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THE LESSONS OF A LIFE:  
HARRIET MARTINEAU.

A Lecture

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SUNDAY LECTURE SOCIETY,

ST. GEORGE'S HALL, LANGHAM PLACE,

ON

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, 11th MARCH, 1877.

BY

FLORENCE FENWICK MILLER.

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- b. Her religious growth.
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of a life which she gave to the world  
and the world has not forgotten her  
name.

## THE LESSONS OF A LIFE: HARRIET MARTINEAU.



ON a summery evening in the month of June, in last year, there was quenched one of the shining lights of our time. After such a lifetime as falls to the lot of but few human beings—still more of but few women; after a long life of physical suffering, and of such torture as could be inflicted on such a mind by misrepresentation, slander, and abuse of her convictions; but withal a life full of work, full of thought, full of purpose, and crowned with result—on that day Harriet Martineau ended her labours, and entered into eternal rest.

All England felt that one of the most remarkable women that ever lived had departed from amidst us. Perhaps she has had really no predecessor in history, if we except Deborah, who dispensed judgment from her seat under the palm-tree to all Israel. Other women have had an equal and a greater influence upon the course of events in their own time, but not under anything like analogous circumstances. Aspasia ruled by the impress of her great mind upon the great men who sat at her feet, and Madame de Pompadour and not a few others have ruled by the power which passion lent them over men who swayed the destinies of states; while Elizabeth of England and Catherine of Russia were placed by birth in a position which gave scope for the exercise of their natural powers of government. But Harriet Martineau was born to no high station; her influence was not the backstairs influence of the beautiful and intriguing favourite; she was not even hidden from view, while the credit of her thoughts and deeds was usurped, by any man whatever. She was a political power in our land; our highest statesmen asked and followed her wise counsel;

thinking for herself, and uttering her thoughts fearlessly, she gained respect for her opinions when she gave them her name, and wrote words winged with power to find their way straight to men's hearts even when they were not known as her utterances. Taking into account the effect of her acknowledged writings (such as her 'Tales in Political Economy,' and her 'Illustrations of Taxation'), the direct influence which she had with various leaders of politics, and the unknown extent to which she educated men as a leader-writer and reviewer, it will be seen how much she has impressed herself upon her time, and what political power she has exercised.

The story of such a life cannot fail to be fraught with both the keenest interest and the highest and most important lessons, over and above those which may be gained from every good biography. Probably no life, even the most insignificant, could be truthfully delineated without conveying some new thought, some fresh lesson, to the wise and careful student of human nature. But if this is so with even the careers which are as commonplace as the story of any one blade of grass, or any one grain of sand upon the sea-shore, how much more must it not be so when the subject of study is a life so full of variety and of individuality as that of Harriet Martineau?

The lessons which we may learn here, and carry away with us to our daily task, are of a twofold character. First, there are the lessons which are given indirectly by the moulding influences of her life. There is a keen interest in watching the growth of a flower, of a fish, or any other mere physical development; but there is far more in tracing the processes by which a mind has increased to its full strength and beauty. We cannot but eagerly strive to see how this one particular mind became greater than its fellows; what are the conditions which seem to have aided and what those which have trammelled its progress? Secondly, there are the direct lessons which this teacher of men spent her life in enforcing; the lessons taught in her written words, and living in the printed page upon which the eyes of so many have rested, and have yet to rest.

And foremost among these lessons is one for me in my present position—one which Harriet Martineau taught both by precept and example—that of complete candour in speaking

of the impressions produced upon me by her works and the record of her life. In the preface to her 'Biographical Sketches,' reprinted from the *Daily News*, she says:

"The true principle of biographical delineation . . . is to tell, in the spirit of justice, the whole truth about the characters of persons important enough to have their lives publicly treated at all. . . . In old age, and on the borders of the grave, what do distinguished persons desire for themselves? How do they like the prospect of sickly praise, of the magnifying of the trifles of their days, of any playing fast and loose with right and wrong for the sake of their repute, of any cheating of society of its rights in their experience of mistake and failure, as well as of gain and achievement? Do they not claim to be measured with the same measure with which they mete their fellows,—to leave the world, not under any sort of disguise, but delivering over their lives, if at all, in their genuine aspect and condition,—to be known hereafter, if at all, for what they are?"

After these words of precept for those who, in any way, shall speak of her life after she has ceased to be, there comes the example of her own biographical sketches. These short essays, which treat of a large proportion of the eminent statesmen, philosophers, and scientific and literary men and women who have died within the last fifteen years, are truly noteworthy for their candour, and a lesson in that respect to all future memoir writers. They are candid not only in blaming—candour which is all verjuice is only spite called by another name; but praise and appreciation are given to the worthy works and the noble qualities of even those who had proved incapable of reaching a high standard of moral and mental excellence in every respect. Two of these short memoirs are those of Lockhart and John Wilson Croker. A reference to the autobiography will show how bitterly Harriet Martineau felt the treatment which she received at the hands of these men (of which I must speak again farther on). But no reader of the notices of their lives would guess that the writer who gives them all the credit which was their due for wit and ability was a woman whom they had joined themselves together to pursue for years with insult, slander, and misrepresentation. On the other hand, her dearest friends, as Lord Durham, are treated with a calm, dispassionate consideration, answering that requirement of honesty laid down in the words which I have quoted.

The first lesson, therefore, which meets me is one for



myself—one given by my illustrious subject both in words and in deeds; to say honestly the truth which I see, not to yield to the natural inclination to speak only of that which we must all reverence—her greatness of mind and life, but *if there be spots upon the sun* which has lightened so much darkness, to recognise their presence, though it be half-concealed by the glory, and account for them as best we may.

First, then, let me say that I am somewhat disappointed in the autobiography. In parts, it wins the reader completely; one rejoices with her in her successes, and sympathises in her disappointments and annoyances. Then there will come some arrogant expression about the people around her, some glorifying of others simply because they were her friends, some scorn, or some other unpleasant egotistical feature, which breaks the spell for pages.

The pleasantest parts of the book are those in which she treats of her own inner experiences—where the interest is so strong that she forgets that she is revealing herself, and talks naturally, openly, boldly, without self-consciousness. The least pleasant parts are those in which she speaks of the incidents of her life, and the people who were connected with her in them.

It must not be imagined that there is in the book any undue laudation of her own works—any of what would be commonly called “conceit.” The reverse is even unpleasantly the case. It is not agreeable to hear that Miss Martineau thought Margaret Fuller a “gorgeous pedant,” that she never had any respect for Lord Brougham, and that she believed Macaulay to have “no heart,” “honesty,” or “capacity for philosophy;” it is not agreeable to contrast with this and very much more of the same kind, her opinion of Mr. Atkinson, and of some of her servants; it is even less pleasant to read of the petty personal insults offered her by Mrs. A. and Lady Dash, which she might well have ignored, or at all events forgotten; but least pleasant of all is it to read her depreciation of her own works, her declaration about first one and then another, that she “dares not read it over now”—she “knows she should despise it now,” and so on.

All these drawbacks to the reader's satisfaction seem to me to arise from (certainly not “conceit,” but) the self-conscious-

ness which is almost inevitable during the writing of a memoir of one's self. Could any one of you, my hearers, write out your whole heart and life unmoved by the knowledge that thousands of ears are open to receive the story, and that friends and enemies will sit in judgment upon it, coldly canvassing your tenderest emotions? It is impossible; and the very effort which has to be made to be candid under such circumstances is in itself the destruction of naturalness and subjective individuality.

For this reason it is that I never read the autobiography of any person of whom I had already formed an opinion, from published writings or public works, without some feeling of disappointment, except in the single case of Leigh Hunt. This exception I imagine to arise from the fact that Leigh Hunt wrote always—poems and essays alike—with his individuality in his own mind, and brought before the mind of his reader. Probably Thomas Carlyle would write an autobiography equally true to the idea of him gained from a perusal of his writings, and for the same reason—that all his works are written with the desire that his readers shall think about the writer as they read.

In almost every other case, however, the aim of the author is to keep his personality out of sight, and remembrance of himself merges in his subject. The result is that he writes with a freedom and unconsciousness of self which make him reveal the true inner man far more honestly and unaffectedly than he can possibly do when he sits down for the express purpose of telling the world all about his own life.

For this reason, I shall consider Harriet Martineau's works as throwing light upon her life to as full an extent as the autobiography itself, and even more satisfactorily.

Passing on to consider the indirect lessons which may be gathered from the moulding influences of her career, I come first to those which acted upon her through the affections—her relationships of birth or of emotion. Let us see the conditions which surrounded this great mind in its early years.

Harriet Martineau might almost be considered as a proof of the correctness of the doctrine that suffering is necessary to mental excellence. Born in 1802, the sixth child of a well-to-do Norwich manufacturer, she passed a childhood and youth of wretchedness both of body and mind; and her misfortunes, to

all appearance, culminated in early womanhood in the total loss of fortune. Her deafness was known before her death by almost every one acquainted with her name, as adding to the marvel of her accomplishments; but she was not deprived of this sense during her earliest years. She did not begin to become deaf until she was twelve years old. She now records, however, that she never had the sense of smell; and as this and taste are most intimately joined together, neither could she taste. The senses are our only methods of communication with the outer world; they are the gates by which pleasure as well as pain enter into the citadel where consciousness resides. Of all the senses, those which most frequently give entrance to pleasure and seldomest to pain, were those which she had lost. Here, then, were two, and soon three, of the avenues of enjoyment shut. To this physical deprivation was added the misery of want of tenderness in family life. Her mother was a woman of, apparently, much intellect, but deficient in the gentler qualities, and wanting in the wisdom of the heart. Miss Martineau speaks of this parent always with the utmost respect, and indeed affection; but she does not attempt to disguise the melancholy truth that, throughout her childhood, she was as desolate a little soul as ever felt the burden of life without love in workhouse or orphan asylum. She had but small natural talent for housewifely work, and what she had was turned into awkwardness by her fear of displeasing her mother. She remembers once upsetting a basin of sugar into a gibletpie from sheer nervousness; and she was always so anxious when sent to look for anything that she never could find it, and "her heart sank" when she received an order to fetch a thing. "I had," she says, "a devouring passion for justice,—justice first to my own precious self, and then to other oppressed people. Justice was precisely what was least understood in our house in regard to servants and children. . . . Toward one person I was habitually untruthful, from fear. To my mother I would in childhood assert or deny anything that would bring me through most easily. I remember denying various harmless things, and often without any apparent reason: and this was so exclusively to one person that, though there was remonstrance and punishment, I was never regarded as a liar in the family. When I left home all temptation to untruth ceased."



And this was the "mothering" of a singularly affectionate child—of one who treasured up in her memory every kind word, and was so grateful for a little loving gentleness as to prove how cruel was the deprivation of it! "The least word of tenderness," she says, "melted me instantly, in spite of the strongest predeterminations to be hard and offensive. I really think if I had once conceived that anybody cared for me, nearly all the sins and sorrows of my anxious childhood would have been spared me." She was devotedly attached to the children who were younger than herself—a sister, and the brother who has grown up to be known to so wide a public as Dr. James Martineau. When, at the age of fifteen, she was sent away to stay with an aunt at Bristol—the first person of whom she was never afraid—she says, "My home affections seem to have been all the stronger for having been repressed and baulked. Certainly, I passionately loved my family, each and all, from the very hour that parted us; and I was physically ill with expectation when their letters were due,—letters which I could hardly read when they came, between my dread of something wrong and the beating heart and swimming eyes with which I received letters in those days."

Can one hope that the lesson for parents taught in this portion of the story will have effect upon those who are erring in their treatment of their children in the same way; who are feeding and caring for the body while neglecting the affections, and leaving them to pine and grow savage under starvation; who are ignoring and neglecting one child of their family, and filling it with a bitter sense of injustice and desolation? Ah, the lesson has been preached many a time—never more impressively than in Hans Andersen's fable of the ugly duckling—and with yet little effect. Would that parents would remember that "Parents, provoke not your children to wrath," is as urgent a moral command as "Children, obey your parents."

One good, however, this hard discipline doubtless worked in Harriet Martineau's character. It gave her endurance under coldness from those whom she loved. Out of the fear of her mother's wrath she grew to that fearlessness which distinguished her whole after life—she learnt how to suffer and be still when the cause of right demanded her sacrifice.

I have dwelt thus upon her passionately emotional childhood,

however, as being necessary for the due appreciation of the fact that she lived solitary, and died unfettered and unhelped by marriage. The suffering which want of love caused her in her childhood is a token of how capable she was of affection. The commonplace supposition that the emotions are crowded out of a mind by the development of the intellect is an utterly false one, founded upon ignorance of both physiology and facts.

Before there came the great awakening of the heart in Harriet Martineau, came her first appearance in print. In 1821, when she was 19 years of age, she wrote a paper upon "Female Writers of Divinity," which appeared in a Unitarian paper conducted by Mr. Moncure Conway's predecessor at South-place. She wrote this essay at her brother James's suggestion, to console herself upon his departure for College.

When she was two years older than this, she saw for the first time the man who drew forth her love. Their union was prevented at the time "by one who had much to answer for in what he did." Then came a failure in her father's business, and his heart-broken sinking into the grave; and when she was in trouble and difficulties, her lover returned to her. The cloud which had kept him away was dispelled by this storm, and he went back and asked her to marry him. She was in a state of great uncertainty of mind, between her fears that she would not make him happy, and her love for him; between her duty to others and to the one to whom her affection was given. "Many a time," she says, "did I wish, in my fear that I should fail, that I had never seen him. But just when I was growing happy, surmounting my fears and doubts, and enjoying his attachment, the consequences of his long struggle and suspense overtook him. He became suddenly insane; and after months of illness of body and mind, he died."

If we had to rely upon the autobiography for information as to how this affected Miss Martineau's character, we should learn but little about it. It is a proof of what I before said about the almost impossibility of any person consciously baring his inner self to the careless gaze of the whole world. One or two essays published at the time tell us far more both what love and its loss were to her than she has consented to deli-

berately inform the world. These essays bear the general title of 'Sabbath Musings.' In the preface to the volume in which they were published, in 1836, she said that the majority of the pieces therein contained were purely impersonal, descriptive of states of thought as she imagined them; but that a few (which she would not be expected to indicate) were truly drawn from her own experience. Read with her autobiography, there is no difficulty in discovering these latter.

As works of literary art alone, the quotations which I purpose giving would be worth listening to; for these are poems. Her *Daily News* leaders long after had that term applied to them; but here it is more justly used. If, as Mr. Mill said, "Whoever writes out truly any human feeling, writes poetry," then these are poems for that reason; but when added to this there is a wealth of language and of imagery, no one will venture to deny their right to the title.

But I quote them for a far more important reason than their poetic beauty. I quote them to show that Harriet Martineau had a heart—and that she knew she had a heart. I am not sure but that the most fatal mistake made by the party who would free mankind from superstition and priestcraft is not the very fact that they neglect and skim over such subjects. Priestcraft has its most unassailable stronghold in the intermixing of its rites and ceremonies with human interests. The birth of the child, the union of the life, the burial of the dead, are the events which appeal to every sympathy—which touch the coldest hearts, and make them impressible for the moment. All systems of religion, accordingly, and the Christian (especially the Roman Catholic) religion before all others, have bound up these moments with sacred observances, so that the mind may be impressed as the priest desires at its most ductile moments. Human nature remains and must remain the same in all ages and climes. If there is any reason to suppose that development of the intellect means crushing of the affections; if there is an impression abroad that the Religion of Humanity is the blasphemy of individual emotion; if it is believed by the masses that only priestcraft recognises and hallows the most solemn occasions of life; then, indeed, will priestcraft flourish. For human affections will assert their sway. Every man or woman who loves knows that his



emotion makes him higher and better ; every parent who leans over the couch of his first child feels that the existence of that little creature is almost as a new birth to his own spirit ; every human being who lays in the grave the object of his dearest love, gone for ever from his sight, knows that sorrow is not to be *reasoned* away, and if lightened at all is to be lightened only by the sympathy of the great heart of the race and the universe with his bleeding soul.

Therefore, I feel that I am doing good service in showing that the development of reason means the simultaneous increase of the power of loving ; that to be possessed of mental power and capacity for breaking away from early-implanted superstitions does not mean to be incapable for affection and sharing in the highest and deepest of human emotions. It was much that John Stuart Mill showed for men the compatibility of the highest order of intellect and the deepest and most profound studies, with a singularly devoted, earnest, and faithful attachment. Now, let Harriet Martineau show the same for women ; let her show how a woman with an intellect of the highest order, and occupying it upon the most abstruse subjects within the range of human comprehension, could appreciate love, and could suffer for the very strength of her affections. The first passage which I quote seems to have been written before her bereavement. The marriage to which she refers is, doubtless, that of her elder sister. The essay is entitled, " In a Hermit's Cave."

" . . . The altar of the human heart, on which alone a fire is kindled from above to shine in the faces of all true worshippers for ever. Where this flame, the glow of human love, is burning, there is the temple of worship, be it only beside the humblest village hearth: where it has not been kindled there is no sanctuary ; and the loftiest amphitheatre of mountains, lighted up by the ever-burning stars, is no more the dwelling place of Jehovah than the Temple of Solomon before it was filled with the glory of the Presence.

" Yes, Love is worship, authorised and approved. . . . Many are the gradations through which this service rises until it has reached that on which God has bestowed His most manifest benediction, on which Jesus smiled at Cana, but which the devotee presumed to decline. Not more express were the ordinances of Sinai than the Divine provisions for wedded love ; never was it more certain that Jehovah benignantly regarded the festivals of His people than it is daily that He appointed those mutual rejoicings of the affections, which need but to be referred to Him to become a holy homage. . . . Would that all could know how from the first flow of

the affections, until they are shed abroad in their plenitude, the purposes of creation become fulfilled. Would that all could know how, by this mighty impulse, new strength is given to every power; how the intellect is vivified and enlarged; how the spirit becomes bold to explore the path of life, and clear-sighted to discern its issues. . . . For that piety which has humanity for its object—must not that heart feel most of which tenderness has become the element? must not the spirit which is most exercised in hope and fear be most familiar with hope and fear wherever found?

“How distinctly I saw all this in those who are now sanctifying their first Sabbath of wedded love. . . . To those who know them as I know them, they appear already possessed of an experience in comparison with which it would appear little to have looked abroad from the Andes, or explored the treasure-caves of the deep, or to have conversed with every nation under the sun. If they could see all that the eyes of the firmament look upon, and hear all the whispered secrets that the roving winds bear in their bosoms, they could learn but little new; for the deepest mysteries are those of human love, and the vastest knowledge is that of the human heart.”

The next quotation is a very small portion of an essay entitled, “A Death Chamber.” This was obviously written immediately after the death of her lover. The piece is, to a certain extent, spoiled by being mutilated; but I have no option but to give only the following few lines from it:—

“All is dull, cold, and dreary before me, until I also can escape to the region where there is no bereavement, no blasting root and branch, no rending of the heart-strings. What is aught to me, in the midst of this all-pervading thrilling torture, when all I want is to be dead? The future is loathsome, and I will not look upon it—the past, too, which it breaks my heart to think about—what has it been? It might have been happy, if there is such a thing as happiness; but I myself embittered it at the time, and for ever. What a folly has mine been! Multitudes of sins now rise up in the shape of besetting griefs. Looks of rebuke from those now in the grave: thoughts which they would have rebuked if they had known them: moments of anger, of coldness; sympathy withheld when looked for; repression of its signs through selfish pride; and worse, far worse even than this . . . all comes over me now. O! if there be pity, if there be pardon, let it come in the form of insensibility; for these long echoes of condemnation will make me desperate.

“But was there ever human love unwithered by crime—by crime of which no human law takes cognisance, but the unwritten, everlasting laws of the affections? Many will call me thus innocent. The departed breathed out thanks and blessing, and I felt them not then as reproaches. If, indeed, I am only as others, shame, shame on the impurity of human affections; or rather, alas! for the infirmity of the human heart! For I know not that I could love more than I have loved.

"Since the love itself is wrecked, let me gather up its relics, and guard them more tenderly, more steadily, more gratefully. O grant me power to retain them—the light and music of emotion, the flow of domestic wisdom and chastened mirth, the life-long watchfulness of benevolence, the thousand thoughts—are these gone in their reality? Must I forget them as others forget?"

And for this Harriet Martineau lived her life alone—a happy life, one full of all human interests; doing good to her servants, her animals, and her poorer neighbours, for her domestic pleasures, and for relief from cares of state and thoughts sublime. Thus she saved herself from that degenerating into selfishness which is the special danger of an independent single life for either men or women. Whether she might not have been better and happier in marriage, had her lover been spared to her, it is impossible to imagine. "When I see," she writes, "what conjugal love is, in the extremely rare cases in which it is seen in its perfection, I feel that there is a power of attachment in me that has never been touched. When I am among little children, it frightens me to think what my idolatry of my own children would have been. But . . . the older I have grown, the more serious and irremediable have seemed to me the evils and disadvantages of married life as it exists among us at this time." And here, no doubt, she is right. The vicious state of the marriage laws and social arrangements, the consequence of the imperfect system by which regulations have been made for both sexes and their mutual interests by the partial knowledge and wisdom of one sex alone, does make marriage a terribly dangerous step for a woman. And she was probably wise when she added, "Thus, I am not only entirely satisfied with my lot, but think it the very best for me."

As regards the cultivation which Harriet Martineau's intellect received in her childhood, there is a very significant fact to be noted: that she adds one more to the long list of illustrious women who have, through some happy accident, been educated "like boys." When one remembers that this phrase means nothing more than that the education has been thorough in its method, and has included careful mathematical and classical teaching, no surprise can be felt at the frequency with which eminent women are found to have shared in the tutorial advantages of their brothers. The moral is obvious.

Now for her religious growth. Miss Martineau was born



of Unitarian parents, and educated theologically in the tenets of that sect. When she was twenty-eight years old, she distinguished herself among the members of the Unitarian body by gaining three prizes, which had been offered for public competition, for essays designed to convert Jews, Mahomedans, and Roman Catholics respectively, to the more advanced faith. Although she was still, at that period, sufficiently an orthodox Unitarian to perform this argumentative exploit to the satisfaction and admiration of the leaders of the sect, yet she had long before emancipated her mind, to some extent, from even the comparatively light chains of that faith. So early as when she was but eleven years old, she remembers asking her elder brother Thomas that question which has been the first stumbling-block in the path of faith to so many. She asked—If God foreknew from eternity all the evil deeds that every one of us should do in our lives, how can He justly punish us for those actions, when the time comes that we are born, and in due course commit them? And her brother replied that she was not yet old enough to understand the point. Whether she ever did become old enough to understand, the course of her mental history will show.

By-and-by, under the guidance of Dr. Carpenter, of Bristol, she became a student of the philosophy of Locke and Hartley; and in time she raised herself to the reception of the philosophical doctrine of Necessity. But she had a terrible season of doubt and struggle with early-implanted impressions to encounter, before she could permit herself to let go one fraction of her theology. *C'est le premier pas qui coute*; and she probably suffered more in this first step onward than in all her future progress. Her description of her agonies of doubt is most forcible; but it is only the experience which all who have equally cut themselves loose from their early belief have felt, and I quote it for the benefit of the persons who are so constituted as to be incapable of ever knowing it in their own lives, and who are apt to believe that the rejection of belief is a pleasant process, wilfully entered on by those who are guilty of it, and affording to them great present delights.

“What can be the retribution of guilt if the horrors of doubt are what I have felt them? What can be the penalties of vice if those of mere ignorance are so agonising? While in my childhood I ignorantly

believed what men had told me of God, much that was true, mixed with much that I now see to be puerile, or absurd, or superstitious, or impious, I was at peace with men, and, as I then believed, with God. But when an experience over which I had no control shook my confidence in that which I held; when I had discovered and rejected some of the falsehoods of my creed, and when I was really wiser than before the torment began which was destined to well nigh wrench life from my bosom or reason from my brain . . . I could not divest myself of the conviction that my doubts were so many sins. Men told me, and I could not but believe, that to want faith was a crime; that misery like mine was but a qualification for punishment, and that every evil of which I now complained would be aggravated hereafter. Alas! what was to become of me if I could find no rest even in my grave?—if the death I longed for was to be only apparent—if the brightness which I found so oppressive here should prove only like the day-spring in comparison with the glow of the eternal fires, amidst which my spirit must stand hereafter? In such moments, feeling that there was no return to the ignorance of the child or the apathy of common men, I prayed, to whom I know not, for madness!

“Yet I would not that the cup had passed from me. Far nobler is the most humiliating depression of doubt than the false security of acquiescence in human delusion. Far safer are the wanderings of a mind which by original vigour has freed itself from the shackles of human authority, than the apathy of weak minds which makes them content to be led blindfold wheresoever their priestly guides shall choose. The happiest lot of all is to be born into the way of truth . . . but where, as in my case, it is not so ordained, the next best privilege is to be roused to a conflict with human opinions (provided there is strength to carry it through), though it be fought in darkness, in horror, in despair.”

At length, as the final words of this passage convey, she made her way to her first definite standpoint, and settled by her reason the question which her faith had never been able to solve satisfactorily. She fully accepted the Necessitarian doctrine that we are what we are, we do what we do, because of the impulses given by our previous training and circumstances; and that the way to improve any human beings or all humanity is to improve their education, and to give them good surroundings and influences, and mental associations: in short, that physical and psychological phenomena alike depend upon antecedent phenomena, called causes. She writes:—

“I fairly laid hold of the conception of general laws, while still far from being prepared to let go the notion of a special Providence. Though at times almost overwhelmed by the vastness of the view opened to me, and by the prodigious change requisite in my moral views and self-management, the revolution was safely gone through. My labouring

brain and beating heart grew quiet, and something more like peace than I had ever yet known settled down upon my anxious mind. . . . I am bound to add that the moral effect of this process was most salutary and cheering. From the time when I became convinced of the certainty of the action of laws, of the importance of good influences and good habits—of the firmness, in short, of the ground I was treading, and of the security of the results which I should take the right means to attain, a new vigour pervaded my whole life, a new light spread through my mind, and I began to experience a steady growth in self-command, courage, and consequent integrity and disinterestedness. I was feeble and selfish enough at best; but yet I was like a new creature in the strength of a sound conviction. Life also was something fresh and wonderfully interesting now that I held in my hand this key whereby to interpret some of the most conspicuous of its mysteries.

“ . . . For above thirty years I have seen more and more clearly how awful, and how irremediable except by the spread of a true philosophy, are the evils which arise from that monstrous remnant of old superstition—the supposition of a self-determining power, independent of laws, in the human will; and I can truly say that if I have had the blessing of any available strength under sorrow, perplexity, sickness and toil, during a life which has been anything but easy, it is owing to my repose upon eternal and irreversible laws, working in every department of the universe, without any interference from any random will, human or Divine.”

When her mind became fairly settled in the doctrine of necessity, she could not but perceive the uselessness of prayer; since to petition the Supreme Power for any given thing is to imply a belief that It can or will set aside the action of fixed laws. First, therefore, she ceased supplicating for benefits; and, in time, she came to feel that even the expression of desires for spiritual goods was “demoralising.” “I found myself,” she says, “best, according to all trustworthy tests of goodness, when I thought least about the matter.” As to praise, she soon “drew back in shame from offering to a Divine Being a homage which would be offensive to an earthly one.” And at last, when “prayer” in the ordinary sense had become quite impossible to her—

“My devotions consisted of aspiration—very frequent and heartfelt—under all circumstances and influences, and much as I meditate now, almost hourly, on the mysteries of life and the universe, and the great science and art of human duty. In proportion as the taint of fear and desire and self-regard fell off, and the meditation had fact instead of passion for its subject, the aspiration became freer and sweeter, till at length, when the selfish superstition had wholly gone out of it, it spread its charm through every change of every waking hour—and does now, when life itself is expiring.”



Gradation by gradation she went on : not willing altogether to give up belief in Christianity, in the Divine authorisation of the mission of Jesus, she "lingered long in the regions of speculation and taste." At last came the illness to which I have already referred; and in it, with leisure for contemplation, she rose by degrees to the highest religious state of all—rejecting theological figments, refusing to believe in a God of love and mercy who yet made a world with evil in it, and condemned the creatures whom he exposed to its irresistible temptations, to eternal torment—an infinite punishment for finite sins. She saw that all conception of the mode of origin, or the scheme or nature of the universe, is above and beyond the comprehension of man;\* she saw that our work here is to do our best for the improvement of ourselves and those who shall come after us; that all our "looking before and after," all our attempts to pierce the veil which is around us, all our foolish vain imaginings, based upon the ridiculous assumption that this world is the centre of the universe, and man its highest product—all are but vanity and vexation of spirit, and must be discarded at the dictates of reason and scientific fact.

This state of conviction was farther strengthened and confirmed by a visit which she paid in 1846 to the East—the birthplace of the Christian religion, and its progenitors, the Hebrew and Egyptian. In connection with the book which she wrote upon her return home, she seriously considered whether she should avow her dissent, which by this time was complete, from all theologies. Finally, she decided that this book was not the proper place for it.

In 1850 appeared 'Letters between H. Martineau and H. G. Atkinson, on Man's Nature and Development.' I am not criticising Mr. Henry G. Atkinson, or I should find it neces-

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\* "I began to see that we, with our mere human faculty, are not in the least likely to understand it, any more than the minnow in the creek, as Carlyle has it, can comprehend the perturbations caused in his world of existence by the tides. I saw that no revelation can by possibility set men right on these matters, for want of faculty in man to understand anything beyond human ken; as all instruction whatever offered to the minnow must fail to make it comprehend the actions of the moon on the oceans of the earth, or receive the barest conception of any such action."—'Autobiography,' vol. ii., p. 185.

sary to say a great deal about this book. Fortunately, I am not called upon to say anything about it more than this—that, as both Mr. Atkinson and Miss Martineau avow several times over, the book is really *his* work. She did the literary arrangement and supervision; and she wrote short letters to serve as a groundwork for Mr. Atkinson's disquisitions.

The only important connection which Miss Martineau had with this book was giving it her name, and thus announcing to the world her total disbelief in all theologies. It is hardly necessary to say that she never stepped back from this advanced position. It is one of the special excellences which persuasions grounded upon reason have over beliefs resting upon unreasoning faith, that any alterations in them (provided the logical apparatus remains sound), must of necessity be changes in the direction of still farther throwing off shackles upon thought.

Intellectual fearlessness is one of the great lessons taught by this branch of Harriet Martineau's life history. She carried the powerful reason which she possessed into every question; and having found that which satisfied her mind of its truth, she never hesitated to avow it. Standing, as she believed, on the very brink of the grave when she wrote her autobiography, she contemplated death with happy calmness, content with having done her share for the advancement of her age, and fully convinced that others would rise to take up the work which she laid down. Satisfied to hope for *rest* in the grave instead of a personal immortality, rejoicing in the belief that the human race is slowly but surely progressing toward higher things, and that the greatest privilege that any man or woman can have had is to have aided that progress if but one fraction of a step, she was ready to spend the remainder of her life in working for her fellows, and in enjoying the sympathy and love of her associates.

Singularly enough, twenty years of life remained to her after she wrote the closing words of her autobiography. The heart disease which then threatened to kill her every day did not do so for twenty years longer. And so well did she employ that time, that those who could not see with her clearness were constrained to believe that God helped her against her own will to be happy and holy; that some of her friends rejoiced

when she died that heaven itself was now her habitation ; and that her Christian relatives could not omit the bad taste of having a Christian religious service, full of that hope of immortality which she had not, read over the grave where they laid her.

It were to be wished that the lesson hereby taught of the complete compatibility of a most truly moral and holy life with a total disbelief in any future and eternal punishments would be laid to heart by the persons who need it most. There is small hope that it will be ; for the same fact has been shown by many a noble life before, as well as by *à priori* reasoning upon the small practical effect which far-distant punishments, rendered likewise uncertain by a scheme of redemption through faith, not works, can ever have on the mind ; but still its possibility is denied ! “Dogmatic faith compels the best minds and hearts to narrowness and insolence. Even such as these cannot conceive of being happy in any way but theirs, or that there may be views whose operation they do not understand.”\* There the lesson is, however, be it received or rejected.

It is an interesting inquiry whether Miss Martineau herself would have sanctioned the use in this connection of the word “religious.” In a chapter in which Mrs. Chapman gives recollections of conversations with her (and in which there are several things that might better have been omitted, since no authorisation for their publicity can have been given by Miss Martineau), her biographer says that she objected to such a use of the term “religion.” My own judgment is the reverse. I cannot see how we are to avoid the word so long as we wish to express the idea. By the word religion, we mean always all those impulses to good and right, all that seeking for holiness, all that desire for the best in living, all that longing for truth, purity, and strength in righteousness as we see these things, which are our highest and sweetest emotions. What other word can we use to express all this, except the one which always has been used ? It is therefore a satisfaction to me to be able to place against Mrs. Chapman’s report from memory Harriet Martineau’s own words in the *Daily News* autobiographical memoir. “Her latest opinions were, in her own

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\* ‘*Autobiography*,’ vol. ii., p. 442.



view, *the most religious*, the most congenial with the emotional as well as the rational department of human nature."\*

I have purposely given the story of her religious growth in her own words, without unnecessary interpolation of my own expressions, and without criticising any of her opinions from an individual point of view.

Harriet Martineau never shrank from giving any work to the world for fear of the criticism it might receive. In 1829, she, with her mother and sister, was reduced to utter destitution by the failure of the concern in which all their property was invested. Two years later appeared the first of the works which made her fame, but in relation to one of which she was most bitterly attacked—her 'Tales in Political Economy.'

During this two years she supported herself by her needle; and when she first made known that she intended to exchange that little implement for the pen, there were not wanting several persons to tell her that such a course would be both unwise and improper, that needle-work was her proper sphere as a woman, and that she should confine her efforts to doing what it was certain she could do. Had she taken this orthodox counsel she would have bent over her stitches from morning to night for a miserable pittance, and the world would have lost all she has given it.

Unknown outside the despised and small sect to which she then belonged, she had great difficulty in getting a publisher to undertake her books; and they were at last issued upon terms which gave her all the risk, and her publisher about seventy per cent. of the profits. When this arrangement was settled, she was in such poverty that she could not afford to ride even part of the way from the publisher's office to the

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\* And again. . . . "The best state of mind was to be found, however it might be accounted for, in those who were called philosophical atheists. . . . I told her that I knew several of that class—some avowed, and some not; and that I had for several years felt that they were among my most honoured acquaintances and friends; and that now I knew them more deeply and thoroughly, I must say that, for conscientiousness, sincerity, integrity, seriousness, effective intellect, and the true religious spirit I knew nothing like them."—'Autobiography,' vol ii., p. 188.

house of the relative with whom she was staying in London ; and she relates that she became so weary and faint as she walked, that she leant to rest upon a railing somewhere near Shoreditch, apparently contemplating a cabbage-bed, but really saying to herself, with shut eyes, "My books will do yet!"

And they *did* "do." No sooner had the first volume appeared than the poor little deaf Unitarian was famous, and hailed as a new light among men. As she went on, illustrating with scientific precision and clearness first one and then another of the principal doctrines of Political Economy, the attention of the great men of her day was drawn to her work. She went through a course of flattery and attempts at "lionising" which would have ruined a weaker character ; and the chief political men of her time, from the Ministry downwards, made overtures for her valuable co-operation in preparing the public mind for their schemes.

But popularity could not spoil her. She knew the dangers she would have to encounter in treating some subjects ; but, she said, what was influence worth except to be used in propagating truth ? Accordingly, when she came to the proper point for illustrating the population doctrine, she unhesitatingly treated it, as she had done all preceding parts of her subject. Her book was called 'Weal and Woe in Garveloch.' The story showed how the inhabitants of a small island had gone on recklessly increasing their numbers, and how a temporary failure in some of their sources of food-supply reduced them immediately to the utmost destitution. The scientific moral was taught that it is dangerous and wrong to multiply the population even up to the extreme limit of its food-supply, and that sickness and famine will eventually step in, in such a case, to do that which prudence should have done before—equalise the food and its consumers.

Mr. Malthus's name has become so associated among us with a doctrine, has been so much used to express a scientific principle, that he is to us quite an impersonal being ; and it is interesting to read Miss Martineau's account of him as an individual. She describes him as one of the mildest and most benignant of men, full of domestic affections.

Upon the issue of this number she was attacked by Lockhart and John Wilson Croker, in the *Quarterly Review*, in the

most violent and scandalous manner. One cannot but wonder that such expressions and insinuations should have been tolerated by the readers of such a periodical. Seldom has so malicious and cruel a personal attack disfigured the pages of a respectable review. Croker openly said that he expected to lose his pension very shortly, and being wishful to make himself a literary position before that event happened he had begun by "tomahawking Miss Martineau." All that could be painful to her as a woman, and injurious to her as a writer, was said, or attempted to be conveyed, in this article.

It pained her intensely, but it eventually did her good. She had one of those temperaments which belong to all leaders of men, whether in physical or moral warfare; danger was to her a stimulus, and her courage rose the higher the greater the demand upon it.

The lesson which we are to learn from it is the one already impressed upon us by this life of fearless speaking the truth, as we may see it, irrespective of its consequences to ourselves. Our eyes are weak, and cannot pierce the veil which covers the future. The only safe course for any one of us to pursue is to do that which we see and know to be right at the moment, leaving our future to take care of itself; to act up to our principles, assured that a policy of unprincipled temporary expediency must end at last in failure and dismay.

Encouragement, too, for speaking our truth, whatever it be, we may get from this history; though it must be acknowledged that those who require such encouragement will seldom be the ones to utter dangerous truths. Five times in her literary history did Harriet Martineau print that which she had cause to believe might ruin her prospects, close her career, and silence her voice for ever; yet she died honoured and respected by all classes and conditions of people, and having had her words listened to always with the fullest respect and readiness.

Another of the subjects upon which she wrote, and for which she was severely criticised, was Mesmerism. From 1839 to 1844, Miss Martineau was a confirmed invalid, confined to her couch, unable to stand upright, constantly sick, and full of pain. She was pronounced incurable by Sir Charles Clarke in 1841. For three years she took iodide of



iron, and was continually under the influence of opiates. There was no improvement in her condition in the summer of 1844, when she consented to be mesmerised, first by Mr. Spencer Hall, and later by Mrs. Wynyard, the widow of a clergyman. In five months she was well enough to start off to the English lakes, and visiting among her relatives, and presently even to go away upon her fatiguing tour in the East.

I have neither time this afternoon, nor inclination at present, to offer any comment upon this case. There were the remarkable facts, whatever their explanation; and Harriet Martineau was not one to shrink from the public avowal of what she knew, for fear of the abuse or pain it might bring to her. As a swimmer grows stronger with breasting the waves, so did her mind gain in strength every time it was necessary for her to come into direct collision with popular opinion.

Her writings contain many direct lessons, some of which have been already referred to, that the world either has learnt or yet must learn. Prominent among the latter are the lessons which her works ever taught to men as to the estimation in which they have to hold the sex to which the writer belonged. There has been far too much heard in past time of men's opinions both of women and of themselves; now we must begin to hear the reverse—both what women think of men, and what women know and think about women.

Miss Martineau, in common with every other woman of intellect and courage in this age, of necessity most earnestly desired the success of what is known as "the woman movement," and did her best for its advancement. Long before the claim for suffrage for women became a "movement;" before the women who desire its concession had banded themselves together to obtain it, she had lifted up her voice as one crying in the wilderness. In her early years, she wrote, in an essay upon Walter Scott, a noble protest against the crushing of women's capacities, the condemning them to waste their energies upon petty trifles and ignoble ends, the frittering away of their existence, and then the presumptuous reproach of them for not doing great things, of which men have dared to be guilty. In the book which she published about 'Society in America,' in 1837, she wrote:—

"The Emperor of Russia discovers when a coat-of-arms and title do

not agree with a subject prince: the King of France early discovers that the air of Paris does not agree with a free-thinking foreigner. The English Tories feel the hardship that it would be to impose the franchise on every artisan, busy as he is in getting bread. The Georgian Planter perceives the hardship that freedom would be to his slaves. And the best friends of half the human race peremptorily decide for them as to their rights, their duties, their feelings, and their powers. In all these cases, the persons thus cared for feel that the abstract decision rests with themselves, that though they may be compelled to submit they need not acquiesce.

It is pleaded that half the human race does acquiesce in the decision of the other half as to their rights and duties. . . . Such acquiescence proves nothing but the degradation of the injured party. It inspires the same emotions of pity as the supplication of the freed slave to his master to restore him to slavery that he may have his animal wants supplied, without being troubled with human rights and duties. Acquiescence like this is an argument which cuts the wrong way for those who use it.

"But this acquiescence is only partial; and to give any semblance of strength to the plea, the acquiescence must be complete. I for one do not acquiesce. I declare that whatever obedience I yield to the laws of society is a matter between, not the community and myself, but my judgment and my will: any punishment inflicted upon me for the breach of those laws I should regard as so much gratuitous injury: for to those laws I have never, actually or virtually, assented. I know that there are women in England, I know that there are women in America, who agree with me in this. The plea of acquiescence is invalidated by us."

But this same lesson of the right and the duty of women to participate in the public work for the public weal, Harriet Martineau taught to men far more emphatically by what she did than by what she said. No words, however eloquent, no pleadings, however forcible, could have the effect which the story of her life's work must have. For this member of a sex "which loves personal government," was the author of some of the most emphatic warnings against meddling legislation that ever were penned.\* This member of a sex "by nature slaves to superstition," did as much as any one living in this century to clear away the dust from men's eyes, and encourage freedom of thought. This member of a sex "opposed to all liberal movements," was a shining light of the most Radical of Radical parties. This member of a sex "incapable of understanding politics," was secretly provided by the Ministry with facts in the hope that she would use them to instruct the

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\* 'The Factory Controversy,' 1855.—'Autobiography,' vol. ii., p. 449.

people upon the forthcoming budget; was implored by the Excise Commissioners to use their facts for the same end: was entreated by Oscar of Sweden to make the world acquainted with the politics and position of his country—by Daniel O'Connell to plead the cause of Ireland as none other had done or could do, calmly, truthfully, understandingly, and without fear or favour—and by Count Porro to lend the strength of her exposition to Lombardy against Austria: nay, was even the source of a great part of the political education and opinions of the very men who presume to make such assertions, through her one thousand six hundred and forty-two leading articles in the principal Liberal newspaper, the *Daily News*.

Yes, Harriet Martineau's life teaches a most valuable lesson to men—both to those who oppose and to those who support the giving a political existence to women. To those who oppose it, she has shown the fallacy of their confidently-expressed belief about women; she has shown them that it is impossible to predict the action of others in a position in which they never yet have been seen; she has shown them that their audacious certainties about the necessary influence of sex upon thought are so many ignorant and contemptible assumptions; she has shown them—what general history might have shown them, had they been capable of reading its lessons—that to give liberty is the only way to procure the virtues of freedom, and that the course of human beings in emancipation must in the nature of things be other than their course in subjection. And to the men who have already determined that right and justice must be done, irrespective of any minor considerations, this life's work gives encouragement: it gives them faith in the principle of justice; it helps them to see the good which their efforts will at last produce—the improvement in women and the aid to progress; it assists them to despise the forebodings of the politically ignorant who now echo those fears which have *always* preceded reforms, and *always* been falsified; it makes them believe more firmly that all women will disprove the prophets' declamations when the thing comes which must come, as Harriet Martineau has disproved them already.

To women she teaches a similar lesson, both directly and indirectly. She teaches us *to do something*. Her purse and



her pen alike were ever ready to aid women's causes ; but far more than these could do she has done by her whole life's work. And every woman who does any one thing well, humble though it may appear ; every woman who dares to think, to speak, and to act for herself, has learnt the great lesson, and does more for her sex than the most eloquent words or the most untiring effort of the greatest of men can do for us. We must help ourselves ; and we must do it by proving our capacity in our varied spheres, from housekeeping up to leader-writing, and by our mental vigour and independence.

Posthumous fame was as nought to Harriet Martineau. She knew that, as the poet of our era, Tennyson, has it :

“The fame that follows death is nothing to us.”

And as the whole of her life shows, she never did anything so unworthy, and so sure to result in disgrace, as following any course for the sake of the reputation and influence it would bring her. Nevertheless, she must ever stand prominent in the history of this wonderful century. For it is a wonderful century, though we may be too close to it to recognise its greatness, and though it must be left for the children of our children's children to compare it with other epochs, and mark its wondrousness. In an earlier age, a Harriet Martineau would have been impossible. Her existence, and the work she did, are at once tokens and results of civilisation and progress. The development of mind has brought the moment for the exercise of the power which resides in the physically weak. The age which has the telescope wherewith to explore the distant universe ; the age which has the microscope, to reveal undreamt-of life and hidden mysteries ; which has the electric telegraph and the steam-engine to carry thought around the globe ; which has the printing-press to multiply the words of the thinker until they can reach all who are ready to hear them ; is an age such as the world never knew before, and for which new provisions and social arrangements must be made. This century has either discovered or applied to practical use all these marvels ; this century has repealed the Corn Laws, recognising in free trade the brotherhood of all mankind,—has freed the slave in civilised lands,—has emancipated other slaves from the serfdom in which wealth had so long held them,—and now only needs to cast aside for ever the slavery of sex to give it immortal pre-

eminence. Yes, although we are too close to the achievements of our time to see all its glories, as

“King Arthur’s self to Lady Guinevere was flat,”

yet it is a glorious age, one worth the living in, worth the working in. And she who has shared in so many of its greatnesses, who has wrought in so many of its nobly-successful struggles, must live with it, so that future ages shall honour the name of HARRIET MARTINEAU.



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