

HARRIET MARTINEAU.



HARRIET MARTINEAU.

THE greatest among Englishwomen, except George Eliot, has just departed from among us. Her genius was not only various and remarkable in every line in which it was developed, but singularly masculine in its characteristics. She was a poet and a novelist; but she was much more distinguished in the more unusual developments of a female mind, namely, as political economist, theologian, and journalist. Of course she was precocious. Indeed, when one thinks of what she has done, and when she began to do it, it seems incredible that even three-quarters of a century should

have sufficed for so much work. To the last generation she must have seemed one of the most familiar and well-established of English writers; to the present generation it is a marvel to see her death announced to-day, for to us she was a British classic, and hardly accounted among the moderns.

In 1823 she published, at the age of twenty-one, her first book—*Devotional Exercises for the Use of Young Persons*. Seven years later she gained all three of the prizes offered by the British and Foreign Unitarian Society for the best tracts addressed respect-

ively to Roman Catholics, Jews, and Mohammedans—a feat probably unexampled in “prize” literature.

Between the two dates of the publications I have mentioned, she wrote a number of charming stories, chiefly addressed to children, another series upon matters relating to the interests of the working classes, and her admirable *Traditions of Palestine as it existed in the Time of our Lord*. But it was when she was thirty years of age that she attained her first marked success, in her *Illustrations of Political Economy*—the first attempt that had then been made to link the attraction of fiction with the great truths of social life. To the disgrace of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, this work was refused by its council, and had to be undertaken by private enterprise. The fact was, the sub-committee gave no attention to it, since they heard it was written by a young woman, though six months afterward the president of the society, Lord Brougham, allowed that “a deaf girl from Norwich was doing more useful work in the country than any man.” Of the details of this curious “adventure”—for such it seemed to the plucky little publisher who undertook it—you will soon hear the true story in Miss Martineau’s *Autobiography*, which will now be published, after lying for nearly twenty years in print at a bookseller’s at Windermere. I have myself had the privilege, enjoyed by not more than half a dozen people, of reading it; and a most interesting and striking production it is. Whether it has been added to and kept up to date during the long years that Miss Martineau lived in her beautiful cottage, “The Knoll,” at Ambleside, I have at present no information, but I sincerely hope that such is the case; for, though secluded and much distressed by bodily infirmity, she probably received more visits from eminent individuals, both English and American, during the last twenty years of her life, than any other person. During this period, strange to say, she followed with the greatest diligence her vocation of journalist, and I believe that almost all of the leading articles upon the American civil war that appeared in the *Daily News* emanated from her pen. I need not say which side she took in that great struggle.

During her visit, long before that date (in 1834), to the United States, she had been the guest of many important persons in the South, but even then and there had never hesitated to express her abhorrence of slavery, or to expose the fallacies by which her hosts endeavored to recommend to her their “peculiar institution.” In 1839 she fell ill, and so famous had she grown by this time that even her illness became a sort of national property, and was fought over, as a common battle-field, by the disciples of mes-

merism and its opponents. She always ascribed her cure to mesmerism, and she was not one to give up a theory or a belief because it was unpopular. Some very hard things were said against her, and some very jocose things—especially about that alleged experiment of mesmerizing her cow; but she overlived all that, though one would hardly have imagined that even the gentle nature which conceived *Life in the Sick-Room** could have endured so much obloquy with equanimity.

Upon the whole, I think *Life in the Sick-Room* is the most delightful of her works, and will live almost as long as sickness is in the world. One proof of its intrinsic merit is that though published without the aid of her then famous name, it achieved a great success at once; nor is it too much to say it would have been the foundation-stone of her fame as a religious writer, had she confined her attention to similar topics. It was now just twelve years since Miss Lucy Aikin had written to Dr. Channing concerning her, “You must know that a great new light has arisen among English-women,” and the light had grown very broad and bright. At that former period, though the wonderful talents of “the deaf girl from Norwich” were beginning to be acknowledged by a few high natures, and this young woman and Mr. Malthus were great allies,† she was in some danger of being patronized. Like Dr. Johnson, she found several Chesterfields to hold out a helping hand to her after she had reached land by her own exertions, and I am afraid that among them was Lord Brougham. He wrote of her: “She has a vast store of knowledge on many deep and difficult subjects, a wonderful store for a person scarcely thirty years old, and her observation of common things must have been extraordinarily correct as well as rapid.” But the object of these eulogies did not reciprocate them, and I am afraid, in many respects, thought his lordship rather a “common thing” himself. Her opinion of this once great man, however, is given in the autobiography, and if I remember right, as the auctioneers say, “without reserve.”

When her *Life in the Sick-Room* was published, she was far out of the reach of personal patronage, and at the zenith not only of her literary fame, but of her social pop-

* Many, many years after the publication of this beautiful book, I asked her to lend it me; and she smilingly did so, with a “That is all over now, you know,” expressive of her change of religious belief. But, as a matter of fact, the gentleness and patience and the belief in good which characterized that volume remained with her to the last, and were never “over” in their best sense.

† It was a period when Malthus was so little known among the gentle sex that I remember one lady, deceived by the classical termination of his name, asking whether he was not an ancient Roman.

ularity. Every one admired her, and society respected and even revered her. It was well known that when her health broke down, the then Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, had offered her, without solicitation, a considerable literary pension, and that she had refused it upon the highest grounds: she "could not conscientiously share in the proceeds of a system of taxation which she had reprobated in her published works." She took care, at the same time, to guard against passing any condemnation on the literary pensioners of the day, and, in a word, exhibited as much good taste as self-denial. Nor did she ever regret the sacrifice; indeed, it would have been difficult for her as a pensioner of the state to have written her *History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace* with the impartiality that distinguishes it. In 1848 appeared her *Eastern Life, Past and Present*, which, although in some respects one of the most attractive of her works, at once cut off from her the sympathies of the so-called "religious public." Although naturally of a deeply devotional spirit, her faith had been from the first the same with that of her family, Unitarian; but in those of her works which had had the largest circulation, this was not obtrusively set forth.

In 1851 she published *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*—a work that cut the last strand loose that bound her to theology of any kind. She used to say of it that it proved who were her true friends, and made "all her relations in life sounder than ever." But it was, without doubt, the cause to her of great distress of mind. In the first place, it dis severed her from her brother James, the great Unitarian preacher, to whom she had at one time been bound by the strongest ties of affection, and for the time, at least, made a bitter enmity between them. He attacked the work with great violence in (I think) the *National Review*, and, what annoyed her most, directed his heaviest fire against Mr. Atkinson, her collaborateur, while he treated herself with pity, as having been nose-led by that distinguished scientist. She was at that time, if I remember right, the proprietress, or at least the mortgagee, of the *Westminster Review*, which, under her influence, advocated the doctrines of Auguste Comte; and a very pretty quarrel between the two quarterlies in question took place in consequence. Comte, whose *Positive Philosophy* she had translated, was up to that time but little known in England, and more people talked about him than had mastered his opinions.

For my own part, I intensely regret her avowal of her later convictions, if it were only on account of the false view that it has generally given of her character. People began to speak of her as "hard," "un-christian," "cold," "a man in petticoats,"

etc., whereas no more gentle, kindly, and, if I may say so, "motherly" nature ever existed than that of Harriet Martineau. She delighted in children,* and in the friendship of good wives and mothers; one of her chief virtues, indeed, was a simple domesticity, that gave her a wonderful charm with those who prefer true gentlewomen to literary lionesses. To my mind Harriet Martineau never seemed to greater advantage than with her knitting-needles in her hands, or, like "Sarah Battle of blessed memory," playing at "the wholesome and athletic game of cribbage," which the writer of these lines had the honor to teach her. How many a time in the summer nights have I sat with her under the porch of her beautiful cottage, looking at the moon-lit mountains and the silver Rothay, which she loved so well, although she never heard its music. "It is all so beautiful," said she, on one occasion, as we looked upon this charming scene, "that I am afraid to withdraw my eyes from it, *for fear it should all melt.*" Her love of the beauties of nature was intense: as keen as her sympathy with human wrongs and struggles. It was when she had first built her lovely little home at Ambleside that the incident occurred which I think I revealed to the American public years ago, upon no such sad occasion as the present—how, being in want of turf for her lawn, and unable to procure it, two cart-loads of that rare commodity were thrown over her wall in the night, with a few ill-spelled words to the effect that this was the gift of a poor poacher who had read her *Forest and Game-law Tales*. This instance of gratitude† (albeit the man had probably stolen the turf to show it) was very dear to her, and moved her both to tears and laughter; for her sense of humor—though she always affected not to possess any, and to regret its absence—was keen enough. Perhaps she enjoyed nothing so much that arose out of her literary fame as the letter the school-boy wrote to her when she lay dangerously ill, and *The Crofton Boys* remained in consequence unfinished:

"MY DEAR MISS MARTINEAU,—I am very sorry to hear you are so bad. I hope you will get well; but I do hope, if not, that some of your family will finish *The Crofton Boys*."

This notion of a hereditary taint of authorship always tickled her very heart-strings.

I remember once reading with her some

* As an instance of her kindness to juveniles I may mention that in spite of her ill health and the many calls upon her time, she would remember the birthday of a child of the present writer, to whom she was attached, and send her a well-chosen present (sometimes one of her own juvenile books) on the exact date.

† Whately, the Archbishop of Dublin, was staying at Dr. Arnold's, at Fox How, at the time, and characteristically refused to credit this story. He said, "She wrote that letter herself, bless you." And I suppose threw the two cart-loads of turf over her own wall also.

good-humored raillery of the Protectionists in the *Times*—in days when the *Times* had gleams of fun in it—in which it pictured England as dependent for its supplies of corn upon “the Romans and the Colossians and the Thessalonians.” We laughed together very heartily, and she exclaimed, “Now I wish I could write like that; but I have no sense of humor.”

She was accustomed to furnish the obituary notices of eminent persons in the *Daily News*, and, very characteristically, she wrote her own, and sent it to lie in the editor's desk until the time should come for its appearance. It lies before me now, with its last touching words: “She declined throughout that and subsequent years, and died —,” the blank being left for the date only. In this strange autobiographical sketch, in which the frankness of self-criticism goes beyond legitimate bounds, she says, writing of herself in the third person: “Her original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imagination and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say.....But she could neither discover nor invent.” This self-depreciation is curiously and undesignedly contradicted in her account of what her writings effected. Even in so simple a matter as her *Guides to Service*, suggested by the Poor-law Commissioners, with the object of training the children of the poor, this “earnestness” went so far on the road to genius as to make her identified with the “maid-of-all-work” whose mode of life she pictured. It was popularly believed that she must have been once in that situation herself, to have described it so “to the life,” and she regarded the mistake (now and then expressed to her face), as she well might, with considerable complacency. In the same hypercritical vein she underrates her capabilities for writing fiction, whereas both *Deerbrook* and *The Hour and the Man* are at least marked by force and originality of a high order. I have remarked on this self-depreciation because it ran through her character, nor do I remember in it any evidence to the contrary, except as respected her deafness. She would venture to say for herself (and with great justice) that she never allowed her misfortune to interfere with the happiness of others, as deafness too often does. One eminent literary friend of hers, and a great talker, once expressed to me his amusement at Miss Martineau having given him the address of the shop in London where she bought “all her ear-trumpets.” He could not understand why she had need of their renewal. “All her ear-trumpets! Why, one would think she listened to what other people said. She could never wear

one out with that, if she lived to be a thousand.” But here he did her wrong; for though a great and good talker, Miss Martineau was always ready to listen when there was any thing worth hearing. Nay, more: she was content *not* to listen. Often have I seen her with her trumpet laid by her side, and a genial smile upon her pleasant face, while conversation was going on around her in which she did not happen to be included. She was always careful not only not to worry others with her importunity, as deaf people so often do, but to prevent others from seeing her own sense of loss.

She had a second misfortune, too: her sense of taste was absent. I believe she had no sense of smell whatever; but she told me that once, and only once, she had tasted, in all its intensity of flavor, as she imagined, a slice of a leg of mutton. It never came again, but that one experience was delicious. “I was going out to a great dinner that evening at the Marshalls’, at Coniston, and I was ashamed to say how I looked forward to the dainties that would be set before me.” But she never did taste them. Curiously enough, her famous neighbor, Wordsworth, was similarly afflicted as respected the sense of smell. Once only he too enjoyed it. “I once smelled a bean field,” he said, “and thought it heaven.”

The poet of Rydal Mount was prudent and “canny” enough to have come from even farther north than he did, and he had also “a guid conceit of himself,” which he showed on one occasion to Miss Martineau naïvely enough. When she first came into the Lake Country, and before she showed any strong signs of heterodoxy, he took much personal interest in her, and favored her with his paternal advice. “Now, my dear Miss Martineau, there is one trouble here all the summer: the tourists. Of course you will not suffer from it so much as I do; but that is a question of degree. If people have letters of introduction, give them tea; but as for meat and such like, let them go to their inns, or you will be eaten out of house and home.” All these stories she told with inimitable humor, and yet it was her whim, as I have said, to consider that she had no sense of fun. I believe this arose from her not being able, as she confessed to me, to appreciate certain books that are supposed to be very humorous, and especially *Tom Jones*. Even making allowance for a natural feminine dislike to its coarseness, the book was distasteful to her in every way. She could see nothing laudable in it, and, with characteristic humility, she set down her want of appreciation to her own mental short-comings.

I was a very young man when I had first the pleasure of Miss Martineau's acquaintance, which was made in an unusually agreeable way. I had just written a volume of

poems which my friends thought more highly of than the world in general, and among others Mary Russell Mitford, of Swallowfield. I was going up to the lakes to spend my college vacation, and the authoress of *Our Village* was so good as to give me a line of introduction to her sister authoress. "You will find her very nice," she said, "and she is a very clever woman, though her works will not outlive her." On the other hand, Miss Martineau remarked to me of Miss Mitford's works, that "one likes them much better than one's judgment approves of them." At that time, in my juvenile cynicism, I snickered at these literary ladies who thus estimated each other's value at so moderate a figure; but, after all, Miss Mitford said of her rival, with whose theories and views of life in general she could certainly have entertained no sort of sympathy, no worse, as we have seen, than that rival said of herself, while Miss Martineau's criticism on Miss Mitford was not only eminently correct, but, when one comes to think of it, exceedingly eulogistic. These two ladies had, indeed, notwithstanding all differences of style and taste, a hearty respect for one another, and I got the benefit of it. I was received at "The Knoll" with a hospitality that was much in the teeth of Mr. Wordsworth's advice, and commenced a friendship that endured until her death, and which will be something more and deeper than a mere pride or boast to me as long as I live.

Miss Martineau was very good-natured in the reception of "good things" said at her expense. Hartley Coleridge, the ne'er-do-weel, who lived at the Nab Cottage, at Rydal, used to have her "thrown at him" a good deal, as the phrase goes; his own idle-

ness and indolence used to be contrasted with the vigor and vehemence of his neighbor, and he was asked why he did not follow so good an example. "Follow her?" said he. "She's a monomaniac about every thing."

That verdict amused her very much, and it was to some degree a true one. Whatever Harriet Martineau took up, she did literally "with all her soul and with all her strength;" and until it was turned out of hand, complete and perfect as far as work could make it, she was a good deal wrapped up in it. And she took many things in hand. These things resolved themselves mainly into two grand objects—the improvement of the position of the poor, and the elevation of public thought: her private conduct and character were in accordance with these high aspirations. She has probably left as many personal friends—real friends—behind her as any woman who ever lived, for she was the guide and comforter of very many. Though her physical ear was closed, her spiritual ear was ever open to the appeal of a fellow-creature. The young and the unknown found in her an adviser and a helper on the same path which she had herself trodden so successfully. She did not say, as the small-great are so prone to do, "I climbed the hill, but you are not strong enough: be content with the valley." If she saw promise, she did not cut it in the bud, but fostered it.

Though "twenty thousand colleges should thunder anathemas" at the memory of Harriet Martineau, it will keep sweet and pure in all hearts that knew her, and those hearts are among the best that beat in her fellow-countrymen and fellow-countrywomen.

GARTH:*

A Novel.

By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAD he been essentially a practical man, it is not likely that Garth would have got much solid encouragement out of this interview with his father. Ostensibly, indeed, there might rather have seemed to be reason for greater dejection than before. Instead of making light of his difficulties, or suggesting a feasible way out of them, Mr. Urmsom had deliberately counted them up and set them in order, denying its full weight to none, and sparing not to admit the multiplied menace of all combined.

Nevertheless, and despite his increasing

bodily discomfort, Garth, ere he fell asleep, was in better spirits than for several days previous. That the evil of his plight had not been extenuated was implicitly complimentary to his ability for getting the upper hand of it. If his father had thought him craven, he would scarcely have been at the pains of frightening him; and, on the other hand, what more poignant way is there of suggesting heroism than to warn of heroic obstacles? A hero delights to battle against odds; and if Garth knew himself for less than a hero, he was yet near enough akin thereto to feel the inspiration of standing in a hero's shoes.

To be understood, moreover, is to be twice one's self, and his father understood him but too well. To find that another mind than our own has analyzed our position and en-

* Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1875, by JULIAN HAWTHORNE, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.