

Martineau's First Ministry

In a narrow street close to the quay-side in the centre of Dublin, there is a forlorn and rather neglected building which would hardly merit a second glance from a passer-by. Yet those who would stop and study the edifice would see that it is a building not without character. Within the last ten years this place was used as a printing works and for over a century it met commercial needs. However, this is a building with important Unitarian connotations, because this was once the Eustace Street Meeting House. It was here, about 100 years after the meeting house was built, that James Martineau was ordained to the ministry and entered into his first pastoral charge.

The congregation had its origins in the period after the restoration of Charles II and the Act of Uniformity, when many clergy in Ireland resigned rather than continue under the Anglican system, taking many of their flocks with them. In Dublin, one of the new dissenting congregations met in New Row where Samuel Winter and Samuel Mather ministered. Winter had been Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, and had arrived in Ireland as chaplain to Cromwell's parliamentary commissioners. Mather, a Fellow of the College, was the son of Richard Mather, the first minister of Toxteth Park Chapel, near Liverpool, and had graduated from Harvard and previously been a Fellow there. Together they had been ministers of St Nicholas's Church and, on resigning, most of their congregation followed them into nonconformity.

In 1728 or 1729, about ten years after the passing of the Irish Toleration Act, the congregation opened their new meeting house. The classical front of the building was very much in keep-

ing with the style of the contemporary parochial churches and demonstrates both the respectability and sense of confidence of the congregation by that time.

In 1828, Martineau was ordained in the meeting house, on 26 October, as assistant (and eventual successor) to Philip Taylor, and co-pastor with Joseph Hutton. This was an arrangement very much within the Irish Presbyterian system—that a new young minister would be appointed as assistant to his elder (and Taylor was then 81 years old) and take over on his death. In addition, the Eustace Street congregation had always employed two ministers and Martineau would work alongside the venerable Joseph Hutton (another name familiar in Unitarian circles, Hutton being the father of Joseph Hutton minister at Mill Hill, Leeds, and grandfather of Richard Holt Hutton).

There was no surprise that, after a short period of teaching in Bristol, Martineau should cross the Irish Sea to commence his ministry in Dublin. Philip Taylor was a kinsman of his and through him Martineau was also related to Nathaniel and Isaac Weld, members of another family with Norwich connections, and between them ministers at Eustace Street for a total of 93 years.

In 1828, Martineau's congregation and its sister churches in Dublin could be described by James Armstrong, minister of the Strand Street congregation, as 'a most respectable body of opulent and useful citizens, ranking among the very highest in professional and commercial pursuits, and distinguished for industry and intelligence, integrity and public spirit'. At that time, Eustace Street ran an almshouse for 12 poor widows, a school for boys,

and a school for girls which was a model for such institutions 'in point of neatness, regularity, and efficacious moral and religious instruction'.

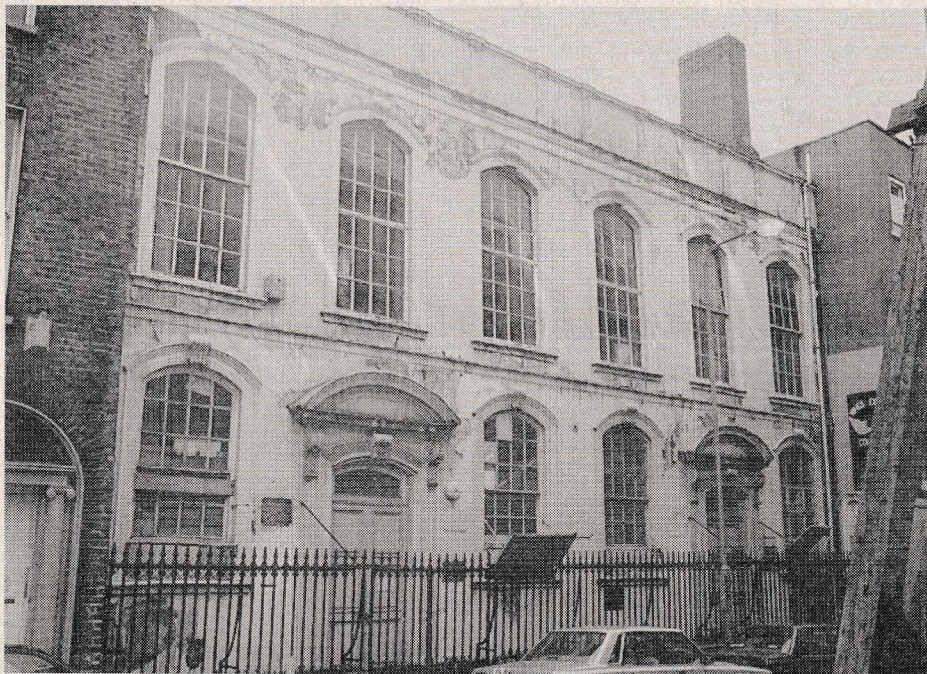
But Martineau's ministry in Dublin was not to be prolonged. In his own words, the congregation was 'very small . . . and disposed to give both themselves and their minister an easy life of it'. Even so, his theological opinions caused one family to leave in some acrimony and at times, particularly in connection with the management of the schools, Martineau encountered some sectarian prejudice which he found most distasteful as well as baffling, especially when it came from someone who was otherwise 'a most estimable gentleman; of much benevolence and high honour; courteous and considerate'. Nevertheless, Martineau remained a strong advocate of toleration, preaching to the Synod of Munster meeting in Cork on "Peace in Division", recommending that Christians concentrate on what unites them rather than on points of controversy. Soon after his arrival, he put his name, together with that of his senior colleague, to a declaration in favour of Catholic emancipation. As a result, the windows of the meeting house were smashed by a mob.

'Regium Donum'

His time in Dublin was not without achievement, though. He compiled a new hymn-book for the use of his congregation and was instrumental in setting up the Irish Unitarian Christian Society in 1830. But the initial cause of his leaving Dublin came in September 1831, following the death of Philip Taylor. At that point Martineau became entitled to receive the 'regium donum', an annual grant paid by the government to Presbyterian ministers in Ireland. Martineau felt he could not accept payment from this source and wrote to his congregation outlining his objections and offering to resign if they could not agree with this decision. The congregation understood this to be a letter of resignation and terminated his ministry. Shortly after, however, a more eirenic compromise was reached and Martineau was asked to stay on as co-pastor until June 1832. In the end he left with a warm address from his former congregation and was presented with a purse of 180 guineas.

Martineau justified his decision not to accept the 'regium donum' on the basis of its essential unfairness and the undesirability of Christianity being dependent upon the state. Curiously, he also mentions that by supporting Presbyterianism the government helped to prevent the development of the congregational system. In view of his own ordination by the Presbytery of Dublin and his future proposals for the reorganization of English Unitarianism, this is an interesting point of view.

(continued on page 9)



Eustace Street Meeting House, Dublin, 1728

Photo: David Steers

(continued from page 8)

In any case, he never changed his opposition to the 'regium donum'. In 1852, the Revd James Orr, minister of the struggling Non-Subscribing Presbyterian congregation of Clonmel, County Tipperary, wrote to Martineau, requesting permission to send an appeal for financial support for the repair of their meeting house to his wealthy congregation in Liverpool. Martineau told him that it would be better if the application were not made, partly because his congregation had just finished paying for their own church, and also because 'our Irish brethren are too ready to seek their resources on this side [of] the channel, from English congregations that enjoy no parliamentary grant, and bear all their own expenses'.

By the 1860s, Martineau's former congregation was reaching the end of its life. In 1863 the Strand Street congregation had built a new Gothic church on Stephen's Green and in 1867 Eustace Street decided to vacate their old meeting house and join their sister church in their splendid new building. The meeting house then passed into commercial use and remained so until recently. It now stands forgotten and neglected with its future uncertain. The 1991 European City of Culture has a less than admirable record of maintaining its Georgian heritage, so the future of the meeting house must be uncertain. Yet for the time being there it still stands, an interesting reminder of the shared history of English Unitarians and Irish Non-Subscribers.

David Steers

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THE STRANGE GIRL

*I often meet them on the promenade—
The father and his strange girl.
In winter months they choose the
forsaken sands,
In salutation to the sullen sea.
Sometimes he holds her hand
And they walk together without words.
She does not seem to possess any.
Mostly she strides ahead,
Settles herself in a shelter,
And will not budge.
Driven past breaking point, he slaps her
arm.
She stands reluctantly, and hurries on.
Once she wore ankle socks and childish
frocks.
Now she is older, and her sturdy frame
Is packed into cold-defying coats.
I wonder: "Does he have to choose her
clothes?
And push resisting arms into those
too short sleeves?
Has she no mother? Was it all too much,
And has she left the caring and the care to
him?"
He does the shopping. Does he also mend
And cook and clean? And does she never
speak?
They leave a trail of sadness in their
wake,
This man and his strange girl. Their life
seems bleak.*

Muriel Grainger

AS IT HAPPENS . . .

REACHING OUT IN CAMBRIDGE Unitarians took part in 'New Horizons—a Celebration of Holistic Alternatives' in the Cambridge Guildhall on February 1st. Their stall, stocked with posters, books and leaflets, was sandwiched between Japanese massage and Rudolf Steiner education. Amongst the fifty other exhibitors were Buddhists, practitioners of acupuncture, Greenpeace and a wide variety of 'New Age' groups. The minister was one of the speakers giving talks in the council chamber. The event was attended by hundreds of people and has already increased the number of visitors to the church.

On 16th February, the congregation held a reception for new members and attenders entitled, "All You Ever Wanted to Ask About Unitarians!". Sixteen new members and friends attended, as well as nine long-time members. Everyone spoke of what had brought him or her to the church, and the minister and established members answered questions. The evening was voted a great success which it is hoped to repeat at regular intervals.—*Frank Walker, Cambridge.*

THE BRITISH UNITARIANS IN CONCERT held their final rehearsal weekend at Great Hucklow on 14–16th February—happily just before a heavy snowfall. All forty-one members of the touring party were present to put finishing touches to choral items and music to be performed by the recorder consort and instrumental ensemble. The weekend concluded with a complete concert of the music for the American tour, to take place in April, before an enthusiastic audience of well over a hundred people packed tightly into the social hall. Resplendent in black and white with maroon chalice scarves and ties, the musicians made a harmonious picture and a fine sound.—*David Dawson*

DATBLYGIAD Datblygiad is the Welsh word for development and this is what was discussed at length recently at a three day conference for ministers held at a tiny sea-side village near Carmarthen. Five ministers and one lay pastor came together to be guided by John Midgley into the relatively unfamiliar area of development.

I'm sure that we all gained much from sharing with our Development Officer some thoughts and ideas on where our congregations are, and more to the point perhaps, where they are going, if they are going anywhere at all. We were all aware of the similarities that exist between English and Welsh Unitarian congregations, but we also realized that there are some fundamental differences.

Some of our congregations in Wales have no church committee to guide them, others are organized or governed by a deaconate, and yet others will do all their business transactions and all their programme arrangements after the Sunday service. If you are not there on that occasion then you will not have a say in the matter being discussed. Some congregations exist in very rural areas whilst others are in town or city centres. The city churches can take advantage of the GA guidelines on development, but our rural congregations would find it impossible to grow in numbers, for instance, although maybe they could develop in some of the other ways suggested by John. The majority of the locals are already Unitarian and are quite happy to let the chapel carry on just as it has done throughout the years. Annual events, monthly programmes and weekly routines just happen like clockwork, albeit, often times, the clock is behind time.

However, after a few sessions with John, we all realized that development is not only about growing in numbers, or extending the church buildings. It means growing spiritually, and to expand in social commitment and to mature in faith and awareness of the social conditions that exist and that need our concern. It means understanding ourselves and each other better, by probing below some of our surface issues to the deeper problems which most congregations experience. Thanks John for coming to share with us some of your inspiring thoughts, experiences and suggestions.—*Eirion Phillips, Swansea.*

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THE SUNKEN ROAD

*What matters is not being here
in this particular time and place,
nor this earth, nor those trees, nor
that sky, peeping between their branches,
nor the road taken only once
and never more traversed,
nor any feature
that fixes us in time; but
to stand for our season still
like a tree, breathing thanks
through all of our being
saying simply
'We, people'.*

John Hands

HABITÚE

*The usual path, but not the usual round
For once against the clock
Not speed just direction
So the way bends left not right
Courts the brook's right rim
Walking against the flow.
With a shrug not a thought
That way was first chosen
Joy of habit cultivated
So to break it and imprint
In reverse the customary path
Find new traces in the not quite old
familiar.
Next time routine will be better
Nor make a habit of breaking the habit.*

Keith Gilley