

Goodrich Samuel Griswold

Lives of Celebrated Women



Samuel Goodrich
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PREFACE

It is an oft-quoted proposition of Rousseau, that “the glory of woman lies in being unknown.” If this be true, we shall deserve little credit for placing before the world these brief sketches of a few of the sex who have acquired celebrity among mankind. We are disposed to think, however, that the oracular words of the Genevan philosopher – though they may coincide with the despotism of the lords of creation, who would arrogate, not merely the sceptre of power, but the trump of fame, entirely to themselves – like most other oracles, are liable to many exceptions.

It may indeed be true that the *happiness* of women is generally to be found in the quiet of the domestic circle; but that all, without distinction, should be confined to it, and that whenever one of the sex departs from it, she departs from her allotted sphere, is no more true than a similar proposition would be of men. Elizabeth of England, though little to be esteemed as a woman, did as much credit to her sex as her father did to

his; and while he enjoys the renown of having achieved the reformation in England, she is entitled to the credit of having been not only his superior as a sovereign, but one of the greatest sovereigns that ever occupied a throne. Joan of Arc performed achievements for her country scarcely less than miraculous; and Hannah More afforded, by her pen, more efficient protection to the three kingdoms against the volcanic shock of the French revolution than the entire army and navy of Great Britain.

Will any one pretend that these persons would have better fulfilled their destiny, if confined to the quiet precincts of the fireside? If woman is only to be a housewife, why are gifts bestowed upon her, that make her often the rival, and sometimes the *master*, of the other sex, even in the higher walks of ambition? Was Sappho's harp, the mere echo of which has thrilled upon the ear of nearly thirty centuries, given only to be touched in the secluded harem of some Lesbian lord? Why had Sévigné such a magic pen, Roland so noble and dauntless a soul, the maid of Saragossa a patriotism so inspired and inspiring, if they were designed by their Creator only to preside over the nursery, the dairy, and the kitchen? If women are created but to attend to the comforts of the other sex at home, why are such spirits as those of the lovely and lamented Davidsons ever formed – spirits bursting with music and poetry, like the Eolian string, that gives forth its unbidden melody, only because God made it so? Was Mrs. Hemans designed but to serve her surly and unappreciating lord? Are Lady Montagu, Mrs. Barbauld, Madame de Stael, Miss

Edgeworth, Miss Sedgwick, Hannah More, Mrs. Sigourney, – who must be regarded as among the most efficient civilizers of modern times, – to be set down as violators of a great law which should govern woman's destiny? In short, shall we, in Christian countries, who make it our boast that we have elevated woman to free companionship with man, still look backward, return to the selfish philosophy of the Turk, shut woman up in the harem, and gloss over our despotism by quotations from the Swiss Diogenes?

While we repeat that, in general, women consult their true dignity and happiness by seeking a quiet domestic career, we still maintain that such among them as have endowments suited to exert a happy influence upon mankind at large, are as truly fulfilling their duty and their destiny, by giving them scope, as are the other sex in doing the same under the like circumstances. It is believed that the following pages, although they notice only a few of those women who have acquired a deserved celebrity, will furnish ample argument to sustain the ground we assume.

LUCRETIA AND MARGARET DAVIDSON

“There stood on the banks of the Saranac a small, neat cottage, which peeped forth from the surrounding foliage – the image of rural quiet and contentment. An old-fashioned piazza extended along the front, shaded with vines and honeysuckles; the turf on the bank of the river was of the richest and brightest emerald; and the wild rose and sweetbrier, which twined over the neat enclosure, seemed to bloom with more delicate freshness and perfume within the bounds of this earthly paradise. The scenery around was wildly yet beautifully romantic; the clear blue river, glancing and sparkling at its feet, seemed only as a preparation for another and more magnificent view, when the stream, gliding on to the west, was buried in the broad, white bosom of Champlain, which stretched back, wave after wave, in the distance, until lost in faint blue mists that veiled the sides of its guardian mountains, seeming more lovely from their indistinctness.”

Such is the description which the younger subject of these memoirs gives us of the home of her parents, Dr. Oliver and Margaret Davidson, in the village of Plattsburg, Vermont. Amidst scenery so well calculated to call forth and foster poetical talent, Lucretia Maria Davidson was born on the 27th September,

1808. Of her earliest childhood there is nothing recorded, except that she was physically feeble, and manifested extreme sensibility of disposition. She was sent to school when she was four years old, and there was taught to read and to imitate, in sand, the printed characters. Books now possessed for her a greater charm than childish sports. The writing paper began to disappear mysteriously from the table, and Lucretia was often observed with pen and ink, to the surprise of her parents, who knew that she had never been taught to write. The mystery remained unexplained until she was six years old, when her mother, in searching a closet rarely visited, found, behind piles of linen, a parcel of little books filled with hieroglyphics. These were at length deciphered by her parents, and proved to be metrical explanations of rudely-sketched pictures on the opposite page; the explanations being made in Roman letters, most unartistically formed and disposed. Not long after, Lucretia came running to her mother in great agitation, the tears trickling down her cheeks, and said, "O mamma! mamma! how could you treat me so? My little books – you have shown them to papa, – Anne, – Eliza! I know you have. O, what shall I do?" Her mother tried to soothe the child, and promised never to do so again. "O mamma," replied she, a gleam of sunshine illumining the drops, "I am not afraid of that, for I have burned them all." "This reserve," says one whose kindred spirit could sympathize with that of Lucretia, "proceeded from nothing cold or exclusive in her character; never was there a more loving or sympathetic creature. It would be

difficult to say which was most rare, her modesty, or the genius it sanctified.”

It does not surprise us to learn that, under the guidance of pious parents, religion took a deep and enduring hold, at a very early period, upon so susceptible a child. From her earliest years, she evinced a fear of doing any thing displeasing in the sight of God; and if, in her gayest sallies, she caught a look of disapprobation from her mother, she would ask, with the most artless simplicity, “O mother, was that wicked?” Her extreme conscientiousness exhibited itself in a manner quite remarkable in a child. Some of the friends of the family thought their mode of education not the most judicious, and that her devoting so much time to study was not consistent with the pecuniary circumstances and the physical condition of the mother, who, being a confirmed invalid, was able to take little part in the ordinary family labors. Lucretia’s parents, however, did not concur in this opinion, and carefully concealed it from her; but she in some manner became aware of its existence, and voluntarily acted in accordance with it. The real feeling which prompted this conduct was artlessly made apparent by the incident which led her to return to her favorite occupation. When she was about twelve, she attended her father to a “birth-night” ball. The next day, an elder sister found her absorbed in composition. “She had sketched an urn, and written two stanzas under it. She was persuaded to show them to her mother. She brought them blushing and trembling. Her mother was ill,

in bed; but she expressed her delight with such unequivocal animation, that the child's face changed from doubt to rapture, and she seized the paper, ran away, and immediately added the concluding stanzas. When they were finished, her mother pressed her to her bosom, wept with delight, and promised her all the aid and encouragement she could give her. The sensitive child burst into tears. 'And do you wish me to write, mamma? and will papa approve? and will it be right that I should do so?'" The following are the verses: —

“And does a hero's dust lie here?
Columbia, gaze, and drop a tear:
His country's and the orphan's friend,
See thousands o'er his ashes bend.

Among the heroes of the age,
He was the warrior and the sage;
He left a train of glory bright,
Which never will be hid in night.

The toils of war and danger past,
He reaps a rich reward at last;
His pure soul mounts on cherub's wings,
And now with saints and angels sings.

The brightest on the list of Fame,
In golden letters shines his name;
Her trump shall sound it through the world,

And the striped banner ne'er be furled.

And every sex, and every age,
From lisping boy to learned sage,
The widow, and her orphan son,
Revere the name of Washington!"

A literary friend, to whom these verses were shown, felt some doubts as to Lucretia's being the real author of the stanzas, and suffered them to appear. The feeling that her rectitude was impeached made the sensitive girl actually ill; but a poetic remonstrance, which she prepared on the occasion, removed every doubt.

From what has been before said, it must not be supposed that Lucretia was suffered to abandon herself to literary avocations. She had her prescribed tasks in sewing, and other customary employments, which she generally performed with fidelity and with wonderful celerity; sometimes, however, the voice of her muse struck her in the midst, and "enchanted she dropped each earthly care." One day, she had promised to do a certain piece of sewing, and had eagerly run for her basket; she was absent long, and on her return found that the work was done. "Where have you been, Lucretia?" said her mother, justly displeased. "O mamma," she replied, "I did forget; I am grieved. As I passed the window, I saw a solitary sweet pea. I thought they were all gone. This was alone. I ran to smell it, but, before I could reach it, a gust of wind broke the stem. I turned away disappointed, and

was coming back to you; but as I passed the table, there stood the inkstand, and I forgot you.” The following beautiful verses insured the forgiveness of her mother: —

“The last flower of the garden was blooming alone,
The last rays of the sun on its blushing leaves shone;
Still a glittering drop on its bosom reclined,
And a few half-blown buds ’midst its leaves were entwined.

Say, lovely one, say, why lingerest thou here?
And why on thy bosom reclines the bright tear?
’Tis the tear of the zephyr – for summer ’twas shed,
And for all thy companions now withered and dead.

Why lingerest thou here, when around thee are strown
The flowers once so lovely, by autumn blasts blown?
Say, why, sweetest floweret, the last of thy race,
Why lingerest thou here the lone garden to grace?

As I spoke, a rough blast, sent by winter’s own hand,
Whistled by me, and bent its sweet head to the sand;
I hastened to raise it – the dew-drop had fled,
And the once lovely flower was withered and dead.”

All her short pieces were composed with equal rapidity; and sometimes she wished that she had two pair of hands to record as fast as her muse dictated. These she composed wherever she chanced to be when the spirit of poesy came over her. In

the midst of her family, blind and deaf to all around her, she held sweet communion with her muse. But when composing her longer poems, as “Amie Khan,” or “Chicomicos,” she required complete seclusion. She retired to her own room, closed the blinds, and placed her Æolian harp in the window. Her mother gives this graphic description: “I entered her room, – she was sitting with scarcely light enough to discern the characters she was tracing; her harp was in the window, touched by a breeze just sufficient to rouse the spirit of harmony; her comb had fallen on the floor, and her long, dark ringlets hung in rich profusion over her neck and shoulders; her cheek glowed with animation; her lips were half unclosed; her full, dark eye was radiant with the light of genius, and beaming with sensibility; her head rested on her left hand, while she held her pen in her right. She looked like the inhabitant of another sphere. She was so wholly absorbed that she did not observe my entrance. I looked over her shoulder, and read the following lines: —

‘What heavenly music strikes my ravished ear,
So soft, so melancholy, and so clear?
And do the tuneful nine then touch the lyre,
To fill each bosom with poetic fire?
Or does some angel strike the sounding strings,
Who caught from echo the wild note he sings?
But, ah! another strain! how sweet! how wild!
Now, rushing low, ’tis soothing, soft, and mild.’”

The noise made by her mother roused Lucretia, who soon afterwards brought her the preceding verses, with the following added to them, being an address to her Æolian harp: —

“And tell me now, ye spirits of the wind,
O, tell me where those artless notes to find —
So lofty now, so loud, so sweet, so clear,
That even angels might delighted hear.

But hark! those notes again majestic rise,
As though some spirit, banished from the skies,
Had hither fled to charm Æolus wild,
And teach him other music, sweet and mild.

Then hither fly, sweet mourner of the air,
Then hither fly, and to my harp repair;
At twilight chant the melancholy lay,
And charm the sorrows of thy soul away.”

Her parents indulged her in the utmost latitude in her reading. History, profane and sacred, novels, poetry, and other works of imagination, by turns occupied her. Before she was twelve, she had read the English poets. Dramatic works possessed a great charm for her, and her devotion to Shakspeare is expressed in the following verses, written in her fifteenth year: —

“Shakspeare, with all thy faults, (and few have more,)
I love thee still, and still will con thee o’er.

Heaven, in compassion to man's erring heart,
Gave thee of virtue, then of vice, a part,
Lest we, in wonder here, should bow before thee,
Break God's commandment, worship, and adore thee;
But admiration, now, and sorrow join;
His works we reverence, while we pity thine."

But above all other books she valued the Bible. The more poetical parts of the Old Testament she almost committed to memory; and the New Testament, especially those parts which relate the life of our Savior, was studied by her, and excited in her the deepest emotions. As an evidence of this we give the following verses, written in her thirteenth year: —

“THE GOOD SHEPHERD

“The shepherd feeds his fleecy flock with care,
And mourns to find one little lamb has strayed;
He, unfatigued, roams through the midnight air,
O'er hills, o'er rocks, and through the mossy glade.

But when that lamb is found, what joy is seen
Depicted on the careful shepherd's face,
When, sporting o'er the smooth and level green,
He sees his favorite charge is in its place!

Thus the great Shepherd of his flock doth mourn,

When from his fold a wayward lamb has strayed,
And thus with mercy he receives him home,
When the poor soul his Lord has disobeyed.

There is great joy among the saints in heaven,
When one repentant soul has found its God;
For Christ, his Shepherd, hath his ransom given,
And sealed it with his own redeeming blood.”

We have now arrived at a period which most girls look forward to as an epoch in their life – the first ball! Lucretia had been to dancing-school, and took great delight in that exercise. In the hope of overcoming her painful timidity, her mother had consented to her attending the public assemblies of Plattsburg. She was fourteen. The day arrived, and the important subject of dress was the matter of consultation between Mrs. Davidson and her eldest daughter, Lucretia sitting by, absorbed in one of the Waverley novels. “What shall Lucy wear?” asked the sister. “Come, Lucretia; what color will you wear to-night?” “Where?” “Where? why, to the assembly, to be sure.” “Is it to-night? so it is!” and she tossed aside her book, and danced delighted about the room. The question of dress was now settled, and Lucretia was soon again absorbed in her book. At the hour for dressing, the delights of the ball again filled her imagination, and she set about the offices of the toilet with interest. Her sister was to dress her hair; but, when the time came, she was missing. She was called in vain, and was at length found in the parlor,

in the dusky twilight, writing poetry. "She returned from the assembly," says her mother, "wild with delight." "O mamma," said she, "I wish you had been there. When I first entered, the glare of light dazzled my eyes; my head whirled, and I felt as if I were treading on air; all was so gay, so brilliant! But I grew tired at last, and was glad to hear sister say it was time to go home."

About the same period, life received for her a new object of interest. Her little sister Margaret, the frequent subject of her verses, was born. The following are among the earliest stanzas addressed to her: —

"Sweet babe, I cannot hope that thou'lt be freed
From woes, to all since earliest time decreed;
But may'st thou be with resignation blessed,
To bear each evil, howsoe'er distressed.

May Hope her anchor lend amid the storm,
And o'er the tempest rear her angel form;
May sweet Benevolence, whose words are peace,
To the rude whirlwind softly whisper, Cease!

And may Religion, Heaven's own darling child,
Teach thee at human cares and griefs to smile;
Teach thee to look beyond that world of woe,
To heaven's high font, whence mercies ever flow.

And when this vale of years is safely passed,
When death's dark curtain shuts the scene at last,

May thy freed spirit leave this earthly sod,
And fly to seek the bosom of thy God.”

Lucretia was now placed in trying circumstances. Her mother, after the birth of Margaret, was very ill; the infant, too, was ill; and, to add to their misfortunes, the nurse was taken sick. Lucretia's eldest sister had recently been married, and had removed to Canada; so that upon her devolved great and manifold duties.

The manner in which she discharged these shall be related in her mother's own words. “Lucretia astonished us all. She took her station in my sick-room, and devoted herself wholly to the mother and the child; and when my recovery became doubtful, instead of resigning herself to grief, her exertions were redoubled, not only for the comfort of the sick, but she was an angel of consolation to her afflicted father. We were amazed at the exertions she made, and the fatigue she endured; for with nerves so weak, a constitution so delicate, and a sensibility so exquisite, we trembled lest she should sink with anxiety and fatigue. Until it ceased to be necessary, she performed not only the duties of a nurse, but acted as superintendent of the household.” Neither did she relinquish her domestic avocations when her mother became better; “she did not so much yield to her ruling passion as to look into a book, or take up a pen, lest she should again become so absorbed in them as to neglect to perform those little offices which a feeble, affectionate mother

had a right to claim at her hands." As was to be expected, her mental and physical health suffered; her cheek became pale, and her spirits dejected. Her mother became alarmed, and expressed her apprehensions. "I am not ill, mamma," said she, "only out of spirits." An explanation ensued, and the mother convinced the child that her duty did not require a total abandonment of the pursuits she longed for, but a judicious intermingling of literary with domestic labors. The good consequences of the change were soon manifest in the restored health and cheerfulness of Lucretia.

It was about this period (1823-4) that she composed the longest of her published poems, "Amie Khan," an Oriental tale, which would do credit to much older and more practised writers.

In 1824, an old friend of her mother's, Moss Kent, Esq., visited Plattsburg. He had never seen Lucretia, but had formed a high opinion of her genius from some of her productions, which had been shown to him by his sister. Her appearance at this time was well calculated to confirm his prepossessions in her favor. She is thus described by her biographer: "Miss Davidson was just sixteen. Her complexion was the most beautiful brunette, clear and brilliant, of that warm tint that seems to belong to lands of the sun, rather than to our chilled regions; indeed, her whole organization, mental as well as physical, her deep and quick sensibility, her early development, were characteristics of a warmer clime than ours: her stature was of the middle height; her form slight and symmetrical; her hair profuse, dark, and curling; her mouth and nose regular, and as beautiful as if they had been

chiselled by an inspired artist; and through this fitting medium beamed her angelic spirit.”

Charmed by all he saw and read, Mr. Kent at once made the proposal to her parents to adopt Lucretia as his own child. The proposal was in part accepted, and, in accordance with his wishes, it was determined to send her to the Troy Seminary. Her feelings on this occasion are thus made known by letter to her sister: “What think you? Ere another moon shall fill, ‘round as my shield,’ I shall be at Mrs. Willard’s Seminary. In a fortnight I shall probably have left Plattsburg, not to return at least until the expiration of six months. O, I am so delighted, so happy! I shall scarcely eat, drink, or sleep, for a month to come. You must write to me often, and you must not laugh when you think of poor Lucy in the far-famed city of Troy, dropping handkerchiefs, keys, gloves, &c.; in short, something of every thing I have. It is well if you can read what I have written, for papa and mamma are talking, and my head whirls like a top. O, how my poor head aches! Such a surprise as I have had!”

She left home November 24, 1824, to appearance full of health and of delight at the opportunities of acquiring knowledge which were to be open to her. At parting she left the following verses: —

“TO MY MOTHER

“O Thou whose care sustained my infant years,
And taught my prattling lip each note of love,
Whose soothing voice breathed comfort to my fears,
And round my brow hope’s brightest garland wove, —

To thee my lay is due, the simple song,
Which nature gave me at life’s opening day;
To thee these rude, these untaught strains belong,
Whose heart indulgent will not spurn my lay.

O, say, amid this wilderness of life,
What bosom would have throbbed like thine for me?
Who would have smiled responsive? Who, in grief,
Would e’er have felt and, feeling, grieved like thee?

Who would have guarded, with a falcon eye,
Each trembling footstep, or each sport of fear?
Who would have marked my bosom bounding high,
And clasped me to her heart with love’s bright tear?
Who would have hung around my sleepless couch,
And fanned, with anxious hand, my burning brow?
Who would have fondly pressed my fevered lip,
In all the agony of love and woe?

None but a mother – none but one like thee,
Whose bloom has faded in the midnight watch,
Whose eye, for me, has lost its witchery,
Whose form has felt disease’s mildew touch.

Yes, thou hast lighted me to health and life,
By the bright lustre of thy youthful bloom;
Yes, thou hast wept so oft o'er every grief,
That woe hath traced thy brow with marks of gloom.

O, then, to thee this rude and simple song,
Which breathes of thankfulness and love for thee,
To thee, my mother, shall this lay belong,
Whose life is spent in toil and care for me."

The following extracts from a letter to her mother tell us of the state of her feelings when established at the Seminary.

"December 24, 1824. Here I am at last; and what a naughty girl I was, when I was at aunt Schuyler's, that I did not write you every thing! But to tell the truth, I was topsy-turvy, and so I am now. But in despite of calls from the young ladies, and of a hundred new faces, and new names which are constantly ringing in my ears, I have set myself down, and will not rise until I have written an account of every thing to my dear mother. I am contented; yet, notwithstanding, I have once or twice turned a wistful glance towards my dear-loved home. Amidst all the parade of wealth, in the splendid apartments of luxury, I can assure you, my dearest mother, that I had rather be with you, in our own lowly home, than in the midst of all this ceremony." "O mamma, I like Mrs. W. 'And so this is my little girl,' said she, and took me affectionately by the hand. O, I want to see you so much! But I must not think of it now; I must learn as fast as I can,

and think only of my studies. Dear, dear little Margaret! Kiss her and the little boys for me. How is dear father getting on in this rattling world?"

The transplanting a flower of so delicate a constitution from the clear air of Lake Champlain to the close atmosphere of a city boarding-school, was followed by consequences which might have been expected. Almost from her arrival, Lucretia's letters speak of ill-health and unhappiness, aggravated by the fear that her progress in studies, thus frequently interrupted, would disappoint the expectations of her kind benefactor, for whom she seems to have cherished the most affectionate and grateful feelings. Neither do the excitements of a large public seminary seem well adapted to one of so sensitive a nature. In the course of time, the public examination approached, and for the two months preceding it, she was kept in a state of constant agitation and dread, which is thus spoken of in a half-serious, half-jesting letter to her mother: "We are all engaged, heart and hand, preparing for this awful examination. O, how I dread it! But there is no retreat. I must stand firm to my post, or experience the anger, vengeance, and punishments, which will, in case of delinquency or flight, be exercised with the most unforgiving acrimony. We are in such cases excommunicated, henceforth and forever, under the awful ban of holy Seminary; and the evil eye of false report is upon us. O mamma, I do, though, jesting apart, dread this examination; but nothing short of real and absolute sickness can excuse a scholar in the eyes of Mrs. W. Even that will not do in the Trojan

world around us; for if a young lady is ill at examination, they say with a sneer, 'O, she is ill of an examination fever!' Thus you see, mamma, we have no mercy either from friends or foes. We must 'do or die.' Tell Morris he must write to me. Kiss dear, dear little Margaret for me, and don't let her forget poor sister Luly, and tell all who inquire for me that I am well, but in awful dread of a great examination."

She was interrupted, in her course of preparation for the examination, by an illness so serious as to require the attendance of a physician. But no sooner was she convalescent than she was suffered to renew her suicidal course. "I shall rise between two and four now every morning, till the dreaded day is past. I rose the other night at twelve, but was ordered back to bed again. You see, mamma, I shall have a chance to become an early riser here." "Had I not written you that I was coming home, I think I should not have seen you this winter. All my friends think I had better remain here, as the journey will be long and cold; but O, there is at that journey's end, which would tempt me through the wilds of Siberia – father, mother, brothers, sisters, *home*. Yes, I shall come." "The dreaded examination is now going on, my dear mother. To-morrow evening, which will be the last, is always the most crowded, and is the time fixed upon for my *entrée* upon the field of action. O, I hope I shall not disgrace myself. It is the rule here to reserve the best classes till the last; so I suppose I may take it as a compliment that we are delayed." "The examination is over. E. did herself and her native village honor; but as for your

poor Luly, she acquitted herself, I trust, decently. O mamma, I was so frightened! But although my face glowed and my voice trembled, I did make out to get through, for I knew my lessons. The room was crowded to suffocation. All was still; the fall of a pin could have been heard; and I tremble when I think of it even now.”

The expected visit to her home was relinquished, and she passed the vacation with her friends in the vicinity of Troy. An incident which occurred as she was crossing the Hudson on her return to Troy, is thus described: “Uncle went to the ferry with me, where we met Mr. P. Uncle placed me under his care, and, snugly seated by his side, I expected a very pleasant ride, with a very pleasant gentleman. All was pleasant, except that we expected every instant that all the ice in the Hudson would come drifting against us, and shut in scow, stage and all, or sink us to the bottom, which, in either case, you know, mother, would not have been quite so agreeable. We had just pushed off from the shore, I watching the ice with anxious eyes, when, lo! the two leaders made a tremendous plunge, and tumbled headlong into the river. I felt the carriage following fast after; the other two horses pulled back with all their power, but the leaders were dragging them down, dashing, and plunging, and flouncing, in the water. ‘Mr. P., in mercy let us get out!’ said I. But as he did not see the horses, he felt no alarm. The moment I informed him they were overboard, he opened the door, and cried, ‘Get out and save yourself, if possible; I am old and stiff, but I will follow you

in an instant.’ ‘Out with the lady! let the lady out!’ shouted several voices at once; ‘the other horses are about to plunge, and then all will be over.’ I made a lighter spring than many a lady does in a cotillon, and jumped upon a cake of ice. Mr. P. followed, and we stood (I trembling like a leaf) expecting every moment that the next plunge of the drowning horses would detach the piece of ice upon which we were standing, and send us adrift; but, thank Heaven, after working for ten or fifteen minutes, by dint of ropes, and cutting them away from the other horses, they dragged the poor creatures out more dead than alive. Mother, don’t you think I displayed some courage? I jumped into the stage again, and shut the door, while Mr. P. remained outside, watching the movement of affairs. We at length reached here, and I am alive, as you see, to tell the story of my woes.”

At the spring vacation, Lucretia returned to her loved home; but the joy of her parents at once more embracing their darling daughter, was damped by observing that the fell destroyer had set its well-known mark upon her cheek. Her father called in another physician to consult with him, and, strange to say, it was decided that she should return to school in Albany, where she arrived May, 1825, and where her reception, her accommodations and prospects, seem to have given her much delight, and where she entered upon her career of study with her wonted ardor. But her physical strength could not sustain the demands upon it. She thus writes to her mother: “I am very wretched: am I never to hear from you again? I am homesick. I know I am foolish, but I cannot

help it. To tell the truth, I am half sick, I am so weak, so languid. I cannot eat. I am nervous; I know I am. I weep most of the time. I have blotted the paper so that I cannot write. I cannot study much longer if I do not hear from you.” Her disease appears now to have assumed a fixed character, and in her next letter, she expresses a fear that it is beyond the reach of human art. Her mother, herself ill, set off at once for Albany, and was received by her child with rapture. “O mamma, I thought I should never have seen you again! But, now I have you here, I can lay my aching head upon your bosom. I shall soon be better.”

The journey homeward, though made in the heats of July, was attended with less suffering than was anticipated. “Her joy,” says her mother, “upon finding herself at home, operated for a time like magic.” The progress of disease seemed to be suspended. Those around her received new hope; but she herself was not deceived, and she calmly waited for that great change which for her possessed no terrors, for her hopes as to the future rested upon a sure foundation.

But one fear disturbed her, to which she refers in the following, the last piece she ever composed, and which is left unfinished: —

“There is a something which I dread;
It is a dark and fearful thing;
It steals along with withering tread,
Or sweeps on wild destruction’s wing.

That thought comes o'er me in the hour
Of grief, of sickness, or of sadness;
'Tis not the dread of death; 'tis more, —
It is the dread of madness.

O, may these throbbing pulses pause,
Forgetful of their feverish course;
May this hot brain, which, burning, glows
With all a fiery whirlpool's force, —

Be cold, and motionless, and still,
A tenant of its lowly bed;
But let not dark delirium steal — ”

She died on the 27th August, 1825. Her literary labors will surprise all who remember that she had not yet reached her seventeenth birthday. They consist of two hundred and seventy-eight poetical pieces, of which there are five regular poems, of several cantos each; three unfinished romances; a complete tragedy, written at thirteen years of age; and twenty-four school exercises; besides letters, of which forty are preserved, written in the course of a few months, to her mother alone. Indeed, we cannot but look upon Lucretia Davidson as one of the wonders of humanity. Her early productions excited even the admiration of Byron; and the delicacy, dutifulness, and exaltation, of her character seemed almost to have realized angelic purity and beauty of soul, in a tenement of clay.

The little Margaret, as we have seen, was the object of Lucretia's fondest affection. She used to gaze upon her little sister with delight, and, remarking the brightness and beauty of her eyes, would exclaim, "She must, she will be a poet!" She did not live to see her prediction verified, but to use her mother's fond expressions, "On ascending to the skies, it seemed as if her poetic mantle fell, like a robe of light, on her infant sister."

Though Margaret was but two years and a half old, the death of her sister made a strong impression on her, and an incident which occurred a few months afterwards showed that she appreciated her character. As Mrs. Davidson was seated, at twilight, conversing with a female friend, Margaret entered the room with a light, elastic step, for which she was remarked. "That child never walks," said the lady; then turning to her, she said, "Margaret, where are you flying now?" "To heaven!" replied Margaret, pointing up with her fingers, "to meet my sister Lucretia, when I get my new wings." "Your new wings! When will you get them?" "O, soon, very soon; and then I shall fly!" "She loved," says her mother, "to sit, hour after hour, on a cushion at my feet, her little arms resting upon my lap, and her full, dark eyes fixed upon mine, listening to anecdotes of her sister's life, and details of the events which preceded her death, often exclaiming, while her face beamed with mingled emotions, 'O mamma, I will try to fill her place! Teach me to be like her!'"

Warned by their dreadful experience in the former instance, the parents endeavored to repress the intellectual activity of

Margaret. She was not taught to read till she was four years old; but so rapid was her progress after that period, under her mother's instructions, that at six she read not only well, but elegantly, and was wont to solace her mother's hours of protracted illness, by reading to her the works of Thomson, Campbell, Cowper, Milton, Byron, Scott, &c., in which she took enthusiastic delight, and in discriminating their beauties and defects, she showed wonderful taste and intelligence. The Scriptures were her daily study; not hurried over as a task, but she would spend an hour or two in commenting with her mother upon the chapter she had read.

"Her religious impressions," says her mother, "seemed to be interwoven with her existence. From the very first exercise of reason, she evinced strong devotional feelings, and, although she loved play, she would at any time prefer seating herself beside me, and, with every faculty absorbed in the subject, listen while I attempted to recount the wonders of Providence, and point out the wisdom and benevolence of God, as manifested in the works of creation."

About the age of six years, she began to exhibit a talent for rhyming. One of her earliest pieces, if not remarkable for poetical merit, is worthy of transcription, from the incident which gave occasion to its composition; it also exhibits in a striking manner that conscientiousness for which her sister was so distinguished, and a power of self-examination of rare existence in one so young.

Her mother reproved her for some trifling act of disobedience upon which she attempted to justify herself, and for this aggravation of the fault was banished to her chamber until she should become sensible of her error. Two hours elapsed, and she continued obstinate; vindicating herself, and accusing her mother of injustice. Mrs. D. reasoned with her, exhorting her to pray to God to assist her in gaining that meekness and humility which had characterized our Savior, and reminding her of the example he had set of obedience to parents. An hour or two afterwards, Margaret came running in, threw her arms around her mother's neck, and, sobbing, put into her hands these verses: —

“Forgiven by my Savior dear
For all the wrongs I’ve done,
What other wish could I have here?
Alas! there yet is one.

I know my God has pardoned me;
I know he loves me still;
I wish I may forgiven be
By her I’ve used so ill.

Good resolutions I have made,
And thought I loved my Lord;
But, ah! I trusted in myself,
And broke my foolish word.

But give me strength, O Lord, to trust

For help alone in thee;
Thou know'st my inmost feelings best;
O, teach me to obey.”

She took little pleasure in the common sports of children; her amusements were almost entirely intellectual. If she played with a doll, or a kitten, she invested it with some historical or dramatic character, and whether Mary, queen of Scots, or Elizabeth, the character was always well sustained.

In her seventh year, her health became visibly delicate, and she was taken to Saratoga springs and to New York, from which excursions she derived much physical advantage, and great intellectual pleasure; but she returned to her native village with feelings of admiration and enthusiasm for its natural beauties, heightened by contrast. As her health began again to fail in the autumn, and the vicinity to the lake seemed unfavorable to the health of Mrs. Davidson, the family went to Canada to pass the winter with the eldest daughter.

Margaret grew stronger, but her mother derived no benefit from the change, and for eighteen months remained a helpless invalid, during which time her little daughter was her constant companion and attendant. “Her tender solicitude,” says Mrs. D., “endeared her to me beyond any other earthly thing. Although under the roof of a beloved and affectionate daughter, and having constantly with me an experienced and judicious nurse, yet the soft and gentle voice of my little darling was more than medicine

to my worn-out frame. If her delicate hand smoothed my pillow, it was soft to my aching temples, and her sweet smile would cheer me in the lowest depths of despondency. She would draw for me – read to me – and often, when writing at her little table, would surprise me by some tribute of love, which never failed to operate as a cordial to my heart. At a time when my life was despaired of, she wrote the following verses while sitting at my bed: —

‘I’ll to thy arms in rapture fly,
And wipe the tear that dims thine eye;
Thy pleasure will be my delight,
Till thy pure spirit takes its flight.

When left alone, when thou art gone,
Yet still I will not feel alone;
Thy spirit still will hover near,
And guard thy orphan daughter here.”

Margaret continued to increase in strength until January, 1833, when she was attacked by scarlet fever, under which she lingered many weeks. In the month of May, she had, however, so far recovered as to accompany her mother, now convalescent, on a visit to New York. Here she was the delight of the relatives with whom she resided, and the suggester of many new sources of amusement to her youthful companions. One of her projects was to get up a dramatic entertainment, for which she was to write the play. Indeed, she directed the whole arrangements, although

she had never but once been to a theatre, and that on her former visit to New York. The preparations occupied several days, and, being nearly completed, Margaret was called upon to produce the play. "O," she replied, "I have not written it yet." "How is this? Do you make the dresses first, and then write the play to suit them?" "O," replied she, "the writing of the play is the easiest part of the preparation; it will be ready before the dresses." In two days she produced her drama; "which," says Mr. Irving, "is a curious specimen of the prompt talent of this most ingenious child, and by no means more incongruous in its incidents than many current dramas by veteran and experienced playwrights."

Though it was the study of her relatives to make her residence in New York as agreeable to her as possible, the heart of Margaret yearned for her home: her feelings are expressed in the following lines: —

"I would fly from the city, would fly from its care,
To my own native plants and my flowerets so fair;
To the cool grassy shade and the rivulet bright,
Which reflects the pale moon on its bosom of light.
Again would I view the old mansion so dear,
Where I sported a babe, without sorrow or fear;
I would leave this great city, so brilliant and gay,
For a peep at my home on this fine summer day.
I have friends whom I love, and would leave with regret,
But the love of my home, O, 'tis tenderer yet!
There a sister reposes unconscious in death;

'Twas there she first drew, and there yielded, her breath:
A father I love is away from me now —
O, could I but print a sweet kiss on his brow,
Or smooth the gray locks, to my fond heart so dear,
How quickly would vanish each trace of a tear!
Attentive I listen to pleasure's gay call,
But my own darling home, it is dearer than all."

In the autumn the travellers turned their faces homewards, but it was not to the home of Margaret's tender longings. The wintry winds of Lake Champlain were deemed too severe for the invalids, and the family took up its residence at Ballston. Margaret's feelings upon this disappointment are thus recorded:

"MY NATIVE LAKE

"Thy verdant banks, thy lucid stream,
Lit by the sun's resplendent beam,
Reflect each bending tree so light
Upon thy bounding bosom bright!
Could I but see thee once again,
My own, my beautiful Champlain!

The little isles that deck thy breast,
And calmly on thy bottom rest,
How often, in my childish glee,

I've sported round them, bright and free!
Could I but see thee once again,
My own, my beautiful Champlain!

How oft I've watched the freshening shower
Bending the summer tree and flower,
And felt my little heart beat high
As the bright rainbow graced the sky!
Could I but see thee once again,
My own, my beautiful Champlain!

And shall I never see thee more,
My native lake, my much-loved shore?
And must I bid a long adieu,
My dear, my infant home, to you?
Shall I not see thee once again,
My own, my beautiful Champlain?"

But Margaret was happy; the family were reunited, and she had health sufficient to allow her to pursue her studies, still under her mother's direction. She was fond, too, of devising little plans for intellectual improvement and amusement: among others, a weekly newspaper was issued in manuscript, called the "Juvenile Aspirant." But this happiness was soon clouded. Her own severe illness excited alarming fears; and hardly was she convalescent, when, in the spring of 1834, intelligence was received from Canada of the death of her eldest sister. This was a severe shock, for she had always looked up to this only surviving sister as to one

who would supply the place of her seemingly dying mother. But she forgot her own grief in trying to solace that of her mother. Her feelings, as usual, were expressed in verses, which are as remarkable for their strain of sober piety as for poetical merit. The following are portions of an address —

“TO MY MOTHER, OPPRESSED WITH SORROW

“Weep, O my mother! I will bid thee weep,
For grief like thine requires the aid of tears;
But O, I would not see thy bosom thus
Bowed down to earth, with anguish so severe;
I would not see thine ardent feelings crushed,
Deadened to all save sorrow’s thrilling tone,
Like the pale flower, which hangs its drooping head
Beneath the chilling blasts of Eolus!

...

When love would seek to lead thy heart from grief,
And fondly pleads one cheering look to view,
A sad, a faint, sad smile one instant gleams
Athwart the brow where sorrow sits enshrined,

Brooding o'er ruins of what once was fair;
But like departing sunset, as it throws
One farewell shadow o'er the sleeping earth,
Thus, thus it fades! and sorrow more profound
Dwells on each feature where a smile, so cold,
It scarcely might be called the mockery
Of cheerful peace, but just before had been.

...

But, O my mother, weep not thus for *her*,
The rose, just blown, transported to its home;
Nor weep that her angelic soul has found
A resting-place with God.
O, let the eye of heaven-born Faith disperse
The darkening mists of earthly grief, and pierce
The clouds which shadow dull mortality!
Gaze on the heaven of glory crowned with light,
Where rests thine own sweet child with radiant brow,
In the same voice which charmed her father's halls,
Chanting sweet anthems to her Maker's praise,
And watching with delight the gentle buds
Which she had lived to mourn; watching thine own,
My mother! the soft, unfolding blossoms,
Which, ere the breath of earthly sin could taint,
Departed to their Savior, there to wait

For thy fond spirit in the home of bliss!
The angel babes have found a sister mother;
But when thy soul shall pass from earth away,
The little cherubs then shall cling to thee,
And then, sweet guardian, welcome thee with joy,
Protector of their helpless infancy,
Who taught them how to reach that happy home.”

...

So strong and healthful did she seem during the ensuing summer, that her mother began to indulge hopes of raising the tender plant to maturity. But winter brought with it a new attack of sickness, and from December to March the little sufferer languished on her bed. During this period, her mind remained inactive; but with returning health it broke forth in a manner that excited alarm. “In conversation,” says her mother, “her sallies of wit were dazzling; she composed and wrote incessantly, or rather would have done so, had I not interposed my authority to prevent this unceasing tax upon both her mental and physical strength. She seemed to exist only in the regions of poetry.”

There was a faint return of health, followed by a new attack of disease; indeed, the remainder of her brief sojourn in this world presents the usual vicissitudes attendant upon her disease – short intervals of health, which she devoted to study, amid long and dreary periods of illness, which she bore with

exemplary patience. It would be painful to follow her through these vicissitudes. We need only note those events and changes which produced a marked effect upon her feelings, and which she has recorded in verse.

In the autumn of 1835, the family removed to "Ruremont," an old-fashioned country house near New York, on the banks of Long Island Sound. The character and situation of this place seized powerfully on Margaret's imagination. "The curious structure of this old-fashioned house," says her mother, "its picturesque appearance, the varied and beautiful grounds around it, called up a thousand poetic images and romantic ideas. A long gallery, a winding staircase, a dark, narrow passage, a trap-door, large apartments with massive doors and heavy iron bolts and bars, — all set her mind teeming with recollections of what she had read, and imagination of old castles, &c." Perhaps it was under the influence of feelings thus suggested that she composed the following

"STANZAS

"O for the pinions of a bird,
To bear me far away,
Where songs of other lands are heard,
And other waters play! —

For some ærial car, to fly
On, through the realms of light,
To regions rife with poesy,
And teeming with delight.

O'er many a wild and classic stream
In ecstasy I'd bend,
And hail each ivy-covered tower
As though it were a friend;

Through many a shadowy grove, and round
Full many a cloistered hall,
And corridors, where every step
With echoing peal doth fall.

...

O, what unmingled pleasure then
My youthful heart would feel,
And o'er its thrilling chords each thought
Of former days would steal!

...

Amid the scenes of past delight,
Or misery, I'd roam,
Where ruthless tyrants swayed in might,
Where princes found a home.

...

I'd stand where proudest kings have stood,
Or kneel where slaves have knelt,
Till, rapt in magic solitude,
I feel what they have felt."

Margaret now felt comparatively well, and was eager to resume her studies. She was indulged so far as to be permitted to accompany her father three times to the city, where she took lessons in French, music, and dancing. To the Christmas holidays she looked forward as a season of delight; she had prepared a drama of six acts for the domestic entertainment, and the back parlor was to be fitted up for a theatre, her little brothers being her fellow-laborers. But her anticipations were disappointed. Two of her brothers were taken ill; and one of them, a beautiful boy of nine, never recovered. "This," says her mother, "was Margaret's first acquaintance with death. She saw her sweet little play-fellow reclining upon my bosom during his last agonies; she witnessed the bright glow which flashed upon his

long-faded cheek; she beheld the unearthly light of his beautiful eye, as he pressed his dying lips to mine, and exclaimed, 'Mother, dear mother, the last hour has come!' It was indeed an hour of anguish. Its effect upon her youthful mind was as lasting as her life. The sudden change from life and animation to the still unconsciousness of death, for a time almost paralyzed her. The first thing that aroused her to a sense of what was going on about her, was the thought of my bereavement, and a conviction that it was her province to console me." But Mrs. Davidson soon presents a sadder picture: "My own weak frame was unable longer to sustain the effects of long watching and deep grief. I had not only lost my lovely boy, but I felt a strong conviction that I must soon resign my Margaret. Although she still persisted in the belief that she was well, the irritating cough, the hectic flush, the hurried beating of the heart, and the drenching night perspirations, confirmed me in this belief, and I sank under this accumulated weight of affliction. For three weeks I hovered on the borders of the grave, and, when I arose from this bed of pain, it was to witness the rupture of a blood-vessel in her lungs, caused by exertions to suppress a cough. I was compelled to conceal every appearance of alarm, lest agitation of her mind should produce fatal consequences. As I seated myself by her, she raised her speaking eyes to mine with a mournful, inquiring gaze, and, as she read the anguish which I could not conceal, she turned away with a look of despair." There no longer remained room for hope, and all that remained to be done was to smooth

the pathway to the grave.

Although Margaret endeavored to persuade herself that she was well, yet, from the change that took place in her habits in the autumn of 1836, it is evident that she knew her real situation. In compliance with her mother's oft-repeated advice, she gave up her studies, and sought by light reading and trivial employments to "kill time." Of the struggles which it cost her thus to pass six months, the following incident, as related by her mother, will inform us: "She was seated one day by my side, weary and restless, scarcely knowing what to do with herself, when, marking, the traces of grief upon my face, she threw her arms about my neck, and, kissing me, exclaimed, 'My dear, dear mother!' 'What is it affects you now, my child?' 'O, I know you are longing for something from my pen.' I saw the secret craving of the spirit that gave rise to the suggestion. 'I do indeed, my dear, delight in the effusions of your pen, but the exertion will injure you.' 'Mamma, I *must* write! I can hold out no longer! I will return to my pen, my pencil, and my books, and shall again be happy.'" The following verses, written soon after, show the state of her feelings: —

“Earth, thou hast but nought to satisfy
The cravings of immortal mind;
Earth, thou hast nothing pure and high,
The soaring, struggling soul to bind.

Impatient of its long delay,

The pinioned spirit fain would roam,
And leave this crumbling house of clay,
To seek, above, its own bright home!

...

O, how mysterious is the bond
Which blends the earthly with the pure,
And mingles that which death may blight
With that which ever must endure!

Arise, my soul, from all below,
And gaze upon thy destined home —
The heaven of heavens, the throne of God,
Where sin and care can never come.

...

Compound of weakness and of strength;
Mighty, yet ignorant of thy power;
Loftier than earth, or air, or sea,
Yet meaner than the lowliest flower! —

Soaring towards heaven, yet clinging still

To earth, by many a purer tie!
Longing to breathe a tender air,
Yet fearing, trembling thus to die!"

Some verses written about the same period show the feelings she held towards her sister Lucretia.

"My sister! with that thrilling word
What thoughts unnumbered wildly spring!
What echoes in my heart are stirred,
While thus I touch the trembling string!

My sister! ere this youthful mind
Could feel the value of thine own;
Ere this infantine heart could bind,
In its deep cell, one look, one tone,

To glide along on memory's stream,
And bring back thrilling thoughts of thee;
Ere I knew aught but childhood's dream,
Thy soul had struggled, and was free.

...

I cannot weep that thou art fled;
Forever blends my soul with thine;

Each thought, by purer impulse led,
Is soaring on to realms divine.

...

I hear thee in the summer breeze,
See thee in all that's pure or fair,
Thy whisper in the murmuring trees,
Thy breath, thy spirit, every where.

Thine eyes, which watch when mortals sleep,
Cast o'er my dreams a radiant hue;
Thy tears, "such tears as angels weep,"
Fall nightly with the glistening dew.

Thy fingers wake my youthful lyre,
And teach its softer strains to flow;
Thy spirit checks each vain desire,
And gilds the lowering brow of woe.

...

Thou gem of light! my leading star!
What thou hast been I strive to be;

When from the path I wander far,
O, turn thy guiding beam on me.

Teach me to fill thy place below,
That I may dwell with thee above;
To soothe, like thee, a mother's woe,
And prove, like thine, a sister's love.

...

When all is still, and fancy's realm
Is opening to the eager view,
Mine eye full oft, in search of thee,
Roams o'er that vast expanse of blue.

I know that here thy harp is mute,
And quenched the bright, poetic fire;
Yet still I bend my ear, to catch
The hymnings of thy seraph lyre.

O, if this partial converse now
So joyous to my heart can be,
How must the streams of rapture flow,
When both are chainless, both are free! —

When, borne from earth for evermore,

Our souls in sacred joy unite,
At God's almighty throne adore,
And bathe in beams of endless light!"

Although the extracts from the works of this gifted being have been so extensive, we cannot forbear giving some portions of a piece written about the same period, and entitled —

“AN APPEAL FOR THE BLIND

...

“Launched forth on life's uncertain path,
Its best and brightest gift denied,
No power to pluck its fragrant flowers,
Or turn its poisonous thorns aside; —

No ray to pierce the gloom within,
And chase the darkness with its light;
No radiant morning dawn to win
His spirit from the shades of night; —

Nature, whose smile, so pure and fair,
Casts a bright glow on life's dark stream, —
Nature, sweet soother of our care,

Has not a single smile for him.

When pale disease, with blighting hand,
Crushes each budding hope awhile,
Our eyes can rest in sweet delight
On love's fond gaze, or friendship's smile.

Not so with *him*; his soul chained down
By doubt, and loneliness, and care,
Feels but misfortune's chilling frown,
And broods in darkness and despair.

Favored by Heaven, O, haste thee on;
Thy blest Redeemer points the way;
Haste o'er the spirit's gloom to pour
The light of intellectual day.

Thou canst not raise their drooping lids,
And wake them to the noonday sun;
Thou canst not ope, what God hath closed,
Or cancel aught his hands have done.

But, O, there is a world within,
More bright, more beautiful than ours;
A world which, nursed by culturing hands,
Will blush with fairest, sweetest flowers.

And thou canst make that desert mind
Bloom sweetly as the blushing rose;

Thou canst illumine that rayless void
Till darkness like the day-gleam glows.

...

Thus shalt thou shed a purer ray
O'er each beclouded mind within,
Than pours the glorious orb of day
On this dark world of care and sin.

...

And when the last dread day has come,
Which seals thine endless doom, —
When the freed soul shall seek its home,
And triumph o'er the tomb, —

When lowly bends each reverend knee,
And bows each heart in prayer, —
A band of spirits, saved by thee,
Shall plead thy virtues there.”

Hitherto Margaret had sedulously avoided all conversations

about her health, and seemed unwilling to let the feeling that disease had marked her for its victim take possession of her mind. But in the summer of 1838, she one day surprised her mother by asking her to tell her, without reserve, her opinion of her state. "I was," says her mother, "wholly unprepared for this question; and it was put in so solemn a manner, that I could not evade it, were I disposed to do so. I knew with what strong affection she clung to life, and the objects and friends which endeared it to her; I knew how bright the world upon which she was just entering appeared to her young fancy – what glowing pictures she had drawn of future usefulness and happiness. I was now called upon at one blow to crush these hopes, to destroy the delightful visions; it would be cruel and wrong to deceive her. In vain I attempted a reply to her direct and solemn appeal; several times I essayed to speak, but the words died away on my lips; I could only fold her to my heart in silence; imprint a kiss upon her forehead, and leave the room, to avoid agitating her with feelings I had no power to repress."

But this silence was to Margaret as expressive as words. Religion had always been present with her, but from this period it engrossed a large portion of her thoughts. She regretted that so much of her time had been spent in light reading, and that her writings had not been of a more decidedly religious character. "Mamma," said she one day, "should God spare my life, my time and talents shall, for the future, be devoted to a higher and holier end." "O mother, how sadly have I trifled with the gifts of

Heaven! What have I done which can benefit one human being?" The New Testament was now her daily study, and a portion of each day was devoted to private prayer and self-examination.

The closing scene of her life, which occurred on the 25th November, 1838, would lose much of its interest in the description, if given in other than the beautiful and touching language of her mother. It was night, and, at the entreaty of her husband, Mrs. Davidson had laid herself on the bed in a room adjoining that of her daughter. "Between three and four o'clock, the friend who watched came again, and said, 'Margaret has asked for her mother.' I flew. She held a bottle of ether in her hand, and pointed to her breast. I poured it on her head and chest. She revived. 'I am better now,' said she. 'Mother, you tremble; you are cold; put on your clothes.' I stepped to the fire, and put on a wrapper, when she stretched out both her arms, and exclaimed, 'Mother, take me in your arms.' I raised her, and, seating myself on the bed, passed both my arms around her waist; her head dropped on my bosom, and her expressive eyes were raised to mine. That look I never shall forget; it said, 'Tell me, mother, is this death?' I answered the appeal as if she had spoken. I laid my hand upon her white brow; a cold dew had gathered there. I spoke – 'Yes, my beloved, it is almost finished; you will soon be with Jesus.' She gave one more look, two or three short, fluttering breaths, and all was over; her spirit was with its God: not a struggle or a groan preceded her departure."

Thus perished Margaret Davidson, at the early age of fifteen

years and eight months. Her sister Lucretia had found in Miss Sedgwick a fitting biographer, and the memory of Margaret has been rendered more dear by the touching manner in which Irving has told her brief but wondrous story. We cannot better close our imperfect sketch, than to use the words of her biographer: "We shall not pretend to comment on these records; they need no comment, and they admit no heightening. Indeed, the farther we have proceeded with our subject, the more has the intellectual beauty and the seraphic purity of the little being we have endeavored to commemorate, broken upon us. To use one of her own exquisite expressions, she was 'a spirit of heaven fettered by the strong affections of earth,' and the whole of her brief sojourn here seems to have been a struggle to regain her native skies."

MRS. ADAMS

The materials for preparing the memoirs of those American ladies whose virtues were conspicuous, and whose position in society imposed upon them great duties, and gave them an extensive influence in their day, are, in general, exceedingly scanty. Happily, the piety of a descendant has, in the present case, supplied the deficiency; and in a mode the most satisfactory. We are here not only made acquainted with the everyday life and actions as they were exhibited to the world around, but are admitted to the inmost recesses of the heart, and all its hopes and feelings are laid open to us. There are few who could bear such an exposure; but in respect to the subject of our present sketch, a nearer acquaintance and more rigid scrutiny serve only to increase our veneration, and to confirm the verdict which her contemporaries had passed upon her.

Abigail Smith, afterwards Mrs. Adams, was born on the 11th of November, 1744. She was the daughter of the Rev. William Smith, the minister of a small Congregational church in Weymouth, Massachusetts, and was descended on both sides from the genuine stock of the Pilgrims.

The cultivation of the female mind was neglected in the last century, not merely as a matter of indifference, but of positive principle; female learning was a subject of ridicule, and “female education,” as Mrs. Adams tells us, “in the best families, went no

further than writing and arithmetic; in some, and rare instances, music and dancing." But Mrs. Adams did not have an opportunity of receiving even the ordinary instruction. She was never sent to school, the delicate state of her health forbidding it. But this is hardly to be considered matter of regret, for constant intercourse with her pious and talented relations had an influence upon her character of even greater value than the learning of the schools. The lessons which made the deepest impression upon her mind were imbibed from her maternal grandmother, the wife of Colonel John Quincy. "I have not forgotten," says Mrs. Adams, to her daughter, in 1795, "the excellent lessons which I received from my grandmother, at a very early period of life. I frequently think they made a more durable impression upon my mind than those which I received from my own parents. Whether it was owing to the happy method of mixing instruction and amusement together, or from an inflexible adherence to certain principles, the utility of which I could not but see and approve when a child, I know not; but maturer years have rendered them oracles of wisdom to me. I love and revere her memory; her lively, cheerful disposition animated all around her, while she edified all by her unaffected piety. This tribute is due to the memory of those virtues, the sweet remembrance of which will flourish, though she has long slept with her ancestors."

But though the list of accomplishments thought essential for a young lady's education was so scanty, it must not be supposed that the mind was left wholly uncultivated. On the contrary,

few women of the present day are so well acquainted with the standard English authors, as those of the period of which we are now speaking. The influence which they had on the mind of the subject of this memoir, is apparent throughout her published correspondence, not only in the style, in the fondness for quotation, but in the love of fictitious signatures, of which the "Spectator" had set the example. The social disposition of youth renders an interchange of thoughts and feelings between those of the same age essential to their happiness. The sparse population, and comparatively small facilities for locomotion in the last century, rendered personal intercourse difficult, and a frequent interchange of letters was adopted as a substitute. This, as an exercise for the mind, is of great value, as it induces habits of reflection, and leads to precision and facility in expressing ideas.

A few of Mrs. Adams's letters, written at an early period of her life, have been preserved, and from one of these – addressed to a married lady, several years older than herself, which will account for a gravity which is beyond her years and ordinary disposition – the following extracts are made. It is dated at Weymouth, October 5th, 1761.

"Your letter I received, and, believe me, it has not been through forgetfulness that I have not before this time returned you my sincere thanks for the kind assurance you then gave me of continued friendship. You have, I hope, pardoned my suspicions; they arose from love. What persons in their right senses would

calmly, and without repining, or even inquiring into the cause, submit to lose their greatest temporal good and happiness? for thus the divine, Dr. Young, looks upon a friend, when he says, —

‘A friend is worth all hazards we can run;
Poor is the friendless master of a world;
A world in purchase for a friend is gain.’

* * * You have, like King Ahasuerus, held forth, though not a golden sceptre, yet one more valuable, — the sceptre of friendship, if I may so call it. Like Esther, I would draw nigh and touch it. Will you proceed and say, ‘What wilt thou?’ and ‘What is thy request?’ it shall be given thee to the half of my’ heart. Why, no, I think I will not have so dangerous a present, lest your good man should find it out and challenge me. * * * And now let me ask you, whether you do not think that many of our disappointments, and much of our unhappiness, arise from our forming false notions of things and persons. We strangely impose on ourselves; we create a fairy land of happiness. Fancy is fruitful, and promises fair, but, like the dog in the fable, we catch at a shadow, and, when we find the disappointment, we are vexed, not with ourselves, who are really the impostors, but with the poor, innocent thing or person of whom we have formed such strange ideas. * * * You bid me tell *one* of my sparks — I think that was the word — to bring me to see you. Why, I believe you think they are as plenty as herrings, when, alas! there is as great a scarcity of them as there is of justice, honesty, prudence, and many other

virtues. I've no pretensions to one. Wealth, wealth is the only thing that is looked after now. 'Tis said Plato thought, if Virtue would appear to the world, all mankind would be enamored of her; but now interest governs the world, and men neglect the golden mean."

At the age of twenty, Miss Smith became the wife of John Adams, afterwards president of the United States. Connected with this event, an anecdote is related, which, as an indication of the fashion of the day, and of the disposition of the bride's father, is too good to be passed over. Mary, the eldest daughter of Mr. Smith, was married to Richard Cranch, an English emigrant, and, as it would appear, with the approbation of all parties; for, upon the Sabbath following, he preached to his people from the text, "And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her." But Abigail was not so fortunate; for her match, it would seem, met the disapprobation of some of her father's parishioners, either on account of the profession of Mr. Adams, – that of the law, – which was then an obnoxious one to many people, who deemed it dishonest; or because they did not consider Mr. Adams – the son of a small farmer – a sufficiently good match for the daughter of one of the shining lights of the colony. Mr. Smith, having become aware of the feeling which existed, took notice of it in a sermon from the following text: "For John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil."

The first ten years of Mrs. Adams's married life were passed

in a quiet and happy manner; her enjoyment suffering no interruptions except those occasioned by the short absences of her husband, when he attended the courts. In this period she became the mother of a daughter and three sons, of whom John Quincy Adams was the eldest.

All are familiar with the distinguished part performed by Mr. Adams in the scenes which immediately preceded our revolution. In all his feelings and actions he had the sympathy and support of his wife, who had thus in some measure become prepared for the stormy period which was at hand.

Mr. Adams, having been appointed one of the delegates to the congress to be held at Philadelphia, left home in August, 1774; and on the 19th of that month, we find the following letter addressed to him by his wife: —

“The great distance between us makes the time appear very long to me. It seems already a month since you left me. The great anxiety I feel for my country, for you, and for our family, renders the day tedious, and the night unpleasant. The rocks and the quicksands appear on every side. What course you can and will take is all wrapped in the bosom of futurity. Uncertainty and expectation leave the mind great scope. Did ever any kingdom or state regain its liberty, when once it was invaded, without bloodshed? I cannot think of it without horror. Yet we are told, that all the misfortunes of Sparta were occasioned by their too great solicitude for present tranquillity; and from an excessive love of peace, they neglected the means of making it sure and

lasting. * * * I have taken a very great fondness for reading Rollin's Ancient History. I am determined to go through it, if possible, in these my days of solitude. I find great pleasure and entertainment from it, and I have persuaded Johnny to read me a page or two every day, and hope he will, from his desire to oblige me, entertain a fondness for it. I want much to hear from you. I long impatiently to have you upon the stage of action. The 1st of September may, perhaps, be of as much importance to Great Britain, as the ides of March to Cæsar. I wish you every public and private blessing, and that wisdom which is profitable for instruction and edification, to conduct you in this difficult day."

She perceived, at a very early period, that the conflict would not be speedily settled, and of the personal consequences to herself she speaks in the following affecting terms: "Far from thinking the scene closed, it looks as though the curtain was but just drawn, and only the first scene of the infernal plot disclosed: whether the end will be tragical, Heaven alone knows. You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator; but, if the sword be drawn, I bid adieu to all domestic felicity, and look forward to that country where there are neither wars nor rumors of wars, in a firm belief that, through the mercy of its King, we shall both rejoice there together."

Indeed, from this period till she joined her husband in Europe, in 1784, she enjoyed very little of his society. Had the state of the times rendered it safe or agreeable for her to have accompanied

her husband in his journeys and voyages, the circumstances of the family would not have allowed it. Without hereditary fortune, with no opportunity of practising in his profession, and now serving the public for a price which would not defray his actual and necessary expenses, – Mr. Adams would have been, in his old age, in the lamentable condition of many of the most active patriots of the revolution, who, devoting their years of vigorous manhood to the service of their country, were left, in their declining days, in a state of penury, – had he not possessed in his wife a helper suited to the exigency. She husbanded their small property, the savings of years of professional prosperity; she managed the farm with skill; and in all matters of business she displayed a degree of judgment and sagacity not to be exceeded. All the powers of her mind were now called into activity, and her character displayed itself in the most favorable colors. The official rank of her husband imposed high duties upon her; her timid neighbors looked to her for support and comfort, and she was never found wanting.

The absence of Mr. Adams relieved his wife from one source of anxiety – that for his personal safety. As the conflict in the early periods of the revolution was confined to the vicinity of Boston, and as the feelings of parties were more exasperated here than elsewhere, he would have been in the greatest danger at home. It was a comfort to her that her husband should “be absent a little while from the scenes of perturbation, anxiety, and distress,” which surrounded her.

As from her residence she could be an eye-witness of few of the events, the details of which she relates, her letters are of most value as furnishing a lively exhibition of her own and of the public feeling. One event, which passed under her own observation, she thus describes: "In consequence of the powder being taken from Charlestown, a general alarm spread through many towns, and was pretty soon caught here. On Sunday, a soldier was seen lurking about, supposed to be a spy, but most likely a deserter. However, intelligence of it was communicated to the other parishes, and about eight o'clock, Sunday evening, there passed by here about two hundred men, preceded by a horse-cart, and marched down to the powder-house, from whence they took the powder, and carried it into the other parish, and there secreted it. I opened the window upon their return. They passed without any noise, – not a word among them, – till they came against the house, when some of them, perceiving me, asked me if I wanted any powder. I replied, No, since it was in so good hands. The reason they gave for taking it was, that we had so many tories here, they dared not trust it; they had taken the sheriff in their train, and upon their return they stopped between Cleverly's and Eltee's, and called upon him to deliver two warrants.¹ Upon his producing them, they put it to vote whether they should burn them, and it passed in the affirmative. They then made a circle and burnt them. They then called a vote whether they should huzza, but, it being Sunday evening, it

¹ For summoning juries.

passed in the negative. * * * This town appears as high as you can well imagine, and, if necessary, would soon be in arms. Not a tory but hides his head. The church parson thought they were coming after him, and ran up garret; they say another jumped out of his window, and hid among the corn; while a third crept under his board fence, and told his beads.”

In the midst of her public cares and anxieties, she did not neglect her sacred duties as a mother. The care of the education of her four children devolved entirely upon her, and “Johnny” was at an age to require much attention. This subject occupied much of her thoughts; and, indeed, the greatest value of her published correspondence consists in the hints which it gives us of the course of culture pursued in producing those glorious fruits of which other generations have had the enjoyment. She carefully guarded against the contagion of vice at that period when the mind and heart are most susceptible to impressions. “I have always thought it,” she says to her husband, “of very great importance that children should, in the early part of life, be unaccustomed to such examples as would tend to corrupt the purity of their words and actions, that they may chill with horror at the sound of an oath, and blush with indignation at an obscene expression. These first principles, which grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength, neither time nor custom can totally eradicate.” By precept, and much more by example, she sought to instil principles, and to form habits, which should lead to the practice of every virtue. Can we be surprised

at the abhorrence which her “illustrious son of an illustrious mother” has ever exhibited to oppression, when we find her thus expressing her sentiments in behalf of the oppressed, at a time when the subject of which she speaks had not excited any attention either in Europe or America? – “I wish sincerely there was not a slave in the province; it always appeared to me a most iniquitous scheme to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have.”

During the recess of Congress, Mr. Adams was at home, but left it again for Philadelphia on the 14th April, 1775. Four days afterwards the expedition to Lexington and Concord took place. The news of this event reached Mr. A. at Hartford; he, did not, however, yield to his anxieties and return, but contented himself by sending home encouragement and advice. After saying that he never feels any personal fear, he adds, “I am often concerned for you and our dear babes, surrounded as you are by people who are too timorous, and too much susceptible of alarm. Many fears and imaginary evils will be suggested to you, but I hope you will not be impressed by them. In case of real danger, fly to the woods with my children.”

Mrs. Adams might be excused for entertaining fears; her residence was near the sea-coast, and the enemy sent out foraging expeditions: the point of destination was perhaps some island in the harbor; but of this there could be no certainty. Of one of the alarms thus occasioned, Mrs. Adams writes to her husband

as follows: "I suppose you have had a formidable account of the alarm we had last Sunday morning. When I rose, about six o'clock, I was told that the drums had been some time beating, and that three alarm guns were fired; that Weymouth bell had been ringing, and Mr. Weld's was then ringing. I sent off an express to learn the cause, and found the whole town in confusion. Three sloops and a cutter had dropped anchor just below Great Hill. It was difficult to tell their designs: some supposed they were coming to Germantown, others to Weymouth: people, women, children, came flocking down this way; every woman and child driven off below my father's; my father's family flying. The alarm flew like lightning, and men from all parts came flocking down, till two thousand were collected. But it seems their expedition was to Grape Island, for Levett's hay." "They delight," says she, on another occasion, "in molesting us upon the Sabbath. Two Sabbaths we have been in such alarm that we have had no meeting; this day we have sat under our own vine in quietness; have heard Mr. Taft. The good man was earnest and pathetic. I could forgive his weakness for the sake of his sincerity; but I long for a Cooper and an Elliot. I want a person who has feeling and sensibility; who can take one up with him,

And 'in his duty prompt at every call,'
Can 'watch, and weep, and pray, and feel for all.'"

The battle of Bunker's Hill followed soon, and, from the top of the highest house in Braintree, Mrs. Adams beheld the conflagration of Charlestown. But she does not lose her courage. In writing to her husband, she seeks to lessen his anxieties. "I would not," says she, "have you be distressed about me. I have been distressed, but not dismayed. I have felt for my country and her sons, and have bled with them and for them."

The appointment of General Washington to the command of the army, then stationed at Cambridge, inspired new confidence. Mrs. Adams thus speaks of the impression made by her first interview with him and General Lee: "I was struck with General Washington. You had prepared me to entertain a favorable opinion of him; but I thought the half was not told me. Dignity with ease and complacency, the gentleman and soldier, look agreeably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and feature of his face. Those lines of Dryden instantly occurred to me —

'Mark his majestic fabric! he's a temple
Sacred by birth, and built by hands divine;
His soul's the deity that lodges there;
Nor is the pile unworthy of the god.'

General Lee looks like a careless, hardy veteran, and, by his appearance, brought to my mind his namesake, Charles XII. of Sweden. The elegance of his pen far exceeds that of his person."

The horrors of war were now aggravated by those of pestilence. From the British army in Boston, the dysentery had

spread into the surrounding country. Mrs. Adams and her whole family were attacked. "Our house," she writes to her husband, September 8, 1775, "is a hospital in every part, and, what with my own weakness and distress of mind for my family, I have been unhappy enough. And such is the distress of the neighborhood, that I can scarcely find a well person to assist me in looking after the sick." Again on the 25th she writes, "I sit with a heavy heart to write to you. Woe follows woe, and one affliction treads upon the heels of another. My distress in my own family having in some measure abated, it is excited anew upon that of my dear mother. She has taken the disorder, and lies so bad, that we have little hope of her recovery." On the 29th, "It is allotted me to go from the sick and almost dying bed of one of the best of parents, to my own habitation, where again I behold the same scene, only varied by a remoter connection —

‘A bitter change, severer for severe.’

You can more easily conceive than I can describe what are the sensations of my heart when absent from either, continually expecting a messenger with the fatal tidings." "The desolation of war is not so distressing as the havoc made by pestilence. Some poor parents are mourning the loss of three, four, and five children; and some families are wholly stripped of every member."

But the hand of the pestilence was stayed, and her country

again engrosses her thoughts. She very early declares herself for independence, and wonders how any honest heart can hesitate at adopting the same sentiment. An attempt to drive the enemy from Boston is meditated, and she tells us that she has been kept in a state of anxiety and expectation. "It has been said 'to-morrow' and 'to-morrow' for this month; but when this dreadful to-morrow will be, I know not. But hark! The house this instant shakes with the roar of cannon. I have been to the door, and find it a cannonade from our army." The militia are all ordered to repair to the lines. The result was thus related: "I have just returned from Penn's Hill, where I have been sitting to hear the amazing roar of cannon, and from whence I could see every shell which was thrown. The sound, I think, is one of the grandest in nature, and is of the true species of the sublime. * * * I could no more sleep than if I had been in the engagement: the rattling of the windows, the jar of the house, the continual roar of twenty-four pounders, and the bursting of shells, give us such ideas, and realize a scene to us of which we could form scarcely any conception. * * * All my distress and anxiety is at present at an end. I feel disappointed. This day our militia are all returning without effecting any thing more than taking possession of Dorchester Hill. I hope it is wise and just, but, from all the muster and stir, I hoped and expected more important and decisive scenes. I would not have suffered all I have for two such hills." The British soon afterwards evacuated Boston, and Massachusetts never again became the theatre of war.

In 1778, the fortitude of Mrs. Adams received a new trial. Her husband was appointed one of the commissioners at the court of France. The sea was covered with the enemy's ships; and, should he escape these and all the natural dangers of the seas, and arrive at the place of his destination in safety, rumor said that he would there be exposed to one of a more terrific character, "to the dark assassin, to the secret murderer, and the bloody emissary of as cruel a tyrant as God, in his righteous judgments, ever suffered to disgrace the throne of Britain. I have," continues Mrs. Adams, writing soon after her husband's departure, "travelled with you across the Atlantic, and could have landed you safe, with humble confidence, at your desired haven, and then have set myself down to enjoy a negative kind of happiness, in the painful part which it has pleased Heaven to allot me; but the intelligence with regard to that great philosopher, able statesman, and unshaken friend of his country," – alluding to a report of Dr. Franklin's assassination in Paris, – "has planted a dagger in my breast, and I feel with a double edge the weapon that pierced his bosom. * * * To my dear son remember me in the most affectionate terms. Enjoin it upon him never to disgrace his mother, and to behave worthily of his father. I console myself with the hopes of his reaping advantages under the careful eye of a tender parent, which it was not in my power to bestow." Mr. Adams was accompanied by his eldest son, John Quincy Adams, and, after incurring various hazards from lightning, storm, and the enemy, arrived in France. The maternal solicitude of Mrs. Adams relieved itself in part by

writing letters to her son filled with the warmest affection and the most wise counsel. She urges it upon him “to adhere to those religious sentiments and principles which were early instilled into your mind, and remember that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and actions. Great learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them, will be of little value and small estimation, unless virtue, honor, truth, and integrity, are added to them. Dear as you are to me, I would much rather you should have found a grave in the ocean you have crossed, than see you an immoral, profligate, or graceless child.”

As has already been said, Mrs. Adams managed her husband's money affairs at home. A short extract from one of her business letters to him may be interesting, and will show how a matter always troublesome was in such times doubly so: “The safest way, you tell me, of supplying my wants, is by drafts; but I cannot get hard money for bills. You had as good tell me to procure diamonds for them; and when bills will fetch but five for one, hard money will exchange ten, which I think is very provoking; and I must give at the rate of ten, and sometimes twenty, for one, for every article I purchase. I blush whilst I give you a price current; all meat from a dollar to eight shillings a pound; corn twenty-five dollars, rye thirty, per bushel; flour two hundred dollars per hundred pounds; potatoes ten dollars per bushel, &c. I have studied, and do study, every method of economy; otherwise a mint of money would not support a family. I could not board our sons under forty dollars a week at school. * * * We have

been greatly distressed for grain. I scarcely know the looks or taste of biscuit or flour for this four months; yet thousands have been much worse off, having no grain of any sort.” Nor were things then at the worst; for in October, 1780, we find “meat eight dollars, and butter twelve, per pound; corn one hundred and twenty dollars, and rye one hundred and eight, per bushel; tea ninety dollars, and cotton wool thirty, per pound.” But our readers must not suppose that this was entirely owing to a scarcity of products; these prices are in “continental money,” seventy dollars of which would hardly command one of “hard money.”

Hitherto Mr. Adams’s residence had seemed too unsettled to render it worth while for his wife to undertake a long and dangerous voyage to meet him. But after the acknowledgment of our independence by Great Britain, a commission was sent to Mr. Adams as first minister to that court; and it was probable that his residence there would be sufficiently long to justify him in a request to Mrs. Adams to join him. The feelings of the latter on the subject were thus expressed before the appointment was actually made: “I have not a wish to join in a scene of life so different from that in which I have been educated, and in which my early, and, I must suppose, happier days have been spent. Well-ordered home is my chief delight, and the affectionate, domestic wife, with the relative duties which accompany that character, my highest ambition. It was the disinterested wish of sacrificing my personal feelings to the public utility, which first led me to think of unprotectedly hazarding a voyage. This

objection could only be surmounted by the earnest wish I had to soften those toils which were not to be dispensed with; and if the public welfare required your labors and exertions abroad, I flattered myself that, if I could be with you, it might be in my power to contribute to your happiness and pleasure.” “I think, if you were abroad in a private character, I should not hesitate so much at coming to you; but a mere American, as I am, unacquainted with the etiquette of courts, taught to say the thing I mean, and to wear my heart in my countenance, – I am sure I should make an awkward figure; and then it would mortify my pride, if I should be thought to disgrace you.”

In spite, however, of this reluctance, she embarked on board the *Active*, a merchant ship, for London. Of this voyage Mrs. Adams has given a most graphic and not very agreeable picture; and nothing can present a greater contrast than her dirty, close, narrow quarters, on board a vessel deeply loaded with oil and potash, – the oil leaking, and the potash smoking and fermenting, – with the floating palaces in which the voyage is now made. The culinary department was in keeping with the rest of the ship. “The cook was a great, dirty, lazy negro, with no more knowledge of cookery than a savage; nor any kind of order in the distribution of his dishes; but on they come, higgledy-piggledy, with a leg of pork all bristly; a quarter of an hour afterwards, a pudding; or, perhaps, a pair of roast fowls first of all, and then will follow, one by one, a piece of beef, and, when dinner is nearly completed, a plate of potatoes. Such a fellow is a real

imposition upon the passengers. But gentlemen know but little about the matter, and if they can get enough to eat five times a day, all goes well." Yet the passengers, of whom there were a number, were agreeable, and, as the wind and weather were favorable, the voyage did not last more than thirty days.

She hoped to have found Mr. Adams in London, but he was at the Hague; and "Master John," after waiting a month for her in London, had returned to the latter place. She received, however, every attention from the numerous Americans then in London, refugees as well as others, many of whom had been her personal friends at home. Ten days were spent in sight-seeing, on the last of which a servant comes running in, exclaiming, "Young Mr. Adams has come!" "Where, where is he?" cried out all. "In the other house, madam; he stopped to get his hair dressed." "Impatient enough I was," continues Mrs. A.; "yet, when he entered, we had so many strangers, that I drew back, not really believing my eyes, till he cried out, 'O my mamma, and my dear sister!' Nothing but the eyes, at first sight, appeared what he once was. His appearance is that of a man, and on his countenance the most perfect good-humor; his conversation by no means denies his stature."

Her first year in Europe was spent at Auteuil, near Paris, and she seems to have enjoyed herself, in spite of her ignorance of the language; though she sometimes expresses her longing for home and the enjoyment of social intercourse with her friends in America. Her letters, during this period, present us with a

lively picture of the state of society and of manners. We have space only for her account of her first visit to madame de la Fayette. "The marquise met me at the door, and with the freedom of an old acquaintance, and the rapture peculiar to the ladies of this nation, caught me by the hand, and gave me a salute upon each cheek. She presented me to her mother and sister, who were present with her, all sitting in her bedroom, quite *en famille*. One of the ladies was knitting. The marquise herself was in a chintz gown. She is a middle-sized lady, sprightly and agreeable, and professes herself strongly attached to Americans. She is fond of her children, and very attentive to them, which is not the general character of ladies of high rank in Europe. In a few days, she returned my visit, upon which I sent her a card of invitation to dine. She came. We had a large company. There is not a lady in our country who would have gone abroad to dine so little dressed; and one of our fine American ladies, who sat by me, whispered to me, 'Good heavens! how awfully she is dressed!' I could not forbear returning the whisper, which I most sincerely despised, by replying that the lady's rank sets her above the little formalities of dress. The rouge, 'tis true, was not so artfully laid on, as upon the faces of the American ladies who were present. Whilst they were glittering with diamonds, buckles, watch-chains, girdle-buckles, &c., the marquise was nowise ruffled by her own different appearance. A really well-bred Frenchwoman has the most ease in her manners that you can possibly conceive of."

In June, 1784, Mr. Adams took up his residence in London. His situation and that of his wife was far from being a pleasant one. The hostile feelings towards Americans, engendered by so many years of warfare, and exasperated by the mortification of ill-success, had not subsided. The loss of his North American colonies was severely felt by the king, who had too much good sense, however, to suffer his feelings to appear in his intercourse with the new minister; but the queen, who, though exemplary in the discharge of domestic duties, was weak-minded, proud, and petulant, could not conceal her bitterness, and her conduct towards Mrs. Adams was hardly civil. Perhaps, however, the account of it given by the latter is colored by her own prejudices against the royal family, which, throughout her life were expressed in the strongest language, and which, towards the king, at least, were entirely unjust. Her presentation at court could not but be somewhat embarrassing and awkward to all parties. The manner in which it passed shall be related in her own words. "The ceremony of presentation is considered as indispensable. One is obliged to attend the circles of the queen, which are held in summer once a fortnight, but once a week the rest of the year; and what renders it very expensive, is, that you cannot go twice the same season in the same dress, and a court dress cannot be used any where else. I directed my mantua-maker to let my dress be elegant, but as plain as it could be, with decency; accordingly it is white lutestring, covered and full trimmed with white crape, festooned with lilac ribbon and mock

point lace, over a hoop of enormous extent; a narrow train of three yards, which is put into a ribbon on the left side, the queen only having a train-bearer. Ruffle cuffs, treble lace ruffles, a very dress cap, with long lace lappets, two white plumes, and a blond lace handkerchief – this is my rigging. I should have mentioned two pearl pins in my hair, ear-rings and necklace of the same kind. * * * ‘Well,’ methinks I hear you say, ‘what is your daughter’s dress?’ White, my dear girls, like her mother’s, only differently trimmed; her train being wholly of white crape, and trimmed with white ribbon; the petticoat, which is the most showy part of the dress, covered and drawn up in what are called festoons, with light wreaths of beautiful flowers; sleeves white crape, drawn over the silk, with a row of lace round the sleeve, near the shoulder, another half way down the arm, and a third upon the top of the ruffle, a little flower stuck between; a kind of hat cap, with three large feathers, and a bunch of flowers; a wreath of flowers upon the hair. * * * We were placed in a circle round the drawing-room, which was very full, I believe two hundred persons present. The royal family have to go to every person, and find small talk enough to speak to all, though they very prudently speak in a whisper. The king enters, and goes round to the right; the queen and princesses to the left. The king is a personable man, but with a red face and white eyebrows. The queen has a similar face, and the numerous royal family resemble them. When the king came to me, Lord Onslaw said, ‘Mrs. Adams;’ upon which I drew off my right hand glove, and

his majesty saluted my left cheek, then asked me if I had taken a walk to-day. I could have told his majesty that I had been all the morning preparing to wait upon him; but I replied, 'No, sire.' 'Why, don't you love walking?' says he. I answered that I was rather indolent in that respect. He then bowed and passed on. It was more than two hours after this, before it came my turn to be presented to the queen. She was evidently embarrassed when I was presented to her. I had disagreeable feelings too. She, however, said, 'Mrs. Adams, have you got into your house? Pray, how do you like the situation of it?' whilst the royal princess looked compassionate, and asked me if I was not much fatigued. Her sister, Princess Augusta, after having asked your niece if she was ever in England before, and her answering, 'Yes,' inquired of me how long ago, and supposed it was when she was very young. And all this with much affability, and the ease and freedom of old acquaintance. * * * As to the ladies of the court, rank and title may compensate for want of personal charms; but they are, in general, very plain, ill-shaped, and ugly; but don't you tell any body that I say so; the observation did not hold good, that fine feathers make fine birds." Referring to this same occasion in a subsequent letter, she says, "I own that I never felt myself in a more contemptible situation than when I stood four hours together for a gracious smile from majesty, a witness to the anxious solicitude of those around me for the same mighty *boon*. I, however, had a more dignified honor, as his majesty *deigned to salute me*."

Of other sources of annoyance Mrs. Adams thus speaks: "Some years hence, it may be a pleasure to reside here in the character of American minister; but, with the present salary, and the present temper of the English, no one need envy the embassy. There would soon be fine work, if any notice was taken of their billingsgate and abuse; but all their arrows rebound, and fall harmless to the ground. Amidst all their falsehoods, they have never insinuated a lisp against the private character of the American minister, nor in his public line charged him with either want of abilities, honor, or integrity. The whole venom is levelled against poor America, and every effort to make her appear ridiculous in the eyes of the nation."

It would have been difficult to find a person better adapted than Mrs. Adams for the trying situation in which she found herself. In other times, a woman of more yielding temper, who could adapt herself more readily to those about her, would, perhaps, answer better. Love of country was engrained in her; for her "the birds of Europe had not half the melody of those at home; the fruit was not half so sweet, nor the flowers half so fragrant, nor the manners half so pure, nor the people half so virtuous." Three years' residence in England produced no change of feeling. In anticipation of a return to her home, we find her writing thus: "I shall quit Europe with more pleasure than I came to it, uncontaminated, I hope, with its manners and vices. I have learned to know the world and its value; I have seen high life; I have witnessed the luxury and pomp of state, the power of riches,

and the influence of titles, and have beheld all ranks bow before them, as the only shrine worthy of worship. Notwithstanding this, I feel that I can return to my little cottage, and be happier than here; and, if we have not wealth, we have what is better – integrity.”

Soon after Mr. Adams’s return, he was elected vice-president of the United States, and took up his residence, at least during the sessions of Congress, first at New York, and afterwards at Philadelphia. The “court” of General Washington was much more to the taste of Mrs. Adams than that of George III.; the circle at the first “drawing-room,” she tells us, was very brilliant; that “the dazzling Mrs. Bingham and her charming sisters were there; in short, a constellation of beauties.”

The next eight years of her life, during which her husband held the office of vice-president, were passed with few incidents to disturb her happiness. Another generation, the children of her daughter, who was married to Colonel Smith, were receiving the benefits of her instruction and experience.

A residence at Philadelphia was not favorable to her health, which, never having been very firm, about this period began decidedly to fail. The bracing air of Quincy was found to be more congenial. For this reason, she was not with her husband at the time when his official duty required him to announce himself as the successor to General Washington; and to this circumstance we are indebted for the following letter, – written on the day on which the votes were counted by the Senate, – in

which, says her biographer, “the exalted feeling of the moment shines out with all the lustre of ancient patriotism, chastened by a sentiment of Christian humility of which ancient history furnishes no example:” —

“Quincy, February 8th, 1797.

“The sun is dressed in brightest beams,

To give thy honors to the day.’

And may it prove an auspicious prelude to each ensuing season. You have this day to declare yourself head of a nation. ‘And now, O Lord, thou hast made thy servant ruler over the people. Give unto him an understanding heart, that he may know how to go out and come in before this great people; that he may discern between good and bad. For who is able to judge this thy so great a people?’ were the words of a royal sovereign, and not less applicable to him who is invested with the chief magistracy of a nation, though he wear not a crown, nor the robes of royalty. My thoughts and my meditations are with you, though personally absent; and my petitions to Heaven are, that the ‘things which make for peace may not be hidden from your eyes.’ My feelings are not those of pride or ostentation. They are solemnized by a sense of the obligations, the important trusts, and numerous duties, connected with it. That you may be enabled to discharge them with honor to yourself, with justice and impartiality to your country, and with satisfaction to this great people, shall be the daily prayer of your

A. A.”

Never has this country witnessed such scenes as characterized the struggle between the two great political parties which divided the people during Mr. Adams's administration. As the representative of one of these, he was assailed with an asperity and malignity to which, happily, succeeding electioneering furnishes no parallel. Accustomed to take a warm interest in political events, it could not be expected that Mrs. Adams should cease to do so when her husband was the chief actor; nor is it surprising that she should have felt what she deemed the ingratitude of his countrymen in casting aside so long-trying and faithful a servant. Retirement to private life was to her a source of rejoicing rather than of regret. At her age, and with her infirmities, she was far happier at Quincy, overseeing the operations of her dairy, whilst her husband, like Cincinnatus, assumed the plough. She has left a record of one day's life; and from this we suppose other days varied but little. It is in a letter to her granddaughter, dated November 19th, 1812. "Six o'clock. Rose, and, in imitation of his Britannic majesty, kindled my own fire. Went to the stairs, as usual, to summon George and Charles. Returned to my chamber, dressed myself. No one stirred. Called a second time, with a voice a little raised. Seven o'clock. Blockheads not out of bed. Girls in motion. Mean, when I hire another man-servant, that he shall come for one call. Eight o'clock. Fires made. Breakfast prepared. Mr. A. at the tea-board. Forgot the sausages. Susan's recollection brought them upon the table. *Enter Ann.* 'Ma'am, the man is come with coal.' 'Go call

George to assist him.' *Exit Ann. Enter Charles.* 'Mr. B. is come with cheese, turnips, &c. Where are they to be put?' 'I will attend to him myself.' *Exit Charles.* Just seated at the table again. *Enter George,* with, 'Ma'am, here is a man with a drove of pigs.' A consultation is held upon this important subject, the result of which is the purchase of two spotted swine. Nine o'clock. *Enter Nathaniel* from the upper house, with a message for sundries; and black Thomas's daughter for sundries. Attended to all these concerns. A little out of sorts that I could not finish my breakfast. Note; never to be incommoded with trifles. *Enter George Adams* from the post-office – a large packet from Russia, (to which court her son J. Q. Adams was then minister.) Avaunt, all cares! I put you all aside, and thus I find good news from a far country. Children, grandchildren all well. For this blessing I give thanks. At twelve o'clock, by previous engagement, I was to call for cousin B. Smith, to accompany me to the bridge at Quincy Port, being the first day of passing it. Passed both bridges, and entered Hingham. Returned before three. Dined, and, at five, went to Mr. T. G. Smith, with your grandfather – the third visit he has made with us in the week; and let me whisper to you, he played at whist. Returned. At nine, sat down and wrote a letter. At eleven, retired to bed. By all this you will learn that grandmother has got rid of her croaking, and that grandfather is in good health, and that both of us are as tranquil as that bold old fellow, Time, will let us be. Here I was interrupted in my narrative. I reassume my pen upon the 22d of November, being this day sixty-eight

years old.”²

From 1801 until her death, in 1818, Mrs. Adams resided at Quincy. Cheerful and retaining the possession of her faculties to the last, she enlivened the social circle about her, and solaced the solitary hours of her husband. She lived long enough to see the seeds of virtue and knowledge which she had planted in the minds of her children, spring up and ripen into maturity; to receive a recompense, in addition to the consciousness of duty performed, for her anxiety and labors, in the respect and honors which her eldest son received from his countrymen.

² President Adams survived his excellent lady several years, and died on the 4th of July, 1826, aged ninety-one. On the morning of the jubilee, he was roused by the ringing of bells and the firing of cannon. Being asked if he knew what day it was, he replied, “O yes, it is the glorious 4th of July – God bless it! God bless you all!” Just before he expired, he said, “Jefferson survives;” but at one o’clock that very day, Jefferson rendered up his spirit to his Maker. The family residence of John Adams at Quincy is the residence of his distinguished son, John Quincy Adams.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Martha Dandridge was born in the county of New Kent, Virginia, in May, 1732. Her education was entirely of a domestic character, there being no schools in the region where she dwelt. As she grew up, she was distinguished for personal beauty, pleasing manners, and general amiability of demeanor. She frequently appeared at the court of Williamsburg, then held by the royal governors of Virginia, and became a general favorite.

At the age of seventeen, she was married to Daniel Park Custis, of her native county, and the new-married couple were settled at the White House, on the banks of the Pamunkey River. Mr. Custis devoted himself to agricultural pursuits, and became an eminently successful planter. They had four children, two of whom died at an early period. Martha arrived at womanhood, and died at Mount Vernon, in 1770, and John perished at the age of twenty-seven, while in the service of his country, at the siege of Yorktown, in 1781. Mr. Custis died at about middle age, leaving his widow, still young, yet possessed of an ample fortune. Beside extensive landed estates, she had £30,000 sterling in money.

Mrs. Custis was sole executor of her husband's will, and she appears to have been well qualified to discharge the duties which devolved upon her. She conducted her affairs with surprising ability, and the concerns of her extensive fortune seemed to thrive under her management. In 1758, Colonel Washington,

then twenty-six years of age, became accidentally acquainted with the fair widow, and, after a brief courtship, they were married. This occurred in 1759. Soon after, they removed to Mount Vernon, which henceforward became their permanent residence.

Mrs. Washington had no children by this second marriage. Martha and John Custis were, however, fully adopted into the affections of her present husband. In discharging her various domestic duties, and rearing her children, time flowed smoothly on for almost twenty years. In 1775, Washington, being appointed commander-in-chief of the American army, proceeded to Cambridge, and did not return to Mount Vernon till after the peace of 1783, except in a single instance. In December, she proceeded to Cambridge, and joined her husband. Here she remained till spring, having witnessed the siege and evacuation of Boston. She then returned to Virginia.

During the war, it was the custom for the general to despatch an aid-de-camp to Mount Vernon, at the close of each campaign, to escort his wife to head-quarters. The arrival of Lady Washington, as she was now called, at the camp, was an event always anticipated with pleasure, and was the signal for the ladies of the general officers to join their husbands. The appearance of the aid-de-camp, escorting the plain family chariot, with the neat postilions in their scarlet and white liveries, was deemed an epoch in the army, and served to diffuse a cheering influence even amid the gloom which hung over our destinies, at Valley

Forge, Morristown, and West Point. She always remained at head-quarters till the opening of the campaign, and she often remarked, in after life, that it had been her fortune to hear the first cannon at the opening, and the last at the closing, of the several campaigns of the war.

During the whole period of the revolutionary struggle, she preserved her equanimity, together with a degree of cheerfulness which inspired all around her with the brightest hopes of final success. The glorious results of the campaign of 1781 were, however, associated with an event most afflictive to her. John Custis, now her only child, had accompanied Washington to the siege of Boston, and had witnessed the most important events of the contest. At Yorktown, he was one of the aids of Washington, and lived to see the surrender of the British army on the 19th of October; but he died soon after of camp fever, which was then raging to a frightful extent within the enemy's intrenchments.

The war being closed, Washington returned to Mount Vernon. His time was now occupied in the peaceful pursuits of private life. He cultivated his lands, and improved his residence at Mount Vernon by additional buildings, and the laying out of his gardens and grounds. He occasionally diversified his employments by the pleasures of the chase. Much of his time, however, was occupied in discharging the grateful duties of hospitality. His fame was spread far and wide, and his home was crowded with guests, among whom were often seen illustrious strangers from foreign lands. During this happy period, Mrs. Washington performed

the duties of a Virginia housewife, and presided at her well-spread board, with an ease and elegance of manner suited to her character and station.

The period at length arrived when Washington was again to leave his home, and enter upon public duties. Being elected president of the United States, he set out, in the spring of 1789, to join Congress at New York, then the seat of the general government. Accompanied by his lady, he proceeded to that city, every where received by crowds of people, showering upon him their most grateful homage. At Trenton, New Jersey, he was received in a manner which is said to have affected him even to tears. In addition to the usual military compliments, the bridge over the creek running through the town was covered with a triumphal arch, supported by thirteen pillars, entwined and ornamented with flowers and laurel, and bearing on the front, in large gilt letters, this inscription: —

**“THE DEFENDER OF THE MOTHERS
WILL BE THE
PROTECTOR OF THE DAUGHTERS.”**

Here were assembled the mothers and daughters dressed in white, each bearing a basket of flowers, which were strewn before the chief, while they sang it chorus,

“Welcome, mighty chief, once more,
Welcome to this grateful shore;
Now no mercenary foe
Aims again the fatal blow,
Aims at thee the fatal blow.

Virgins fair and matrons grave,
Those thy conquering arms did save,
Build for thee triumphal bowers;
Strew, ye fair, his way with flowers,
Strew your hero's way with flowers.”

Arrived at New York, the president's establishment was

formed upon a scale partaking at once of simplicity and dignity. "The house was handsomely furnished; the equipages neat, with horses of the first order; the servants wore the family liveries; and, with the exception of a steward and housekeeper, the whole establishment differed very little from that of a private gentleman. On Tuesdays, from three to four o'clock, the president received the foreign ambassadors and strangers who wished to be introduced to him. On these occasions, and when opening the session of Congress, he wore a dress sword. His personal apparel was always remarkable for being old-fashioned, and exceedingly plain and neat.

"On Thursdays were the congressional dinners, and on Friday night, Mrs. Washington's drawing-room. The company usually assembled about seven, and rarely staid exceeding ten o'clock. The ladies were seated, and the president passed round the circle, paying his compliments to each. At the drawing-rooms, Mrs. Morris always sat at the right of the lady president, and at all dinners, public or private, at which Robert Morris was a guest, that venerable man was placed at the right of Mrs. Washington. When ladies called at the president's mansion, the habit was for the secretaries and gentlemen of the president's household to hand them to and from their carriages; but when the honored relicts of Greene and Montgomery came, the president himself performed these complimentary duties.

"On the great national festivals of the fourth of July and twenty-second of February, the sages of the revolutionary

Congress and the officers of the revolutionary army renewed their acquaintance with Mrs. Washington. Many and kindly greetings took place, with many a recollection of the days of trial. The members of the Society of Cincinnati, after paying their respects to the chief, were seen to file off towards the parlor, where Lady Washington was in waiting to receive them, and where Wayne, and Mifflin, and Dickenson, and Stewart, and Moylan, and Hartley, and a host of veterans, were cordially welcomed as old friends, and where many an interesting reminiscence was called up, of the head-quarters and the 'times of the revolution.'

"On Sundays, unless the weather was uncommonly severe, the president and Mrs. Washington attended divine service at Christ Church; and in the evenings, the president read to Mrs. Washington, in her chamber, a sermon, or some portion of the sacred writings. No visitors, with the exception of Mr. Trumbull, of Connecticut, — who was then speaker of the house, and afterwards governor of Connecticut, — were admitted on Sunday.

"There was one description of visitors, however, to be found about the first president's mansion, on all days. The old soldiers repaired, as they said, to head-quarters, just to inquire after the health of his excellency and Lady Washington. They knew his excellency was, of course, much engaged; but they would like to see the good lady. One had been a soldier of the life-guard; another had been on duty, when the British threatened to surprise the head-quarters; a third had witnessed that terrible

fellow, Cornwallis, surrender his sword; each one had some touching appeal, with which to introduce himself at the peaceful head-quarters of the president. All were ‘kindly bid to stay,’ were conducted to the steward’s apartments, and refreshments set before them; and, after receiving some little token from the lady, with her best wishes for the health and happiness of an old soldier, they went their ways, while blessings upon their revered commander and the good Lady Washington were uttered by many a war-worn veteran of the revolution.”³

In the autumn of 1789, General Washington made a tour to the Eastern States. Soon after his return, Mrs. Washington addressed a letter to Mrs. Warren, of Boston, giving an account of her views and feelings at that period, which, as it is interesting for the information it contains, and alike creditable to the head and heart of the writer, we present to the reader. It is dated December 26th, 1789.

“Your very friendly letter of last month has afforded much more satisfaction than all the formal compliments and empty ceremonies of mere etiquette could possibly have done. I am not apt to forget the feelings which have been inspired by my former society with good acquaintances, nor to be insensible to their expressions of gratitude to the president; for you know me well enough to do me the justice to believe that I am fond only of what comes from the heart. Under a conviction that the demonstrations of respect and affection to him originate in that source, I cannot

³ American Portrait Gallery.

deny that I have taken some interest and pleasure in them. The difficulties which first presented themselves to view on his first entering upon the presidency, seem thus to be in some measure surmounted. It is owing to the kindness of our numerous friends in all quarters that my new and unwished-for situation is not indeed a burden to me. When I was much younger, I should probably have enjoyed the innocent gayeties of life as much as most persons of my age; but I had long since placed all the prospects of my future happiness in the still enjoyments of the fireside at Mount Vernon.

“I little thought, when the war was finished, that any circumstances could possibly happen, which would call the general into public life again. I had anticipated that, from that moment, we should be suffered to grow old together in solitude and tranquillity. That was the first and dearest wish of my heart. I will not, however, contemplate with too much regret, disappointments that were inevitable, though his feelings and my own were in perfect unison with respect to our predilection for private life. Yet I cannot blame him for having acted according to his ideas of duty in obeying the voice of his country. The consciousness of having attempted to do all the good in his power, and the pleasure of finding his fellow-citizens so well satisfied with the disinterestedness of his conduct, will, doubtless, be some compensation for the great sacrifices which I know he has made. Indeed, on his journey from Mount Vernon to this place in his late tour through the Eastern States, by

every public and every private information which has come to him, I am persuaded he has experienced nothing to make him repent his having acted from what he conceived to be a sense of indispensable duty. On the contrary, all his sensibility has been awakened in receiving such repeated and unequivocal proofs of sincere regard from his countrymen.

“With respect to myself, I sometimes think the arrangement is not quite as it ought to have been, – that I, who had much rather be at home, should occupy a place with which a great many younger and gayer women would be extremely pleased. As my grandchildren and domestic connections make up a great portion of the felicity which I looked for in this world, I shall hardly be able to find any substitute that will indemnify me for the loss of a part of such endearing society. I do not say this because I feel dissatisfied with my present station; for every body and every thing conspire to make me as contented as possible in it; yet I have learned too much of the vanity of human affairs to expect felicity from the scenes of public life. I am still determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions, and not on our circumstances. We carry the seeds of the one or the other about with us in our minds wherever we go.

“I have two of my grandchildren with me, who enjoy advantages in point of education, and who, I trust, by the goodness of Providence, will be a great blessing to me. My other

two grandchildren are with their mother in Virginia.”

In the spring of 1797, bidding adieu to public life, Washington took leave of the seat of government, and returned to Mount Vernon, prepared in good earnest to spend the remainder of his days in retirement. He accepted, indeed, the command of the army of the United States, soon after; but this did not draw him from his home. In 1799, he died, after a brief illness. His affectionate partner was at the bedside when his spirit departed. “It is all over now,” said she. “I shall soon follow him. I have no more trials to pass through.” About two years after, she was seized with bilious fever. Being perfectly aware that her end was at hand, she assembled her grandchildren at her bedside, discoursed with them of their duties in life, of the happy influences of religion, of the consolations it had afforded her in hours of affliction, and the hopes it offered of a blessed immortality; and then, surrounded by weeping relatives, friends, and domestics, the venerable relict of Washington resigned her life into the hands of her Creator, in the seventy-first year of her age.

Few women have figured in the great drama of life, amid scenes so varied and imposing, with so few faults, and so many virtues, as Martha Washington. Identified with the Father of his country in the great events which led to our national independence, she partook much of his thoughts, views, and counsels. In the dark hours of trial, her cheerfulness soothed his anxieties, and her devotional piety aided him in drawing hope

and confidence from Heaven. She was indeed the fit partner of Washington, and, in her sphere, appears to have discharged her duties with a dignity, devotion, and consistency, worthy of her exalted destinies.

MADAME DE STAEL

Jacques Necker, born of Protestant parents at Geneva, was sent, at the age of fifteen, to seek his fortune at Paris. After serving as a clerk in the banking-house of Vernet, he passed into that of the eminent banker Thelusson, where he displayed such a capacity for business, as to lead to his admission into the house as a partner. In a few years he acquired a large fortune, and withdrew from active business, but remained at Paris as minister of the republic of Geneva to the French court. His “Eloge de Colbert,” which gained the prize in the French Academy in 1773, and his essay on the corn laws, first drew towards him the attention of the public, which finally settled upon him as the only person capable of preserving the country from that bankruptcy upon the verge of which it was standing; and Louis XVI., notwithstanding his religious bigotry, was compelled to appoint Necker to the office of director-general of the finances, in 1785, being the first Protestant who had held office since the revocation of the edict of Nantes.

There resided with Madame Thelusson, as companion, a Swiss lady, named Curchod, the same who had the fortune to excite in the bosom of the historian Gibbon, for the first and last time, the passion of love. There is, however, no undue praise in the following description which he has given of her: “The personal attractions of Mdlle. Curchod were embellished by the

virtues and talents of her mind. Her fortune was humble, but her family was respectable. Her mother, a native of France, had preferred her religion to her country. Her father, with the moderation of a philosopher, was content with a small salary and laborious duty in the obscure lot of minister of Cressy, a small village in the mountains of Switzerland. He bestowed a liberal and even learned education on his only daughter. She surpassed his hopes by her proficiency in the sciences and languages; and in her short visits to Lausanne, the wit, the beauty, and the learning, of Mademoiselle Curchod were the theme of universal applause. The report of such a prodigy awakened my curiosity; I saw and loved. I found her learned without pedantry, witty in conversation, pure in sentiment, and elegant in manners.” After the death of her father, she supported herself and her mother by teaching young ladies at Geneva; from whence she removed to Paris.

The character of Necker gained her admiration, her respect, and her love. She married him; and, from that time, the great business of her life was to make him happy. To divert him after the cares of business, she sought to make her house agreeable. She had not the light and gay manners of a Parisian lady, but she had a native grace and sweetness, and a solidity of talent, which caused her society to be sought for by the learned and intelligent, and her drawing-rooms to be filled with the *beaux esprits* of Paris.

Her only daughter, Anne Louisa Germaine, born in 1766,

became her next object of solicitude. She wished that her education should be perfect; she wished her to know every thing, and thought that her mind could not be stored with too many words and facts; she introduced her, even in infancy, to the brilliant circle of her own friends, and learned men were almost her only companions. It was therefore with a transport of delight that the child received, at the age of eleven, a young girl, whom her mother wished her to make her companion, and who afterwards described her thus: "She spoke with a warmth and facility which were already eloquent, and which made a great impression on me. We did not play like children. She at once asked me what my lessons were, if I knew any foreign languages, and if I went often to the play. When I said, I had only been three or four times, she exclaimed, and promised that we should often go together, and, when we came home, write down an account of the piece. It was her habit, she said; and, in short, we were to write to each other every day. We entered the drawing-room. Near the arm-chair of Madame Necker was the stool of her daughter, who was obliged to sit very upright. As soon as she had taken her accustomed place, three or four old gentlemen came up, and spoke to her with the utmost kindness. One of them, in a little round wig, took her hands in his, held them a long time, and entered into conversation with her, as if she had been twenty. This was the Abbé Raynal; the others were Messrs. Marmontel, Thomas, the Marquis de Pesay, and Baron de Grimm. We sat down at table. It was a picture to see

how Mademoiselle Necker listened. She did not speak herself; but so animated was her face, that she appeared to converse with all. Her eyes followed the looks and movements of those who talked; it seemed as if she grasped their ideas before they were expressed. She entered into every subject, even politics, which at this epoch was one of the most engrossing topics. After dinner, a good deal of company arrived. Each guest, as he approached Madame Necker, addressed her daughter with some compliment or pleasantry; she replied to all with ease and grace. They delighted to attack and embarrass her, and to excite her childish imagination, which was already brilliant. The cleverest men were those who took the greatest pleasure in making her talk." When she was not in society, she was kept constantly at her books. She wrote a great deal, and her writings were read in public and applauded. This system of education had its natural results. Praise, and reputation, and success in society, became as necessary to her as her daily food: her understanding, brilliant, but not profound, gathered knowledge by cursory reading and from conversation – not by hard study; hence it was superficial.

Her physical strength could not endure this constant straining and excitement of the mind. At fourteen, her physicians ordered that she should be removed to the country, and should give up all study. Madame Necker was deeply disappointed: unable to carry her system of education to the fullest extent, she abandoned it altogether; henceforth she took little interest in the talents of her daughter, and, when she heard her praised, would say,

“O, it is nothing, absolutely nothing, in comparison to what I intended to make her.” This carelessness on the part of her mother, developed in the young girl an ardent affection for her father, which she dwells upon in her writings with so much fervor. There existed between them the most unreserved and open communication of thought. He delighted in her talents, which she exerted for his entertainment, and to amuse his hours of leisure. Her superior success in this last particular even excited the jealousy of her mother, who sought by reproof to check the outpouring of her wit and imagination. Mademoiselle listened with respect to the reproof, but took the first opportunity to escape from her mother’s side, and shelter herself behind her father’s chair, where she soon collected the cleverest men in the room to listen to her sallies, and to be charmed by her eloquence.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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