John Stuart Mill's Autobiography: A Study

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May, 1973

JOHN STUART MILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY:
A
STUDY OF
A PROMINENT
NINETEENTH CENTURY INTELLECTUAL'S
SELF-DEVELOPMENT, CONSIDERED IN THE
LITERARY TERMS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL GENRE

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
McGILL UNIVERSITY
MAY, 1973

Abstract

Mill's Autobiography developed in response to three important events in his life: the possibility of an early death, the death of his wife, and his retirement from public life. If the genesis of the Autobiography is unusual, so is its structure, which had an evolution of its own. The autobiographical impulse at its best seeks for a significant pattern in the experiences of a life, and this Mill's autobiography does. Mill's "mental crisis" and personal relationships brought greater insight into the theoretical considerations his trained mind developed. His approach to the basic problems of humanity was the result of careful philosophical enquiry tempered by the realities of experience. His Autobiography is an account of his personal and philosophical odyssey.

Le Sommaire

L'Autobiographie de J.S. Mill prit forme sous la pression des trois événements les plus marquants de sa vie, lesquels étaient la probabilité d'une mort prématurée, la mort de sa femme, et sa retraite de la vie publique. Si la genèse de L'Autobiographie est insolite sa structure ne l'est pas moins: elle avait une évolution toute particulière. Le moteur autobiographique est à son plus puissant quand il cherche à trouver un dessin dans les expériences d'une vie, et c'est ce que Mill fait. Il vit ses considérations théoriques sous la lumière de la crise de sa histoire intellectuelle, et de ses relations avec les autres. Son attitude envers les problèmes fondamentaux de l'humanité était le résultat de l'interrogation philosophique tempéré par les réalités de l'expérience vécue. Ainsi, son Autobiographie est le compte rendu de son odyssée personelle et philosophique.

Contents

I: Introduction

John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, posthumously published in 1873, appeared at a time when the genre was becoming increasingly popular.[1] The spate of autobiographies in the second half of the nineteenth century contrasts with the paucity in the first half. The genre progressed slowly owing to a neglect much earlier in publishing autobiographical writings. "The seventeenth century," Waldo Dunn observes, "produced a considerable number of autobiographical documents few of which were given to the public until well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[2]

Thwarted in its own line of development, autobiography spread its influence to other genres. In the art of biography, Boswell established the autobiographical method by following it in his Life of Dr. Johnson (1791). Boswell incorporated letters and conversations of his subject into his text, as well as anecdotes and contemporary recollections. In 1805, Wordsworth completed his autobiographical poem The Prelude, which he subtitled "Growth Of A Poet's Mind." In fiction, there were attempts to use autobiographical materials to produce fictional autobiographies, such as John Galt's Annals of the Parish (1813) and Disraeli's idealized self-portrait Vivian Grey (1826). The materials of a life offered

[1] Keith Rinehart, "The Victorian Approach to Autobiography," Modern Philology, LI (February 1954), pp. 177-186.

[2] English Biography (London, 1916), p. 139.

creative possibilities that contributed to another off-shoot -- the autobiographical novel, which has steadily gained ground since the nineteenth century. This development, in its early stages, leaned towards thinly veiled revelation as in Lady Caroline Lamb's Glenarvon (1816) detailing her affair with Byron, or Lady Morgan's Florence Macarthy (1818) vilifying a disparaging critic.

The earlier interest in self-study had been satisfied by the reading of 'lives' as exemplars in the art of living. J.S. Mill, too, could recall obtaining

> poetic culture of the most valuable kind, by means of reverential admiration for the lives and characters of heroic persons; especially the heroes of philosophy. The same inspiring effect which so many of the benefactors of mankind have left on record that they had experienced from Plutarch's Lives, was produced on me by Plato's pictures of Socrates, and by some modern biographies, above all by Condorcet's Life of Turgot; a book well calculated to rouse the best sort of enthusiasm, since it contains one of the wisest and noblest of lives, delineated by one of the wisest and noblest of men. The heroic virtue of these glorious representatives of the opinions with which I sympathized, deeply affected me, and I perpetually recurred to them as others do to a favourite poet, when needing to be carried up into the more elevated regions of feeling and thought.[3]

[3] Autobiography (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), p. 79. All references in the text, henceforth placed in parentheses after the quotation, are cited from the Columbia edition, the definitive one till superseded by Jack Stillinger's edition (Boston, 1969) based on the Columbia holograph mss. The latest re-editing of Mill's writings in the Collected Works of John Stuart Mill (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) has not yet published the Autobiography. For my purposes, I have found that the 1924 edition will suffice.

The times, however, were changing. Wayne Shumaker draws attention to the impetus autobiography received from the "decay of a moral imperative against frankness [which] continued throughout the romantic period and by the middle of the nineteenth century was profound."[4] Truth could now have freer play. The whole man, rather than his heroic image, became the focus of the life-story. A philosophical change in outlook was the natural consequence, and it not only encouraged autobiography still further but also affected its content. The resulting interest in the process of "intellectual or affective becoming" Shumaker relates to the growth of philosophical determinism in the nineteenth century:

> In earlier centuries life was viewed as actions performed and decisions arrived at; and written lives, in the form of res gestae, followed the philosophical assumption. But when determinism began increasingly, and, among authors, almost regularly, to be postulated of human life, as well as of nonhuman nature, autobiographers -- many of whom, like Darwin, Huxley, Galton, Bray, Mill, Spencer, and Wallace, were either scientists or scientific philosophers -- began to feel it their duty not only to describe how the individual life was lived, but also to explain why it was necessarily lived so and not otherwise. Hereditary and environmental influences now assumed the centrality which had formerly been accorded to actions and observations; and the materials, as well as the methods and purpose, of autobiography changed radically.[5]

There was a move towards understanding and appreciating the

[4] English Autobiography (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954), p. 76.

[5] Ibid., p. 90.

individual worth of the self where success and failure were only relative to the profoundly variable influences man can be subjected to.

Both readers and writers were affected by the economic, social, and spiritual upheavals of the time. In "The Victorian Approach to Autobiography," Keith Rinehart explains:

> A chief problem confronting the Victorians was how to combine aesthetic interest and moral value with fact -- in their case the facts of growing industrial activity and scientific knowledge and consequent growing dissatisfaction with traditional religious creeds. Autobiography promised to be a suitable literary medium in the Victorian attempt to cope with this problem. It was, thought the early and mid-Victorians (led by Carlyle), moral and practical, and it could be aesthetically satisfying.[6]

Much the same concern spurred writers to some analysis of their lives. Anna R. Burr sees the interest in self-study as a tendency presaging major intellectual changes:

> The observation of great movements at work in himself causes a man fresh interest in himself: the observation of a similar movement at work in others makes a man wish to state his position, to define his credo. The atmosphere of doubt, restlessness, insecurity, caused by intellectual upheavals, produces in the serious mind a desire to clear the ground for himself, and to aid others, -- produces, in a word, the autobiographical intention.[7]

Autobiography in the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth

[6] Modern Philology, p. 181.

[7] The Autobiography (Boston, 1909), pp. 186-87.

centuries was looked upon as a branch of biography, often referred to as self-biography. Samuel Johnson compared the two in an Idler essay (1759) :

> The writer of his own life has at least the first qualification of the historian, the knowledge of the truth; and though it may be plausibly objected that his temptations to disguise it are equal to his opportunities of knowing it, yet I cannot but think that impartiality may be expected with equal confidence from him that relates the passages of his own life, as from him that delivers the transactions of another.[8]

Robert Southey has been credited as having first used the word "auto-biography" in 1809, the hyphenation still linking the form to biography. In the Quarterly Review, Southey was describing a Portuguese poem: "It is the life of Francisco Viera, the painter, the best artist of his age, composed by himself. Much has been written concerning the lives of painters; and it is singular that this very amusing and unique specimen of auto-biography should have been entirely overlooked."[9] Carlyle in his essay on "Biography" did not distinguish between the two forms. He saw a "scientific" and a "poetic" interest in biography/autobiography:

> A scientific: because every mortal has a Problem of Existence set before him, which, were it only, what for the most it is, the Problem of keeping soul and body together, must be to a certain extent original, unlike every other; and yet, at the same time, so like every other; like our own, therefore; instructive,

[8] Cited by W. Dunn, English Biography, p. 154.

[9] Ibid., pp. 130-31.

> moreover, since we also are indentured to live. A poetic interest still more: for precisely this same struggle of human Freewill against material Necessity, which every man's Life, by the mere circumstance that the man continues alive, will more or less victoriously exhibit, -- is that which above all else, or rather inclusive of all else, calls the Sympathy of mortal hearts in action; and whether as acted, or as represented and written of, not only is Poetry, but is the sole Poetry possible.[10]

Mill thought very highly of this essay. In writing to Carlyle, he said: "Your paper on Biography and on Johnson has been more precious to me than I well know how to state. I have read it over and over till I could almost repeat it by heart; and have derived from it more edification and more comfort, than from all else that I have read for years past."[11] Carlyle supported biography in preference to fictionalised self-history. The interaction between self and society would be the means of gaining new and unique knowledge of life from the individual's own experience. The old role of autobiography glorifying feats of achievement by men of action gave way to the new role: a means to understanding the conflict between man and his circumstances from an individual point of view. The more personal tone of the narrative allowed greater scope to the writer than ever before.

[10] Thomas Carlyle, "Biography" first published in Fraser's Magazine (1832); in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, vol. III (London, 1899), pp. 44-45.

[11] The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848, ed. Francis E. Mineka (Toronto, 1963), XII, p. 104.

An autobiography tells the story of the changes that develop in a personality. These are recalled and related so that the present self in effect explains how the state in which it rests at the moment of writing has come about. Explanation is the key word since the experiences to be described are unique and very personal. The recollections are grouped together by the imagination into progressive and regressive stages revealing the process of the changes.

The essential link connecting all parts of an autobiography is the writer himself. As principal character and narrator, he can only be in an extremely self-conscious position that affects the story, causing some distortion of fact. Memory, too, has its own sifting process, giving a shape to the sequence of events recorded.[12] A more conscious controlling force is the purpose the author selects incidents for. His overall purpose in writing will also be influenced by his views on autobiography and his concept of audience.

Autobiography, therefore, shapes itself through distorting influences. From the autobiographer "we want the past as it appears in his mind, in his present mind. This may reject certain facts, it may alter others; it is their reflection and refraction

[12] On the value of the Autobiography as a historical source, see William Thomas, "John Stuart Mill and the Uses of Autobiography," History, LVI (1971), pp. 341-359.

in him that is important, and that is shaped in his narrative."[13] The autobiographer's selection of facts distorts the truth, but only in so far as the distortion is the inevitable result of one person's point of view. Genuine concern for truth is inherent in the act of making public a private record of one's life. As Anna R. Burr notes:

> Men may securely tell their sins to a collective body of their fellow-men; such confidence presupposes a very sacredness of privacy. That this paradox is true is proven by the nature of some of the sins thus entrusted to the printed page, by such confessants as Abélard and Cardan, such self-students as Benevenuto Cellini and Rousseau. The feeling which realizes that this privacy is real because it is also publicity, forms a part of the autobiographical intention toward sincerity. . . .[14]

Autobiography offered a form flexible enough to allow the writer considerable freedom in presenting his material. Mill emphasized the stages he passed through leading to a mental freedom he so strongly believed in. His autobiography concentrated on self-development, the kind that was essential towards bringing about general social progress. Although Victorian readers had become more sophisticated as a result of the increased frankness and the philosophical trend of the time, there were, nevertheless, conventions to be respected. To keep clear of these and yet aim

[13] Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London, 1960), p. 71.

[14] Religious Confessions and Confessants: With a Chapter on the History of Introspection (Boston, 1914), p. 42.

at the truth, required experience and skill in writing.

Mill had paid particular attention to his writing. He aimed at "ease with force," a quality he admired in writers both English and French, like Goldsmith, Fielding, Pascal, Voltaire, and Courier. He was pleased to note the improvement in his early writing when "the bones and cartilages began to clothe themselves with flesh, and the style became, at times, lively and almost light."(82) Mill brought to the writing of his Autobiography a mind trained "by practice [in] ~~in~~ the mode of putting a thought which gives it easiest admittance into minds not prepared for it by habit. . . ." (60)

Mill, through his writings, contributed towards the formation of the leading ideas of his time. When he chose to write in a genre that was rapidly becoming popular, he did not let it dominate him. His individualistic approach arose from the circumstances that caused him to consider writing an autobiography.

II: The Genesis of the Autobiography: Its Composition, Structure, and Style

At the age of forty-seven, Mill undertook to tell the story of his life. This was an act so out of character that it demands explanation. Mill cherished his privacy highly. As his father's executor, he had destroyed a number of letters which would have been valuable in a biography of James Mill. The rough drafts of his own correspondence, he had carefully kept.[15] He had even begun marking those he thought could be published as containing matter of interest to future generations. In this way Mill made sure he had some part in a selection of his correspondence that might be published.

Why did he not leave his letters to reveal his life-story as many other Victorians have left theirs ? Mill found letters too episodic in their presentation of a life. In them "the life of a man, and above all the chief part of his life, his inner life, is not gradually unfolded without break or sudden transition, those changes which take place insensibly being also manifested insensibly; but exhibited in a series of detached scenes, taken at considerable intervals from one another, shewing the completed change of position or feeling, without the process by which it was effected. . . ."[16]

[15] The Letters of John Stuart Mill, ed. Hugh S.R. Elliot (London, 1910), I, p. v.

[16] Mineka, Earlier Letters, XII, p. 99.

They left too much to speculation on the part of the reader, and Mill well knew the course of society's gossip.

Mill had made no long-term preparation for writing an autobiography. His selecting letters for publication was a dutiful task of a methodical man. He had a habit of keeping careful records, whether they were journals of his visit to France, his botanical expeditions, or his chronicles of the activities of the Utilitarian Society. Even during his career at India House, 1822-1858, he carefully catalogued his dispatches. In the light of such doings, it is unlikely that a notebook containing the titles of all his published work was necessarily any part of a long-term plan for writing an autobiography -- though he probably used it to refresh his memory.[17] A diary he kept between January 8 and April 15, 1854 was not a preparation either, as by January 23 he had already written a good portion of the account: "I too have thought very often lately about the life & am most anxious that we should complete it the soonest possible. What there is of it is in a perfectly publishable state. As far as the writing goes it could be printed tomorrow. . . ."[18] Rather, the diary caught the overflow

[17] Bibliography of the Published Writings of J.S. Mill, eds. Ney MacMinn, J.R. Hainds, and J.M. McCrimmon (Evanston, 1945), p. xii, n. 21: It is conjectured that the notebook was a preparatory measure "but no evidence has been found yet to show why Mill drew up this elaborate list. . . ."

[18] F.A. Hayek, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage (London, 1951), p. 190.

from the first draft of the Autobiography that Mill was working on, as some of the topics mentioned there are echoed in the diary.

The Autobiography was Mill's response to the threat of impending death. His father and younger brother had died of tuberculosis, and Mill feared that he, too, had the disease. His wife was also in poor health; much of their holidaying in sunnier climes was part of her treatment as much as his.

Mill threw himself into a feverish round of writing, aiming at "one large or two small posthumous volumes of Essays, with the Life at their head."[19] The exact date when he began the Autobiography in not known, but from extant letters he seems to have begun it in the Autumn of 1853. It was only on April 8, 1854, that Mill's physician confirmed the advanced stage of Mill's illness. By 1856, however, Mill was so much better that he could accept the appointment of Chief Examiner at India House, a position of responsibility.

The possibility of an early death filled Mill with remorse -- "When death draws near, how contemptibly little appears the good one has done! how gigantic that which one had the power and therefore the duty of doing! I seem to have frittered away the working years of life in mere preparatory trifles, and now 'the night when no one can work' has surprised me with the real duty of my life undone."[20] So far Mill had published A System of Logic and

[19] Hayek, p. 191.

[20] Elliot, II, p. 383, diary entry: March 30, 1854.

Principles of Political Economy. He urgently wanted to write his latest opinions. Although Mill had contributed to Reviews in abundance, he felt he had not carried out a recommendation he had once expressed to John Austin, that "every thinker should make a point of either publishing in his life if possible, or at any rate leaving behind him the most complete expression he can produce of his best thoughts, those which he has no chance of getting into any review."[21] The essays he worked on concurrently with the Autobiography were "Nature," "On Liberty," "Utility of Religion," and "Utilitarianism."

The Autobiography seems out of place among these essays; yet Mill felt it fitted his overall plan "of fixing in writing, so that it may not die with me, everything that I have in my mind which is capable of assisting the destruction of error and prejudice and the growth of just feelings and true opinions."[22] In choosing to write autobiography, Mill was still on familiar ground. He would be writing a review of his own life. ~~The historical explanation was not unfamiliar, only the personal note would be~~. In reviewing his own life, he would emphasize and explain what the most important events and influences were that formed his character and developed his mind. He would fill the gaps that letters leave and so reveal the continuous process of which the major changes are only highlights.

[21] In 1847; Mineka, Earlier Letters, XIII, p. 712.

[22] Elliot, II, p. 361, diary entry: January 19, 1854.

The reasons prefaced to the first draft of the Autobiography were:

> It may be useful that there should be some record of an education which was unusual & remarkable. . . . That in an age of transition in opinions, there may be somewhat both of interest & of benefit in noting the successive phases of a mind which was always pressing forward, equally ready to learn & unlearn either from its own thoughts or from those of others.[23]

The third reason, added in 1861, when Mill rewrote the whole account, runs as follows:

> But a motive which weighs more with me than either of these, is a desire to make acknowledgment of the debts which my intellectual and moral development owes to other persons; some of them of recognized eminence, others less known than they deserve to be, and the one to whom most of all is due, one whom the world had no opportunity of knowing. (1)

These reasons reveal his plan only in its public aspect.

His extant letters disclose a more personal level, shared with his wife: "I find there is a great deal of good matter written down in the Life which we have not written anywhere else, & which will make it valuable in that respect (apart from its main object) as the best things we have published."[24] He further elucidates this main object: "We must do what we can while we are alive -- the Life being the first thing -- which independent of the personal matters which it will set right when we have made it what we intend,

[23] The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, ed. Jack Stillinger (Urbana, 1961), p. 35.

[24] Hayek, pi 194.

is even now an unreserved proclamation of our opinions on religion, nature, & much else."[25] Clearly to Mill, the public aspect carried a little more weight, though it did not diminish the importance of the private one.

Mill and Harriet had been deeply offended by criticisms of their personal relationship before their marriage, when Harriet was still the wife of John Taylor. In the mid-forties Harriet and Mill had withdrawn from their habitual circle of friends. Nearly ten years later, these criticisms still rankled. In the diary Mill pondered "how far, for example, the stretch of invention in the way of malicious gossip transcends anything which we ever should or even could dream of the possibility of, until taught by experience. . . . As we grow older we learn that the most insignificant particulars in one's daily life, unnecessarily revealed, are very likely to be made the groundwork of a pile of médisance as mountain-like, and the top of it as distant from the foundation, as the Tower of Babel itself."[26] The time had come when he could vindicate himself to society, choosing to answer slurs and misconjectures through the written word rather than attempting the painful task of face to face confrontations By choosing when he would speak, he remained true to his belief in individual freedom within society.

Yet the personal note troubled Mill the most. The very opportunity of self-vindication had to be handled with great caution

[25] Hayek, p. 200.

[26] Elliot, II, p. 366, diary entry: February 3, 1854.

lest it turn into undue self-exposure. Mill wanted to include as much as was "necessary or desirable to say in order to stop the mouths of enemies hereafter."[27] "But," as he wrote to his wife, "we have to consider . . . how much of our story it is advisable to tell, in order to make head against the representations of enemies when we shall not be alive to add anything to it. . . . There must be care taken not to put arms into the hands of the enemy."[28]

Having to contend with possible misinterpretation by the enemy put Mill in a difficult position with regard to truth. It meant he had to set arbitrary limits to truth. This was his dilemma: he wanted the account to be "a fair representation," but he had to decide how explicit to be. Only by deferring publication for a hundred years could he really "tell all, simply & without reserve."[29] Mill had probably discussed this solution with his wife and had abandoned it. If the whole truth could not be told, however, Mill considered it important to state this unequivocally.

Certain aspects of the genre itself put it beyond Mill's control. They bothered him. For instance, the title of a work presupposes certain assumptions about the content, which the

[27] Hayek, p. 190.

[28] Ibid., p. 194.

[29] Ibid.

writer had not assumed:

> The critic seldom in these cases deigns to consider that all he says rather proves the title to be in the wrong than the book. So if a history or a biography professes, though but by implication, to tell anything, and then does not do so, but purposely keeps anything back, the writer may justly be blamed, not however for what his book is, but for what it professes to be without being. Goethe avoided this snare by calling his autobiography, which tells just as much about himself as he liked to be known, 'Aus meinem Leben Dichtung und Wahrheit.' The Aus even without the Dichtung saves his veracity.[30]

In a concern for truth, Mill underwent much soul-searching. What detail did integrity require to be told ? Fixing limits was not easy, and he asked his wife to decide these with respect to their relationship. When he let her know that what he had written showed "confidential friendship & strong attachment ending in marriage . . . & ignore/d/ there having ever been any scandalous suspicions,"[31] Harriet suggested a summary in a dozen lines of their relationship "so as to preclude other and different versions of /their/ lives at Ki/ngston/ and Wal/to/n -- /their/ summer excursions, etc." She continued, "It seems to me an edifying

[30] Elliot, pp. 372-73, diary entry: February 19, 1854. Mill, however, read his own apprehensions into Goethe's choice of title. George Santayana, Persons and Places (New York, 1944), p. 148, saw Goethe's title less as a way out of a snare than a realization "that his mature imagination, in which those facts /of his life/ were pictured, could not but veil them in an atmosphere of serenity, dignity, and justice utterly foreign to his original romantic experience."

[31] Hayek, p. 197.

picture for those poor wretches who cannot conceive friendship but in sex -- nor believe that expediency and the consideration for feelings of others can conquer sensuality. But of course this is not my reason for wishing it done. It is that every ground should be occupied by ourselves on our own subject."[32]

Harriet's recommendations were not only by letter. She took an active part in revising the manuscript as it progressed. Jack Stillinger says "except possibly for the revised leaves that replaced the rejected leaves of the original Part II, Harriet Mill read the entire manuscript /of the first draft/, marking passages with lines, X's, and question marks in the margin, deleting and sometimes rewriting Mill's text, occasionally commenting in the space at left; and Mill followed many of her suggestions and introduced most of her penciled alterations by rewriting them in ink."[33] Her suggestions were in an earlier portion of the first draft that Mill worked on, revising and adding to it while she was away in Europe. The progress he reported drew from her this reply: "I feel sure dear that the Life is not half written and that half that is written will not do."[34] Mill could not agree and replied, "the greater part, in bulk, of what is written

[32] Hayek, p. 196.

[33] Early Draft, pp. 4-5.

[34] Hayek, p. 196.

consists in the history of my mind up to the time when your influence over it began -- & I do not think there can be much objectionable in that part, even including as it does, sketches of the character of most of the people I was intimate with -- if I could be said to be so with any one."[35]

His last remark was exactly the type Harriet would have recommended for cancellation. She took care to curtail Mill's tendency to self-disparagement. When he wrote that he had studied ancient history in detail but that in modern history he "was very far from being similarly well informed," she altered it to suggest only a lack of interest on his part. In another instance, Mill had written: "In this part of my life at least, whatever may have been the case at others, I had a really active mind."[36] This Harriet marked with a query.

Her aim was probably to present what she called "an edifying picture." She would have preferred to uphold a studious, serious image of Mill. Even a hobby such as botany she would have wanted considered as gravely pursued. Appearances mattered more to her. She did not object to Mill's severe criticism of Sarah Austin in the first draft, because it coincided with her notions of attacking the médisance (this word had been used with regard to Mrs. Austin) at its source. Her editorial ability, while it served to stimulate Mill's writing, rendered his sentences more outward than inward-

[35] Hayek, p. 197.

[36] Stillinger, Early Draft, pp. 43, n.43, 134, n.393.

directing. As Stillinger says, "at the suggestion of Harriet, [Mill] suppressed personal and family details that, had they been kept in the later draft, would have made the Autobiography a more recognizably human document. . . ."[37]

Her active role ended with her death in 1858. Her annotations were still in the manuscript when, in 1861, Mill rewrote it. This was his usual practice with all his books.

> They were always written at least twice over; a first draft of the entire work was completed to the very end of the subject, then the whole begun de novo; but incorporating, in the second writing, all sentences and parts of sentences of the old draft, which appeared as suitable to [his] purpose as anything which [he] could write in lieu of them. . . . This system of double redaction . . . combines better than any other mode of composition, the freshness and vigour of the first conception, with the superior precision and completeness resulting from prolonged thought. (155-56)

Ultimately, therefore, Mill himself decided what he should put into the final version. In 1861, his circumstances were different. The threat of death had lifted. Living in Avignon, where Harriet had died, he had left the scenes of bitterness with his own family and one-time friends. The memory of his wife was still too strong for him to write any more on their life together. He could only add three pages and record the fact of her death.

The intervening five years, however, had brought Mill greater perspective. He revised his severe assessment of Grote and the

[37] Ibid., p. 15.

part he had played in Parliamentary proceedings because, "on a calm retrospect," Mill saw that "the men were less in fault," and that the Radicals "had expected too much from them." (137) He followed his wife's suggestion and omitted his criticism of his mother, thus leaving her out of the Autobiography entirely. He independently deleted the scathing comment on Mrs. Austin and toned down his criticism of John Roebuck and Frederick Maurice. He even put in a comment on his own physical awkwardness that was a legacy of his father's system of education. Mill had tried to include some mention of it in the first writing, but Harriet had overridden his attempts. He retained his comment that he had taken up botany "as an amusement," and some of his remarks on Harriet's influence on his mind.

Eight years later, at the age of sixty-three, Mill wrote the rest of the Autobiography. In the Autumn of the previous year, he had lost his seat in the House of Commons and finished his term as Rector of the University of St. Andrews: his public activity seemed at an end. He carefully analyzed Harriet's contribution to his mental development and recorded the principal events of his "outward life."

Mill took up his pen at three significant events of his life -- at the threat of death, in grief over his wife's death, and from a sense of reluctant retirement from active life. From his closing lines, "Here, therefore, for the present, this Memoir may close," it is clear that Mill intended to return to the Autobiography

to include further events in his life. His approach was unusual. Normally an autobiography is begun towards the end of a life; Mill's Autobiography developed in response to the events of his life.

The final draft of the Autobiography resulted from three different periods of writing. Begun two years after his marriage, the first draft shows

> evidence of Mill's early intention to divide the work into two parts, the first covering his life before he met Harriet Taylor, and "Part II.," beginning with his "first introduction to the lady whose friendship has been the honour & blessing of my existence." Possibly because he wished to introduce her at an earlier point in his account . . . possibly also because the two parts were of considerably disproportionate lengths (121 vs. 24 leaves), Mill rearranged several paragraphs, condensed the first eight leaves of Part II to three and a half, and discarded the two-part division altogether.[38]

Three years after his wife's death, when Mill rewrote and revised the whole, the structure remained essentially the same. In fact, without the third part added in 1869-70, the account would amply fulfill Keith Rinehart's explanation of the structure as "the movement of the human hero, John Stuart Mill, from the aegis of one demi-god, his father, to another, his wife, through the very human experience of his crisis."[39] Sixteen years after the first writing, Mill quite deliberately changed that structure by adding

[38] Stillinger, Early Draft, p. 4, n. 7.

[39] "John Stuart Mills' [sic] Autobiography: Its Art and Appeal," University of Kansas City Review, XIX (1953), p. 267.

forty-eight leaves. He toned down its dramatic effect. Shumaker sees the structure as weakened, that "the account of parliamentary activity is sadly out of harmony with the expressed purpose and tone of the remainder of the volume. . . . The materials are no longer the data of consciousness, but res gestae. . . . The artistic oneness of the book has been sacrificed."[40]

The Autobiography, however, falls into two parts. The first part deals with an aspiring and energetic young man hoping for personal happiness as a reformer of opinions. He planned to acquire a thorough knowledge of the philosophy he espoused. His early education and his vigorous efforts to develop his mind place the emphasis on him. The first part closes when Mill despairs of finding personal happiness should he reach all the goals he aimed at. His illusions shattered, he undergoes a mental crisis that serves to make him understand his earlier errors. A period of consolidation follows leading to a new phase.

The second part moves the battle being fought into the foreground, stressing not the combatants, but the issues at stake. A realistic understanding of the practical problems replaces the young man's visionary zeal. The crusade for reform calls for fundamental change in the public mind which surface improvement does not reflect. With all his mental resources, the young

[40] English Autobiography, p. 156.

reformer attempts to find solutions -- workable ones.

The second part balances the first: whereas the young man had a personal goal the mature man has a purposeful existence; the ephemeral aspects of youth have their counterpart in the substantial, thought-provoking inquiries of responsible maturity. The first part is the period of apprenticeship to the second part of action, using those powers of mind cultivated earlier.

The structure develops within a chronological framework. This is the usual treatment autobiography lends itself to -- that of the life-cycle. But, in the art of autobiography, "even the most natural of its conventions, the division of a life into 'periods' of 'chapters', can be misleading, an infringement of the truth, 'façade-architecture' as it has been called."[41] Narrative development is linear but experiences are simultaneous. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Mill held back the time-scheme after Chapter I, so that in Chapter II, he could deal with the moral upbringing of his youth. Reverting to chronological sequence in III and IV, he retraces his steps in V to better explain what led to his crisis. Chapter VI and VII follow chronologically ~~except that~~ (thirty years are compressed into the seventh chapter.)[42]

[41] Pascal, p. 78.

[42] Mill's first draft contains no divisions into chapters. Helen Taylor, as editor, seems to have provided these and supplied their titles.

In the earlier part, time was of significance because Mill felt that at the age of fourteen, he had acquired a twenty-five year lead over all his contemporaries as a result of his unique education. Consequently, his mental dejection, which he thought others had similarly "passed through," happened to him earlier and more intensely because "the idiosyncrasies of [his] education had given to the general phenomenon a special character, which made it seem the natural effect of causes that it was hardly possible for time to remove." (99) Thus, while time is telescoped in the later part, time is stretched in the earlier so that Mill devotes a whole chapter (III) to three years of his life.

Mill's mental crisis is the focus of the structure. The first part leads to it and the second part develops from it. The two parts are bound together by that traumatic experience which is carefully foreshadowed by the selection of suitable detail and incident. The years of transition immediately following the crisis prepared Mill to act on the basis of his changed views.

The structure is locked into place with the use of the first-person. The ever-present 'I' has a unifying force that makes everything relevant, that makes the reader conscious of "the intimate and dynamic identity of experiences and events with the writer, with the writer as the object of the book and as the author."[43] First-person narration encourages an intimacy between

[43] Pascal, p. 188.

writer and reader; it sheds many barriers imposed by the materials and conventions. The first-person approach is common to autobiography and a closely related form, personal narrative. Both deal with personal experience. They differ in that personal narrative makes no attempt to analyze experience in subjective terms but relates it from a more objective standpoint.

Mill, as noted earlier, was constantly aware that excessive self-revelation could be self-condemning. Unable to take the reader into his confidence, he resorted to the strategy of the Greek orator:

> how everything important to his purpose was said at the exact moment when he had brought the minds of his audience into the state most fitted to receive it; how he made steal into their minds, gradually and by insinuation, thoughts which, if expressed in a more direct manner would have aroused their opposition. (14-15)

Mill's manner of writing combined a direct and an indirect approach.

I have taken as a sample of Mill's style in general a passage, containing twenty-five sentences, beginning "Being now released from an active concern" and ending "with the society they belong to."[44] This passage is a revised version of the first draft,[45] which ensures that Mill, whether in 1861 or 1869/70, polished this passage to his own liking. The first paragraph on the kind of

[44] Autobiography, pp. 159-162.

[45] Early Draft, pp. 169-173.

society Mill had forgone takes up ten sentences, the second paragraph on his early friendship with Mrs. Taylor has four sentences, while the remaining eleven form one-third of the next paragraph where Mill compares his philosophical position before and after meeting Mrs. Taylor.

A striking feature of the diction is Mill's fondness for abstract nouns, mostly of Latin origin: "designation," "aspiration," "requisite." In the first paragraph, only three nouns "person," "French," "apostle" are remotely human. In the second, where more specific nouns would be expected there are, however, only three: "friend," "daughter," "husband." In the third part, "paupers" and "human beings" are the closest approximations to the non-abstract noun. Adjectives add some definition to the nouns: "active concern," "incomparable friend," "superficial improvement," though Mill does not rely solely on them. There is a predominance of adjectives in the first paragraph, half of which are modified by adverbs. By means of this modification, Mill reveals his disdain for so-called society: "a very common order in thought and feeling," "so insipid an affair," "make their contact with it so slight, and at such long intervals," "a really earnest mind." Adding to this effect are the negative words "unattractive," "unpractical," "unintellectual," as well as a strong verbal negative in a main clause: "A person of high intellect should never go into unintellectual society." Mill uses far more negatives including implied negatives in the third part, where they distinguish the differences between the two phases

of his opinions.

Mill's sentences vary considerably in length: three are extremely long, being one-hundred words and over, three are fairly short, between thirteen and eighteen words. There are only two simple sentences with twenty-eight and twenty-four words each. Mill writes compound-complex sentences fairly frequently; eleven co-ordinate clauses are used in the passage, never more than two to a sentence. Complex sentences, though, are Mill's favoured style. The clausal weight is usually in the predicate. Up to six subordinate clauses are not unusual, although the eleven in the final sentence are an exception. Overt balancing of clauses or undue repetition of clausal structure has no part in Mill's style. Such balancing or repetition as does occur is for contrast to deeper meaning: "A person of high intellect should never go into unintellectual society unless he can enter it as an apostle; yet he is the only person who can safely enter it at all." "My opinions gained equally in breadth and depth, I understood more things, and those which I had understood before, I now understood more thoroughly."

Clauses in the form of parenthetical asides allow Mill to convey information about himself discreetly; information, which directly stated, would have given an egotistical tone to the sentence. Mill is describing himself when he says, "I was enabled to indulge the inclination, natural to thinking persons when the age of boyish vanity is once past, for limiting my own society. . . ."

He also uses the asides to reveal his views at the time of writing, even while he was recalling the past:

> I was much more inclined, than I can now approve, to put in abeyance . . .
>
> in removing the injustice -- for injustice it is, whether admitting of a complete remedy or not -- involved . . .
>
> instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth . . .

Mill frequently uses clauses and phrases to interrupt syntactical movement. These pauses allow him to interject qualification to the thought suggested. When, however, he indulges in a periodic opening to a sentence and also includes asides in that long preamble, the sentence becomes a little confusing, as meaning is suspended and then interrupted further: "The notion that it was possible to go further than this in removing the injustice -- for injustice it is, whether admitting of a complete remedy or not -- involved in the fact that some are born to riches and the vast majority to poverty, I then reckoned chimerical. . . ."

Adjectival clauses predominate over adverbial and noun clauses. The adjectival clauses work towards defining the abstract nouns. In addition, Mill uses prepositional groups to further narrow the meaning of the nouns. His habit of stringing these groups together strains some of his sentences. One such begins: "All serious discussion on matters on which opinions differ, being considered ill-bred, and the national deficiency in liveliness and sociability having prevented the cultivation of the art of talking agreeably

on trifles, in which the French of the last century so much excelled, the sole attraction of what is called society. . . ." Yet, Mill maintains the pace and rhythm of his sentences by liberally interspersing single-syllabled words among the fairly frequent polysyllabic words which receive emphasis by contrast. Such a strategy eliminates a ponderous effect: "Persons even of intellectual aspirations had much better, if they can, make their habitual associates of at least their equals, and, as far as possible, their superiors, in knowledge, intellect, and elevation of sentiment."

Mill has a flair for bringing into his writing the natural emphasis of the spoken word. He values his adjectives more for the emphasis they produce in conjunction with a noun, than for their descriptive qualities. Mill makes his point by means of such emphasis together with a subtle touch of alliteration: "To a person of any but a very common order in thought or feeling, such society, unless he has personal objects to serve by it, must be supremely unattractive: and most people, in the present day, of any really high class of intellect, make their contact with it so slight, and at such long intervals, as to be almost considered as retiring from it altogether."

The pronoun 'I' appears only twice in the first paragraph. Mill expresses his views on society without being didactic. In the second paragraph, the 'I' also appears twice, but is subsumed in 'our.' In the third part, however, the 'I' appears thirteen times, five of these being in separate main clauses. Contrary to

expectation, Mill is not so much detailing the opinions he holds as much as he contrasting his position when he was on his own with what he and Harriet came to hold. So the 'I's in this section are a disparagement of his earlier self.[46]

Mill appears to have carried over his philosophically analytical style into the writing of his autobiography. His verbs lack vigour; many of them are forms of "to be."[47] Mill, on the whole, eschews emotive words. The only figures of speech he uses in the passage are "age of boyish vanity," "[social] tree," "as an apostle."

There is one section in the Autobiography where Mill does not stint in his use of imagery. He breaks into a highly evocative style to describe his mental crisis. The stylistic change reinforces this period's focal position in the structure of the Autobiography. By violent contrast in style, Mill has dramatised the experience of his crisis. He reserved a cluster of metaphors specially for this part, whereas the On Liberty, written at the same time as the first draft, abounds in metaphor.[48] Mill had

[46] For Mill's use of pronouns revealing a dependency on his father see Norman Holland's "Prose and Minds: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Non-fiction" in The Art of Victorian Prose, pp. 316-20, eds. George Levine and William Madden (New York, 1968).

[47] Richard Ohmann's "A Linguistic Appraisal of Victorian Style" in The Art of Victorian Prose analyses Mill's philosophical style, pp. 305-306.

[48] John Grube, "On Liberty as a Work of Art," The Mill News Letter (Fall 1969), pp. 2-6.

somehow to make clear a situation that had seemed "a very unromantic and in no way honourable distress," a dejection, which "honestly looked at, could not be called other than egotistical, produced by the ruin . . . of /his/ fabric of happiness. . . !" (102) Yet, this experience was vital to an understanding of the changes to come in his ideas.

Chapter V on the crisis almost immediately starts off with a metaphor reminiscent of Bacon -- " to digest and mature my thoughts." Mill, in his life so far, had hoped "to pick as many flowers as /he/ could by the way." Before long, however, "the time came when /he/ awakened from this as from a dream." His awakening resulted from a Socratic question and answer confrontation he had with himself:

> "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you ?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm. . . .(94)

He waited for "the cloud to pass away of itself; but it did not. A night's sleep, the sovereign remedy for the smaller vexations of life, had no effect on it." Instead, "for some months the cloud seemed to grow thicker and thicker." His earlier ideas weighed on his spirits "like an incubus." Mill tried to illustrate his experience with the help of quotations from Coleridge's poetry.

lines that he came across only later. He alluded to Macbeth's despairing words to the physician for a cure. Mill knew that his father "was not the physician who could heal" him. In agony, he concluded in a poignantly Blakean image that reason is "a perpetual worm at the root both of the passions and of the virtues." In a striking metaphor of stasis, Mill frames the paralysis he felt:

> I was thus, as I said to myself, left stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well-equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail; without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for: no delight in virtue, or the general good, but also just as little in anything else. The fountains of vanity and ambition seemed to have dried up within me, as completely as those of benevolence. (97-8)

His recovery is heralded by "a small ray of light [that] broke in upon [his] gloom," and " the cloud gradually drew off." After the "tide had turned" his ship could set sail. Mill set about repairing "the fabric of [his] old and taught opinions . . . and was incessantly occupied in weaving it anew." (110) Mill's use of metaphor allowed him a means of graphically presenting his changed views about "the passive susceptibilities" and their cultivation through poetry.

Other devices, such as deliberate irony, are absent in the Autobiography. Unconscious irony, however, does result when, for instance, Mill observes: "Such is the facility with which mankind believe at one and the same time things inconsistent with one another." (29) This could be applied to Mill himself to explain the claims he made for Harriet Taylor's intellectual ability.

Mill's statement on the power of logic gives rise to a curious twist of irony. Mill wrote of it as "a power which, for want of some such discipline, many otherwise able men altogether lack; and when they have to answer opponents, only endeavour, by such arguments as they can command, to support the opposite conclusion, scarcely even attempting to confute the reasonings of their antagonists. . . ." (14) This comment was added at a later date, and, though one cannot be certain who, if anyone, Mill had in mind, yet it does bring to mind James Mill's reply to Macaulay's attack on the "Essay on Government." Describing the counter attack, Mill wrote: "I was not at all satisfied with the mode in which my father met the criticisms of Macaulay. . . . He treated Macaulay's argument as simply irrational; an attack upon the reasoning faculty; an example of the saying of Hobbes, that when reason is against a man, a man will be against reason." (111) It is doubly ironical that his father acted in this way, most unlike a trained logician according to Mill's argument; worse still, it had been his father who had taught Mill logic in the first place!

The Autobiography lacks even the slightest hint of vanity. Mill was careful to prune his writing of any trace of self-conceit.[49] His tendency is, rather, to underestimate himself. With regard to the Logic, he wrote: "How the book came to have, for a work of the

[49] Stillinger, Early Draft, pp.11-12.

kind, so much success, and what sort of persons compose the bulk of those who have bought, I will not venture to say read, it, I have never thoroughly understood." (157)

A sober mood tinges the Autobiography. The story is in itself ironical, as the mind specially trained to demolish the opponents of Benthamism exercised its talents instead on that philosophy. Attention is focused on the chief protagonist and the small cast of supporting characters.

III: Mill's Dominant Relationships

Mill's isolation, enforced in childhood by his father and encouraged in his prime by Harriet Taylor, did not prevent Mill from cultivating friends from many walks of life, and ranging in varying degrees of intimacy. The ones he chose to mention in his Autobiography are those whose relationships to him were meaningful only in relation to his mental development. As a result of his published opinions, even as early as 1848, he says, "my correspondence (much of it with persons quite unknown to me), on subjects of public interest, swelled to a considerable bulk." (166)

Yet, at the one stage when he most needed a sympathetic ear, he felt no one could qualify: "Of other friends, I had at that time none to whom I had any hope of making my condition intelligible." (95) He was referring to the youths of his own age whom he had contrived to associate with under the disguise of a discussion group he had started:

> Over and above the benefit of practice in oral discussion, was that of bringing me in contact with several young men at that time less advanced than myself, among whom, as they professed the same opinions, I was for some time a sort of leader, and had considerable influence on their mental progress. Any young man of education who fell in my way, and whose opinions were not incompatible with those of the Society, I endeavoured to press into its service; and some others I probably should never have known, had they not joined it. (57)

From 1822 to 1826, Mill met these young men for early morning discussions. Yet, in 1826, he could not find a suitable confidant

among them.

To turn to his father, he felt, would cause more distress:

> My father, to whom it would have been natural to me to have recourse in any practical difficulties, was the last person to whom, in such a case as this, I looked for help. Everything convinced me that he had no knowledge of any such mental state as I was suffering from, and that even if he could be made to understand it, he was not the physician who could heal it. My education, which was wholly his work, had been conducted without any regard to the possibility of its ending in this result; and I saw no use in giving him the pain of thinking his plans had failed, when the failure was probably irremediable, and, at all events, beyond the power of his remedies. (95)

His father he saw first as the teacher who would grieve over the failure of his educational experiment: "It was not an experiment in the sense of being an attempt to discover what would happen if a child were subjected to an unique method of training. There was never any doubt of the results in the mind of James Mill. The experiment was rather in the nature of a demonstration, a demonstration of the soundness and applicability of the Utilitarian theory of education."[50] As a result of this education, the son was prevented from really knowing his teacher as a parent. As Keith Rinehart observes, "the father is clearly and objectively defined as far as his intellectual opinions are concerned. But Mill writes about his father's feelings as if they were unknown and

[50] James McNab McCrimmon, "Studies towards a Biography of John Stuart Mill," Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University (1937), p. 1.

he has to infer what they were."[51] Only the teacher's opinions were fully understood; no other intimacy was possible.

Separation of the father from the teacher was difficult because the fatherly role was not distinct to the son. The "constitutionally irritable" father was an exacting and thorough teacher who "was often, and much beyond reason, provoked by . . . failures in cases where success could not have been expected." (20) He constantly reproved the boy for "inattention, inobservance, and general slackness of mind in matters of daily life." (25) The strong personality of the teacher-father was an overpowering influence that extended not only over the boy's studies, which filled most of his days and evenings, but also over such leisure time as was allowed him.

Consequently, the first emotion felt by the boy Mill was fear. He knew what it was to feel the "chilling sensation of being under a critical eye." (10) Fear generated instant obedience, compromise, and self-sacrifice. Mill "was always too much in awe of [his father] to be otherwise than extremely subdued and quiet in his presence." (23) His father's usual practice of explaining the reasons for what he required his young son to do made it difficult for the son to take a different stand, considering the strong personality of the father. Mill could "derive none but a very

[51] "Studies in Victorian Autobiography," Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin (1951), p. 104.

humble opinion" of himself from his father's company. The mature Mill, looking back, could feel pity for his father "who did, and strove to do, so much for his children, who would have so valued their affection, yet who must have been constantly feeling that fear of him was drying it up at its source. This was no longer the case later in life, and with his younger children. They loved him tenderly: and if /Mill could not/ say so much of /himself/, /he/ was always loyally devoted to him." (36-7)

The father-son relationship did not improve when eventually Mill realized that Benthamism was not for him. Mill was too sensitive to argue openly with his father:

> On those matters of opinion on which we differed, we talked little. He /the father/ knew the habit of thinking for myself, which his mode of education had fostered, sometimes led to opinions different from his, and he perceived from time to time that I did not always tell him <u>how</u> different. I expected no good, but only pain to both of us, from discussing our differences: and I never expressed them but when he gave utterance to some opinion of feeling repugnant to mine, in a manner which would have made it disingenuousness on my part to remain silent. (126)

Inevitably, the rift between father and son widened.

The situation became particularly frustrating when Mill, as the "real" editor of the <u>London Review</u>, "could not exercise editorial control over /his father's/ articles, and . . . was sometimes obliged to sacrifice to him portions of /his/ own." (140) Mill, with his changed views, was in a peculiar position, for his father's articles "made the <u>Review</u> at first derive its tone and colouring from him more than from any of the other writers. . . .

The old Westminster Review doctrines, but little modified, thus formed the staple of the review." (140) Mill was forced to bide his time. When an opportunity did arise for revealing his new views on Hartleianism and Utilitarianism, Mill could not take full advantage of it. He saw it would be "painful" to him to do so on account of his father.

By contrast, Mill presents his memory of John Austin, who replaced his father as tutor, with affection. In fact, Mill felt he benefited from Austin's influence, for his new tutor "had attained by reading and thought, a considerable number of the same /as James Mill/ opinions, modified by his own very decided individuality of character." (52) Austin also possessed, in Mill's estimation, a "tone of highmindedness which did not show itself so much, if the quality existed as much, in any of the other persons with whom at the time /Mill/ associated." (53) Implied here is a comparison with James Mill. In a deleted rendering in the first draft, Mill stated as much, the passage given above continuing "associated, not even in my father; although my father was as high principled as Mr Austin & had a stronger will; but Mr Austin was both a prouder man, & more a man of feeling than my father."[52] This last quality made Austin more approachable. Mill liked him even though Austin "from the first set himself decidedly against the prejudices and narrownesses which are almost sure to be found

[52] Stillinger, Early Draft, p. 81, n.209.

in a young man formed by a particular mode of thought or a particular social circle." (53) When Mill saw himself, after his mental crisis, "at a great distance from" his father, he found he had "most points of agreement" with the elder Austin. Both of them had responded to new influences. In Austin's case "the influences of German literature and of the German character and state of society had made a very perceptible change in his views of life. . . . His tastes had begun to turn themselves towards the poetic and contemplative," (124) -- much like Mill's.

Mill was never to get so close with his father. James Mill remained a formidable person to his son. At home, the father dominated the scene. At India House, he supervised the work his son did. Among the Radicals, his personality and reputation maintained him as their life-force.

Only in fantasy could Mill rid himself of the oppressive presence of his father. Mill was quite overcome on reading the death scene of a father in Marmontel's Mémoires. In the story Marmontel, to whom tears come easily, does not weep but bravely shoulders the burden of the family's grief. This scene caused Mill to weep. A.W. Levi sees it as the result of Mill's own suppressed wish rising to the surface:

> Raised in a social milieu where, artificial and unrealistic as it was, the only acceptable attitude toward the father was love or, at the very least, respect, the existence of death wishes was taboo and could not be honestly admitted to the self, much less expressed.[53]

[53] "The 'Mental Crisis' of John Stuart Mill," Psychoanalytic Review, XXXII (January 1945), p. 97.

Mill's reluctance to criticize his father is evident in the Autobiography. He found an indirect means of doing so, however, through his strongly expressed views on John Roebuck. Mill describes his father and Roebuck as having similar outgoing personalities:

> My father[s] . . . senses and mental faculties were always on the alert; he carried decision and energy of character in his whole manner and into every action of life. . . .(25)
>
> Roebuck, all whose instincts were those of action and struggle. . . . (105)

They also shared a reserved attitude to the feelings:

> I believe him [the father] to have had much more feeling than he habitually showed, and much greater capacities of feeling than were ever developed. He resembled most Englishmen in being ashamed of the signs of feeling, and by the absence of demonstration, starving the feelings themselves. (36)
>
> Personally, instead of being, as Benthamites are supposed to be, void of feeling, he [Roebuck] had very quick and strong sensibilities. But, like most Englishmen who have feelings, he found his feelings stand very much in his way. (106)

Roebuck and James Mill were lovers of poetry, too. Packe records that Mill's father introduced Mill to "Milton, Goldsmith, Burns, Grey[sic], Cowper, Beattie, Spenser, Scott, Dryden, Campbell, and Pope -- a not inconsiderable list."[54] But, neither the elder Mill nor Roebuck possessed the capacity for feeling that would give it its due place in the formation of character.

Just as Mill moved away from Roebuck, so did he move away

[54] Michael St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill (London, 1954), p. 25.

from his father -- inwardly. Mill could never bring himself to openly break with him. With Roebuck, Mill found that "in the beginning [their] chief divergence[55] related to the cultivation of the feelings."(106) Later, Mill's description of what led to his break with Auguste Comte ~~similarly applied~~ became apparent. Their differences "were chiefly on those points of opinion which blended in both of [them] with [their] strongest feelings, and determined the entire direction of [their] aspirations." (148)

Mill showed a special concern for human feelings after his mental crisis, and this marked a change in his meetings with the Coleridgians. F.D. Maurice and John Sterling became "of considerable use to [his] development." But while the thinker Maurice originated those ideas that gave an impetus to Mill's own thoughts and so provided one side of his development, Sterling's contribution lay in becoming the kind of friend Mill had never had. He says of Sterling:

> He and I started from intellectual points almost as wide apart as the poles, but the distance between us was always diminishing: if I made steps towards some of his opinions, he, during his short life, was constantly approximating more and more to several of mine: and if he had lived, and had health and vigour to prosecute his ever assiduous self-culture, there is no knowing how much further

[55] Roebuck, however, dated their estrangement from the day after he spoke to Mill at India House on what "might result from his connection with Mrs. Taylor," in Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck, ed. Robert E. Leader (London and New York, 1897), p. 59.

> this spontaneous assimilation might have proceeded. (109-110)

Mill could generously sympathize with Sterling when he "made the mistake of becoming a clergyman," but ridiculed Maurice for his lapse into religion.

The post-crisis Mill was very receptive to many influences and his reaction to which Carlyle reveals the state of his extreme reaction to Benthamism. A more anti-pathetic person he could not have known. James Mill specially disliked Carlyle's fantastic prose;[56] whereas Mill came to find it as "poetry to animate." Carlyle sought out the writer of the "Spirit of the Age" articles, hailing him as "a new Mystic." This impression, Mill later corrected by sending "a distinct profession" of his divergent views to Carlyle. Yet, some kind of bond linked the two men. It did not slacken till much later, when Harriet Taylor's influence left Carlyle no room in Mill's life.

Mill's friendship with Sterling, the lesser thinker but the more lovable person, and with Carlyle illuminates the basis of his friendship with Harriet. The emotional aftermath of his mental crisis left him more responsive to others. He was very much alone: companionship of a like-mind and friendship of a kindred soul were what he needed. Shirley Letwin says Mill "had to feel himself part of an army, or at least a band of fellow

[56] Ruth Borchard, John Stuart Mill: The Man (London, 1957), p. 38.

crusaders. He is the first notable example of a character so familiar now, an intellectual with great powers of independent thought, who nevertheless needs the warmth of membership in a group, organization, or cause. . . . With Harriet, he regained a fellow crusader.[57]

When Mill and Harriet met, in 1830, Harriet was hungering for intellectual communion that her husband could not meet and society hardly considered appropriate to a woman. These very disadvantages would have appealed to Mill, who had been intellectually convinced at an early age of the equality of men and women. Besides, the lady herself was very eager in her attitude to Mill's ideas. His impact on her she revealed in a note to W.J. Fox and Eliza Flower, in 1833:

> O this being seeming as tho God had willed to show the type of the possible elevation of humanity. To be with him wholly is my ideal of the noblest fate for all the states of mind and feeling which are lofty & large & fine, he is the companion spirit and heart desire -- we are not alike in trifles only because I have so much more frivolity than he.[58]

To Mill, she was "a woman of deep and strong feeling, of penetrating and intuitive intelligence, and of an eminently meditative and poetic nature." (130) He stressed her qualities of mind and his intellectual debt to her. But his private admission to her was ". . . ~~intellectually~~ [humbled] That, though it is the smallest

[57] The Pursuit of Certainty (Cambridge, 1965), p. 241.

[58] Hayek, p. 54.

part of what you are to me, is the most important to commemorate, as people are comparatively willing to suppose all the rest."[59] Having learned the necessity for the cultivation of the feelings, Mill had turned his "thoughts and inclinations . . . in an increasing degree towards whatever seemed capable of being instrumental to that object." (101) Harriet's "rich and powerful nature" (130) offered the enrichment he was seeking, and he gave her effect on him an intellectual basis.

Mill clearly delighted in Harriet's self-improvement, which he saw as "progress in the highest and in all senses, [and] . . . a law of her nature; a necessity equally from the ardour with which she sought it, and from the spontaneous tendency of faculties which could not receive an impression or an experience without making it the source or the occasion of an accession of wisdom." (129-30) Just as with Sterling, there was "spontaneous assimilation." Mill saw that Harriet, "in the rapidity of her intellectual growth, her mental activity, which converted everything into knowledge, doubtless drew from [him], as it did from other sources, many of its materials." (132)

Critics view Mill's relationship to Harriet as his blind spot. It is often pointed out that he could not see any discrepancy in his describing her as having acquired her ideas from a "moral

[59] Hayek, p. 194.

intuition," the very philosophy he castigated as being

> the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions. By the aid of this theory, every inveterate belief and every intense feeling, of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its own all-sufficient voucher and justification. There never was such an instrument devised for consecrating all deep-seated prejudices. (158)

Harriet's characteristics, however, were quite contrary to such prejudice:

> In her, complete emancipation from every kind of superstition (including that which attributes a pretended perfection to the order of nature and the universe), and an earnest protest against many things which are still part of the established constitution of society, resulted not from the hard intellect, but from strength of noble and elevated feeling, and co-existed with a highly reverential nature. (130)

Besides, it is not often emphasized that Mill in his final revision put in two words that clarify the point. He said she was one "who had at first[60] reached her opinions by the moral intuition of a character of strong feeling, /and/ there was doubtless help as well as encouragement to be derived from one /himself/ who had arrived at many of the same results by study and reasoning. . . ." (132)

Mill stresses that at this period, when he was doing much thinking, her influence "was only one among many which were helping

[60] My emphasis.

to shape the character of [his] future development. . . ."(133) If in the beginning she was his pupil and learnt from him, later at least, Mill believed that the roles were reversed. Yet even when her influence became "the presiding principle of [his] mental progress, it did not alter the path, but only made [him] move forward more boldly, and, at the same time, more cautiously, in the same course. (133)

Mill found his relationship to Harriet most meaningful for "she possessed in combination, the qualities which in all other persons whom [he] had known [he] had been only too happy to find singly." (130) No longer would he feel as he did in 1829, when he wrote to John Sterling: "There is now no human being (with whom I can associate on terms of equality) who acknowledges a common object with me, or with whom I can cooperate even in any practical undertaking without the feeling, that I am only using a man whose purposes are different, as an instrument for the furtherance of my own."[61] When Harriet was free to marry him, they "added to the partnership of thought, feeling, and writing which had long existed, a partnership of [their] entire existence." (168) Whether she was really all he thought her to be is of little importance.[62] What is relevant is that he found her so.

[61] Mineka, Earlier Letters, XII, p. 30.

[62] For a favourable view of Harriet's intellectual ability see "Sentiment and Intellect," the introduction to Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill, Harriet Mill, ed. Alice Rossi (Chicago, 1970).

The clues to his attitude are revealed in a letter to a fellow writer in 1832:

> We two possess what, next to community of purpose, is the greatest source of friendship between minds of any capacity; this is, not <u>equality</u>, for nothing can be so little interesting to a man as his own double; but, <u>reciprocal superiority</u>. Each of us knows many things that the other knows not, & can do many things which the other values but cannot himself do, or not so well. There is also just that difference of character between us which renders us highly valuable to each other in another way for <u>I</u> require to be warmed, <u>you</u> perhaps occasionally to be calmed. We are almost as much the natural complement of one another as man and woman are: we are far stronger together than separately, & whatever both of us agree in, has a very good chance, I think, of being true. We are therefore made to encourage and assist one another. Our intimacy is its own reward, & we have only to consider in what way it may be made most useful to both of us.[63]

[63] Mineka, <u>Earlier Letters</u>, XII, pp. 123-24.

IV: His Personal Challenge

Mill's Autobiography reads like a struggle for survival. To maintain his own identity, he fought off the clutches of sectarianism that tried to draw him into its centre and fashion him into its chief exponent. He came through severely battle-scarred but soon set about rebuilding his life in a manner more suited to his own self.

Ironically, his rejection of sectarian Benthamism resulted from a series of self-initiated phases vigorously undertaken in preparation for the role of a Benthamite reformer. Initially, his education under his father had directed him towards that end. Mill, however, needed to personalize this goal for himself. It was only after reading the Traité de Législation that "the Benthamic standard of 'the greatest happiness' . . . which [he] had always been taught to apply . . . burst upon [him] with all the force of novelty." (45) The subject took a strong hold over him -- "at every page [it] seemed to open a clearer and broader conception of what human opinions and institutions ought to be, how they might be made what they ought to be, and how far removed from it they [then were]." (47) It was a source of inspiration for him: "I felt taken up to an eminence from which I could survey a vast mental domain, and see stretching out into the distance intellectual results beyond computation." (46)

The sudden excitement resulted from putting himself into the

picture. He had a part to play, armed with "opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one of the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of a life. And [he] had a grand conception . . . of changes to be effected in the condition of mankind through that doctrine." (47) Like an explorer, there was hope for personal adventure and, added to this, profit or benefit for mankind.

This vision awakened him to the fact that his ideas still bore the stamp of his father's opinions. With enthusiasm, he set about the task of re-forming them, so as to make them his personal convictions. This called for a thorough study of all Bentham's writings. So, Mill planned the formation of the Utilitarian Society, whose members acknowledged "Utility as their standard in ethics and politics, and a certain number of the principal corollaries drawn from it in the philosophy [Mill] had accepted." (56) This Society took Mill out of the orbit of his father's influence and into the company of like-minded, youthful Benthamites. Their discussions centred on essays and questions based on their agreed interests. Before long, Mill and "a dozen or more" directed their attention to those books Benthamites considered valuable in political economy, logic, and psychology.

These discussions ~~eradicated~~ made plain Mill's mere adherence to his taught opinions and led him on to much original thinking:

> Our rule was to discuss thoroughly every point

> raised, whether great or small, prolonging the discussion until all who took part were satisfied with the conclusion they had individually arrived at; and to follow up every topic of collateral speculation which the chapter or the conversation suggested, never leaving it until we had untied every knot which we found. (84)

A more hostile testing ground helped to put Mill's acquired views into a new perspective. This was the London Debating Society, founded to bring together men of differing views: Radicals, Liberals "of differing orders and degrees," as well as Tories. Mill had prepared himself for meeting the opposition in debate, by his earlier study of their views in print. To help his father write the leading article of the first issue of the Westminster Review, he had read through "all the volumes of the /Edinburgh/ Review, or as much of each as seemed of any importance . . . and made notes. . . ."(64-5) Mill's analysis of what he read contributed to the impact of this article: "So formidable an attack on the Whig party and policy had never before been made; nor had so great a blow been ever struck, in this country, for radicalism. . . ."(66) Immediately after this, and coinciding with the formation of the Debating Society, Mill had the opportunity of examining at first hand and studying Bentham's Rationale of Judicial Evidence. He undertook to condense into a single treatise three masses of manuscript, each written "at considerable intervals, each time in a different manner, and each time without reference to the preceding: two of three times /Bentham/ had gone over nearly the whole subject. . . . The theory of evidence being in itself one of the

most important of his subjects, and ramifying into most of the others, the book contains, very fully developed, a great proportion of all his best thoughts. . . ."(80-81) The "direct knowledge" Mill acquired prepared him for the debates with the opposition.

The Debating Society thrust Mill into the centre of "the movement of opinion of the most cultivated part of the new generation." The debates "consisted of the strongest arguments and most philosophic principles which either side was able to produce, thrown often into close and serré confutations of one another." (90) He was thus in a position to evaluate the doctrines of Benthamism against intelligent opposing ideas.

Five years of intense study shaped his views and led him on to independent thought. His contributions to the Parliamentary History and Review (1825-8) Mill claimed "were no longer mere reproductions and applications of the doctrines [he] had been taught; they were original thinking, as far as that name can be applied to old ideas in new forms and connexions. . . ." (83)

His increasing independence of thought began to locate flaws in Bentham's philosophy that could not be ignored. An outward indication of his uneasiness appears in his statement: "I left off designating myself and others as Utilitarians, and by the pronoun 'we' or any other collective designation, I ceased to afficher sectarianism." (80) He later recalled that "the conflicts which [he] had so often had to sustain in defending the theory of government laid down in Bentham's and [James Mill's] writings . . .

made [him] aware of many things which that doctrine, professing to be a theory of government in general, ought to have made room for, and did not." (110)

The mind that had been taught to think was pursuing its thoughts relentlessly to their farthest extreme. Indeed, as Mill says, "the description so often given of a Benthamite, as a mere reasoning machine . . . was during two or three years of my life not altogether untrue of me." (76) His desperation was hardly obvious, being concealed as part of the debates and discussions he threw himself into. Outwardly, then, he continued with all the vociferous clamour of the young Radicals, the comforting sounds of normality. Inwardly, his despair choked him.

His dejection finally surfaced in the winter of 1826-7. He found himself in "a dull state of nerves . . . unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement." In this mood, he faced the torment within himself. He asked himself:

> "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" (94)

Mill knew that something was wrong. Intellectual doubts racked him. Yet, he made no move to voice them in an outright statement of points of disagreement. To do so, would have brought him into unpleasant conflict with his father and Bentham. To them, he could not freely express himself on his changed views even after the crisis, let alone at this stage, when he still did not know what

to believe. Instead, his reaction took the form of an inertia that delayed all careful analytical enquiry.

Mill had read in manuscript, by this time, a considerable portion of his father's Analysis of the Mind (published in 1829), a treatise on Experience and Association. These two theories seemed to preclude the possibility of self-rejuvenation, if one "was scientifically proved to be the helpless slave of antecedent circumstances." (118) Such was Mill's interpretation of the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity. In a later period of his dejection, he saw that he had associated the word 'necessity' with inevitability, and this association "was the operative force in the depressing and paralysing influence which [he] had experienced." (119) Since his early education had disregarded emotion, he feared that "precocious and premature analysis" had annihilated all feeling in him; that his "love of mankind, and of excellence for its own sake, had worn itself out." (95) Questioning his personal happiness was the first step towards single-handedly changing the course of his life; and he had faltered.

An emotional outburst broke the impasse between his intellect and his feelings. He wept -- a spontaneously felt response gave him hope that his feelings had not been eroded. This had been the trying point, because, without this knowledge, he saw "no power in nature sufficient to begin the formation of [his] character anew, and create in a mind now irretrievably analytic, fresh associations of pleasure with any of the objects of human desire." (98)

His immediate problem was to make his personal happiness meaningful again. This meant finding a lasting method of cultivating the feelings. After floundering around searching, he found that Wordsworth's poetry relieved his anxiety on this point. The poems gave him "a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind." (104) About this time, he also worked out a proper understanding of the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity and found that "our will, by influencing some of our circumstances, can modify our future habits or capabilities of willing." (119) There was hope, then, that he could effect some change.

Mill has greatly emphasized the emotional reaction to a basically intellectual or rational conflict. His dilemma lay in finding a suitable means of announcing his loss of conviction in sectarian Benthamism when he had close ties with its leaders. The "culture of the feelings" provided him with a solution. It was a masterstroke. Benthamites viewed the feelings with suspicion. Too often they had to combat views based merely on feeling. Even in the popular view, a Benthamite was strictly a rationalist. Mill's "culture of the feelings" served to drive a wedge between him and the Benthamites while he set about redefining his ideas. This is not to say that his belief in the enrichment of the emotions was merely an expediency. Mill sincerely believed in it, and spent a

a great deal of time making up his lack by cultivating a genuine attitude towards poetry. He published his thoughts on the subject till 1840, after which time, his continued advocating of poetic culture in his other writings attests to his enduring conviction.[64] In the Autobiography, Mill states: "The cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed." (101)

Although Mill's crisis was an intensely personal one, it threw in relief his concern for mankind in general. Even his early education, he thought, was within the reach of "any boy or girl of average capacity and healthy physical constitution." He was convinced of this for he said: "If I had been by nature extremely quick of apprehension, or had possessed a very accurate and retentive memory, or were of a remarkably active and energetic character, the trial would not be conclusive; but in all these natural gifts I am rather below than above par. . . ." (21) In his earlier aspirations, his zeal for the good of mankind was merely a "zeal for speculative opinions. It had not its root in genuine benevolence, or sympathy with mankind. . . ." (77) By the time of his crisis, it had become an important factor. Mill explained:

> For though my dejection, honestly looked at, could not be called other than egotistical, produced by

[64] John Robson, "J.S. Mill's Theory of Poetry," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXIX (July 1960), pp. 420-38.

> the ruin, as I thought, of my fabric of happiness, yet the destiny of mankind in general was ever in my thoughts, and could not be separated from my own. I felt that the flaw in my life, must be a flaw in life itself. . . . And I felt that unless I could see my way to some better hope than this for human happiness in general, my dejection must continue. . . . (102)

The theory of life Mill eventually adopted of treating "not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life," he considered "the best theory for all those who have but a moderate degree of sensibility and of capacity for enjoyment, that is, for the great majority of mankind." (100)

Besides his special brand of altruism, Mill, as a result of his crisis, recognized a distinctive element that connected him with his own generation. This was the "irrepressible self-consciousness" that had made him question his whole position in Benthamism. It had been silently at work even as far back as his holiday in France. There he had had the first chance to sample his own tastes, and he had done so with zest. He only realized this on looking back with eyes opened to reality as a result of his crisis:

> But the greatest, perhaps, of the many advantages which I owed to this episode in my education, was that of having breathed for a whole year, the free and genial atmosphere of Continental life. This advantage was not the less real though I could not then estimate, nor even consciously feel it. . . . Neither could I then appreciate the general culture of the understanding, which results from the habitual exercise of the feelings. . . . All these things I did not perceive till long afterwards; but I even then felt, though without stating it clearly to myself, the contrast between the frank sociability and amiability of French personal intercourse, and the English mode of existence. . . . (40-2)

This new self-awareness separated him from the preceding generation. He saw that although his father figured among the best minds of the eighteenth century, "there was, on the whole, a marked opposition between his father's spirit and that of the nineteenth century." (143) Mill saw Bentham in the same light: "Self-consciousness, that daemon of the men of genius of our time, from Wordsworth to Byron, from Goethe to Chateaubriand, and to which this age owes so much both of its cheerful and its mournful wisdom, never was awakened in him."[65] Mill's crisis had shown him that "the modern mind is, what the ancient mind was not, brooding and self-conscious; and its meditative self-consciousness has discovered depths in the human soul which the Greeks and Romans did not dream of, and would not have understood."[66]

Had Mill's early education under his father been one of "cram," it is unlikely he would have questioned the theories he had been given. He had, however, been taught to think for himself. During the years after the crisis, he exposed himself to all kinds of influences, particularly European ideas. As a result, he realized that he had mistaken the "moral and intellectual characteristics" of his era for the "normal attributes of humanity," whereas, they were really the peculiarities of an era of transition. In 1824,

[65] "Bentham" essay in Mill on Bentham and Coleridge with an introduction by F.R. Leavis (New York, 1950), pp.62-3.

[66] J.S. Mill's Inaugural Address in Rectorial Addresses Delivered At The University of St. Andrews, ed. William Knight (London, 1894), p. 38.

Mill had seen the age as a time of "rapidly rising Liberalism. When the fears and animosities accompanying the war with France had been brought to an end . . . the tide began to set towards reform. . . . There arose on all sides a spirit which had never shown itself before, of opposition to abuses in detail." (68-9) After reading the St. Simonians, however, Mill discovered a natural order of human progress where organic periods of firm beliefs and progress result in inorganic periods, characterized by lack of convictions and criticism. The latter were the features of his time, and so, he "looked forward, through the present age of loud disputes but generally weak convictions, to a future which shall unite the best qualities of the critical with the best qualities of the organic periods; unchecked liberty of thought, unbounded freedom of individual action in all modes not hurtful to others. . . ." (116)

Mill revelled in the challenge he had found to get at the truth wherever it might be. His "willingness and ability to learn from everybody" led him to examine "what was said in defence of all opinions, however new or however old, in the conviction that even if they were errors there might be a substratum of truth underneath them, and that in any case the discovery of what it was that made them plausible, would be a benefit to truth." (172)

His method was cautious in these transitional years. He was now on his own, in a private battle he so graphically describes as taking place at the loom -- weaving the fabric of his old

opinions wherever it had begun to give way, never letting any part of it wear away completely but was "incessantly occupied in weaving it anew," going back to the warp and weft and repairing it, holding it together, keeping a watchful eye on all of it:

> I never, in the course of my transition, was content to remain, for ever so short a time, confused and unsettled. When I had taken in any new idea, I could not rest till I had adjusted its relation to my old opinions, and ascertained exactly how far its effect ought to extend in modifying or superseding them. (110)

Mill's analyses gradually transmuted the fabric of his thoughts. He never did recognize this. He maintained that he understood more clearly "the truths less generally known which lay in /his/ early opinions, and in no essential part of which /he/ at any time wavered. All /his/ new thinking only laid the foundation of these more deeply and strongly, while it often removed misapprehension and confusion of ideas which had perverted their effect." (118) His method allowed him to confront the bases of all his opinions without losing control or undermining himself. He could thus, from a position of relative security, analyze to the root of all his ideas.

During these precarious years, Harriet Taylor appeared on the scene. Mill assigned to her credit a "steadying influence" but for which, his openness of mind might "have seduced /him/ into modifying /his/ early opinions too much. She was in nothing more valuable to /his/ mental development than by her just measure of the relative importance of different considerations, which often

protected [him] from allowing to truths [he] had only recently learned to see, a more important place in [his] thoughts than was properly their due." (177) It is debatable how much of an intellectual support Harriet was, but in practical matters, and as another human being warmly interested in his ideas, she was a very much needed ally. She served "as an anchor to keep him firm against the constant temptation to question his own position and to put the burden of proof and defense upon himself rather than his adversary."[67] J.A. Roebuck's observation of Mill after his crisis describes his new attitude generally: "During all this time he never doubted as to his own infallibility. Whatever he thought at the time was right; but whatever might be the change in him, he was never wrong. A very comfortable condition of things, but not as satisfactory to others as himself."[68]

Mill's flexibility disturbed his former colleagues. He himself considered his willingness to change to be his greatest strength. Mill's idea of progress developed out of his strivings to implement the political principles on which his philosophy was based. Practical experience showed him that only "the mental emancipation" of the individual would bring about any lasting improvement. After reading the St. Simonians, Mill saw clearly

[67] Edward Alexander, Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill (London, 1965), pp. 130-31.

[68] Life and Letters, p. 37.

that "different stages of human progress not only will have, but ought to have, different institutions." (114) Political systems were not the starting point of improvement. The "true system /of political philosophy/ was something much more complex and many-sided than /he/ had previously had any idea of, ~~and that~~ its office was to supply, not a set of model institutions, but principles from which the institutions suitable to any given circumstances might be deduced." (113) However removed Mill was, theoretically, from the views of the other Radicals, in practical politics, he declared himself "as much as ever a radical and democrat for Europe, and especially for England." (120) He demonstrated this by joining his father in 1832 to encourage those Philosophic Radicals elected to Parliament to show "what was in them." Little was accomplished, for the Radicals lacked a leader "who being himself in Parliament, could have mixed with the radical members in daily consultation, could himself have taken the initiative, and instead of urging others to lead, could have summoned them to follow." (138) Mill made further attempts later "to stir up the educated Radicals, in and out of Parliament, to exertion, and induce them to make themselves . . . a powerful party capable of taking the government of the country, or at least of dictating the terms on which they should share it with the Whigs." (150) His efforts were primarily channelled through The London Review.[69]

[69] Its founding title in 1834, till changed to The London and Westminster Review. For the rest of this chapter it will be referred to as the Review.

After James Mill's death in 1836, four years after Bentham, Mill felt he need defer to no one. As the editor of the Review he successfully used it to advertise his new mode of thought. He wanted "to free philosophical radicalism from the reproach of sectarian Benthamism. . . . to show that there was a Radical philosophy, better and more complete than Bentham's, while recognizing and incorporating all of Bentham's which is permanently valuable." (149-50) He encouraged writers who "were sympathetic with progress as /he/ understood it," insisting that they assume responsibility for their opinions by signing their articles.

The challenge Mill gave himself had its theoretical and practical aspects. By wielding his pen, he wished to establish a "useful influence over the liberal and democratic section of the public mind." (144) He saw, however, that his aim of putting life into Radical politics by means of the Review had failed completely. His exhortations "found no response" because "among the Radicals in Parliament there were several qualified to be useful members of an enlightened Radical party, but none capable of forming and leading such a party." (150)

Disillusioned with the failure of his efforts, Mill gave up the editorship of the Review in 1840. He began to turn his attention to encouraging progress where he was beginning to see it mattered most -- in the individual mind. His System of Logic struck at the core of those forces that impede progress by enslaving men's minds. The Logic "met the intuitive philosophers

on ground on which they had previously been deemed unassailable; and gave its own explanation, from experience and association, of that peculiar character of what are called necessary truths, which is adduced as proof that their evidence must come from a deeper source than experience." (158-59) His next treatise, in which Harriet, he claimed, had a "conspicuous" share, was the Principles of Political Economy. It "was not a book merely of abstract science, but also of application. . . ." (165) The social transformation required "to unite the greatest individual liberty of action, with a common ownership of the raw material of the globe" rested on bringing about a "change of character . . . in the uncultivated herd who now compose the labouring masses, and in the immense majority of their employers." (162-63) The change needed was in individual motivation; to redirect it towards the general good of society. Mill believed that "the capacity to do this has always existed in mankind, and is not, nor is ever likely to be, extinct." (163) Self-interest, however, was encouraged by existing institutions.

Mill had seen many of the reforms he had striven for in his youth bring about only slight changes, and "very little improvement in that which all real amelioration in the lot of mankind depends on, their intellectual and moral state." (167) The tendency towards uniformity of opinion, encouraged by inferior education, undermined progress for the new opinions acquired, in effect, the "same power of compression," so long exercised by the creeds that had been

successfully ousted. A questioning attitude of mind was necessary before individual regeneration could begin.

Mill made it a point to attack anti-progressive ideas appearing in any form. The American Civil War came within his terms of reference. The success of the slave owners would be "a victory of the powers of evil which would give courage to the enemies of progress and damp the spirits of its friends all over the civilized world. . . ." (187) His unexpected tenure in Parliament, he also saw as another means to the same end. It gave him an opportunity to spread his political opinions more widely: from the publicity he received, his readership would increase and his ideas would circulate further. Untouched by a need for personal aggrandizement, Mill found his position in Parliament allowed him a special role. He reserved himself "for work no others were likely to do," specially during the period of the Reform Bills. He thus defended "advanced Liberalism on occasions when the obloquy to be encountered was such as most of the advanced Liberals in the House preferred not to incur." (201)

In the fight for progress, Mill was dedicated to reaching a solution based on human freedom. Hence, even as he changed his views on pure democracy, he still "repudiated with the greatest energy that tyranny of society over the individual which most Socialistic systems are supposed to involve." (162) The regeneration of society had to keep the individual in the forefront. Comte's views had failed to satisfy Mill on this very point. To Mill,

Comte's Système de Politique Positive, "stands a monumental warning to thinkers on society and politics, of what happens when once men lose sight in their speculations, of the value of Liberty and of Individuality." (149)

V: Conclusion

Mill's Autobiography reflects the ordering in his consciousness of the experiential factors behind his philosophy. The whole direction of his philosophy bears out his experience of life: "It seems as if his thought could only be as effective as he was as a man -- that is, his theories were inextricably bound up with himself."[70] Since Mill evaluated himself in terms of his work, his autobiography contains evidences of the mainsprings of his actions:

> When an autobiography is produced independently out of his own life and by the application of his own gifts, by a person of exceptional calibre, it provides a supreme example of representation -- the contemporary intellectual outlook revealed in the style of an eminent person who has himself played a part in the forming of the spirit of his time.[71]

An autobiography is by its nature charged with emotion. While an autobiographical novel safely shrouds the immediacy of experience in 'characters,' autobiography has to deal with real life experience. Mill did not have a high opinion of the novel as he knew it. He thought that "avoidance of the inner conflict

[70] Peter E. Martin, "Carlyle and Mill: The 'Anti-Self-Consciousness' Theory," Thoth, VI (Winter 1964), p. 28.

[71] Georg Misch, quoted by Keith Rinehart, "Studies in Victorian Autobiography," p. 18.

branded the novel as an inferior form."[72] If literature is looked upon as an imaginative representation of life, autobiography can claim to be a form of literature since, as "representation," its connexion with the facts can be as tenuous as that of the novel. As W. Shumaker says, "the obstacles to a complete and flawless recapturing of the past render inevitable, in autobiography as in history, the creation of a new past -- a past recognizably similar to the actual past in obvious ways, but different, in spite of every straining for truthfulness, in shading, in inclusiveness, and even in coherence and comprehensibility."[73] Consequently, to attack Mill on the basis that he has written "half-truths"[74] ignores the creative element in shaping the past through the eyes of present experience. A fact is less important than the way it is remembered. Mill as autobiographer invites his readers to a tour of the dark labyrinths of his past. Carefully lit are only those areas and such facets that explain and maintain continuity of self-development. He had to strike a balance between the curiosity-seeker and the intelligent reader interested in understanding the development of a mind that "was always pressing forward."

Mill's views on social improvement touched on such sacred

[72] Raymond Chapman, The Victorian Debate (London, 1968), p. 172.

[73] English Autobiography, p. 112.

[74] Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds (New York, 1968), p. 115.

topics as family size, equality of women, the relations between the sexes, and religion. Hence, Mill deleted the frank revelation of his views on sexual matters[75] and only lightly touched on the subject of religion. Criticism of religion was then only beginning to be tolerated. Mill confined himself to exposing the source of such conventions -- the intuitionist philosophy that blocked all effort at improving the lot of people who suffered from the stifling mores of the day. Mill wished to relate how he had arrived at his state of mind, and yet not make the revelation a means of doing harm to the very cause he espoused -- the good of mankind.

Mill had a grave sense of responsibility. He viewed with horror that "timidity of conscience . . . which has so often driven highly gifted men into Romanism from the need of a firmer support than they can find in the independent conclusions of their own judgment." (108) His slowness to criticize Bentham, for instance, was dictated by a realization that there was much good in Bentham's philosophy. He repeatedly states that his new way of thinking expanded on Benthamism. His attitude is clear from the doubts he expressed in publishing a philosophical estimate of Bentham: "The substance of this criticism I still think perfectly just; but I have sometimes doubted whether it was right to publish it at that time. I have often felt that Bentham's philosophy, as

[75] Stillinger, Early Draft, p. 171.

an instrument of progress, has been to some extent discredited before it had done its work, and that to lend a hand towards lowering its reputation was doing more harm than service to improvement." (153) Similarly, although he had been brought up without religion, he could still see that "the old opinions in religion, morals, and politics, are so much discredited in the more intellectual minds as to have lost the greater part of their efficacy for good. . . ." (167)

It is fitting that Mill's Autobiography does not cover the last three years of his life. His own stand he kept under continual appraisal in the light of newer influences. Caroline Fox's comment would be an appropriate epitaph for him:

> He lays it on one as a tremendous duty to get oneself well contradicted, and admit always a devil's advocate into the presence of your dearest, most sacred Truths, as they are apt to grow windy and worthless without such tests, if indeed they can stand the shock of argument at all.[76]

His views on religion are therefore incomplete, for his posthumously published essays reveal that he had developed these further.

His crisis did not weaken his belief in intellectual culture, but taught him to continue with analytical thought provided he maintained a culture of the feelings. Mill himself had been the victim of his age, when emotions were discounted or never expressed. His friendships thereafter were a search for "someone who acknow-

[76] Memories of Old Friends, ed. Horace N. Pym, 3rd edn. (London, 1882), II, p. 269.

ledg[ed] a common object." In Harriet Taylor, Mill found the companionship he needed. His neglected emotional nature found in her an object of adulation, and his repressed emotions turned into sentimentality. Mill's feelings for Harriet hid her behind a screen of emotion so that he could really better explain his feelings than describe what she actually was.

Moreover, Mill made a martyr of Harriet. She became to him the typical sacrifice of an intellectually capable woman to the prejudices of society concerning women and their proper place. He just as generously praised her daughter, Helen, who helped him with his correspondence in later life. To those who criticize Mill's extravagant praises of his wife, Helen Taylor posed this question: "Can it be right for us to tone down the deliberate and reiterated statements of a remarkable man, until we bring them into harmony with the preconceived opinions of the world in general (or ourselves) as to what his impressions ought to have been ?"[77]

Mill's crisis threw into prominence the question of his personal happiness. Having made this his starting point in taking an independent path, Mill based his philosophy on individual freedom. In any sphere, political, economical, or social, he believed there was no progress if individual freedom was sacrificed,

[77] From a letter quoted by Jack Stillinger, "The Text of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XLIII (September 1960), p. 236.

and he looked to all improvement as resulting from educating the public mind. He saw that social revolutions achieve less that is lasting compared to the small successes gained as prejudice slowly breaks down. Unlike the European philosophers of the nineteenth century who were avid systematizers, Mill had no system, except a clear principle that the complexity and diversity of human nature must be free to develop, so that the shackles that keep mankind bound to regressive ideas may be loosened.

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