

Harriet Martineau

It hadn't been my choice to give a speech; I had thought my presence alone would be enough to show that I supported their cause, it being a meeting of an anti-slavery society and all. But they wanted me to say a word or two and given the vile activity that was being fought against here I didn't think that was too much to ask.

That did not mean I looked forwards to stepping out into the limelight though. Even here in the backroom I could hear the pro-slavery apes pounding their fists into the windows, their insolence shaking the glass in its frame as they seethed for our blood. Women had a hard enough time making it in this world as it was, without us becoming political and daring to have an opinion, let alone a controversial one. I was under no illusions that I would have any kind of career here in America once I'd spoken. If I escaped with my life it would be a blessing in itself.

But my reservations were tempered by thoughts of the thousands I could help in some small way with a few words, though they had none themselves. I'd always felt justified in saying I'd had a hard upbringing, or at least not an easy one whatever the difference may be. But no matter how tight money had got I'd been able to write and mercifully it had got me more than through, even giving me a measure of freedom. Perhaps it had been God's will when he gave me those gifts that one day I would be able to use them to the advantage of others; if so I felt I had not failed him yet. Whilst it would bring me no joy to say my piece, there were friends both known and not whose benefit would far outweigh my suffering.

It seemed like my duty to stand up and speak.