FORMATIVE INFLUENCES.

When I promised the editor of the Forum to cite some of the influences which have been the most powerful in shaping my character and energies, I did not appreciate the difficulties in my way. Memory is a precious guide into the realms of the past, but it is unruly, choosing its own lines of travel and loitering in pleasant places at its own sweet will. It does not incline to explore the whole life at one's bidding, or to furnish the delicate shades of color with which to present its discoveries intelligibly to the reader. It leads into rich fields, but instead of harvesting the gems for exhibition, it proceeds to demonstrate with convincing logic that the career of an individual and the special character of a life work are the results of a vast combination of subtile forces acting together.

The child of Puritan parentage, bred in a well-ordered family where educational, religious, and political affairs were familiar topics of conversation, and trained in the schools of a community that frowned upon ignorance and cherished a solid intellectual purpose, must necessarily trace the first impelling, if not determining, formative influences to such sources. If I should write my autobiography, I should be compelled to admit that my child life appears of peculiar interest as it looms up before me in a brief survey. I was reared among older people, in a household where I had no companions of my own age except as occasional invited guests, and I learned, almost as soon as I could talk, to amuse and to entertain myself, often by listening with undivided attention to animated discussions on a great variety of abstruse themes. I absorbed unconsciously habits of thinking and of formulating my own opinions, and frequently surprised my parents and their friends by suddenly appearing before them, in the midst of an exciting argument, to explain and soften what I conceived to be unnecessary differences of belief. In such cases I always had a polite and attentive audience.

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My father was very tender in his treatment of me, and from first to last encouraged the full exercise of my reasoning powers.

Among the chief links in the chain of formative influences which have been moving powers for good throughout my literary life, I should mention the excellent schools in which I was trained. I was an irregular attendant while I was from five to seven years of age, and regarded the privilege as one of my sweetest pleasures. As time rolled on I never knew the sensation of being sent to school, but always supposed that I went from choice, and my grief was immoderate when the conditions of weather or health obliged me to remain at home. I was fond of study, found nothing irksome in it, and from the beginning to the end of my school experiences was generously indulged in my inclinings, to the extent of being allowed to take up any branch of learning that I pleased, and to enter any class of older pupils, provided I could master the lessons and keep abreast with credit in recitation. I recall, for instance, a swift transit that I made from the class in mental arithmetic to that in written arithmetic, at my own option, soon after my seventh birthday, which first revealed to those about me my natural predilection for mathematics. I was registered in both classes, very likely as a curiosity, but my progress and my tastes in that line of study were subsequently fostered by nearly every teacher under whose instruction I was placed. Perhaps the attention then paid to discipline in mental arithmetic was the primary cause which gave an impetus to my development.

The one teacher who, more than any other, propelled me in the direction of mathematical acquirements—which I regard as having been one of the greatest of helps in my historical writing—and whom I shall always remember with profound gratitude, was George M. Burgess, who afterward became a noted physician. He took the measure of my tendency, cultivated it by giving me extra and special lessons in mathematics, and encouraged me to rush ahead irrespective of classes. His own love for the science undoubtedly had much to do with his methods, but his teaching was so thorough, chiefly while I was between nine and thirteen years of age, that when, later on, I entered the Williston Seminary, at Easthampton, Massachu-

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setts, I was assigned, after examination, to the most advanced classes in algebra and geometry, and not only kept pace easily with young men who were my seniors by several years, but carried off the prize at the first commencement. In the little country school this same teacher directed some of my earliest lessons in composition. Prior to coming under his tuition I had evolved from my inner consciousness—whatever that might be in an uninformed child—a variety of crude essays and verses, some of which, before learning to write, I had traced upon paper by printing out the words with a pen. I was delighted with the practice of composing, in which every pupil, from the oldest to the youngest, was presently drilled. Our productions were laughed at, criticised, and commended; but in whatever light they were viewed, we were always inspired to try again. The master brought out and systematized such talent as he perceived, and taught the child how to utilize it. He introduced many novel exercises, one of which I remember with more than ordinary interest, as I never met with it elsewhere. He selected a few words that had no possible bearing upon one another—from eight to a dozen usually—and as he recited them to the class these were written swiftly by each pupil at the top of a blank page, for reference; then, without a second for thought or preparation, and in a limited number of minutes, we were required to construct a paragraph, including every word named, which should make good sense.

It was during this period of my school life that my passion for reading was brought into harness, so to speak. Hitherto I had seized upon such books and papers as were most accessible, and my mind was crowded with a vast accumulation of miscellany. No flood of children's literature had then devastated the country. I had never seen a book written expressly for a child, except those at our Sunday school, which failed to interest me. Poetry was my delight. Numerous little antique volumes in the household library, including Watts's hymns and Pope's "Essay on Man," were literally worn out in my small playhouse under the sweet apple tree in the garden, where, reclining on the grass in the bright Summer sunshine, I could pore over them by the hour undisturbed. But a new light dawned in my

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horizon when I was called upon at school to recite Halleck's "Marco Bozzaris," memorized long before, and its beauties suddenly were made clear to me. The poems of Tennyson were then in everybody's hands, and from "The May Queen" to "The Princess" I had already found my way. I had also pried into Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Cowper, Spenser, Burns, Southey, and Campbell, and had read the greater part of Milton's "Paradise Lost," Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel," and Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon." What portion of all this would have remained in my memory and proved of any permanent advantage, I know not, if the teacher had not unpacked the mass and re-arranged it in good order. Extracts from these poetical works, and from many others, were turned to profitable account as reading lessons, and many of the gems of the great poets were recited in concert by the whole school.

My first romantic love of nature was awakened by the poems of William Cullen Bryant, then in the zenith of their popularity. There was something tangible in the pictures that he drew; his themes pointed out the charms of the woods and the mountains and the fields, which were all about me—before my eyes on every side. The distinguished poet was our neighbor, or, to be more exact, his birthplace was on a picturesque hillside in sight of my own birthplace, and he usually came to the old homestead every Summer. When a boy, he attended school with my father, and I had asked so many questions about how he looked in his youth and what he said and did, that I almost fancied I had actually seen him write "Thanatopsis." His "Monument Mountain" was one of our special school recitations, and I was never satisfied until I had visited the ragged precipice which suggested the production. His "Forest Hymn" and "Song of the Stars" were as familiar to me as the alphabet; while "The Death of the Flowers" brought vividly before my vision Bryant's beautiful sister, whose rare loveliness I had often heard described in our family circle, and to whom he refers as

"The fair, meek blossom that grew up and faded by my side."

Professor Burgess was a classical scholar, fresh from one of the notable colleges of the country, and ere long had formed a small class in Latin, of which I was a voluntary member. He

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smiled when I asked permission to join it, and told me how dry and tiresome I should find the lessons. But I was resolute, and he did not object; and I have no recollection that his predictions proved true. In the mean time the ordinary branches of a child's education were by no means neglected. Geography in particular was taught in the most interesting fashion. The rudiments of drawing were brought into service, and prizes were given for the best outline maps of States that could be made at a moment's notice upon the blackboard. Very little attention, I am sorry to say, was paid to history, and yet we were guided through the tales of Peter Parley and taught some useful statistics about the early Indian wars in America. I learned the story of the Revolution from the lips of my grandfather. As in many another school of later date, it was esteemed much more advisable to instruct in the whole range of English literature than to look after the affairs of our own country.

Works of fiction were not at that day permitted a place under our Puritan roof, and although I had seen Cooper's, Captain Marryatt's, and Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the works of Washington Irving, occasionally in the houses of friends, I had not yet learned the nature of their contents. But there came a time one bright morning when I flitted away to school with a strange-looking, unbound book hidden in my sachel. I had surreptitiously borrowed it from my brother's table, where he had left it by accident. It was "The Scottish Chiefs," by Miss Porter, a work that was destined to create within me a new want, and to turn my thoughts to the reading and study of history. Turning points in life are not always mere accidents, and I cannot designate this simple event as really a turning point, but its influence is still with me. I read the book by stealth, concealing it under my text book during school hours, when my quiet attitude led my teacher and others to suppose I was absorbed in study. The book opened to me a bewildering view of gorgeous castles among the grand cliffs of beautiful mountains, with Gothic arches, central towers, and circular flanking ramparts of stone; and of handsome knights in armor, literally iron-clad, with hosts of followers, prancing about the Scottish country on fine horses at all times and seasons, with their long plaids streaming in the

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wind. The story introduced me to an age when danger was the pastime and arms were the occupation of the European nations, and when gray hairs were seldom seen under a Scotchman's bonnet. Sir William Wallace, as described in this novel, was less than twenty-five years old, but a man of gigantic frame, larger even than Washington, and of great personal beauty and magnetism. He was a marvelous and magnanimous hero, as I found him, and my wonder was that I had never heard of him before. I immediately started on a crusade into the past, in quest of more knowledge. In exploring my father's library I found upon the top shelf two dilapidated volumes of ancient date, entitled "The History of Scotland," which I brought down in much excitement and examined with the greatest care. They were poorly printed in old-fashioned type, and from their appearance probably had not been opened in a generation. But I eagerly read them, from cover to cover. They were intensely disappointing books, dull and commonplace, telling me very little about Sir William Wallace, for whom I was searching; yet they increased my appetite for further information, and taught me forcibly the great truth that we draw all our learning from the past—that to-day is the pupil of yesterday, this year of last year, and that drop by drop the activities of each successive year are distilled from the experiences of the centuries gone by. Henceforward I sought historical books on all occasions, until the pursuit became a fascination. I was naturally at first interested in Scotland. I shall never forget the singular impression made upon my mind by perusing "The Life of James V.," upon which was founded the historical novel "Jane Seton." I soon had in my hands the story of the unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots, which led me with celerity into England's history. I was so fortunate as to discover, here and there, odd volumes which I could borrow—there was then no public library within my reach—and ere very long I had faithfully traced the English chronicles from Julius Cæsar to Queen Victoria. In the mean time I had learned something of old Rome, and I could not rest until I had tripped through her printed history. There was not a country in Europe to which I was not similarly drawn, and whose history I did not secure, in one way or another, for perusal.

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In this historical reading I had very little help or sympathy, either at home or at school. Both parents and teachers seemed to look upon it as a mere matter of childish fancy that would soon wear itself out. I encountered many works of a different character, while hunting for histories, which I did not omit to read. Sometimes it was a novel which I would enjoy in secret, then a work of travel or a poem. I read Irving's "Knickerbocker's History of New York" twice, and wondered how much of it was true; and among the American stories that fell in my way and captivated me for the time were Paulding's "The Puritan and his Daughter" and Kennedy's "Horseshoe Robinson," the latter of which I should like even now to read again, if I could find it. My opportunities for reading were greatly facilitated by the isolation of our home, and the consequent absence of distracting diversions. We were near enough to the metropolis to partake of its literary culture, and sufficiently remote to escape its dissipating wastes, while the atmosphere acted like a tonic in stimulating intellectual industry.

In my subsequent experiences in educational institutions I seem to have been conducted by the same or by a similar momentum, constantly broadening, it is true, but diverging very little from the current of my apparent destiny. Mathematics was given the first place in my curriculum every time, for there was always more in the science that I wished to learn. Then followed the languages, in which I became greatly interested, and philosophy and English literature; after which I was agreeable to any other pursuit that the teacher might suggest. History—as jotted in my little note book—was "to be read at my convenience, as my own private affair." American history was not then in my mind apart from general history. It was long after I had left school before I discovered its manifold and picturesque attractions, and became impressed with its singular neglect by educators.

When, finally, in the drift of remarkable events, I found myself engaged in the production of an historical work of great magnitude, having for its subject an American metropolis and one of the most important cities on the globe, I recognized my early attainments as my strongest pillar of support. My work was issued in parts of forty-eight pages each, that it might have the benefit

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of the judgment of intelligent readers and critical scholars upon each successive portion; and I was earnestly and anxiously asked how I was to treat of the complicated problems involved—such as the rise of churches, newspapers, schools, charities, and all the other institutions which go to make up a great metropolis, with correct pen pictures of public characters, manners, customs, social life, and political disturbances in the various eras—in a clear and comprehensive style that should be well balanced throughout. It was apparent that no theme must be given more space than its relative importance deserved, and that I was expected to infuse life and color into every paragraph, and to hit the happy medium between the dull repetition of details and the indulgence of fancy. I had undertaken to introduce biographical sketches and family history into the narrative of public affairs, which no American historian had hitherto attempted, and my material was to be drawn from innumerable unknown sources. I was pledged to unravel the tangled and obscure threads of New York's early history while it was yet a little Dutch town; to present, step by step, its growth, its early boundaries, its material aspects; and to show clearly the gradual development of the enormous commercial interests which have changed the whole face of a continent. I was also deftly to reveal the relations that existed between this country and England, France, Holland, and Spain during our entire history. "Even if you are able," was the pressing inquiry, "to carry out your ideas of minute research, how will you acquire the art of exact discrimination?" The question was one that could be answered by deeds much better than by words. If I had acquired the gift to accomplish what was desired and expected of me, it was certainly due in a large measure to that preparatory training unwittingly inaugurated in my infancy. The subtile power that regulated my sense of proportion, enabling me to distinguish the essential from the non-essential in the grave problems with which I had to deal, and which definitely contributed to my habits of concentrated attention, was easily discoverable in the principles of mathematics, which by many in my school days was considered a most useless acquisition.

It must be borne in mind, however, that when we look for

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formative influences, no one can properly be considered alone. It is the union of many that produces satisfactory results. But for my acquaintance with European history, obtained when my mind was in a receptive condition, mathematical science would hardly have influenced or promoted any practical achievement, for I should never have sufficiently understood and appreciated the peculiar character of my own country to have ventured into its history. Then, again, my varied reading, especially my study of the poets, brought me into intimate relations with the growth and expansion of American literature, and acted an influential part in shaping my literary and historical tastes. It brought me into contact with the great facts of life as revealed in human experience, and furnished the mental exercises requisite for healthful and symmetrical development. It would be impossible to state which of all these several formative influences exerted to the greatest degree the secret power that held me devoted to my chosen field of research for fifteen well-rounded years, without variableness or shadow of turning. There was an irresistible charm somewhere, for I had not foreseen the magnitude of the work that I was to perform. The structure became a matter of growth instead of architecture. And the educational influences behind me seemed to increase in magnetism and vitality as I drilled the raw material into order.

I ought, perhaps, to speak of the special influence for good that has come to me through the discipline of the work itself, although I am aware that the outlook toward the far past is the chief concern of the present series of papers. The formative influences of my life were realized in the volumes to which reference has been made, but they have reached into my subsequent work as an editor and an author with even greater force and significance. Together with the education which practical experience provides, they have helped me into a loving friendship for our whole vast and beautiful country; they have widened my views, enabled me to look upon all sides of a subject, and inspired me to keep my mind ever open to fresh discoveries and enlarged possibilities in the direction of historic truth.

MARTHA J. LAMB.

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A NEW POLICY FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SOCIAL problems are raised as frequently by insensible and unobserved changes in existing conditions, as by a clear forecast of the principles involved in them. An example in point is public instruction in the United States at the present moment. Our public schools are apparently prosperous, and command the same popular interest as in previous periods. There has been some stir in the popular mind concerning them during the last year, but hardly an apprehension of coming disaster. Yet the facts in the case should lead us to anticipate the need of a change of policy in the somewhat near future. A very considerable number of private schools in the several States have always been engaged in primary work. These have more or less weakened and disparaged public schools. In some States intermediate instruction and collegiate instruction have been largely in the hands of religious bodies. The feeling has prevailed in many churches that each denomination should provide for itself higher institutions of learning suited to its own sense of fitness. Yet the limits of this private effort have been narrow. The public system has not been seriously embarrassed by it, and has had no occasion to expect determined or extended attacks.

For some time past, however, some churches, more particularly the Roman Catholic and Lutheran, have been occupied with a systematic and extended effort to place the children of their households, as far as practicable, under instruction of their own providing. It has been stated in the FORUM* that the parochial schools of the Roman Catholic Church now include more than 600,000 children, while those of the Lutheran Church, in Wisconsin alone, embrace 20,394. So widely-sustained a method of private training, by which the public schools are displaced, promises to bring far more serious embarrassment to our public method than any which it has hitherto encountered.

* December, 1889, p. 380.

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