

# Political Economy Disguised as Fanciful Fables

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## I. Introduction

Ricardo, Malthus and Mill are the traditional "giants" of nineteenth century British economic theory. Contrary to the usual impression, however, all knowledge of political economy did not come from the works of the masters. Parallel to their writings which represented the frontier in economic theory was a collection of publications by the popularizers of political economy. These pioneers in economic education echoed the teachings of the masters and disseminated their ideas in palatable form.

Textbooks in the history of economic thought seldom consider the achievements of the popularizers. Their writings range from entertaining stories to longer publications corresponding to present day textbooks. The differing degrees of sophistication reflect the varied audiences for which they were written. The most sophisticated books were intended as teaching aids for students and may have taught the teachers as well. Compilations of lectures were also published and these generally required a somewhat lower level of education on the part of the reader. At the lower end of the scale were collections of stories designed for children and the laboring classes. These inexpensive primers in political economy were accessible to the barely literate.

Jane Haldimand Marcet (1769-1858), one of the first participants in the popularizing field, published *Conversations on Political*

*Economy in which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained* without the author's name. (Marcet 1816) Drawing heavily on the works of Smith, Malthus, Say and Ricardo, Marcet used a dialogue form of instruction between Mrs. B, the teacher, and Caroline, the student.<sup>1</sup> Intended for readers of above average educational background, the book was immensely successful, running to sixteen editions. It presented political economy to young people and was also read by many women with whom the subject was quite popular. Maria Edgeworth, herself a successful writer, tells us, "It has now become high fashion with blue ladies to talk political economy.... Fine ladies now require that their daughters' governesses should teach political economy." (Lampen Thomson 1973 p. 24) It may well be that the governesses themselves needed the lessons in political economy.

The "Conversations" represents the more sophisticated end of the range of the popularizing works; Marcet's *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* is targeted at very different readers. The advertisement at the front of the book states that the stories were first published by a society interested in the "improvement of the labouring classes" and that "It is for that rank of life that this little work is principally intended." (Marcet 1833, p.3) The book contains nine stories illustrating economic topics: exchange, real income,

<sup>1</sup>Lampen Thomson, Dorothy, *Adam Smith's Daughters*, Exposition Press, New York, 1973, pp. 18-19. This excellent book details the lives of six women economists from the eighteenth century to the present.

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wages, prices, employment, population and emigration, poor relief, machines and foreign trade. The book centers on John Hopkins, an agricultural worker with a large family. It is this collection that I will compare with Millicent Fawcett's later stories in the same genre.

Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929) is better known to readers, possibly because of her long advocacy of suffrage for women. Like Jane Marcet, she wrote on many subjects and was most successful. Also like Marcet, she published two works in the field of economic education, on two different levels. Her *Political Economy for Beginners*, first published in 1870, “explains as briefly as possible the most important principles of the science” and “would perhaps be an assistance to those who are desirous of introducing the study of Political Economy into schools.” (Fawcett 1884, Preface) Each chapter includes discussion questions at the end and might be compared with study guides accompanying modern textbooks. The book went into ten editions in 41 years, “a pre-Samuelson record.” (Lampen Thomson, p 45) Fawcett subsequently published *Tales in Political Economy* in 1874. (Fawcett 1874) It is a collection of four stories which “may be useful to those students who find that some of the puzzles [of economics] carry them out of their depth.” (Fawcett 1884) She suggests that “these little tales may be useful to those trying to teach Political Economy” since they hide “the powder, Political Economy, in the raspberry jam of a story.” (Fawcett 1874 Preface) Thus, readers are to be fed a dollop of jam as they are led to such topics as the efficiency of exchange, productivity and the division of labor, the standard of living, the benefits of international trade and so forth.

More than forty years separate the *Tales of Political Economy* from *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* and a comparison of the two may be revealing. The time interval, 1833 to 1874, is a significant one in

the development of the British economy and each group of stories should reflect the concerns of the readers of the day, since they were written to sell widely. The specific question to be addressed is: are the revolutionary economic changes in British society over this period reflected in these two books designed for lay readers?

## II. Marcet: *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy*

*John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* was a primer on political economy for the laboring classes. Approximately two of every three working men could read in some fashion in this period, although the proportion who could have read this particular book may have been smaller. (Thompson 1964 p 713) The stories explored the economic questions of the day, particularly those thought to be relevant to a person near the bottom of the economic ladder. At a time when income distribution had become more unequal and much of the working class remained near the subsistence level, the books may have been intended to convince the working poor that their lot could not have been better than it was. (Thompson 1964 p 318) The stories are well written and the economic ideas presented in a fresh, palatable manner. Those readers who completed the book would have been introduced to ideas which troubled many in society.

John Hopkins, the principal character of these stories, is an agricultural laborer with a wife and a large family. He lives in the countryside in a setting which is touched only lightly by the industrial revolution. His life appears quite stable, but it is a life where opportunity knocks not at all. He is uncowed by the death of several of his children, but he questions how life might have been different for himself and those he brought into the world. As an introduction to the book, I have set out in Table 1, a summary of the story

TABLE 1. Summary of John Hopkins's "Notions"

Story Title	Subject	Primary Question
The Rich and the Poor: A Fairy Tale	Income Distribution	Do the luxuries of the rich help or hurt the poor?
Wages: A Fairy Tale	The level of wages	Can wages be maintained at higher than equilibrium levels?
The Three Giants	Productivity of Nature	Can a high standard of living be achieved in a society where nature has been generous?
Population and Etc.; or, The Old World	Family Size	What is the relationship between family size and the level of wages?
Emigration; or, A New World	Population	Why are wages and living standards high in America?
The Poor's Rate; or, The Treacherous Friend	Poor Relief	Does poor relief ultimately help or hurt the poor?
Machinery; or, Cheap Goods and Dear Goods	Productivity of Machinery	Have machines brought an increase in the standard of living?
Foreign Trade; or, The Wedding Gown	Imports	Does importation of goods displace British workers?
The Corn Trade; or, The Price of Bread	Food prices	Should the corn laws be repealed?

titles, the subjects, and the primary questions dealt with for each of the nine stories.

The summary table shows clearly that the overwhelming concern of the book is poverty. In fact, poverty is an umbrella topic covering three other closely related subjects: wages, income distribution and poor relief. The four primary subjects give the book a pre-industrial cast and reflect a society where prosperity is neither around the corner nor down the street.

Including a secondary set of recurrent topics produces only a scant indication that the industrial revolution occurred in this same country. These topics include: 1) the burden of too many children, 2) the effect of machines, and 3) the lack of employment opportunities. Allowing for the fact that the stories are told in a rural setting, there is still little evidence of their being written in a country that had experienced an industrial revolution.

Merely listing the subjects of Hopkins's questions fails to convey the flavor of this

remarkable little book. Its style, while somewhat dated, is most appealing even to the modern reader. To illustrate, I have chosen one passage for each of the seven recurrent topics.

John Hopkins speaks:

It is the will of God that children should die if their parents do not provide for them so that they may live. And when there is no small-pox, why the sickly ones are carried off by the measles or hooping cough [sic] nay, even a cold will do the work; for die some of them *must*, when there is not food to rear them all. (Marcet, 1833, p 79)

Poverty

Hopkins' son Dick speaks:

A rise of wages, in a fair and natural way, is a very good thing . . . When wages rise because there is a greater demand for workmen, we are all the better for it, master and man too; but when they rise from a foolish and arbitrary law, it does us all harm instead of good; and it is to be hoped that those who made it will soon see the folly of it, and bring us back to the natural wages. (p 25)

Wages

Hopkins concludes:

*Income  
Distri-  
bution*

Why then, after all, the rich and the poor have but one and the same interest—that is very strange! I always thought they had been as wide apart as the east is from the west! But now I am convinced that the comforts of the poor are derived from the riches of the rich. (p. 14)

Farmer Stubbs decries the poor rates:

*Poor  
Relief*

When the large families are there, and distress and poverty keep close at their heels, then the poor's rate lends a helping hand, it is true. But it is a treacherous friend, that pretends to do a mighty deal of good by giving you a mouthful, after it has taken away a whole meal. You don't think of the lost meal, because you never saw it, and don't understand it. But just think a bit: if this enormous sum of money, instead of being paid in the poor's rate, was employed in setting people to work; why, the poor would earn the same money by labor that they get now as paupers, and the hard-working and industrious would come in for the best share, which now falls to the lot of idle vagabonds. (p. 117)

Hopkins' wife laments:

*The burden  
of too many  
children*

Ay, it is very hard that I, who have brought sixteen children into the world, and worked as one may say, day and night, should not be able to give them clothes to their backs, nor a hearty meal of wholesom [sic] food; no, nor a bit of learning to lift them on in the world. (p. 68–69)

Hopkins relates a story told him by Spires, a man experienced in mills. In the story an old woman who spins by hand claims that times were better before factories. She was asked:

*The effect  
of  
machines*

what she paid for stockings in the days of her youth? 'Nothing at all' answered she; 'for I was fain to go barefooted; stockings were too dear, and we never found the want of them.' [Spires] 'Then why not do without them now and spend the money in something you do want? But me thinks you would be loathe to part with the pair of worsted stockings that keeps your feet so warm and comfortable; and your grandchildren would not be willing to part with theirs either, for the comfort or the look of it.' [Old Woman] 'There's no need we should . . . they are cheap enough now for us to afford to wear them.' [Spires] 'because they were woven in a loom, and made

with half of the labor that was bestowed on them, when they were knitted.' (p. 133–134)

Hopkins' wife speaks:

*Lack of  
Employment  
Oppor-  
tunities*

You know what a hard matter we have had to place out Dick and Nance [older children] and now that I am looking out for Jenny, there is nothing to be had. I sent her after Farmer Wilkins place but there were no less than six girls about it already; so they underbid each other, and one of them got it, who offered to go for nothing more than her board and a pair of shoes a year. (p. 69)

The preoccupation of the characters shown here is the effort required to obtain life's basics: food and clothing. The families are close to the margin of subsistence and adversity would lead to even more strained circumstances.

The number of times that a particular subject appears in each story and throughout the book should be some indication of its importance to the author and readers. Accordingly, I have constructed Table 2, a frequency table indicating the number of times that each of the four poverty related topics is mentioned in the nine stories. The story title is given in the left column with the number of pages in the story indicated in parentheses.

Table 2 shows clearly that the focus of these stories is poverty. The pursuit of food casts a shadow on every day for John Hopkins and his wife. They live with no guarantee that even life's necessities can be obtained by their hard labor and best intentions. Life is fragile where half of a family's children may be lost and only the sturdiest adults may reach 50. Poor relief is the last resort for those residing in the countryside and those who labor in the cities may lack even that.

"John Hopkins's Notions" suggests a society that is simple, rural and poor. Yet we know British society in the 1830's was more diverse than that portrayed in this storybook of political economy. Both the elegant life of the rich and the desperation of the rioters seen in other

TABLE 2. Frequency Analysis of Marcet's "Hopkins," By Individual Story

Story Title	Subject	Poverty	Wages	Income Distribution	Poor Relief
The Rich and The Poor (10)		10	1	9	0
Wages (15)		9	34	4	0
The Three Giants (37)		11	8	1	0
Population; or The Old World (15)		18	21	3	0
Emigration; or, A New World (18)		9	4	0	2
The Poor's Rate; or, The Treacherous Friend (22)		31	18	10	51
Machinery; or, Cheap Goods and Dear Goods (25)		22	16	9	1
Foreign Trade; or, The Wedding Gown (21)		5	0	0	1
The Corn Trade (19)		15	0	4	0
Total		130	102	40	55

sources are missing in Marcet. Nevertheless, poverty and over-population are recurring concerns as the recent debate on the standard of living during the industrial revolution confirms.<sup>2</sup> Millicent Fawcett's book, written 40 years later, will show a quite different orientation.

### III. Fawcett: *Tales of Political Economy*

Fawcett's *Tales of Political Economy*, written in 1874, reflects Smith's harmony of interest and Mill's anticipation of a favorable

economic future.<sup>3</sup> That the book is inspired by Harriet Martineau's work, Fawcett quickly acknowledges in the preface. Like Marcet, her stories show an acceptance of Say's Law, the doctrine of the Wages Fund, and a commitment to free enterprise and free trade.

Unlike Marcet's stories, Millicent Fawcett's book has a bright and optimistic tone. It is a series of four stories told to the author by an old sailor, Captain Adam. The first story relates his adventures in visiting an island colony of Dutch descendants located "in the Indian Ocean to the west of the island of

<sup>2</sup>For a summary of the debate, see Arthur J. Taylor, ed., *The Standard of Living in Britain in the Industrial Revolution*, Methuen, London, 1975.

<sup>3</sup>In fact, Mill was a close personal friend who shared both Fawcett's interest in economics and a commitment to extend suffrage to women.

TABLE 3. Summary of Fawcett's "Tales"

Story Title	Subject	Primary Question
The Srimats	Productivity of native industry	Why forego the advantages of trade and instead devote capital and labor to protected domestic production?
The Shipwrecked Sailors	Productivity/Division of labor	What benefits are to be derived from specialization of production and exchange of products?
Isle Pleasant	Rise of real income	How does the introduction of money facilitate a rising standard of living?
The Islanders Experience of Foreign Trade	Benefit of international trade	How can both parties gain from international trade?

Sumatra." This story illustrates the benefits of free trade and the cost incurred by protection of native industry. The residents of the island, who are called the Srimats, are required by their ruling council to use domestically produced palm oil to light their homes during daytime hours and are forbidden to have windows or light from any other source. Captain Adam suggests that the islanders could raise their standard of living by using the sun's natural light for their homes and by freeing the two-thirds of the island's population engaged in palm oil production for other work. The islanders perceive this as a threat to their livelihood and chase Captain Adam from their island.

The remaining three stories center on an isolated Pacific island where Captain Adam and some twenty passengers and crew were shipwrecked. Using the popular Robinson Crusoe theme, Fawcett describes the growth of their economy from salvage and barter to one using money and engaged in active trade with the city of San Francisco. As an introduction to the book, I have constructed Table 3, a summary table which contains the story titles, the subjects and the primary questions addressed for each of the four stories.

The conclusion that should be drawn from the summary table is that the Fawcett book reflects a society of prosperity, not poverty. The last three stories, in particular, show a society undergoing economic growth and a rapidly rising standard of living. The relative affluence of the islanders is indicated in the

book by their demographic experience. During the first ten years on the island, the population grows from 23 to 50; only two deaths occur over this same period. (Fawcett 1874 p 42) After 20 years on the island, they are discovered by the crew of a British ship, whose captain offers to take the entire company back to England. Only twelve persons accept this offer, the rest choosing to remain on Isle Pleasant. (p 50-51)

As in the Marcet book, certain topics recur intermittently through the book. In the *Tales in Political Economy* these primary topics are 1) the productivity/specialization of labor, 2) the efficiency of exchange, 3) the standard of living/real income and 4) the benefits of international trade. The secondary topics, which are explored but not repeated in every story are 1) the functions of money, 2) Say's Law and 3) the principle of comparative advantage. These ideas are illustrated in the following passages, each chosen to represent one of the primary or secondary topics, given at the left of the quotation.

After they were shipwrecked, the islanders constructed shelters individually with lackluster and sometimes painful results. Then:

these various misfortunes made everybody see how much better things would go on if the carpenter did all the carpentering that was needed by the little colony. If the carpenter hired the tools of Green, Green would lose nothing, for the carpenter could give him more for the loan of them than anyone else because no one could make such good use of them as the carpenter. The carpenter would also be a gainer,

TABLE 4. Frequency Analysis of Fawcett's "Tales", By Individual Story

Story Title	Subject	Productivity/ Specialization of Labor	Efficiency of Exchange	Standard of Living/Real Income	Benefits of International Trade
The Scrimats (13)		5	0	6	5
The Shipwrecked Sailors (38)		11	6	17	1
Isle Pleasant (27)		3	2	3	0
The Islanders Experience of Foreign Trade (26)		2	2	5	10
Total		21	10	31	16

*Productivity/  
Division  
of Labor*

because he would then be able to turn his skill in his trade to the best account, and would get all his wants supplied by his companions in return for the services he rendered to them. Finally, the entire colony would gain by the carpenter having the use of the tools; for instead of chopping off their toes, brusing their fingers, and spoiling the tools, with the worst possible result in the carpentering line, they now saved their own skin, the tools were not injured, their carpentering was well done . . . It was therefore agreed on all hands that everyone should find out what he or she could do best, and stick to it. (p 18-19)

The lesson on productivity was combined with a similar one on exchange:

just as everyone who earns his own living can best obtain the necessaries and comforts of life by applying himself to the one particular occupation in which he can do his best; he exchanges the result of his labour for the result of the labour of other people and by this means a person of quite ordinary capacity obtains a degree of comfort and luxury which no man, however clever and however industrious he might be, could furnish himself with if he relied solely on what he was able to produce directly with his own labour (pp 18-19)

*The  
Efficiency  
of Exchange*

Nature treated the "Pleasant People" kindly and one day they discovered some remarkable plantain trees on an adjacent island. It was a most fortunate discovery as:

they had now a new source of obtaining both food and clothing; that no more labour need be expended in the cultivation of corn; they would be able to provide themselves with a variety of excellent food free of all labour except that of bringing the fruit from the place where it grew to their own island . . . In less than a year there was not one of the former corn growers who did not confess, if not to his neighbors, at least to himself, that he had been a great gainer by the discovery of the plantain trees. The degree of comfort, and even luxury, possessed by everyone on the island had increased fourfold in consequence of finding these friendly trees. Food was now secured to everyone almost free of cost; the greater part of the labour that it was formerly necessary to give to obtain daily bread was now set free and it found new employment in those industries that added to the comfort and enjoyment of life. (pp. 33, 40-41)

*The Stan-  
dard of  
living/  
Real  
Income*

As real income rose on the island, a surplus was created which allowed the Pleasant People to begin trade abroad. Soon Captain Adam sailed for San Francisco laden with products from every industry on the island. The islanders were pleased with the results of their exchanges with the San Franciscans as:

both San Francisco and Isle Pleasant were benefitted by trade carried on in this manner, for the island now shared in those commodities which San Francisco had a special advantage in producing, whilst San Francisco enjoyed a similar benefit in sharing those articles for the production of which the island was specially well adapted . . . The whole secret of the advantage of foreign trade is, that it enables each country to apply its labour and capital as far as possible to those industries in which its advantages are the greatest, or in which its disadvantages are the least. Considered in this way, free trade between nations is an extension of the principle of division of labour. It sets nations free to do those things which they can do best; just as division of labour sets individual men and women free to do that kind of work which they can do best. (pp 91, 99)

During the course of their development, the islanders had learned the disadvantage of having to make all exchanges by barter. There was:

a great deal of talk about the inconvenience of having no money to make purchases with, and two or three suggestions were made to adopt some natural product of the island as money, and make all exchanges by means of this product. The plan was even tried of using cocoa-nuts for money; they were not at all plentiful in the island; and to procure them required a considerable amount of exertion, as they grew in distant places, and they were very generally valued for their own sakes, as the milk they contained was very refreshing and the nut itself was wholesome and nutritious. They had, therefore, the two necessary elements of value, i.e., they were useful in themselves, and there was some difficulty obtaining them . . . But, although the cocoa-nuts possessed one quality, 'intrinsic value,' which made it possible to use them as money for the purpose of carrying on all exchanges, in two other qualities which should characterize the substance used as money they were found wanting, to a

*The  
functions  
of money*

degree that soon led to the abandonment of the idea that they could be used as money. In the first place, although they had considerable intrinsic value, this value varied very much from time to time. Besides the inconvenience arising from their frequent variations in value, the cocoa nuts were extremely unsuited to be used as money in another respect . . . The bulk of cocoa-nuts in proportion to their value was so great that it formed the strongest possible objection to their use as the medium of exchange . . . but their unsuitability was made evident in another way . . . It was very difficult to use the nuts to make small payments. If a cocoa-nut were divided into twelve equally valuable parts, every one of these, except the shell, would be less valuable a day after it was divided, because the pieces exposed to the air would become first dry and chippy, and then positively bad. (pp 54, 55, 57, 58)

Luckily, the islanders recovered a sea chest containing British coins. Trade was facilitated by the convenience of the new money, yet the Pleasant people continued to believe that:

the only demand for labour is that which is ready to supply commodities to the labourer in exchange for those which his toil produces. If you demand commodities, you must supply the labourer who produces them with an equivalent value of some other commodities or services. So demand and supply cannot increase independently of each other. If demand increases, supply must increase at the same time. (p 24)

Say's Law

In the last story, the inhabitants of Isle Pleasant are seen to be enjoying the abundance of their island and the benefits of prosperity and trade. Their well-being has been enhanced by an exchange of matting woven on the island for leather boots and other products brought from San Francisco. They conclude that:

Sometimes, owing to the greater fertility of the soil and other natural advantages, such as geographical position and the skill and industry of the population, one country has greater facility than the other with which it trades in producing every kind of commodity; that is to say, that the same amount of labour and capital produces a greater return in every branch of industry in one country than in another. Yet between two such countries a trade advantageous to

each may be carried on . . . Although the San Franciscans have the advantage in every kind of industry, their advantage is less in some industries than in others; and if their advantage over the islanders is less, for instance, in the production of matting than in the production of leather goods, a trade might be set up which would be permanently advantageous to each country. (pp. 94-95)

Again using the assumption that the number of times that a particular subject appears in the work is some indication of its importance to both readers and author, I have constructed Table 4, a frequency table similar to that drawn up for "John Hopkins's Notions." It indicates the number of times that each of the four major topics is mentioned in the four stories. The story title is given in the left column with the number of pages in the story shown in parentheses.

Two topics are mentioned most frequently: 1) productivity/specialization of labor and 2) standard of living/real income. The frequency of appearance of these two positive indicators of economic development reflects the overall mood of the book; it is one of well-being. Here is a prosperous, productive and harmonious economy. Optimism prevails and the Islanders can anticipate that enterprise, diligence and thrift will be rewarded to benefit both themselves and their children.

#### IV: Comparison of the Two Books

The two books appear to have quite different perspectives: Marcet's with poverty and Fawcett's with prosperity. To test that initial finding, I will compare the two books directly. Frequency Table 2, drawn up to analyze the subjects appearing in "John Hopkins" will be applied to the *Tales of Political Economy* and Table 4 which was used to analyze the subjects in the "Tales" will be applied to *John Hopkins's Notions of Political Economy*. Each "cross frequency" table will show whether the subjects frequently mentioned in one book also appear often in the other. If,

TABLE 5. Cross-Frequency Analysis of "John Hopkins's Notions" Fawcett's Subjects, By Individual Story

Story Title	Subject	Productivity/ Specialization of Labor	Efficiency of Exchange	Standard of Living/Real Income	Benefits of International Trade
The Rich and The Poor (10)		0	0	11	0
Wages (15)		0	0	10	0
The Three Giants (37)		0	3	12	1
Population; or, The Old World (15)		0	0	4	0
Emigration; or, A New World (18)		0	0	6	1
The Poor's Rate; or, The Treacherous Friend (22)		0	0	4	0
Machinery; or, Cheap Goods and Dear Goods (25)		7	0	12	0
Foreign Trade; or, The Wedding Gown (21)		0	3	4	10
The Corn Trade (19)		0	0	6	3

however, the concerns and questions are as different as they appear, little correspondence will be discovered between the subjects of the two books. In Table 5, if the four primary subjects of Fawcett's concerns were not Marcet's concerns as well, the table will show the lack of correspondence by containing many zero elements. The story title is given in the left column with the number of pages in the story indicated in parentheses.

Table 5 indicates that three of the primary topics of Fawcett's "Tales" are infrequently mentioned in Marcet's "Notions." These are 1) productivity/specialization of labor, 2) the efficiency of exchange and 3) the benefits of international trade. One subject, the standard of living/real income is frequently mentioned

and this requires explanation. Two reasons account for this repeated occurrence. First, poverty—the subject of Marcet's book—is simply a low level of real income. Second, treatment of the subjects differs in the two books. In Marcet, the individuals in the story are near the margin of subsistence and the level of real income is crucial to them. In Fawcett, the characters enjoy a high standard of living within a productive and efficient economy. Thus, the application of Fawcett's primary topics to "John Hopkins's Notions" seems to confirm the initial finding that the focus of the two books is quite different.

Application of Marcet's four primary topics to Fawcett's "Tales" is displayed in Table 6. If the subjects of concern in "John Hopkins's

TABLE 6. Cross-Frequency Analysis of *Tales in Political Economy* Using Marcet's Subjects, By Individual Story

Story Title	Subject	Poverty	Wages	Income Distribution	Poor Relief
The Srimats (13)		2	0	2	0
The Shipwrecked Sailors (38)		1	0	6	0
Isle Pleasant (27)		0	6	1	0
The Islanders Experience of Foreign Trade (26)		0	3	4	0

Notions" fail to appear in Fawcett's "Tales," the table will contain many zero elements. In Table 6, the story title is given in the left column and the number of pages in the story indicated in parentheses.

Table 6 reveals that the primary focus of Marcet's book—poverty—is mentioned only three times in Fawcett's "Tales." Wages and income distribution are mentioned more often and this suggests further study. The subject of the distribution of income arises in each of the four stories. Reexamination of each case shows that in eleven of the thirteen times which the subject appears, the cause is a realignment of trade patterns rather than an inquiry into the class structure of long run income shares found in Marcet. The subject of wages is raised nine times in the last two stories. In eight of nine cases, the idea is presented within the context of a link between wages and prices and hence, is quite different from Marcet's pursuit of the level of wages in relation to the cost of bread. While it may seem on the surface that there is some repetition of Marcet's topics in Fawcett's "Tales," further study refutes this idea. The treatment of the topics in question—income distribution and wages—is different in the two collections of stories. Thus the initial finding is confirmed: the books share little common ground and they reflect two dissimilar economic worlds.

### V. Conclusion

The popularizing of political economy was an important task in the nineteenth century. It was conducted on several levels simultaneously, ranging from the fictionalized political economy seen here to curricula of the Mechanics Institutes and even to the writings of the disciples of the masters such as Torrens and McCulloch. The Mechanics Institutes, for example, played a significant part in adult education by preaching the elements of economics to artisans; Thomas Chalmers be-

lieved that political economy had a definite role as "a sedative to all sorts of turbulence and disorder." (Berg 1980, p 163) This paper has dealt with only one fraction of a diverse field which deserves detailed assessment.

Jane Marcet was among the earliest entrants into the popularizing field, publishing her *Conversations on Political Economy* in 1816. She had an engaging manner which enticed reluctant students into the study of political economy. While the popularizing done by some authors has been described as "middle-class propaganda of the crudest kind," (Berg p 163) Marcet was highly regarded by her contemporaries. An article in the *Edinburgh Review*, April 1833, commenting on her *John Hopkins's Notions of Political Economy*, paid the following tribute:

Popular priestesses have arisen. And they have fortunately undertaken to preach the practical truths and blessings of the science, rather than its mysteries and creed. Mrs. Marcet has resumed her valuable labours in the unpretending little volume that heads our article. It is delightfully written, and is admirably adapted, by plain straightforward sense, for its virtuous purpose—the improvement of the labouring classes. It is intended to do for the uneducated generally, what her well-known "Conversations on Political Economy" had before done (and most successfully) for young and controversy-hating students.<sup>4</sup>

Comparing Jane Marcet with the better known Harriet Martineau, the article concluded: "Mrs. Marcet has less of imagination and of poetry about her. But we feel, while with her, that we are in the hands of a more judicious reasoner, and a surer guide."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, even Ricardo came under her spell, recommending her writings to his daughter. (Hutchison 1978, p 43) J. B. Say praised Marcet as "the only woman who has written on political economy and shown herself superior even to men." (Lee, 1893, p 123) Still

<sup>4</sup>"Illustrations of Political Economy," *The Edinburgh Review*, CXV, April 1833, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

this is less than the claim made by the author of the *Critical Dictionary of English Literature* who credits Marcet with doing "as much to familiarize scientific pursuits to the public as any writer of the age." (Kirk 1897, p 1218)

This paper sought to discover whether the economic circumstances of the early years of the nineteenth century were reflected in Marcet's stories and whether Fawcett's stories, written forty years later, reflected the revolutionary economic changes that had occurred over the interval. All evidence presented indicates that Marcet's book mirrored well the precarious poverty of most common folk. The crucial issue of income distribution addressed by Ricardo resurfaces in these stories for the education of the laboring classes.

Forty years later, Millicent Fawcett, using the pictorial medium of desert island stories, was addressing a new generation. English society had been transformed by the industrial revolution: railroads and steamships, the adoption of free trade, and the opening of overseas sources of cheap food and raw materials had produced a new England. At the beginning of the 1870's, Britain reached her peak as the first industrialized country and was producing nearly one-third of the world's output of manufactured goods.<sup>6</sup> Average real wages (allowing for unemployment) rose by thirty-eight percent between 1850 and 1875. (Mitchell and Deane 1962, pp 343-344) This increase in the standard of living of workers resulted in rising consumption levels. If we take the fifty years, 1825-1875, the consumption of tea per head of the population increased over threefold from 1.31 to 4.43 lbs and that of sugar from 16.44 to 59.35 lbs; in 1876 the consumption of beer was 36 gallons per head—an all-time high. (Mitchell and Deane, p 356-357) A contemporary observer, Sir Robert Giffen, reviewing the previous

half-century in 1886, summarized the progress as follows:

The great rise of money wages among labourers of every class, coupled with stationary or even falling prices of commodities on the average, the all but universal shortening of hours of labour, the decline of pauperism, the enormously increased consumption of the luxuries of the masses, the improvement in the rate of mortality—these and other facts combine to prove that there has been a great general advance in well-being among the masses of the community. (Giffen 1890)

A recent authority on the history of diet in England in the nineteenth century confirms this picture in the following words:

Most are agreed that from some date around the Great Exhibition [1851] onwards the wealth derived from Britain's predominant industrial and commercial position began to be shared to a growing extent by all sections of the community, and that for the first time the working class as a whole began to enjoy a taste of the prosperity which was making us the richest nation the world has ever seen. (Burnett 1968, p 123)

The substantial improvement which had occurred in the standard of living of Britain's workers by the 1870's was strongly reflected in Millicent Fawcett's book. The dwellers of Isle Pleasant enjoyed an increasing level of well-being as had the workers of London and Liverpool. The optimism of Mill seemed justified by the experience of the islanders of the South Seas as well as those of the North Atlantic. In contrast to the preoccupation with poverty exhibited in Jane Marcet's stories written during the 1830's, Fawcett's stories in the 1870's proclaimed the triumph of productivity and free trade over pauperism. The dismal doctrines of Malthus no longer were fashionable.

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<sup>6</sup>League of Nations, *Industrialization and Foreign Trade*, Geneva, 1945, p. 13.

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