

From: **WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE**  
**A RECORD OF THE**  
**WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN THE**  
**BRITISH ISLES**  
WITH  
**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF MISS BECKER**

BY  
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published in 1902

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**PART II.**  
**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND REMINISCENCES OF**  
**MISS BECKER.**

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**CHAPTER III.**  
**MISS BECKER**  
**§ 6. *Introductory***

There are times when the story of one life is so interwoven with the story of its time, when the thought and conduct of one individual soul is so typical of the life of its generation, that to tell the story of the one, is to tell that of the other.

So it is with the story of the Women's Suffrage agitation in Great Britain, and the life-story of Miss Becker, the woman who will stand forth to after times as the leader whose personality was impressed on its early work, whose forethought and judgment moulded its policy.

One must stand in a sense apart, at a certain distance from events and persons that one has known intimately near, to be able to marshal them in clear procession with due subordination of the parts, and to show truly the stature of those who have taken part in the procession.

**p. 24**

That the task is not an easy one, no one can feel more keenly than the present writer, who can but give her best endeavour, out of the huge mass of letters, minutes, circulars, journals, pamphlets, and speeches, to seize on those points which will most clearly and effectually delineate the character of the movement and of the workers therein.

It seems remarkable that we should look in vain in the memorable petition of 1866 for the name which was soon to become the personification of the movement to the world Yet so it was - the knowledge of that petition had not penetrated to her quiet home in Lancashire. "There ought to have been 1500 names," she used to say; "mine ought to have been there."

However, it was not long before the meeting of the Social Science Association, held that year in Manchester, brought her into touch with the work which responded to the aspirations of her life. Miss Becker was one of the audience when Mrs. Bodichon read her paper, "On Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women," before the Association, on 6th October 1866.

**§7. *Her Young Days.***

Lydia Ernestine Becker was born in Cooper Street, Manchester, on 24th February 1827 - the eldest of the fifteen children of Hannibal Leigh Becker and Mary Duncuft. Her mother was of an

old Lancashire stock, her father was of German descent: his father, Ernest Hannibal Becker, being a native of Thuringia, who had

**p. 25**

come to England as a young man and lived to an advanced age at Foxdenton Hall, where all his children were born.

Notwithstanding the strain of German descent Miss Becker was thoroughly a Lancashire woman: her life was spent in Lancashire; her family affections all centred there. The Beckers moved when Lydia was but a child to Altham, near Accrington, a large house on rising ground, with a fine view of the Pendle range, and later to Reddish. Their old house, and indeed the whole of Cooper Street, is now occupied by huge warehouses.

In reference to Miss Becker's early days one of her sisters writes :-

"Upon myself her influence has been very strong, and I owe to her much of my intellectual life. Perhaps the quiet way in which our youth was spent brought us into closer contact than would have been the case otherwise.

"We lived in the country and were thrown much together, as we were almost entirely educated at home. Lydia was always a great reader, and always remembered what she read, so that she was the universal referee when information was wanted, no matter what the subject. She had a wonderful way, too, of getting at the kernel of a book in a very short time. Without reading it through she seized on the salient points, and knew more about it in an hour than I should have done after careful plodding through. She went for a long visit to Germany about 1844. This was a great event in our quiet lives."

**p. 26**

The following letter to her father, from his cousin, Dr. Hermann Piutti, Principal of a Hydropathic establishment in the beautiful Thuringen Wald, where Lydia paid a long visit, shows the impression the young girl made on her German relatives. To one who only knew her in the after years of her public life, this letter is full of characteristic traits. The weakness in her back referred to was never wholly eradicated, and she was never able to make progress in music from the consequent want of sufficient force in the fingers. The same weakness showed itself also in her handwriting, which had a peculiar sort of unfinished look from her inability to grasp her pen firmly - and every one in the Suffrage office knew that Miss Becker could not fold circulars with anything like neatness, much as she insisted on every packet that went forth being neatly and accurately folded, as became documents issued from a lady's office. Her love of chess, referred to by Dr. Piutti, continued her favourite recreation throughout her life and beguiled many weary hours in her last months.

" Elgersburg, Feb. 28th, 1845.

"DEAR HANNIBAL, - I ought to have written to you and your dear wife long ago and to have expressed my gratitude for the friendship you have shown and the pleasure you have caused to me and my wife in confiding your dear Lydia to our care for some time. She is, I am happy to say, very much improved in health and vigour; a weakness in the back, which doubtless existed for some years, and having rendered her weak and unable to use her bodily strength, seems much better, though

**p. 27**

not quite subsided. Lydia is grown tall and stout, and you will be quite surprised to see what a lady-like figure she will be when you meet her again. She is fond of learning and of everything that touches mental faculties and clever understanding; she is sharp and keen in her intellect,

clever in judging matters, fond of knowledge, has an excellent memory, and her passion for reading facilitates the study of the German language at present very much, as she is now so far advanced as to read books in German easily. All that is mechanical gives her more trouble to do, although whenever she does it she does it well, viz., writing in German.

"She plays sometimes on the piano very nicely and agreeably, though I think the weakness of her back will for the present prevent that practice which is wanted to carry it on to a higher degree of ability. She began drawing and painting flowers upon china and did it remarkably well. We sometimes have a game of chess, in which I am frequently the loser.

"Lydia is the best tempered girl I ever saw, which principally and partly arises from her activity of mind, which is always busy, time never hanging heavy on her hands. She is always interested for things around her and does all she can to increase her knowledge of things.

"Before she leaves Germany, which I trust will be a long while yet, I hope she will see Leipzig, Dresden, and perhaps Berlin. - Always yours most sincerely,

"Hermann Piutti."

Continuing her reminiscences of this period, her sister, Miss Esther Becker, writes that her uncle Leigh

### **p. 28**

went to fetch her home towards the end of the year 1845.

"A great bonfire was kindled on their arrival at Reddish. Lydia had grown very stout and she had a very warm grey cloak. This makes me sure it must have been cold weather when they came, but I find no precise date.

"Soon after her return she began to give us lessons in German and, I think, other branches.

"As a teacher her powers were remarkable; she seemed to go right down to the bottom of things. It all came out so clear to one's mind.

"Our life at Reddish was a quiet and uneventful one, - in the midst of lovely scenery and beautiful flowers.

"The agitations in the political life of the period to some extent affected us. I remember the excitement when it was thought the Chartists might find their way to our peaceful valley, also the year of revolutions, 1848, when Louis Philippe landed in England as 'Mr. Smith.' And the stormy discussions connected with the Anti-Corn Law League were reproduced in miniature in our juvenile circle!

"Doubtless Lydia, with her quick intellect and more advanced age, took an intelligent interest in these matters; to me they were somewhat unintelligible!

"In 1850 we removed from Reddish to Altham, an interval of thirteen years having elapsed since we left it. The house was finely situated in view of Pendle Hill. The drives and walks about presented great attractions to us, as the scenery was on a bolder, grander scale than that round our pretty valley at Reddish.

### **p. 29**

"Lydia entered with zest into the study of the plants of the neighbourhood. I remember her pleasure at finding some which were new to her, - *Primula farinosa* and *Pinguicula* on Pendle, a rare sort of geranium in Symonstone Lane, etc. She joined a class for painting in water colours, and though she always depreciated her own efforts we have a collection of very beautiful sketches done from nature. She also executed some good copies, - interior of Milan Cathedral, etc.

"In 1862 (I think) she won the gold medal from the Horticultural Society of S. Kensington for the best collection of dried plants made within a year. She adopted the plan of drying the plants very quickly under great pressure and in heat. The press she used was made of transverse pieces of wood, which allowed the air to pass through. She used bricks covered with brown paper as weights. Her specimens preserved their colour beautifully, and she fastened them on to the paper with gum tragacanth - no ugly strips disfiguring them. The competition was open to the United Kingdom. Her pleasure in botany was intense and her knowledge of it thorough and complete. She had some interesting correspondence with the celebrated naturalist Mr. Charles Darwin in connection with some facts she had observed in the course of her studies.

"Our mother died in 1855 and two years later our eldest brother, Ernest. This last was so terrible a trial to Lydia that she never could bear any reference to it. Other troubles, many and bitter, followed. About 1865 we went to live in Manchester.

**p. 30**

"She attended the meeting there of the British Association, an era in her intellectual life."

**§ 8. Her Early Work.**

Miss Becker's first piece of authorship, *Botany for Novices*,<sup>1</sup> fully bears out her sister's remarks as to her power of clear explanation. It is surprising that so clear and explicit a little book should have disappeared so entirely from circulation. It was written from pure love of her subject. "Lydia knew and loved every little flower that grew," as an old friend and companion of her girlhood expressed it, when speaking of her life at Altham. In the midst of the anxieties of her political work in London, she found her best refreshment in a run down to the gardens and conservatories at Kew. Visitors to the office could always know when Miss Becker was in residence by the flowering plants she always gathered round her - in the little house, 155 Shrewsbury Street, Manchester, where she removed on the death of her father, the little conservatory was her constant pleasure. Flowers were her delight. Astronomy had the next largest share of her studies in her pre-suffrage days, and a little treatise on *Elementary Astronomy*, a companion volume to the *Botany for Novices*, was written by her, but never published; probably the circulation of her first venture did not encourage expenditure on another. The MS. has been preserved by the friend already referred to, and shows her grasp of the subject and her descriptive power.

**Footnote:**

1. 'Published by Remington, Rugby, 1864, under her initials L. E. B.

**p. 31**

Whatever the unfulfilled hopes of her books she was ever eager to arouse others to the enjoyment she had found in scientific pursuits, and on the return of the family to live in Manchester she devised a plan for a Ladies' Literary Society. Here again she met with disappointment, the number of members with which it started being much short of her hopes. What the little Society might have eventually grown to, had it continued to receive her undivided attention, it would be useless to speculate - meantime those efforts were pointing her out as the natural leader of the new movement now drawing thoughtful women all over the land to join in one common purpose.

Her mental attitude at that time may be estimated by the address, given by her as President of the "Manchester Ladies' Literary Society" at its opening meeting in the Royal Institution, Mosley Street, on 30th January 1867.

## ADDRESS.

Ladies - The Society we are met to-day to inaugurate is designed to supply a want which must have been experienced by many who interest themselves in the pursuit of knowledge. We all know how much more pleasant and easy any study appears, when pursued in common with others of kindred tastes; and how much more interesting any new fact becomes when we are sure of a sympathizing audience to whom we may impart it; who are ready to listen to any observations we may make, and to communicate to us any knowledge they may possess, which bears upon the subject.

Those of our number who have been in the habit of collecting plants or insects well know the pleasure of announcing, or receiving the news of the discovery, of some rare variety; and

### **p. 32**

will agree that a much greater amount of positive knowledge, if it must be shut up for ever within our own breasts, would not afford the same kind of enjoyment as that found in sharing its pleasures and surprises with those around us. Should there be any among us who have not yet experienced this pleasure, they will, I trust, learn it through their connection with us, and thus add another to such agreeable episodes as brighten the path of our daily lives.

The necessity for some common ground on which all interested in intellectual pursuits may meet, has been so strongly felt, that there exist all over the country institutions and societies, devoted either to literature and philosophy in general, or to the cultivation of special branches of knowledge. The efforts of these societies conduce not only to the delight and edification of their members, but by the stimulus they have given to individual research, have led to the making of great discoveries with regard to the hidden laws of nature. These discoveries have been applied practically towards facilitating the means of communication and locomotion, and in countless other ways, and a general amelioration of the hardships and discomforts of life has taken place, as a direct consequence of the encouragement of scientific research.

But practical advantage of this kind, though the inevitable result of better acquaintance with the laws that rule the world in which we live, is not the object with which scientific societies were founded. They were designed to promote the discovery and the spread of truth. By truth I do not mean any mysterious abstraction, but true assertions respecting matters of fact, and true theories, that is, theories consistent with the appearances they are designed to explain. The pleasure the mind derives from the discovery and contemplation of truth of this kind is one of the highest and purest emotions of our nature. It is an end in itself, and for the attainment of this end, men have cheerfully devoted the best years of their lives to patient and incessant study, for no other fee or reward than the delight of solving the mysterious enigmas presented by the living universe. These high priests of science labour, and invite us to enter into the fruit of their labours; they gather and spread the feast, and call upon all to

### **p. 33**

partake of it. The qualification for partaking of this feast consists not so much in amount of information, as in taste or inclination. Of course our enjoyment is heightened in direct proportion to the store of previous knowledge we bring to the board; but Wisdom is liberal to all her children, and has milk for babes, as well as strong meat for men.

In this city there are many societies established for the advancement of science, in each of the two ways in which science can be said to advance. There is the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, which aims at advancing science by encouraging actually new discoveries; and which numbers among its members men eminent in the ranks of those whose efforts carry the lantern of research into hitherto unexplored regions. With less ambitious aims

exists the Manchester Scientific Students' Association, whose professed object is the advancement of knowledge among its own members, by mutual encouragement in the study of what has been actually attained in science, rather than with any expectation of surprising the world by new discoveries. These, and other societies with similar aims, fill a most useful place, and all must wish for them a long continuance of prosperity.

But these institutions have a deficiency, which deficiency we are now trying to remedy. They do not throw open such opportunities as they afford for acquiring knowledge, freely to all who desire it; they draw an arbitrary line among scientific students, and say to our half of the human race - you shall not enter into the advantages we have to offer - you shall not enjoy the facilities we possess of cultivating the faculties and tastes with which you may be endowed; and should any of you, in spite of this discouragement, reach such a measure of attainments as would entitle one of us to look for the honour of membership or fellowship in any learned body, we will not, by conferring such distinctions upon any of you, recognize your right to occupy your minds with such matters at all.

Under these circumstances, the only course for the excluded persons seems to be to try what can be done by forming a society of their own; and the cordial support which the idea has received from those directly interested, forms not only its complete justification,

**p. 34**

but is the best earnest of the success for which we hope. It has also received such assistance and encouragement from scientific men, and others, as proves conclusively that the apparently harsh and arbitrary exclusiveness of the scientific societies of Manchester, proceeds from no deliberate desire that we should pass our lives in ignorance.

It has not been thought desirable to specify any branch of study to which the deliberations of the society shall be directed, but to allow ourselves free range over all the subjects embraced in the general name of intellectual pursuits.

Some persons may be tempted to smile at the idea of a number of ladies, whom they cannot suppose to be very learned, occupying their minds with such subjects for instance, as the Origin of Species, or the Antiquity of Man; the full understanding of which demands an amount of knowledge and experience in scientific investigations to which, I fear, none of us can lay claim.

The implied censure would be well deserved were our professed object to throw any new light on these difficult questions, but as we meet simply to inform ourselves on what has been discovered and propounded respecting them, the reproach of ignorance cannot be justly employed as an argument to dissuade us from endeavouring to gain information. We believe there is no method so effective of fixing in the mind the information that is imparted to us, as that of a discussion, in which every one is invited to ask any question that occurs, or to state unreservedly any opinion, along with the grounds on which it is entertained. We therefore determine to institute and encourage such discussions, and if the result should be, to prove to ourselves that we know very little of what we are talking about, that will surely be the best of reasons for trying to remedy the defect as fast as we can.

Besides the addition to our store of positive knowledge, there is another important advantage to be derived from scientific study, namely, the cultivation of those habits of accuracy in speech and thought, which are so absolutely necessary to its successful prosecution. One of the first lessons which a scientific student learns is, that he must not take a mere impression on his own mind, however powerful, as representing a positive fact, until he has

**p. 35**

carefully verified its accuracy by comparing it with the results of observation, and is prepared to

state exactly on what grounds he entertains it. And when he hears an assertion made, he will pause, before accepting it as true, for the mental enquiry whether the asserter is likely to be personally acquainted with the fact he alleges, and if not, what are his probable sources of information.

On the answer to these expressed or unexpressed queries, will depend the measure of credence to be given to the assertion in question. A reverence for accuracy of this kind would arrest many a baseless and painful rumour; and if it be the tendency of scientific investigation to conduce to such a tone of mind, the most inveterate sceptic as to the benefits of intellectual culture for women, might be induced to confess, that it is better that maids, old and young, should graduate in the School for Science, rather than in the School for Scandal.

Another good habit learned at scientific gatherings is that of listening with patience and courtesy to opinions differing widely from our own. Within the limits prescribed by the rules we, in common with similar societies, have adopted, there is room for much divergence of thought, and we hope for, and desire to encourage the expression of, all the various views that exist on the subject chosen for discussion. Nothing can be more dull than a debate in which the speakers are all of one mind; therefore, we hope that on any subject on which it is possible to hold two opinions somebody will always be found ready to advocate the other one. Difference of opinion does not imply disrespect for the judgement of those from whom we dissent. It must have occurred at times to all of us, to find ourselves at issue, on some point or other, with persons to whom we look up, as being, on the whole, wiser or more learned than ourselves.

One of the greatest benefits which intellectual pursuits bring in their train, is that of affording a peaceful neutral ground, in which the mind can take refuge from the petty cares and annoyances of life, or even find diversion from more serious troubles. Like prudent speculators, who keep part of their capital in the funds, those who place the sources of a portion of their income of enjoyment in some pursuit wholly unconnected with their personal

#### **p. 36**

affairs, will find that they have an interest which is perfectly safe amid the chances and changes of life. I do not for a moment maintain that intellectual pursuits can afford consolation in sorrow, for this we must look elsewhere; but they are undoubtedly capable of giving solace and diversion to the mind, which might otherwise dwell too long on the gloomy side of things; and of beguiling the tedium of enforced solitude, or of confinement to a sick-room. For an instance of this, we need look no further than to the experience of the illustrious naturalist who has honoured us by sending us a paper for this, our first meeting. Some of the curious and interesting observations, to which we shall presently listen, were made when he was a prisoner, night and day, to one room; and we cannot doubt that the occupation they afforded him, not only served to lighten the weary hours, but occasioned him an amount of positive enjoyment which one less gifted might have failed to secure, though at liberty to participate in the ordinary pleasures of social life.

Such an example should encourage us to go and do likewise. Many particulars respecting the commonest of our wild plants, animals, and insects, are yet imperfectly understood; and any one of us who might select one of these creatures, and begin a series of patient observations on its habits, manner of feeding, of taking care of its young, of communicating with its kind, of guarding against approaching danger; on its disposition and temper, and the difference in character between two individuals of the same species, would find such occupation, not only exceedingly entertaining, but if the observations were carefully and accurately recorded as they were noted, the result would be something of real, if not of great, scientific value. Gold is gold -

whether our amount be an ingot or a spangle; and we need but to open our eyes, and carefully observe what is passing around us, to add perpetually to our store of the pure gold of knowledge.

No one should be deterred from either making or reporting original observations, by a feeling that they are trifling or unimportant. Nothing that is real is considered insignificant by the naturalist, and observations, apparently the most trifling, have led to results which have turned the whole current of scientific thought.

**p. 37**

What could be a more trifling circumstance than the fall of an apple from a tree? yet the appearances presented contained the key that unlocked the mystery of the planetary movements. The law of gravitation maintains the stability of the universe, yet the fall of a pin to the ground is as truly a manifestation of this force as the movement of the earth in its orbit. With the sentiment of the poet in our hearts-

"That very law which moulds a tear,  
And bids it trickle from its source,  
That law preserves the earth a sphere,  
And holds the planets in their course,"

we shall never regard any appearance as trifling, which the tremendous forces of nature concur to produce.

How seemingly unimportant are the movements of insects, creeping in and out of flowers in their search for the nectar on which they feed. If we saw a man spending his time in watching them, and in noting their flitting with curious eyes, we might be excused for imagining that he was amusing himself by idling an hour luxuriously in observing things which, though curious, were trifling. But how mistaken might we be in such an assumption! For these little winged messengers bear to the mind of the philosophical naturalist, tidings of mysteries hitherto unrevealed, and as Newton saw the law of gravitation in the fall of the apple, Darwin found, in the connection between flies and flowers, some of the most important facts which support the theory he has promulgated respecting the modification of specific forms in animated beings.

It is true we are not Darwins nor Newtons, and cannot expect to make surprising discoveries, but we may be sure that these, and all other philosophers, have found an exquisite pleasure in tracing the workings of nature, independently of searching to establish any theory; and this enjoyment may be had by all who follow, however humbly, in their footsteps. And if we wish to understand their theories, it is consoling to find our attention directed at the outset, not to seemingly dry disquisitions, full of hard words, but to loved and familiar natural objects; to humble bees sucking clover flowers, to beetles swimming with their wings, to primroses

**p. 38**

and crimson flax, to grotesque orchids with their wild, weird beauty, setting traps for unwitting insects, and making them pay for their feast of honey by being the bearers of love tokens from one flower to another; to be sent, in fact, to the Book of Nature, and hidden to read its wondrous stories with our own eyes.

One of the special advantages that this society offers us, is that of being an arena for the communication of any interesting fact we may have observed, and a storehouse, in which will accumulate the results of our labours. Many curious facts in natural history are constantly coming under the notice, at least of such as reside or visit in the country, but the interest or curiosity roused at the moment is apt to pass away, if we have no persons to whom to



communicate the facts we have observed. But they become a source of perpetual interest if we are united with others in the prosecution of such studies, if we are sure of a sympathizing audience to whom we may impart them, and if we know that they will be recorded and preserved as a contribution to the sum of what is known on the subject.

I have attempted to give a few of the considerations which seemed to render the formation of such an association as this admirable, and which have enabled us to bring it up to the present point. Our infant society is now fairly started in life, with every possible encouragement to hope for a prosperous career. We begin with a goodly number of members; we have funds in hand for our present requirements, and have been thereby enabled to lay the foundation of our proposed library by acquiring a title to the valuable publications for this year, of the Ray Society.

The Council of the Royal Institution has liberally accorded to us the gratuitous use of a most convenient room for our meetings; and several eminent men among the Manchester Literati have promised to come and read papers for our instruction, on which we shall have the opportunity of expressing our opinions, and of asking of the author any questions his communications may suggest to our minds.

We are met today to listen to a paper by one of the most eminent naturalists in the world<sup>1</sup>, sent to us with his good wishes

**Footnote:**

1. Mr. Charles Darwin.

**p. 39**

for our success. Beginning under such favourable auspices, we may hope for a series of agreeable and instructive gatherings, to secure which end we shall, I am sure, all be desirous of contributing to the extent of our several abilities. Any of our members who may feel disposed so to do, will, we hope, favour us with original papers, which we shall always be most happy to receive, while those who are not desirous of being writers, will fill the no less useful and important office of listeners, and perhaps of critics of what is advanced. In one way or other, all can do good service, and it only needs a continuation of the support and goodwill hitherto displayed by its members, to render the Manchester Ladies' Literary Society an institution to which we shall feel it a pride and a pleasure to belong.

January 30th, 1867.

**§ 9. Extracts from Correspondence.**

Miss Becker never wrote anything in haste. A certain irritability of nature betrayed itself at times in a hasty word, her impatience of fussiness sometimes showed itself too plainly, but she never allowed herself to show hastiness or impatience in writing. Her letters were written with great care and consideration. They show her in her real strength, in her statesmanlike toleration and indifference to petty things. Her wealth of sympathy with suffering and wrong, gave her insight into character; her massive force of purpose made her strong to endure and made pettiness of thought an impossibility for her.

Her standard of work was very high, and she exacted the best work from herself and from those under her. She fully gauged their capacities for work, and knew

**p. 40**

what should be expected of each. Her method was to leave each responsible for the work entrusted to her, and they knew they could rely absolutely on her justice and her appreciation of work well done. But if she met with anything like deceit or underhand dealing, she showed no toleration.

These were the qualities that drew the strong to her. The fussy and the self-opinionated shrank from her. The weak might feel overpowered in her presence, the over-zealous might be disconcerted by her cool reception of their zeal, but those who had power to appreciate power appreciated her, according to the measure of their own power.

From the day when she accepted the invitation of the Manchester Committee to become its Secretary, her life, so far as the public are concerned, became identified with the movement in which she thenceforth lived and moved and had her being, until the last fatal journey. Of the tragic close, so terrible for all who loved her, it will be best to speak when that time is reached, and let these reminiscences close with a few extracts from her correspondence illustrating the character of the writer and the then condition of public opinion.

**The first extract gives a sort of confession of her political faith.**

"I have never doubted which was the party of progress, but I certainly think that on our question the Tory and Liberal have been till very lately, if they are not now, so helplessly in the rear that there was not much to choose between them, and I do not believe that the Liberal party as a party care a straw

**p. 41**

for the interests and wishes of women, or will stir a step to do them justice. With this firm conviction, their profession of liberalism and desire for government founded on popular consent and the principles of justice sound a mockery and command none of my sympathy.

"That which is a 'great principle' applied to men becomes a 'crotchet' when women claim the benefit of it. The Liberal party is more tractable - that is all, and a part of it gives us a mild kind of half-contemptuous approval. Mr. Mill, your husband and a few others are in earnest in trying to remedy the wrong, but not so the bulk of the party. However, I expect a different spirit will come over them soon."

**Speaking of the attitude of women happy in their own surroundings : -**

"You say rightly that many women who are happy in their own position are apt to forget that others are not so fortunate - yet it is in truth the *happy* women who should be most anxious to devote themselves to our cause. However miserable a woman may be, if she makes that the ground of agitating for an amelioration of the condition of the sex - though she is undoubtedly right in so doing, yet it may be said that self-seeking is at the bottom of her efforts. But when women who have nothing to ask for, as far as they are personally concerned, exert themselves in the cause of their suffering sisters the voice of reproach is silenced. Let not the cry of the degraded and heartbroken go forth in vain to the ear of those whose lot is happier. In our little band of workers and leaders the most earnest are those whose

**p. 42**

own domestic bliss is perfect. We want to make this band larger, and sinking all minor differences, join hands with all who strive for the elevation of women."

**The relation of the women of the upper class to the movement is thus sketched in a letter :-**

"Is the industrial school you speak of, for girls? I should be interested in such an institution. But what we want to help women, is to bring women of the upper classes into the active concerns of life - women of the lower classes have nearly as good a chance of maintaining themselves in an independent position as men, at least in the manufacturing districts. What I most desire is to see men and women of the *middle classes* stand on the same terms of equality as prevail in the working classes - and the highest aristocracy. A *great lady* or a *factory woman* are independent

persons - personages - the women of the *middle classes* are nobodies, and if they act for themselves they lose caste!

“Nothing can go right without the union of the full force and intellect of all sections of society. The inert mass of deadness to public interest - what is everybody’s business is nobody’s business - is the bane of national and personal nobleness. This is fostered by inculcating the duty of indifference on women - and they drag down the men to their own enforced level of stagnation.”

**The following expresses her ideal of the marriage relation : -**

“I think that the notion that the husband ought to have headship or authority over his wife, is the root of all social evils. It is a doctrine demoralizing alike to men

**p. 43**

and women. Husband and wife should be co-ordinate and co-equal, each owing to the other entire personal service and devotion, their obligations being strictly reciprocal and mutual. In a happy marriage, there is no question of ‘obedience’ or which shall be ‘paramount’; in an unhappy marriage a claim to authority only embitters strife. Brothers, sisters or partners, can contrive to exist in Society without the law declaring that one owes obedience to the other; why not husband and wife?”

**To a correspondent who had asked if she thought the study of politics would make our countrywomen less frivolous or better mothers, and ensure for the next generation a better race of human beings, she replies : -**

“I do not like to assent to general charges of frivolity against our countrywomen. I do not believe that women are more frivolous than men - if there is a difference, I believe that of the two women are rather more earnest and serious; and the frivolities of men, such as horse-racing and dissipation, are far more injurious to Society than any practice of women.

“To the last part of the question I answer most emphatically ‘yes’; it would be worth while to take all these pains to enfranchise them.”

**MLFHS, [Oldham & District Branch](#)**

**Return to [Pictorial Index](#) or Return to [Miscellany](#), March 2023**

Read more ... In 1992 a booklet (60 pages) was published by the Centre for North West Regional Studies University of Lancaster. Its title was, ' *Lydia Becker and the Cause*' written by Audrey Kelly. The blurb, on the back cover, neatly sums up the content and reads, "*Lydia Becker was an early Manchester suffragist who campaigned vigorously in 'the Cause' of votes for women, a generation before the Pankhursts and suffragettes. By addressing meetings, establishing the first periodical exclusively devoted to women's suffrage and in co-ordinating a nationwide campaign, she she did much to prepare the ground for the final onslaught of the militants in the Edwardian era. This sympathetic biographical portrait is of an interesting and truly remarkable woman.*"

Print copies for sale are thin on the ground but, on the Internet Archive, it is freely available to 'borrow' and read online [HERE](#)