



Harriet Martineau

(*1802 Norwich - †1876 Ambleside)

She was not only a woman, who wrote about women's emancipation; she was also a woman who put into practice what she wrote. Instead of accepting a marriage arranged by her father in 1829, Harriet Martineau defiantly decided to become an independent publicist, novelist and journalist. It was a brave choice in these days, since marriage would have brought her the economic security, which she was always lacking afterwards. Throughout her life Martineau wrote for the cause of liberal reform. Her still most famous book, "Society in America" (1837), which she published after a two-year journey through the United States, offered one of the most well-informed critiques of the American political system. To her the young democracy did not live up to its

ideals, especially because it allowed slavery to exist.

Her enormous intellectual stature became most evident in a series of educational novels under the title "Illustrations of Political Economy" (1832-34). Commissioned by a group of radical reformers, these publications made her one of the earliest female economists of rank. Based on the writings of David Ricardo and Jane Marcet (another early female economist), she staunchly advocated a liberal reform agenda, such as free trade and laissez faire.

Martineau saw herself as an educationalist in the enlightenment tradition (as already her first article "On Female Education" in 1823 showed). Progress of society, she thought, was based on the progress of the individual: "The progression or emancipation of any class usually, if not always, takes place through the efforts of individuals of that class."

Literature:

Most of Harriet Martineau's works are still only available via antiquarian bookshops, since there still is no modern complete collection of her works.

Among those available today, the following can be recommended: "Society in America" (various editions), "Autobiography", "Illustrations of Political Economy". See also: Claudia Orazem: Political Economy and Fiction in the Early Works of Harriet Martineau, Frankfurt/New York 1999

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