

HARRIET MARTINEAU ON WOMEN

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II

ON WOMEN'S EQUAL RIGHTS

Let your attack be Evidence softened by Benevolence.

—Harriet Martineau
“*Criticism on Women*”

There can be but one true method in the treatment of each human being of either sex, of any color, and under any outward circumstances—to ascertain what are the powers of that being, to cultivate them to the utmost, and then to see what action they will find for themselves. This has probably never been done for men, unless in some rare individual cases. It has certainly never been done for women.

—Harriet Martineau
*Letter to an American women's rights
convention held at Worcester, Massachusetts*



- Harriet Martineau c. 1835
Reprinted from Webb, *Harriet Martineau*
Courtesy of R. K. Webb

Harriet Martineau was a lifelong feminist, and she became one early and on her own. "The woman question" was what she and other like-minded nineteenth-century thinkers and activists called what we call feminism.¹ In addition to giving her individual attention to women and women's concerns, Martineau participated in groups in both England and the United States that were fertile environments for deliberate efforts on women's behalf. Probably not too much should be made of the fact that she wrote admiringly of women writers in her first published piece ("Female Writers of Practical Divinity") or that she went to some length to establish the fact that the form she used for her political economy tales was derived from a woman. Still, these attributions acknowledged influences from women that she valued from the first.

Her first intellectual groups, the Norwich and then the London Unitarians and Utilitarians, were probably far more important in her development, since a component of the thought of both Unitarian religion and Utilitarian philosophy was favorable to women having a larger place in intellectual and public pursuits. Although the first of Martineau's several breaches with people she had once favored came with W. J. Fox, the Unitarian editor, because of his setting up a household with Eliza Flowers without marriage, Martineau was surely influenced by Fox's liberality toward talented women and the intellectual role such women as Flowers played in Fox's editorship. Her scruples about sexual liaisons were more stereotypically Victorian than the views and practices of many of her associates. Yet sexuality per se was not a feminist issue in the nineteenth century. To consider it an obstacle to the realization of feminist goals is to interpret nineteenth-century views in light of twentieth-century feminism which has made the link between sexuality and gender role assignment. It is ironic from a contemporary feminist stance, if not from her own, that she regenerated or kept up correspondence or a working relationship with the men in such affairs, but not the women.

The American group with whom Martineau found the greatest affinity during her 1834-1836 travels, the Garrisonian abolitionists, like the British Unitarians and Utilitarians, val-

¹ See note 13, Introduction.

ued the activity and importance of women and was markedly more advanced on the question than many other groups. Anti-slavery women's groups in America were to provide leaders and formative ideas in its early years for the movement for women's rights per se, a movement for women as well as a movement of and by women on behalf of slaves.

The five pieces that follow are ones in which Martineau addressed feminism in some general way. In the opening selection she questions the advisability of marriage for everyone, a position that required considerable bravery in 1838. She raised the question as a means of making judgments about the character of a society, but whatever its intent, it was a courageous question to ask and one that anticipates such contrasting variations of the theme in the 1970s as Kate Millett's "sexual politics" and Jessie Bernard's study of "his" and "hers" marriages that yield greater benefits to men and lesser benefits to women. Martineau was shrewd and discerning to pick the place of women and the treatment of women in marriage as indices of a society's distinctiveness.

In *How to Observe Morals and Manners* she set up criteria for analyzing a society. Published after her books on the United States, *Society in America* and *Retrospect of Western Travel*, it reflects the method of comparative study of societies used in those books. She set down what she believed to be an appropriate set of principles, laws of right and wrong, if you will, and then gauged the society by how well she thought it met the principles. As the title suggests, these principles had to do with "morals," deep values held and acted upon, and "manners," assumptions and practices of courtesy, kindness, politeness, or the absence thereof, the surface manifestations of moral depth.

This work was indeed an early sociological work on method, as Alice Rossi has claimed. Martineau goes halfway toward what early anthropologists and sociologists several decades later hoped to achieve. That is, her methodological approach involved the attempt to evolve some detached criteria for objectivity. That far, she succeeds in being a primitive scientist. But the other half of her approach provides her limitation. She inserts her *own* values, quite assuredly and dogmatically, as the appropriate criteria. This was, however, four

years before Comte's *Positive Philosophy* was published and at least thirteen years before she read it. She was herself to criticize this phase of her thinking as "metaphysical" at a later time.

Her feminism and her social science may be in conflict in this article. To raise such questions about women and marriage was important on women's behalf however she did it, but to do it dogmatically is not good enough. Calling monogamy of the English variety "the natural method" for all coupling is application of an unexamined value system. Calling for removal of inferior treatment of women is suggesting a new one.

The second selection, "Criticism on Women," published in 1839, is ostensibly a review essay of three items, but is in fact an essay on the abuse of women and the right of women to be respected and honored or to be criticized according to standards of honesty and fairness to all people. One of the persons she defends so splendidly in this piece is the young Queen Victoria, just come to the throne in 1837. Another (this review is anonymous) is herself, attacked ad hominem for her deafness and her womanhood after daring to write on population.

She had received vicious treatment in the reviews of "Weal and Woe in Garveloch." Writing under the editorship of John Gibson Lockhart in the *Quarterly Review*, John Wilson Croker was the first to damn her. He wrote, "and most of all it is quite impossible not to be shocked, nay, disgusted, with many of the unfeminine and mischievous doctrines on the principles of social welfare. . . . A woman who thinks child-bearing a *crime against society*! An unmarried woman who declaims against marriage!! A *young woman* who deprecates charity and provision for the poor!!"²

The attack was patently unfair, not only for its rejection of the mild story favoring birth control, but also for its sexist rebuke of Martineau personally as a woman who would dare to write on such a subject. In "Criticism on Women," she coins the word "Crokerism" to identify this particular kind of reputation smearing.

The very year (1832) of Croker's article, in fact, she was still allowing for the possibility that she might marry and,

²Quoted in Vera Wheatley, *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), pp. 101-102.

hence, bear children herself. Writing to her mother in anticipation of her mother's coming to live with her in London, she laid out, along with her claim to professional independence as a woman, her right to marry: "There is another chance, dear mother, and that is, of my marrying. I have no thoughts of it. I see a thousand reasons against it. But I could not positively answer for always continuing in the same mind. . . . I mean no more than I say, I assure you; but, strong as my convictions are against marrying, I will not positively promise."³

The third piece is a marvelous letter written, no doubt, to Maria Weston Chapman and read at an American women's rights convention at Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1851.⁴ In the letter, Martineau repeats her themes of the necessity of equal treatment of all humans, of the importance of education to enable women to flourish, of the need for the object of education to be occupation, and of the silliness of the old controversy of influence versus office. However, it is significant here that she couched her persuasive arguments in terms of the need to do a scientific experiment. Although her writing had always been analytical, this letter was written in the year she was first reading Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, and it is clear that she has a new faith that social experiment will yield proof of women's ability. This letter from 1851 is an early example of her work after she had found clarity in science and provides a good exhibit of her utter confidence in the outcome of an experiment not yet conducted. Only to those of us with post-Darwinian, post-Freudian, post-Einsteinian mentalities is such assurance unwarranted. It was entirely earnest and even revolutionary in Martineau.

If the personal is the political is the intellectual, we may have the key to Martineau's vast outpouring of work about

³Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴I have to thank Joan H. Winterkorn of the Department of Rare Books, Cornell University Libraries, both for providing me with a copy of an undated clipping of the article from the Cornell University Library Anti-Slavery Collection, and for tracing its source of publication to the *Liberator*. Webb in his *Harriet Martineau* (p. 182n) credits its publication to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, but Winterkorn speculates that he did so on finding it among other clippings of Martineau's writings from the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in the Cornell University Libraries.

women. One element in the shaping of her young life was the insanity and apparent suicide of the one man to whom she ever seemed to have had a romantic attachment, her fiancé John Worthington, a college friend of her brother James. I do not think it is the whole story. I do not think it is even a great part of the story. Yet, I take at her word the account she gives in the fourth selection of her singleness being the great benefit to her work, in effect her work being her love. In so doing, I differ with her recent biographers who have speculated about her lesbianism or absence of it, her sexuality, latent or active. R. K. Webb concludes that she was a "latent lesbian." Pichanick disagrees with him, arguing that although Martineau had important "affectionate female friendships," there is no evidence for her being a lesbian.⁵ I believe she was probably behaviorally asexual and emotionally sexually naive, and I think she means what she says in her *Autobiography*: that Worthington's death liberated her to be alone and like it.

The fifth selection, on Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and the woman question, occurs in the context of a description of William Godwin as one of her morning visitors in London in the early days of her fame in 1833.⁶ She delighted in Godwin and greatly enjoyed his company, and, seeing no conflict of ideology loyalties, Martineau expressly denied that her interest in him arose because of his connection with Mary Wollstonecraft. Instead, she said, the opposite was true. She had no use for Wollstonecraft, while honoring Godwin. She claimed Wollstonecraft did the cause of woman a disservice, proclaiming Wollstonecraft "a poor victim of passion, with no control over her own peace, and no calmness or content except when the needs of her individual nature were satisfied."

All that, while extolling the pleasure of visiting with the man who loved Wollstonecraft—presumably with a passion

⁵ See Webb, *Harriet Martineau*, pp. 50-51; and Pichanick, *Harriet Martineau*, pp. 109-110.

⁶ Godwin, a radical philosopher, was briefly the beloved husband of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, the first English feminist work. The two were a devoted couple but maintained separate households. Wollstonecraft died from complications following the birth of their daughter, Mary Shelley.

of his own—and who had done everything he could to keep her memory alive! The passion she means, of course, is not merely sexual extravagance but the exaggerated romantic flamboyance of a personality like Wollstonecraft's.

Following that judgment of Wollstonecraft, however, her comments on the woman question sound uncharacteristically self-righteous. Her tone is hostile toward some women, but her message is still consistently that of the rational moralist. She writes calmly of her expectation that women will achieve the right to vote.

ON MARRIAGE

The Marriage compact is the most important feature of the domestic state on which the observer can fix his attention. If he be a thinker, he will not be surprised at finding much imperfection in the marriage state wherever he goes. By no arrangements yet attempted have purity of morals, constancy of affection, and domestic peace been secured to any extensive degree in society. Almost every variety of method is still in use, in one part of the world or another: The primitive custom of brothers marrying sisters still subsists in some Eastern regions. Polygamy is very common there, as every one knows. In countries which are too far advanced for this, every restraint of law, all sanction of opinion, has been tried to render that natural method,—the restriction of one husband to one wife,—successful, and therefore universal and permanent. Law and opinion have, however, never availed to anything like complete success. Even in thriving young countries, where no considerations of want, and few of ambition, can interfere with domestic peace,—where the numbers are equal,

Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (London: Charles Knight, 1838), pp. 167–182. Probably drafted in 1834.

where love has the promise of a free and even course, and where religious sentiment is directed full upon the sanctity of the marriage state,—it is found to be far from pure. In almost all countries, the corruption of society in this department is so deep and wide-spreading, as to vitiate both moral sentiment and practice in an almost hopeless degree. It neutralizes almost all attempts to ameliorate and elevate the condition of the race.—There must be something fearfully wrong where the general result is so unfortunate as this. As in most other cases of social suffering, the wrong will be found to lie less in the methods ordained and put in practice, than in the prevalent sentiment of society, out of which all methods arise.

It is necessary to make mention (however briefly) of the kinds of false sentiment from which the evil of conjugal unhappiness appears to spring.—The sentiment by which courage is made the chief ground of honour in men, and chastity in women, coupled with the inferiority in which women have ever been sunk, was sure to induce profligacy. As long as men were brave nothing more was required to make them honourable in the eyes of society: while the inferior condition of women has ever exposed those of them who were not protected by birth and wealth to the profligacy of men. . . .

Marriage exists everywhere, to be studied by the moral observer. He must watch the character of courtships wherever he goes;—whether the young lady is negotiated for and promised by her guardians, without having seen her intended; like the poor girl who, when she asked her mother to point out her future husband from among a number of gentlemen, was silenced with the rebuke, “What is that to you?”—or whether they are left free to exchange their faith “by flowing stream, through wood, or craggy wild,” as in the United States;—or whether there is a medium between these two extremes, as in England. He must observe how fate is defied by lovers in various countries. . . . Scotch lovers agree to come together after so many years spent in providing the “plenishing.” Irish lovers conclude the business, in case of difficulty, by appearing before the priest the next morning. There is recourse to a balcony and rope-ladder in one country; a steam-boat and back-settlement in another; trust and patience in a third; and intermediate flirtations, to pass the time, in a fourth. He must note the degree of worldly ambition which attends marriages,

and which may therefore be supposed to stimulate them,—how much space the house with two rooms in humble life, and the country-seat and carriages in higher life, occupy in the mind of bride or bridegroom.—He must observe whether conjugal infidelity excites horror and rage, or whether it is so much a matter of course as that no jealousy interferes to mar the arrangements of mutual convenience.—He must mark whether women are made absolutely the property of their husbands, in mind and in estate; or whether the wife is treated more or less professedly as an equal party in the agreement.—He must observe whether there is an excluded class, victims to their own superstition or to a false social obligation, wandering about to disturb by their jealousy or licentiousness those whose lot is happier.—He must observe whether there are domestic arrangements for home enjoyments, or whether all is planned on the supposition of pleasure lying abroad; whether the reliance is on books, gardens, and play with children, or on the opera, parties, the ale-house, or dances on the green.—He must mark whether the ladies are occupied with their household cares in the morning, and the society of their husbands in the evening, or with embroidery and looking out of balconies; with receiving company all day, or gadding abroad; with the library or the nursery; with lovers or with children.—In each country, called civilized, he will meet with almost all these varieties: but in each there is such a prevailing character in the aspect of domestic life, that intelligent observation will enable him to decide, without much danger of mistake, as to whether marriage is merely an arrangement of convenience, in accordance with low morals, or a sacred institution, commanding the reverence and affection of a virtuous people. No high degree of this sanctity can be looked for till that moderation is attained which, during the prevalence of asceticism and its opposite, is reached only by a few. That it yet exists nowhere as the characteristic of any society,—that all the blessings of domestic life are not yet open to all, so as to preclude the danger of any one encroaching on his neighbour,—is but too evident to the travelled observer. He can only mark the degree of approximation to this state of high morals wherever he goes.

The traveller everywhere finds woman treated as the inferior party in a compact in which both parties have an equal

interest. Any agreement thus formed is imperfect, and is liable to disturbance; and the danger is great in proportion to the degradation of the supposed weaker party. The degree of the degradation of woman is as good a test as the moralist can adopt for ascertaining the state of domestic morals in any country.

The Indian squaw carries the household burdens, trudging in the dust, while her husband on horseback paces before her, unencumbered but by his own gay trappings. She carries the wallet with food, the matting for the lodge, the merchandise (if they possess any), and her infant. There is no exemption from labour for the squaw of the most vaunted chief. In other countries the wife may be found drawing the plough, hewing wood and carrying water; the men of the family standing idle to witness her toils. Here the observer may feel pretty sure of his case. From a condition of slavery like this, women are found rising to the highest condition in which they are at present seen, in France, England, and the United States,—where they are less than half-educated, precluded from earning a subsistence, except in a very few ill-paid employments, and prohibited from giving or withholding their assent to laws which they are yet bound by penalties to obey. In France, owing to the great destruction of men in the wars of Napoleon, women are engaged, and successfully engaged, in a variety of occupations which have been elsewhere supposed unsuitable to the sex. Yet there remains so large a number who cannot, by the most strenuous labour in feminine employments, command the necessaries of life, while its luxuries may be earned by infamy, that the morals of the society are naturally bad. Great attention has of late been given to this subject in France: the social condition of women is matter of thought and discussion to a degree which promises some considerable amelioration. Already, women can do more in France than anywhere else; they can attempt more without ridicule or arbitrary hinderance: and the women of France are probably destined to lead the way in the advance which the sex must hereafter make. At present, society is undergoing a transition from a feudal state to one of mutual government; and women, gaining in some ways, suffer in others during the process. They have, happily for themselves, lost much of the peculiar kind of observance which was the most remarkable feature of the

chivalrous age; and it has been impossible to prevent their sharing in the benefits of the improvement and diffusion of knowledge. All cultivation of their powers has secured to them the use of new power; so that their condition is far superior to what it was in any former age. But new difficulties about securing a maintenance have arisen. Marriage is less general; and the husbands of the greater number of women are not secure of a maintenance from the lords of the soil, any more than women are from being married. The charge of their own maintenance is thrown upon large numbers of women, without the requisite variety of employments having been opened to them, or the needful education imparted. A natural consequence of this is, that women are educated to consider marriage the one object in life, and therefore to be extremely impatient to secure it. The unfavourable influence of these results upon the happiness of domestic life may be seen at a glance.

This may be considered the sum and substance of female education in England; and the case is scarcely better in France, though the independence and practical efficiency of women there are greater than in any other country. The women in the United States are in a lower condition than either, though there is less striving after marriage, from its greater frequency, and little restriction is imposed upon the book-learning which women may obtain. But the old feudal notions about the sex flourish there, while they are going out in the more advanced countries of Europe; and these notions, in reality, regulate the condition of women. American women generally are treated in no degree as equals, but with a kind of superstitious outward observance, which, as they have done nothing to earn it, is false and hurtful. Coexisting with this, there is an extreme difficulty in a woman's obtaining a maintenance, except by the exercise of some rare powers. In a country where women are brought up to be indulged wives, there is no hope, help, or prospect for such as have not money and are not married.

In America, women can earn a maintenance only by teaching, sewing, employment in factories, keeping boarding-houses, and domestic service. Some governesses are tolerably well paid, — comparing their earnings with those of men. Employment in factories, and domestic service, are well paid.

Sewing is so wretched an occupation everywhere, that it is to be hoped that machinery will soon supersede the use of human fingers in a labour so unprofitable. In Boston, Massachusetts, a woman is paid ninepence (sixpence English) for making a shirt.—In England, besides these occupations, others are opening; and, what is of yet greater consequence, the public mind is awakening to the necessity of enlarging the sphere of female industry. Some of the inferior branches of the fine arts have lately offered profitable employment to many women. The commercial adversity to which the country has been exposed from time to time, has been of service to the sex, by throwing hundreds and thousands of them upon their own resources, and thus impelling them to urge claims and show powers which are more respected every day.—In France this is yet more conspicuously the case. There, women are shopkeepers, merchants, professional accountants, editors of newspapers, and employed in many other ways, unexampled elsewhere, but natural and respectable enough on the spot.

Domestic morals are affected in two principal respects by these differences. Where feminine occupations of a profitable nature are few, and therefore overstocked, and therefore yielding a scanty maintenance with difficulty, there is the strongest temptation to prefer luxury with infamy to hardship with unrecognized honour. Hence arises much of the corruption of cities,—less in the United States than in Europe, from the prevalence of marriage,—but awful in extent everywhere. Where vice is made to appear the interest of large classes of women, the observer may be quite sure that domestic morals will be found impure. If he can meet with any society where the objects of life are as various and as freely open to women as to men, there he may be sure of finding the greatest amount of domestic purity and peace; for, if women were not helpless, men would find it far less easy to be vicious.

The other way in which domestic morals are affected by the scope which is allowed to the powers of women, is through the views of marriage which are induced. Marriage is debased by being considered the one worldly object in life,—that on which maintenance, consequence, and power depend. Where the husband marries for connexion, fortune, or an heir to his estate, and the wife for an establishment, for conse-

quence, or influence, there is no foundation for high domestic morals and lasting peace; and in a country where marriage is made the single aim of all women, there is no security against the influence of some of these motives even in the simplest and purest cases of attachment. The sordidness is infused from the earliest years; the taint is in the mind before the attachment begins, before the objects meet; and the evil effects upon the marriage state are incalculable.

All this—the sentiment of society with regard to Woman and to Marriage, the social condition of Woman, and the consequent tendency and aim of her education,—the traveller must carefully observe. Each civilized society claims for itself the superiority in its treatment of woman. In one, she is indulged with religious shows, and with masquerades, or Punch, as an occasional variety. In another, she is left in honourable and undisputed possession of the housekeeping department. In a third, she is allowed to meddle, behind the scenes, with the business which is confided to her husband's management. In a fourth, she is satisfied in being the cherished domestic companion, unaware of the injury of being doomed to the narrowness of mind which is the portion of those who are always confined to the domestic circle. In a fifth, she is flattered at being guarded and indulged as a being requiring incessant fostering, and too feeble to take care of herself. In a sixth society, there may be found expanding means of independent occupation, of responsible employment for women; and here, other circumstances being equal, is the best promise of domestic fidelity and enjoyment.

It is a matter of course that women who are furnished with but one object,—marriage,—must be as unfit for anything when their aim is accomplished as if they had never had any object at all. They are no more equal to the task of education than to that of governing the state; and, if any unexpected turn of adversity befalls them, they have no resource but a convent, or some other charitable provision. Where, on the other hand, women are brought up capable of maintaining an independent existence, other objects remain where the grand one is accomplished. Their independence of mind places them beyond the reach of the spoiler; and their cultivated faculty of reason renders them worthy guardians of the rational beings

whose weal or woe is lodged in their hands. There is yet, as may be seen by a mere glance over society, only a very imperfect provision made anywhere for doing justice to the next generation by qualifying their mothers; but the observer of morals may profit by marking the degrees in which this imperfection approaches to barbarism. Where he finds that girls are committed to convents for education, and have no alternative in life but marriage, in which their will has no share, and a return to their convent, he may safely conclude that there a plurality of lovers is a matter of course, and domestic enjoyments of the highest kind undesired and unknown. He may conclude that as are the parents, so will be the children; and that, for one more generation at least, there will be little or no improvement. But where he finds a variety of occupations open to women; where he perceives them not only pursuing the lighter mechanic arts, dispensing charity and organizing schools for the poor, but occupied in education, and in the study of science and the practice of the fine arts, he may conclude that here resides the highest domestic enjoyment which has yet been attained, and the strongest hope of a further advance. . . .

From observation on these classes of facts,—the Occupation of the people, the respective Characters of the occupied classes, the Health of the population, the state of Marriage and of Women, and the character of Childhood,—the moralist may learn more of the private life of a community than from the conversation of any number of the individuals who compose it.

CRITICISM ON WOMEN

- Art. VII.—1. *A Letter to the Queen on the State of the Monarchy.* By a Friend of the People.
2. *A Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infants' Custody Bill.* By Pierce Stevenson, Esq.
3. A few Plain Words to the Author of 'A Letter to the Queen.'

These publications, though their subjects are very different, have one common feature, for the sake of which we have put them together, at the head of this article. They all either contain or comment on the topic we have chosen for a few remarks—Abuse of Women;—the question never more urgently pressed on our attention than at the present moment—How ought women to be treated in controversy?

The whole morality of controversy is so very new to literature and literary journals, that (like the man who was astonished when told that he had spoken prose all his life, without knowing it), it will be a surprise to some to be told there is such a thing as a morality of literary controversy. But literature is, however lamentably, amenable to moral rules as well as to artistical ones, and even critics are responsible to moral obligations, like ordinary mortals; . . .

In consequence of the change of the relations between authors and reviewers—*slashing* articles have become more valuable to reviews. They are really very stirring reading: even when stupidly done they are not dull. If it be the interest of most men to be civil and decorous even to their enemies (on the principle of the Spaniard, who called the devil, my lord), because they may one day fall into their hands, the reviewer is an exception. The more spicy and personal he can make his article the better, provided he has enough of tact and taste to

carry the malice of his readers along with him. Hence, it is this circumstance, we presume, which accounts for the existence of a very curious thing in literature, called Crokerism. There are several clever and amusing writers of the present day who owe much notoriety, and sale, to the regularity with which they season their journals with attacks on men, and especially on women. The morality of controversy among these men, is a fear of the law of libel, and the rules of duelling, and nothing more. They hold, that in politics and literature everything is fair against an opponent that is safe; at least this is the only morality they practise, and, therefore, their only real morality. In slang parlance, their attacks are called by the strange word we have used—they are called Crokerisms: a word of mysterious origin and import. Philologists and lexicographers are divided regarding its origin; for ourselves, we are opposed to the opinion that it is derived from a venomous reptile. No reptile could write reviews; at least our acquaintance with natural history does not furnish us with the slightest knowledge of any such, since the fish which yields a fluid like ink, does not, from want of early instruction in caligraphy, put its ink into a form adapted to the printers. We can only inform our readers what the usage is regarding the word. If a man is addicted to abuse—if he is an animal who lives by it,—and if he exhibits a “wonderful accession of courage,” to quote the words of a great wit, “when he attacks a woman,” he is called a Crokerite. When a general of great and well-merited fame—the greatest marshal a great people have amongst them, arrives, bearing the congratulations of a nation to the foot of the English throne on the occasion of the coronation of a young Queen,—if, instead of a generous admiration of distinguished genius, and a proud and noble superiority, to national prejudices, and the base ashes of old feuds, a writer selects this very moment for the fabrication of a tissue of unworthy insinuations addressed to the meanest capacities and hearts,—and if, when from the magnificent aisles of Westminster Abbey, the assembled aristocracy of the empire, and from the thronged streets and allies of the metropolis, the toil-worn democracy of England—both unite to give an utterance in shouts from the great heart of manhood, in admiration of an old, brave, and fame-covered foe,—if at this hour of national generosity and

enthusiasm, a writer is found who mutters feebly from the dirt, weak innuendoes and insinuated lies, the name which describes him to all men is a "Crokerite." When a woman who has had her name blighted by slander, and her honour implicated by imbecility—has obtained a verdict of acquittal from a jury of her countrymen, and her husband himself has declared her innocence—if a set of men are found who, under the shelter of the anonymous, and laws which give no redress for the foulest wrong which words can inflict on a human being—the sullyng of the fair fame of a woman—still brutally denounce her as guilty, they, whatever may be the vehicle they use—are a set of Crokerites. If a writer, who carefully and skilfully avoids duellable matter when attacking men, unscrupulously publishes things which can receive no other reply from women, who cannot fight—the man or thing is a Crokerite. When the successful sycophant of a debauched king sneers at a gifted man, made poor by sufferings for his honest convictions for being poor, the sneer is a Crokerism. If a man, who by no merit of his, has ears to hear, sneers at a woman for being deaf; a man who is not lame ridicules another man for being halt; a man who has the use of his eyesight throws jokes at a man who is blind—adding the scoffer's sting to the afflicting dispensations of Providence; and if this ribald scoffer has not even the excuse of the children who cried "bald-head" at the prophet in the scriptures, being neither young nor thoughtless, the irreverend mocker, with a heart of blackness and a soul of slime—is a Crokerite. If a woman, virtuous and gifted, whose genius sheds a lustre on the nation which gave her birth, and showers benefits on the people who are proud when they call her countrywoman—complies with the dying wish of her father, and before her eyes are dry from the tears she dropped over his sacred grave, completes and publishes his Life,—if this woman is abused for being too partial to that pious and holy memory, accused of too much love to that dead and departed one, and because she has been too partial and too loving to her father, charged with caring no more for the death of her mother than for the death of a kitten, the man who sends his slanders all over the world against the mourner beside that grave,—is a Crokerite. Were a stranger to seek throughout the empire for the men who have spared no woman who has dared

to differ from them in politics—not even those across the purity of whose fame the breath of no slander but theirs was ever breathed—an Austen, an Edgeworth,⁷ or a Martineau,—for the men whom all manly men who speak the English tongue would clothe in recreant calf-skin, or substitute for it the red stripes of the horsewhip,—he would find them in the Crokerites.

We shall now, by a selection of instances, show that there is not a single syllable of exaggeration in the general statement we have made of the conduct of the Crokerites towards distinguished women. Women are not protected by law from the worst slander to which they can be subjected, unless they can prove special damages. They cannot have the miserable protection of the duel, because every affection of their natures rises up to make them use their influence to prevent their brothers and husbands from taking up their quarrels. They are the most piquant and the safest objects of abuse a reviewer can select. . . .

The Queen is the first woman of whose treatment by anonymous writers we have to speak. When, at the early age of eighteen, this young and blooming girl was called by the laws to the throne of the British empire—that throne became, we do believe, a greater object of interest to all Europe than it had been for many generations; and at home there were, no doubt, various feelings entertained by different parties, but indifference was felt nowhere. A human interest was imparted to a gorgeous pageant—royalty was made attractive by womanhood—the chief magistrate enlisted all sympathies as a youthful girl. It is true that to the office-hunting Tories her accession was detestable. Amidst the universal sympathy and affection which prevailed in society at that hour, it is true that from men of this class might be heard muttered curses on the laws which placed the Queen in her powerful position; and it is equally true, whatever may have been the father to his thought, that Sir Robert Peel⁸ compared her to Marie Antoinette, a glittering star which set in blood. But these were the only excep-

⁷Jane Austen (1775–1817) and Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849). Edgeworth was also a novelist, highly thought of in Martineau's time.

⁸Leader of the opposition when Queen Victoria came to the throne.

tions. In the assembled crowd which saw her with tearful eyes appear at the window of the palace of St. James's⁹ on the lovely summer morning of her proclamation,—among the eager crowds who hedged her state carriage as, drawn along the Strand towards Guildhall on the 9th of November 1837, by cream-coloured horses, it floated—a fairy vision—there was one common feeling of sympathy, and hope of kindness and good-will: and from St. James's these circling feelings extended and widened through the length and breadth of the empire. A gifted lady traveller, Mrs. Jameson,¹⁰ has told us how they sprung up in her heart in the far west on the Lake Huron, when in the east the lake and sky were intermingling radiance, and then, just there, where they seemed flowing and glowing together like a bath of fire, the huge black hull of a vessel loomed, lessened, and became distinct as a heavy-built schooner, with one man on her bows slowly pulling a large oar by walking backwards and forwards, who, when asked what news, answered, "William the Fourth is dead, and Queen Victoria reigns in his stead."

"As many hopes hang on that youthful head
As there hang blossoms on the boughs in May."

These feelings have not yet passed away. True it is, the Queen has done little to increase those feelings towards her: but *she* has done nothing to alter them.

Though we have enjoyed, we do not think, the satire quite just of the caricature of her which represents Britannia patronizing the drama;—the Queen patting the lions which are trampling upon Shakspeare. The Queen, though at first, when the lion novelty was at its height, she went more frequently to Drury Lane than to Covent Garden theatre, has since, by the frequency of her visits, shown a disposition to appreciate the noble exertions of Mr. Macready¹¹ in a great national cause—the restoration of Shakspeare to the stage and

⁹Royal residence from 1697 to 1837, hence the starting point for the coronation procession.

¹⁰Anna Brownell Jameson (1794–1860), writer on art, literature, religion, and charity; best known for her works on art history.

¹¹William Charles Macready (1793–1873), prominent Shakespearean actor, at this time (1837–1839) manager of Covent Garden theater.

the people. It was a fit and proper feeling which dictated the fear that these services were not appreciated by the occupant of the throne; it was a just and rightly informed taste which was apprehensive that the Queen was wanting in a due and becoming loyalty and homage to Shakspeare—a man greater in real greatness than all her line—and to the admirable and exquisite delineations of his great creations which Covent Gardens presents, the Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Prospero of a Macready, the first tragedian of his time—and the Hermione, Miranda, Cordelia, and Desdemona of Miss Helen Faucit, a young actress of unrivalled grace, and power, and tenderness, omitting all mention for the present of the excellent performers who support them, Horton, Elton, and Bartley, and the rest,—but however praiseworthy the feelings may have been which dictated the fears and suspicions in question, the Queen deserved them not; since we doubt if there be a single member of the upper classes who has, more frequently than she has done, encouraged and applauded by her presence the efforts now made to support and perpetuate the legitimate drama.

When it is considered that the Queen, whether fit or otherwise for the position she occupies, was put into it by no seeking of hers,—that laws to the making of which she was not a party, and a Providence in the decrees of which she had no voice, dragged her from the studies of girlhood to the cares of empire, the man who reproaches her or insults her, or mentions so as to pain her, the inevitable consequences of the laws and of Providence, is guilty of an immorality and a cruelty akin to his who scoffs the baldness of the old or the blindness of the blind. . . .

. . . [A] writer, who is said to be a man whose sycophancy to a brave and stout-hearted old man, William the Fourth, was as conspicuous and odious as his rude and base insolence to a defenceless girl—the most defenceless and exposed in matters of this sort in the empire,—is unworthy of manhood;—this virtuous, experienced, aged, dignified, and much read patriot, compares the Queen to Louis XIV, an infant called to grasp the sceptre when his fingers were too tiny to grasp its narrow end, and to Henry VI, a slaving idiot, called upon to satisfy the “longing desire of his faithful Commons” by making a sign that he heard their prayers.

It is true, doubtless, that great qualifications for govern-

ment cannot be possessed by a girl of twenty; we could name orators of sixty who have not an atom of them; but it is false that a young woman of twenty is a child, and every one who has seen her intelligent face knows that the comparisons by which utter incapacity is insinuated against the Queen are alike unfeeling and false. We believe this writer equally far from the truth when he says, the feelings of loyalty and affection with which the accession of the Queen to the throne was greeted were unmeaning, and that they have already changed into feelings of unpopularity. The human sympathy for one so young, and so perilously placed, which fused itself through the habitual loyalty of a monarchical people—even the Chartists¹² are not Republicans—sprung from feelings too deeply planted in the natures of all generous and kind-hearted people to be erased until its object shall have done, instead of nothing, many things, to cause its erasure. . . .

[There follow examples of critical slander of Mrs. Norton, Lady Morgan, Mrs. Jameson, and Miss Edgeworth.]

MISS MARTINEAU. — We have found it to be impossible to give any examples from the Crokerite reviews of the worst and coarsest attacks which they have made on this lady. Our pages have never contained a line or an allusion calculated to bring a blush on the cheek of any woman; and we will not sully them now with the pollutions of the Crokerites. Miss Martineau happened to differ with the Crokerite review regarding the new Poor-law Bill: she approved in 1833 of a measure which their slower appreciation approved a few years later. But, owing to this she was made the object of attacks in which every joke a coarse but stupid writer could invent in the subject of population was applied to her.

Of the abuse of another sort we can furnish specimens. Miss Martineau is, as everybody knows, so deaf that she is obliged to use an ear-trumpet, which, however, she does so well, that very few persons indeed surpass her in the ability with which she collects information, whether from seeing or listening. This infirmity is thus brutally alluded to by the Cro-

¹²A reform group of the 1830s and 1840s concerned with electoral and social reform. Martineau's point here is that even these reformers, feared as extremists by many, were not opposed to the monarchy.

kerite review—the sneer at the blind is directed against Mr. Holman, the traveller.

—“We cannot answer these questions; but Miss Martineau’s inference is plain and undeniable—none of these persons could be expected in their present state to write an instructive book of travels, whereas, if any of them, after losing eyes and ears, should by any means become acquainted with this excellent work, and thereby learn *how to observe*, &c.”

—“Very few indeed; and considering that there are but two *blind* travellers extant, and only *one* that we know of, stone *deaf*, we cannot but wonder where Miss Martineau has collected all this valuable information.”

The editors of the periodicals in which these things appear, complain most piteously against being held responsible for the slanders they are said to insert by the contributors who proclaim everywhere, that they despise and detest the insertions which are forced upon them by editorial omnipotence. No man owns these things: the owning of them would be incompatible with a reception into the society of honourable men. The editors, it is true, are liable to be asked, why they insert passages which expose them to imputations on their personal honour and respectability; and the contributors to the enquiry, why they send their articles to men who issue them to the world with detestable and despicable additions. But the cowardice of the anonymous, covers both editors and contributors. The baseness of equivocation conceals them. The women who are slandered are known: they stand clearly and distinctly in the public gaze—the men who slander them are hidden: their names are denied; their deeds are repudiated even by themselves. Their friends would not stand up for them were their names or their initials attached to their articles. We remember having seen a caricature, in which a gentleman is represented asking a villanous-looking cabman to drive him to the Old Bailey,¹ who replies, that he had never heard of the place. Mention Crokerism to a Crokerite, and he assures you he never heard of such a thing.

The disgust which the account we have given of abuse of women, must have excited, in every manly breast, is likely to be less than it ought to be, owing to the lax morality prevalent

¹Famous London criminal court.

on the subject of satire. When benevolent writers have said that pity and compassion, rather than anger and reprobation, were the fit feelings with which men ought habitually to regard even the crimes of their fellows, they have been told that the Creator would not have implanted the emotions of anger and reprobation in our natures, had he not intended them to be exercised on appropriate and deserving objects. . . .

We had almost forgotten the Crokerites. As an improvement on their mode of warfare, clever and witty men, have said it is not the interest of our class to fight with the weapons of abuse and slander, at which the worst men are the best fighters, and therefore they have recommended the use only of the weapons of cleverness and wit. This is a great improvement, but somewhat selfish of the wits: the true morality of controversy seems however to be, to avoid all personalities with an avoidance proportioned to the defencelessness of their object, and when the duty of attack comes to discharge it even against a Crokerite,—hesitatingly as one awed by the realized presence of both Truth and Charity: let your attack be Evidence softened by Benevolence.

LETTER TO AMERICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION

The following Letter from Miss Martineau was read to the Convention:—

Cromer, [England], Aug. 3, 1851.

MY DEAR MADAM: I beg to thank you heartily for your kindness in sending me the Report of the Proceedings of your 'Woman's Rights Convention.' I had gathered what I could from the newspapers concerning it, but I was gratified at being able to read, in a collected form, addresses so full of ear-

Liberator 21 (November 1, 1851).

ness and sound truth as I found most of the speeches to be. I hope you are aware of the interest excited in this country by that Convention; the strongest proof of which is the appearance of an article on the subject in *The Westminster Review*, (for July,) as thorough-going as any of your own addresses, and from the pen (at least, as it is understood here,) of one of our very first men, Mr. John S. Mill. I am not without hope that this article will materially strengthen your hands, and I am sure it cannot but cheer your hearts.

As for me, my thoughts and best wishes will be with you when you meet in October. I cannot accept your hearty invitation to attend your Convention, as my home duties will not allow of my leaving my own country. But you may be assured of my warm and unrestricted sympathy. Ever since I became capable of thinking for myself, I have clearly seen—and I have said it till my listeners and readers are probably tired of hearing it—that there can be but one true method in the treatment of each human being of either sex, of any color, and under any outward circumstances—to ascertain what are the powers of that being, to cultivate them to the utmost, and *then* to see what action they will find for themselves. This has probably never been done for men, unless in some rare individual cases. It has certainly never been done for women: and, till it is done, all debating about what woman's intellect is—all speculation, or laying down the law, as to what is woman's sphere, is a mere beating of the air. *A priori* conceptions have long been found worthless in physical science, and nothing was really effected till the experimental method was clearly made out and strictly applied in practice, and the same principle holds most certainly through the whole range of Moral Science. Whether we regard the physical fact of what women are able to do, or the moral fact of what woman ought to do, it is equally necessary to abstain from making any decision prior to experiment. We see plainly enough the waste of time and thought among the men who once talked of Nature abhorring a vacuum, or disputed at great length as to whether angels could go from end to end without passing through the middle; and the day will come when it will appear to be no less absurd to have argued, as men and women are arguing now, about what woman ought to do, before it was ascertained what woman can do. Let us once see a hundred women educated up

to the highest point that education at present reaches—let them be supplied with such knowledge as their faculties are found to crave, and let them be free to use, apply and increase their knowledge as their faculties shall instigate, and it will presently appear what is the sphere of each of the hundred. One may be discovering comets, like Miss Herschel; one may be laying upon the mathematical structure of the universe, like Mrs. Somerville;¹⁴ another may be analyzing the chemical relations of Nature in the laboratory; another may be penetrating the mysteries of physiology; others may be applying Science in the healing of diseases; others may be investigating the laws of social relations, learning the great natural laws under which society, like every thing else, proceeds; others, again, may be actively carrying out the social arrangements which have been formed under these laws; and others may be chiefly occupied in family business, in the duties of the wife and mother, and the ruler of a household. If, among the hundred women, a great diversity of powers should appear, (which I have no doubt would be the case), there will always be plenty of scope and material for the greatest amount and variety of power that can be brought out. If not—if it should appear that women fall below men in all but the domestic function—then it will be well that the experiment has been tried; and the trial had better go on forever, that woman's sphere may forever determine itself, to the satisfaction of everybody.

It is clear that Education, to be what I demand on behalf of woman, must be intended to issue in active life. A man's medical education would be worth little, if it was not a preparation for practice. The astronomer and the chemist would put little force into their studies, if it was certain that they must leave off in four or five years, and do nothing for the rest of their lives; and no man could possibly feel much interest in political and social morals, if he knew that he must all his life long, pay taxes, but neither speak nor move about public affairs. Women, like men, must be educated with a view to

¹⁴Caroline Lucretia Herschel (1750–1848), astronomer, discovered eight comets, prepared an index of all the known stars, was made an honorary member of the Royal Astronomical Society. Mary Somerville (1780–1872), writer on science, became famous with her translation of Laplace's *Mécanique céleste*. Also wrote *The Connection of the Physical Sciences* (1834), *Physical Geography* (1848), and *Molecular and Microscopic Science* (1866).

action, or their studies cannot be called Education, and no judgment can be formed of the scope of their faculties. The pursuit must be the life's business, or it will be mere pastime or an irksome task. This was always my point of difference with one who carefully cherished a reverence for woman—the late Dr. Channing.¹⁵ How much we spoke and wrote of the old controversy—*INFLUENCE vs. OFFICE!* He would have had any woman study any thing that her faculties led her to, whether physical science, or law, government and political economy; but he would have had her stop at the study. From the moment she entered the hospital as physician, and not nurse; from the moment she took her place in a court of justice in the jury-box, and not the witness-box; from the moment she brought her mind and her voice into the legislature, instead of discussing the principles of laws at home; from the moment she enounced and administered justice, instead of looking upon it from afar, as a thing with which she had no concern—she would, he feared, lose her influence as an observing intelligence, standing by in a state of purity, 'unspotted from the world.' My conviction always was, that an intelligence never carried out into action could not be worth much; and that, if all the action of human life was of a character so tainted as to be unfit for woman, it could be no better for men, and we ought all to sit down together to let barbarism overtake us once more. My own conviction is, that the natural action of the whole human being occasions not only the most strength, but the highest elevation: not only the warmest sympathy, but the deepest purity. The highest and purest beings among women seem now to be those who, far from being idle, find among their restricted opportunities some means of strenuous action; and I cannot doubt that, if an active social career were open to all women, with due means of preparation for it, those who are high and holy now would be high and holy then, and would be joined by an innumerable company of just spirits from among those whose energies are now pining and fretting in enforced idleness or unworthy frivolity, or brought down into pursuits and aims which are any thing but pure and peaceable. In regard to this old controversy—of *Influence vs. Of-*

¹⁵ William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), American Protestant clergyman and intellectual, a founder of American Unitarianism.

vice—it appears to me that, if Influence is good and Office is bad for human morals and character, Man's present position is one of such hardship as it is almost profane to contemplate; and if, on the contrary, Office is good and a life of Influence is bad, Woman has an instant right to claim that her position be amended.

With every wish that your meeting may be a happy one, and your great cause a flourishing one, I am, dear Madam, yours, faithfully,

HARRIET MARTINEAU

SINGLE LIFE

And now my own special trial was at hand. It is not necessary to go into detail about it. The news which got abroad that we had grown comparatively poor,—and the evident certainty that we were never likely to be rich, so wrought up the mind of one friend as to break down the mischief which I have referred to as caused by ill-offices. My friend had believed me rich, was generous about making me a poor man's wife, and had been discouraged in more ways than one. He now came to me, and we were soon virtually engaged. I was at first very anxious and unhappy. My veneration for his *morale* was such that I felt that I dared not undertake the charge of his happiness: and yet I dared not refuse, because I saw it would be his death blow. I was ill,—I was deaf,—I was in an entangled state of mind between conflicting duties and some lower considerations; and many a time did I wish, in my fear that I should fail, that I had never seen him. I am far from wishing

Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Co., 1879), vol. 1, pp. 130-133. Written in 1855.

that now;—now that the beauty of his goodness remains to me, clear of all painful regrets. But there was a fearful period to pass through. 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. The calamity was aggravated to me by the unaccountable insults I received from his family, whom I had never seen. Years afterwards, when his sister and I met, the mystery was explained. His family had been given to understand, by cautious insinuations, that I was actually engaged to another, while receiving my friend's addresses! There has never been any doubt in my mind that, considering what I was in those days, it was happiest for us both that our union was prevented by any means. I am, in truth, very thankful for not having married at all. I have never since been tempted, nor have suffered any thing at all in relation to that matter which is held to be all-important to woman,—love and marriage. Nothing, I mean, beyond occasional annoyance, presently disposed of. Every literary woman, no doubt, has plenty of importunity of that sort to deal with; but freedom of mind and coolness of manner dispose of it very easily: and since the time I have been speaking of, my mind has been wholly free from all idea of love-affairs. My subsequent literary life in London was clear from all difficulty and embarrassment,—no doubt because I was evidently too busy, and too full of interest of other kinds to feel any awkwardness,—to say nothing of my being then thirty years of age; an age at which, if ever, a woman is certainly qualified to take care of herself. I can easily conceive how I might have been tempted,—how some deep springs in my nature might have been touched, then as earlier; but, as a matter of fact, they never were; and I consider the immunity a great blessing, under the liabilities of a moral condition such as mine was in the olden time. If I had had a husband dependent on me for his happiness, the responsibility would have made me wretched. I had not faith enough in myself to endure avoidable responsibility. If my husband had *not* depended on me for his happiness, I should have been jealous. So also with children. The care would have so overpowered the joy,—the love would have so exceeded the ordinary chances of life,—the fear on my part would have so impaired the freedom

on theirs, that I rejoice not to have been involved in a relation for which I was, or believed myself unfit. The veneration in which I hold domestic life has always shown me that life was not for those whose self-respect had been early broken down, or had never grown. Happily, the majority are free from this disability. Those who suffer under it had better be as I,—as my observation of married, as well as single life assures me. When I see 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, through it all, I have ever been thankful to be alone. My strong will, combined with anxiety of conscience, makes me fit only to live alone; and my taste and liking are for living alone. 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 I am provided with what it is the bane of single life in ordinary cases to want—substantial, laborious and serious occupation. My business in life has been to think and learn, and to speak out with absolute freedom what I have thought and learned. The freedom is itself a positive and never-failing enjoyment to me, after the bondage of my early life. My work and I have been fitted to each other, as is proved by the success of my work and my own happiness in it. The simplicity and independence of this vocation first suited my infirm and ill-developed nature, and then sufficed for my needs, together with family ties and domestic duties, such as I have been blessed with, and as every woman's heart requires. Thus, I am not only entirely satisfied with my lot, but think it the very best for me,—under my constitution and circumstances: and I long ago came to the conclusion that, without meddling with the case of the wives and mothers, I am probably the happiest single woman in England. Who could have believed, in that awful year 1826, that such would be my conclusion a quarter of a century afterwards!

THE WOMAN QUESTION

The mention of Coleridge reminds me, I hardly know why, of Godwin, who was an occasional morning visitor of mine. I looked upon him as a curious monument of a bygone state of society; and there was still a good deal that was interesting about him. His fine head was striking, and his countenance remarkable. . . . and I fear there was no other portrait, after the one corresponding to the well-known portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft. It was not for her sake that I desired to know Godwin; for, with all the aid from the admiration with which her memory was regarded in my childhood, and from my own disposition to honour all promoters of the welfare and improvement of Woman, I never could reconcile my mind to Mary Wollstonecraft's writings, or to whatever I heard of her. It seemed to me, from the earliest time when I could think on the subject of Woman's Rights and condition, that the first requisite to advancement is the self-reliance which results from self-discipline. Women who would improve the condition and chances of their sex must, I am certain, be not only affectionate and devoted, but rational and dispassionate, with the devotedness of benevolence, and not merely of personal love. But Mary Wollstonecraft was, with all her powers, a poor victim of passion, with no control over her own peace, and no calmness or content except when the needs of her individual nature were satisfied. I felt, forty years ago, in regard to her, just what I feel now in regard to some of the most conspicuous denouncers of the wrongs of women at this day;—that their advocacy of Woman's cause becomes mere detriment, precisely in proportion to their personal reasons for unhappiness, unless they have fortitude enough (which loud complainants usually have not) to get their own troubles under

Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Co., 1879), vol. 1, pp. 399–403. Written in 1855.

their feet, and leave them wholly out of the account in stating the state of their sex. Nobody can be further than I am from being satisfied with the condition of my own sex, under the law and custom of my own country; but I decline all fellowship and co-operation with women of genius or otherwise favourable position, who injure the cause by their personal tendencies. When I see an eloquent writer insinuating to every body who comes across her that she is the victim of her husband's carelessness and cruelty, while he never spoke in his own defence: when I see her violating all good taste by her obtrusiveness in society, and oppressing every body about her by her epicurean selfishness every day, while raising in print an eloquent cry on behalf of the oppressed; I feel, to the bottom of my heart, that she is the worst enemy of the cause she professes to plead. The best friends of that cause are women who are morally as well as intellectually competent to the most serious business of life, and who must be clearly seen to speak from conviction of the truth, and not from personal unhappiness. The best friends of the cause are the happy wives and the busy, cheerful, satisfied single women, who have no injuries of their own to avenge, and no painful vacuity or mortification to relieve. The best advocates are yet to come,—in the persons of women who are obtaining access to real social business,—the female physicians and other professors in America, the women of business and the female artists of France; and the hospital administrators, the nurses, the educators and substantially successful authors of our own country. Often as I am appealed to speak, or otherwise assist in the promotion of the cause of Woman, my answer is always the same:—that women, like men, can obtain whatever they show themselves fit for. Let them be educated,—let their powers be cultivated to the extent for which the means are already provided, and all that is wanted or ought to be desired will follow of course. Whatever a woman proves herself able to do, society will be thankful to see her do,—just as if she were a man. If she is scientific, science will welcome her, as it has welcomed every woman so qualified. I believe no scientific woman complains of wrongs. If capable of political thought and action, women will obtain even that: I judge by my own case. The time has not come which certainly will come, when women who are practically concerned in political life will have a voice

in making the laws which they have to obey; but every woman who can think and speak wisely, and bring up her children soundly, in regard to the rights and duties of society, is advancing the time when the interests of women will be represented, as well as those of men. I have no vote at elections, though I am a tax-paying housekeeper and responsible citizen; and I regard the disability as an absurdity, seeing that I have for a long course of years influenced public affairs to an extent not professed or attempted by many men. But I do not see that I could do much good by personal complaints, which always have some suspicion or reality of passion in them. I think the better way is for us all to learn and to try to the utmost what we can do, and thus to win for ourselves the consideration which alone can secure us rational treatment. The Wollstonecraft order set to work at the other end, and, as I think, do infinite mischief; and, for my part, I do not wish to have any thing to do with them. Every allowance must be made for Mary Wollstonecraft herself, from the constitution and singular environment which determined her course: but I have never regarded her as a safe example, nor as a successful champion of Woman and her Rights.
