Out of the Shadows

Out of the Shadows:
The Life and Works of Mary De Morgan

By

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This book is dedicated to all women everywhere—past, present, and future—who live in the shadows cast by others, whoever they may be.

Come out into the light, so that we may see you and hear you—you too have a story to tell, one that must be told.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

MARY DE MORGAN: FAIRY-TALE WRITER, SOCIAL WORKER OR "DEVIL INCARNATE"?

1. Miss De Morgan inherited from both parents very considerable literary power, as well as singular nobility of character and great social aptitude … It was, however, by her personality rather than her writings that she was known and endeared to a large circle of friends in all ranks of life. She had a genius from first to last for making and keeping friends … For many years she was an ardent social worker among the girls in the East-End of London.

2. I had heard a good deal of Mary before I met her, and was persuaded by all I had heard that she must be the most odious female then alive, a woman who embroiled and wrecked every household she entered by mischief-making gossip and an unfailing instinct for laying down the law in the way most exquisitely calculated to infuriate her hosts. As she was not related to any of the families she frequented I could not understand why they not only tolerated her but seemed to consider her as necessary and inevitable, though they spoke of her as the devil incarnate.

Can the writers of these two extracts possibly be referring to the same woman? The first quote is taken from Mary De Morgan's obituary (fully reproduced in Appendix A) and the other is Bernard Shaw's recollection of his first meeting with her in 1892, during a visit to Kelmscott Manor (Shaw 1966, 27).[1] Even taking into account the tendency to idealise the

[1] Shaw's reminiscences of William Morris were not written until 1936 and there are no dates provided in the text to give the reader a chronological frame of reference for the events described therein. Shaw frequented Morris's Kelmscott House in London, initially as a lecturer at meetings held there by the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League The Socialist League was formed in December 1884 and a description of a meal shared after a branch meeting immediately precedes Shaw's reminiscences of his first meeting with De Morgan, so this latter

deceased in obituaries, and the inaccuracy of one's memory nearly half a century after the event, there is certainly a huge discrepancy between the two portrayals, which this book will attempt to explore.

If the reader has heard of Mary De Morgan at all, it is likely to be as a writer of Victorian fairy tales. There are indeed limited examples of her works in anthologies of Victorian fairy tales,[2] and in recent years there have been a small number of articles written about her fairy tales.[3] Despite, however, Jack Zipes, an authority on fairy and folk tales, describing De Morgan as one of those Victorian writers who "conceived tales with strong heroines who rebel against convention-ridden societies" (Zipes 1989, 13), De Morgan is still not one of the better-known Victorian fairy-tale writers, even within feminist academia.

Mary De Morgan came from an illustrious family and moved in celebrated circles: her father Augustus was an eminent mathematician and her mother Sophia was a renowned spiritualist and social reformer; her brother William made beautiful tiles, which are still very collectible today, and later in life wrote best selling novels; William's wife Evelyn (née Pickering), was a well-known and well-respected Pre-Raphaelite painter; another of her brothers was a potential mathematical genius; and William Morris and his artistic and literary circle were among her friends. It is

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event is certainly 1885 or later. Shaw claims that it was at Kelmscott Manor in Gloucestershire that Shaw first met De Morgan and in his extremely detailed diaries he only mentions visiting Kelmscott Manor twice: once on August 14th 1888, when none of the Morris family was present (Weintraub 1986, 402), and again on December 21st 1892, when he mentions that Mary De Morgan was one of a large party (882). Shaw describes, however, sitting in the garden drinking tea with Morris and De Morgan—an unlikely event during mid-winter, especially as Morris was suffering from ill-health. Either Shaw missed another visit to Kelmscott Manor out of his diaries or, more likely, he first met De Morgan at Kelmscott House instead of Kelmscott Manor.

[2] For instance: "A Toy Princess" in *Victorian fairy tales: the revolt of the fairies and elves,* and again in *The Oxford book of modern fairy tales*; "Through the Fire" and "The Wanderings of Arasmon" in *Beyond the looking glass: extraordinary works of fairy tales & fantasy*; "Leila's Gold" in *Enchanted ideologies: a collection of rediscovered nineteenth-century English moral fairy tales.* It is pertinent that Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepflmacher did not choose to include any of De Morgan's fairy tales in *Forbidden journeys: fairy tales and fantasies by Victorian women writers.*

[3] For instance: James Fowler's "The golden harp: Mary De Morgan's centrality in Victorian fairy-tale literature," Alicia Carroll's "The greening of Mary De Morgan: the cultivating woman and the ecological imaginary in 'The Seeds of Love'," and Marilyn Pemberton's "Mary De Morgan: out of the Morrisian shadow" and "The fairylands of Mary De Morgan: seedbeds of domestic anarchy."

perhaps no small wonder that De Morgan's own literary and social achievements have been over-shadowed by those of her family and friends.

As her obituary and my own research reveals, De Morgan was far more than a daughter of famous parents, a sister to well-known brothers, or even an acknowledged writer of well-received fairy tales; she also wrote short stories and a novel, she edited her mother's reminiscences and wrote some very interesting non-fiction articles on diverse themes ranging from trades-unionism to the education of Englishmen. In addition, she ran a typewriting office, helped May Morris with her embroidery, was the secretary of the People's Concert Society and ran mothers' groups in the East End of London. Even when she had to go and live in Egypt because of poor health, she ended her days there as a directress of a girls' reformatory in Helouan.[4] De Morgan was a so-called "odd" or "redundant" woman, in that she was one of the million or so unmarried females—whether from choice or not I have not been able to ascertain[5]—and she had to work out of necessity. She moved not only in the celebrated Arts and Crafts circle, but also that of the poor in the East End of London. She utilised modern technology, travelled, was a signed-up member of the Women's Franchise League and, as I will show later in this book, addressed contemporary political issues through her writing.

This book is an attempt to bring De Morgan's life and works out of the shadows by gleaning everything that can be discovered from her fictional and non-fictional works, from correspondence to, from and about her, and from references to her in other people's biographies, reminiscences and diaries. The result is a colourful and multi-textured collage, which illustrates contemporary society and De Morgan's role therein; a picture showing her to be not just a daughter, a sister, a writer, a social worker, or even a "devil incarnate," but a multi-faceted person, one who lived during the volatile and fascinating second half of the nineteenth century, and one who is worthy of the academic spotlight.

The structure of this book is generally chronological, starting with a chapter containing a brief biography of De Morgan's parents, followed by chapters on De Morgan's early, middle and later years. Where appropriate, themes are inter-woven into the chapters: spiritualism, education, politics,

[4] Also spelt Hélouan, Helwan and Heluan—but the majority of contemporary texts refer to it as Helouan, so this is the spelling I have used throughout the book.

[5] According to Joan Perkin, the 1851 census (just after Mary was born) shows that there were 30 per cent of women between the ages of 20 and 40 who were unmarried, numbering over a million (Perkin 1989, 226). This figure increased during the rest of the century.

social reform, marriage, death and juvenile reformatories, and annotated extracts or full works are reproduced in the relevant chapters or in an Appendix at the end of the book.

1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd Generation
John De Morgan (1772-1816) married 1798 Elizabeth Dodson (1776-1856)	John Augustus De Morgan (1799-1804) James Turing De Morgan (1800-1804) (both died in a shipwreck on the passage to England)	
	Eliza De Morgan (1802-1836) married 1830 Lewis Hensley (1795-1846)	
	Georgiana De Morgan (1805-1807)	
	Augustus De Morgan (27 Jun 1806-18 Mar 1871) married 3 Aug 1837 Sophia Elizabeth Frend (10 Nov 1809-5 Jan 1892)	Elizabeth Alice De Morgan (4 Jun 1838-23 Dec 1853) William Frend De Morgan (16 Nov 1839-16 Jan 1917) married 5 Mar 1887 Mary Evelyn Pickering (1855-1919) George Campbell De Morgan (16 Oct 1841-14 Oct 1867) Edward Lindsey De Morgan (22 Jun 1843-1880) married 13 Mar 1872 Ada Margaret Stratford-Wright (1851-?) Anne Isabella De Morgan (11 Feb 1845-18 Jan 1884) married 17 Jun 1874 Reginald Edward Thompson (1834-1912) Helena Christiana De Morgan (20 Mar 1847-19 Aug 1870) **Mary Augusta De Morgan (24 Feb 1850-18 May 1907)**
	George De Morgan (18 Jul 1808-13 Mar 1890) married 1844 Josephine Coghill (1813-8 Aug 1905)	Edith Eliza Hort De Morgan (7 Jan 1845-?) Henry Joscelyn Coghill De Morgan (1846-1847) Joscelyn Augustus De Morgan (1848-1899) married 1887 Georgina Elizabeth Whitmore (nee Beckford Long) (1845-1891) Sydney Aylmer De Morgan (19 Feb 1850-14 Feb 1920) married 1886 Sarah Waring Pittar (?-1905) Emmeline Theodosia Sophia De Morgan (1852-?)
	Campbell Grieg De Morgan (1811-1876) married 1848 Katherina Susanna Hobson (1817-1859)	Katherine Campbell De Morgan (1849-1851) Walter Campbell De Morgan (1852-?) John Woodhouse Campbell De Morgan (1854-1897) married 1897 Evelyn Mary Yardley (?-?) Francis Augustus Campbell De Morgan (1857-1857)

Figure I-1 Three generations of the De Morgan Family

3rd Generation	4th Generation
Elizabeth Alice De Morgan (4 Jun 1838-23 Dec 1853)	
William Frend De Morgan (16 Nov 1839-16 Jan 1917) married 5 Mar 1887 Mary Evelyn Pickering (1855-1919)	
George Campbell De Morgan (16 Oct 1841-14 Oct 1867)	
Edward Lindsey De Morgan (22 Jun 1843-1880) married 13 Mar 1872 Ada Margaret Stratford-Wright (1851-?)	Mary Beatrice (Molly) De Morgan (1873-1953) Augustus De Morgan (1874-1906) Millicent (Milly) De Morgan (1875-1937) married 1901 Ralph Edmund Antrobus (1871-?) Campbell William De Morgan (1877-1924)
Anne Isabella De Morgan (11 Feb 1845-18 Jan 1884) married 17 Jun 1874 Reginald Edward Thompson (1834-1912)	Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941) Augustus Peronet Thompson (1880-?) Edward Vincent Thompson (1881-?)
Helena Christiana De Morgan (20 Mar 1847-19 Aug 1870)	
Mary Augusta De Morgan (24 Feb 1850-18 May 1907)	
Edith Eliza Hort De Morgan (7 Jan 1845-?)	
Henry Joscelyn Coghill De Morgan (1846-1847)	
Joscelyn Augustus De Morgan (1848-1899) married 1887 Georgina Elizabeth Whitmore (nee Beckford Long) (1845-1891)	
Sydney Aylmer De Morgan (19 Feb 1850-14 Feb 1920) married 1886 Sarah Waring Pittar (?-1905)	Richard De Morgan (1887-?) Arthur De Morgan (1889-?) Harold De Morgan (1893-?) Egerton De Morgan (1895-?) Elsie De Morgan (1898-?)
Emmeline Theodosia Sophia De Morgan (1852-?)	
Katherine Campbell De Morgan (1849-1851)	
Walter Campbell De Morgan (1852-?)	
John Woodhouse Campbell De Morgan (1854-1897) married 1897 Evelyn Mary Yardley (?-?)	
Francis Augustus Campbell De Morgan (1857-1857)	

Figure I-2 Third and fourth generation of the De Morgan Family

CHRONOLOGY	
Year	**Event**
27 Jun 1806	Birth of Augustus De Morgan
10 Nov 1809	Birth of Sophia Elizabeth Frend
3 Aug 1837	Augustus marries Sophia
4 Jun 1838	Birth of Elizabeth Alice De Morgan
16 Nov 1839	Birth of William Frend De Morgan
16 Oct 1841	Birth of George Campbell De Morgan
22 Jun 1843	Birth of Edward Lindsey De Morgan
11 Feb 1845	Birth of Anne Isabella De Morgan
20 Mar 1847	Birth of Helena Christiana De Morgan
24 Feb 1850	Birth of Mary Augusta De Morgan
23 Dec 1853	Death of Elizabeth Alice De Morgan (aged 15)
1859	The De Morgan family move to Chalcot Villas, Adelaide Road, Hampstead
1863	Publication of *From Matter to Spirit* by Sophia De Morgan, with an introduction by Augustus De Morgan
1866	Sophia De Morgan signs the Women's Suffrage Petition
14 Oct 1867	Death of George Campbell De Morgan (two days off his 26th birthday)
1869	The De Morgan family move to 6 Merton Road, St. John's, Hampstead
19 Aug 1870	Death of Helena Christiana De Morgan (aged 23)
18 Mar 1871	Death of Augustus De Morgan (aged 64)
13 Mar 1872	Edward Lindsey De Morgan marries Ada Stratford-Wright
1873	Publication of *Six by Two: Stories of Old School Fellows,* by Mary De Morgan and Edith Helen Dixon
17 Jun 1874	Anne Isabella De Morgan marries Dr. Reginald Edward Thompson
1877	Publication of *On a Pincushion and Other Fairy Tales* by Mary De Morgan
1880	Death of Edward Lindsey De Morgan (aged 37)
1880	Publication of *The Necklace of Princess Fiorimonde and Other Stories* by Mary De Morgan
1881	Possible publication year of "Leila's Gold" by Mary De Morgan
1882	Mary De Morgan becomes secretary of the People's Concert Society

CHRONOLOGY	
Year	**Event**
18 Jan 1884	Death of Anne Isabella Thompson (née De Morgan, aged 38)
5 Mar 1887	William Frend De Morgan marries Mary Evelyn Pickering
1887	Publication of *A Choice of Chance* by William Dodson (pseudonym of Mary De Morgan)
1889	Mary De Morgan signs the "Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage," along with her mother and Evelyn, her sister-in-law
May 1890	Publication of the article "Co-operation in England in 1889" by Mary De Morgan
Jan 1891	Publication of the article "The New Trades-Unionism and Socialism in England" by Mary De Morgan
April 1891	Publication of the article "Thomas Carlyle's Home and Home-Life" by Mary De Morgan
5 Jan 1892	Death of Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan (aged 82)
May 1894	Publication of the article "The Jewish Immigrant in East London" by Mary De Morgan
1895	Publication of *Three Score Years and Ten: Reminiscences of the Late Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan,* edited by Mary De Morgan
3 Oct 1896	Death of William Morris - Mary De Morgan at his bedside
April 1898	Publication of the article "At the Foot of the Pyrenees" by Mary De Morgan
Oct 1898	Publication of the short story "An Old Time Tune" by Mary De Morgan
Feb 1899	Publication of the article "The Education of Englishmen" by Mary De Morgan
1900	Publication of *The Windfairies and Other Tales* by Mary De Morgan
23 Dec 1902	Mary De Morgan signs her last will and testament
Nov 1905	Mary De Morgan travels to Egypt
18 May 1907	Death of Mary De Morgan from phthisis at the German Hospital in Cairo
20 May 1907	Mary De Morgan buried at the British Protestant Cemetery in Cairo

Table I-1 Key dates in the life of Mary De Morgan

CHAPTER ONE

INFLUENCES, INSPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Before focussing on Mary De Morgan herself, it is first of all useful to provide some details of her parents and siblings, in order to put her life and works into a familial and social context. I have included quite a bit of information because I think it is important to understand the environment in which De Morgan grew up, but some readers may not find it of interest and they are quite at liberty to skip this chapter. I have gleaned quite a lot of detail for this chapter from the biography of William De Morgan written by Anna Maria Wilhelma Stirling, the sister of Evelyn De Morgan, who married William in 1887. Stirling provides a useful synopsis of the De Morgan ancestry, the key facts being: the capitalisation of the letter d in "De" is distinctive of this branch of the family; the De Morgan ancestors were a mixture of Anglo-Indian and French, with a touch of Danish—although Stirling includes an observation by William De Morgan that by the middle of the nineteenth century the family were "'English enough now!'" (Stirling 1922, 21); the majority of the De Morgan males served in the military, many entering the East India Company as private soldiers, although this proclivity ended with Mary's father, Augustus.

Augustus De Morgan (1806-1871)

Lieutenant-Colonel John De Morgan (1772-1816) and his wife Elizabeth (1798-1856) had seven children in all, although two sons died in a shipwreck on the way from India to England in 1804, and a daughter died in England in 1807 when only two years old. Augustus was born in 1806 in Madura in the Madras Presidency, but when he was only seven months old the family moved to Worcester, England, due to the continued unrest in India.

At birth Augustus had suffered from a common infection in India called "sore eye," and it is perhaps the affliction of losing the sight in his right eye that led him to prefer studying to more physical pursuits. His

mathematical ability, however, was not discovered until he was fourteen or so, but although it was this field that he loved and excelled in, it was to read Classics that he entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1823 on the recommendation of his schoolmasters. His mother, a widow since 1816, initially wished her eldest son to become an Evangelical clergyman, little realising that the compulsory attendance, rigid doctrines and formal observances enforced on the boy throughout his childhood had done little to feed his spiritual needs and had in fact "become a source of misery" (De Morgan 1882, 10). During his last year at University, as ordination was out of the question due to his refusal to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles—these were produced in 1563 and attempt to define and codify Anglican beliefs and doctrines—Augustus considered medicine, but was quickly dissuaded by his mother and friends, who suggested that he was perhaps not "pliant enough" nor that he was "sufficiently ready to adapt himself to the fancies and peculiarities" of his patients, both being attributes necessary to becoming a "popular" doctor (De Morgan 1882, 17). In 1827 he took the degree of fourth wrangler, having been expected to be senior or second wrangler—until 1909 Cambridge University ranked the highest-scoring student who had taken an honours examination as senior wrangler, then second, third, fourth etc.—his "failure" being due, according to his colleagues, to his reading of mathematical books outside of those prescribed for the examination. Augustus was never a great believer in examinations being a true test of someone's ability, as proven when he was eventually recognised as being a mathematical genius.

Having taken his degree, Augustus conceded to his mother's wishes, rather than his own preference, and started legal studies. It was over the following few years that he became friends with William Frend, one of whose daughters, Sophia, would later become Mrs De Morgan. Frend was also a mathematician, although not in the same league as Augustus despite being second wrangler in 1780, but it was their common religious scruples which created the strongest bond. Frend had started his working life as a clergyman of the Church of England but left after only four years, his conviction being that, a propos the different Churches that abounded—of Rome, of England, of Scotland—

> Our Saviour and His Apostles do not countenance such establishments; the religion they taught is founded on conviction; it requires no external pomp, no proud parade of worship.
>
> Lordly prelates, subscription to articles, and the imposition of tithes, are necessary only in that system of folly and superstition which disgraces

> human nature, and is in the present day "*le bandeau du vulgaire et le mepris des grands"*[1] (De Morgan 1895, x-xi)

Like Augustus, then, Frend was an advocate of religious freedom and could not, and would not, profess to the creeds of the established church.

Augustus used to visit Frend's home at Stoke Newington, along with other men and women of every intellectual, religious, and political inclination. Augustus was twenty-one when he first met the nineteen-year old Sophia, who was surprised that this "rising man" could rival the Frend family in "love of fun, fairy tales, and ghost stories" (De Morgan 1882, 20). His sense of humour remained with him all his life, as evidenced by his weekly contribution of puns, puzzles and paradoxes to the *Athenæum,* which was posthumously edited by his wife and published in 1872 as *A Budget of Paradoxes.* Augustus was also very musical and used to play the flute, accompanied by Sophia's sister, much to the chagrin of the musically untalented Sophia.

In 1827 Augustus applied for, and won, the appointment of chair of Mathematics at the newly created University College, allowing him to forgo his much disliked study of law, to follow his love of science—both the teaching and the research. This ideal job did not, however, last for long. In 1831 Granville S. Pattison, the Professor of Anatomy, was dismissed by the Council after a sustained student protest, which questioned his competency and the extent of his knowledge. Although the Council stated that nothing in his conduct, character or professional skill were at fault, they criticised his approach as being old-fashioned and not in tune with that of the new university.[2] To a man of principle such as Augustus De Morgan, this unjustified action could not be countenanced and he resigned forthwith.

In 1836, after the drowning of the incumbent Professor of Mathematics, Augustus agreed to take over the post on a temporary basis, and then, having judged that the management had changed sufficiently such that there would not be a reoccurrence of the event which triggered his resignation a few years earlier, he agreed to resume his post on a permanent footing. In between professorships he had become very

[1] My translation is "the banner of the vulgar (or common) with disregard to (or contempt of the majority."

[2] The entry for Pattison in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* makes fascinating reading: prior to 1831 he had been accused of illegal exhumation, found to be negligent of his duties and of professional incompetence and misconduct, named as co-respondent in a divorce and had injured General Thomas Cadwalader in a pistol dual.

involved in the Astronomical Society and the Useful Knowledge Society, and earned his living by his writings and the teaching of private pupils.

In *Memoir of Augustus De Morgan,* his wife describes his academic life in some detail, but it is worth including here some excerpts from an article printed in the *Cambridge University Reporter* on the occasion of Augustus's death, by one Sedley Taylor, a former student who only made the grade of sixteenth wrangler. Taylor summarises the Professor's work load:

> As Professor of Pure Mathematics at University College, London, De Morgan regularly delivered four courses of lectures, each of three hours a week, and lasting throughout the academical year. He thus lectured two hours every day to his College classes, besides giving a course addressed to schoolmasters in the evening during a portion of the year. His courses embraced a systematic view of the whole field of Pure Mathematics, from the first book of Euclid and Elementary Arithmetic, up to the Calculus of Variations. From two to three years were ordinarily spent by mathematical students in attendance on his lectures. De Morgan was far from thinking the duties of his chair adequately performed by lecturing only. At the close of every lecture in each course he gave out a number of problems and examples illustrative of the subject which was then engaging the attention of the class. His students were expected to bring these to him worked out. He then looked them over, and returned them revised before the next lecture. Each example, if rightly done, was carefully marked with a tick, or if a mere inaccuracy occurred in the working it was crossed out and the proper correction inserted. If, however, a mistake of *principle* was committed, the words "shew me" appeared on the exercise. The student so summoned was expected to present himself on the platform at the close of the lecture, when De Morgan would carefully go over the point with him privately, and endeavour to clear up whatever difficulty he experienced. The amount of labour thus involved was very considerable, as the number of students in attendance frequently exceeded one hundred. (Taylor 1871, 337)
>
> De Morgan combined constant systematic lecturing and supervision of his pupils' work with fertile activity in the fields of original research and literary production—an achievement rarely witnessed, and by some thought impossible. He was a man of unswerving integrity, spent his life nobly in unselfish labours, condescended to no pushing, self-advertising, or interest making, and lived and died without one morsel of national or academic recognition of his pre-eminent services in the cause of science and education. (Taylor 1871, 337-338)

In his article, Taylor also explains that perhaps De Morgan's best quality was his "love of scientific truth for its own sake and the utter contempt for all counterfeit knowledge" (Taylor 1871, 337). This statement

is relevant and important when considering Augustus' involvement in spiritualism, described later in this book. Augustus also apparently abhorred "cramming" and warned his students one year that there would be no point in revising for a coming examination because he intended to set a paper where cramming would be of no use. Augustus's intention in teaching was to ensure that his students understood and assimilated the fundamental concepts and principles of mathematics—and perhaps to love and respect science as he himself did—and whether or not they could reproduce their knowledge onto paper within a set time mattered to him not one jot.

For one who obviously worked very hard, one would think that a holiday would be a blessing, but as Augustus's wife relates, of a five-week holiday in Boulogne in 1839, just after their first son William was born:

> … he soon got tired of it, and felt glad to get back to his work. He bore a few weeks at Blackheath next year with equanimity … After this summer he begged me to take the children without him; and I found that this arrangement, which I disliked, was the best. He required a letter, reporting health, &c., and sent me one in return, every day. (De Morgan 1882, 108-109)

In his article, Taylor also includes an interesting physical description of De Morgan: "A voice of sonorous sweetness, a grand forehead, and a profile of classic beauty…" (Taylor 1871, 337). It is pertinent to include here an amusing anecdote related by Sophia in her own reminiscences, of an occasion when she, her sisters and her father attended a lecture on phrenology, given by a Mr Holmes. At this time Sophia was acquainted with Augustus but not yet married to him. After the lecture, Mr Holmes showed off some plaster-of-Paris casts and because of his very distinctive head-shape Sophia recognised that of her friend, Mr De Morgan. On asking why the cast was there, Mr Holmes looked sorrowful and claimed "'that is the head of a man who will never do anything. There is every kind of capacity in this head … wonderful endowments in science, in literature, in every way; but they are all lost.'" On being asked "'Why so?'" he responded, "'There is no power to make them active. The poor weak temperament cannot sustain any continued effort, so the fine organisation is quite useless'" (De Morgan 1895, 163-164).

Despite this dire prediction, in 1837, ten years after having first met, Sophia Frend agreed to be Augustus De Morgan's wife and, as befits their refusal to comply with religious and social conventions, they were married at the Superintendent's Registrar's Office, St. Pancras.

Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan (née Frend, 1809-1892)

Sophia was the eldest of seven children of William Frend and Sarah Blackburne, who was the daughter of a clergyman of the Established Church but whose "traditions," according to Mary De Morgan in her introduction to her mother's reminiscences, were similar to those of her husband. This being the case, it is not surprising that Sophia's upbringing was, by her own account, totally unlike that of a conventional lady due, in the main, to the influence of her father on her education. He supervised her training throughout her youth, teaching her Hebrew, a language which allowed her to follow with greater understanding questions of theology and history, in which she was particularly interested. She also learned a little Greek and Latin, and her father encouraged her to read metaphysical and philosophical texts—little wonder she never acquired the more expected, and accepted, proficiency in playing a musical instrument. Her life, however, was not just one of the intellect, as shown by a letter from her father on the occasion of her first ball. In this letter he counsels her to "avoid affectation" and "anything like romping in dancing is to be carefully avoided" (De Morgan 1895, xxxii). He goes on to explain that the secret of her success will be in carrying a

> cheerful and innocent heart, desirous of giving and receiving all the satisfaction which the amusement is capable of affording, wishing no ill to your neighbour, passing over their faults, and highly regarding their excellencies. (De Morgan 1895, xxxiv)

Although Sophia subsequently rejoiced in her learning, she recalls that in her early twenties she suffered humiliation when she realised that she did not know the rules of grammar as did her female companions. Sophia, like her husband, recognised that the learning of knowledge for its own sake was not of any benefit. She recalls, at the age of about eleven, meeting Mrs Barbauld, who had brought up her nephew Charles and given him an education "undreamed of then, and now found to involve too great a strain upon very young nerves and brains; but she was among the first who thought a young child should be taught anything intelligible." With hindsight De Morgan is able to suggest that if "Mrs Barbauld had ever had a baby of her own, and had put it to sleep in her arms, her educational system would have been less intellectual, but more perfect" (De Morgan 1895, 87).

Because—or perhaps despite—of her own up-bringing, Sophia De Morgan supported the movement to enable women to receive higher education. Between 1848-1849 she was secretary of the Ladies Committee,

being those interested in the establishment of a Ladies College. Elizabeth Jesser Reid (1789-1866) is considered to be the founder of Bedford College, the first women's college,[3] but she was obviously supported by a group of like-minded women, who had the energy and foresight to make a vision into reality. As a young man, Augustus had held, as Sophia says somewhat acidly, "man-like and masterful views of women's powers and privileges. Women, he thought, ought to have everything provided for them, and every trouble taken off their hands; so the less they meddled with business in any form the better" (De Morgan 1882, 94). No doubt influenced by his wife, Augustus changed his views sufficiently to concede to women "full scope and opportunity for the exercise of all their faculties" (De Morgan 1882, 94) and agreed to give lectures gratuitously at the Ladies' College during its first year. Sophia was unable to continue supporting this venture due to the birth of her last child, Mary, in May 1850.

A decade or so later, Sophia appears to have had some doubts about the usefulness of Ladies' Colleges and comments, with views similar to those of her husband, that the minds of the female, as well as the male students, are too often "crammed to insanity, by an excess of indigestible food" (De Morgan 1863, 330). She concurs that Ladies' Colleges may be a "boon to women, and an instrument of great good to the world" but there is a risk of the displacement of "genial womanly feelings" by ambition and competitiveness to win at examinations (De Morgan 1863, 330 and 331).

As well as the education of women, Sophia supported women's suffrage. In 1866 Barbara Bodichon[4] formed the first ever Women's Suffrage Committee, which organised the women's suffrage petition, to which Sophia De Morgan added her signature. This petition was presented to the House of Commons by J. S. Mill.[5] Augustus, however, held contrary views to those of his wife, and in a letter to Mill dated August 2nd 1867, he wrote:

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[3] For the archives of Bedford College, along with relevant correspondence of Sophia De Morgan, visit the Royal Holloway University Library archives in person or on-line at http://www.calmview.eu/royalholloway/CalmView/.

[4] Barbara Bodichon (née Leigh Smith, 1827-1891) was one of five children born to parents who lived openly as an unmarried couple because her radical father had no desire to take away the freedom of the woman he loved by turning her into a wife. Barbara's parents treated her in exactly the same manner as her brothers and throughout her life she campaigned for women's rights.

[5] John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was a Utilitarian and a great advocate of women's equality, both socially and politically. He wrote *The Subjection of Women* in 1869, with the help of his wife, Harriet, and his step-daughter, Helen, both of whom were promoters of female emancipation and life-long feminists.

> As touching your proposal to me to join the committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, I cannot accede. I never join political agitations, or associations for procuring changes in the political machine. I remember signing a petition which, as I understood it, was for franchise to be granted to single women having the property qualification. Your Society, as its title is worded, contemplates a full female suffrage—e.g. a vote for a man and another for his wife. Supposing me willing to join a political agitation, I should hardly be ready for such a one as this. I should think better of two votes given to the couple jointly—i.e. the two to agree upon the two. (De Morgan 1882, 370)

In another letter to Mill, dated September 20th 1868, Augustus asserts:

> But, in justice, let no woman be placed on the register except on her *demand.* To be a voter is sometimes dangerous. A man ought to face danger, but you have no right to enforce it on women; in principle you might as well enforce the militia on them. Many women think exemption from politics is one of their rights. (De Morgan 1882, 383-384)

Mary followed in her mother's footsteps, in that in the early 1890s she was one of the 140 members of the Women's Franchise League, but we have no further evidence of any "political agitation," other than, as I will show in later chapters, hints of social and political critiques within her writings.

Another trait passed on by her mother was Mary's involvement in social work in the East End of London. In her introduction to *Three Score Years and Ten,* Mary summarises only some of her mother's various social activities over no more than four pages, but it is nevertheless clear that her daughter was immensely proud of her mother and had a lot of respect for her endeavours. There was, for instance, the creation of the Workhouse Visiting Association in 1857, which was a direct result of Sophia's interest in workhouse reform. In the De Morgan archives, there is a copy of a letter (believed to have been written around 1850), a version of which was presumably sent:

> To the Directors of the Poor of St Pancras
> Gentlemen,
> We, the undersigned, inhabitants of the Parish of St Pancras, believing that an important sphere of usefulness is open to Ladies in the visitation of Workhouses, Hospitals, and similar Institutions, respectfully request your permission to form ourselves with such other Ladies as may be desirous of regularly visiting the Workhouse of the Parish.
> We desire to comfort and if possible ameliorate the condition of the sick and aged, to watch the industrial operations of the able-bodied, to superintend the working of the schools, to observe the conditions of the

> Infant Nurseries, and to suggest from time to time, such changes as may appear to us likely to conduce to the well being of the poor.
>
> We believe that much good may be effected in this way without interruption to the officials, or annoyance to the constituted authorities. We remain
>
> Gentlemen,
> Yours obediently

The result of such a letter resulted in the formation of a small committee of ladies who visited the wards and made suggestions to the Board for improvements to the comfort and welfare of the "inmates." For instance, a footnote in *Workhouses and Women's Work* refers to a paper sent to the Meeting for Social Science at Birmingham by Mrs De Morgan, in which she suggests that tailors and shoemakers superintend the work of the inmates, bread for the workhouse is made on site and wood-chopping is provided as an occupation. She also suggests a small remuneration for work done and industrial training for the young, so that the workhouse becomes the first step in an upward climb to success, rather than a downward fall into prison (*Workhouses and Women's Work* 1858, 35).[6]

This involvement in workhouses was followed a few years later by Sophia, along with a few female friends, setting up a society for the provision of playgrounds for the poor slum children. Sophia was asked to join the Rev. David Mr Laing's committee in 1858, which attempted to obtain waste land throughout London where poor children could play "harmlessly and happily, uncontaminated by street influences" (De Morgan 1882, 265). She wrote an article entitled "A Plea for Playgrounds" for *Household Words*, which explains what prompted her to get involved in the project and asks others to share her concern and vision.[7] The aims of the society were supported by Augustus De Morgan, Charles Dickens and Lord Shaftesbury, among others.[8] The venture failed, however, due to lack of public support, an insufficient number of committee members and the

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[6] See Appendix B for a reproduction of the article by Sophia De Morgan entitled "Recollections of a London Workhouse Forty Years Ago," published in *The Englishwoman's Review* (1889).

[7] See Appendix C for a reproduction of "A Plea for Playgrounds," published in *Household Words* (1858).

[8] Sophia had first met Lord Shaftesbury at a meeting of the Playground Committee and they were to meet and correspond over social issues for the next thirty years or so. Working under his "leadership," she knew how his heart bled for the sufferings of the little chimney-sweeps, and how vigorous were his efforts for their relief, and for that of the factory children. His battles for the freedom of the slave, the better treatment of the lunatic and the prisoner—in short, for all who were suffering and oppressed, are written in history. (De Morgan 1882, 245)

Rev. Laing's failing health, although the useful work was carried on more successfully by other societies and the Board Schools themselves.

As well as supporting initiatives to improve life for the poor, Sophia also campaigned to prevent harm or abuse to the powerless. Although Mary does not mention it in the introduction to her mother's reminiscences, her mother was a keen member of the anti-slavery lobby. In *Threescore Years and Ten,* Sophia recalls seeing Harriet Beecher Stowe at Mrs Reid's, when Stowe visited England in 1852 during a European speaking tour to promote *Uncle Tom's Cabin;* she did not manage to speak to her, however, due to the throng of people.

From the number of letters held in the De Morgan archives from Edwin

Chadwick and Lord Shaftesbury to Mrs De Morgan, it is clear that she was involved in the production of the following letter, which was included in all the main newspapers on the 5th November 1852 or soon thereafter:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS

Sir,—May I request you to insert in your paper this letter and the copy of the proposed address which accompanies it? It is with great reluctance that I put myself forward, and venture to suggest a course of proceeding to my fair fellow subjects, but I am impelled to do so by a feeling almost irresistible—a feeling in which they and many others will I am sure participate. In the days in which we live more is to be permanently effected by public opinion, and by appeal to the great sympathies of mankind, than by force or by statute law. If this or some such address were undertaken by local committees, enriched by many signatures, and then transmitted to America, it would not fail, with God's blessing, to produce a deep and fruitful impression.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,
SHAFTESBURY.

Nov. 5.

"The affectionate and Christian address of many thousands of the women of England to their sisters, the women of the United States of America"

"A common origin, a common faith, and, we sincerely believe, a common cause, urge us, at the present moment, to address you on the subject of that system of negro slavery, which still prevails so extensively, and with such frightful results, in many of the vast regions of the Western World. We will not dwell on the ordinary topics; on the progress of civilisation; on the advance of freedom everywhere; on the rights and requirements of the nineteenth century; but we appeal to you very seriously to reflect, and to