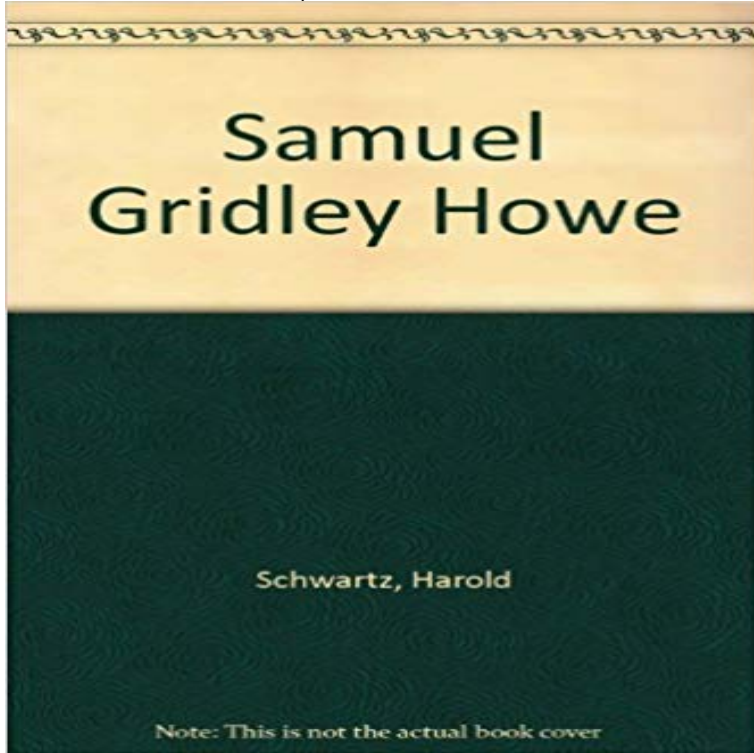


Samuel Gridley Howe: Social Reformer (Harvard Historical Studies)



This readable book is the first authoritative biography of Samuel Gridley Howe, the remarkable Bostonian who actively participated in most of the major reform movements of the nineteenth century. He founded the Perkins School for the Blind which quickly became the foremost institution of its type in the world. There he developed techniques for teaching the deaf-blind, the first man in history to succeed in this field. He supported Horace Mann in reforming the public school system and Dorothea Dix in protecting the interests of the insane. After 1845, he spent most of his energies, political and literary, in abolitionist activities. Yet he found time to give his medical services in the Greek war of independence 1825-1830, and in our Civil War; and he worked on the presidential commission sent to Santo Domingo in 1871. Schwartz traces Howes public career, but he also describes Howes childhood, his choice of a medical career, his membership--together with Longfellow, Cornelius Felton, Charles Sumner, and George Hillard--in the social circle called the Five of Clubs, and his marriage to Julia Ward. This book carries the full flavor of mid-nineteenth-century Boston. Howes own activities, the reform movements he supported, and the striking individuals with whom he was associated are merged into one integrated story. The spotlight often shifts from Howe to Horace Mann, John Brown, Theodore Parker, Laura Bridgman, and--most of all--Charles Sumner; and in the background we can see the slow development of the slavery issue, which eventually overrode all other reform movements. Here too is the story of a marriage: Julia Ward Howe led but half a life with a husband whose ideas about a womans place did not stretch to include her talents. Schwartz bases his admirable biography on extensive research in primary, and largely untouched, sources: these include the Howe papers--which

contain many letters to Mann, Parker, and Sumner, and never used by their biographers--the Sumner and Laura Bridgman papers, and contemporary newspapers as well as Howes own books, pamphlets, and articles. Schwartz is thus able to cast new light on the personalities of the Bostonian reformers: harsh, sanctimonious, or unfair as they might appear to their opponents, they were, Schwartz reminds us, basically earnest men who, by acting on their faith in progress and their sense of duty to the helpless did, in fact, improve the lot of humanity.

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