SAMUEL G. GOODRICH

LIVES OF CELEBRATED WOMEN

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PREFACE.

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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 6 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.

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LUCRETIA AND MARGARET DAVIDSON.

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“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 10 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 11 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 12 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!”

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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?
14
’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 15 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 16 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.

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“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 18 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 19 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 20 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 21 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.

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“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, 23 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 24 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, 25 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, 26 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, 27 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 30 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, 31 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, 32 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