

**ELLET
ELIZABETH
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THE WOMEN OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION,
VOL. 2

Elizabeth Ellet
The Women of The
American Revolution, Vol. 2

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E. F. Ellet

The Women of The American Revolution, Vol. 2

XXVI. MARTHA WASHINGTON

None who take an interest in the history of Washington can fail to desire some knowledge of her who shared his thoughts and plans, and was associated with him in the great events of his life. Few women have been called to move, in the drama of existence, amid scenes so varied and imposing; and few have sustained their part with so much dignity and discretion. In the shades of retirement, or the splendor of eminent station, she was the same unostentatious, magnanimous woman; through the gloom of adverse fortune she walked by the side of the Chief, ascending with him the difficult path Heaven had opened before him; and when standing with him on the summit, in the full light of his power and renown, the eyes of her spirit looked still upward, seeking in the smile of the Supreme a reward which earthly honors could not bestow.

Though the life of Mrs. Washington was a changeful one, and had its full measure of sorrow and joy, it affords little material for the biographer. She moved in woman's domestic

sphere, to which pertain not actions that strike the public eye, but uncomplaining endurance, and continual, unnoted self-sacrifice. The best account of her is the memoir prepared for the National Portrait Gallery, by her grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, of Arlington, D. C. According to this, Martha Dandridge was descended from an ancient family that migrated to the colony of Virginia and was born in the county of New Kent, in May, 1732. Her education was only a domestic one, such as was given to females in those days, when there were few seminaries of instruction, and private teachers were generally employed. Her beauty and fascinating manners, with her amiable qualities of character, gained her distinction among the ladies who were accustomed to resort to Williamsburg, at that time the seat of government.

When but seventeen, Miss Dandridge was married to Colonel Daniel Parke Custis, of the same county. Their residence – called the "White House," – was on the banks of the Pamunkey River, where Colonel Custis became a highly successful planter. None of the children of this marriage survived the mother; Martha, who arrived at womanhood, died at Mount Vernon, in 1770; and John perished eleven years later, at the age of twenty-seven.

Mrs. Custis was early left a widow, in the full bloom of beauty and "splendidly endowed with worldly benefits." As sole executrix, she managed with great ability the extensive landed and pecuniary business of the estate. Surrounded by the advantages of fortune and position, and possessing such charms

of person, it may well be believed that suitors for her hand and heart were many and pressing.

"It was in 1758," says her biographer, "that an officer, attired in a military undress, and attended by a body servant, tall and militaire as his Chief, crossed the ferry called Williams's, over the Pamun-key, a branch of the York River. On the boat touching the southern, or New Kent side, the soldier's progress was arrested by one of those personages who give the beau ideal of the Virginia gentleman of the old regime – the very soul of kindness and hospitality." He would hear of no excuse on the officer's part for declining the invitation to stop at his house. In vain the Colonel pleaded important business at Williamsburg; Mr. Chamberlayne insisted that his friend must dine with him at the very least. He promised, as a temptation, to introduce him to a young and charming widow, who chanced then to be an inmate of his dwelling. At last the soldier surrendered at discretion, resolving, however, to pursue his journey the same evening. They proceeded to the mansion. Mr. Chamberlayne presented Colonel Washington to his various guests, among whom was the beautiful Mrs. Custis. Tradition says that the two were favorably impressed with each other at the first interview. It may be supposed that the conversation turned upon scenes in which the whole community had a deep interest – scenes which the young hero, fresh from his early fields, could eloquently describe; and we may fancy with what earnest and rapt interest the fair listener "to hear did seriously incline;" or how "the heavenly rhetoric of her eyes"

beamed unconscious admiration upon the manly speaker. The morning passed; the sun sank low in the horizon. The hospitable host smiled as he saw the Colonel's faithful attendant, Bishop, true to his orders, holding his master's spirited steed at the gate. The veteran waited, and marvelled at the delay. "Ah, Bishop," says a fair writer describing the occurrence, "there was an urchin in the drawing-room more powerful than King George and all his governors! Subtle as a sphynx, he had hidden the important despatches from the soldier's sight, shut up his ears from the summons of the tell-tale clock, and was playing such mad pranks with the bravest heart in Christendom, that it fluttered with the excess of a new-found happiness!"

Mr. Chamberlayne insisted that no guest ever left his house after sunset; and his visitor was persuaded, without much difficulty, to remain. The next day was far advanced when the enamored soldier was on the road to Williamsburg. His business there being despatched, he hastened to the presence of the captivating widow.

A short time after the marriage, which took place about 1759, Colonel and Mrs. Washington fixed their residence at Mount Vernon. The mansion was at that period a very small building compared with its present extent. It did not receive many additions before Washington left it to repair to the first Congress, and thence to the command-in-chief of the armies of his country. He was accompanied to Cambridge by Mrs. Washington, who remained some time with him, and witnessed the siege and

evacuation of Boston. She then returned to Virginia.

So prevalent at one time was the disaffection, as Mrs. Washington herself remarked, that on a visit to Philadelphia, upon her way to camp one season, few of the ladies of the city called upon her. A passage from Christopher Marshall's manuscript diary for the year 1775,¹ curiously illustrates the state of popular feeling at the breaking out of the war.

Mrs. Washington arrived in the city on the twenty-first of November, on her journey to Cambridge. A ball was in preparation, to be given on the twenty-fourth; and it was expected that both she and the wife of Colonel Hancock would grace the entertainment with their presence. But from some threats thrown out, it was feared that a commotion would be made, which might result in disturbance of the peace of the city. A large and respectable committee was held at the Philosophical Hall, called together for the purpose of considering the propriety of allowing the ball to be given that evening; and after mature consideration, it was concluded that no such entertainment should take place, either then, or during the continuance of those melancholy times. A committee was appointed to inform the managers that they must proceed no further in the preparations; and also to wait upon "Lady Washington," and request her not to attend at the assembly to which she had been invited. The committee acted agreeably to directions; and reported that Lady Washington had received

¹ *This passage may be found, quoted from the MS., in a note in the Life and Correspondence of President Reed. Vol. II., p. 24.*

them with great politeness, thanked the committee for their kind care and regard in giving her timely notice, and assured them that their sentiments on this occasion were perfectly agreeable to her own.

It was not often that the interest taken by Mrs. Washington in political affairs was evinced by any public expression. The address already mentioned, which was read in the churches of Virginia, and published in the Philadelphia papers, June, 1780, as "The Sentiments of an American Woman" – was attributed – it cannot be ascertained with what truth – to her pen.² She passed the winters with her husband. Mr. Custis states that it was the habit of the Commander-in-chief to despatch an aid-de-camp, at the close of each campaign, to escort Mrs. Washington to headquarters.

Her arrival at camp was an event much anticipated; the plain chariot, with the neat postillions in their scarlet and white liveries, was always welcomed with great joy by the army, and brought a cheering influence, which relieved the general gloom in seasons of disaster and despair. Her example was followed by the wives of other general officers.

It happened at one time while the ladies remained later than usual in the camp on the Hudson, that an alarm was given of the approach of the enemy from New York. The aids-de-camp proposed that the ladies should be sent away under an escort. To this Washington would not consent. "The presence of our wives,"

² *Remembrancer, Vol. VIII.*

said he, "will the better encourage us to a brave defence." The night was dark; and the words of command from the officers, the marching of the troops, the dragging of artillery into the yard, and the noise of removing the windows of the house – the house itself being filled with soldiers – all gave "dreadful note of preparation." The enemy, however, finding themselves mistaken in their hopes of a surprise, withdrew without coming to blows.

Lady Washington, as she was always called in the army, usually remained at head-quarters till the opening of the succeeding campaign, when she returned to Mount Vernon. She was accustomed afterwards to say that it had been her fortune to hear the first cannon at the opening, and the last at the closing, of all the campaigns of the Revolutionary war. How admirably her equanimity and cheerfulness were preserved, through the sternest periods of the struggle – and how inspiring was the influence she diffused, is testified in many of the military journals. She was at Valley Forge in that dreadful winter of 1777-8; her presence and submission to privation strengthening the fortitude of those who might have complained, and giving hope and confidence to the desponding. She soothed the distresses of many sufferers, seeking out the poor and afflicted with benevolent kindness, extending relief wherever it was in her power, and with graceful deportment presiding in the Chiefs humble dwelling.³

In a letter to Mrs. Warren she says, "The General's apartment

³ *Thacher's Journal and other authorities.*

is very small; he has had a log cabin built to dine in, which has made our quarters much more tolerable than they were at first." Their table was but scantily furnished; but the soldiers fared still worse, sitting down at a board of rough planks, set with horn spoons and a few tumblers; the food being often salt herrings and potatoes, without other vegetables, or tea, coffee, or sugar. Their continental money was no temptation to the farmers to sell them produce. The stone jug passed round was filled with water from the nearest spring; and rare was the privilege of toddy in which to drink the health of the nation. Yet here, forgetful of herself, the patriot wife anxiously watched the aspect of affairs, and was happy when the political horizon brightened. She writes to Mrs. Warren – "It has given me unspeakable pleasure to hear that General Burgoyne and his army are in safe quarters in your State. Would bountiful Providence aim a like stroke at General Howe, the measure of my happiness would be complete."⁴

The Marquis de Chastellux says of Mrs. Washington, whom he met at the house of General Reed in Philadelphia, – "She had just arrived from Virginia, and was going to stay with her husband, as she does at the end of every campaign. She is about forty, or five-and-forty, rather plump, but fresh, and of an agreeable countenance." In another passage, he notices the camp life shared by her: "The head-quarters at Newburgh consist of a single house, built in the Dutch fashion, and neither large nor commodious. The largest room in it, which General Washington

⁴ *MS. letter, March 7th, 1778.*

has converted into his diningroom, is tolerably spacious, but it has seven doors and only one window. The chimney is against the wall; so that there is, in fact, but one vent for the smoke, and the fire is in the room itself. I found the company assembled in a small room which served as a parlor. At nine, supper was served, and when bedtime came, I found that the chamber to which the General conducted me was the very parlor spoken of, wherein he had made them place a camp-bed. We assembled at breakfast the next morning at ten, during which interval my bed was folded up; and my chamber became the sitting room for the whole afternoon; for American manners do not admit of a bed in the room in which company is received, especially where there are women. The smallness of the house, and the inconvenience to which I saw that General and Mrs. Washington had put themselves to receive me, made me apprehensive lest M. Rochambeau might arrive on the same day. The day I remained at headquarters was passed either at table or in conversation."

The recollections of a veteran still living at Manchester, Massachusetts, at the age of ninety-two, bear testimony to the kindness of Mrs. Washington towards those in the humblest sphere. One little incident occurred when she came to spend the cold season with her husband in winter-quarters. There were but two frame-houses in the settlement, and neither had a finished upper story. The General was contented with his rough dwelling, but wished to prepare for his wife a more retired and comfortable apartment. He sent for the young mechanic, and desired him

and one of his fellow-apprentices to fit up a room in the upper story for the accommodation of Lady Washington through the winter. She herself arrived before the work was commenced. "She came," says the narrator, "into the place – a portly-looking, agreeable woman of forty-five, and said to us: 'Now, young men, I care for nothing but comfort here; and should like you to fit me up a beaufet on one side of the room, and some shelves and places for hanging clothes on the other.' We went to work with all our might. Every morning about eleven Mrs. Washington came up stairs with a glass of spirits for each of us; and after she and the General had dined, we were called down to eat at their table. We worked very hard, nailing smooth boards over the rough and worm-eaten planks, and stopping the crevices in the walls made by time and hard usage. Then we consulted together how we could smooth the uneven floor, and take out, or cover over some of the huge black knots. We studied to do every thing to please so pleasant a lady, and to make some return in our humble way for the kindness of the General. On the fourth day, when Mrs. Washington came up to see how we were getting along, we had finished the work, made the shelves, put up the pegs on the wall, built the beaufet, and converted the rough garret into a comfortable apartment. As she stood looking round, I said, 'Madam, we have endeavored to do the best we could; I hope we have suited you.' She replied, smiling, 'I am astonished! your work would do honor to an old master, and you are mere lads. I am not only satisfied, but highly gratified with what you

have done for my comfort.'" As the old soldier repeated these words, the tears ran down his furrowed cheeks. The thrill of delight which had seventy years before penetrated his heart at the approving words of his General's lady, again animated his worn frame, sending back his thoughts to the very moment and scene.

At one time the head-quarters of the Commander-in-chief were at the house of Mrs. Berry, in New Jersey. While he remained here Mrs. Washington arrived. When the carriage stopped, and a female in a plain russet gown, with white handkerchief neatly folded over her neck, was seen, Mrs. Berry imagined her to be a domestic. But she was undeceived when the General went forward to receive her, assisted her from the carriage, and after the first greeting, began to inquire after his pet horses. A ball was given in honor of the arrival of "Lady Washington," at which her brave husband himself condescended to lead a minuet; it being the first occasion in a long time on which he had been known to dance.⁵

An anecdote illustrative of the heroic spirit of the lady whose house was the Chief's abode on this occasion, will not be here misplaced. Her husband was at Saratoga attending to some private business, when General Washington, with his officers and troops, went forth to battle. Mrs. Berry and the wives of the officers who were with her, were busily occupied in preparing bandages and wrappings for the use of the army; every sheet and article of linen in the house having been torn up for that purpose.

⁵ *Communicated by a friend of Mrs. Berry.*

She was harassed with anxiety lest her husband should not return to assume his post before the departure of the troops. He did not arrive in time; and she had the mortification of seeing another appointed to the command of his men. Sometime after they were gone, she heard the welcome sound of his horse's feet. He rode up hastily, and stopped only long enough to change his wearied horse for another. As he galloped down the lane leading from the house, he heard his wife's voice calling, "Sidney, Sidney!" She was leaning from a window, her hand stretched towards him, as if eagerly soliciting his attention. He turned and rode within hearing; she wished but to give him her parting words. These were, "Remember, Sidney, to do your duty! I would rather hear that you were left a corpse on the field, than that you had played the part of a coward!"

Mrs. Wilson, a lady whose name is mentioned elsewhere in this book, has favored me with an account of Mrs. Washington's visit to her father's house at Union Farm, the last time she came to that part of New Jersey. She was escorted by Major Washington and ten dragoons. She remained a day and night at the house of Colonel Stewart, and spoke much with his daughter concerning housekeeping and her domestic affairs. Her conversation is described as agreeable, and her manners simple, easy, and dignified. Among other particulars, Mrs. Washington mentioned that she had a great deal of domestic cloth made in her house, and kept sixteen spinning wheels in constant operation. She showed Mrs. Wilson two dresses of cotton striped

with silk, manufactured by her own domestics, and worn by herself; one weighing a pound and a half, the other rather less. The silk stripes in the fabric were made from the ravellings of brown silk stockings, and old crimson damask chair-covers. Her coachman, footman, and waiting-maid, were all habited in domestic cloth; though the coachman's cuffs and collars, being scarlet, must have been imported. In the practice of this economy and moderation, as in the simplicity of her dress, Mrs. Washington appeared desirous of affording an example to others in inferior station. As late as 1796, Mrs. Wilson, inquiring for pocket handkerchiefs at a celebrated fancy store in Philadelphia, was shown some pieces of lawn, of which Mrs. Washington had just purchased. The information was added, that she paid six shillings for handkerchiefs for her own use, but went as high as seven shillings for the General's.

The anniversary of the alliance with France was celebrated by an entertainment given in the camp near Middlebrook.⁶ On this festive occasion Mrs. Washington, Mrs. Greene and Mrs. Knox, and the wives of several officers were present; and a circle of brilliants, the least of which, says the gallant journalist, was more valuable than the stone which the king of Portugal received for his Brazilian possessions. The ladies and gentlemen from a large circuit around the camp, attended the celebration. It was opened by a discharge of cannon; and dinner was prepared in a building used for an academy. There was dancing in the

⁶ *Remembrancer*, Vol. VI.

evening, and a grand display of fire-works. The ball was opened by General Washington. As this was a festival given by men who had not enriched themselves by the war, the illuminations were on a cheap scale, being entirely of their own manufacture; the seats were adorned with no armorial blazonry, but were the work of native, and rather unskillful artisans. "Instead of knights of different orders, such as pageants like the Mischianza could boast, there were but hardy soldiers; happy, however, in the consciousness that they had contributed to bring about the auspicious event they had met to celebrate."

Among the lively sallies of the belles of this entertainment, one is recorded, that caused no inconsiderable amusement. A young lady, when asked if the roaring of the British lion in his late speech had not somewhat depressed the spirit of the dance – replied: "No, it should rather enliven it; for I have heard that such animals always increase their howlings when frightened."

For Mrs. Washington a heavy cloud of sorrow hung over the conclusion of the glorious campaign of 1781. Her only child was seized with a fever while attending to his duties during the siege of Yorktown. He lived to behold the surrender of the British army, and expired in the arms of his mother, mourned for by Washington as a son. The Marquis de Chastellux visiting Mount Vernon not long after this sad event, says: "I had the pleasure of passing a day or two with Mrs. Washington, at the General's house in Virginia, where she appeared to me one of the best women in the world, and beloved by all about her. She has no

family by the General, but was surrounded by her grandchildren and Mrs. Custis, her son's widow. The family were then in mourning for Mr. Custis, whose premature death was a subject of public and private regret."

After the close of 1783, General Washington had leisure for the superintendence of improvements in the building and grounds at Mount Vernon. This old mansion was always crowded with visitors.

Social and rural pleasures winged the hours, and past dangers were pleasantly talked over. A letter never before published, of Mr. N. Webster, affords a passing glimpse of this period.

"When I was travelling to the south in the year 1785, I called on General Washington at Mount Vernon. At dinner the last course of dishes was a species of pancakes, which were handed round to each guest, accompanied with a bowl of sugar, and another of molasses for seasoning them, that each one might suit himself. When the dish came to me, I pushed by me the bowl of molasses, observing to the gentlemen present that I had enough of *that* in my own country. The General burst out with a loud laugh, a thing very unusual with him; 'Ah,' said he, 'there is nothing in that story about your eating molasses in New England!' There was a gentleman from Maryland at the table, and the General immediately told a story, stating that during the Revolution, a hogshead of molasses was stove in at Westchester by the oversetting of a wagon; a body of Maryland troops being near, the soldiers ran hastily and saved all they could by filling

their hats or caps with molasses.

"Near the close of the Revolutionary war, I think in 1782, I was at West Point, when the birth of a Dauphin in France was celebrated by the American troops at that place. The troops were arranged in a line along the hills on the west of the camp, on the point, and on the mountains on the east side of the Hudson. When the order was given to fire, there was a stream of firing all around the camp, rapidly passing from one end of the line to the other; while the roar of cannon reverberated from the hills, resounded among the mountains, and thousands of human voices made the atmosphere ring with a song prepared for the occasion. 'A Dauphin is born!' This was a splendid exhibition, closed with a handsome repast under a long arcade or bower formed with branches of trees. I have never seen any account of this celebration in print."

While the victorious general was thus merged in "the illustrious farmer of Mount Vernon," Mrs. Washington performed the duties of a Virginia housewife, which in those days were not merely nominal. She gave directions, it is said, in every department, so that, without bustle or confusion, the most splendid dinner appeared as if there had been no effort in the preparation. She presided at her abundant table with ease and elegance, and was indeed most truly great in her appropriate sphere of home. Much of her time was occupied in the care of the children of her lost son.

The period came when this rural Eden, which had bloomed

and flourished under their care, was to be exchanged for new scenes. A few years of rest and tranquil happiness in the society of friends having rewarded the Chief's military toils, he was called by the voice of the nation to assume the duties of its Chief Magistrate. The call was obeyed. The establishment of the President and Mrs. Washington was formed at the seat of government. The levees had more of courtly ceremonial than has been known since; but it was necessary to maintain the dignity of office by forms that should inspire respect. Special regard was paid to the wives of men who had deserved much of their country. Mrs. Robert Morris was accustomed to sit at the right of the lady of the President, at the drawing-rooms; and the widows of Greene and Montgomery were always handed to and from their carriages by the President himself; the secretaries and gentlemen of his household performing those services for the other ladies. In this elevated station, Mrs. Washington, unspoiled by distinction, still leaned on the kindness of her friends, and cultivated cheerfulness as a duty. She was beloved as few are in a superior condition. Mrs. Warren says, in reply to one of her letters, "Your observation may be true, that many younger and gayer ladies consider your situation as enviable; yet I know not one who by general consent would be more likely to obtain the suffrages of the sex, even were they to canvass at elections for the elevated station, than the lady who now holds the first rank in the United States."⁷ On the retirement of Washington from

⁷ *Manuscript letter.*

public life, he prepared to spend the remnant of his days in the retreat his taste had adorned.

It was a spectacle of wonder to Europeans, to see this great man calmly resigning the power which had been committed to his hands, and returning with delight to his agricultural pursuits. His wife could justly claim her share in the admiration; for she quitted without regret the elevated scenes in which she had shone so conspicuous, to enter with the same active interest as before upon her domestic employments. Her advanced age did not impair her ability or her inclination to the discharge of housewifely duties. But she was not long permitted to enjoy the happiness she had anticipated. It was hers too soon to join in the grief of a mourning nation for the death of Washington.

Visits of condolence were paid to the bereaved lady by the President and others; and from all quarters came tributes of sympathy and sorrow. She continued to receive the visitors who came to Mount Vernon, and gave the same attention to her domestic concerns. But in less than two years after her husband's death, she was attacked by a fever that proved fatal. When aware that the hour of her dissolution was approaching, she called her grandchildren to her bedside; discoursed to them on their respective duties; spoke of the happy influences of religion; and then, surrounded by her weeping family, resigned her life into the hands of her Creator, in the seventy-first year of her age. Her death took place on the 22d of May, 1802. Her remains rest in the same vault with those of Washington, in the family tomb at

Mount Vernon.

Those who read the record of her worth, dwell with interest on the loveliness of her character. To a superior mind she joined those amiable qualities and Christian virtues which best adorn the female sex, and a gentle dignity that inspired respect without creating enmity. Her features are familiar to all, from the portraits of her, taken at different ages, published in Sparks' Life of Washington, and the National Portrait Gallery. These have been copied into different publications.

XXVII. ABIGAIL ADAMS

The Letters of Mrs. Adams are well known to American readers. Her history and character have been so well unfolded in these and in the memoir by her grandson, that an extended sketch of her would be superfluous. Only a brief notice, therefore, is here required.

Abigail Smith was descended from the genuine stock of the Puritan settlers of Massachusetts. Her father, the Reverend William Smith, was for more than forty years minister of the Congregational Church at Weymouth. The ancestors of her mother, Elizabeth Quincy, were persons distinguished in the sacred office, and first in honor among the leaders of the church. From this ancestry, it may be inferred that her earliest associations were among those whose tastes and habits were marked by the love of literature. She was the second of three daughters, and was born at Weymouth, Nov. 11th, 1744. Not being sent to any school, on account of the delicate state of her health, the knowledge she evinced in after life was the result of her reading and observation, rather than of what is commonly called education. The lessons that most deeply impressed her mind were received from Mrs. Quincy, her grandmother, whose beneficial influence she frequently acknowledges. Her marriage took place, October 25th, 1764. She passed quietly the ten years that succeeded, devoting herself to domestic life, and the care of

her young family. In 1775 she was called to pass through scenes of great distress, amid the horrors of war and the ravages of pestilence.

She sympathized deeply in the sufferings of those around her. "My hand and heart," she says, "still tremble at this domestic fury and fierce civil strife. I feel for the unhappy wretches, who know not where to fly for succor. I feel still more for my bleeding countrymen, who are hazarding their lives and their limbs!" To the agonized hearts of thousands of women went the roar of the cannon booming over those hills! Many a bosom joined in breathing that prayer – "Almighty God! cover the heads of our countrymen, and be a shield to our dear friends."

When the neighborhood was no longer the field of military action, she occupied herself with the management of the household and farm. Mr. Adams was appointed joint commissioner at the court of France, and embarked in February, 1778, with his eldest son, John Quincy. During the years in which Mrs. Adams was deprived of his society, she devoted herself to the various duties devolving on her, submitting with patience to the difficulties of the times. In all her anxieties, her calm and lofty spirit never deserted her; nor did she regret the sacrifice of her own feelings for the good of the community. After the return of peace, Mr. Adams was appointed the first representative of the nation at the British court, and his wife departed to join him; moving from this time amidst new scenes and new characters, but preserving, in the variety and splendor of life in the luxurious

cities of the old world, the simplicity and singleness of heart which had adorned her seclusion at home. In the prime of life, with a mind free from prejudice, her record of the impressions she received is instructive as well as interesting. She resided for a time in France, and visited the Netherlands, enjoying all she saw, with that delicate perception of beauty which belongs to a poetic spirit. When the official duties of Mr. Adams called him to the court of St. James, the unaffected republican simplicity, and exquisite union of frankness and refinement in her manners, charmed the proud circles of the English aristocracy. As was to be expected, neither she nor her husband were exempted from annoyances growing out of the late controversy. She writes to Mrs. Warren: "Whoever in Europe is known to have adopted republican principles must expect to have all the engines of every court and courtier in the world displayed against him."⁸

The aspect of independence she maintained, considering what was due to her country, did not tend to propitiate the pride of royalty; yet notwithstanding the drawbacks that sometimes troubled her, her residence in London seems to have been an agreeable one. Her letters to her sisters are a faithful transcript of her feelings. She observed with mingled pleasure and pain the contrast between the condition of her own country and that of the prosperous kingdoms she visited. Writing to Mrs. Shaw she says – "When I reflect on the advantages which the people of America possess over the most polished of other nations, the

⁸ *Unpublished letter.*

ease with which property is obtained, the plenty which is so equally distributed, – their personal liberty and security of life and property, I feel grateful to Heaven who marked out my lot in that happy land; at the same time I deprecate that restless spirit, and that baneful ambition and thirst for power, which will finally make us as wretched as our neighbors."⁹

When Mr. Adams, having returned with his family to the United States, became Vice President, his wife appeared, as in other situations – the pure-hearted patriot – the accomplished woman – the worthy partner of his cares and honors. He was called to the Presidency, and the widest field was opened for the exercise of her talents. Her letter written on the day that decided the people's choice, shows a sense of the solemn responsibility he had assumed, with a spirit of reliance upon Divine guidance, and forgetfulness of all thoughts of pride in higher sentiments – honorable to the heart of a Daughter of America. Well might the husband thus addressed bear the testimony he does in one of his letters, in the midst of the perils of war: "A soul as pure, as benevolent, as virtuous, and pious as yours, has nothing to fear, but every thing to hope and expect from the last of human evils."

In her elevated position, the grace and elegance of Mrs. Adams, with her charms of conversation, were rendered more attractive by her frank sincerity. Her close observation, discrimination of character, and clear judgment, gave her an influence which failed not to be acknowledged. Her husband ever

⁹ *Unpublished letter, 1787.*

appreciated her worth, and was sustained in spirit by her buoyant cheerfulness and affectionate sympathy, in the multiplicity of his cares and labors. It was hers, too, to disarm the demon of party spirit, to calm agitations, heal the rankling wounds of pride, and pluck the root of bitterness away.

After the retirement of her husband, Mrs. Adams continued to take a deep interest in public affairs, and communicated to her friends her opinions both of men and measures. Writing to Mrs. Warren, March 9th, 1807, she says: "If we were to count our years by the revolutions we have witnessed, we might number them with the Antediluvians. So rapid have been the changes that the mind, though fleet in its progress, has been outstripped by them, and we are left like statues gazing at what we can neither fathom nor comprehend. You inquire, what does Mr. Adams think of Napoleon? If you had asked Mrs. Adams, she would have replied to you in the words of Pope,

'If plagues and earthquakes break not heaven's design,
Why then a Borgia or a Napoline?'"

Her health was much impaired; and from this time she remained in her rural seclusion at Quincy. With faculties unimpaired in old age, her serenity and benign cheerfulness continued to the last; the shadows of a life full of changes never deepened into gloom; she was still a minister of blessing to all within her influence, and in the settled calm of Christian

contentment awaited the change that was to terminate her connection with the things of earth. To this she was summoned on the twenty-eighth of October, 1818.

Her character is a worthy subject of contemplation for her countrywomen. With intellectual gifts of the highest order she combined sensibility, tact, and much practical knowledge of life. Thus was she qualified for eminent usefulness in her distinguished position as the companion of one great statesman, and the guide of another. Few may rise to such pre-eminence; but many can emulate the firmness that sustained her in all vicissitudes, and can imitate her Christian virtues. These are pictured in her Letters, the publication of which was the first attempt to give tradition a palpable form, by laying open the thoughts and feelings of one who had borne an important part in our nation's early history.

The mother of Abigail Adams, it is said, took her last illness from a soldier who had served in her daughter's family, and whom she visited at Braintree, he having returned sick from the army.

She was the daughter of the Hon. John Quincy, of Braintree, and died in 1775, at the age of fifty-three. Without the least tincture of what is called pride of family, she possessed a true dignity of character, with great kindness of heart; and her efforts to relieve those in need extended to all objects of distress within her reach. Prudent and industrious in her own domestic management, she was attentive to provide employment

for her poor neighbors; and was mild, frank and friendly in her intercourse with the parishioners, who regarded her with unbounded esteem and affection.

Another of her three celebrated daughters – Elizabeth – was remarkable in character and influence. She was born in 1750, and married the Rev. John Shaw of Haverhill. Her second husband was the Rev. Stephen Peabody, of Atkinson. Like her sister, she possessed superior powers of conversation, with a fine person, and polished and courtly manners. Her reading was extensive, and when speaking to youthful listeners on some improving topic, she would frequently recite passages from Shakespeare, Dryden, and the other English poets. Attentive to her domestic duties, and economical from Christian principle, to purity of heart and highly cultivated intellectual powers she united the most winning feminine grace. Her house at Haverhill was the centre of an elegant little circle of society for many years after the Revolution, and resorted to by the most cultivated residents of Boston and its vicinity. In Atkinson her gentle and friendly deportment won the lasting regard of the parishioners. She loved to instruct the ignorant, feed the poor, and comfort the afflicted; and the young were particularly the objects of her solicitude. Thus dispensing light and joy wherever she moved, she passed a useful, and therefore a happy life, which terminated at the age of sixty-six.

Mrs. Peabody formed an early and enduring friendship with Mrs. Warren, for whose character and intellect her letters express

the highest respect.

Her correspondence contains frequent remarks upon the prospects of the country, and the movements of the army. "Lost to virtue," she says to John Adams – "lost to humanity must that person be, who can view without emotion the complicated distress of this injured land. Evil tidings molest our habitations, and wound our peace. Oh, my brother! oppression is enough to make a wise people mad."

On her road to Plymouth to visit Mrs. Warren, her MS. journal mentions that she stopped at the house of Dr. Hall, where she dined on salt bacon and eggs. Three of the daughters were grown, and appeared sensible as well as pretty. "But," she says, "in order to discover whether their sensibility reached further than their faces, I sat down after dinner, while they were quilting a very nice homespun bedquilt, and read in a book I had brought with me several detached pieces – "Virtue and Constancy rewarded," "Zulima the Coquette, etc." This little memorandum throws light not only on the writer's character, but the manners of the time. The result appeared satisfactory; the young ladies being so well pleased with the reading that they begged their visitor to continue it.

The eldest daughter, Mary, was married in 1762, to Richard Cranch, afterwards Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in Massachusetts. In 1775, the family removed from Boston to Quincy, then a part of Braintree, where they continued to reside till 1811. In October of that year both Mr. and Mrs. Cranch died,

and were buried on the same day. The life of Mrs. Cranch was spent in deeds of charity and kindness. She was remarkable for her cheerfulness and fortitude, with earnestness in the discharge of her Christian duties. The Hon. Judge William Cranch, of Washington, is her son.

In those portions of the country which were, at different periods, the scene of military operations, the energy, heroism, and magnanimity of woman were called by necessity into continual exercise. But there were other women whose more homely heroism was not without its effect; whose unacknowledged influence extended widely into the future. Their sphere of action limited to the bosom of their own families, the influence wrought quietly and unmarked, yet sent forth an impulse and an energy, like the life-blood propelled from the heart, through our whole national system. The mothers, who through years of adverse fortune were true to American principles, and who kept them pure in their homes in the season of prosperity, although no brilliant acts illustrate their simple history, rendered real service to the country. Their duties during the war, or after the return of peace, were fulfilled in a spirit of self-sacrifice, without the wish or expectation of reward. The noblest reward, however, was theirs; the sons in whose minds they had nursed the germs of patriotism and virtue, rose up to call them blessed.

Our country offers abundant examples of men who have attained the highest eminence, ascribing all to early maternal

influence and training. For the mother of Henry Clay, that great man – the pride and honor of his country – has ever expressed feelings of profound affection and veneration. Though her life afforded no incidents of striking or romantic interest, she was what expresses the perfection of female character – an excellent mother. She was the youngest of two daughters, who were the only children of George and Elizabeth Hudson. Her name also was Elizabeth. She was born in the county of Hanover, in Virginia, in 1750. Her early education was such as was attainable at that period in the colony. In her fifteenth year she was married to John Clay, a preacher of the Baptist denomination, and became the mother of eight children. Mr. Clay died during the war of the Revolution. Some years afterwards, Mrs. Clay contracted a second marriage with Mr. Henry Watkins; and in course of time eight children more were added to her family. The cares devolving upon her, in the charge of so many children, and the superintendence of domestic concerns, of course occupied her time to the exclusion of participation in matters of public interest. She must, however, have borne her share in the agitations and dangers of the time, in behalf of those who claimed her maternal solicitude and guidance.

Her son, Henry, was separated from her when only thirteen years of age, having before that period been occasionally absent from home for months in going to school. In 1792, his step-father removed, with his mother and family, from Hanover County

to Woodford County in Kentucky, leaving him at Richmond, in Virginia. He did not again see his mother till the fall of 1797, when he himself emigrated to Kentucky. His estimable and beloved parent died in 1827, having survived most of her children, of whom there are now but four remaining – two by her first, and two by her last marriage.

She was from her youth a member of the Baptist Church, and eminent in piety. Her distinguishing traits of character were energy and industry; and she was most faithful in the performance of all her domestic duties.

XXVIII. MARTHA WILSON

One of the representatives of those times, in which America must ever feel pride, is yet living at the Lakelands, Lake of Otsego, near Cooperstown, New York. She not only retains an accurate and vivid recollection of scenes in the stormy and fearful infancy of the nation on whose vigorous manhood she is permitted to look, but has kept pace in intellectual cultivation, with the advancement of modern days. The grasp of mind that apprehends and appreciates the progress of her country's prosperity and power, gives a deeper interest to her thrilling recital of incidents belonging to its struggle for life. I am particularly favored in having received from her various anecdotes of persons with whom she was intimately acquainted at that period, her reminiscences of whom would form a most valuable contribution to the domestic history of the Revolution.

The subject of this brief sketch is a daughter of the late Colonel Charles Stewart of New Jersey. She was born December 20th, 1758, at Sidney, the residence of her maternal grandfather, Judge Johnston, in the township of Kingwood, and county of Hunterdon, in that State. This old mansion was at that time one of the most stately and aristocratic of the colonial residences in this section of West Jersey. Constructed while the border settlements of the province were still subject to treacherous visits from the Indian, its square and massive walls and heavy portals

had reference as well to protection and defence as to "the pride of life;" and for many years, in its earlier days, it was not only the stronghold of the wealthy proprietor, his family and dependants, but the refuge in alarm, for miles around, to the settlers whose humbler abodes were more assailable by the rifle and firebrand of the red man. "The big stone house," as it was designated in the common parlance of the people, was thus long a place of note as a refuge from danger; and not less, in later times, as one for a redress of wrongs, and the punishment of crime; Judge Johnston having been, for more than thirty years previous to the Revolution, the chief magistrate of that section of the colony, holding a court regularly, on Monday of every week, in one of the halls of his dwelling.

It stood in that region of-undulating hill country, between the high mountains of North and the flat sands of South Jersey, of the beauty of which those who fly across the State by railroad at the present day can form no conception: where blue hills and tufted woodlands, winding streams and verdant valleys, often present to the eye in their varied forms and combinations, a perfection of picturesque and rural beauty, which, while it seldom fails to attract the admiration of the passing traveller, fastens upon the heart of the resident with an enduring charm. Finely situated on an elevated terrace, at the confluence of the Capulong and a branch of the Raritan, overhung by extensive and park-like woods, with encircling waters and clusters of grove-covered islets behind, and wide-spread valleys in front, it was regarded in olden

times as one of the choicest residences in the State. As the birthplace and home in childhood of the subject of this record, it has attractions of association and memory which cause her affections to revert warmly to it after a pilgrimage, amid other scenes, of well nigh a century.

The old house was accidentally burned down some fifty years ago, and a new, though less imposing, dwelling erected on the same site, by a branch of the Coxe family. This, in its turn, became the resort, for many years, of a circle greatly distinguished for beauty, wit, and cultivated talent; but now, for a long time, vicissitudes of fortune, neglect, desertion, and decay, have accomplished in it their accustomed work; and stripped of its embellishments of taste, despoiled of much of its fine woods, and its majestic single trees, it presents little indication of its former fortunes, and is fallen in its uses to the purposes of a common farm.

Previous to the Revolution, Colonel Stewart resided chiefly at Landsdown, a beautiful property in Kingwood, immediately adjoining the estate of his father-in-law at Sidney. It was here that the later years of the childhood of his daughter were spent; and here, at the early age of thirteen, she was bereaved of her mother – a woman of strong and polished intellect, of a refined and poetical taste, and said to have been the best read female in the province. Till within a short time of Mrs. Stewart's death, the education of her daughter had been exclusively at home. She had been but a brief period at a boarding-school, when

summoned to the dying bed of her mother; and it is no slight proof of the mental attainments and maturity of character which she already possessed, that her father, in his bereavement, found her society too necessary to his happiness, and the maternal care which she was called to exercise over her sisters and brothers of a more tender age, too essential to their welfare, to permit her again to resume her place at school. It is chiefly, therefore, to the self-cultivation of an inquiring and philosophic mind, and to association at home and in society, with the intelligent and the wise, that are to be ascribed the rich stores of general information and wide-spread practical knowledge, for which, from early womanhood to the passing day, she has been so highly distinguished, and so justly and extensively honored.

The hospitality of Colonel Stewart was unbounded. His friend Chief Justice Smith of New Jersey has expressed this trait of character in the epitaph upon his tomb – "The friend and the stranger were almost compelled to come in." His house was the resort of the choice spirits in intellect and public influence, of the times; and it was at his table and fireside that his daughter, called at the early age we have mentioned to the responsible position of female head of his family, from 1771 to 1776, imbibed even in childhood from him and his compeers the principles of patriotism and the love of freedom which entitle her name and character to a prominent place among the Women of the Revolution. Colonel Stewart himself had been trained from infancy in the spirit of 1688. His grandfather, Charles Stewart,

of Gortlee, a cadet of the Stewarts of Garlies, was an officer of dragoons in the army of William III., and acquitted himself gallantly, at the side of his monarch, in the battle of the Boyne. The demesne which he afterwards possessed, in the north of Ireland, was the reward of his valor; but, in transmitting to his son and his son's son the untrammelled spirit of a Scotch Puritan, who had periled his life in the cause of civil and religious liberty, he conferred upon them a better and more enduring heritage.

It was the proud and honorable independence of the same indomitable principles, that led his descendant in early youth, ere he had fully attained his majority, to self exile in the new world. Energy of character and enlarged enterprise soon secured to him here both private fortune and public influence; and the first breath of the spirit of "'76" which passed over the land, kindled within his bosom a flame of zeal for the freedom and honor of his adopted country, which no discouragement could dampen, and which neither toil, nor danger, nor disaster could extinguish.

His daughter well recollects having been told by him, on his return from the first general meeting of the patriots of New Jersey for a declaration of rights, an incident relating to himself, highly characteristic of the times. Many of the most distinguished royalists were his personal and intimate friends; and when it became evident that a crisis in public feeling was about to occur, when disregarded remonstrance would be converted into open resistance, great efforts were made by some

of those holding office under the crown, to win him to their side. Tempting promises of ministerial favor and advancement were made to induce him at least to withhold his influence from the cause of the people, even if he would not take part in support of the king; and this with increased importunity till the very opening of the meeting. But when it was seen to have been in vain – when he immediately rose and was one of the first, if not the very first, with the Stocktons, the Pattersons, and the Frelinghuysens of the day, in the spirit, at least, of the Declaration of 1776, boldly to pledge his "life, his fortune, and his sacred honor" in defence of the rights of freemen against the aggressions of the throne – the Attorney General, approaching and extending his hand, said to him, in saddened tones, as if foretelling a speedy doom – "Farewell, my friend Charles! – when the halter is about your neck, send for me! – I'll do what I can to save you!"

It was thus that the familiar confidence of the patriot father cherished and strengthened, in the bosom of his daughter, sympathies and principles corresponding with his own; while in the accelerated movements of the Revolution, he successively and rapidly became a member of the first Provincial Congress of New Jersey, Colonel of the First Regiment of minute-men of that State; Colonel of the Second Regiment of the line; and eventually, one of the staff of Washington, as Commissary General of Issues, by Commission of the Congress of 1776.

In January of this year, Miss Stewart, at the age of seventeen, gave her hand in marriage to Robert Wilson, a young Irishman

of the Barony of Innishowen, who, after being educated and trained for mercantile life in one of the first houses of his native land, had emigrated to America a few years before, and amassed a considerable fortune. In her husband she made choice of one not less congenial in political sentiments and feeling than in intellectual culture and in winning manners. The first intelligence of the battle of Lexington had fired his warm blood into immediate personal action in the cause; and he was one of the volunteers who, with his friend Colonel Reed, accompanied General Washington from Philadelphia to the camp at Cambridge. A brief journal kept by him at this time shows that for six months he was at head-quarters, as muster-master-general, honored by the confidence of the Commander-in-chief, and often a guest at his table. He shared largely in the exposures of the camp, and distinguished himself for daring intrepidity, in two or three instances, in the skirmishes and cannonading which occurred at times between the forces. But his health failing, he was obliged to forego the prospect of a military appointment pledged to him; and resigning his position sought the milder climate of the Jerseys.

Among the officers in the British army were several near relatives of Mr. Wilson; and it is a fact illustrative of the times, that a young cousin-german, who not long before the commencement of hostilities had visited the family of their common friend and relative, Colonel Stewart, at Kingwood, was now at Boston, in the gallant discharge of his duty in the enemy's

ranks. He was afterwards wounded at the battle of Germantown, and visited by Colonel Stewart under a flag of truce.

It was on his return to Jersey that Mr. Wilson's marriage took place. Shortly afterwards, he, with his bride, became a resident of Hackettstown, near which he possessed a valuable property. During the year 1777, he was again in public service, as Assistant Commissary General of Purchases; but, finding the duties of the station too arduous for his health, he resigned his appointment and entered into mercantile pursuits in Philadelphia. In these he was very extensively and successfully engaged – greatly honored and beloved – till his death, in 1779, at the early age of twenty-eight. His wife had accompanied him to Philadelphia, and was established in much elegance there; but on her widowhood thus in her twentieth year, she returned to her residence at Hackettstown, where she remained till near the close of the war.

During the whole Revolution, the situation of Mrs. Wilson was as favorable, if not more so, for observation and a knowledge of important movements and events, than that of any other lady in her native State. Her father, at the head of an important department, in the staff of the Commander-in-chief, became generally, and almost from necessity, familiarly acquainted with the principal officers of the army; and head-quarters being most of the time within twenty or thirty miles of her residence, she not only had constant intercourse in person and by letter with him, but frequently and repeatedly entertained at her house many of his military friends. Among these, with numerous others

of less distinction, were Washington, La Fayette, Hamilton, Wayne, Greene, Gates, Maxwell, Lincoln, Henry Lee, Stevens, Walter Stewart, Ethan Allen, Pulaski, Butler, Morgan, Sinclair, Woodward, Varnum, Paul Jones, Cochrane, Craik, etc. – With General Washington she was on terms of friendship. She first met him in Philadelphia, in 1775, when he was preparing to join the army at Cambridge. He afterwards visited her at different times at her residence in Hackettstown; on the last occasion a year after her husband's death, and a short time after the execution of Major André. His approach, with Mrs. Washington and his staff, under the escort of a troop of horse, was privately announced to Mrs. Wilson in time to have dinner in readiness for a party of thirty or forty persons. To one whose patriotism was so decided, it must have been a pleasure indeed, thus to welcome to her roof and table the leading spirits of the land. The party did not leave till after luncheon on the second day; and knowing that they could not reach their destination till late at night, ample provision was made from her larder and wine cellar, to furnish all needed refreshment by the way.

Before these distinguished guests took their departure, a large concourse of people from the adjacent country and the towns in the vicinity had crowded round the house to catch a glimpse of the idolized Chief. A few members of the legislature and the prominent gentlemen of the neighborhood were admitted and formally introduced. Among these was Dr. Kennedy, the family physician, whose salutation, as Mrs. Wilson well recollects, was:

"I am happy indeed to meet the man whom under God, I deem the saviour of our country." As it was impossible for the multitude to obtain entrance, a little stratagem was devised by one of the gentlemen, by which those without could be gratified without subjecting the General to the annoyance of a mere exhibition of himself. Knowing his admiration of a fine horse, he ordered an animal remarkable for its beauty to be brought into the street, and then invited him out to inspect it. Thus an opportunity was afforded to the whole assemblage to gaze upon and salute him with their cheers.

Mrs. Wilson relates the following anecdote in connection with another of the visits of Washington to her:

One Mrs. Crafts, a native of Germany, who had emigrated and settled in New Jersey, through the industry of herself and husband had become the owner of a fine farm near Hackettstown, and was in comfortable and easy circumstances. She was an excellent neighbor; and though an ardent tory, was universally respected for her many kind and good qualities. On the morning of General Washington's departure, as on the visit before described, Mrs. Wilson's house was surrounded by a throng of persons eager to obtain a glance at him. In this state of things, Mrs. Crafts, tory as she was, repaired to the spot and sent a message to Mrs. Wilson in her parlor, requesting from her the privilege of seeing the General. A reply was sent, saying that General Washington was at the time surrounded by a crowd of officers; but if Mrs. Crafts would station herself in

the hall till he passed through, her desire would be gratified. She accordingly took her post there, and patiently waited his appearance. When, at length, she obtained a full view of his majestic form and noble countenance, raising both hands, she burst into tears, uttering in her native tongue an exclamation expressive of intense astonishment and emotion! Mrs. Crafts never afterwards ranked herself on the tory side. "The august and commanding presence of the father of his country," as Mrs. Wilson remarks, "having alone inspired her with such profound veneration for the man as to produce an abiding respect for the cause of which he was leader."

Mrs. Washington was several times the guest of Mrs. Wilson, both at her own house and that of her father. These visits were made when on her way to and from the camp. That mentioned in the sketch of "Martha Washington," was at the Union Farm, the residence of Colonel Stewart.

The hospitality which Mrs. Wilson had the privilege thus repeatedly to extend to these illustrious guests, was not forgotten by them, but most kindly acknowledged, and returned by very marked attentions to her daughter and only child, on her entrance into society in Philadelphia during the Presidency of Washington. In personal calls and invitations to her private parties, Mrs. Washington distinguished her by courtesies rarely shown to persons of her age. The merest accident has placed before me, without the knowledge or agency of any one interested, the letter of a lady to a friend, in which the appearance

and dress of this daughter at a drawingroom at the President's is described. I insert it as illustrative of the costume on such an occasion, now more than half a century ago. She says, "Miss Wilson looked beautifully last night. She was in full dress, yet in elegant simplicity. She wore book muslin over white mantua, trimmed with broad lace round the neck; half sleeves of the same, also trimmed with lace; with white satin sash and slippers; her hair elegantly dressed in curls, without flowers, feathers, or jewelry. Mrs. Moylan told me she was the handsomest person at the drawing-room, and more admired than any one there."

Mrs. Wilson herself was favored with more than ordinary advantages of feature and person. In youth she is said to have been remarkably handsome. Even at the age of thirty-eight, the period of life at which the likeness engraved for this volume was taken, a lady of Philadelphia thus writes of her during a visit there: "I wish you could see dear Mrs. Wilson. She is the genteelest, easiest, prettiest person I have seen in the city. And I am far, I can assure you, from being alone in this sentiment. I hear many others constantly express the same opinion. She looked charmingly this evening in a Brunswick robe of striped muslin, trimmed with spotted lawn; a beautiful handkerchief gracefully arranged on her neck; her hair becomingly craped and thrown into curls under a very elegant white bonnet, with green-leafed band, worn on one side. She says she is almost worn out with a round of visiting among the Chews, Conynghams, and Moylans, Mrs. General Stewart, etc., etc.; but she does not look so. I do

not wonder that all who know this good lady should so love her. I am sure no one could know her intimately and not do so." It was not alone for friends and acquaintances, and persons of distinction and known rank, that Mrs. Wilson kept open house in the Revolution. Such was the liberality of her patriotism, that her gates on the public road bore in conspicuous characters the inscription, "Hospitality within to all American officers, and refreshment for their soldiers."

An invitation not likely to prove a mere form of words on the regular route of communication between the northern and southern posts of the army. Not satisfied with having given even this assurance of welcome, instances have occurred in which the stranger of respectability, who had taken quarters at the public-house of the village, has been transferred at her solicitation to the comforts and elegance of her table and fireside.

On one occasion it was reported to her that a gentleman had been taken ill at the tavern. Knowing, if this were true, that he must suffer there from the poorness of the accommodations, and want of proper attention, a male friend was sent to make inquiry; and learning that this was the case, she had him brought by her servants immediately to her dwelling, and the best medical aid and nursing secured. He proved to be a surgeon in the army,¹⁰ of high respectability, several of whose friends, male and female, hastened to visit him; and during a critical illness, and long convalescence, shared with him the hospitality of the benevolent

¹⁰ *Dr. Crosby, of New York.*

hostess, and formed with her an enduring friendship.

From the commencement of the struggle for freedom till its close, Mrs. Wilson was occasionally a personal witness and participator in scenes and incidents of more than ordinary interest. She was in Philadelphia on the day of the Declaration of Independence, and made one of a party – embracing the élite of the beauty, wealth, and fashion of the city and neighborhood – entertained at a brilliant fête, given in honor of the event, on board the frigate *Washington*, at anchor in the Delaware, by Captain Reid, the Commander. The magnificent brocade which she wore on the occasion, with its hooped petticoat, flowing train, laces, gimp, and flowers, remained in its wardrobe unaltered long after the commencement of the present century, and till the difficulty of transporting it in its ample folds and stately dimensions led to its separation into pieces, and thus prepared the way for it to become a victim to the modern taste for turning the antique dresses of grandmamas into eiderdown bedspreads, and drawing-room chair-covers.

Within the month after, she became a witness to a scene – the legitimate result of that Declaration – the mustering of her neighbors and fellow citizens in Jersey under the banner of her uncle, Colonel Philip Johnston of Sidney, and the girding on of their arms for the bloody conflict in which, on Long Island, they were so speedily engaged. Colonel Johnston, when a mere youth, a student of college at Princeton, had abandoned his books for the sword, in the French war of 1755, and with such bravery

and success as to return to his home with military reputation and honors. He was now appointed by the Congress of New Jersey to the command of its first volunteer regiment; and in a few days a thousand strong arms and brave hearts were gathered round him, in readiness to march against the invading foe. Mrs. Wilson was present in his house at the final leave-taking of his youthful wife and infant daughters. He was a fine-looking officer – tall and athletic, and of great physical power. He was said to have had a premonition of his fate. This impression, it was thought, added to his own, if not to the common grief of his family. He was seen in his closet in earnest prayer just before taking his departure. The final embrace of his family was deeply affecting, and is well pictured in the frontispiece of Glover's *Leonidas*, where the husband and the father, departing for Thermopylae, overcome by the grief of his wife hanging upon his bosom, and that of his children clinging in his embrace, looks to Heaven in strong appeal for aid, while

" Down the hero's cheek —
Down rolls the manly sorrow."

Colonel Johnston fell a victim on the altar of his country a few days afterwards, in the fatal conflict of the 27th August, 1776. General Sullivan, in whose division he served, bore the strongest testimony to his intrepidity and heroism. "By the well-directed fire of his troops," he wrote, "the enemy were several times

repulsed, and lanes made through them, till a ball in the breast put an end to the life of as gallant an officer as ever commanded a battalion."

The robbery of her father's house by a company of bandit tories was, however, the most alarming and exciting scene, illustrative of the times of the Revolution, through which Mrs. Wilson passed. This occurred in June, 1783. Deprived, by the marriage of his daughter in 1776, of the maternal care which she had exercised over his younger children, Colonel Stewart, on his appointment to the staff of the Commander-in-chief, had placed them at school, and broken up his establishment in King-wood. But when the triumph at Yorktown gave assurance of peace, in the hope of a speedy return to the enjoyments of private life, he gathered his two sons and two daughters to a home again, under the management, for a second time, of their elder and now widowed sister: not at Landsdown, his former dwelling, however, but at the "Union," in the adjoining township of Lebanon. Like Sidney, this old residence was, in that day, one of the great houses of upper jersey; and the surrounding farm, comprising a thousand acres of land under fine cultivation, was noted throughout the State. The dwelling consisted of three separate houses, built at different periods – one of brick, one of wood, and the other of stone – without regard to any harmony of style or architecture. They were so situated as to form the connecting sides of a quadrangular courtyard, into which the porches and a piazza opened. With a farm-house and numerous

out-buildings clustering round, the whole presented the aspect of a hamlet, rather than of a single abode, in the midst of the landscape spreading widely on the east, the west and the south. Immediately in the rear, on the north, stretches the chain of rugged hills, which separate the head waters of the Raritan from those of the Muskenetcong, a tributary of the Delaware; and within a quarter of a mile of the house was the mouth of the wild ravine of the "Spruce Run," the only pass through them for miles on either hand. This gorge, filled with interlacing trees and closely-set thickets bordering the rapid waters of the stream, afforded, in the days of Indian warfare, a choice place of ambush; and on the occasion referred to, was selected by the tory robbers, as the securest approach to the scene of their depredations, and a safe place of concealment, for the day preceding their descent upon "the Union." It was the Sabbath. Spies in advance, whom the servants at the dairy recollected to have seen moving stealthily about in the early dusk, reported to their accomplices, as was afterwards learned, the retirement for the night of the workmen to their quarters, and the departure of the overseer also to his home, after having been to Mrs. Wilson, as accustomed, for instructions for the following day. These could scarce have had time to fall asleep, when the family, with some female friend, on a visit, enjoying the cool of the evening in the porch of the principal building, were startled by the sudden exclamation, in a suppressed but authoritative tone: "Surround the house! Close in!" While from either side some

twenty or thirty men, disguised with paint and charcoal, and armed with various weapons, rushed upon them. Silence was enjoined on pain of death, and inquiry made for Colonel Stewart. They evidently supposed him to be at home, and his capture if not assassination, was doubtless a chief object in their plans. But he had been summoned away by express, and accompanied by General Lincoln, had left for Philadelphia, with a large amount of public funds at a late hour the day before. Being assured of this, the ring-leaders approached Mr. Charles Stewart, the eldest son of the Colonel, and a son-in-law, the late Judge Wilson of Landsdown, both young men some twenty years of age and the only gentlemen of the party, saying, "you are our prisoners;" and demanded their purses and watches. Young Wilson, somewhat recovered from the first surprise, and his Irish blood inflamed by the indignity, replied, "I would like, to know who the d – l you are, first!" when he instantly received a severe stroke across the head with a sword or sabre, laying open his forehead from temple to temple. A pistol was immediately afterwards placed at the breast of young Stewart, because he hesitated, after delivering his purse, to yield up his watch, the dying gift of his mother. Mrs. Wilson in alarm for her brother rushed forward, promising, if life and further bloodshed were spared, the money and every thing valuable in the house should be delivered up. Upon this she was ordered with her brother, to show two of the gang to her father's apartments. Here, besides a considerable amount in specie, they secured four thousand dollars in current bills, while another

package containing the same amount, being placed among some wearing apparel, escaped their notice. In addition to this money, a large amount of silver plate, a quantity of valuable linen, every article of gentlemen's apparel in the house, three watches, Colonel Stewart's sword and a pair of superb pistols, with heavy mountings of solid silver beautifully and elaborately wrought, a present of friendship from Baron Steuben, were among the booty secured.

The pistols thus lost, brought from Europe by the Baron, had been carried by him through the war. The circumstances under which they were presented to Colonel Stewart are honorable alike to the generous spirit both of himself and friend, and deserve a record.

After the capture of Yorktown, the superior officers of the American army, together with their allies, vied with each other in acts of civility and attention to the captive Britons. Entertainments were given to them by all the Major Generals except the Baron Steuben. He was above prejudice or meanness, but poverty prevented him from displaying that liberality which had been shown by others. Such was his situation, when calling on Colonel Stewart, and informing him of his intention to entertain Lord Cornwallis, he requested that he would furnish him the money necessary for this purpose, as the price of his favorite charger. "Tis a good beast," said the Baron, "and has proved a faithful servant through all the dangers of the war: but, though painful to my heart, we must part." Colonel

Stewart immediately tendering his purse, recommended the sale or pledge of his watch should the sum it contained prove insufficient. "My dear friend," replied the Baron, "'tis already sold. Poor North was sick and wanted necessaries. He is a brave fellow and possesses the best of hearts. The trifle it brought is set apart for his use. So, say no more – my horse must go." To the purchase, however, Colonel Stewart would not listen; and having pressed upon the Baron the means requisite for his purpose, received from him in acknowledgment of his friendship the pistols above referred to. It was to expenditures of this kind, it is probable, that the generous-hearted soldier and patriot alluded, when as he first met his daughter after this decisive crisis in the Revolution, he exclaimed – "Well, Martha, my dear, I come to you a thousand dollars out of pocket by the surrender of Yorktown. But I care not. Thank God! the struggle is over and my country is free!"

Three hours were spent by the leaders of the banditti in ransacking the dwelling under the forced guidance of Mrs. Wilson and her brother. The others, relieving each other in standing guard outside, and over the rest of the family, refreshed themselves abundantly from the store-rooms and cellars which the servants were compelled to throw open to them. Mrs. Wilson at last ventured the request that they would leave, as her brother-in-law, Mr. Wilson, ill from loss of blood, required her attention. During the whole time she had been treated with great deference and respect; so much so as to have been asked by the leaders as

they passed over the house, to point out what belonged to her personally, that it might be left in her possession. On preparing to depart, they took the whole family to an upper room, and extorting a promise from Mrs. Wilson that no one should attempt to leave it within two hours, fastened them in. The staircases were then closely barricaded with tables, chairs and every kind of furniture, the windows and doors firmly fastened, the lights all extinguished, the front door locked, and the key thrown among the grass and shrubbery in the courtyard. The jingling of the plate in the bags in which it was carried off, could be heard for some time, and marked the rapidity of their flight when once started with their booty. The gentlemen, not regarding Mrs. Wilson's promise as of any binding force, insisted upon an immediate alarm of the workmen and neighborhood. But the difficulty of making a way out was such that they were long in accomplishing it. By daybreak, however, some three hundred were in pursuit of the plunderers. Some of them were taken on suspicion, but could not be fully identified on account of the paint and disguises they had worn. The ring-leaders, Caleb and Isaac Swezey, and one Horton, all Tories of the neighborhood, made their escape to New York, and though known, were not heard of till after the evacuation of the city by the British, when it was ascertained that they had purchased a vessel with the proceeds of this robbery, and sailed for Nova Scotia.

Till the death of Colonel Stewart, in 1800, Mrs. Wilson continued at the head of his family – the wise, benevolent,

energetic and universally admired manager of a house proverbial in her native State, and extensively out of it, for generous and never changing hospitality. Among the many guests entertained at the Union, General Maxwell was a constant visitor. Mrs. Wilson expresses her regret that justice has not yet been done, in a full biography, to this valued friend. "As a soldier and patriot," is her testimony, "he had few superiors; and in integrity, strength of mind, and kindness of heart – but few equals." She saw him first in 1775, at a review of his regiment, the second raised in New Jersey, Lord Stirling being the commander of the first. Her father was intimately acquainted with him; he was ever a welcome guest, and after the war, spent much of his time at their fireside.¹¹

¹¹ *It is unquestionably true that injustice has been done to this officer – his merits and services never having been properly represented before the public. In early life he was an officer in the Colonial service; fought on the field of the Monongahela and in other battles; and continuing in the army after the commencement of the Revolutionary war, was one of the most prominent patriots in New Jersey. He was at the storming of Quebec, and distinguished himself in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, etc., etc. In numerous letters and journals of the day, testimony is borne to his high character and services. Less than two years before the close of the war, he resigned his commission in displeasure at the appointment over him of an inferior officer. His death took place, probably in 1796, at the house of Colonel Stewart. He had escorted the young ladies on a visit, from which the whole party had returned early in the evening in fine spirits. The Colonel and the General had sat down to their usual evening amusement of backgammon, when Maxwell was suddenly taken ill. Supposing it to be a headache, which he had never experienced before, he rose to retire to his room. But the attack was fatal, and he expired about one o'clock the same night. Expresses were sent for his brothers, one of whom was an officer in the Revolution; but they did not arrive until some hours after his death. His remains rest in the Presbyterian church-yard, at*

For a period of near fifteen years after the death of Colonel Stewart, much of the time of his daughter became necessarily devoted, as his sole administratrix, to the settlement of a large and widely scattered landed estate, including the disputed proprietorship of a portion of the valley of Wyoming, which the business habits and energy of her father had scarce disenthralled at his death from the effects of unavoidable neglect and inattention during the discharge of his official duties in the Revolution. The strength of mind, clearness of judgment, practical knowledge, and firmness of purpose and character, witnessed in her by much of the finest talent at the bar and on the bench, not only of New Jersey, but of the adjoining States, in the legal investigations of claims, and titles, and references, and arbitrations, were such as to secure to her, in general estimation, a degree of respect for talent and ability not often accorded to her sex.

Though thus for a long time placed in circumstances which tasked heavily the energies both of body and of mind, she was ever prompt and true to the discharge of the gentler and more feminine duties of life, to all who had any possible claim upon her kindness and regard. Not long after she had been called to the management of her father's estate, two orphan sons of her brother were left in their childhood to her guardianship and maternal care. Delicacy to Mrs. Wilson and to her correspondents yet living, has forbidden an inquiry for

any letters from her pen, illustrating her character; but a series written by her to one of these adopted sons¹² while a boy in school and college, shows so strikingly the fidelity with which she discharged her trust, and at the same time so clearly exhibits her own principles and views of character and life, that I cannot forego the privilege granted me of making one or two extracts.

After pointing out some grammatical errors in a letter just received, she thus writes:

"February 16th, 1811.

"It is not from any pleasure in finding fault that I point out these errors; but from the sincere desire that you should be as perfect as possible in every branch of education. Next to your being an honest and virtuous man, I wish to see you the accomplished gentleman. You have no better friend on earth than myself: regard, therefore, my advice. Solomon says, 'A wise man will take counsel from a friend, but a fool will despise it.' Prove yourself to be the former by putting in practice all I say in reference to your mind, manners and morals. Let your example to your brother, as the eldest, ever be such as to induce him to look to you as a polar-star by which he may safely guide his own conduct.

"Your desire to attend the birth-night ball, is neither improper nor unnatural at your age. It is always a gratification to my heart to promote, or be the means of promoting your innocent

¹² *The Rev. C. S. Stewart – of the U. S. Navy – the distinguished missionary, and author of "A Residence in the Sandwich Islands" – "Visit to the South Seas," etc.*

enjoyment, and that which is esteemed pleasure in youth, when the indulgence is not incompatible with your interest and honor, and not contrary to the rules of the institution to which you belong. But I would by no means have you forfeit a character for obedience and good order, with your tutors, for the trifling gratification of a dance; and let it never be forgotten by you that the reputation established by a boy at school and college, whether it be of merit or demerit, will follow him through life. As to your dress and manners, avoid as you would a pestilence those of a fop. Be plain and simple in your apparel and modest and unassuming in your address – respectful and courteous to all, but especially to the aged. The wise and the well-bred will ever mete to you a just reward; for nothing affords more pleasure to the good and truly great, while nothing certainly is more prepossessing than a modest youth.

"You say that you have received much attention from the first families in – . Whatever company you do keep, should ever be the first – that is, the wisest and the best; but for the present, the less time you spend in society of any kind the better. Close attention to your studies, in the acquisition of a solid and polished education, will yield you a larger profit. Be particular in the intimacies formed with your schoolmates. Boys of good family and good breeding are always to be preferred as companions, if their principles and conduct are praiseworthy. But where this is not the case, those morally good, though destitute of such advantages, are to be chosen as more worthy of your regard and

friendship.

"I again commend you to the care of Heaven. May the Almighty guide and shield you – preserving you from temptation and delivering you when tempted."

In a letter written shortly afterwards, she says:

"B – has read to me a paragraph from a letter just received, in which it is stated that you are one of the most studious and best scholars in – . If you knew how gratifying to my heart this intelligence is, it would, I am sure, inspire you with the love of honest fame. Go on, my dear boy, as you have begun, and you will attain all that is most desirable and most valuable in this world – the character and position of a good and wise man, useful, beloved, and honored in your generation. True, there is no near male friend in your family to extend a fostering hand to you and lead you onward to fame and fortune. Let not this circumstance, however, discourage you, but rather let it stimulate you to fresh industry and exertion. A faithful use of the means in your power will insure to you the desired result. But ever remember that in this more even will depend on your moral conduct as a man and gentleman than on your mental accomplishments. There is much even in external manner – more than many wise people think; and a gentlemanlike deportment, accompanied by honest candor, strict integrity, and undeviating truth will secure more respect and esteem for you in youth, as well as in after age, than any degree of talent, however brilliant, possibly can without them."

When, some three years afterwards, the same relative had

commenced his collegiate course, she thus writes, under the date of May 31st, 1814:

"I am happy to learn that you have received so much kindness from so many friends. Be mindful of their civilities and ever prove yourself worthy of them. I confess I have been greatly gratified in hearing from many quarters such flattering reports of your good conduct and success in study. Press forward, my dear son, in the ways of wisdom – they are ways of pleasantness, and their end is peace. Industry is the handmaid of good fortune; and always keep it in mind, that persevering assiduity will surely accomplish for you all that is desirable in this world. Under this conviction, which is certainly a truth, let no trivial obstacle you may occasionally meet discourage your efforts or impede your progress. You have gained considerable distinction in your career thus far; – never rest satisfied short of the first honors of the institution you have now entered.

"Your advantages for the study of composition and oratory have not been, I fear, as good heretofore as I could have wished. Let these important branches now engage much of your attention; you cannot excel in either of the leading professions without them. If you would become a wise man, a variety of reading from the best authors, both ancient and modern, must also be added to your attainments in college studies. Acquire, too, a habit of observation on men and manners, without which you can never secure the knowledge of the world essential to success in practical life. Political knowledge, also, is absolutely

indispensable to the attainment in our country of a conspicuous and influential position, at which I trust you will aim; pay attention, therefore, to the passing events of the day and to the information to be derived from the best conducted public prints. Man can do much for himself as respects his own improvement, unless selflove so blinds him that he cannot see his own imperfections and weaknesses. Some of the most finished characters, in all ages, of which the world can boast, are those who found the greatest difficulty in controlling their natural propensities, but whose persevering efforts caused even bad habits to give place to the most graceful accomplishments. Above all, my dear son, take care of your morals. All I ever say to you proceeds from the sincerest affection and the deepest anxiety for your success and happiness in life. Keep yourself for the future, as you have for the past, as far as possible from unprincipled young men, many of whom you will everywhere find around you. Treat your tutors and professors with the respect to which they are entitled, and conform promptly and strictly to the discipline and usages of the college. If ever tempted to a different course, resist the evil. The exercise of a little self-denial for the time will be followed by the pleasure of having achieved the greatest of triumphs – a triumph over one's self.

"I cheer myself daily with thoughts of your constant improvement in everything calculated to be useful and honorable to yourself, and gratifying to your friends. May God ever bless and keep you."

One additional extract from a letter to the same individual, written while he was still in college, under the date of March 20th, 1815, presents briefly, but clearly, the sentiments and feelings of Mrs. Wilson, on the most important of all subjects – that of personal and experimental piety.

"Your last letter," she writes, "gave me more pleasure than any one I have ever received from you. I cannot be too thankful to that great and good Being who, in infinite mercy, hath opened your eyes to see yourself spiritually as you are – a guilty sinner, in need of a better righteousness than your own, to appear acceptably in His sight. Believers, even as others, are by nature dead in trespasses and sins; but by faith in the Son of God – derived from him alone – they arise to newness of life, and become heirs of eternal glory. The blessed assurance is, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' Live in life, and live for ever.

"I doubt not that your views of the world, and the things pertaining to it, as well as of yourself, are different from what they ever were before. You see and feel that to the renewed soul, all things, in comparison with 'Christ and Him crucified,' are of small consideration. Since God has been pleased to impress your soul with a sense of His divine perfections, of the depravity of your nature, and of the riches of His grace, be watchful, my dear son, and continue instant in prayer. Confident that the life of a sincere Christian will ever be your highest honor, on this subject regard neither the smiles nor frowns of the world – neither its fashions nor its favors. I have often thought of you with much

satisfaction, in the belief that you would prove yourself worthy of my warmest and sincerest affection; but the possession of the finest talents, such as would command the applause of a vain world, attended with the most brilliant success, could never give me half the happiness of an assurance that you were truly a pious man. I could write much upon this interesting and sublime subject, but the necessity of preparing several letters for the present mail, obliges me to close with my blessing."

Mrs. Wilson herself became interested in the subject of personal and practical piety in early youth, and made a profession of her faith, at the time, in the Presbyterian church of Bethlehem, New Jersey, of which her grandfather, Judge Johnston, was the founder and chief patron through life. Her example as a Christian has ever been in harmony with the leading traits of her character – consistent, energetic, decisive – abounding in charities, and full of good works. In religion, as in intellectual advancement, she has kept pace in spirit and active zeal with the enlarged benevolence and expanding enterprise of the passing age; and though now in her ninetieth year, not only by her subscriptions and her prayers, but often by her personal presence and aid, still cheers the ladies of her neighborhood in their associations for purposes of local and general benevolence and piety.

The marriage of her only daughter and child in 1802, to the late John M. Bowers, Esq., of Bowers-town, county of Otsego, New York, led Mrs. Wilson, in 1808, to change her home from Flemington, New Jersey, to Cooperstown, New York, in

which village for a long period afterwards, she, at different times occupied her own dwelling; but now for many years she has lived exclusively at the Lakelands, the beautiful residence of her daughter, in the immediate vicinity of that place. Here, respected and honored by all who know her, and reposing in the affections of a devoted household, with the blessings of unnumbered poor – the widow, the orphan, the destitute and friendless of every name – descending like dews of Hermon on her head, she cheerfully awaits the change when the "corruptible shall put on incorruption, and the mortal put on IMMORTALITY."

XXIX. REBECCA MOTTE

Fort Motte, the scene of the occurrence which so strikingly displayed the patriotism of one of South Carolina's daughters, stood on the south side of the Congaree river. The height commands a beautiful view, several miles in extent, of sloping fields, sprinkled with young pines, and green with broom grass or the corn or cotton crops; of sheltered valleys and wooded hills, with the dark pine ridge defined against the sky. The steep overlooks the swamp land through which the river flows; and that may be seen to a great distance, winding, like a bright thread, between the sombre forests.

After the abandonment of Camden to the Americans, Lord Rawdon, anxious to maintain his posts, directed his first effort to relieve Fort Motte, at the time invested by Marion and Lee.¹³ This fort, which commanded the river, was the principal depot of were entertained at her luxurious table, she had attended with active benevolence to the sick and wounded, soothed the infirm with kind sympathy, and animated the desponding to hope. It was thus not without deep regret that the commanders determined on the sacrifice, and the Lieutenant Colonel found himself compelled to inform Mrs. Motte of the unavoidable necessity of the destruction of her property.

¹³ *Ramsay's History of South Carolina: Moultrie's Memoirs? Lee's Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, etc.*

The smile with which the communication was received, gave instant relief to the embarrassed officer. Mrs. Motte not only assented, but declared that she was "gratified with the opportunity of contributing to the good of her country, and should view the approaching scene with delight." Shortly after, seeing by accident the bow and arrows which had been prepared to carry combustible matter, she sent for Lee, and presenting him with a bow and its apparatus, which had been imported from India, requested his substitution of them, as better adapted for the object than those provided.

Every thing was now prepared for the concluding scene. The lines were manned, and an additional force stationed at the battery, to meet a desperate assault, if such should be made. The American entrenchments being within arrow shot, M'Pherson was once more summoned, and again more confidently – for help was at hand – asserted his determination to resist to the last.

The scorching rays of the noon-day sun had prepared the shingle roof for the conflagration. The return of the flag was immediately followed by the shooting of the arrows, to which balls of blazing rosin and brimstone were attached. Simms tells us the bow was put into the hands of Nathan Savage, a private in Marion's brigade. The first struck, and set fire; also the second and third, in different quarters of the roof. M'Pherson immediately ordered men to repair to the loft of the house, and check the flames by knocking off the shingles; but they were soon driven down by the fire of the six pounder;

and no other effort to stop the burning being practicable, the commandant hung out the white flag, and surrendered the garrison at discretion.

If ever a situation in real life afforded a fit subject for poetry, by filling the mind with a sense of moral grandeur – it was that of Mrs. Motte contemplating the spectacle of her home in flames, and rejoicing in the triumph secured to her countrymen – the benefit to her native land, by her surrender of her own interest to the public service. I have stood upon the spot, and felt that it was indeed classic ground, and consecrated by memories which should thrill the heart of every American. But the beauty of such memories would be marred by the least attempt at ornament; and the simple narrative of that memorable occurrence has more effect to stir the feelings than could a tale artistically framed and glowing with the richest hues of imagination.

After the captors had taken possession, M'Pherson and his officers accompanied them to Mrs. Motte's dwelling, where they sat down together to a sumptuous dinner. Again, in the softened picture, our heroine is the principal figure. She showed herself prepared, not only to give up her splendid mansion to ensure victory to the American arms, but to do her part towards soothing the agitation of the conflict just ended. Her dignified, courteous, and affable deportment adorned the hospitality of her table; she did the honors with that unaffected politeness which wins esteem as well as admiration; and by her conversation, marked with ease, vivacity and good sense, and the engaging kindness of her

manners, endeavored to obliterate the recollection of the loss she had been called upon to sustain, and at the same time to remove from the minds of the prisoners the sense of their misfortune.

To the effect of this grace and gentle kindness, is doubtless due much of the generosity exercised by the victors towards those who, according to strict rule, had no right to expect mercy. While at the table, "it was whispered in Marion's ear that Colonel Lee's men were even then engaged in hanging certain of the tory prisoners. Marion instantly hurried from the table, seized his sword, and running with all haste, reached the place of execution in time to rescue one poor wretch from the gallows. Two were already beyond rescue or recovery. With drawn sword, and a degree of indignation in his countenance that spoke more than words, Marion threatened to kill the first man that made any further attempt in such diabolical proceedings."¹⁴

Other incidents in the life of Mrs. Motte, illustrate the same rare energy and firmness of character she evinced on this occasion, with the same disinterested devotion to the American cause. When an attack upon Charleston was apprehended, and every man able to render service was summoned to aid in throwing up intrenchments for the defence of the city, Mrs. Motte, who had lost her husband at an early period of the war, and had no son to perform his duty to the country, despatched a messenger to her plantation, and ordered down to Charleston every male slave capable of work. Providing each, at her own

¹⁴ *Simms' Life of Marion*, p. 239.

expense, with proper implements, and a soldier's rations, she placed them at the disposal of the officer in command. The value of this unexpected aid was enhanced by the spirit which prompted the patriotic offer.

At different times it was her lot to encounter the presence of the enemy. Surprised by the British at one of her country residences on the Santee, her son-in-law, General Pinckney, who happened to be with her at the time, barely escaped capture by taking refuge in the swamps. It was to avoid such annoyances that she removed to "Buckhead," afterwards called Fort Motte, the neighborhood of which in time became the scene of active operations.

When the British took possession of Charleston, the house in which she resided – still one of the finest in the city – was selected as the head-quarters of Colonels Tarleton and Balfour. From this abode she determined not to be driven; and presided daily at the head of her own table, with a company of thirty British officers. The duties forced upon her were discharged with dignity and grace, while she always replied with becoming spirit to the discourteous taunts frequently uttered in her presence, against her "rebel countrymen." In many scenes of danger and disaster was her fortitude put to the test; yet through all, this noble-spirited woman regarded not her own advantage, hesitating at no sacrifice of her convenience or interest, to promote the general good.

One portion of her history – illustrating her singular energy,

resolution, and strength of principle—should be recorded. During the struggle, her husband had become deeply involved by securities undertaken for his friends. The distracted state of the country – the pursuits of business being for a long time suspended, – plunged many into embarrassment; and after the termination of the war, it was found impossible to satisfy these claims. The widow, however, considered the honor of her deceased husband involved in the responsibilities he had assumed. She determined to devote the remainder of her life to the honorable task of paying the debts. Her friends and connections, whose acquaintance with her affairs gave weight to their judgment, warned her of the apparent hopelessness of such an effort. But, steadfast in the principles that governed all her conduct, she persevered; induced a friend to purchase for her, on credit, a valuable body of rice-land, then an uncleared swamp – on the Santee – built houses for the negroes, who constituted nearly all her available property – even that being encumbered with claims – and took up her own abode on the new plantation. Living in an humble dwelling – and relinquishing many of her habitual comforts – she devoted herself with such zeal, untiring industry, and indomitable resolution to the attainment of her object, that her success triumphed over every difficulty, and exceeded the expectations of all who had discouraged her. She not only paid her husband's debts to the full, but secured for her children and descendants a handsome and unincumbered estate. Such an example of perseverance under adverse circumstances,

for the accomplishment of a high and noble purpose, exhibits in yet brighter colors the heroism that shone in her country's days of peril!

In the retirement of Mrs. Motte's life after the war, her virtues and usefulness were best appreciated by those who knew her intimately, or lived in her house. By them her society and conversation were felt to be a valued privilege. She was accustomed to amuse and instruct her domestic circle with various interesting anecdotes of persons and events; the recollection of which, however, at this distant period, is too vague to be relied on for a record. The few particulars here mentioned were received from her descendants.

She was the daughter of Robert Brewton, an English gentleman, who emigrated to South Carolina, and settled in Charleston before the war. Her mother was a native of Ireland, and married Mr. Brewton after her removal to this country, leaving at her death three children – Miles, Frances, and Rebecca. Miles Brewton took part with the first abettors of resistance to British oppression; and their consultations were held at his house in Charleston. Early in the war he was drowned on his way to England with his family, whom he intended to leave there, while he should return to take part with the patriots.

Rebecca Brewton was born on the 28th June, 1738.¹⁵ She

¹⁵ *The dates are taken from the family Bible, recorded in Mrs. Motte's own handwriting.*

married Jacob Motte¹⁶ in 1758, and was the mother of six children, only three of whom lived to maturity. General Thomas Pinckney married in succession the two elder daughters.¹⁷ The third surviving daughter was married to the late Colonel William Alston, of Charleston. By the children of these, whose families are among the most distinguished in the State, the memory of their ancestor is cherished with pride and affection. Her fame is, indeed, a rich inheritance; for of one like her the land of her birth may well be proud!

Mrs. Motte died in 1815, at her plantation on the Santee. The portrait from which the engraving is taken is said to be an excellent likeness.

Some facts related to Major Garden by Mrs. Brew-ton, who was an inmate of Mrs. Motte's family at the time of the destruction of her house, are interesting in this connection. She stated that Mrs. Motte and her family had been allowed to occupy an apartment in the mansion while the American forces were at a distance; but when the troops drew near, were ordered to remove immediately. As they were going, Mrs. Brewton took up the quiver of arrows, and said to her friend that she would take those with her, to prevent their being destroyed by the soldiers. She was passing the gate with the quiver in her hands, when

¹⁶ *A celebrated writer informs me that the name is French, and was originally spelled 'Mothè.*

¹⁷ *It was the wife of Thomas Pinckney who dressed his wounds after the battle of Camden, with her own hands, and fainted when the task was over.*

M'Pherson asked what she had there, at the same time drawing forth a shaft, and applying the point to his finger. She sportively bade him be careful, "for the arrows were poisoned;" and the ladies then passed on to the farm-house where they were to take up their abode.

On several occasions Mrs. Brewton incurred the enmity of the British officers by her lively sallies, which were sometimes pointed with severity. Before the siege of Fort Motte, a tory ensign had frequently amused himself, and provoked the ladies, by taunts levelled against the whigs, sometimes giving the names of the prominent commanders to pine saplings, while he struck off their heads with his weapon. After the surrender, Mrs. Brewton was cruel enough, meeting this young man on the spot where he had uttered these bravadoes, to request, sportively, another exhibition of his prowess, and regret that the loss of his sword did not permit him to gratify her.

Not long after this, Mrs. Brewton obtained permission to go to Charleston. An officer in the city inquiring the news from the country, she answered "that all nature smiled, for every thing was *Greene*, down to Monk's Corner." This *bon mot* was noticed by an order for her immediate departure; she was obliged to leave the city at a late hour, but permitted to return the following day. Her ready wit procured her still further ill-will. An officer going into the country offered to take charge of letters to her friends. She replied, "I should like to write, but have no idea of having my letters read at the head of Marion's brigade." The officer

returned in a few days on parole, having been taken prisoner by Marion, and called to pay his thanks, as he said, to her for having communicated the intelligence of his movements.

The society of this sprightly and fascinating widow appears to have been much sought by the more cultivated among the British, who enjoyed her brilliant conversation, while they winced under her sarcasm. One day when walking in Broad street, wearing deep mourning, according to the custom of the whig ladies, she was joined by an English officer. They were passing the house of Governor Rutledge, then occupied by Colonel Moncrief, when taking a piece of crape that had been accidentally torn from the flounce of her dress, she tied it to the front railing, expressing at the same time her sorrow for the Governor's absence, and her opinion that his house, as well as his friends, ought to wear mourning. It was but a few hours after this act of daring, that the patriotic lady was arrested and sent to Philadelphia.

* Note. – Mrs. Motte's arrows, which have become so famous in history, had been given as a curiosity – being poisoned – by an East India captain to her brother, Miles Brewton. After his loss at sea, they were accidentally put among some household articles belonging to Mrs. Motte, and in her several removals for quiet and security, chanced to be taken to "Buckhead" in the hurried transportation of her effects.

XXX. SUSANNAH ELLIOTT

The presentation of a pair of colors, by the wife of Colonel Barnard Elliott, is mentioned in several historical works. They were presented to the second South Carolina regiment of infantry, commanded by Colonel Moultrie, – on the third day after the attack on Fort Moultrie, Sullivan's Island, which took place June 28th, 1776. These colors were very elegant, and both richly embroidered by Mrs. Elliott's own hand. One was of fine blue, the other of red silk. They were presented with these words: "Your gallant behavior in defence of liberty and your country, entitles you to the highest honors; accept these two standards as a reward justly due to your regiment; and I make not the least doubt, under Heaven's protection, you will stand by them as long as they can wave in the air of liberty."¹⁸

The colors having been received from the lady's hands by the Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel, she was thanked for the gift – and a promise was made by the Colonel in the name of the soldiers – that they should be honorably supported, and never tarnished by the second regiment. Never was pledge more nobly fulfilled. Three years afterwards, they were planted on the British lines at Savannah. Two officers, who bore them, lost their lives; and just before the retreat was ordered, the gallant Sergeant

¹⁸ *Moultrie's Memoirs; Ramsay's History of South Carolina; McCall's History of Georgia.*

Jasper, in planting them on the works, received a mortal wound and fell into the ditch. One of the standards was brought off in the retreat; and Jasper succeeded in regaining the American camp. In his last moments he said to Major Horry, who had called to see him – "Tell Mrs. Elliott I lost my life supporting the colors she presented to our regiment." The colors were afterwards taken at the fall of Charleston, and were deposited in the Tower of London.

The maiden name of Mrs. Barnard Elliott was Susannah Smith. She was a native of South Carolina, and the daughter of Benjamin Smith, for many years Speaker of the Assembly of the province. Left young an orphan and an heiress, she was brought up by her aunt, Mrs. Rebecca Motte, with whom she lived till her marriage. Mrs. Daniel Hall used to say she was "one of the most busy among the Revolutionary women, and always active among the soldiers." It is known that her husband raised and maintained a regiment at his own expense. Among the papers in the possession of the family is a letter from General Greene to Mrs. Elliott, expressive of high respect and regard, offering her a safe escort through the camp, and to any part of the country to which she might desire to travel.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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