact on his judgment. She mentions in passing in chapter 2 that the remuneration of Catholic clergy in Ireland comes mostly from marriage fees (Martineau 1832b, 3:26). As she concludes the tale she makes reform in this area a more explicit part of her message. Orme, the disinterested and thoughtful foreigner, explains to Father Glenny that "by receiving your emoluments chiefly in the shape of marriage fees, you expose yourselves to the suspicion of encouraging marriage" (3:115). The way for them to prevent such suspicion would be to "cancel every relation between the wedding propensities of the young and the welfare of the priests purse" (3:116). For Orme to understand the problem of early marriages he needed to perceive the role that the Church played in relation to them.

Martineau also touches upon the issue of Catholic-Protestant relations and their relevance to the welfare of Ireland. In her description of Mr. Rosso, in the opening chapter, she mentions that while he is a Protestant himself, he is willing to overlook what he sees as superstition in the education of the children in order for them to get the best education possible (Martineau 1932b, 3:4). While this issue does not play a direct role in the events of the tale, she evidently thought it an important enough lesson to broach it again later at the end of a conversation on how to reform Ireland where Mr. Tracey argues, "Above all, let education be abundantly given, so as to afford us hope that the people may in time understand that their interests are cared for; and that men who differ in religion and politics may find it possible to live in fellowship like ourselves, friend Rosso" (3:104). Religious discord, like religious teaching, can have harmful effects upon a nation's political economy, and Martineau suggests the road to solving Ireland's economic woes consists partly in diminishing the harmful effects of both.

In choosing locations to use as settings for various tales, Martineau ([1855] 1983, 1:194) claims to have picked the places and times that she believed best exemplified the economic principles she meant to illustrate. What makes *Ireland* unique among the tales is that it presents its setting as a location with its own unique problems that require examination, rather than as the best exemplification of principles universally true but more easily perceived in some countries than in others. Many of the

principles listed in the “Summary of Principles” at the end of *Ireland* discuss nationally specific issues; “the imposition of a church establishment on those who already support another church,” “the practice of letting land to the highest bidder,” and “the levying of” fines on a whole district for an illegal practice going on in one part of it” are all listed as sources of Ireland’s problems (Martineau 1832b, 3:134). Martineau suggests that the adjustment of the proportion of capital to population in Ireland “must be attempted by means suited to her peculiar circumstances” (3:135). She also prescribes “removal of political grievances” and popular education as important steps to remedying Ireland’s economic woes (3:135–36). By presenting the problems and proposed solutions in their uniqueness, this illustration demonstrates the value of the kind of attention to national differences that the historical economists emphasized in their writings.

The question of whether knowledge of history, religion, and culture was necessary to understand the political economy of a particular time and place was at the heart of the debates between classical and historical economists. Some idea of Martineau’s perspective on this question can be gleaned from a passage in *Brooke & Brooke Farm*, where the main character’s father contends that “if statesmen and legislators saw that usages and laws must be varied with the lapse of time and change of circumstances, we should be freed from many useless institutions. If our men of power saw that what is beneficial to a country in one age may be hurtful in another, we should have a better economy and a wiser distribution of our wealth” (Martineau 1832b, 1:65). This was an argument that was frequently made by historical economists. Most notably, Friedrich List ([1841] 1856), a founder of the German historical school, argued against Adam Smith’s presentation of free trade as a universally preferable policy and in favor of a view in which countries progress through distinct phases of development, benefiting from free trade at some phases and from protection at others. Martineau certainly does not seem to have agreed with List on the matter of free trade, but her treatment of enclosure rests upon similarly historicist premises, and she presents these premises as being invaluable to a proper understanding of policies and institutions in general.

The chapter of *Brooke and Brooke Farm* titled “What Joe Harper Saw Abroad” demonstrates another important principle of historical economics. In this chapter, Joe Harper arrives back at Brooke from Languedoc, a French province that inspired in him “a horror of small properties” (Martineau 1832b, 1:116). He tells them how “the people are attracted to the soil from its being their own. It is the custom there for

families to divide the paternal property” (1:117). When Joe’s father asks why these industrious but impoverished farmers cannot keep their own land while also doing labor for others, Joe explains how a Languedoc laborer “will walk ten miles to sell an egg, and he will be content with twopence a-day on his own ground instead of half a crown on another man’s, if he is born to call himself a landed proprietor” (1:122). This episode in *Brooke and Brooke Farm* is an interesting demonstration of how culture and customs affect economic behavior and how the latter cannot be properly understood or studied in the absence of the former. The historicist treatment of enclosure and the depiction of how national culture influences attitudes toward land in this tale show that for Martineau religion is far from the only historical factor that informs and shapes economic life in important ways.

4. Conclusion

Martineau’s career as a writer would continue for several decades after the publication of the *Illustrations*, but the majority of her post-*Illustrations* output does not deal primarily with the subject of political economy.¹⁵ One of the next works she would write following the *Illustrations* was *How to Observe Manners and Morals* (1838), a work that has been described as “a pioneering tract of sociological methodology” and “symbolically at least, one of the founding theoretical texts in the discipline” (Logan 2002: 82; Kaplan 2010: 180). She would write a considerable amount of material on Ireland and its problems, having been commissioned to do so by a friend who claimed that her writings on America and the American abolitionist movement had shown how effectively she could “understand and represent the political and social condition of another country” (Martineau [1855] 1983, 2:312). Many historical economists, meanwhile, would spend much of the century either arguing that economics should be more broadly sociological or that it should be relegated to a branch of sociology (Ingram 1878: 15; Leslie 1879: 40–41). The fact that Martineau had become a pioneer in early sociology by the time Ingram was approvingly quoting her

15. As previously mentioned, the *Illustrations* was not her first or last attempt at fiction writing, though by Victorian standards she was by no means a prolific novelist. Her stature as a journalist was quite formidable (Crawford 2020: 183). Her range of subjects was extremely broad, though certain causes like abolitionism would preoccupy her throughout her career.

disillusionment with classical political economy makes her and Ingram seem less like strange bedfellows. Yet, her interest in obtaining such thorough and detailed knowledge about life in various settings was clearly something that had preoccupied her even while writing the *Illustrations*, as evidenced by the prodigious time, energy, and attention that went into producing the kind of ethnographic authenticity with which the tales were frequently credited. A careful reading of the tales reveals that this preoccupation on her part had a significant impact upon the broader representation of political economy articulated in these tales, an impact that has so far been insufficiently examined.

While Martineau moved beyond political economy and devoted her energies to sociology, travel writing, history, topical journalism, and fiction, the inductive economists succeeded in attracting the notice of and soliciting responses from their opponents. There are moments in these debates where the differences between the classical and historical schools can seem fairly subtle. After all, as Coats (1954: 150) explains, “the orthodox economists shared the historist desire to avoid excessive rigidity in the laws of political economy and in the application of doctrines to different historical situations.” The depth with which J. S. Mill addressed questions about the proper relationship between deductive and inductive reasoning, especially applied to economics, and his fair-minded assessment of both sides of the debate has resulted in him being seen as something of a “half-way house” between historical and classical economics (Koot 1987: 22).¹⁶ J. E. Cairnes ([1857] 1875: 84–85) would suggest that facts collected through experience played an important role in verifying conclusions arrived at deductively and in revealing the need to discover “the disturbing causes” of any apparent discrepancies between these conclusions and the observed facts. However, as Marshall ([1890] 1952:

16. J. S. Mill explores the relationship between induction and deduction in human sciences in a deep and nuanced way in *A System of Logic* (1843). The treatment of scope and method in his economic writings may have reduced the tension between the two schools. His extremely influential *Principles of Political Economy, with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (1848) followed Jones when it came to the different kinds of rent around the world and contained the sort of historical detail that Jones advocated, and his focus on the “art” of political economy in *Principles* probably made Jones and Whewell feel “that they had won the war on some important fronts” (Snyder 2006: 319, 321). On the other hand, it has also been argued that the exalted status achieved by Mill’s political economy “obscured many of the central questions about the scope and method of the subject rather than resolving them” (Collini, Winch, and Burrow 1983: 252). Koot (1987: 22) argues that Mill’s “half-way house” helped both historical economists and neoclassical economists to reenvision the science following its impending crisis.

773–75) would later reiterate, there was no way to glean causation from induction, leaving those who looked to it as a way to discover economic principles prone to fallacious post hoc reasoning. W. S. Jevons ([1871] 1957: 20) expressed appreciation of the works of historical economists, but he nonetheless maintained that his attempt to improve economic theory was an altogether separate project from theirs. Meanwhile, some historical economists would argue that the condemnation of the deductive method in political economy on the part of writers like Leslie was misguided (Toynbee [1884] 1920: 3).¹⁷

Martineau was not an active contributor to these debates in the decades that followed the publication of the *Illustrations*, nor does she seem to have been eager to weigh in on them, stray comments in her *Autobiography* notwithstanding. The fact that over the course of her career she became less focused on political economy and branched out into fields like travel writing and sociological methodology does not necessarily suggest that she must have had more ideologically in common with historical economists than with classical and neoclassical economists. However, the fact that she had always been seen as having an aptitude for these latter types of writing since at least as early as the *Illustrations* suggests that she was just the person to articulate a vision of political economy that could encompass both the economic principles of the classical school and the social and methodological concerns of the burgeoning historicist critique. What I hope this essay has shown is that part of what made the *Illustrations* prescient was their suggestion that ordinary people could learn economic principles in ways that the inductivists believed they ought to be discovered, hence countering the idea that classical principles were inherently at odds with the evidence before our eyes. They also present a holistic depiction of economic life operating alongside and continuously influenced by religious, moral, and cultural life suggestive of the way that Malthus and his inductivist followers preferred to conceptualize the subject. That she

17. This summary should not be taken to imply that there was more closure to the disputes between neoclassical economists and historical economists than there actually was. Well into the twentieth century, William James Ashley would warn his fellow historicists that “the theoretical economists are ready to keep us quiet by giving us a little garden plot of our own” (quoted in Koot 1987: 1). Alon Kadish (1989: v–vi) discusses the “the liberation and contraction of economics” and the corresponding creation of economic history as a separate subject through the series of debates and conflicts over curriculums, examinations, and instruction at Oxford and Cambridge in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

saw that it was possible to demonstrate both of these things while illustrating principles that were taken from classical economic writings proved to be quite prophetic as the century continued, and it became apparent that it was possible, if not always easy, for the study of economic history and economic theory to coexist without being inherently in conflict.

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