

# ABIGAIL ADAMS

## THE PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN LADY

BY GAMALIEL BRADFORD

### I

THE wife of President John Adams and the mother of President John Quincy Adams is sometimes accused of being more man than woman in her temperament. This is a mistake. She was a woman and a charming one, even in an age when there was no offense in saying that women differed from men in their hearts as well as in their garments.

She had a large and varied life. Starting from a peaceful New England parsonage, where she learned the love of God and good breeding, she passed a quiet girlhood, then plunged, in her early married days, into the fierce, tumultuous vortex of the Revolution, managed her family and estate during her husband's long periods of absence, stood at his side in the presence of the sovereigns of Europe, reigned as the President's wife over the society of Washington, and shared the long post-presidential retirement in the Quincy home. She was always adequate to every situation, and said the word and did the deed that dignity and high patriotism required of her. But it is impossible to read her many letters and not feel that through it all she was charmingly and sensitively and delicately a woman.

She herself required and appreciated the softer elements of the feminine character. In England she complains

somewhat of the lack of these qualities. 'The softness, peculiarly characteristic of our sex, and which is so pleasing to the gentlemen, is wholly laid aside here for the masculine attire and manners of the Amazonians.' She herself is feminine in the deeper things of life, in the tenderness of her affection and in the bitterness of her mourning, when those she loves are lost to her, as in her profound grief over her mother's death. She is feminine, also, in those lighter trifles of fashion and dress which are supposed — by man — to form the larger part of woman's conversation and correspondence.

She was a thorough woman in her domestic interests — in that busy, often trivial care, which sustains the unconscious felicity of home. She looked after her husband's comfort as well as his greatness. In the midst of shrewd advice as to his moral bearing among those who were making the American nation, she murmurs a housewife's anxiety about his personal appearance: 'I feel concerned lest your clothes should go to rags, having nobody to take any care of you in your long absence; and then, you have not with you a proper change for the seasons.' She felt sometimes a little impatiently the tumult of nothings which makes up domestic life. Her health? She believes she has little health. 'Much of an invalid,' she calls herself casually; and elsewhere admits that her

'health is infirm,' and that she is not 'built for duration.' But, bless me, she has no time to think about health, or talk about it, or write about it. The machine must go as long as it will.

How apt and vivid is her account of the interruptions that puncture the whole course of her home existence! She rises at six o'clock and makes her own fire, 'in imitation of his Britannic Majesty.' She calls the servants—repeatedly—and notes that in future she will hire only those who will stir at one call. Breakfast gets on the table. She would like to eat it. A man comes with coal. A man comes with pigs. Another man comes for something else, and another. Meanwhile, where is breakfast? And what flavor has it? 'Attended to all these concerns. A little out of sorts that I could not finish my breakfast. Note; never to be incommoded with trifles.' You think you are reading Madame de Sévigné.

Yet she loves her home with all a woman's true deep affection. Men often claim a specialty in home-loving and decry a woman's restlessness. They do not realize that they shake off the burden of life when they enter their own doors. A woman takes it on. Yet few men's love is really deeper than a woman's for the home she has created and every day sustains. It was so with this lady. There are cares, indeed. But what is life without cares? 'I have frequently said to my friends, when they have thought me overburdened with care, I would rather have too much than too little. Life stagnates without action.' And though she saw and knew all the diversions of society and all the heights and depths of the great outer world, she clung steadfastly to the simplest maxim of a woman's heart. 'Well-ordered home is my chief delight, and the affectionate, domestic wife, with the relative duties which accompany that character, my highest ambition.'

And as she was a woman in her love of home, so she was thoroughly a woman in her love of her children and in her care for them. When they are ill, she watches at their bedsides with the tenderest solicitude, delights in their recovery, and mourns almost beyond consolation over those who are untimely snatched away. She herself superintends their early education, and most watchfully and thoughtfully. She does indeed regret her own lack of book-learning, because she has none to impart to her daughters; but perhaps, even in this regard, she was less deficient than might be supposed. She keeps little Johnny at her knee reading aloud Rollin's *Ancient History*, and hopes that he will come to 'entertain a fondness for it.' She vastly prefers Dr. Watts's *Moral Songs for Children* to 'modern frivolities of "Jack and Jill" and "Little Jack Horner."' Would she have liked 'Rollo,' I wonder, or would she not?

Whatever the value of her literary teaching, her moral lessons were as homely, as sturdy, and as lofty, as those of a matron of Plutarch. On this point she was fully supported by the resonant precepts of her husband. 'Root out every little thing. Weed out every meanness. Make them great and manly. Teach them to scorn injustice, ingratitude, cowardice, and falsehood.' But she needed no precepts from any one. Out of her own heart she taught these things; and her apostrophe to her son, when he left her for the great world, is simply the flower of lessons and influences established many years before: 'Dear as you are to me, I would much rather you should have found your grave in the ocean you have crossed, or that an untimely death should crop you in your infant years, than see you an immoral, profligate, or graceless child.'

If one wants evidence of this mater-

nal loftiness and maternal tenderness combined, one has only to open the *Diary of John Quincy Adams* and see how reverent, how affectionate, and how obviously sincere are the numerous references to his mother's care and devotion. 'My mother was an angel upon earth. She was a minister of blessings to all human beings within her sphere of action. . . . She has been to me more than a mother. She has been a spirit from above watching over me for good, and contributing by my mere consciousness of her existence to the comfort of my life.' — 'There is not a virtue that can abide in the female heart but it was the ornament of hers.'

Yet the younger Adams was not one inclined to overestimate human nature, even in those most nearly bound to him. His devotion to his mother's memory was as persistent as it was profound. When he himself had reached his seventy-sixth year, the mere hearing some of her letters read threw him into a state of almost indescribable excitement. 'I actually sobbed as he read, utterly unable to suppress my emotion. Oh, my mother! Is there anything on earth so affecting to me, as thy name? so precious as thy instructions to my childhood, so dear as the memory of thy life?'

We may safely say, then, that this was a true woman in her home and in her motherhood. She was a woman likewise in the freshness and vivacity and spirit of her social relations. When she writes to her granddaughter, 'Cultivate, my dear, those lively spirits and that sweet innocence and contentedness, which will rob the desert of its gloom, and cause the wilderness to bloom around you,' we know that she herself had cultivated these things with assiduity and success. She was in no way dependent upon society, and there were times when she distinctly shrank from it — when its duties were a bur-

den and its form and ceremonial a wearisome embarrassment. Her happiest, sunniest hours were no doubt passed with her husband and children in the busy retirement of her Quincy home. But at different periods of her life she was called upon to mingle in all sorts of social circles, the loftiest as well as the most brilliant, and everywhere she bore herself with the grace and ease and dignity of a refined and accomplished lady.

She had that essential ingredient of the social spirit, a woman's quick sense of the varied interest of human character and sympathetic insight into the workings of the human heart. And she had, also, a rare power of expression, so that her account of striking scenes and distinguished people has often something of the snap and sparkle of Lady Mary Montagu or Madame de Sévigné. How admirable, for instance, is her picture of Madame Helvetius, the friend of Franklin, ending, 'I hope, however, to find amongst the French ladies manners more consistent with my ideas of decency, or I shall be a mere recluse.' Or, for a briefer sketch, take that of Mrs. Cranch, who is 'a little smart, sprightly, active woman and is wilted just enough to last to perpetuity.'

And Mrs. Adams's thorough womanliness showed, not only in her personal relations, in her daily interests, in her social glitter and vivacity, but in deeper and more subtle sensibilities, which many true women are without. She had excellent control over her nerves; but the nerves were there and show through all her mastery. She would have readily admitted, with the heroine of Shakespeare, that she was

A woman, naturally born to fears.

Or, as she herself puts it, 'I never trust myself long with the terrors which sometimes intrude themselves upon

me.' The nerves responded to all sorts of other stimuli also. To art, perhaps, not so much. The early training of Puritan New England did not altogether fit nerves for æsthetic sensibility. Yet her enthusiasm over the opera in Paris is far more than a mere conventional ecstasy, and the possibilities of music for her are richly suggested in a casual sentence: 'I cannot describe to you how much I was affected the other day with a Scotch song, which was sung to me by a young lady in order to divert a melancholy hour.'

Nature touched her even more than music. The poets she knew were those of the eighteenth century, and her formal description has rather too much of eighteenth-century 'zephyrs' and 'vernal airs.' But it is easy to get through this to her real, deep love of bare New England pastures and wide meadows, and the homely countryside that had woven itself into her life. And as the nerves thrilled to old Scotch tunes, so they quivered and melted under the coming of May days. 'The approach of spring unstrings my nerves, and the south winds have the same effect upon me which Brydone says the Sirocco winds have upon the inhabitants of Sicily.'

In short, she was a shifting, varying, mercurial creature, as perhaps we all are, but she certainly more than many of us. 'Oh, why,' she exclaims, 'was I born with so much sensibility, and why, possessing it, have I so often been called to struggle with it?' One moment she is 'lost and absorbed in a flood of tenderness.' The next, 'My heart is as light as a feather and my spirits are dancing.' To-day she writes, 'I am a mortal enemy to anything but a cheerful countenance and a merry heart.' And then to-morrow, 'I have many melancholy hours, when the best company is tiresome to me and solitude the greatest happiness I can enjoy.'

So it can hardly be claimed that she was too stoical and too philosophical and too stern-hearted to be a woman.

## II

But Mrs. Adams lived in a tremendous time. In her early married years her husband's political duties left her alone to do both her work and his in the midst of difficulty and danger. Later she was called upon to stand by his side through great crises of statesmanship, and to give him counsel in triumph and comfort in defeat. She performed all these functions nobly, and to do it required something more than the usual feminine contributions to domestic felicity. She had a woman's heart, a woman's nerves, a woman's tenderness. But little indeed of what a man requires to make his way in life was lacking to her.

She had a high and fine intelligence. Elaborate education she had not, nor any woman in that day. She herself complains that she was not sent to school, that ill-health prevented any systematic mental training, that reading and writing and the simplest arithmetic, with a few accomplishments, were all that was thought necessary for her or any of her sex. In later life she bewailed this state of things and urged that a wide and rational spiritual culture was as necessary and as suitable for women as for men.

But we all know that education does not make intelligence and that natural intelligence can supply almost everything that education gives to either man or woman. After all, schooling is but an inadequate and apologetic substitute for brains. Brains Mrs. Adams had, and needed no substitute. From her childhood her keen and active wit was working, observing, acquiring, rejecting, laying by for future use. She was always a wide reader, read and

quoted Shakespeare and Pope and the eighteenth-century poets and essayists. Above all, she read the Classics — of course in translation; even writers minor or less known, like Polybius. Plutarch she nourished her heart on, and when she signed her letters to her husband, 'Portia,' it was partly an eighteenth-century affectation, but much more that the iron of old Roman virtue had entered into the very tissue and fibre of her soul.

Also, her intelligence reached far beyond books. She had that penetrating, analytical instinct, which plucks wisdom from the actions and motives of man, and which especially lays the foundation of such wisdom in a close, dispassionate consideration of the observer's own heart. 'You know I make some pretensions to physiognomy,' she writes. The pretensions were justified. She saw many faces in her life, and read them attentively, curiously, and always with profit.

But the finest testimony to Mrs. Adams's intelligence is the letters addressed to her by her husband and her son. Both were men of wide and deep reflection. Both touched perpetually the gravest problems of statesmanship and of human conduct generally. Both discussed these problems with wife and mother as they would have discussed them together or with the wisest men of their time. Would this have been possible with any but a woman of the broadest grasp and keenest power of comprehension?

And the intelligence was progressive as well as vigorous. Mrs. Adams's energetic protest to her husband against the legal and political subjection of women in that day has been often quoted and justly praised. It is as dignified as it is energetic. 'That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute,' she says; and urges

such an adjustment of law as may check that tyranny. In religious matters there is the same broad, sober common sense. Mrs. Adams had been brought up in the strictest New England Calvinism, and always retained the intense earnestness of that creed and its disposition to try all things by the standard of conscience. But bigotry and intellectual cowardice were alike abhorrent to her, and she had no inclination to judge others harshly. 'True, genuine religion is calm in its inquiries, deliberate in its resolves, and steady in its conduct.' And besides common sense she infused into her piety something of that sunshine which was the sorest need of Calvinism and for want of which it perished. 'I am one of those who are willing to rejoice always. My disposition and habits are not of the gloomy kind. I believe that to enjoy is to obey.'

But vigorous and clear as Mrs. Adams's mind was in the abstract, its energy showed still more in practical matters, as was natural and necessary with the life she lived. We have seen that she could be perfectly contented with simple home-surroundings and regular pursuits. But she wanted neither sloth nor lethargy. 'Confinement does not suit me or my family,' she wrote to her granddaughter. And again, 'Man was made for action and for bustle, too, I believe. I am quite out of conceit with calms.'

She had her share of furious housewifery, and no sooner gets on board ship than she sets to work with 'scrapers, mops, brushes, infusions of vinegar, etc.,' to produce the neatness and order which she maintained daily at home without such appeal to violent measures.

And her domestic economy went far beyond mops and brushes. During her husband's long and necessary absences, she undertook, not only the ordinary



duties of wife and mother, but the general management of farms and property, and performed these functions most efficiently, as is shown by the commendation which she receives from her loving partner quite as frequently as advice. She makes purchases and sales, she hires help, she garners crops. Through it all she carries her own burden and avoids, so far as possible, filling her letters with complaint. 'I know the weight of public cares lies so heavy upon you that I am loath to mention private ones.'

In dealing with that greatest and ever-present and insoluble problem of married and all other life, money, Mrs. Adams herself asserts that she was thrifty and prudent. So do all of us, all man and womankind. But in this case I think we may believe the statement. There was certainly no niggardliness. The husband was too large for petty cheese-paring. 'You know I never get or save anything by cozening or classmating,' he writes; and his wife was like him. She maintained a sober decency and propriety in her own expenditure; and through all the cramped revolutionary time, when cash was even rarer than hope, she always kept and used the means of relieving those whose straits were worse than her own. But she understood thoroughly both the theory of economy and its practice. Few professional students would have analyzed financial conditions better than she does, in the long letter written to her husband in the early days of the war. And the practical strain shows in her simple statement, 'I have studied, and do study, every means of economy in my power; otherwise a mint of money would not support a family.'

Certainly without any intention of boasting, she herself, in her later years, sums up her usefulness to husband and children, when she is explaining to her sister the multiplicity of cares that

seem to hang around her as thickly in age as they did in youth. 'You know, my dear sister, if there be bread enough and to spare, unless a prudent attention manage that sufficiency, the fruits of diligence will be scattered by the hand of dissipation. No man ever prospered in the world without the consent and coöperation of his wife.'

As she had patience to endure want, so she had courage to meet danger. When those she loves are in peril, her heart feels 'like a heart of lead.' But for herself, sensitive as her nerves may be, there is a strain of heroism which swells and hardens at the touch of emergency. The anticipation of evils makes her doubt a little. 'If danger comes near my dwelling, I suppose I shall shudder.' But when her husband writes to her, 'In case of real danger, of which you cannot fail to have previous intimations, fly to the woods with our children,' we know, we see, that she would have had perfect presence of mind either to fly or to remain, as the wisest courage might have dictated. 'I am not suddenly elated or depressed,' she says; and again, 'I am not apt to be intimidated.'

Though she was far from given to self-commendation, she declares solemnly, that, if the men are not able to perform their duty to their country, the enemy will find the women to be a veritable race of Amazons. Nay, she even goes forth as a spectator and enjoys the most fierce, intense excitement known to man, the vision of a field of battle. 'I have just returned from Penn's hill, where I have been sitting to hear the amazing roar of cannon, and from whence I could see every shell which was thrown. The sound, I think, is one of the grandest in nature, and is of the true species of the sublime.'

Do not, however, set this lady down as one who would have taken a blood-thirsty delight in bull-fights or the

prize-ring. If she hearkened with a thrill of awed pleasure to the booming of cannon, it was because they were fired in defense of her country and of liberty. She knew well what her friends and fellow citizens were fighting for, and if she took a passionate interest in the struggle, it was because her whole heart and hopes were fixed upon the end of it. Her husband's letters to her contain much lucid statement and analysis of the methods and aims of the Revolution and hers are scarcely behind his in clear understanding and intensity of purpose.

She thought much and thought with broad intelligence on general political questions—liked to talk of them, liked to write of them. 'Well, you tell H. she must not write politics; now it is just as natural for me to fall upon them as to breathe.' She has no illusions about democracy, or about human nature; speaks at times even with cynical insight of its failures and weaknesses. The lamentable inconsistencies of statesmanship are not hidden from her. How many who were fighting for American freedom at that day had the courage to cry out that it was absurd for men who kept slaves to take up arms and fight battles in the name of liberty? Mrs. Adams had that courage.

Yet, in spite of the selfishness of politicians and the inadequacy of human ideals, this wise and energetic woman never faltered for a moment in her devotion to the cause of her country, never wavered in her hope. The warmth and the glory of her enthusiasm must have been a splendid comfort to her husband and to all who knew her. Her passion does, indeed, occasionally degenerate into bitterness against her enemies. Alas, we do not need recent examples to show us that this is too easy with even the wisest and the noblest. 'Those who do not scruple to bring poverty, misery, slavery, and

death upon thousands will not hesitate at the most diabolical crimes,' she writes, 'and this is Britain!' But she has the same noble scorn for folly and meanness and selfishness on her own side. 'If our army is in ever so critical a state, I wish to know it. If America is to be ruined and undone by a pack of cowards and knaves, I wish to know it. Pitiably is the lot of their commander.'

And her words of counsel, of confidence, of inspiration are never wanting. Her young brother-in-law longs to enter the army. She pleads and reasons with his doubting mother to make her permit it. Her husband is involved in an endless tangle of difficulty and danger. She would not have him shun an hour of it. 'You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator; but if the sword be drawn, I bid adieu to all domestic felicity, and look forward to that country where there are neither wars nor rumors of war, in a firm belief, that through the mercy of its King we shall both rejoice there together.'

Nor does she urge others to sacrifices which she is unwilling to make herself. Foreign luxuries? Let them go. Plain milk makes as good a breakfast as sugared coffee. Not one of the comforts to which she has been accustomed but she will cheerfully renounce. If the men are taken from the fields, the women will do the work for them. She herself doubts her strength for digging potatoes, but she can gather corn and husk it. What she can do, she will do, that her children and her children's children may be free.

### III

Mrs. Adams's interesting combination of a true woman's gentleness and sensibility with the masculine qualities called for by her time is best studied, as some of the preceding quotations indicate, in her relation to her husband.

To appreciate this relation fully, it is necessary to have some idea of his very marked and peculiar character. He was, then, a man of broad intellectual power, of keen insight into political and moral problems, of energetic and self-sacrificing patriotism. He commanded the respect of all by his dignity, his courage, his sincerity of speech and action, his entire honesty. But men did not love him, for he had not tact, he had not social charm, he bristled with egotism, and, like many egotists, he was morbidly sensitive, and showed it. I do not know any one sentence that much better depicts the man than the following. 'I have a very tender, feeling heart. This country knows not, and never can know, the torments I have endured for its sake. I am glad it never can know, for it would give more pain to the benevolent and humane than I could wish even the wicked and malicious to feel.' Try to imagine Washington saying that!

Also, John Adams was a man who found fault with everything and therefore naturally he found fault with his wife. Even his praise too often savors of patronage, and his advice is apt to carry a strong suggestion of criticism. Occasionally he flings out in undisguised displeasure. Although Mrs. Adams was the last person to complain of her health, he cannot resist a sarcasm about it. 'My wife has been sick all winter, frequently at the point of death, in her own opinion.' Her indiscretion in money matters, though at a time when discretion was almost impossible, provoked him to sharp reproof. 'How could you be so imprudent? You must be frugal, I assure you.' But the best is the incident of the young coach-horses, driven carelessly to church and causing a most indecorous disturbance there. Mrs. Adams was not present herself, but she authorized the proceeding, and the hus-

band notes, in hot wrath, 'I scolded at the coachman first, and afterwards at his mistress, and I will scold again and again; it is my duty.' Perhaps a husband to whom scolding is a duty is even worse than one to whom it is a pleasure.

Nevertheless, this husband, who could scold and be imperious and even tyrannical, like others, adored and revered and obeyed his wife, like others. How pretty are his compliments to her wit and intelligence, though he veils them under sarcasm! Of a certain acquaintance he says, 'In large and mixed companies she is totally silent, as a lady ought to be. But whether her eyes are so penetrating, and her attention so quick to the words, looks, gestures, sentiments, etc., of the company, as yours would be, saucy as you are this way, I won't say.' And there is no trace of sarcasm in the ample admission to his son that in all the vicissitudes of fortune his wife had been his help and comfort, while without her he could not have endured and survived. In a letter written to his granddaughter the same enthusiasm appears, even more nobly. He compares his wife to the heroic Lady Russell, who stood by her husband's side in times equally troublous. 'This lady,' he says, 'was more beautiful than Lady Russell, had a brighter genius, more information, a more refined taste, and [was] at least her equal in the virtues of the heart.'

An extensive correspondence, covering many years, reveals to us fully Mrs. Adams's relations with this companion of her long life, her love and anxiety and devotion and enthusiasm for the man to whom she early gave her whole heart and from whom she never withdrew it for a moment. As he rises in the world, becomes a guide and a leader, a prominent citizen, a great historical figure, she accompanies him in spirit always, with watchful care, with fruitful caution, with delicate suggestion. She



sighs over the necessities of state which part him from her. She slights, as we all do, great gifts of fortune that she has, and deplores those that are denied her. She hoped to have married a man, not a title, she says. A humble private station with a husband would have been sweeter than grandeur without one. Yet we know well enough that she would not have had him lose an inch of fortune for her comfort, and never woman developed more fully the grace and ease and dignity which great station requires than did she. The letter she wrote him on the day of his inauguration has been often cited and deserves to be. It is a noble letter. 'My feelings are not those of pride or ostentation, upon the occasion. They are solemnized by a sense of the obligations, the important trusts, and numerous duties connected with it. That you may be enabled to discharge them with honor to yourself, with justice and impartiality to your country, and with satisfaction to this great people, shall be the daily prayer of your A. A.'

And as she was perfectly adapted to share her husband's greatness, so she accepted with equal composure and dignity his comparative failure and downfall. She did not seek honors and glories, she says, and she is quite content to part from them. A peaceful life at Quincy, with him whom she loves, is all she ever asked for, and nothing can be more delightful than to have it given back to her. We know how much of sincerity there is in such declarations and how much of creditable and fine mendacity. In Mrs. Adams they were probably as sincere as they ever are. She was a sincere woman. But, though she was perfectly ready to accept her husband's defeat, she could not quite forgive those who, in her opinion, had conspired against him and betrayed him. Toward such political enemies her language is not wholly free from a cer-

tain ungracious, if pardonable, acerbity. Thus, she says of one who should have been beneath her contempt, 'I hear that Duane has got hold of my letter to Niles, and spits forth vulgar abuse at me . . . but the low sarcasms of these people affect me no more at this day than the idle wind.'

Even in regard to Jefferson her animosity was long a-dying. In early days she had known him well and admired and loved him. Then the fierce political contest which made him her husband's successor parted them. Between the two men the feud was soon forgotten, and the long correspondence of their old age, crowned by their deaths on the same anniversary of American independence, is one of the striking traditions of our history. But Mrs. Adams forgave more slowly than her husband. When Jefferson finally made a direct appeal to their former affection, she answered him with courtesy, but with a clear, vigorous, burning logic that showed how deep and unhealed the old wound was. 'The serpent you cherished and warmed bit the hand that nourished him.' Then she ends, as a Christian should, 'I bear no malice. I cherish no enmity. I would not retaliate if it was in my power.' But nobody is left in a moment's doubt as to how she felt.

Through all these accidents and floods of fortune it is easy to observe how great at once and how unobtrusive was Mrs. Adams's influence over her husband. She never dreamed of any vulgar domination, or desired it. She knew well the limits of her activity and his, and respected them. Her advice, when given at all, was given discreetly, tentatively, and without being in any way enforced, was left with time to prove its value. Time did prove its value, and in consequence the recipient of it came to look for it more and to depend upon it more than he knew; per-

haps more than even she herself knew.

Yet in all that concerned their personal relations, as indeed in all that concerned human nature, her knowledge was far finer and more delicate than his. It was just this exquisite comprehension of his character and temperament that made her advice and counsel of such constant utility. To be sure, her means of information were greater, as well as her faculty of insight. He had little reserve, with her at any rate; spoke out his needs and hopes and discouragements; made plain his strength and weakness; unrolled his heart like a scroll before her searching and tender scrutiny. This she could not do. She felt more than he those mighty, subtle barriers which seal the tongue and make it incapable of uttering what it yearns to utter. In one of her letters occurs this simple statement which says so much. 'My pen is always freer than my tongue. I have written many things to you that I suppose I never could have talked.' Yet even her pen is tongue-tied in comparison with his. Therefore it is evident that much of her is beyond his divination, while she sees clear into every corner of his heart, understands what affection there is, what power there is, what weakness there is, understands, just exactly the weight and significance there is in those scoldings delivered again and again from a sense of duty. Must we add that she saw all this, partly from finer vision and partly from greater eagerness, while he saw not only all that he was fitted, but also all that he cared, to see?

For she was a woman and her love was her whole soul, and it is a delight, after all these strayings in masculine by-paths, to return to the woman in her. She writes long letters on great matters,—domestic difficulties, foreign levies, questions of policy, questions of state,—but always in some brief sen-

tence there is the heart of the letter and the heart of the woman. It is annoying sometimes to stiff, starched John. 'I shall have vexations enough, as usual,' he writes. 'You will have anxiety and tenderness enough, as usual. Pray strive not to have too much.' When there is prospect of their letters being captured by the British and printed, his comment is, that they would both be made to appear very ridiculous.

Ridiculous! What does she care for being ridiculous? This is the man she worships and she wants him. At the very suggestion of his being ill, ten thousand horrors seize on her imagination, and she says so. All he writes her of state matters is very well. She is glad to hear it, hungers for it. But she hungers far more for those little tokens of tenderness which he has no time for giving. 'Could you, after a thousand fears and anxieties, long expectation and painful suspense, be satisfied with my telling you that I was well, that I wished you were with me, that my daughter sent her duty, that I had ordered some articles for you, which I hoped would arrive, etc., etc.? By Heaven, if you could, you have changed hearts with some frozen Laplander, or made a voyage to a region that has chilled every drop of your blood.'

Love her! Oh, yes, she knows that he loves her, after his fashion, but why does n't he say so, after her fashion? 'Every expression of tenderness is a cordial to my heart.' Again, 'I want some sentimental effusions of the heart.' The language is the language of Addison, but the want is the want of Eve forever. It murmurs through these letters of war and business, like a touch of bird-song on a field of battle.

Then, when we have got it thoroughly into our heads that this was a woman and a lover, we can end with her own splendid answer when she was asked how she bore having Mr.

Adams absent for three years in his country's service. 'If I had known, sir, that Mr. Adams could have effected what he has done, I would not only have submitted to the absence I have endured, painful as it has been, but I would not have opposed it, even though three years more should be added to

the number — which Heaven avert! I feel a pleasure in being able to sacrifice my selfish passions to the general good, and in imitating the example which has taught me to consider myself and family but as the small dust in the balance, when compared with the great community.'

## OVER MY FENCE

BY LUCY ELLIOT KEELER

'How big is your garden?' asked the friendly traveler.

'Oh, about so big,' I replied, spreading out a handkerchief; 'this hem is a retaining wall over which little boys let themselves down on ropes; this hem is a close, high board fence along the top of which cats perambulate, sketching their unwelcome profiles against the sky; this hem is of old-fashioned pickets wreathed with vines, across which I serve and return snatches of conversation; and this hem is an ugly iron fence over which the world and I exchange prunes and prisms. I stand four-square; but the talk over the pickets is as different from the talk over the stone wall as the conversation over the iron fence is from remarks over the tight palings.'

The friendly traveler laughed and would know more; but, indeed, I knew no more myself. All four hems were born of the moment, and though, like other new-born things, they had the germ of growth, they were speechless. Even now they are only green adolescents, but proportionately irrepressible.

My earliest drawings showed no craving for variety. Always there was

a gabled house, with wings, over which spread the boughs of a tree, from which swung a swing, in which sat a child. Around the whole was a parallelogram done with pencil well wetted and fingers bearing on. The fence was the finishing touch, the frame. Over the fence was out. With the years, my microcosm has been circumscribed again and again as Emerson early told me it would be; but for myself microcosm and macrocosm keep identical centres, and travelers of the larger circumference turn many a friendly eye upon the old hemmed-in garden. For this the fence is responsible to a degree. Its few inches of width definitely separate street customs, costumes, manners, from those of private life. It is a physical hint to such characters as do not sufficiently recognize the existence of bells and knockers; and it bespeaks a touch of courtesy like the 'Miss' in front of one's name. Behind the stronghold of my pickets I can be incisive with my milkman, and accumulate courage to refuse to uproot herbaceous treasures for beggars quite as able as I to buy them; and I am less dragooned by imitators who