



Somerville College
University of Oxford

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Friends of the John Stuart Mill Library Newsletter

*“This is an auspicious event for Somerville,
and I hope also in a modest way, an
auspicious contribution to the study of one of
the great political philosophers of the
western world, John Stuart Mill.”*

So began Dr Alice Prochaska, Principal of Somerville College, as she welcomed guests to the inaugural John Stuart Mill Annual Lecture and it is a fitting start too, to the inaugural newsletter of the Friends of the John Stuart Mill Library. In this issue we will be bringing you up to date with the various projects involved in fulfilling Somerville’s commitment to preserving, promoting and researching the John Stuart Mill Library, including:

- News of the first book to be taken to the Oxford Conservation Studio for repair,
- the significant amount of marginalia being found in the books by Research Assistant Hazel Tubman,
- the progress of the digitisation project being undertaken by the University of Alabama,
- the full texts of the two lectures given by Professor Alan Ryan and Dr Frank Prochaska at our Annual Lecture evening
- and of course future events for Friends of the Library. We hope you enjoy this first edition of the newsletter, which we hope to produce for many years to come.

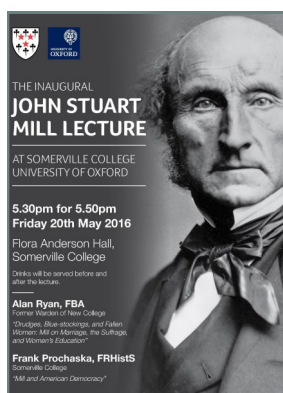
If you have any comments, queries or suggestions for us at the Library, please do get in touch (details on page 14).

Anne Manuel
College Librarian and Archivist



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PLAQUES FOR TWO OF THE LIBRARY'S BIGGEST SUPPORTERS

The College was delighted to recognise the contributions of two members of the Mill community who have been instrumental in the past eighteen months in launching and accelerating the John Stuart Mill Library project. By installing brass plaques in the John Stuart Mill Library

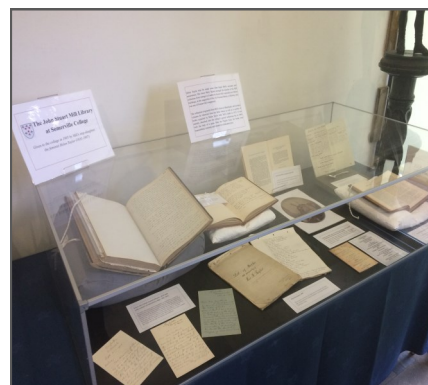
Christopher Kenyon, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the collection since Frank Prochaska introduced him to it back in 2014. His decision to match the funds raised through our 2015 crowdfunding project made an enormous difference to the amount of money we were able to raise during that campaign. Since then he has continued to stay engaged with the project and we hope that will continue for some time to come!

Frank Prochaska arrived at Somerville in 2010 and was immediately captivated by the Library, and became determined to make the collection better known and researched. He has gone to great lengths to raise awareness, not to mention funds, to ensure that this becomes a reality. His energy has transferred to all those around him and it is largely thanks to his enthusiasm that we are now able to undertake the work you will read about in the newsletter.

INAUGURAL JOHN STUART MILL LECTURE 20TH MAY 2016

On May 20th 2016, John Stuart Mill's 210th birthday, Somerville College celebrated with the inaugural John Stuart Mill Lecture delivered by distinguished speakers Alan Ryan and Frank Prochaska. In front of an audience of over 100 Mill enthusiasts, we heard about Mill's feminist commitments and his views on democracy in America. Fittingly for Mill, whose writings are still so relevant over a hundred years after he produced them, both lectures were highly topical as well as engaging.

The text of both lectures is reproduced on pages 4 to 13 of this newsletter and the Principal's introduction is on page 3



Display at the lecture featuring items from Somerville's archives relating to the gift of the Library in 1906

HAZEL'S MARGINALIA HUNT : *Dr Hazel Tubman describes her work looking for the notes and marks that James and John Stuart Mill left behind*



"My work locating the marginalia in the volumes of the John Stuart Mill collection began at the end of June. Two months and 200 volumes later, my spreadsheet runs to almost 10,000 entries - that's almost 10,000 symbols, sidelines, N.Bs, Roman numerals, full sentences and critical comments. I've even found ink sketches of pointing hands, and a woman's face! While it's safe to say that biro lines and lurid highlighter marks weren't John or his father James, attributing symbols and even the fuller, textual marginalia is challenging; James and John Stuart Mill's handwriting was quite similar. Yet they engaged with the texts they read in different ways. James Mill tended to keep longer, pencil notes on the endleaves of books, using a system of sidelines and asterisks in the text itself. John, alternatively, used a wider array of markings directly on the page. Exclamation points pencilled in the margin indicate

disbelief or disagreement, and fuller comments - 'what is this?' - and occasional corrections to the text indicate that he critiqued as he read.

The aim of this stage of the project is to find marginalia; understanding what these marks mean comes later. Yet it is hard not to wonder about what some of our more exciting discoveries might reveal about J. S. Mill's life and work. A fourteen-volume edition of Francis Bacon's works, printed while Mill was an MP, contains thousands of his marginal marks: did he use these volumes for his parliamentary speeches? And what should we make of the acerbic comments pencilled into Richard Whately's *Elements of Logic*, so influential in Mill's own work?

This project is also a great opportunity to get a feel for the health of the collection and identify the volumes that need conservation. I have been undertaking conservation 'lite', armed with a duster, a mini Hoover and metres of white ribbon. I won't make it through the whole collection on my marginalia hunt - with a month left there are still 1500 volumes to go! - but the advantage of cleaning every volume is that I will perhaps get a sneak preview of the marginalia still to be found."

Somerville College gratefully acknowledges that Hazel's work has been supported by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation to whom our warmest thanks are extended.

RESEARCH IN THE LIBRARY —*who is currently making use of the books?*

Our latest research visitor to the Library has been Sir Adam Roberts, Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford and a former President of the British Academy. His academic interests over the years have been wide ranging but he has consistently enjoyed teaching the theory of, and ideas behind, modern international relations. He is currently working on a book about the history of liberal ideas about international order from Ancient Greece to the present which will include a section on John Stuart Mill. Being able to look at first editions of Mill's works along with the books that Mill owned is invaluable to Professor Roberts, who is delving into the way Mill arrived at his concepts and philosophies. Professor Roberts finds Mill's contradictions particularly interesting and puzzling, for example, Mill was an advocate for liberalism and democracy but worked for the East India Company, a particularly

autocratic company. Again, his attitudes to women were sometimes groundbreakingly feminist and at other times prudish and dismissive, something that Professor Alan Ryan addressed in his lecture this year, a copy of which you'll find on p 4 of this newsletter. There are of course also the annotations and markings which provide a small glimpse into the workings of Mill's mind as he was formulating his own ideas. But just as telling for Professor Roberts are the books that Mill didn't look at – easy to spot because the pages are still uncut!

Professor Roberts's mother, sister and mother-in-law were all Somerville students and he likes to think that the books he is using now might have been used by them in their day. He is certainly maintaining the family connection to Somerville and the John Stuart Mill library. We look forward to seeing the fruits of his labours in due course

MILL MARGINALIA PROJECT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

In July 2016 the Library welcomed Professor Albert Pionke from the University of Alabama, the inspiration and drive behind the Mill Marginalia Online project. Professor Pionke writes on his website:

"Mill Marginalia Online aspires to digitize all pages within the John Stuart Mill Library containing any handwritten mark or annotation while offering users a chance to view these individual pages within their larger textual contexts by providing links to already-available full-text versions of the marked books. The site will employ a NoSQL database and metadata scheme that will allow for multi-faceted searching of all verbal and nonverbal marks, which means that scholars interested in both Mills' readerly judgment, writerly influence, and intellectual networks will be able to consult and compare not just their annotations, but their broader strategies of marking their books. Even scholars without a singular investment in John Stuart or James Mill, but instead a diverse set of interests in cognitive approaches to textual studies, histories of reading practices, and literary aesthetics should find empirical evidence to support their research. Knowledge of the nineteenth century is literally inscribed in the margins of the Mill Library, and Mill Marginalia Online seeks to make that knowledge as accessible and broadly useful as possible"

Using Hazel Tubman's map of the marginalia he has started systematically photographing it for the database that his digital humanities team are building. He'll be back in 2017 to carry on with the task and we look forward to seeing him again then.



"Somerville College, I will boldly claim, embodies some of the ideals of western liberalism that Mill articulated. As the one of Oxford's two first colleges for women that explicitly opened its doors to students of all faiths, nationalities and social backgrounds, Somerville raised the standard of inclusion and openness in Britain's oldest university, a cradle of the establishment, at a time when those values were far from uncontested. The Liberal statesman and biographer of Gladstone, John Morley, recognised the college for these qualities when he persuaded Helen Taylor, the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill, to give her step-father's London-based library for the use of Somerville students in 1905.

Since then, these two thousand or so volumes have had a chequered career, living for many decades on open shelves to be used – with varying degrees of respect -- by generations of Somervillians before they were gathered together in the 1960s by our far-sighted then librarian Pauline Adams, and placed in a special reading room. Even then, and despite Pauline's efforts, only a few scholars knew of, still less used, the library.

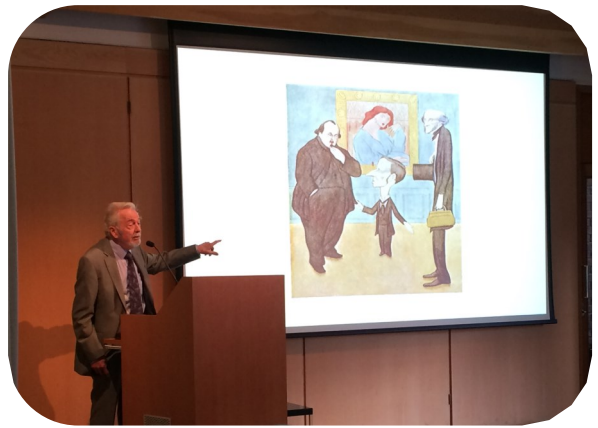
What we are inaugurating this evening is – I hope, a new series of lectures to take place in years to come, and a new group of Friends of the John Stuart Mill Library, for which the college has received some wonderfully generous contributions, and has been supported most gratifyingly by the crowd-funding initiative of current Somerville students. Let me only say here that we are deeply grateful for the support we have received, and I hope it will help us to make a serious contribution to philosophical studies at many levels in the future."

*Dr Alice Prochaska, Principal of Somerville College, May 2016.
Extract from Introduction to the John Stuart Mill lecture*

DRUDGES, BLUE-STOCKINGS, AND FALLEN WOMEN: JOHN STUART MILL ON SEX, SUFFRAGE, AND EDUCATION

ALAN RYAN

The purpose of this occasion – which is very much my purpose – is to celebrate Frank Prochaska's campaign to renovate the library of John Stuart Mill, and to congratulate him on the fund-raising and friend-raising efforts that seem set fair to allow the work to proceed successfully. The library was given to the College by Mill's stepdaughter, Helen Taylor at the instigation of John Morley, who was himself a great admirer of both Mill and Mary Somerville. [Max Beerbohm's cartoon puts a characteristically tongue in cheek gloss on the connection, though the lady in the picture is obviously Jane Morris rather than Helen Taylor or Mary Somerville.] My task is to celebrate Mill's feminist commitments; I am honoured by being invited to do so,



and delighted to have the chance to recall how much Mill and Mary Somerville admired each other, and how united they were in many good causes: the need for women to have the vote, the importance of women's education, especially in the sciences, and how appalled they both were about the evils that had to be remedied: especially violence against working class women in Victorian England and the intolerable lack of concern displayed by the forces of law and order and politicians. Their task is far from finished. But, I begin dispiritingly - with Mill's behaviour towards the women in his life, and the limits of his emotional imagination.

Dispiritingly 1: The other Harriet Mill: Mrs Mill, the missing mother: her husband's contempt and her son's unkindness.

In his *Autobiography* Mill describes himself as the eldest son of James Mill, the author of *The History of British India*. As Frank Manuel observed many years ago, it's unusual to find a child who thinks he is the offspring of a man and a book. In the published *Autobiography*, Mill's mother, born Harriet Burrows, makes no appearance at all. Mill's reputation – entirely justified – as a central figure in the campaign for women's rights in the mid-19th century, is not enhanced by his contempt for his mother and sisters. In a discarded early draft of the *Autobiography*, he did discuss his mother: he observed that she was a wholly inadequate companion for James Mill, and by the same token a wholly inadequate parent for the young John Stuart. Mill half-acknowledged that bearing nine children for a quick-tempered husband was no easy task, but instead of directing his anger at the proper target, namely his father, he simply complains that she became a drudge and that he grew up in a loveless environment. "That rarity in England, a really warm-hearted mother, would ... have made my father a totally different being... and made her children grow up loving and being loved. But my mother with the best of intentions knew only how to drudge for them."

Blaming his mother for his father's deficiencies is pretty indefensible. According to his son's account – whose accuracy we have no way of assessing – James Mill treated her with near-contempt. Her son came to do so, too. Mill's relations with his mother (and his sister Mary Colman) deteriorated irreparably in the aftermath of his marriage to Harriet Taylor in 1851. Exactly what Mill's mother's and sister's offence consisted in is impossible to determine; but Mill thought they had behaved disrespectfully towards his new wife, broke off relations, and did not relent even when his mother was dying. The savagery of his reaction is not wholly inexplicable; but it was hysterically exaggerated and unforgivably unkind; and it remains depressing to contemplate.

2. Almost as dispiritingly: What JSM and Harriet Taylor Mill thought the *Autobiography* should teach their contemporaries about a marriage of true minds; what you will not find in Mill.

Of course, it is usually both easy and right to detach the author from the work, and to insist that what matters is the quality of Mill's arguments, and what we might expect if people were to act on the principles

Mill defends. The claim that women should have the vote on the same terms as men stands on its own moral base, regardless of Mill's shortcomings as a son and brother, and by the same token, so does his insistence that women should be educated on the same terms as men, should be protected from domestic violence, should have equal access to interesting careers, should be able to control their own property, retain access to their children after divorce, and so on. Things are more complicated where Mill's views concern what he described as intimate relations, for there he offers his relationship with Harriet Taylor as exemplary.

Mill's *Autobiography* is a fascinating document, not least because the centrality of his mental crisis makes it *look* like an artless and revelatory document, while it is actually a profoundly political and didactic piece of work, and never more than when discussing marriage. If not duplicitous, it is far from artless. The *Autobiography*, says Mill, is a record of an unusual education; readers looking for human interest or mere gossip are warned off on the first page. In fact, Mill reveals an education more truly unusual than he seems to have fully understood; the *Autobiography* famously describes him receiving a notoriously demanding education at the hands of his father – Greek at three, Latin at eight, logic and economics in his early teens – only to submit himself to an equally demanding second education at the hands of Harriet Taylor, whose readiness to denounce him for moral cowardice, sentimentality, and for displaying the sensibilities of a housemaid, is impressive if not very likeable. In a passage cut out of the final version of the *Autobiography*, Mill says his father's domineering approach to his education undermined his will; his wife was alarmingly like his father in that respect.

I dwell on this point for two reasons only. Mill and his wife regarded their relationship as exemplary; they wanted to show that world that it was a deep, spiritual friendship, a union of two souls with no 'sensuality' involved. Their relationship was certainly unorthodox – she remained married to John Taylor for almost twenty years after she and Mill had fallen in love with each other; she and Mill went on holiday together for extended periods, and essentially lived together much of the time; John Taylor tolerated all this uncomplainingly, demanding only that they did not make him look ridiculous. He, perhaps uniquely, emerged with great credit from the whole business. Mill and Mrs Taylor knew they had provoked prurient curiosity about their sexual relations and hated the fact; that explains their prickly behaviour. Nonetheless, dismissing sexual relations as 'the animal function' as Mill did, seems an impoverished view of the subject, and not absolutely necessary to his claim that theirs was not a relationship built on 'sensuality.' Such a glacial view was also at odds with Mill's own enthusiasm for Shelley. Mill's love of Shelley's poetry was very real; he could not read it aloud without choking up. Alexander Bain thought Mill 'below the average in sensuality,' and this was probably true, but *something* happened when he read Shelley.

The other thing to notice is how different Mill's behaviour towards Harriet was from what *The Subjection of Women* seemed to suggest an ideal marriage would be; there Mill celebrates a marriage of equals. In life, he was astonishingly servile. He addressed Harriet in the third person, said that wherever he initially disagreed with her, he was sure he would come round in the end, and so generally on. In *The Subjection of Women*, female emancipation was said to benefit men as well as women because the companionship of free and equal members of the human race is better than the companionship of slaves or household pets. Although *Subjection* was published a decade after Harriet's death, she knew what its contents were, and it is hard not to wonder what she thought about a relationship in which she was so utterly the dominant partner.

3. *More interestingly*: Mill's insistence that a society's progress was to be measured by its treatment of women. It is time to head to the more invigorating side of Mill's feminism. Mill's feminism permeated almost all his work bar the more abstract discussion of mathematics and formal logic. Mill thought that what marked out the modern age was a commitment to progress; or, rather, since that makes him sound much more cheerful than he was, he thought that the western, European world had a glimpse of what might be possible for humanity if we all behaved more intelligently than hitherto. It was a rather teeth-gritted commitment to progress, since Mill was the kind of utopian who thinks that things *could* be vastly better for all of us than they presently are, but probably won't be so for a very long time. Intelligent and sensitive spirits find the world as it is a bad joke on what it might be. Mill was not as addicted to the trope of 'it could be heaven, but it is more commonly hell' as

his godson, Bertrand Russell was, but he certainly employed it a great deal.

However, what is to our purpose is not Mill's liking for violent antitheses, but the criteria of progress in the here and now. Improvements in the lives of women of every social class and background provided many of the criteria of social, intellectual, and moral progress. Materially, over-burdened working class women with too many children, brutal husbands, and hideous living conditions, needed rescuing from an animal existence; and women of every social class needed to be treated as equally entitled to all the protections and opportunities legally available to men, and enabled to take advantage of them. Mary Somerville was a distinguished scientist and mathematician rather than a philosopher, but like Mill, she saw the legal disabilities of women in Victorian England as a moral affront, and like Mill in the aftermath of the American Civil War, she seized on the contrast between the fact that newly emancipated slaves had been given the right to vote, no matter how uneducated and illiterate they might be, while women continued to be denied the vote, no matter how well-educated they were. Harriet Beecher Stowe might well have done as much to hasten the end of slavery as several divisions of Union troops, but she had no vote.

4. How Mill's feminism permeates his philosophy:

The Subjection of Women was Mill's set-piece contribution to feminist theory – to be thoroughly anachronistic about it – but his allegiances are visible almost everywhere. A brief tour of his philosophical and social scientific *corpus* may make the point.

Utilitarianism and the widening circle of equal treatment of everyone's interests. The virtue of utilitarianism, defended in the little book of that name, on Mill's view of the matter, was that it was 'inductive' and 'progressive.' Progress has two aspects: morally, a morality progresses by becoming more inclusive, and accepting the legitimacy of a wider range of interests – just as nobody is born to be a slave, women are not born to be drudges at the beck and call of men; as to the content of morality, progress consists in asking ourselves whether the rules we observe as 'moral' rules and enforce by the pressure of opinion, produce as much general happiness as can be achieved. Essentially, this means taking a scientific attitude towards our social practices. It's a view of morality that doesn't appeal to people who think a set of prescriptions was laid down by the Almighty, or is perceived intuitively by people with the right moral outlook; they were Mill's opponents, and Mill thought they were the greatest obstacle to social progress in Victorian England. Nor are they the dictates of nature; 'nature' cannot tell us what to do; wickedness is as natural as virtue, and everything worth having requires the intelligent direction of *some* forces of nature to frustrate or redirect others. Moreover, the characters and convictions of individuals as we know them are overwhelmingly the result of their socialisation. We must reflect on what happiness truly is, and how to create as much of the right kind as possible.

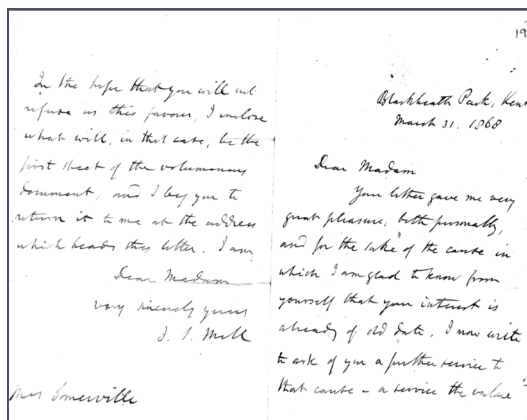
On Liberty: 'everybody lib.' This was the book that was truly Mill's homage to Harriet Taylor Mill. Like Gibbon, who was provoked to write *Decline and Fall*, Mill hit on the idea of writing *On Liberty* in the Forum in Rome. The book was dedicated to the memory of Harriet, who died shortly before its publication. It was also a tribute to her unflinching insistence on individual autonomy. How much impact she had on the arguments narrowly considered, it is impossible to tell; but it was conceived and written as a major part of their joint legacy. Critics who dislike both Harriet Taylor and the ideas of *On Liberty*, such as Gertrude Himmelfarb and Diana Trilling, think she wrote the whole essay and Mill put his name to it. I think that is nonsense, not least because so many of the ideas and illustrations recur in works that nobody suggests she had a hand in. The underlying theme anyway underlies almost everything Mill wrote: custom may be 'second nature,' but we are much too prone to confuse custom with nature; only a society that encourages us to look behind the veil of custom is likely to be a progressive society.



Representative Government: what interests many readers are Mill's defence of proportional representation and his well-known and much mocked proposal for an 'educational' franchise in which (almost) everyone would have at least one vote, but the better educated could qualify for more on the basis of their attainments. For our purposes, what is impressive is Mill's refusal to take opposition to female suffrage seriously. It is no worthier of discussion than objecting to giving the vote to men with red hair. As a member of parliament in the 1860s, Mill did surprisingly well in advancing the cause of female suffrage; on the second reading of what became the 1867 Reform Act, he got 73 votes for his motion to

give women the vote on exactly the same terms as men. That was a more impressive result than any before women got the vote on restrictive terms in 1918; full equality only came over a decade later in 1930.

Principles of Political Economy: One place where Harriet Taylor's impact was unequivocally important was in economics. Mill was anxious about the impact on working class wages of large numbers of women joining the workforce. For this reason, among others, he broke his own rules about second-guessing what experience would reveal about female human nature, and suggested that women would naturally gravitate towards bringing up a family rather than working outside the home. This earned a serious telling-off from Harriet Taylor. In terms of 19th century economic theory, Mill's anxieties made sense; the so-called 'wage-fund' theory held that at any given moment, capitalists in total held a fund with which to hire labour, so that the average wage amounted to the 'wage fund' divided by the number of workers employed. This (bad) theory lay behind the classical economists' obsession with 'prudence,' which is to say keeping down the number of children born to working-class families; Mill shared that wish, but he did so for further reasons less common among other economists. The economic prospects of their children aside, over-burdened women could not live a proper human existence; Mrs James Mill comes to mind. Mrs John Mill took a no-holds-barred view. Women should not bear unwanted children, but not primarily for economic reasons. They had the right to lead whatever life best suited them on the same terms as men – which duly became the doctrine of *Subjection*. If men could not compete with better qualified women, so much the worse for them. Mill gave in: egalitarian principle trumped (as it happens bad) economics. There was much more that Mill could have said; he was the first serious thinker to explore what became known as the theory of dual labour markets, and he could have said a lot about the problems that were likely to occur on the way to a world in which women had the same educational opportunities as men and the same chance to exercise their (fully developed) abilities unhampered by being stuck at home to do 'women's work.' He did not, although a reader can elicit some interesting half-expressed views.



But, of course, the set piece was *The Subjection of Women*: Mill sent a copy to Mary Somerville, who was delighted to have it and wrote to thank him. Mill replied to her, saying that there was nobody whose approbation could have given him more pleasure. Of course, he was in her debt, both as a signatory to the 1867 petition on female suffrage that the London Society for Women's Suffrage had launched, and as the most distinguished possible counterexample to the conventional view that women can't do science.

Subjection is an interesting essay, not because it is surprising, but because it does three things rather cleverly. First, it presses Mill's hostility to arguments

from 'nature' to the limit. We simply do not *know* what women might do or want in an egalitarian, liberal environment, so we do not know what might suit women's 'nature' until we try the experiment. All our existing evidence comes from inequalitarian conditions. The analogy with slavery is latent but obvious. Second, therefore, Mill is a theorist of negative feminism. He neither offers nor needs to offer an elaborate account of 'what women really want,' because it's up to them to make up their own minds when they can do so freely. Janet Radcliffe Richards's *Sceptical Feminist* is a recent version of essentially that argument. Lastly, Mill connects *Subjection* to *On Liberty* in a more rhetorically relaxed fashion than he allows himself in *Liberty*. He imagines a good-natured male wondering why women might want the vote, education, the right to control their own property, and so on. Isn't it enough that their husbands look after them devotedly and effectively? Mill throws the argument back at his supposed interlocutor: who really wants to go back to school, who really wants to live all their life under the parental roof? Did his interlocutor not feel twice the man when he threw off his parents' leading strings? Why does he think women should feel differently?

While he is at it, of course, Mill emphasizes the appalling state of English law that made wives all but the literal slaves of their husbands. On marriage, their property became their husband's; if the marriage broke down, their children became his. Mill carefully avoided committing himself on the obvious

question that all this raised: would not the remedy for this last inequality be divorce laws that allowed wives to sue for divorce cheaply and easily and expect to have their futures secured and their access to their children legally enforced? Mill obviously thought so, but knew that he had sufficiently scandalised respectable opinion and would not get a hearing for his less radical views if he unveiled the full extent of his radicalism. It was not as though he took particular care to avoid insulting his more conservative readers; one very nice example was where he continued the discussion of the similarities between slavery and marriage by observing that it was a unique case where the slaveowner wanted not only the body and the labour of the slave, but their affection as well.

5. *Polemic: a) domestic violence; b) the Contagious Diseases Act.* Mill could be a lethal debater and polemicist when he chose. He sometimes distressed those who wanted to see him as a detached, Olympian figure; FitzJames Stephen thought that a 'red veil' came over Mill's eyes when he confronted the massed ranks of conservative stupidity in the House of Commons – or indeed in his own imagination. On the subject of violence against women, he was implacable; he shared Mary Somerville's view that "no savages are more gross than the lowest ranks in England, or treat their wives with more cruelty." Mill wrote many newspaper articles demanding a change in laws that effectively sent women back under the roof of those who assaulted them. Late in life, he astonished the parliamentary committee assessing the merits and defects of the Contagious Diseases Act by siding with Josephine Butler and others in demanding its repeal, and taking the opportunity to go a good deal further.

The Act was intended to reduce the number of soldiers and sailors incapacitated by venereal diseases. It gave the police in garrison towns and naval ports wide powers to detain women suspected of prostitution and subject them to compulsory physical examination, and if they were infected, detention in hospital and compulsory treatment. As a good utilitarian, Mill did not object in principle to measures of this sort. Someone with typhoid fever might legitimately be sequestered for public health reasons. This case was different. All the burdens fell on women, not on the men who were likely to be infected. Women were doubly victims, since it was men who passed the disease from one woman to another. Add to that the over-reach in police powers which rendered every woman in a particular area vulnerable to arrest on suspicion and a demeaning assault, and the Act could be seen as intolerable. Mill, of course, was out of step with public opinion; he did not see the sexual urges of the brutal and licentious soldiery and the Jolly Jack Tars as something that 'needed' satisfying in a safe way. Nor, perhaps more surprisingly in view of the awkward discussion of prostitution in *Liberty*, did he think of prostitution as covered by the 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle. The Act was a pure case of tyranny over women. Reversing the assumptions of the committee, Mill went on to say that if a man infected his wife with a venereal disease, she should be able to get an instant divorce, with heavy pecuniary damages. It was, of course, utterly implausible to expect 'other ranks' to pay such damages, but there were innumerable cases where upper class men had passed on syphilis to their unwitting families. The world caught up with Mill in due course, but took its time about it.

6. *The Upshot:* I am a political theorist; and unsurprisingly, my conclusion is that politics matters. The campaign for universal suffrage to which Mill devoted so much effort may seem unexciting almost a century after the first British legislation to give women the vote. But we must remember that Swiss women got the vote as late as 1971, a referendum in 1956 having gone the other way by 2 to 1. France had held out until 1944. Mill and Mary Somerville took the same view of the connection between education and the suffrage. One might expect them to have argued that when women were adequately educated, they would be entitled to vote. They argued in the opposite direction. During the debates on the 1967 Reform Bill, Robert Lowe, an opponent of extending the franchise, finally conceded defeat with the words, "We must educate our masters." Mary Somerville saw where the argument went: when women could vote, their education would be taken wholly seriously. Reform follows the power to demand it.

In a year of electoral turmoil across the United States, when driven candidates and rival parties see society in the light of their political altars, it is perhaps worth recalling, albeit briefly, what Mill thought about American democracy. A principal cause of Mill's interest in the United States was the publication of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which received glittering reviews in a host of British periodicals. Tocqueville persuaded his European readers that democracy was the future, but left them wondering how its vices were to be attenuated and its virtues bestowed. The publication of *Democracy in America* coincided with an era of political agitation in Britainⁱ. The first two volumes appeared in 1835, not long after the Reform Act of 1832 widened the franchise and opened up the prospect of further reform. The second two volumes appeared in 1840, during a peak in the Chartist campaign for the extension of democratic rights.



Somerville has these books in the library, which are the very ones that Mill used in his lengthy reviews of *Democracy in America* in 1835 and 1840. The volumes published in 1840 are not only inscribed to Mill by Tocqueville, 'as evidence of esteem and friendship' (those are his words), but they contain fascinating annotations in the text and on the flyleaves. To my knowledge, no scholar has ever cited these annotations. To my dismay, I discovered them only a few weeks before the publication of my book *Eminent Victorians on American Democracy*. Mill annotated various volumes in his personal library, but the pungent jottings on *Democracy in America* are among the more notable and would probably have disconcerted the Frenchman had he seen them. Phrases such as 'this is not true' or 'all this must be taken with great reserve', or simply the word 'no' are among the marginalia.

While Tocqueville was composing his masterpiece Mill was building his reputation as the editor of the *London Review*, a voice for the cause of philosophical radicalism. His initial review of *Democracy in America* in 1835 gave him an opportunity to explore an issue of paramount importance to the radical cause. He found the work a brilliant contrast to the customary writings on America, which were often little more than party pamphlets disguised as travel booksⁱⁱ. Tocqueville provided just the hoped-for impartial study of America that would enlarge the discussion of democracy and counter partisan views. As Mill saw it, American democracy was so pregnant with meaning that 'he who sees furthest into it will longest hesitate before finally pronouncing whether the good or evil of its influence . . . preponderates'ⁱⁱⁱ.

The structure that shaped Mill's analysis of Tocqueville had little to do with American political parties, which were only beginning to emerge. Instead, he focused on the contrast between aristocracy and democracy, an issue of abiding interest to his British readers. Tocqueville had concluded that democracy had been advancing since the dawn of time and was inevitable and desirable, but only under certain conditions, which were capable of being realized or frustrated. His belief that democracy was synonymous with 'equality of conditions' and the absence of an aristocracy was a challenging idea to the British, where a landed aristocracy was still powerful and social hierarchy remained entrenched. Tellingly, Mill double scored the word 'No' in his copy of *Democracy in America* next to Tocqueville's generalization that democracies were more authentic than aristocracies.

Mill was much taken with the view that across Europe all nations were moving towards the extension of political rights and the removal of distinctions based on hereditary wealth. But he felt that Tocqueville made a serious error in confusing the effects of Democracy with the effects of Civilization. As Mill remarked, 'he has bound up in one abstract idea the whole of the tendencies of modern commercial society, and given them one name—Democracy; thereby letting it be supposed that he ascribes to equality of conditions, several of the effects naturally arising from the mere progress of national prosperity'^{iv}.

Mill admired much about American society: its enterprise, its active citizenry, its free associations, and its local government, which he described as 'the fountain-head' of US democracy. He associated democracy with prosperity and a numerous middle class, but coming from a society in which an aristocracy was still powerful, he did not assume that democracy was incompatible with social hierarchy. America was altogether middle class in Mill's view, whereas in Britain the ascendant middle class, though not a numerical majority, was increasingly shaping government. Tocqueville saw equality of conditions as the

prominent feature of American democracy, but Mill did not see much sign of it in 1830s Britain, where there was little enthusiasm for egalitarianism, apart from the Chartist movement ^v.

Mill moved easily between discussions of democratic institutions and wider social issues, and he had serious criticisms of the particular form of democracy taking shape in America. But he saw advantages, which stemmed from his education at the hands of the Utilitarians. The course of legislation tended to benefit the greatest number of people. He felt that the United States could support the transitory effects of bad laws and mediocre public servants even when legislation was defective. Much in America, as he recognized, turned not on legal and democratic causes but on the nation's special circumstances: its natural resources, its open spaces, and the lack of extreme poverty ^{vi}. Mill also noted the perpetual exercise of the faculties among the American public, which Tocqueville had witnessed. He had no doubt that the democratic institutions of the United States, along with its physical advantages, were the cause of the prodigious commercial activity of the inhabitants ^{vii}.

Mill considered the Federal Constitution, with its checks and balances, a work of sagacity drawn up by men of foresight, but he was not insensitive to its faults. He noted that the institutional mainspring of America was the principle of sharing the powers of municipal, state and Federal government among a great variety of elected officials and keeping these independent of one another. But such a system of divided sovereignty, capped by the tripartite division of power in the Federal government between the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives, each independent of one another, suffered from being so often in opposition. 'In what manner is harmony maintained among these jarring elements', he asked? 'How is so minute a division of the government power rendered compatible with the existence of government?' ^{viii} As with other federal constitutions, the American model encouraged union but not unity.

To Mill, every government had to have an arbiter to keep the peace between the various authorities. In the American system, the Founding Fathers recognized the danger in making the political or electoral branches arbiters of the Constitution and thus created a moderating power in the courts. This made sense to Mill, who believed the framers had forged a legal system amenable to democracy and favourable to liberty. He did not, however, think judges should be irremovable and thought their popular election, introduced by some of the State Constitutions, to be among democracy's most perilous errors ^{ix}. Still, he looked on the American judicial system with approval. It was, as he put it, one of the most powerful barriers ever devised against the tyranny of political assemblies ^x.

Given such views, it is not surprising that Mill admired the Supreme Court, at least in principle. One of the benefits of the Court was that it did not declare the law in the abstract but waited until a case was brought before it. This had the effect of allowing the popular discussion to have taken place before a decision had to be made. Impartial justice was the ideal and this required the intellectual pre-eminence of Supreme Court Justices. As Mill saw it, there was nothing more important to the American people than to guard against everything that had a tendency to diminish the quality of this great national institution ^{xi}. But as he recognized, a Supreme Court of impartial, pre-eminent justices could not be guaranteed in a highly charged political atmosphere.

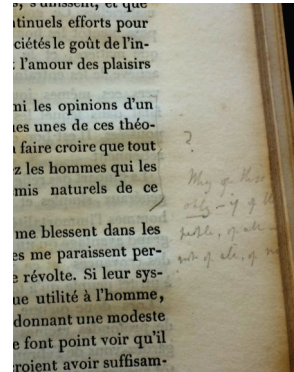
For all the virtues of American democracy, Mill pinpointed what he saw as its many failings. Like most European commentators, he was unimpressed by US politicians, who were often philistine and ill prepared for public service. Mill, in common with other British commentators, thought American statesmen were intellectual pygmies, though he came to see Lincoln as a notable exception ^{xii}. In his opinion, the electoral system promoted indifference among the voters and mediocrity among the candidates. Moreover, a political career held out few financial rewards to a man of ability. In America, he observed, 'statesmanship is not a profession . . . there are no traditions, no science or art of public affairs' ^{xiii}.

Slavery and women's rights were becoming central to Mill's thinking in the 1830s; and in reviewing *Democracy in America* he linked the issue of race prejudice to the position of women in society. Tocqueville, who was content to see women in a domestic role, was not an enthusiast for expanding their political rights ^{xiv}. But to Mill, there was no excuse to exclude women from the vote since their destiny was as dependent on elections as the destiny of men. It was a signal abuse that in the world's premier democracy one entire half of the human race was wholly excluded from the political equality so often boasted of. As he put it: 'In the American democracy, the aristocracy of skin, and the aristocracy of sex, retain their privileges' ^{xv}.

Mill was unusual in his day in thinking a denial of freedom was more likely to come from social oppression than political despotism ^{xvi}. He believed that the tyranny to be feared in America, at least for the white population, was a tyranny over the mind ^{xvii}. In no country, he asserted, was there less independence of thought, which was

a precondition for individual freedom. The lack of dissent led to a passive citizenry who followed the received wisdom with the most servile adulation and sycophancy ^{xviii}. Mill believed that the intelligence of the citizenry was the first element of good government ^{xix}, and he lamented the lack of leisured and learned classes in America. In his writings, as Stefan Collini has observed, we may see the beginnings of the perception that the United States was inhospitable to intellectuals ^{xx}.

Like so many other Britons of his generation, Mill saw Americans as displaced Englishmen, but lacking the Englishman's intellectual vitality and independence of thought. In his aforementioned annotations on the flyleaves of *Democracy in America*, he noted that American manners were greatly influenced by Englishmen and English literature. And then he added: 'Wait until the Americans by their great deeds, in arms, arts, science and literature, have taken a place among the great nations of the earth, and they will no longer be quarrelsome, and doubtful of their position—they will then be as forward, haughty and self-satisfied as the English—but not before.'



In his early writings on the United States, Mill clearly had his doubts about the prospect of an improvement in the moral and intellectual capacity of the American public. He was not a child of the romantic movement, and with a mind formed by a secular outlook, rooted in a utilitarian tradition, he did not share Tocqueville's belief in the creative role of religion in shaping morality and sustaining the social order ^{xxi}. In volume 3 of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville had written that those who did not believe in the immortality of the soul were 'enemies of the people'. Mill scribbled a series of questions and the word 'No' in the margins of his copy.

Though Mill was largely insensitive to American evangelicalism, he was attuned to the commercial spirit across the Atlantic. Yet he underestimated the capacity of the moneyed class to undermine democracy. He was of the opinion that in the United States the rich and poor were not at odds. He took the view that America was not like Europe where class divisions, real or imaginary, represented a danger to property or contracts. Where everyone had property or the hope of enjoying a large fortune through exertion, the inviolability of property was a given. He assumed, rather innocently given the growing wealth of commercial men in American cities, that the rich were content to be rich and did not claim any particular political influence. He did not foresee the plutocracy's fondness for democratic institutions. Nor, of course, did he live to witness the great advance of the plutocracy in the late nineteenth century.

Mill believed that all selfish ambition gravitated towards the Demos, and he was well aware of the potential of demagogues to undermine the republic. He was a democrat who had misgivings about democracy, valued individualism and wished to protect the elite from the tide of mediocrity and uniformity. The best government was clearly government by the wisest. But the powerful current of anti-elitism in America, in which the uninspiring led the uninspired, dimmed the prospects of a rational consensus based on clear thinking ^{xxii}.

Mill gave recurring expression to his fears about the threat democracy posed to the intellect. He ended *On Liberty* (1859) with a famous line that echoed the fears of Tocqueville: 'A State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes—will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished' ^{xxiii}. Like other Victorian commentators, Mill believed that America was remarkable in that its best and brightest citizens habitually avoided politics. This, in his view, made the United States a far from ideal representative democracy.

In his critique of *Democracy in America*, Mill said relatively little about the ins and outs of American politics. But he wrote to a friend in 1842 that he followed events in the United States, particularly the issue of slavery, with very great interest ^{xxiv}. From time to time he commented on American affairs in print. In 1850, he wrote a leading article in the *Daily News* on the California Constitution, in which he praised the document for advocating the right of women to their own property ^{xxv}. In *On Liberty* he

had skated over his views on America--preferring to write a panegyric to the sovereignty of the individual. But having digested Tocqueville's ideas, he eventually turned his mind to the virtues and defects of democracy in his book *Considerations on Representative Government*, published in 1861. It was, as he put it, a study of 'the ideal type of perfect government'. Here he updated his views on America. He gave the US Constitution a mixed review.

Mill was of the opinion that institutions shaped the national character of a country but they did so by their spirit rather than their provisions. In a striking passage in *Considerations on Representative Government* he chastised as a false creed the very spirit of the revered foundation documents of the republic: 'American institutions have imprinted on the American mind, that any one man (with a white skin) is as good as any other. It is not a small mischief that the constitution of any country should sanction this creed; for the belief in it, whether express or tacit, is almost as detrimental to moral and intellectual excellence, as any effect which most forms of government can produce.' The opinion that men were not created equal was unlikely to endear Mill to those who treated the Declaration of Independence as Holy Writ. His view was reminiscent of his mentor Jeremy Bentham, who described the Declaration of Independence as a 'hodge podge of confusion and absurdity in which the theory to be proved is all along taken for granted'.

In *Considerations on Representative Government* Mill returned to the theme that representative systems turned out second-rate candidates in elections. It should be said that he was now writing against the background of a more robust and combative party system. Mill shared the fears of the Founding Fathers that parties were likely to have baneful effects, and he was unimpressed by a system that produced such a succession of uninspiring Presidents. His belief in the need for effective American leadership had hardened because of the crisis of the Union. It was no longer plausible to argue, as he had done in his reviews of *Democracy in America*, that the United States did not require distinguished leaders because it was stable and enduring.

To Mill, the political parties never dared put forward their strongest, most experienced candidates because they had made themselves objectionable to some group of voters. To enter Congress, it was usual to be a representative from a state in which you were a resident, subject to all the pettiness of local politics that went with it. The consequence was that many of America's finest minds were alienated from national office 'as if they were under a formal disqualification' ^{xxvi}. This compelled the majority to accept the weakest candidate or, as Mill put it, 'the worst of themselves'. In this faulty democratic system, the cultivated classes, certain of defeat, avoided running for office. As a consequence they became, in Mill's words, 'the servile mouth-pieces of their inferiors in knowledge' ^{xxvii}.

Mill believed that the United States had produced one of the few effective federal constitutions, but he had a particular objection to the procedures that elected the American President. He particularly disliked the incessant electioneering, which led the whole nation to become preoccupied with personalities, while issues were discussed without reference to their merits. He did not acquit the Constitution, which had encouraged such mischief: 'If a system had been devised to make party spirit the ruling principle of action in all public affairs, . . . it would have been difficult to contrive any means better adapted to the purpose' ^{xxviii}. One is reminded of the American writer Henry Adams, who remarked in 1918 that democratic politics had created 'the systematic organization of hatreds.'

The power of dissolving Parliament, which was a feature of British government, appealed to Mill because it eliminated the possibility of a political stalemate. As a principle, the executive should have the liberty to call for a new election when circumstances required it. When a President and Congress quarrelled, a deadlock could ensue that might last for years without resolution. To expect the executive and the Congress not to paralyse each other's operations, was to suppose that the political life of the country would always be pervaded by a spirit of mutual forbearance and compromise. Mill concluded that if the President, like a British Prime Minister, had the power to dissolve the Congress and appeal to the people it would give him greater independence from the legislature ^{xxix}. Like most Englishmen, Mill preferred the Senate to the House of Representatives, which he described as a chamber of museless nobodies ^{xxx}.

The outbreak of the Civil War intensified Mill's interest in America, which he saw as a conflict with

profound implications for democracy and humanity. For him, it was less about North and South than about 'free and slaveholding America' ^{xxx}. He rejoiced when he heard the news of Lincoln's desire to declare all states in the South free should the North win the war. The abolition of slavery and the victory of the North in the Civil War erased many of the doubts about American democracy that had coloured his earlier opinions. He had long criticized the United States for what he saw as its stagnant democracy and low morality, but Lincoln's political genius and the abolition of slavery renewed his faith in the American people. If he had found fault with the Constitution of 1787, he admired its progressive amendments in the 1860s. He even reconsidered American education, which had failed to impress him in the past. Despite the assassination of Lincoln, which he much lamented, he now looked forward to a great future for America, 'provided that the North was not foolishly generous to its conquered enemies' ^{xxxii}.

In later life, Mill continued to brood over the implications for European society of advancing democracy, but he found consolation in America, where he saw popular government showing signs of progress despite the injustices of reconstruction. As for many other Englishman of his generation, the end of slavery reinvigorated his sense of the unity of Anglo-American culture, which had come under strain during the Civil War. The erstwhile provincials had earned a place in his esteem.

In 1867, Mill described himself to Samuel Wood, a populist politician from Kansas, as 'one who takes as deep and continuous an interest in the political, moral and social progress of the United States as if he were himself an American citizen' ^{xxxiii}. But in 1869, for reasons of work and his advancing years, he turned down the offer of a lecture tour of the United States from the American Social Science Association ^{xxxiv}. Thus Mill died without visiting a country where he would have felt at home.

Notes

i. *Democracy in America* was first published in French in four volumes, the first two in 1835 and the second two in 1840. It became customary to refer to the parts published in 1835 as volume one and those published in 1840 as volume two.

ii See John Stuart Mill, 'State of Society in America', *London Review*, vol. 2, January, 1836, p. 367.

iii Mill, 'M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America', *Collected Works*, vol. xviii, pp. 156-7.

iv *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2

v *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3

vi Mill, 'State of Society in America', p. 371.

vii Mill, 'M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America', *Collected Works*, vol. xviii, p. 171.

viii *Ibid.*, pp. 102-03.

ix John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London, 1861), pp. 254, 257.

x Mill, 'De Tocqueville on Democracy in America', *London Review*, p. 106.

xi *Ibid.*, pp. 304-05.

xii *Ibid.*, p. 112.

xiii Mill, 'M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America', *Collected Works*, vol. xviii, p. 174.

xiv Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 565.

xv Mill, 'De Tocqueville on Democracy in America', p. 92.

xvi Albert William Levi, 'The Value of Freedom: Mill's Liberty (1859-1959)', *Ethics*, vol. 70, p. 37.

xvii Mill, 'M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America', *Collected Works*, vol. xviii, p. 178.

xviii Mill, 'M. de Tocqueville on Democracy in America', *Collected Works*, vol. xviii, p. 178.

xix Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, p. 30.

xx On this issue see Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), chapter 10.

xxi For an analysis of Mill's religion see Alan Millar, 'Mill on religion', *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge, 198), pp. 176-202.

xxii On this issue see Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberty* (Cambridge, 1963).

xxiii Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 106.

xxiv Mill to Sarah Austin, 11 March, 1842, *Collected Works*, vol. xiii, p. 506.

xxv *Daily News*, 2 January, 1850, *Collected Works*, vol. xxv, pp. 1147-51.

xxvi Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, p. 157.

xxvii *Ibid.*, p. 146.

xxviii *Ibid.*, pp. 251-2.

xxix *Ibid.*, pp. 252-3

xxx *Ibid.*, p. 308.

xxxi Reeves, *John Stuart Mill*, p. 334.

xxxii Mill to Roland G. Hazard, 7 June, 1865, *Collected Works*, vol. xvi, p. 1066.

xxxiii Mill to Samuel Wood, 2 June, 1867, *Collected Works*, vol. xvi, p. 1278.

xxxiv Mill to Henry Villard, 19 January, 1869, *Collected Works*, xvii, p. 1550.

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FIRST BOOK GOES OFF FOR CONSERVATION



Thanks to our 2015 crowdfunding campaign, we were recently able to commission the Oxford Conservation Consortium (OCC) to start treating some of our damaged volumes. The books in the library are in various states of repair and an exercise to prioritise which items to be treated first was carried out by Jane Eagan, Head Conservator at the OCC and Anne Manuel, College Librarian. We were all very excited in August when the OCC removed the first book from the Library to be conserved. It was one of the jewels in the collection: Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* inscribed to Mill 'with great respect from the author'. The front page had completely detached and the spine was broken, revealing some very loose stitching. In the picture above Jane Eagan, shows benefactors Christopher

and Margaret Kenyon how she plans to treat the volume to ensure no loss occurs to the book and to enable it to be handled safely in the future.



OCC Conservator Victoria Stevens starts work cleaning prior to re-sewing the volume

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