



THE WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTION (1848, 1850)
by Mrs. Ellet.

Are 19th century American histories always, or do they at least tend to be, overly sentimental, or superficial, or outright fallacious (as not infrequently is casually claimed or assumed of them?) It depends. Some indeed are, and except perhaps as peculiar curiosities or mementos of the era in which they were writ, can safely be passed up. Others, on the other hand, while they suffer from sundry defects, including even their being of dubious accuracy, may still contain enough in them of value to make them worth turning to. Works like that of Alexander Garden, Lyman Draper, and Benson J. Lossing, for instance and to name a few of the more credible chroniclers, cannot always be taken at their word and their patriotic bias will remind us to be careful in using them without reservation or a degree of circumspect skepticism. And yet as long as we are careful to double check and research what they assert (and where we can do so), they often are rich mines of scarce and valuable information not to be found, or at least readily found, anywhere else, and it is the short-sighted scholar, rather than the wise and savvy one, who out of hand dismisses them as unreliable or wholly without merit. Sometimes we simply don't know whether something stated or claimed is in fact true and correct. Even so, it usually won't hurt to generally give a 19th century historian the benefit of the doubt; that is, when there is any doubt; as long as do so cautiously and with qualified approbation. Moreover, and where there is a question as to accuracy, they may still provide us with a useful hint or suggestion that may lead us to something worth following up on; so that, for example, what we might end up discovering is that they were right, but only partly so, and had we denied them all credence regarding some rare or unheard of matter, we will or might find ourselves (did we know better) all the poorer for having done so.

Elizabeth F. Ellet's three volume *The Women of the American Revolution* (vols. I and II from 1848, and vol. 3 from 1850) is a particularly good case in point of this phenomena. So much of what she records we may rightly wonder at the exact truth of; despite her own insisting that she has carefully striven for historical precision. Nevertheless much of what she relates we will find nowhere else, and it would be foolish to assume it wrong merely because we can't confirm what she says elsewhere. At the same time, and even if we in a given case might reasonably doubt what is claimed and that derives from someone's reminiscences, we do get a sense of what mattered to people, both in Revolutionary and 19th century America, and this of itself is helpful and not without benefit to a deeper understanding of the people and era which she covers.

Leaving aside that Ellet's is essentially, albeit understandably for its time, a *whites only* history, her work is actually quite ground breaking and progressive in bringing special attention to the vital and regularly overlooked role of women in the Revolutionary War, and doing so no less as a serious, or at any rate would-be serious, historian. While hardly a *great* writer, her style being not unusually affected and overly mannered of a sort typical of 19th century female prose, she was a hard working and zealous reporter, correspondent, interviewer, and researcher. It was only fairly recently that I myself became acquainted with her work; only to be much gratified in finding that there is much it contains that, as

supplementary material, would (in parts) make interesting and valuable additions to my own history of the Revolutionary War in the South 1780-1781, and that I had, despite *many* years of readings and research, hitherto never heard of or was acquainted with.

In 1850, Ellet also put out *Domestic History of the American Revolution* and which transmutes into a single narrative the biographical sketches presented in *Women of the American Revolution*.

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#### CATHARINE GREENE.

Catharine Littlefield, the eldest daughter of John Littlefield and Phebe Ray, was born in New Shoreham, on Block Island, 1753. When very young, she came with her sister to reside in the family of Governor Greene, of Warwick, a lineal descendant of the founder of the family, whose wife was her aunt. The house in which they lived, twelve or fourteen miles south of Providence, is still standing. It is situated on a hill, which commands a view of the whole of Narragansett Bay, with its islands. Mount Hope, associated with King Philip, and the Indian traditions, fills the back-ground, rising slightly above the line of the horizon. It was here that Miss Littlefield's happy girlhood was passed; and it was here also that she first knew Nathanael Greene. She often went on a visit to her family at Block Island. Nathanael would come there to see her; and the time was spent by the young people in amusements, particularly in riding and dancing, of which the future general was remarkably fond, notwithstanding his father's efforts to whip out of him such idle propensities. He was not discouraged by the example of his fair companion from any of these outbreaks of youthful gaiety; for the tradition of the country around, and the recollections of all who knew her, testify that there never lived a more joyous, frolicsome creature than "Kate Littlefield." In person, she was singularly lovely. Her figure was of the medium height, and light and graceful at this period, though in after years she was inclined to *embonpoint*. Her eyes were gray, and her complexion fair; her features regular and animated. The facilities for female education being very limited at that period, Miss Littlefield enjoyed few advantages of early cultivation. She was not particularly fond of study, though she read the books that came in her way, and profited by what she read. She possessed, moreover, a marvellous quickness of perception, and the faculty of comprehending a subject with surprising readiness. Thus in conversation, she seemed to appreciate every thing said on almost any topic; and frequently would astonish others by the ease with which her mind took hold of the ideas presented. She was at all times an intelligent listener...

How, when, or by what course of wooing, the youthful lover [Greene] won the bright, volatile, coquettish maiden, cannot be ascertained; but it is probable their attachment grew in the approving eyes of their relatives, and met with no obstacle till sealed by the matrimonial vow. The marriage took place July 20th, 1774, and the young couple removed to Coventry. Little, it is likely, did the fair Catharine dream of her future destiny as a soldier's wife; or that the broad-brimmed hat of her young husband covered brows that should one day be wreathed with the living laurels won by genius and patriotism. We have no means of knowing with how much interest she watched the over-clouding of the political horizon, or the dire advance of the necessity that drove the Colonies to armed resistance. But when her husband's decision was made, and he stood forth a determined patriot, separating himself from the community in which he had been born and reared, by embracing a military profession, his spirited wife did her part to aid and encourage him. The papers of the day frequently notice her presence, among other ladies, at headquarters. Like Mrs. Washington, she passed the active season of the campaign at home. Hers was a new establishment at Coventry, a village in Rhode Island, where her husband had erected a forge, and built himself what then passed for a princely house on the banks of one of those small streams which form so beautiful a feature in Rhode Island scenery. When the army before Boston was inoculated for the small pox, she gave up her house for a hospital. She was there during the attack on Rhode Island; and every cannon on the hard fought day which closed that memorable enterprise, must have awakened the echoes of those quiet hills. When the army went into winter quarters, she always set out to rejoin her husband, sharing cheerfully the narrow quarters and hard fare of a camp. She partook of the privations of the dreary winter at Valley Forge, in that "darkest hour of the Revolution;" and it appears that, as at home, her gay spirit shed light around her even in such scenes, softening and enlivening the gloom which might have weighed many a bold heart into

despondency. There are extant some interesting little notes of Kosciusko, in very imperfect English, which show her kindness to her husband's friends, and the pleasure she took in alleviating their sufferings.

...Mrs. Greene joined her husband in the South after the close of the active campaign of 1781, and remained with him till the end of the war, residing on the islands during the heats of summer, and the rest of the time at head-quarters. In the spring of 1783, she returned to the North where she remained till the General had completed his arrangements for removing to the South. They then established themselves at Mulberry Grove, on a plantation which had been presented to Greene by the State of Georgia...

It was while on a visit to Savannah with his wife, that General Greene was seized with the disease which in a few days closed his brilliant career. They were then preparing to return and pass the summer at the North. The weight of care that fell on Mrs. Greene in consequence of this event, would have crushed an ordinary mind; but she struggled nobly through it all. Some years afterwards, thinking that some lands she owned on Cumberland Island offered greater advantages than Mulberry Grove, she removed there with her family; dividing her time between her household duties and the cares of an extensive hospitality; occasionally visiting the North in the summer, but continuing to look upon the South as her home. It was while she lived at Mulberry Grove, that she became instrumental in introducing to the world an invention [Eli Whitney's cotton gin] which has covered with wealth the fields of the South...

...Mr. Phineas Miller entered into an agreement with Whitney, to bear the expense of maturing the invention, and to divide the future profits. He was a man of remarkably active and cultivated mind. Mrs. Greene married him some time after the death of General Greene. She survived him several years—dying just before the close of the late war with England. Her remains rest in the family burial-ground at Cumberland Island, where but a few years afterwards, the body of one of her husband's best officers and warmest friends -- the gallant [Henry] Lee -- was brought to moulder by her side.<sup>1</sup> She left four children by her first marriage -- three daughters and one son -- of whom the son and second daughter are still living.

Mrs. Miller related to a lady residing in New York, the incident of Colonel Aaron Burr's requesting permission to stop at her house, when he came South, after his fatal duel with General Hamilton. She would not refuse the demand upon her hospitality, but his victim had been her friend; and she could not receive as a guest, one whose hands were crimsoned with his blood. She gave Burr permission to remain; but at the same time ordered her carriage, and quitted her house; returning as soon as he had taken his departure. This little anecdote is strongly illustrative of her impulsive and generous character. The lady who mentioned it to me had herself experienced, in time of the illness of one dear to her, Mrs. Miller's sympathy and active kindness; and described her manners as gentle, frank and winning. Her praise, were I at liberty to mention her name, would do the highest honor to its object.

The descendants of Mrs. Greene regard her with affectionate reverence. She was a loved and honored wife, and a tender yet judicious mother. Her discipline was remarkably strict, and none of her children ever thought of disobeying her. Yet she would sometimes join with child-like merriment in their sports. A lady now living in Providence states, that one day, after the close of the war, passing General Greene's house in Newport, she saw both him and his wife playing "puss in the corner," with the children.

She loved a jest, and sometimes too, a hearty laugh upon her friends. On one occasion, while living at Newport after the close of the war, she disguised herself like an old beggar-woman, so effectually that she was not recognized even by her brother-in-law. In this dress she went round to the houses of her friends to ask charity -- telling a piteous tale of losses and sufferings. At one house they were at the card-table; and one of her most intimate friends, as she ordered her off, desired the servant to look well as she went out and see that she did not steal something from the entry. At another, the master of the house was just sitting down to supper; and though an old acquaintance and a shrewd man, was not only deceived, but so moved by her story, that he gave her the loaf he was on the point of cutting for himself. When she had sufficiently amused herself with this practical test of her friends' charity, she took off her disguise, and

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<sup>1</sup> [Edit. Note.] After a stay in Barbados and nearby islands to recuperate from bad health, in large part a result of the injuries he had suffered in the Baltimore riot of late July 1812, Lee in early 1818 finally returned home by way of Georgia, and the Greene plantation; where he died before being able to reach Virginia.

indulged her merriment at their expense; reminding them that with the exception of the loaf, she had been turned away without any experience of their liberality...<sup>2</sup>

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#### REBECCA FRANKS.

“The celebrated Miss Franks” -- so distinguished for intelligence and high accomplishment, in Revolutionary times, could not properly be passed over in a series of notices of remarkable women of that period. In the brilliant position she occupied in fashionable society, she exerted, as may well be believed, no slight influence; for wit and beauty are potent champions in any cause for which they choose to arm themselves. That her talents were generally employed on the side of humanity and justice, -- that the pointed shafts of her wit, which spared neither friend nor foe, were aimed to chastise presumption and folly -- we may infer from the amiable disposition which it is recorded she possessed. Admired in fashionable circles, and courted for the charms of her conversation, she must have found many opportunities of exercising her feminine privilege of softening asperities and alleviating suffering -- as well as of humbling the arrogance of those whom military success rendered regardless of the feelings of others. Though a decided loyalist, her satire did not spare those whose opinions she favored. It is related of her, that at a splendid ball given by the officers of the British army to the ladies of New York, she ventured one of those jests frequently uttered, which must have been severely felt in the faint prospect that existed of a successful termination to the war. During an interval of dancing, Sir Henry Clinton, previously engaged in conversation with Miss Franks, called out to the musicians, “Give us ‘Britons, strike home.’” “The commander-in-chief,” exclaimed she, “has made a mistake; he meant to say, ‘Britons -- go home.’”

The keenness of her irony, and her readiness at repartee, were not less promptly shown in sharp tilting with the American officers. At the festival of the *Mischianza*, where even whig ladies were present, Miss Franks had appeared as one of the princesses. She remained in Philadelphia after its evacuation by the British troops. Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Steward of Maryland, dressed in a fine suit of scarlet, took an early occasion to pay his compliments; and gallantly said -- “I have adopted your colors, my princess, the better to secure a courteous reception. Deign to smile on a true knight.” To this covert taunt Miss Franks made no reply: but turning to the company who surrounded her, exclaimed -- “How the ass glories in the lion’s skin!” The same officer met with another equally severe rebuff, while playing with the same weapons. The conversation of the company was interrupted by a loud clamor from the street, which caused them to hasten to the windows. High head dresses were then the reigning fashion among the English belles. A female appeared in the street, surrounded by a crowd of idlers, ragged in her apparel, and barefoot; but adorned with a towering head-dress in the extreme of the mode. Miss Franks readily perceived the intent of this pageant; and on the lieutenant-colonel’s observing that the woman was equipped in the English fashion, replied, “Not altogether, colonel; for though the style of her head is British, her shoes and stockings are in the genuine continental fashion!”

Many anecdotes of her quick and brilliant wit are extant in the memory of individuals, and many sarcastic speeches attributed to her have been repeated. It is represented that her information was extensive, and that few were qualified to enter the lists with her. General Charles Lee, in the humorous letter he addressed to her -- a *jeu d’esprit* she is said to have received with serious anger -- calls her “a lady who has had every human and divine advantage.”

Rebecca Franks was the daughter and youngest child of David Franks,<sup>3</sup> a Jewish merchant, who emigrated to this country about a century since. He married an Englishwoman before coming to America, and had three sons and two daughters. The eldest daughter married Andrew Hamilton, brother to the well-

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<sup>2</sup> *The Women of the American Revolution*, vol. I (1856, sixth edition), pp. 62-73.

<sup>3</sup> [Edit. Note.] Rebecca was the cousin and her father was the uncle of Maj. David Salisbury Franks (c.1740–1793), a one time aide to Benedict Arnold. He and Lieut. Col. Richard Varick, another aide of Arnold’s, and despite their both previously honorable and distinguished conduct, were court martialed on charges of treason; owing to their connection with the turncoat. The two officers were, notwithstanding, completely exonerated, and which included the endorsement and trust of Washington. In the last year of and after the war, Franks served as a diplomat for Congress in France, and in 1786 participated in the negotiations with Morocco. Not long after in 1793, he died in Philadelphia during the Yellow Fever epidemic.

known proprietor of "The Woodlands." After the termination of the war, Rebecca married General Henry Johnson, a British officer of great merit, and accompanied him to England. He distinguished himself by some act of gallantry in one of the outbreaks of rebellion in Ireland, and received the honor of knighthood. Their residence was at Bath, where their only surviving son still lives. The other son was killed at the battle of Waterloo.

The lady who furnished the above details, informed me that her brother was entertained in 1810, at Lady Johnson's house in Bath, where she was living in elegant style, and exercising with characteristic grace the duties of hospitality, and the virtues that adorn social life. He described her person as of the middle height, rather inclining to embonpoint; and her expression of countenance as very agreeable, with fine eyes. Her manners were frank and cheerful, and she appeared happy in contributing to the happiness of others. Sir Henry was at that time living.

It is said that Lady Johnson, not long after this period, expressed to a young American officer her penitence for her former toryism, and her pride and pleasure in the victories of her countrymen on the Niagara frontier, in the war of 1812. It has been remarked that favorable sentiments towards the Americans are general among loyalists residing in England; while, on the other hand, the political animosity of Revolutionary times is still extant in the British American Colonies. A loyal spinster of four-score residing in one of these, when on a visit to one of her friends, some two years since, saw on the walls, among several portraits of distinguished men, a print of "the traitor Washington." She was so much troubled at the sight, that her friend, to appease her, ordered it to be taken down and put away during her visit. A story is told also of a gentleman high in office in the same colony, on whom an agent of the "New York Albion" called to deliver the portrait of Washington which the publisher that year presented to his subscribers. The gentleman, highly insulted, ordered the astonished agent to take "the -- thing" out of his sight, and to strike his name instantly from the list...<sup>4</sup>

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ELIZABETH, GRACE, AND RACHEL MARTIN.

The daring exploit of two women in Ninety-Six District, furnishes an instance of courage as striking as any remembered among the traditions of South Carolina. During the sieges of Augusta and Cambridge, the patriotic enthusiasm that prevailed among the people prompted to numerous acts of personal risk and sacrifice. This spirit, encouraged by the successes of Sumter and others over the British arms, was earnestly fostered by General Greene, whose directions marked at least the outline of every undertaking. In the efforts made to strike a blow at the invader's power, the sons of the Martin family were among the most distinguished for active service rendered, and for injuries sustained at the enemy's hands. The wives of the two eldest, during their absence, remained at home with their mother-in-law. One evening intelligence came to them that a courier, conveying important despatches to one of the upper stations, was to pass that night along the road, guarded by two British officers. They determined to waylay the party, and at the risk of their lives, to obtain possession of the papers. For this purpose the two young women disguised themselves in their husbands' clothes, and being well provided with arms, took their station at a point on the road which they knew the escort must pass. It was already late, and they had not waited long before the tramp of horses was heard in the distance. It may be imagined with what anxious expectation the heroines awaited the approach of the critical moment on which so much depended. The forest solitude around them, the silence of night, and the darkness, must have added to the terrors conjured up by busy fancy. Presently the courier appeared, with his attendant guards. As they came close to the spot, the disguised women leaped from their covert in the bushes, presented their pistols at the officers, and demanded the instant surrender of the party and their despatches. The men were completely taken by surprise, and in their alarm at the sudden attack, yielded a prompt submission. The seeming soldiers put them on their parole, and having taken possession of the papers, hastened home by a short cut through the woods. No time was lost in sending the important documents by a trusty messenger to General Greene. The adventure had a singular termination. The paroled officers, thus thwarted in their mission, returned by the

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-182.

road they had taken, and stopping at the house of Mrs. Martin, asked accommodation as weary travellers, for the night. The hostess inquired the reason of their returning so soon after they had passed. They replied by showing their paroles, saying they had been taken prisoners by two rebel lads. The ladies rallied them upon their want of intrepidity, "Had you no arms?" was asked. The officers answered that they had arms, but had been suddenly taken off their guard, and were allowed no time to use their weapons. They departed the next morning, having no suspicion that they owed their capture to the very women whose hospitality they had claimed...⁵

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MARY SLOCUMB.

The first expedition into North Carolina projected by Lord Cornwallis, was baffled by the fall of Colonel Ferguson at King's Mountain. The disaster at the Cowpens forbade perseverance in the second attempt and was followed by the memorable retreat of Greene. The battle of Guilford took place in March, 1781; and towards the end of April, while Lord Rawdon encountered Greene at Hobkirk's Hill, Cornwallis set out on his march from Wilmington, bent on his avowed purpose of achieving the conquest of Virginia. On his march towards Halifax, he encamped for several days on the river Neuse, in what is now called Wayne County, North Carolina. His head-quarters were at Springbank, while Colonel Tarleton, with his renowned legion, encamped on the plantation of Lieutenant Slocumb. This consisted of level and extensive fields, which at that season presented a most inviting view of fresh verdure from the mansion-house. Lord Cornwallis himself gave it the name of "Pleasant Green," which it ever afterwards retained. The owner of this fine estate held a subaltern's commission in the State line under Colonel Washington, and was in command of a troop of light horse, raised in his own neighborhood, whose general duty it was to act as Rangers, scouring the country for many miles around, watching the movements of the enemy, and punishing the loyalists when detected in their vocation of pillage and murder. These excursions had been frequent for two or three years, and were often of several weeks' duration. At the present time Slocumb had returned to the vicinity, and had been sent with twelve or fifteen recruits to act as scouts in the neighborhood of the British General. The morning of the day on which Tarleton took possession of his plantation, he was near Springbank, and reconnoitered the encampment of Cornwallis, which he supposed to be his whole force. He then, with his party, pursued his way slowly along the south bank of the Neuse, in the direction of his own house, little dreaming that his beautiful and peaceful home, where, some time before, he had left his wife and child, was then in the possession of the terrible Tarleton.

During these frequent excursions of the Rangers, and the necessary absence of her husband, the superintendence of the plantation had always devolved upon Mrs. Slocumb. She depended for protection upon her slaves, whose fidelity she had proved, and upon her own fearless and intrepid spirit. The scene of the occupation of her house, and Tarleton's residence with her, remained through life indelibly impressed on her memory, and were described by her to one who enjoyed the honor of her intimate friendship. I am permitted to give his account, copied almost verbatim from notes taken at the time the occurrences were related by Mrs. Slocumb.

It was about ten o'clock on a beautiful spring morning, that a splendidly-dressed officer, accompanied by two aids, and followed at a short distance by a guard of some twenty troopers, dashed up to the piazza in front of the ancient-looking mansion. Mrs. Slocumb was sitting there, with her child and a near relative, a young lady, who afterwards became the wife of Major Williams. A few house servants were also on the piazza.

The officer raised his cap, and bowing to his horse's neck, addressed the lady, with the question --

"Have I the pleasure of seeing the mistress of this house and plantation!"

"It belongs to my husband."

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-276.

“Is he at home?” “He is not.” “Is he a rebel?” “No sir. He is in the army of his country, and fighting against our invaders; therefore not a rebel.” It is not a little singular, that although the people of that day gloried in their rebellion, they always took offence at being called rebels.

“I fear, madam,” said the officer, “we differ in opinion.” A friend to his country will be the friend of the king, our master.”

“Slaves only acknowledge a master in this country,” replied the lady.

A deep flush crossed the florid cheeks of Tarleton, for he was the speaker; and turning to one of his aid[s], he ordered him to pitch the tents and form the encampment in the orchard and field on their right. To the other aid his orders were to detach a quarter guard and station piquets on each road. Then bowing very low, he added: “Madam, the service of his Majesty requires the temporary occupation of your property; and if it would not be too great an inconvenience, I will take up my quarters in your house.”

The tone admitted no controversy. Mrs. Slocumb answered: “My family consists of only myself, my sister and child, and a few negroes. We are your prisoners.”

From the piazza where he seated himself, Tarleton commanded a view of the ground on which his troops were arranging their camp. The mansion fronted the east, and an avenue one hundred and fifty feet wide, and about half a mile in length, stretched to the eastern side of the plantation, where was a highway, with open grounds beyond it, partly dry meadow and partly sand barren. This avenue was lined on the south side by a high fence, and a thick hedge-row of forest trees. These are now removed, and replaced by the Pride of India and other ornamental trees. On the north side extended the common rail-fence seven or eight feet high, such as is usually seen on plantations in the low country. The encampment of the British troops being on that part of the plantation lying south of the avenue, it was completely screened by the fences and hedge-row from the view of any one approaching from down the country.

While the men were busied, different officers came in at intervals, making their reports and receiving orders. Among others, a tory captain, whom Mrs. Slocumb immediately recognized -- for before joining the royal army he had lived fifteen or twenty miles below -- received orders in her hearing to take his troop and scour the country for two or three miles round.

In an hour every thing was quiet, and the plantation presented the romantic spectacle of a regular encampment of some ten or eleven hundred of the choicest cavalry of the British monarch.

Mrs. Slocumb now addressed herself to the duty of preparing for her uninvited guests. The dinner set before the king's officers was, in her own words to her friend, “as a good dinner as you have now before you, and of much the same materials.” A description of what then constituted a good dinner in that region may not be inappropriate. “The first dish, was, of course, the boiled ham, flanked with the plate of greens. Opposite was the turkey, supported by the laughing baked sweet potatoes; a plate of boiled beef, another of sausages, and a third with a pair of baked fowls, formed a line across the centre of the table; half a dozen dishes of different pickles, stewed fruit, and other condiments filled up the interstices of the board.” The dessert, too, was abundant and various. Such a dinner, it may well be supposed, met the particular approbation of the royal officers, especially as the fashion of that day introduced stimulating drinks to the table, and the peach brandy prepared under Lieutenant Slocumb's own supervision, was of the most excellent sort. It received the unqualified praise of the party; and its merits were freely discussed. A Scotch officer, praising it by the name of whiskey, protested that he had never drunk as good out of Scotland. An officer speaking with a slight brogue, insisted it was not whiskey, and that no Scotch drink ever equalled it. “To my mind,” said he, “it tastes as yonder orchard smells.”

“Allow me, madam,” said Colonel Tarleton, to inquire where the spirits we are drinking is procured.”

“From the orchard where your tents stand,” answered Mrs. Slocumb.

“Colonel,” said the Irish captain, “when we conquer this country, is it not to be divided out among us?”

“The officers of this army,” replied the Colonel, “will undoubtedly receive large possessions of the conquered American provinces.”

Mrs. Slocumb here interposed. “Allow me to observe and prophesy,” said she, “the only land in these United States which will ever remain in possession of a British officer, will measure but six feet by two.”

“Excuse me, madam,” remarked Tarleton. “For your sake I regret to say -- this beautiful plantation will be the ducal seat of some of us.”

“Don’t trouble yourself about me,” retorted the spirited lady. “My husband is not a man who would allow a duke, or even a king, to have a quiet seat upon his ground.”

At this point the conversation was interrupted by rapid volleys of fire-arms, appearing to proceed from the wood a short distance to the eastward. One of the aids pronounced it some straggling scout, running from the picket-guard; but the experience of Colonel Tarleton could not be easily deceived.

“There are rifles and muskets,” said he, “as well as pistols; and too many to pass unnoticed. Order boots and saddles, and you -- Captain, take your troop in the direction of the firing.”

The officer rushed out to execute his orders, while the Colonel walked into the piazza, whither he was immediately followed by the anxious ladies. Mrs. Slocumb’s agitation and alarm may be imagined; for she guessed but too well the cause of the interruption. On the first arrival of the officers she had been importuned, even with harsh threats -- not, however, by Tarleton -- tell where her husband, when absent on duty, was likely to be found; but after her repeated and peremptory refusals, had escaped further molestation on the subject. She feared now that he had returned unexpectedly, and might fall into the enemy’s hands before he was aware of their presence.

Her sole hope was in a precaution she had adopted soon after the coming of her unwelcome guests. Having heard Tarleton give the order to the tory captain as before-mentioned, to patrol the country, she immediately sent for an old negro, and gave him directions to take a bag of corn to the mill about four miles distant, on the road she knew her husband must travel if he returned that day. “Big George” was instructed to warn his master of the danger of approaching his home. With the indolence and curiosity natural to his race, however, the old fellow remained loitering about the premises, and was at this time lurking under the hedge-row, admiring the red coats, dashing plumes, and shining helmets of the British troopers.

The Colonel and the ladies continued on the look-out from the piazza. “May I be allowed, madam,” at length said Tarleton, “without offence, to inquire if any part of Washington’s army is in this neighborhood.”

“I presume it is known to you,” replied Mrs. Slocumb, “that the Marquis and Greene are in this State. And you would not of course,” she added, after a slight pause, “be surprised at a call from Lee, or your old friend Colonel Washington, who, although a perfect gentleman, it is said shook your hand (pointing to the scar left by Washington’s sabre) very rudely, when you last met.”⁶

This spirited answer inspired Tarleton with apprehensions that the skirmish in the woods was only the prelude to a concerted attack on his camp. His only reply was a loud order to form the troops on the

⁶ * [Footnote in the original] As I cannot distrust the authority on which I have received this anecdote, it proves that on more than one occasion the British colonel was made to feel the shaft of female wit, in allusion to the unfortunate battle of the Cowpens. It is said that in a close encounter between Washington and Tarleton during that action, the latter was wounded by a sabre cut on the hand. Colonel Washington, as is well known, figured in some of the skirmishes in North Carolina.

right; and springing on his charger, he dashed down the avenue a few hundred feet, to a breach in the hedge-row, leaped the fence, and in a moment was at the head of his regiment, which was already in line.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Slocumb, with John Howell, a private in his band, Henry Williams, and the brother of Mrs. Slocumb, Charles Hooks, a boy of about thirteen years of age, was leading a hot pursuit of the tory captain who had been sent to reconnoitre the country, and some of his routed troop. These were first discerned in the open grounds east and northeast of the plantation, closely pursued by a body of American mounted militia; while a running fight was kept up with different weapons, in which four or five broad swords gleamed conspicuous. The foremost of the pursuing party appeared too busy with the tories to see any thing else; and they entered the avenue at the same moment with the party pursued. With what horror and consternation did Mrs. Slocumb recognize her husband, her brother, and two of her neighbors, in chase of the tory captain and four of his band, already half-way down the avenue, and unconscious that they were rushing into the enemy's midst!

About the middle of the avenue one of the tories fell; and the course of the brave and imprudent young officers was suddenly arrested by "Big George," who sprang directly in front of their horses, crying, "Hold on, massa! de debbil here! Look yon [i.e., "yonder"]!" A glance to the left showed the young men their danger: they were within pistol shot of a thousand men drawn up in order of battle. Wheeling their horses, they discovered a troop already leaping the fence into the avenue in their rear. Quick as thought they again wheeled their horses, and dashed down the avenue directly towards the house, where stood the quarter-guard to receive them. On reaching the garden fence -- a rude structure formed of a kind of lath, and called a wattled fence -- they leaped that and the next, amid a shower of balls from the guard, cleared the canal at one tremendous leap, and scouring across the open field to the northwest, were in the shelter of the wood before their pursuers could clear the fences of the enclosure. The whole ground of this adventure may be seen as the traveller passes over the Wilmington railroad, a mile and a half south of Dudley depot.

A platoon had commenced the pursuit; but the trumpets sounded the recall before the flying Americans had crossed the canal. The presence of mind and lofty language of the heroic wife, had convinced the British Colonel that the daring men who so fearlessly dashed into his camp were supported, by a formidable force at hand. Had the truth been known, and the fugitives pursued, nothing could have prevented the destruction not only of the four who fled, but of the rest of the company on the east side of the plantation.

Tarleton had rode back to the front of the house, where he remained eagerly looking after the fugitives till they disappeared in the wood. He called for the tory captain, who presently came forward, questioned him about the attack in the woods, asked the names of the American officers, and dismissed him to have his wounds dressed, and see after his men. The last part of the order was needless; for nearly one-half of his troop had fallen. The ground is known to this day as the Dead Men's Field.

As Tarleton walked into the house he observed to Mrs. Slocumb, "Your husband made us a short visit, madam. I should have been happy to make his acquaintance, and that of his friend, Mr. Williams."

"I have little doubt," replied the wife, "that you will meet the gentlemen, and they will thank you for the polite manner in which you treat their friends."

The Colonel observed apologetically, that necessity compelled them to occupy her property; that they took only such things as were necessary to their support, for which they were instructed to offer proper remuneration; and that every thing should be done to render their stay as little disagreeable as possible. The lady expressed her thankfulness for his kindness, and withdrew to her room, while the officers returned to their peach-brandy and coffee, and closed the day with a merry night.

Slocumb and his companions passed rapidly round the plantation, and returned to the ground where the encounter had taken place, collecting on the way the stragglers of his troop. Near their bivouac he saw the tory captain's brother, who had been captured by the Americans, hanging by a bridal rein from the top of a sapling bent down for the purpose, and struggling in the agonies of death. Hastening to the spot, he severed the rein with a stroke of his sword, and with much difficulty restored him to life. Many in the

lower part of North Carolina can remember an old man whose protruded eyes and suffused countenance presented the appearance of one half strangled. He it was who thus owed his life and liberty to the humanity of his generous foe.

Mr. Slocumb, by the aid of Major Williams, raised about two hundred men in the neighborhood, and with this force continued to harass the rear of the royal army, frequently cutting off foraging parties, till they crossed the Roanoke, when they joined the army of La Fayette at Warrenton. He remained with the army till the surrender at Yorktown.

It need hardly be mentioned that "Big George" received his reward for this and other services. His life with his master was one of ease and indulgence. On the division of Colonel Slocumb's estate some years since, a considerable amount was paid to enable the faithful slave to spend the remnant of his days with his wife, who belonged to another person...⁷

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#### DEBORAH SAMSON.<sup>8</sup>

...Deborah Samson was the youngest child of poor parents, who lived in the county of Plymouth, Massachusetts. Their poverty, rendered hopeless by pernicious habits, was the least of the evils suffered by the unfortunate children. Charity interposed to rescue them from the effects of evil example; they were removed from their parents, and placed in different families, where a prospect was afforded of their receiving proper care and instruction to fit them for maintaining themselves when arrived at a suitable age. Deborah found a home in the house of a respectable farmer, whose wife, a well-disposed woman, bestowed upon her as much attention as is common in such cases. The friendless and destitute girl was kindly treated, and provided with comfortable food and clothing; but had no advantages of education. Her keen feeling of this deprivation, and the efforts she made to repair the deficiency, show her possession of a mind naturally superior, and that judicious training might have fitted her to promote in no insignificant degree the good of society. There was none to teach her; but she seized every opportunity for acquiring knowledge. She borrowed books from the children who passed the house in which she lived on their way to and from school, and persevered with untiring exertion in her private studies, till she had learned to read tolerably well; but attempted no other branch of scholarship, until, on the completion of her eighteenth year, the law released her from her indentures.

Her first arrangement on becoming the mistress of her own movements, was to secure herself the advantages of instruction. The only way in which she could do this was by engaging to work in the family of a farmer one half the time, in payment for her board and lodging, and attending the common district school in the neighborhood. Her improvement was rapid beyond example. In a few months she had acquired more knowledge than many of her schoolmates had done in years; and was by them regarded as quite a prodigy of industry and attainment.

Meantime, the Revolutionary struggle had commenced. The gloom that had accompanied the outburst of the storm, hung over the whole land; the news of the carnage on the plains of Lexington -- the sound of the cannon at Bunker's Hill, had reached every dwelling, and vibrated on the heart of every patriot in New England. The zeal which had urged the men to quit their homes for the battle-field, found its way to a female bosom; Deborah felt as if she would shrink from no effort or sacrifice in the cause which awakened all her enthusiasm. She entered with the most lively interest into every plan for the relief of the army, and bitterly regretted that as a woman she could do no more, and that she had not the privilege of a man, of shedding her blood for her country.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 304-315.

<sup>8</sup> [Edit. Note.] There is a contemporary memoir about Samson and her war experiences titled *The Female Review: Or, Memoirs of an American Lady; Whose Life and Character are Peculiarly Distinguished-Being a Continental Soldier, for nearly three years, in the Late American War. During which Time, she performed the Duties of Every Department, Into which She was Called with Punctual Exactness, Fidelity and Honor, and Preserved her Chastity Inviolable, by the most Artful Concealment of Her sex. With an Appendix, Containing Characteristic Traits, by Different Hands, Her Taste for Economy, Principles of Domestic Education, &c, By a Citizen of Massachusetts* (1797). It is available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N24494.0001.001>

There is no reason to believe that any consideration foreign to the purest patriotism, impelled her to the resolution of assuming male attire, and enlisting in the army. She could have been actuated by no desire of gaining applause; for the private manner in which she quitted her home and associates, entrusting no one with her design, subjected her to surmises of a painful nature; and the careful preservation of her secret during the period of her military service, exonerates her from the least suspicion of having been urged to the step by an imprudent attachment. It is very likely that her youthful imagination was kindled by the rumor of brave deeds, and that her visions of “the camp’s stir and crowd and ceaseless ’larum” were colored richly by the hues of fancy. Curiosity to see and partake of this varied war-life, the restlessness of “a heart unsouled and solitary” -- the consuming of energies which had no object to work upon, may have contributed to the forming of her determination. It must be borne in mind, too, that she was restrained by no consideration that could interfere with the project. Alone in the world, there were few to inquire what had become of her, and still fewer to care for her fate. She felt herself accountable to no human being.

By keeping the district school for a summer term, she had amassed the sum of twelve dollars. She purchased a quantity of coarse fustian, and working at intervals when she could be secure from observation, made up a suit of men’s clothing; each article, as it was finished, being hid in a stack of hay. Having completed her preparations, she announced her intention of going where she could obtain better wages for her labor. Her new clothes, and such articles as she wished to take with her, were tied in a bundle. The lonely girl departed; but went not far, probably only to the shelter of the nearest wood, before putting on the disguise she was so eager to assume. Although not beautiful, her features were animated and pleasing, and her figure, tall for a woman, was finely proportioned. As a man, she might have been called handsome; her general appearance was extremely prepossessing, and her manner calculated to inspire confidence.

She now pursued her way to the American army, where she presented herself, in October, 1778, as a young man anxious to join his efforts to those of his countrymen in their endeavors to oppose the common enemy. Her acquaintances, meanwhile, supposed her engaged in service at a distance. Rumors of her elopement with a British soldier, and even of her death, were afterwards current in the neighborhood where she had resided; but none were sufficiently interested to make such search for her as might have led to a discovery.

Distrusting her own constancy, and resolute to continue in the service, notwithstanding any change of her inclination, she enlisted for the whole term of the war. She was received and enrolled in the army by the name of Robert Shirliffé. She was one of the first volunteers in the company of Captain Nathan Thayer of Medway, Massachusetts; and as the young recruit appeared to have no home or connections, the Captain gave her a home in his family until his company should be full, when they were to join the main army.

We now find her performing the duties and enduring the fatigues of military life. During the seven weeks she passed in the family of Captain Thayer, she had time both for experience and reflection; but in after years her constant declaration was that she never for one moment repented or regretted the step she had taken. Accustomed to labor from childhood, upon the farm and in out-door employment; she had acquired unusual vigor of constitution; her frame was robust, and of masculine strength; and having thus gained a degree of hardihood, she was enabled to acquire great expertness and precision in the manual exercise, and to undergo what a female delicately nurtured would have found it impossible to endure. Soon after they had joined the company, the recruits were supplied with uniforms by a kind of lottery. That drawn by Robert did not fit; but taking needle and scissors, he soon altered it to suit him. To Mrs. Thayer’s expression of surprise at finding a young man so expert in using the implements of feminine industry, the answer was -- that his mother having no girl, he had been often obliged to practice the seamstress’s art.

While in the house of Captain Thayer, a young girl visiting his wife was much in the society of Deborah, or as she was then called, Robert. Coquettish by nature, and perhaps priding herself on the conquest of the “blooming soldier,” she suffered her growing partiality to be perceived. Robert on his part felt a curiosity to learn by new experience how soon a maiden’s fancy might be won; and had no scruples in paying attentions to one so volatile and fond of flirtation, with whom it was not likely the impression would be lasting. This little piece of romance gave some uneasiness to the worthy Mrs. Thayer, who could

not help observing that the liking of her fair visitor for Robert was not fully reciprocated. She took an opportunity of remonstrating with the young soldier, and showed what unhappiness might be the consequence of such folly, and how unworthy it was of a brave man to trifle with a girl's feelings. The caution was taken in good part and it is not known that the "love passage" was continued, though Robert received at parting some tokens of remembrance, which were treasured as relics in after years.

For three years our heroine appeared in the character of a soldier, being part of the time employed as a waiter in the family of Colonel Patterson. During this time, and in both situations, her exemplary conduct, and the fidelity with which her duties were performed, gained the approbation and confidence of the officers. She was a volunteer in several hazardous enterprizes, and was twice wounded, the first time by a sword cut on the left side of the head. Many were the adventures she passed through; as she herself would often say, volumes might be filled with them. Sometimes placed unavoidably in circumstances in which she feared detection, she nevertheless escaped without the least suspicion being awakened among her comrades. The soldiers were in the habit of calling her "Molly," in playful allusion to her want of a beard; but not one of them ever dreamed that the gallant youth fighting by their side was in reality a female.

About four months after her first wound she received another severe one, being shot through the shoulder. Her first emotion when the ball entered she described to be a sickening terror at the probability that her sex would be discovered. She felt that death on the battlefield were preferable to the shame that would overwhelm her, and ardently prayed that the wound might close her earthly campaign. But, strange as it may seem, she escaped this time also unsuspected; and soon recovering her strength, was able again to take her place at the post of duty, and in the deadly conflict. Her immunity was not, however, destined long to continue -- she was seized with a brain fever, then prevalent among the soldiers. For the few days that reason struggled against the disease, her sufferings were indescribable; and most terrible of all was the dread lest consciousness should desert her, and the secret she had guarded so carefully be revealed to those around her. She was carried to the hospital, and there could only ascribe her escape to the number of patients, and the negligent manner in which they were attended. Her case was considered a hopeless one, and she perhaps received less attention on this account. One day the physician of the hospital, inquiring -- "How is Robert?" received from the nurse in attendance the answer -- "Poor Bob is gone." The doctor went to the bed, and taking the hand of the youth supposed dead, found that the pulse was still feebly beating; attempting to place his hand on the heart, he perceived that a bandage was fastened tightly round the breast. This was removed, and to his utter astonishment he discovered a female patient where he had least expected one!

This gentleman was Dr. Binney, of Philadelphia. With a prudence, delicacy and generosity ever afterwards warmly appreciated by the unfortunate sufferer, he said not a word of his discovery, but paid her every attention, and provided every comfort her perilous condition required. As soon as she could be removed with safety, he had her taken to his own house, where she could receive better care. His family wondered not a little at the unusual interest manifested for the poor invalid soldier.

Here occurred another of those romances in real life which in strangeness surpass fiction. The doctor had a young and lovely niece, an heiress to considerable property, whose compassionate feelings led her to join her uncle in bestowing kindness on the friendless youth. Many censured the uncle's imprudence in permitting them to be so much in each other's society, and to take drives so frequently together. The doctor laughed to himself at the warnings and hints he received, and thought how foolish the censorious would feel when the truth should come out. His knowledge, meanwhile, was buried in his own bosom, nor shared even with the members of his family. The niece was allowed to be as much with the invalid as suited her pleasure. Her gentle heart was touched by the misfortunes she had contributed to alleviate; the pale and melancholy soldier, for whose fate no one seemed to care, who had no possession in the world save his sword, who had suffered so much in the cause of liberty, became dear to her. She saw his gratitude for the benefits and kindness received, yet knew by intuition that he would never dare aspire to the hand of one so gifted by fortune. In the confiding abandonment of woman's love, the fair girl made known her attachment, and offered to provide for the education of its object before marriage. Deborah often declared that the moment in which she learned that she had unwittingly gained the love of a being so guileless, was fraught with the keenest anguish she ever experienced. In return for the hospitality and tender care that had been lavished upon her, she had inflicted pain upon one she would have died to shield. Her former entanglement

had caused no uneasiness, but this was a heart of a different mould; no way of amends seemed open, except confession of her real character, and to that, though impelled by remorse and self-reproach, she could not bring herself. She merely said to the generous girl, that they would meet again; and though ardently desiring the possession of an education, that she could not avail herself of the noble offer. Before her departure the young lady pressed on her acceptance several articles of needful clothing, such as in those times many of the soldiers received from fair hands. All these were afterwards lost by the upsetting of a boat, except the shirt and vest Robert had on at the time, which are still preserved as relics in the family.

Her health being now nearly restored, the physician had a long conference with the commanding officer of the company in which Robert had served, and this was followed by an order to the youth to carry a letter to General Washington.

Her worst fears were now confirmed. From the time of her removal into the doctor's family, she had cherished a misgiving, which sometimes amounted almost to certainty, that he had discovered her deception. In conversation with him she anxiously watched his countenance, but not a word or look indicated suspicion, and she had again nattered herself that she was safe from detection. When the order came for her to deliver a letter into the hands of the Commander-in-chief, she could no longer deceive herself.

There remained no course but simple obedience. When she presented herself for admission at the head-quarters of Washington, she trembled as she had never done before the enemy's fire. Her heart sank her; she strove in vain to collect and compose herself, and overpowered with dread and uncertainty, was ushered into the presence of the Chief. He noticed her extreme agitation, and supposing it to proceed from diffidence, kindly endeavored to re-assure her. He then bade her retire with an attendant, who was directed to offer her some refreshment, while he read the communication of which she had been the bearer.

Within a short time she was again summoned into the presence of Washington. He said not a word, but handed her in silence a discharge from the service, putting into her hand at the same time a note containing a few brief words of advice, and a sum of money sufficient to bear her expenses to some place where she might find a home. The delicacy and forbearance thus observed affected her sensibly. "How thankful"-- she has often said, "was I to that great and good man who so kindly spared my feelings! He saw me ready to sink with shame; one word from him at that moment would have crushed me to the earth. But he spoke no word -- and I blessed him for it."

After the termination of the war, she married Benjamin Gannett, of Sharon. When Washington was President, she received a letter inviting Robert Shirtliffe, or rather Mrs. Gannett, to visit the seat of government. Congress was then in session, and during her stay at the capital, a bill was passed granting her a pension in addition to certain lands, which she was to receive as an acknowledgment for her services to the country in a military capacity. She was invited to the houses of several of the officers, and to parties given in the city; attentions which manifested the high estimation in which she was there held.

In 1805 she was living in comfortable circumstances, the wife of a respectable farmer, and the mother of three fine, intelligent children, the eldest of whom was a youth of nineteen. The Dedham Register, dated December, 1820, states that during the late session of the court, Mrs. Gannett had presented for renewal her claims for services rendered the country as a *Revolutionary soldier*. She was at that time about sixty-two; and is described as possessing a clear understanding and general knowledge of passing events, as being fluent in speech, delivering her sentiments in correct language, with deliberate and measured accent; easy in her deportment, affable in her manners, and robust and masculine in her appearance. She was recognized on her appearance in court by many persons belonging to the county, who were ready to testify to her services. A brief notice added of the life of this extraordinary woman, was copied into many of the papers of the day, and appears in Niles' "Principles and Acts of the Revolution." It is but a few years since she passed from the stage of human life. The career to which her patriotism urged her, cannot be commended as an example; but her exemplary conduct after the first step will go far to plead her excuse.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Women of the American Revolution*, vol. II (1848), pp. 124-135.

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