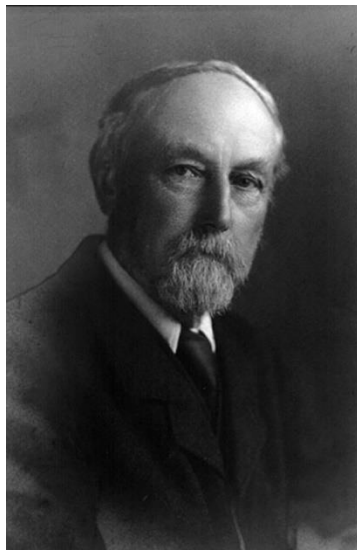




## HENRY SALT (1851-1939)

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*Portrait of Henry S. Salt (1851-1939). Black and white photograph, 1928, Wikimedia Commons.*

Henry Shakespear Stephens Salt is best known today for *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (1892), although he also published widely on other social and humanitarian causes. Peter Singer hails this volume as “the best of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works on animal rights” (viii), noting further that there is little that subsequent animal rights advocates can add to this prescient and pivotal text. In his own day, Salt was also known for his literary criticism, publishing two volumes on Percy Bysshe Shelley alone, as well as other biographies and analyses of Alfred Tennyson, Thomas de Quincey, and the writings of Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau in particular was to prove influential on Salt’s life and work.

Salt was born in Nynee Tal, India, to Colonel Thomas Salt and Ellen Matilda Salt; the latter returned to England with her young son in 1852, her husband remaining in India. Salt spent the majority of his early years with his maternal grandparents, the Allnatts, in the Shrewsbury area. Despite writing two autobiographies – *Seventy Years Among Savages* (1921) and *Company I Have Kept* (1930), Salt himself was rather reticent on his early years. Biographer George Hendrick notes, however, that Salt’s childhood was

happy and filled with valuable friendships made in Shrewsbury, and at both Eton College and Cambridge University, where he majored in classics (*Henry Salt* 9).

Returning to Eton in 1875 as a master, after completing his studies at Cambridge, Salt befriended James Leigh Joynes, Jr., who was to prove pivotal in developing Salt's interest in advocacy and social justice. Joynes had long been active in socialist circles and introduced Salt to many other reformers, such as John Burns, Edward Carpenter, Eleanor Marx, William Morris, and George Bernard Shaw. Joynes's sister Catherine (Kate) shared their interest in social reform and in 1897 she and Salt were married.

Largely as a result of his intense interest in Shelley, particularly his writing on vegetarianism, Salt became dissatisfied with his life at Eton. Shelley's work was influential on both poetry and social reform in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but was out of favour with many of Salt's colleagues at Eton, and ultimately became a source of conflict. Salt characterized the other masters as "cannibals in cap and gown[...] living by the sweat and toil of the classes that do the hard work of the world" (*Seventy* 28). In 1884, he left his teaching post to live simply in a labourer's cottage in Tilford, Surrey. This afforded him the time to concentrate on his humanitarian endeavours and his writing. Salt was a prolific writer, publishing over 40 books on various social causes from prison reform to nature conservation, in addition to his literary work and two memoirs of his time at Eton.

Given his interests, it is not surprising that Salt, in his one contribution to *The Yellow Book*, was eager to call attention to the poetry of a fellow social reformer. In his Volume 11 essay, "John Barlas's Poetry" (Oct. 1896), Salt was among the first to appreciate Barlas's work publicly. In this piece, Salt quotes extensively from Barlas's sonnets, praising their artistic merit and passionate love of nature. Comparing Barlas's early work to that of Shelley and Algernon Swinburne, Salt observes that, while not overtly incorporating a socialist agenda, a "fiery impatience of privilege, authority, commercialism breathes through all the writings" (81) and, as such, ought not to be overlooked by the literary establishment. Despite his admiration of Barlas's poetry and commitment to social causes, Salt nonetheless provides a balanced analysis, noting that

Barlas's dramatic works take themselves too seriously, a "fatal" flaw in their execution that diminishes their impact (86). Salt concludes his essay with further praise of the writer, and notes that a new volume of his selected poetry is about to be released.

It is not clear whether or not Salt was personally acquainted with Barlas prior to the publication of his appreciative essay in *The Yellow Book*; the two may have met via their mutual association with the Social Democratic Federation or merely through Barlas's writing (Krishnamurti n.p.). Certainly after October 1896 they carried on a lengthy correspondence until Barlas's death in 1914. Salt included Barlas in *Songs of Freedom* (1893), an edited anthology of English and American poetry focused on the ideals of revolution, and edited a collection of Barlas's own work, *Selections from the Poems of John E. Barlas* (1925). He also praises the poet in his autobiography as a "genius" (*Seventy* 85), finding it strange that the poet's work continued to be overlooked after his death.

In addition to his prolific literary output, Salt co-founded the Humanitarian League in 1891 and worked tirelessly, until the League's dissolution in 1919, to lobby for both animal rights and social reforms, including women's suffrage, child labour, criminal law, and prison reform. Kate died in 1919, and Salt married Catherine Mandeville, his former housekeeper, in 1927. He carried on writing, summing up his humanitarian principles in a final volume published in 1936, *The Creed of Kinship*. Plagued by ill health in his final years, Salt died in Brighton on April 19, 1939, survived by his second wife.

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