

“I am, dear Sir, your grateful disciple,
Margaret Chappellsmith”

CLARK KIMBERLING

One day, many years before he became Governor of Indiana, Judge Alvin P. Hovey was giving one of his “country school-house speeches in his terse, acid style,” this time in the historic town of New Harmony. “He was so defiant, and threw down the glove with such a haughty air, that it brought forth a reply from one of the New Harmony ladies, who met the Judge’s positions with substantial answers, and placed him at a decided disadvantage...”¹

The challenger was later described as “a lady of good abilities and not unaccustomed to speaking in public,” whose reply to Judge Hovey flowed in “very pretty, smooth words.”² Her name was Mrs. Chappellsmith, and yes indeed, she was accustomed to speaking in public! She had been a salaried Owenite lecturer, described as “the greatest success in that time of any woman who had ever lectured in England.”³

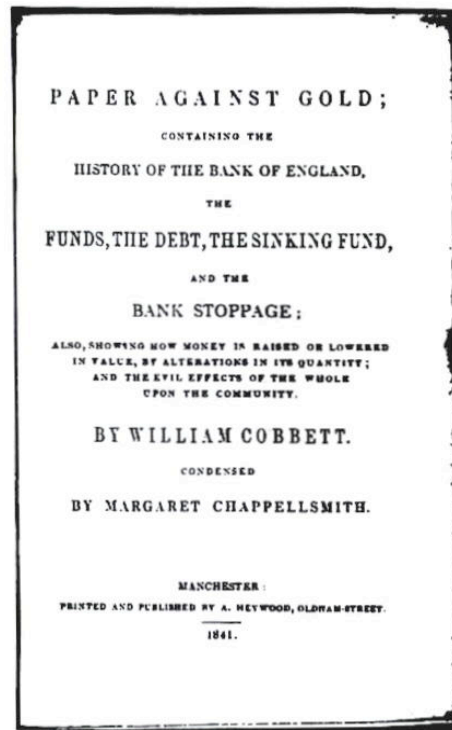
Who was this woman? What led her from lecturing in London to living in New Harmony? Why was it a full century after her death in 1883 that her name finally appeared in a major study in feminist history?⁴ These questions lead to the discovery that Margaret Chappellsmith was one of the foremost promulgators of those aspects of Robert Owen’s communitarianism that involved marriage, divorce, parenting, and women’s rights.

Margaret was born on February 27, 1806 in Aldgate, London, England. Her father’s name was John Reynolds, a bookseller who attended the Church of England but “didn’t concern himself with its doctrines.” From seven years of age Margaret assisted in her father’s bookstore and was early spoken of as a remarkable child.

In 1836 she was “induced” to write a series of twenty-five articles which were published in the *London Dispatch* under the signature of “A Woman”...⁵ The inducer was probably Henry Hetherington, editor of the

Dispatch,⁶ as Margaret's first article appears in the very first issue of Hetherington's paper. Altogether, there were twenty-three articles on money and banking, then a sharp defense of Harriet Martineau and her recent book, *Society in America*, and finally a lengthy essay on reasons that women should study politics. Such study, she wrote, "when rightly pursued -- when it is a study of principle, and not of party -- is most interesting. Most women may find time for it. The twenty-two years out of thirty of my life in which I have studied politics, I have been actively employed in, at different periods, every domestic employment, and in superintending a business requiring much mental activity; but politics have been my relaxation..."⁷ This 1837 essay, possibly Margaret's earliest surviving feminist⁸ writing, marks a turning point in her life. Her earlier writings in the *Dispatch*, primarily on monetary issues, echo the writings of William Cobbett⁹ and are summarized in her edition of one of Cobbett's books.

Figure 1. Front cover of William Cobbett's *Paper Against Gold*



By 1839, Margaret had become an Owenite lecturer, and the titles of her lectures indicate that she now spoke more often about women's issues than about monetary issues. In order to understand Margaret's role as an Owenite feminist, and later, the Chappellsmiths' place in the life of New Harmony, it is necessary to know something of the social reformer, Robert Owen, and the Owenite movement.

Robert Owen was already in his mid-thirties when Margaret was born. His rise as an industrialist and social reformer has been the subject of much writing, and only a brief summary will be given here.¹⁰ By 1822, Owen had become a champion of the laboring classes in England, and his views were sufficiently radical to alarm economic, political, and religious conservatives. He "had denounced all existing religions...and...considered this to be the turning point of his career."¹¹ Although Owenites did not yet call themselves socialists, Owen's notions of a utopian socialism, in the form of communal living, were already clearly fixed in his mind. With such living as a goal, including unorthodox rules for marriage, divorce, and the role of women, Owen purchased the town *Harmonie*, on the banks of the Wabash River, from Father George Rapp. About nine hundred people had arrived there by May, 1825, to participate in Owen's community.¹² The experiment failed, and by 1827, Robert Owen had moved back to England, where the Owenite movement continued to spread. In 1834, Owen founded the *New Moral World*, which became the principal Owenite journal, and five years later, the Owenite organizations were combined to form the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, which beginning in 1842 was called simply the Rational Society.

Perhaps Margaret's earliest Owenite writing was a letter dated September 23, 1838. It was originally sent to the London *Weekly Dispatch* (not the same as Hetherington's *London Dispatch*) but was refused by the editor. The editor of *New Moral World*, however, took "much pleasure in giving it insertion," with a hope of "being favoured with any future communications of the authoress." Excerpts comprising about one-fifth of the letter are reprinted here:

By his system of bringing up boys and girls from their infancy together, under the *immediate and continual* superintendence of their parents and of efficient teachers, which Mr. Owen's system and no other will afford the means of doing, they will be together engaged in those healthy and intellectual pursuits to which their individual capacities fit them. Under such circumstances, boys and girls who resemble each other in intelligence and sentiments, will become attached, long before passion, except in very rare cases, can exist; and when it does arise, it must be towards those who have excited their kindest feelings for so long. Mr. Owen knows that feelings thus engendered are more binding, more enduring, than any legislative enactment [i.e., marriage]; but, that nothing may be wanting to prevent that desecration of character which he abhors, he has *that* also; and, knowing how much public

opinion controls, he calls that to his aid; for, he will have men and women, wishing to live together, come before a meeting of all the persons of a certain age, say from twenty to forty, in the community, and declare that such is their wish; and then, that it may not be done rashly, they must appear again in three months, and declare it to be their continued wish, and then they are deemed to be MARRIED.

Under such circumstances, infidelity or jealousy are not likely to arise. There must be confidence that affection has determined the choice; and those who experience affection, know its intense, its enduring power. But, as it might happen that there would be some one or two so weak in intellect, so vacillating as to what constitutes his or her happiness, as to make an erroneous choice, Mr. Owen thinks it better to let such separate...¹³

This futuristic view was tempered by a note following Margaret's name at the end of the letter, emphasizing "that Mr. Owen will not have his system of marriage and divorce acted upon under the existing state of things."¹⁴

With similar care the editor of *New Moral World* couched a second letter, on permanence of marriage unions under the rational system. He wrote that the letter had been received by Mr. Owen and was forwarded by that gentleman for publication. Not far into this lengthy letter, Margaret wrote, ". . . therefore, dear sir, I dare, emboldened by the questions you addressed to me during our recent conversation on the subject, to state, why I think [that marriage unions under the Rational System will be permanent]."¹⁵ Obviously, Owen approved of Margaret's answers to his questions, and one may well imagine that she thereby passed a test that in part qualified her to become an Owenite lecturer.

That same year, Margaret also took a step toward passing another test, for on August 27, 1839, she married John Chappell Smith, to whom she remained married for the rest of her life.¹⁶ Soon after the marriage, Margaret began a series of lectures in the Lambeth Social Institution in London. Robert Owen attended at least one of these lectures.¹⁷

Margaret's first lectures reported in *New Moral World* were delivered in March 1840.¹⁸ Among her subjects were the effects of machinery on unemployment, the formation of character in an ideal society, and Mr. Owen's system of marriage. The industrial revolution had created an enormous social upheaval, including the displacement of thousands of working people by machinery. The resulting economic and moral chaos had led Owen to declare that the character of a man is formed *for* him, not *by* him. In fact, words to this effect formed a motto for the Rational Society, and for several years, the motto appeared on the front page of *New Moral World*.

In a March report from Liverpool, John Finch¹⁹ wrote that Mrs. Chappellsmith is "...the very best female public speaker I ever heard." The next month Margaret again lectured in Liverpool. An account is excerpted

here from the *Liverpool Journal*:

SOCIALISM: OPENING OF THE HALL OF SCIENCE

Yesterday [Good Friday, April, 1840], the followers of Mr. Owen opened their new Hall of Science... The orchestre is calculated for 200 performers...the gallery for 600 sittings...the body of the building for 1800 individuals... Mr. Finch opened the business by giving out a social hymn... ROBERT OWEN, in addressing the audience, said, that the opening of that room was a certain sign that a great change was coming over the world...

In the afternoon a lecture was delivered by Mrs. Chappellsmith [sic], in support of the rights of woman. The fair lecturer, in the course of her address, said that the more highly cultivated was the mind of woman, the more clearly would she perceive which were the duties of her domestic station, and how they might be best performed...²⁰

Although earlier reports from branches of the Rational Society had mentioned hecklers, an account of Margaret's lectures in and around Glasgow is of particular interest. On June 8, 1840, she lectured at Kilmarnock on marriage to an audience of about 300 persons. Prior to the lecture, many "disgusting remarks" about Mrs. Chappellsmith and her views were heard, and as the lecture began, many in the audience snickered or hissed. A few minutes into the lecture, however, the derision abated, and soon the scoffers "became surprised; from surprise their looks changed to those of attention; and at length they became deeply interested..." About two weeks later, Margaret lectured in Glasgow on the Protestant Reformation. Afterward, outside, there were shouts of "Owenite" and "Socialist," and stones hit the persons who were escorting her. A woman darted forward from the crowd and snatched her veil, and the mob followed until Margaret and her party reached a nearby police office.

An Edinburgh reporter wrote in the *New Moral World*²¹ that Mrs. Chappellsmith, having delivered twenty-four lectures in Glasgow and western Scotland, had arrived in the "Modern Athens," where she lectured on "The Present State of the Country, Competition, Machinery," "The Practicability of Community," "The Formation, and Re-formation of Character," and "The Rights and Duties of Woman." Later she delivered two discourses in the large Hall in the City -- Dun Edin Hall. "This large and magnificent Hall," wrote the reporter, "was crowded almost to suffocation... There could not be less than 2,000 people in the Hall." Members of the middle and higher classes also attended these lectures, in which Margaret spoke on her religious experience. These persons "would also be glad to attend her Socialism-lectures, but only it is not quite so safe for them..."

This enthusiastic reporter went on to say that Mrs. Chappellsmith had been lecturing in Edinburgh for five weeks, and that "more successful

lectures were never delivered in this City.” The lectures in and around Edinburgh perhaps comprised the high point of Margaret’s career as a social reformer. Her effectiveness shines through even the reports of observers who deplored what she said. One of these was a seven-page letter sent to the Secretary of State in London. It is quoted in part here not only for contrast to the laudatory reports but also for its detail and freshness of impression:

Allow me briefly to bring before your Lordship the following circumstances, which may not be unworthy of your Lordship’s notice.

Yesterday, as I was returning from [a church service], I went into a place of public meeting, called “Dun Edin Hall.” It was formerly a circus, occupied by Cooke, the Equestrian... It was crammed three times, I’m sorry to say by parties anxious to hear the dangerous doctrines of a Mrs. Chappellsmith, [who] continued till about 20 minutes past 4 P. M. endeavouring to convince the 2000 of her fellow mortals who heard her, that they were no more responsible to God for their belief, than for the colour of their skin, &tc &tc. She seemed a singularly cool, brassfaced, tolerably good looking, hatless & capless, black haired & ringletted, clever, eloquent woman, about 30. I scanned the company & her partizans, & at once smelt a rat, & from that moment, I viewed her as but the organ of a dangerous political party, which terms itself a branch of the Universal community... Towards the close of her afternoon’s lecture, Mrs. C, in the most plausible manner imaginable, begged that any one, who wished to question any of her doctrines or her statements, would just put their questions in writing [and] she would answer them in the evening. Accordingly after dinner, with a political drift, I wrote [three lengthy questions],...and do you not farther see that such authorities as Tom Paine, Robert Owen, & even Lord Brougham, are miserable indeed to offer to a christian scottish public on a subject like this?

Her Bills and placards I should state, were very specious, & not at all heretical or bad, to look at! At ¼ past 6 in the evening I again returned to the Hall & deposited the above queries in the plate at the door... Mrs. Chappellsmith shortly [thereafter] came in & began her lecture, & for upwards of two hours she held forth endeavouring to do, & I fear doing, incalculable mischief. The most damnable doctrines which I ever [heard of] were never so coolly & sophistically promulgated, I would almost venture to say, as they were last night... Oh. It was really awful – I actually feared that at some parts of her discourse, an earthquake, or a thunderbolt would not be out of place.²²

The first 1841 issue of *New Moral World* contains a report of one of Margaret’s several lectures in London. She spoke out against the notion that society must consist of distinct classes.²³ These classes she characterized as either “destined to enjoy the luxuries of life without toil” or else “destined to toil without enjoying even the necessities of life.” Such classes were unnatural, for *nature* presents no such distinction. She then contrasted the formation of character under this unnatural arrangement with that which

would be formed under natural and social arrangements. Such arrangements would recognize equal *capacities* for enjoyment and equal *rights* to enjoyment. They would afford equal education to all, and the production and distribution of wealth would be founded on mutual cooperation. Margaret contrasted ideal character formation with that under a competitive system, and she concluded that only under Social arrangements could the precept of "Love thy neighbour as thyself" be combined with practice. She then asked how those above the laboring class could profess to revere the Scriptures, where it is decreed that by sweat *all* shall *earn* their daily bread. She asked how it is that those of this class, the idle, the luxurious, the orthodox and the pious, have escaped the penalty? It is through man's ignorance, she held, that they have escaped. The inequality of conditions and the excessive toil and poverty on the one hand, contrasted with excessive idleness and luxury on the other -- these are the chief causes of crime and misery, and these evils must persist as long as they are "attributed to Adam's transgression and God's vengeance, instead of man's ignorance..."

Margaret continued to lecture in London, and reports of some of these lectures can be found in *New Moral World* until July 1, 1843. However, in contrast to her lecturing in the largest cities of England and Scotland, there was an occasion where her role was of quite a different nature.²⁴ On August 11, 1844, the Metropolitan Branches of the Rational Society sponsored a Public Breakfast for Robert Owen. Some six hundred persons attended. After several speeches, Margaret was introduced. Addressing Mr. Owen, she said, that though not officially deputed by her sister Socialists, she hoped that she might express, "on their and her own behalf, and of woman in all countries and ages, her gratitude to the only philosopher who had considered and provided for the happiness of woman..." As she struggled to speak a few more words of praise, silence swept through the assembly, for it had become clear that Margaret's voice on this particular morning was not that of a great orator. She hesitated one last time, and "deeply affected, sat down in tears, accompanied by most of the ladies present."

Figure 2. Signature at end of letter from Margaret Chappellsmith to Robert Owen, dated four days after the Public Breakfast honoring Owen.

*I am, dear Sir,
Your grateful disciple,
Margaret Chappellsmith.*

Mr. Owen stood and expressed his sympathy and then addressed the assembly on the prospects of woman in the new civilization that he envisioned. The only true precursor of happiness to either of the sexes was equality in social position and education. Mr. Owen went so far as to say that women's "truthfulness, faithfulness, and sensibility to the best feelings, had produced an impression on his mind, that they were better prepared than the other sex for the life of the new moral world."

Over the years, letters from Robert Owen's eldest son, Robert Dale Owen, as well as letters from John Finch and George Flower,²⁵ had been sent from New Harmony and published in *New Moral World*. These letters portrayed America and New Harmony as challenging and promising places to live. It is not surprising, therefore, that by 1850, an estimated 34 heads of household with real estate exceeding \$500 in value in Harmony Township, about 16% of the total, were born in England.²⁶ Wealth in real estate in Harmony Township was, in part, distributed approximately as follows: William Maclure estate, \$50,000; families of the children of Robert Owen, \$47,825; households in which the head-of-household was born in England, \$39,400. This last figure represents about 13.5% of the total for the township, \$293,000.²⁷

As these figures suggest, the influence of the Owen families in New Harmony was great. In particular, Robert Dale Owen was a man of national prominence, "one of the best known and most publicized men of his generation."²⁸

The circumstances that led to the Chappellsmiths' decision to move to New Harmony will perhaps never be known. Concerning the date of their arrival, however, there is no longer any doubt, for this, as well as a cheerful disposition, are revealed in a letter dated July 10, 1850 to Robert Owen in England:²⁹

Dear and respected Sir,

I have the pleasure to inform you that we arrived safely here on the 5th. In pursuance of the advice you gave me when I last had the pleasure to see you, I wrote to Mr Finch informing him of our intention to go to the United States, and requesting his advice regarding the Vessel we should go by, he replied immediately by giving information and by inviting myself and husband to his house. I objected to his recommendation [but] he wrote to me again agreeing with my objections, and giving me more information and advice, by which we obtained a passage in a fine American Vessel under excellent management, "The Maine." We spent eight days at the Finch's and experienced from himself and eldest daughter the kindest hospitality, with much of polite attention from the rest of his family. We have reason to be grateful to them, and to you, dear Sir, for your kind attention [to our] interest. We had a very pleasant voyage to New Orleans. We were only 43 days from Liverpool to the Base of the Mississippi. We had good weather and good health all the way. We stayed a

day and a half at New Orleans and then had a delightful voyage of 6 days by steamer to Mount Vernon, landed on the night of the 4th of July and proceeded next Morning to New Harmony. We [soon] became inmates of the Flowers' Hotel, and sat beside a gentleman at dinner there, who I immediately saw was your son, from his extraordinary resemblance to yourself, it was Mr Richard Owen,³⁰ who with his Lady and children are staying here for a few weeks. In the two next days the whole of your family were so very kind as to call on us, bringing books and papers and invitations to their houses. We spent the last evening most [agreeably] at Mr Robert's house in the company of himself, his Lady, Dr David Owen and Mrs Fauntleroy. It is highly gratifying to be in the way of exchanging thoughts, and benefitting by the superior cultivation of such intelligent and estimable beings. Mrs Fauntleroy's manner and solid sensible remarks take one by surprise – the poor lady – one cannot but feel grief as we look at her, for she seems to be still maintaining a struggle against grief, still she seems to be in health and so do all your family.³¹ How very much some of your grandsons resemble you. Mr Robert's last son, of about 3 months, is strikingly like you.

We are very much pleased with New Harmony and its society. The Weather is just now very hot and every one but Mr Flowers³² says that it has not been so hot for several years. Mr Finch advised us to travel before we took a house but I think we shall take a house as soon as we can find one. I don't think we shall purchase one just yet, as we may as well take a few months to learn what we shall like best before we either purchase or build, but we have no doubt of fixing ourselves here.

I hope, dear Sir, that you are in good health and that you are having some satisfactory evidence that you are not laboring in vain. Your family tell me that they have learned from "The Tribune" that you were much indisposed after the Celebration of your last birthday, and they are anxious to know how you now are. They hope from the newspapers being directed by yourself that you are better. We hope so too. My husband sends his affectionate respects.

I am, dear Sir,

Affectionately and respect[fully] yours
Margaret Chappellsmith

No record of Margaret's speaking or writing during the years 1850 to 1858 seems to have survived. This is mysterious for two reasons, the first being her prolific writing thereafter, and the second, that the good will toward Robert Owen's family in New Harmony, expressed in Margaret's 1850 letter, seems to have been irrevocably reversed by 1860.

In 1858, Charles W. Slater, one of the many Englishmen residing in New Harmony, began publishing the *New Harmony Advertiser*,³³ and soon, letters and articles by both Margaret and John Chappellsmith appeared. By January 14, 1860, Margaret had published items in nine issues. The articles perhaps raise more questions than they answer. For example, in the December 18, 1858 issue, Margaret severely criticized a poem entitled "The Angel's Gift of the Beautiful," which had appeared three weeks earlier,

having been contributed by an unidentified resident of New Harmony. This was one of several poems printed in the *Advertiser* during the era of the much-heralded Minerva Society. The society itself was officially founded nine months later by Constance Fauntleroy (who wrote the aforementioned poem), and there can be little doubt that many of the poems published in the *Advertiser* between 1858 and 1860 were composed by Minerva members. The society was explicitly instituted “by the *young* ladies of New Harmony for self-improvement and mental cultivation.”³⁴

Concerning literary activities in New Harmony, one must wonder about the extent to which women of the Minerva Society, or Margaret or other women, were allowed to participate in the activities of the library of the New Harmony Workingmen’s Institute. The Institute, established by William Maclure in 1838, appears not to have had any women members before or during the Chappellsmiths’ residence in New Harmony. In view of Margaret’s earlier outspoken position on the education of women and the fact that her husband was treasurer of the Institute for several years,³⁵ one must speculate that there were some interesting conversations about these matters in the Chappellsmith home.

As a young man, Robert Dale Owen, the oldest son of Robert Owen, had exerted considerable influence on American free thought as a writer and editor. In particular, he had worked with Horace Seaver and Fanny Wright, both of whom would later become editors of the *Boston Investigator*.³⁶ To some readers of the *Investigator*, Robert Dale Owen represented his father’s views on social reform and “rational religion.” However, in their later years, both son and father became spiritualists, and in the case of the son – the father already being quite old – this turn represented an unacceptable inconsistency.

The inconsistency drew fire in connection with Robert Dale Owen’s book, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, published on the first day of 1860. While this book on spiritualism was not exactly Christian, it represented quite a departure from the author’s reputation as an agnostic. Freethinkers, including John Chappellsmith, heaped abuse³⁷ upon Owen until he wrote his own letter to the *Boston Investigator*. “It is not worth any one’s while to take much trouble about my consistency,” wrote Owen, “...there are, indeed, some opinions which a good man cannot change; for example, his opinion of bigotry.” He continued, “Religious bigotry is probably the most common of its types...Bigotry consists, not in believing too much or too little, but in believing in its own infallibility. It makes a Pope of itself, and issues its bulls from its own Vatican of presumption.” In due course, Owen narrowed his attack without naming anyone: “Some of your correspondents have yet to learn, that abuse proves nothing except the lack of good sense and good feeling in the abuser.”³⁸

Figure 3. Masthead of the *Boston Investigator*.



But the Chappellsmiths would not back down. In 1864, Robert Dale Owen published articles³⁹ in the *Atlantic Monthly*, describing specific instances of spiritualist phenomena that he believed to be proof of supernatural intervention. Two of the articles were named "The Convulsionists of St. Medard" and "The Electric Girl of La Perrière." In the *Boston Investigator*, Margaret Chappellsmith wrote scathing reviews,⁴⁰ concluding one of them with a list of inconsistencies: "[Robert Dale Owen] has been a free-trader; he has been opposed to free trade; he has been against the extension of slavery, then, three years ago, earnestly in favor of it; and, in the last three years, he has been an abolitionist, (a very good change, but I cannot reckon on its durability;) he was trained in religion, which, on investigation, he abandoned; he wrote, argumentatively, against miracles; he had experience of the unpopularity of unorthodoxy; he became again a Christian, and now advocates superstitions which have been the derision of Christians, as well as of unbelievers." These observations on his changeable character are echoed in the opening pages of the definitive biography of Robert Dale Owen.⁴¹

From 1860 to 1878, Margaret and her husband published nearly three hundred articles in the *Boston Investigator*.⁴² None of these articles was expressly co-authored, and the articles often came in series. An incomplete summary of series authored by Margaret follows:

- "Hindu religion and related topics," 10 articles (1860-61)
- "Circumstances and Moral Accountability," nos. 1-5 (1862)
- "On England and the U.S.," nos. 1-4 (1863)
- "The Three-Fifths Rule," nos. 1-4 (1863-64)
- "Equal Representation of States," nos. 1-3 (1864)
- "Historical Existence of Jesus," 8 articles (1871)
- "On the 'Historic Value' of the Gospels," nos. 1-60 (Feb. 21, 1872 - Nov. 18, 1874)
- "Did Christianity Originate in an Astronomical Allegory?" nos. 1-17 (1874-76)
- "Pope Joan," nos. 1-4 (1877)

- “The Christian Martyrology,” nos. 1-7 (1877)
- “God and Matter,” nos. 1-3 (1878).

No attempt is made here to summarize or evaluate any of the multitude of Margaret’s articles in the *Boston Investigator*. However, the series of sixty articles on the historic value of the Gospels deserves special mention. If printed as a book, these articles would probably occupy more than two hundred pages. To understand the articles in detail, one would need to be familiar with a vast array of older literature on Biblical sources, from which Margaret quoted liberally. Perhaps the questions raised in Margaret’s series on the historic value of the Gospels will never be satisfactorily answered. This would help to explain why those questions continue to surface from time to time, for example, in Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. At the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, millions of Americans read in their newspapers about the unorthodox pronouncements of a group of Bible scholars called the “Jesus Seminar.”⁴³

In 1875, when Robert Dale Owen suffered a mental illness, a journalist traveled to New Harmony to write about Owen, the town, and the people. Her account⁴⁴ appears to contain the only surviving portrait of the Chappellsmiths, who are described as living in a “state of absolute seclusion.” Having asked to see them, the journalist was turned down. The Chappellsmiths had “retired from the world and did not wish to have their seclusion disturbed,” but in the evening, John Chappellsmith did make himself known to the journalist, and he repeated Margaret’s excuses for not allowing an interview. John was more willing to talk. He said that they were Infidels,⁴⁵ who, “not finding in the town of New Harmony the tolerance which attracted them hither, determined to live in seclusion.” Household chores were evenly divided, and the two of them otherwise spent time in study and gardening.

The journalist persisted. “A cat may look at a king,” she wrote, “and this much I dare do.” She walked to the Chappellsmiths’ “small, brown cottage, with a knocker (useless of course) on the door.” Her eyes were gladdened by a view of Mrs. Chappellsmith picking peas in her garden, dressed in a bright blue gown, cut short, and made as plainly as possible. “An old broad-brimmed straw hat was poised, rather than worn, on the head, for the brim was turned up all around, and plainly revealed to view the dark hair and sun-burned face. But the features were fine, and there was an expression of benignity in the calm, dark eyes that, coupled with an ineffable smile, gave a charm to the countenance that is not easily described. Her very attitude was grace, and the brown little hand extended toward the vines had a pose that a modern belle might envy. I looked at her with some such feeling as one surveys the cover of a tempting book, but there was no way of penetrating this sealed human volume of treasured

personal and historic lore."

In 1883, the *New Harmony Register* gave only a single paragraph to Margaret's passing: "Mrs. Margaret Chappellsmith, for many years a resident of New Harmony, died last Tuesday, after a long illness, having on that day attained her 77th year. Dr. Gotwald was called in at the last moment, but it was too late..."⁴⁶ Near the top of the hill for which Maple Hill Cemetery in New Harmony is named stand the stones of Robert Dale Owen, David Dale Owen, Richard Owen, and Jane Dale Owen Fauntleroy. On a side of the hill lie the remains of Margaret Chappellsmith in an unmarked grave.

Conclusions

Margaret Chappellsmith's meteoric career as an Owenite lecturer closely matched the peak years, 1839-1841, of the Owenite movement in England. It has been estimated that three million tracts were circulated during this period, and that the circulation of *New Moral World* doubled between October 1838 and June 1840. By 1842, however, it was felt that missionaries and lecturers had served their purpose and were no longer cost-effective, and so the Central Board greatly reduced the missionary efforts of the Society.⁴⁷

There were really two principal female Owenite lecturers, Margaret Chappellsmith and Emma Martin. Possibly, Emma left the more indelible mark. This may be because she continued lecturing after Margaret stopped, because the Chappellsmiths moved away from England and lived reclusively, and because Emma's descendants preserved materials and contributed to what is known about her.⁴⁸

On the other hand, Margaret stirred up more attention in the world's largest newspaper⁴⁹ than Emma did, and she was personally closer to Robert Owen. Owen saved several letters received from Margaret but none, it appears, from Emma. The portrayal of Margaret's emotional faltering at the 1844 breakfast honoring Owen further signifies the closeness, as does her letter sent from New Harmony in 1850, describing so warmly the members of Mr. Owen's family in New Harmony. On at least one later occasion, Margaret wrote directly, and affectionately, about Mr. Owen:

[Robert Owen declared] that all ideas of merit or demerit, of reward or punishment, are unjust and unphilosophical. I often, in private, discussed this question with Robert Owen, opposing his doctrine upon natural and utilitarian principles. – It was almost impossible to drive Mr. Owen from any position he had deliberately taken up, but so little could he say in defence of his doctrine, that the invariable immediate results of our discussion were looks and words from him in approbation of what I said. Not any one ever expressed praise more eloquently than he did by looks and manner; and, as I said to him, "if

praise may be expressed by natural language, why not by artificial?" With all his kindness, and great self-control as to words and actions, his looks expressed, at times, severe disapprobation, even, of individuals...; but he admitted that...in the existing state of society, which fails to form characters rightly, rewards and punishments must be used to mitigate the consequences of deficient moral and intellectual control.⁵⁰

The name Margaret Chappellsmith will always be associated with Robert Owen and his sons; with the former while in England, and with the latter during the Chappellsmiths' thirty-three years of residence in New Harmony. Margaret must have been greatly affected by the rapid decline of the Owenite movement during the 1840s and the death of Robert Owen in 1858. Recalling Margaret's penultimate piece in the *London Dispatch*, in defense of Harriet Martineau, one wonders what Margaret may have thought if she read Miss Martineau's words about Mr. Owen and the times during which these people lived:

ROBERT OWEN.

DIED NOVEMBER 17TH, 1858.

With Robert Owen dies out one of the clearest and most striking signs of our times. He was a man who would have been remarkable at any period for the combination that was so strong in him of benevolence and inclination to ordain and rule; but these natural dispositions took form under the special pressure of the time. So entire was the suitability, thus far, of the man to his age, that there can be little doubt that if he had been gifted with the power in which he was most deficient -- reasoning power -- he would have been among the foremost men of his generation... [He] could assert dogmatically, and he could prove his convictions, to a considerable extent, by act; but he could not reason. If he could have reasoned, he might have achieved what he was constantly expecting, and have changed the whole aspect of civilization. . . .⁵¹

NOTES

¹ *Evansville Daily Journal* (September 6, 1860), 1.

² *New Harmony Advertiser* (September 15, 1860), 2.

³ *Cincinnati Commercial* (July 19, 1875), 2. The describer was, according to the *Commercial* article, Moncure Daniel Conway, a well-published Unitarian minister and biographer of Thomas Paine. During 1875, the *Commercial* published a series of letters written by Conway in England.

⁴ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London: Virago, 1983).

⁵ *Evansville Daily Journal* (March 7, 1883).

⁶ Henry Hetherington (1792-1849) and the *London Dispatch* are discussed in Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press, A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). See also Joyce M. Bellamy and

John Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography. Vol. 1* (Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley, 1972).

⁷ *London Dispatch* (July 9, 1837). Perhaps Margaret took over her father's business, which was listed in *The Post-Office London Directory for 1836* as "Reynolds John, Bookseller, Church row, Aldgate."

⁸ The term "feminist" was not yet in use during Margaret's lifetime.

⁹ William Cobbett (1763-1835) was a civil rights activist, journalist, farmer, and Member of Parliament. In America he published under the name Peter Porcupine and was widely recognized for his insight and wit. For a biographical sketch, including a list of his books, see *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (1992).

¹⁰ See J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenite Movement in Britain and America: The Quest For the New Moral World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) or an eleven-page account in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography, vol. 6* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

¹¹ J. F. C. Harrison, in Bellamy and Saville (1982), 209.

¹² From nearby Saundersville, in a letter dated October 27, 1826, an observer wrote that "Mr. Owen at Harmony is making a considerable noise in this country in trying, as he calls it, to alleviate the condition of the human race, but I am decidedly of the opinion that he cannot reduce his theory to successful practice. He will spend a fortune in the attempt." Exactly two years later, John Ingle again wrote, "I expect that Mr. Owen has sunk 50,000 pounds sterling, and his system as he was pleased to style it has gone to the dogs." Ingle's letters repose in the Indiana State Library. They are quoted in Kenneth P. McCutchan, *Saundersville, An English Settlement in Vanderburgh County, Indiana* (Evansville, IN: Unigraphic, 1978).

¹³ *New Moral World* (October 27, 1838), 2-4.

¹⁴ Robert Owen's "Marriage System of the New Moral World" is an appendix in his *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World* (Leeds: J. Hobson, 1840). The "marriages of the priesthood" – meaning those performed by the clergy – were declared "a Satanic device of the Priesthood to place and keep mankind within their slavish superstitions and to render them [mankind] subservient to all their [Priests'] purposes." Such inflammatory writing stands in stark contrast to Owen's manner of public speaking: "Owen himself was always gentle, and repeated his boring platitudes with infinite patience and with thorough disregard for his opponents' arguments." See Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), 62.

¹⁵ *New Moral World* (June 22, 1839), 556-558.

¹⁶ The marriage took place in the Registrar's Office in the St. Botolph's District in the City of London. The certificate repose in the General Register Office of England.

¹⁷ *The Social Reformer* (October 20, 27; November 3, 1839). It appears that Margaret lectured on five consecutive Tuesday evenings beginning on October 8, 1839.

¹⁸ Accounts of the lectures are found in many 1840 issues of *New Moral World*: March 21 (Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton); April 4 (Oldham); April 11 (Manchester, two accounts); April 25 (Liverpool); May 9 (Bury); May 16 (Hyde);

May 23 (Stalybridge, Manchester); May 30 (Newcastle, Oldham), June 6 (Potteries); August 1 (Glasgow and surrounding towns); August 8 (Edinburgh); August 29 (Dundee, Edinburgh); October 3 (Edinburgh); October 10 (Kirkcaldy); December 5 (London). The 1841 volume indicates that Margaret lectured further in London and Chatham.

¹⁹ For a biographical sketch of John Finch, see Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. 1 (Clifton, NJ: A. M. Kelley, 1972), 118-120.

²⁰ *Liverpool Journal* (April 18, 1840).

²¹ *New Moral World* (January 2, 1841), 13.

²² "John Pringle, Student of Law, to the Right Hon. Lord John Russell, July 27, 1840." This letter reposes in the Public Record Office, London, in record group HO 44/38, folio 1064-1067. Shorter letters of similar ilk have been unearthed in record group HO 44/38: a letter written by a Liverpool magistrate, Adam Hodgson (April 16, 1840 – folio 1006, 1007); a second letter from Pringle to Lord Russell (August 13, 1840, folio 1078-1079); and a statement from John McDowall and John Hawkes of Manchester (March 26, 1840), including a tract entitled "Mr. Owen on Marriage" (folio 509-510).

²³ *New Moral World* (January 2, 1841), 13.

²⁴ A FULL ACCOUNT of the FAREWELL FESTIVAL given to ROBERT OWEN, Esq., on his DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA, with REPORTS OF THE SPEECHES of Messrs. ELLIS, HOLYOAKE, FLEMING, A. CAMPBELL, SOUTHWELL AND MRS CHAPPELLSMITH; also Mr. Owen's SECOND LEGACY TO THE HUMAN RACE (London: J. J. Merriman, 1844). The account is also given in *New Moral World*, August 17, 1844, where it is mentioned that Mrs. Chappellsmith sat at the right hand of Mr. Owen.

²⁵ George Flower (1788-1862) was an Englishman who, with his father, Richard Flower (1761-1829) established the village of Albion, Illinois, some twenty-five miles from New Harmony. It was Richard Flower who was commissioned by Father George Rapp to find a purchaser (Robert Owen) for Harmonie.

²⁶ Based on data printed in Elfrieda Lang, "The Inhabitants of New Harmony According to the Federal Census of 1850," *Indiana Magazine of History* 42 (December, 1946) 355-394.

²⁷ Elfrieda Lang (1946).

²⁸ Richard William Leopold, *Robert Dale Owen, A Biography* (New York, NY: Octagon Books, 1969), vii.

²⁹ This letter reposes in the Co-operative Union Library, Holyoake House, Manchester, England. Letters in the collection known to have been written by Margaret Chappellsmith are indexed and dated as follows: No. 1098 (April 22, 1839) reports on Mr. Curling's sermon and mentions Margaret's sister. No. 1118 (June 26, 1839) discusses the Bank of England. No. 1122 (July 2, 1839) thanks Mr. Owen for his letter and mentions her next lectures and a possible pilgrimage. No. 1127 (July 6, 1839) notes her forthcoming lectures. No. 1334 (August 15, 1844) is a seven-page letter seeking Mr. Owen's counsel in connection with the planned emigration of her sister and her sister's husband to America on the ship *Victoria*; also mentioned is a dear unnamed friend who had introduced her to Mr. Owen's principles. This was evidently someone who had been in love with Margaret's sister

– who had "venerated but did not love" him. No. 1825 is the letter quoted above, sent from New Harmony. The 1839 letters were posted from 11 Church Row, Aldgate, London, and the 1844 letter, from 13 Dean Street, Westminster, London. Barbara Taylor (1983, 322) mentions an additional letter (no. 1239) as Margaret's. However, it was written by John Hunter (dated January 30, 1840) and asked Mr. Owen to tea to hear Mrs. Chappellsmith lecture on her conversion from Calvinism to socialism.

³⁰ Four of Robert Owen's children lived in New Harmony in 1850 or thereafter. In addition to Robert Dale Owen were the renowned geologist David Dale Owen, a daughter, Jane Dale Owen Fauntleroy, and the youngest son, Richard Owen, who became the first president of Purdue University. The proud father summarized the accomplishments of these four in *Robert Owen's Journal*, v. 1 (London: James Watson, 1851), 114-115.

³¹ Mrs. Fauntleroy's husband, Robert Henry Fauntleroy, had died of cholera in December 1849.

³² Flower, not Flowers.

³³ Thomas W. Records, "The Old Printing Office in New Harmony," *Indiana Magazine of History* 33 (1937) 428-434.

³⁴ These words are from the Constitution of the Minerva Society, written by Robert Dale Owen, according to Ross F. Lockridge, *The Old Fauntleroy Home* (New Harmony Memorial Commission, 1939). Lockridge lists the members of the Society, but there is no mention of members' writings in the *Advertiser* (there were several) or of Margaret Chappellsmith.

³⁵ Thomas James de la Hunt, *History of The New Harmony Working Men's Institute* (Evansville, IN: Burkert-Walton, 1927).

³⁶ Richard William Leopold (1969), 104, 160. See also Celia Morris Eckhardt, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 256-259. The Owen influence on the *Boston Investigator* was significant, not only through Robert Dale Owen, but also through his father. For example, *Robert Owen's Journal*, v. 4, no. 88 (July 3, 1852), page 79 reprinted from the *Investigator* a recent and substantial birthday tribute to Robert Owen. It is a curious note that, years earlier, the editor of Owen's *New Moral World* (vol. 9, 1841, 266) had deemed the *Investigator* "repulsive."

³⁷ *Boston Investigator* (September 8, 1859).

³⁸ Robert Dale Owen, *Boston Investigator* (March 14, 1860).

³⁹ Robert Dale Owen, "The Convulsionists of St. Medard," *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (February, March, 1864), 209-222, 339-352; "The Electric Girl of La Perrière," *Atlantic Monthly* 14 (September, 1864), 284-292.

⁴⁰ Margaret Chappellsmith, "The Convulsionists of St. Medard," *Boston Investigator* (March 2; March 30; April 6, 1864). "Robert Dale Owen and the Electric Girl of La Perrière," *Boston Investigator* (September 21, September 28, 1864).

⁴¹ Richard William Leopold (1969), vii.

⁴² A list of all known Chappellsmith writings is available from the Bower-Suhrheinrich Library at the University of Evansville.

⁴³ Typical of present-day articles is one headed "What Really Happened to Jesus?; Seminar's Quest for That Answer Angers Some Traditional Christians..."

Washington Post (April 6, 1996).

⁴⁴ Laura Ream, New Harmony Notes, *Cincinnati Commercial* (July 19, 1875). Only the initials L. R. are given in the *Commercial*, but an entry in R. E. Banta, *Indiana Authors and their Books 1816-1916* (Wabash College, 1949), reveals the journalist's full name with a biographical sketch. Ream's portrayal of the Chappellsmiths typifies an engaging but exaggerating style; after this is taken into account, the portraits remain significant. Ream's story on Robert Dale Owen is partially discreditable for reasons pointed out by Richard William Leopold (1969, 127n) and by a correspondent in the July 25, 1875 issue of the *Commercial*.

⁴⁵ The first national Infidel Convention took place in New York City in 1845. Whether to include the word "Infidel" in the name "The [Infidel] Society for the Promotion of Mental Liberty" became a topic of heated debate. Robert Owen, visiting from England, took the floor and vigorously opposed the inclusion, but his admirer, Ernestine Rose, and Horace Seaver of the *Boston Investigator* argued otherwise and won. See Yuri Suhl, *Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights* (New York, NY: Reynal, 1959).

⁴⁶ *New Harmony Register* (March 2, 1883).

⁴⁷ Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels, The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), 62.

⁴⁸ Barbara Taylor (1983), 323.

⁴⁹ The *Times* (London), October 12, 1838; October 9, 1839; October 17, 1839; October 24, 1839 ("Socialism Expounded by a Female"). These four articles are cited in *Palmer's Index to the Times*, which contains no entries for Emma Martin. Other coverage of Margaret's lecturing by non-socialist papers include *The Weekly Dispatch*, October 27, 1839 ("Owenism and the New Morality Humbug") and *Old England*, October 12, 1839; October 26, 1839.

⁵⁰ Margaret Chappellsmith, in the *Boston Investigator* (May 28, 1862).

⁵¹ Harriet Martineau, *Biographical Sketches 1852-1875* (London: Macmillan, 1876), 307-315.

Author's note: Individual web pages for members of the Owen and Chappellsmith families are accessible from the author's web site: <http://cedar.evansville.edu/~ck6/bstud/nh.html>.