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Millicent Garrett Fawcett

He who fifty years from now shall set himself the task of writing a history of what we used to called the "Women's Rights Movement" is to be envied - envied because of the materials which will be at his hand. If he limits himself to the eighty or ninety years just closing, as he well may, he will have the story of the taking of three great objectives - education, occupations, suffrage. The richness of his material will lie in the stories of the individual women who have been leaders in carrying on the campaigns which have resulted in England and in America in the capture of the points they had been so long after. None of the autobiographical material from these leaders and from their lieutenants which is now coming out will be more important than Milicent Garrett Fawcett's "What I Remember" And that for several reasons: the length of time that she has been in the movement, the breadth of view she brought to it and which she has neverlost, the methods she has developed and possibly most important, her temper.

Mrs. Fawcett was, as she says somewhere in the course of her book, "born a suffragist." She was one of those women, of whom there were many in both the United States and in England, who seem to have come into the world convinced that the masculine attitude towards a woman's intellectual capacity and the feminine acceptance of this attitude and the perquisites she exacted because of this acceptance, were both false and silly. Mrs. Fawcett has not a few amusing stories to tell of incidents which in her girlhood fixed her revolt.

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* What I Remember. By Millicent Garrett Fawcett. G.P.Putnam's Sons 1925

There is a story of a clergyman to whose preaching she was accustomed to listen, who said one day in talking about a church in Asia to which one of St. Paul's Epistles had been addressed, "It was a very small church and it was insignificant in another respect, it was almost entirely composed of women!" Young Milicent Garrett was one - perhaps the only one of the women in his congregation, who flamed with indignation and later let him know that she felt it.

But she was as deeply affected by the talk that she heard among women. One of the incidents which she gives as having affected her deeply at ~~a very~~ an early ~~point~~ ays was this. The group she was with was discussing the estrangement of a young husband and wife, the reasn for which no one understood, and one of her companions said, "I cannot see what she has to complain of. Look how he dresses her!" This "Look how he dresses her!" cut the girl to the quick. She sensed something of which she never at that time had heard - the "kept woman" - and resented it with all her being.

~~All~~ of this instinctive revolt was fed by her associations. Her elder sister Elizabeth Garrett was making a fight for a medical education, and winning out through great odds. It brought the girl as she grew up in touch with a circle where there was gradually forming a very definite plan of campaign - a wise and evolutionary campaign, too, that is, the little group of older people to which Milicent Garrett was admitted, were willing to work for these causes

that they had so much at heart - work patiently and persistently. Her mind responded boldly to the influences under which she came, and she had a habit of speaking out her mind, whatever the company, which marked her, attracting the liberal to her, and causing her to be admitted into more and more choice circles. It was her generous and clear-sighted view of things, her unafraid expression that led to her marriage to Henry Fawcett, that brave, and engaging young scholar and statesman. The incident is interesting to Americans.

When our Civil War came, Milicent Garrett though she was but fifteen years old, instantly allied herself with the cause of the North, understanding its objective as the abolition of slavery. She confesses that she was slow in understanding Lincoln's position when he declared at the start that he had no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it existed, that she thought him half-hearted in the matter; but as time went on his position, under the Constitution, his wise and progressive handling of the matter completely won her. She was at the home of London friends, ardent Northerners, when the news of Lincoln's death came. There was a group of people, distinguished in political and social reform at the time, but this girl of eighteen did not hesitate to announce that the tragedy was the greatest misfortune which could have befallen the world from the loss of any one man. "Yes," she declared, "greater than the loss of any of the crowned heads in Europe." The blind Henry Fawcett

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heard the expression, asked for an introduction, and two years later the two were married.

Henry Fawcett was a member of Parliament as well as a professor in the University of Cambridge. His wife was at once brought into a group of people active in political and social reform. As Mr. Fawcett had always been an ardent supporter of every measure which looked to the improvement of the condition of women, in any way opening larger opportunities to them, Millicent Fawcett now had a chance to throw herself into the political movement under a direction wise and influential.

There is something very delightful in the way she enjoyed her contacts - particularly enjoyed her opponents. "What I Remember" is sprinkled with amusing stories of skirmishes with obdurate members of Parliament, such as that she tells of one of her husband's colleagues who rose in the House of Parliament the day after she and the wife of another member had spoken at the first public meeting held in London in the interest of suffrage. This was in 1868. The outraged gentleman talked of the disgrace the ladies, both wives of members, had brought upon their sex and the country, but refrained from mentioning their names, he said, because he would not further disgrace them.

A few nights later Mrs. Fawcett found with glee that she was being taken in to dinner by this same gentleman! Before the dinner was over, she had so softened his temper that he never came back to a second attack.

That is, she went into her cause not only with all her heart but with all her brains; and she seems never to have lost her sense of humor

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though for fifty years she was constantly in the thick of the struggle - speaking, debating, organizing, and finally - though a little reluctantly, one gathers - marching and pilgrimaging, for Mrs. Fawcett never could bring herself to the militancy of the extreme left wing of her party. Her well developed brains, the wisdom born of her long experience in dealing with all kinds of men and women, the knowledge of political procedure, its possibilities and its limitations - all convinced her that violence, whatever relief it might be to one's feelings and however powerful an act in summary destruction, had to be paid for. So she never joined the Suffragettes - but she was generous to them and admits the justice of what a workingman called out at one of the meetings in answer to a speaker who sympathized with Woman's Suffrage but who was belaboring the violent; "They've rose the country, Sir!"

This was true, she admits, and when certain of the militants that she could not join were in prison, she went to see them and did her utmost to improve their condition. It is much for one who has fought as long as Mrs. Fawcett did along certain lines and who sees methods adopted to which she cannot bring herself, to still remain generous.

Indeed, she is practically always generous unless it is in taking opportunities to poke fun at Mrs. Humphrey Ward, her most distinguished opponent in the anti-suffrage ranks; but it must be confessed that Mrs. Ward's solemnity, not to say self-importance, was such that she made herself something of a target even for those who sympathized

with her point of view.

The importance of "What I Remember" lies in Mrs. Fawcett's story of the growth of the movement in which she was so deeply interested and to which she gave the full measure of her strength and time. But quite outside of that, it is a worth while book for the good temper, the courage and the all around view she has of life. Here you have a woman whose nature is not dried up by its devotion to one idea. The book is filled with amusing and touching stories of a great procession of people of all sorts, humble and grand; They run from her father's gardener to Prime Minister Gladstone himself, and they are told with a relish of their values most refreshing from a politician and a reformer. One feels convinced that the general sanity of her life and work was helped no little by her love of beauty, of music. She traveled much for pleasure. She never neglected the opportunity to see any good and fine thing. It is quite as much Milicent Garrett Fawcett, the woman, that the future historian of the feminist movement will rejoice in-if he is wise as Milicent Garrett Fawcett, the advocate.

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