

12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

## Sustaining

**"One thing alone my heart requires – one gleam of living light amid the ashes and the gloom; that into my cell of humiliation the flood of Divine pity should break, and keep aglow the openings of eternal hope, and sustain the hidden strength of an everlasting love."**

*James Martineau, as quoted in Josiah Hotchkiss Gilbert's "Dictionary of Burning Words of Brilliant Writers" (1895)*

On a modern Grand Piano there are three pedals: on the right, the "sustain pedal", on the left the "soft pedal" and in the middle the "*sostenuto* pedal". This pedal is very clever indeed, for it sustains *only* those notes that are being held down when the pedal is depressed, allowing any additional notes played to be unaffected. The technology needed to make this happen is beyond me. But I *do* know that it's a pretty nifty piece of kit!

The 18<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher, James Martineau, was described in his day by William Ewart Gladstone as, "beyond question the greatest of living thinkers". Martineau was a Unitarian, believing in one God, and not subscribing to the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as in traditional Christian teaching. In his early years he'd been a preacher, never believing in the Incarnation, holding to a belief in a God who was seen in all humanity, and propounding "the authority of reason above that of scripture." He also spent time exploring "transcendentalism".

A man who'd drifted from "main-stream" thinking, it might appear. But was he not on the same journey, engaged in the same search, as you and me? "One thing my heart desires," he said, "one gleam of living light amid the ashes and the gloom ... [to] keep aglow the openings of eternal hope, and sustain the hidden strength of an everlasting love." Martineau was seeking a *sostenuto* pedal in his life, sustaining these notes that mattered, no matter what additional notes came along. His "sustaining" was the "hidden strength of everlasting love". Divine or human, in us or beyond us, love mattered above all else. This was his *sostenuto*.

What are the important things in your life right now? What sustains you? What will last as other things change? And what will you do to ensure that these sustaining notes are your "living light" and "eternal hope"?

### A prayer for today

*Living God, let me be sustained by the light and hope of your truth. Amen.*

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