

Our Own Fireside

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Henry Fawcett M.P.

HENRY FAWCETT, whose death was chronicled Nov. 6, 1884, was a noteworthy example of what perseverance and application will do. Whilst out shooting in 1868, being but 28 years of age, he was entirely deprived of his eyesight. What he has since learned was, consequently, from others. Notwithstanding the difficulties under which he labored he was one of the best informed men upon current topics. In April 1867 he married Millicent, daughter of Newson Garrett Esq., of Aldeburgh, Suffolk, and to her not a little of his success is to be ascribed. Henry Fawcett was the son of W. Fawcett Esq., of Salisbury, and was born at the latter place in 1838. He was educated at Trinity Hall, Cambridge and graduated with high mathematical honors in 1856. He was elected fellow of the Cambridge Society during the same year. Notwithstanding his blindness he wrote "A Manual of Political Economy" in 1863, and the "Economic Position of the British Laborer" in 1865 and having been an extensive contributor of articles of economic and political science to the various magazines and reviews; he was elected in 1868, Professor of Political Economy in the University of Cambridge. He unsuccessfully contested on Liberal principles, Southwark in 1857, and the borough of Cambridge in 1862. He was again defeated at Brighton in Feb. 1864 but was returned by the last mentioned constituency at the general election of July 1865, and was re-elected in 1868. He was unseated at Brighton in 1874 but was elected for Hackney during the same year. On the formation of Mr. Gladstone's administration in 1880 he was appointed Post Master General. The University of Wurzburg on the occasion of its ter-centenary in 1882 conferred upon Mr. Fawcett the honorary degree of Doctor in Political Economy. A new and revised edition of Mr. Fawcett's "Manual of Political Economy" was published in 1869 with two new chapters on "National Education" and "The Poor Laws and their influence on Pauperism." Still another edition appeared in 1874. He also published "Pauperism, its causes and Remedies" 1871, "Speeches on some current Political Questions" 1878 and "Free Trade and Protection" in 1878. Mrs. Fawcett has also published several works on political economy and is an ardent supporter of the women's suffrage movement.



HENRY FAWCETT, M.P.

Mr. Fawcett was sick only a few days with pleurisy and pneumonia.

It is long since the death of a prominent politician has aroused such a general and widespread feeling of regret as has been caused by the untimely decease of Mr. Fawcett. By every party in the House of Commons Mr. Fawcett was held in the highest respect. Throughout the country by politicians of every grade as well as by men who pay little heed to what is going on in the political world, his career was followed with the utmost interest and often with the warmest admiration. The wonderful courage and manliness with which he had fought against the sad accident which threatened for a time to blight his career gained for him the sympathy of every one with whom he came into contact and of many who know him simply by repute. No man could have set to work more doggedly or more bravely than he did to live a life of usefulness and activity in spite of a disaster which would have crushed ninety-nine people out of a hundred. Moreover, as a politician he occupied a unique position of which any public man might be proud. He was a strong Liberal, in many respects a radical of the philosophical school as opposed to the Birmingham type, as the Tories delight to call it. Strong Liberal measures always received his support, but he was essentially an independent Liberal, and no one knew better than

the Liberal whips that there was in Mr. Fawcett at least one man in the House who could not be forced by any pressure to vote or speak with his party if he did not heartily and thoroughly approve of their policy. Once or twice his independence has, from a party point of view, proved most injurious. Once certainly, his influence went a long way towards nearly upsetting one of Mr. Gladstone's Administrations. His conscientiousness, his firmness, and his ability were such as to command admiration on all sides, and the tributes which have been paid his memory by Mr. Gladstone, Lord Hartington, Sir Stafford Northcote, and Lord John Manners have been as sincere expressions of regret and admiration as have ever fallen from the lips of public men. As the Postmaster-General during the present Administration, Mr. Fawcett has been an unqualified success. His administrative qualities proved far superior to those of his predecessors and far greater than had been expected of a professor of political economy who had been previously spoken of not unfrequently as a doctrinaire politician. We need not mention any of the numerous reforms which he brought about at St. Martin le Grand. He will be missed there not only by the rank and file of the post-office, by whom he was respected as Postmaster Generals very rarely are, but in a still larger measure by the public who reposed in him a confidence

which they placed in very few men in his position. As a political economist Mr. Fawcett can hardly be called an original thinker but he had a wonderfully clear and able mind, with powers of persuasion and lucid expression which give to his writings a permanent value. His books have been and will be still more widely read; and will do much to perpetuate the name of one of the most remarkable and most honorable figures in both political and literary worlds.

The Right Hon. George J. Shaw Lefevre, M.P., has been appointed Postmaster-General, in succession to the late Mr. Fawcett.

Shortly after he left Cambridge, while out partridge shooting with his father, he was the victim of a melancholy accident. As his father was about to fire, the head of his son rose into view directly in front of him, and he received wounds in each eye which blinded him for life. The last and greatest honour conferred upon him was when he was made Postmaster-General by Mr. Gladstone. As a private member of Parliament he went at once to the front, and on becoming an administrator he far more than justified the most sanguine expectations formed by those who had gauged his great capacities for hard work. As Postmaster-General he distinguished himself not merely for energy and assiduity, but for a readiness to test and try new things when they appeared themselves to his remarkably sane-business judgment. The postoffice, now so vast an establishment, may have been as well administered before as it was under his rule, but never better. The manner in which he first introduced himself to the electors of Brighton is characteristic of his courageous spirit and his cheerful indifference to his affliction. He travelled down to Brighton one afternoon alone and unattended, and when he reached his hotel he heard there was a political meeting in the town that evening. He asked the waiter after dinner to accompany him thither, and started forth under the man's guidance. He found the meeting occupied in selecting candidates for the approaching election, and without a moment's hesitation he rose and said that he did not wish to disturb the harmony of the evening, but begged to announce that he intended to offer himself as a candidate. This bold address naturally took every one by surprise, but his candidature was adopted with acclamation, and he subsequently represented Brighton for nearly ten years.