HARRIET MARTINEAU

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Harriet Martineau by Mrs. F. Fenwick Miller

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PREFACE.

The material for this biographical and critical sketch of Harriet Martineau and her works has been drawn from a variety of sources. Some of it is quite new. Her own *Autobiography* was completed in 1855; and there has not hitherto been anything at all worth calling a record of the twenty-one years during which she lived and worked after that date. Even as regards the earlier period, although, of course, I have drawn largely for facts upon the *Autobiography*, yet I have found much that is new to relate. For some information and hints about this period I am indebted to her relatives, of her own generation, Dr. James Martineau, and Mrs. Henry Turner, of Nottingham, as well as to one or two others. With reference to the latest twenty-one years of her life, my record is entirely fresh, though necessarily brief. Mrs. Chapman, of

Boston, U.S., has written a volume in completion of the *Autobiography*, which should have covered this later period; but her account is little more than a repetition, in a peculiar style, of the story that Miss Martineau herself had told, and leaves the later work of the life without systematic record. As a well-known critic remarked in *Macmillan*—"This volume is one more illustration of the folly of intrusting the composition of biography to persons who have only the wholly irrelevant claim of intimate friendship." But it should be remembered that when Miss Martineau committed to Mrs. Chapman the task of writing a memorial sketch, and when the latter accepted the undertaking, both of them believed that the life and work of the subject of it were practically over. I have reason to know that if Harriet Martineau had supposed it to be even remotely possible that so much of her life remained to be spent and recorded, she would have chosen someone more skilled in literature, and more closely acquainted with English literary and political affairs, to complete her "Life." Having once asked Mrs. Chapman to fulfil the task, however, Harriet Martineau was too loyal and generous a friend to remove it from her charge; and Mrs. Chapman, on her side, while continually begging instructions from her subject as to what she was to say, and while doubtless aware that she would not be adequate to the under-

taking which had grown so since she accepted it, yet would not throw it off her hands. But her volume is in no degree a record of those last years, which constitute nearly a third of Harriet Martineau's whole life. I have had to seek facts and impressions about that period almost entirely from other sources.

My deepest obligations are due, and must be first expressed, to Mr. Henry G. Atkinson, the dearest friend of Harriet Martineau's maturity. It is commonly known that she forbade, by her will, the publication of her private letters; but she showed her supreme faith in and value for her friend, Mr. Atkinson, by specially exempting him from such prohibition. Her objection to the publication of letters was made on general grounds. Her own letters are singularly beautiful specimens of their class; and she declared that she would not mind if every word that ever she wrote were published; but she looked upon it as a duty to uphold the principle that letters should be held sacred confidences, just as all honourable people hold private conversations, not to be published without leave. But in authorising Mr. Atkinson to print her letters, if he pleased, she maintained that she was not departing from this principle; for it was only the same as it would be if two friends agreed to make their conversation known. I feel deeply grateful to Mr. Atkinson for allowing me the privilege of presenting

some of her letters to the public in this volume, and of perusing very many more.

I have been permitted, also, to read a vast number of Harriet Martineau's letters addressed to other friends besides Mr. Atkinson, and how much they have aided me in following her work and in appreciating her personality, may easily be guessed; but, of course, I may not publish these letters. Amongst many persons to whom I am indebted for helping me to "get touch" with my subject in this way, I must specially thank two. Mr. Henry Reeve, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, was a relative and intimate friend of Harriet Martineau; and her correspondence with so distinguished a man of letters was, naturally, peculiarly interesting—not the less so because they differed altogether on many matters of opinion. Her letters, which Mr. Reeve has kindly allowed me to see, have been of very great service to me. Miss F. Arnold, of Fox How, (the youngest daughter of Dr. Arnold, of Rugby,) is the second to whom like particular acknowledgment is due. She was young enough to have been Harriet Martineau's daughter; but she was also a beloved friend, and was almost a daily visitor at "The Knoll" during the later years of Miss Martineau's life. The letters which Miss Arnold, during occasional absences from home, received from her old friend, are very domestic, lively, and characteristic of the writer. It

has been of great value to me to have seen all the letters that have been lent me, but especially these two sets, so different and yet so similar as I have found them to be.

I have visited Norwich, and seen the house where Harriet Martineau was born; Tynemouth, where she lay ill; Ambleside, where she lived so long and died at last; and Birmingham, to see my valued friends, her nieces and nephew. If I should thank by name all with whom I have talked of her, and from whom I have learned something about her, the list would grow over-long; and so I must content myself with thus comprehensively expressing my sense of individual obligations to all who have laid even a small stone to this little memorial cairn.

F. F. M.
