

Deborah Logan and her Contributions to History.

In that portion of the suburbs of Philadelphia originally settled by Germans, and from them called Germantown, surrounded by tramways, paved streets, long rows of brick houses, and the ugly boarded fence of a near by athletic field, there stands a still stately mansion called "Stenton," built in 1728. Enough of its original demesne remains about it to suggest the acres of lawn and grass land and waving fields of grain and tobacco, which once bounded the landscape.

Here, in intellectual but observant retirement, lived, until his death in 1751, the Honourable James Logan, Secretary, Deputy-Governor, and lifelong friend of William Penn. And to Stenton, in 1781, as the bride of his grandson, Dr. George Logan, came Deborah Norris, the only daughter of Charles, son of Isaac Norris, Jun., and his wife, Mary Parker. "Debby" Norris, as her lively friend, Sally Wister, calls her throughout her own entertaining Revolutionary journal,¹ was born October 19th, 1761, in the handsome residence which her father had built on Chesnut Street below Fifth, in Philadelphia, where now stands the Custom House. Across Fifth Street were the State House grounds, now Independence Square. This elegant mansion boasted tiers of piazzas, and a beautiful garden in which stood hot houses containing such rarities as pineapples. Revolutionary Philadelphia looked upon this fine residence as almost in the suburbs, for it stood upon the western extremity of the town.

From this home, little Debby went daily to Anthony Benezet's school for girls, where her high spirits refused to be subdued into Quaker demureness, and her consequent deficiencies upon leaving had to be made good by diligent voluntary application afterward. Her strength of character is shown in the acquirements to which she soon attained, entirely unaided. Thanks to the literary habits into which she trained herself, we owe to Deborah Logan's care and diligence some of the most important contributions to the Colonial history of Pennsylvania.

Deborah Norris was about fifteen when her morning walk in the garden one summer's day was interrupted by a

¹ *Sally Wister's Journal, being a Quaker Maiden's Account of her Experiences with Officers of the Continental Army, 1777-1778.* Edited by Albert Cook Myers. Philadelphia, 1902.

great commotion in the adjoining street, and clambering upon the garden fence to see, as well as to hear, this wide-awake school girl was involuntarily one of the most intelligent witnesses to the reading of that great document, the Declaration of Independence. From her perch, where the view was interrupted by a little frame building put up by some of the science-loving Philadelphians for astronomical purposes, a familiar voice was heard commanding silence; and from a stage erected near the steps of the State House, called by John Adams, in after years, "that awful platform," was read the fateful instrument. Deborah Logan wrote afterward of the reader's identity as Charles Thomson; but Christopher Marshall, a very accurate historian, speaks of the reader on this occasion as John Nixon. This is what she says herself of the experience:—

How a little time spreads the mantle of oblivion over the manner of the most important events! It is now a matter of doubt at what hour, or how, the Declaration was given to the people; perhaps few remain who heard it read on that day; of these few I am one. Being in the lot adjoining to our old mansion on Chestnut Street, that then extended to Fifth, I distinctly heard the words of that instrument read to the people (I believe from the State House steps, for I did not see the speaker). . . . I think it was Charles Thomson's voice. It took place a little after twelve at noon, and they then proceeded down the street (I understood) to read it at the Court House. It was a time of fearful doubt and great anxiety with the people, many of whom were appalled at the boldness of the measure, and the first audience of the Declaration was neither very numerous nor composed of the most respectable class of citizens.

And now began the dangers of the Revolutionary period—dangerous in a double sense to the fair Deborah, who, in her widowed mother's elegant drawing-room, assisted in receiving the curious mixture of distinguished people who met there. Mrs. Norris's Quaker hospitality was always open to the leaders of the Revolution, while elegant and accomplished Frenchmen and the plainest Quakers met indiscriminately upon this familiar ground. Just how many swains fell victim to the fair Deborah's charms, history does not tell us, but before she was twenty, on September 6th, 1781, she was married to Dr. George Logan, of Stenton, then a medical graduate of Edinburgh, her senior by eight years. The young physician, whose parents had both died during his prolonged absence in Scotland, found himself heir to pillaged lands and a wasted estate, due to the ravages of war, and only the mansion of Stenton, and its lands about, remained. The

former was narrowly saved from the British torch by the cleverness of Dinah, the old negro housekeeper, who sent to the barn two officers, who happened along in search of deserters, and who arrested and carried off, despite their protestations, the men who had gone thither after firewood.

To Stenton came the young couple less than a year after their marriage, Dr. Logan being obliged to give up the practice of his profession in order to devote himself to the reclaiming of his impaired estates, which his excellent management soon accomplished. While never able to support his wife in the luxury to which in her youth she had been accustomed, yet he acquired an ample competency, and his wife's admirable thrift and systematic methods made everything available.

The bricks of which Stenton is built were made on the spot, and in one of them the print of a child's hand is still discernible—probably that of some Indian's papoose, for in those days there were few white children to stray about the place. An avenue of grand hemlocks is said to have been planted by William Penn. The brick hall by which one enters through an arched door, unique in its beauty, leads directly to a splendid double staircase, while right and left are lofty rooms, nearly square, remarkable for their beautiful woodwork. The wainscot is sometimes carried above the mantel to the ceiling, and all the fire places have large openings set with blue and white grotesque Scriptural tiles. Corner cupboards abound, the glass front setting off the rare silver, china, and glass, when not in use. In the second story, the master's library occupied a large room extending over half the front of the house. The bedrooms in the rear are not large, but are well arranged, and the secret staircase connecting with the attic in the thick walls makes one feel as if in mediæval days again, and aware of early colonial dangers from marauders and Indians, as also does the long underground passage connecting with the stables.

In this delightful home, surrounded by an atmosphere of culture and beauty, Deborah Logan passed the whole of her married life. Its lesson is good for our strenuous days. She accomplished a vast deal in her husband's lifetime, and upheld him in his work in the advancement of agricultural and political science. They both believed thoroughly in domestic manufactures, and encouraged the production in each farmer's family of as many articles as possible needed in the household. Mrs. Logan writes :—

I have not forgotten the agreeable interchange of visits, the beneficial emulation, and the harmless pride with which we exhibited specimens of our industry and good management to each other. The spinning wheel was going in every house, and it was a high object of our ambition to see our husbands and families clothed in our own manufactures (a good practice which my honoured husband never relinquished), and to produce at our social dinner parties the finest ale of our own brewing, the best home made wines, cheese, and other articles which we thought ought to be made among ourselves rather than to be imported from abroad.

She did her own clear-starching, and her fine lace caps and kerchiefs were models of "doing up." Mrs. Logan did not accompany her husband when, in 1798, he went to France upon an unofficial visit, in the attempt to promote peace—an attempt in which he was successful. In 1812, he undertook a journey to England for a similar purpose, in which he went commended by President Madison to the American minister at the court of St. James. As history tells us, the effort was in vain.

But other women, few in number though they be, have *been*, and have *done* all these things. Deborah Logan's memory, apart from the personal charm to which every one who met her at once succumbed, is held in honour for her notable contributions to Colonial history. Without her, some of William Penn's most valuable letters and memoranda to James Logan must have perished. Her diary, from which our quotations are made, was begun before her husband's death in 1821. She was in the practice of noting down interesting or amusing conversations which took place in the varied society to which she was accustomed. In later years, when the circle of her intimate friends had narrowed down to a few quiet people, she was persuaded by a very strict Quakeress to submit her priceless manuscript to the censorship which was so arbitrarily exercised by the older Friends, in order to eliminate everything that savoured of worldliness or interfered with "our peaceable testimony." We can therefore only mourn over the laborious care with which the Friend, whose "concern" it was, went with the author through her precious reminiscences, and erased every word of chit-chat, table talk, and delightful nothings, or more sententious paragraphs, which fell from the lips of the most eminent people of the day, merely because, forsooth, they were men and women of affairs. This revision shows what dangers lay before Quakerism in lack of education, for any one with a proper sense of proportion must have felt such an act to be

vandalism, even though under peaceful guise, and no doubt Mrs. Logan inwardly rebelled. The personal recollections of a gifted woman who writes of contemporary events are always of untold value. About the year 1814, however, Deborah Logan began to examine the great mass of material which she found in the attics of Stenton, and becoming convinced of the importance of its preservation for posterity, she set bravely about the arduous task of deciphering and arranging what has since been given to the world, through the Pennsylvania Historical Society, as *The Penn and Logan Correspondence*,² which, without her labours, must have fallen a prey to the tooth of time—and mice. Of these papers, the editor of the Penn-Logan letters says:—

They had been very much neglected and treated as useless waste paper, and were piled away in the garrets as worthless rubbish, the very room they occupied being bestowed reluctantly. She was not, however, to be discouraged by their unpromising appearance, and mouldy, worm-eaten, tattered condition, nor the difficulty of deciphering that which appeared at first as unintelligible as Egyptian hieroglyphics. She devoted many years of her life in collecting, arranging, systematising, and copying these papers. Many thousand pages of original letters relating to Colonial history were neatly copied, with remarks and annotations.

Her first idea was merely to preserve the papers and documents and make a general orderly arrangement. There were so many of these, however, that in order to make any impression upon the mass of material before her, she was obliged to take time from her hours of sleep by rising before or at the dawn, summer and winter, to secure the leisure from her many social and household duties necessary for the labour involved. Without such industry and intelligent method, reduced to a system extending over some years, she could not have left behind her the eleven manuscript quarto volumes in which her work was completed. As she went on, the

² *Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan, Secretary of the Province of Pennsylvania, and others, 1700-1750, from the original letters in possession of the Logan family. With notes by the late Mrs. Deborah Logan. Philadelphia, 1870-72.* This forms volumes ix. and x. of the *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*. Considerable use of the *Correspondence* was made by Alfred Cope in a series of articles in *The Friend* (Phila.), vols: 18 and 19 (1845, 1846), entitled, *Proprietary Correspondence*. See also Janney's *Life of Penn*, 1851; Armistead's *James Logan*, 1851: Some account of the literary labours of Deborah Logan may be found in Hotchkin's *Penn's Greene Country Town*, 1903; Armistead's *James Logan*, 1851. [EDS.]

importance of the material in her hands was recognised by her. She says of the papers :—

Many of them evidently belong to the public, as containing references to transactions which the historian may claim as his right, whilst the sentiments and opinions of such eminent characters as William Penn and James Logan seem to be a part of the common inheritance of mankind, and therefore ought not to be withheld from them. . . . In contemplating the sudden rise of Pennsylvania to her present state of wealth, strength, and resources, the mind becomes curious to trace the steps of such prosperity; and I flatter myself that I am performing an acceptable service to my fellow-citizens in discovering to their view some of the remote rills and fountains which are the sources of the majestic river which we now survey.

Mrs. Logan made selections from a portion of her miscellaneous material, but the correspondence between Penn and Logan was copied entire, as she states in her preface to the manuscript, "I have copied the whole of their correspondence which is in our possession." The letters cover a period of forty years, and increase in interest and importance as time goes on. The large collection of Penn's letters now in possession of the Pennsylvania Historical Society at Philadelphia, gathered from other sources as well, makes possible and desirable a complete publication of all his letters, and what is very necessary, and would add much to the value of the letters edited by Mrs. Logan, a full and careful index.

Her MS. is very beautiful. In an even, small, but unfeminine hand,³ as legible as type, with wide margins and well broken paragraphs, with foot notes separated by double lines from the page above, and careful distinction given to extracts, quotations, dates, titles, or signatures, the whole is a model of how this sort of work should be done. The typewriter has now effected another transformation, and the MSS. of Deborah Logan may well be kept as types of the best of that style of work.

Her death occurred in 1839, and she lies in the picturesque private burying ground of the Logans at Stenton, beside her devoted husband.

One cannot turn from the subject without reflecting upon the value of such work, and such appreciation of official and informal correspondence, without hoping that modern Quakerism may draw a lesson from the example set us, and

³ D. possesses specimens of her hand-writing, and also that of her husband and his grandfather.

that each family of Friends on both sides of the Atlantic may be zealous to preserve all old family or historical papers in their possession, which, however commonplace their character, often become of great value with the passing years. In fact, it is by the use of such material that history is written.

AMELIA MOTT GUMMERE.

Church Affairs in Gaol.¹

Thomas Harris of this City, Apothecary, and Phebe Hollister did on the 29th day of the 8th moneth at the mens meeting manefest their Jntentions of marriage, and on the twelueth day of the Nineth moneth, 1683, the mens meeting Advised them to publish the same amongst our friends both in Prison and at the weomens meeting.

wittness THOMAS CALLOWHILL.

Wheras upon the proposalls of an entended Marriage between Thomas Harris, of Bristoll, Apothecary, & Phebe Hollister, our friends from the mens meeting advised them to cause the same to be published amongst our friends in Prisson and at the weomens meeting. These are therefore to Certefie all whom it may Concerne that the Jntention of Marriage betwene the said Thomas Harris & Phebe Hollister haue been published amongst us, and that wee find noe thing meet to obstruct them in their Jntended Marriage.

Signed on behalfe of our ffriends

at Newgate, by RICHD : SNEADE,

at Bridewell, by ANNA JORDAN,

at the Weomans meeting, by ANN JONES.

¹ The following is copied from the original in **D.** (Gibson Bequest MSS. iii. 81.) The body of the document is in one handwriting, and the signatures are autographs. Priscilla A. Fry, of Bristol, owns a similar document, dated the same year, and signed by three of the four Friends, relating to William Gravet and Martha ffrye, of Bristol. It would be interesting to hear of other documents of this kind;