

LYDIA MARIA CHILD

To those of us who were by twenty years or more the juniors of Mrs. Child, she always presented herself rather as an object of love than of cool criticism, even if we had rarely met her face to face. In our earliest recollections she came before us less as author or philanthropist than as some kindly and omnipresent aunt, beloved forever by the heart of childhood, — some one gifted with all lore, and furnished with unfathomable resources, — some one discoursing equal delight to all members of the household. In those days she seemed to supply a sufficient literature for any family through her own unaided pen. Thence came novels for the parlor, cookery books for the kitchen, and the "Juvenile Miscellany" for the nursery. In later years the intellectual provision still continued. We learned, from her anti-slavery writings, where to find our duties; from her "Letters from New York," where to seek our highest pleasures; while her "Progress of Religious Ideas" introduced us to those profounder truths on which pleasures and duties alike rest.

It is needless to debate whether she did the greatest or most permanent work in any especial department of literature, since she did pioneer work in so many. She showed memorable independence in repeatedly leaving beaten paths to strike out for herself new literary directions, and combined the authorship of more than thirty books and pamphlets with a singular devotion both to public and private philanthropies, and with almost too exacting a faithfulness to the humblest domestic duties.

Lydia Maria Francis was born at Medford, Mass., February 11, 1802. Her ancestor, Richard Francis, came from England in 1636, and settled in Cambridge, where his tombstone may still be seen in the burial-ground. Her paternal grandfather, a weaver by trade, was in the Concord fight, and is said to have killed five of the enemy. Her father, Convers Francis, was a baker, first in West Cambridge, then in Medford, where he first introduced the article of food still known as "Medford crackers." He was a man of strong character and great industry. Though without much cultivation, he had uncommon love of reading; and his anti-slavery convictions were peculiarly zealous, and must have influenced his children's later career. He married Susannah Rand, of whom it is only recorded that "she had a simple, loving heart, and a spirit busy in doing good."

They had six children, of whom Lydia Maria was the youngest, and Convers the next in age. Convers Francis was afterwards eminent among the most advanced thinkers and scholars of the Unitarian body, at a time when it probably surpassed all other American denominations in the intellectual culture of its clergy. He had less ideality than his sister, less enthusiasm, and far less moral courage; yet he surpassed most of his profession in all these traits. He was Theodore Parker's first scholarly friend, and directed his studies in preparation for the theological school. Long after, Mr. Parker used still to head certain pages of his journal, "Questions to ask Dr. Francis." The modest "study" at Watertown was a favorite headquarters of what were called "the transcendentalists" of those days. Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Ripley, and the rest came often thither, in the days when the "Dial" was just emancipating American thought from old-world traditions. Afterwards, when Dr. Francis was appointed to the rather responsible and conservative post of professor in the Harvard Theological School, he still remained faithful to the spirit of earlier days, never repressing free inquiry, but always rejoicing to encourage it. He was a man of rare attainments in a variety of directions; and though his great read-

ing gave a desultory habit to his mind, and his thinking was not quite in proportion to his receptive power, he still was a most valuable instructor, as he was a most delightful friend. In face and figure he resembled the pictures of Martin Luther, and his habits and ways always seemed like those of some genial German professor. With the utmost frugality in other respects, he spent money profusely on books, and his library—part of which he bequeathed to Harvard College—was to me the most attractive I had ever seen; more so than even Theodore Parker's.

His sister had, undoubtedly, the superior mind of the two; but he who influenced others so much must have influenced her still more. "A dear good sister has she been to me; would that I had been half as good a brother to her." This he wrote, in self-depreciation, long after. While he was fitting for college, a process which took but one year, she was his favorite companion, though more than six years younger. They read together, and she was constantly bringing him Milton and Shakespeare to explain. He sometimes mystified her,—as brothers will, in dealing with maidens nine years old,—and once told her that "the raven down of darkness," which was made to smile, was but the fur of a black

cat that sparkled when stroked ; though it still perplexed her small brain why *fur* should be called *down*.

Their earliest teacher was a maiden lady, named Elizabeth Francis, — but not a relative, — and known universally as “Ma’am Betty.” She is described as “a spinster of supernatural shyness, the never-forgotten calamity of whose life was that Dr. Brooks once saw her drinking water from the nose of her tea-kettle.” She kept school in her bedroom, — it was never tidy, and she chewed a great deal of tobacco ; but the children were fond of her, and always carried her a Sunday dinner. Such simple kindnesses went forth often from that thrifty home. Mrs. Child once told me that always on the night before Thanksgiving, all the humble friends of the household — “Ma’am Betty,” the washerwoman, the berry-woman, the wood-sawyer, the journeymen-bakers, and so on — some twenty or thirty in all, were summoned to a preliminary entertainment. They here partook of an immense chicken-pie, pumpkin-pies (made in milk-pans), and heaps of doughnuts. They feasted in the large old-fashioned kitchen, and went away loaded with crackers and bread by the father, and with pies by the mother, not forgetting “turnovers” for their children. Such homely applications of the doctrine “It is

more blessed to give than to receive” may have done more to mould the Lydia Maria Child of maturer years than all the faithful labors of good Dr. Osgood, to whom she and her brother used to repeat the Westminster Assembly’s Catechism once a month.

Apart from her brother’s companionship, the young girl had, as was then usual, a very subordinate share of educational opportunities ; attending only the public schools, with one year at the private seminary of Miss Swan, in Medford. Her mother died in 1814, after which the family removed for a time to Maine. In 1819 Convers Francis was ordained over the First Parish in Watertown, and there occurred in his study, in 1824, an incident which was to determine the whole life of his sister.

Dr. J. G. Palfrey had written in the “North American Review” for April, 1821, a review of the now forgotten poem of “Yamoyden,” in which he had ably pointed out the use that might be made of early American history for the purposes of fictitious writing. Miss Francis read this article, at her brother’s house, one summer Sunday noon. Before attending the afternoon service, she wrote the first chapter of a novel. It was soon finished, and was published that year, — a thin volume of two hundred pages, without her name, under the title of “Hobo-

mok: a Tale of Early Times. By an American."

In judging of this little book, it is to be remembered that it marked the very dawn of American imaginative literature. Irving had printed only his "Sketch Book;" Cooper only "Precaution." This new production was the hasty work of a young woman of nineteen — an Indian tale by one who had scarcely even seen an Indian. Accordingly, "Hobomok" now seems very crude in execution, very improbable in plot; and is redeemed only by a certain earnestness which carries the reader along, and by a sincere attempt after local coloring. It is an Indian "Enoch Arden," with important modifications, which unfortunately all tend away from probability. Instead of the original lover who heroically yields his place, it is to him that the place is given up. The hero of this self-sacrifice is an Indian, a man of high and noble character, whose wife the heroine had consented to become, at a time when she had been almost stunned with the false tidings of her lover's death. The least artistic things in the book are these sudden nuptials, and the equally sudden resolution of Hobomok to abandon his wife and child on the reappearance of the original betrothed. As the first work whose scene was laid in Puritan

days, "Hobomok" will always have a historic interest, but it must be read in very early youth to give it any other attraction.

The success of this first effort was at any rate such as to encourage the publication of a second tale in the following year. This was "The Rebels; or, Boston before the Revolution. By the author of 'Hobomok.'" It was a great advance on its predecessor, with more vigor, more variety, more picturesque grouping, and more animation of style. The historical point was well chosen, and the series of public and private events well combined, with something of that tendency to the over-tragic which is common with young authors, — it is so much easier to kill off superfluous characters than to do anything else with them. It compared not unfavorably with Cooper's revolutionary novels, and had in one respect a remarkable success. It contained an imaginary sermon by Whitefield and an imaginary speech by James Otis. Both of these were soon transplanted into "School Readers" and books of declamation, and the latter, at least, soon passed for a piece of genuine revolutionary eloquence. I remember learning it by heart, under that impression; and was really astonished, on recently reading "The Rebels" for the first time, to discover that the high-sounding periods which I had

always attributed to Otis were really to be found in a young lady's romance.

This book has a motto from Bryant, and is "most respectfully inscribed" to George Ticknor. The closing paragraph states with some terseness the author's modest anxieties:—

"Many will complain that I have dwelt too much on political scenes, familiar to every one who reads our history; and others, on the contrary, will say that the character of the book is quite too tranquil for its title. I might mention many doubts and fears still more important; but I prefer silently to trust this humble volume to that futurity which no one can foresee and every one can read."

The fears must soon have seemed useless, for the young novelist early became almost a fashionable lion. She was an American Fanny Burney, with rather reduced copies of Burke and Johnson around her. Her personal qualities soon cemented some friendships, which lasted her life long, except where her later anti-slavery action interfered. She opened a private school in Watertown, which lasted from 1825 to 1828. She established, in 1827, the "Juvenile Miscellany," that delightful pioneer among children's magazines in America; and it was continued for eight years. In October, 1828, she was married to David Lee Child, a lawyer of Boston.

In those days it seemed to be held necessary for American women to work their passage into literature by first compiling some kind of cookery book. They must be perfect in that preliminary requisite before they could proceed to advanced standing. It was not quite as in Marvell's satire on Holland, "Invent a shovel and be a magistrate," but, as Charlotte Hawes has since written, "First this steak and then that stake." So Mrs. Child published in 1829 her "Frugal Housewife," a book which proved so popular that in 1836 it had reached its twentieth edition, and in 1855 its thirty-third.

The "Frugal Housewife" now lies before me, after a great many years of abstinence from its appetizing pages. The words seem as familiar as when we children used to study them beside the kitchen fire, poring over them as if their very descriptions had power to allay an unquenched appetite or prolong the delights of one satiated. There were the animals in the frontispiece, sternly divided by a dissecting knife of printer's ink, into sections whose culinary names seemed as complicated as those of surgical science,—chump and spring, sirloin and sperib,—for I faithfully follow the original spelling. There we read with profound acquiescence that "hard gingerbread is good to have in the family," but demurred at the reason

given, "it keeps so well." It never kept well in ours! There we all learned that one should be governed in housekeeping by higher considerations than mere worldly vanity, knowing that "many people buy the upper part of the sparerib of pork, thinking it the most genteel; but the lower part is more sweet and juicy, and there is more meat in proportion to the bone."

Going beyond mere carnal desires, we read also the wholesome directions "to those who are not ashamed of economy." We were informed that "children could early learn to take care of their own clothes,"—a responsibility at which we shuddered; and also that it was a good thing for children to gather blackberries,—in which we heartily concurred. There, too, we were taught to pick up twine and paper, to write on the backs of old letters, like paper-sparing Pope, and if we had a dollar a day, which seemed a wild supposition, to live on seventy-five cents. We all read, too, with interest, the hints on the polishing of furniture and the education of daughters, and we got our first glimpses of political economy from the "Reasons for Hard Times." So varied and comprehensive was the good sense of the book that it surely would have seemed to our childish minds infallible, but for one fatal admission, which through life I have recalled with dismay,

— the assertion, namely, that "economical people will seldom use preserves." "They are unhealthy, expensive, and useless to those who are well." This was a sumptuary law, against which the soul of youth revolted.

The wise counsels thus conveyed in this more-than-cookery book may naturally have led the way to a "Mother's Book," of more direct exhortation. This was published in 1831, and had a great success, reaching its eighth American edition in 1845, besides twelve English editions and a German translation. Doubtless it is now out of print, but one may still find at the antiquarian bookstores the "Girl's Own Book," by Mrs. Child, published during the same year. This is a capital manual of indoor games, and is worth owning by any one who has a household of children, or is liable to serve as the Lord of Misrule at Christmas parties. It is illustrated with vignettes by that wayward child of genius, Francis Graeter, a German, whom Mrs. Child afterwards described in the "Letters from New York." He was a personal friend of hers, and his pencil is also traceable in some of her later books. Indeed, the drollest games which he has delineated in the "Girl's Own Book" are not so amusing as the unintentional comedy of his attempts at a "Ladies' Sewing Circle," which illustrates American life in the "History

of Woman." The fair laborers sit about a small round table, with a smirk of mistimed levity on their faces, and one feels an irresistible impulse to insert in their very curly hair the twisted papers employed in the game of "Genteel lady, always genteel," in the "Girl's Own Book."

The "History of Woman" appeared in 1832, as one of a series projected by Carter & Hendee, of which Mrs. Child was to be the editor, but which was interrupted at the fifth volume by the failure of the publishers. She compiled for this the "Biographies of Good Wives," the "Memoirs" of Madame De Staël and Madame Roland, those of Lady Russell and Madame Guion, and the two volumes of "Woman." All these aimed at a popular, not a profound, treatment. She was, perhaps, too good a compiler, showing in such work the traits of her brother's mind, and carefully excluding all those airy flights and bold speculations which afterwards seemed her favorite element. The "History of Woman," for instance, was a mere assemblage of facts, beginning and ending abruptly, and with no glimpse of any leading thought or general philosophy. It was, however, the first American storehouse of information upon that whole question, and no doubt helped the agitation along. Its author evi-

dently looked with distrust, however, on that rising movement for the equality of the sexes, of which Frances Wright was then the rather formidable leader.

The "Biographies of Good Wives" reached a fifth edition in the course of time, as did the "History of Woman." I have a vague childish recollection of her next book, "The Coronal," published in 1833, which was of rather a fugitive description. The same year brought her to one of those bold steps which made successive eras in her literary life, — the publication of her "Appeal for that Class of Americans called Africans."

The name was rather cumbrous, like all attempts to include an epigram in the title-page, but the theme and the word "Appeal" were enough. It was under the form of an "Appeal" that the colored man, Alexander Walker, had thrown a firebrand into Southern society which had been followed by Nat Turner's insurrection; and now a literary lady, amid the cultivated circles of Boston, dared also to "appeal." Only two years before (1831), Garrison had begun the "Liberator," and only two years later (1835), he was dragged through Boston streets, with a rope around his body, by "gentlemen of property and standing," as the newspapers said next day. It was just at the very most dan-

gerous moment of the rising storm that Mrs. Child appealed.

Miss Martineau in her article, "The Martyr Age in America," — published in the "London and Westminster Review" in 1839, and at once reprinted in America, — gives by far the most graphic picture yet drawn of that perilous time. She describes Mrs. Child as "a lady of whom society was exceedingly proud before she published her Appeal, and to whom society has been extremely contemptuous ever since." She adds: "Her works were bought with avidity before, but fell into sudden oblivion as soon as she had done a greater deed than writing any of them."

It is evident that this result was not unexpected, for the preface to the book explicitly recognizes the probable dissatisfaction of the public. She says: —

"I am fully aware of the unpopularity of the task I have undertaken; but though I expect ridicule and censure, I cannot fear them. A few years hence, the opinion of the world will be a matter in which I have not even the most transient interest; but this book will be abroad on its mission of humanity long after the hand that wrote it is mingling with the dust. Should it be the means of advancing, even one single hour, the inevitable progress of truth and jus-

tice, I would not exchange the consciousness for all Rothschild's wealth or Sir Walter's fame."

These words have in them a genuine ring; and the book is really worthy of them. In looking over its pages, after the lapse of many years, it seems incredible that it should have drawn upon her such hostility. The tone is calm and strong, the treatment systematic, the points well put, the statements well guarded. The successive chapters treat of the history of slavery, its comparative aspect in different ages and nations, its influence on politics, the profitableness of emancipation, the evils of the colonization scheme, the intellect of negroes, their morals, the feeling against them, and the duties of the community in their behalf. As it was the first anti-slavery work ever printed in America in book form, so I have always thought it the ablest; that is, it covered the whole ground better than any other. I know that, on reading it for the first time, nearly ten years after its first appearance, it had more formative influence on my mind in that direction than any other, although of course the eloquence of public meetings was a more exciting stimulus. It never surprised me to hear that even Dr. Channing attributed a part of his own anti-slavery awakening to this admirable book.

He took pains to seek out its author immediately on its appearance, and there is in her biography an interesting account of their meeting. His own work on slavery did not appear until 1835.

Undaunted and perhaps stimulated by opposition, Mrs. Child followed up her self-appointed task. During the next year she published the "Oasis," a sort of anti-slavery annual, the precursor of Mrs. Chapman's "Liberty Bell," of later years. She also published, about this time, an "Anti-Slavery Catechism" and a small book called "Authentic Anecdotes of American Slavery." These I have never seen, but find them advertised on the cover of a third pamphlet, which, with them, went to a second edition in 1839. "The Evils of Slavery and the Cure of Slavery; the first proved by the opinions of Southerners themselves, the last shown by historical evidence." This is a compact and sensible little work.

While thus seemingly absorbed in reformatory work, she still kept an outlet in the direction of pure literature, and was employed for several years on "Philothea," which appeared in 1836. The scene of this novel was laid in ancient Greece. I well remember the admiration with which this romance was hailed; and for me personally it was one of those delights

of boyhood which the criticism of maturity cannot disturb. What mattered it if she brought Anaxagoras and Plato on the stage together, whereas in truth the one died about the year when the other was born? What mattered it if in her book the classic themes were treated in a romantic spirit? That is the fate of almost all such attempts, — compare, for instance, the choruses of Swinburne's "Atalanta," which might have been written on the banks of the Rhine, and very likely were. But childhood never wishes to discriminate, only to combine; a period of life which likes to sugar its bread and butter prefers also to have its classic and romantic in one.

"Philothea" was Mrs. Child's first attempt to return, with her anti-slavery cross still upon her, into the ranks of literature. Mrs. S. J. Hale, who, in her "Woman's Record," reproves her sister writer for "wasting her soul's wealth" in radicalism, and "doing incalculable injury to humanity," seems to take a stern satisfaction in the fact that "the bitter feelings engendered by the strife have prevented the merits of this remarkable book from being appreciated as they deserve." This was perhaps true; nevertheless it went through three editions, and Mrs. Child, still keeping up the full circle of her labors, printed nothing but a rather

short-lived "Family Nurse" (in 1837) before entering the anti-slavery arena again.

In 1841 Mr. and Mrs. Child were engaged by the American Anti-Slavery Society to edit the "Anti-Slavery Standard," a weekly newspaper published in New York. Mr. Child's health being impaired, his wife undertook the task alone, and conducted the newspaper in that manner for two years, after which she aided her husband in the work, remaining there for eight years in all. She was very successful as an editor, her management being brave and efficient, while her cultivated taste made the "Standard" attractive to many who were not attracted by the plainer fare of the "Liberator." The good judgment shown in her poetical and literary selections was always acknowledged with especial gratitude by those who read the "Standard" at that time.

During all this period she was a member of the family of the well-known Quaker philanthropist, Isaac T. Hopper, whose biographer she afterwards became. This must have been the most important and satisfactory time in Mrs. Child's whole life. She was placed where her sympathetic nature found abundant outlet and plenty of coöperation. Dwelling in a home where disinterestedness and noble labor were as daily breath, she had great opportunities.

There was no mere almsgiving there, no mere secretaryship of benevolent societies; but sin and sorrow must be brought home to the fireside and to the heart; the fugitive slave, the drunkard, the outcast woman, must be the chosen guest of the abode,—must be taken and held and loved into reformation or hope. Since the stern tragedy of city life began, it has seen no more efficient organization for relief than when Isaac Hopper and Mrs. Child took up their abode beneath one roof in New York.

For a time she did no regular work in the cause of permanent literature,—though she edited an anti-slavery almanac in 1843,—but she found an opening for her best eloquence in writing letters to the "Boston Courier," then under the charge of Joseph T. Buckingham. This was the series of "Letters from New York" that afterwards became famous. They were the precursors of that modern school of newspaper correspondence in which women have so large a share, and which has something of the charm of women's private letters,—a style of writing where description preponderates over argument and statistics make way for fancy and enthusiasm. Many have since followed in this path, and perhaps Mrs. Child's letters would not now be hailed as they then were. Others may have equaled her, but she

gave us a new sensation, and that epoch was perhaps the climax of her purely literary career.

Their tone also did much to promote the tendency, which was showing itself in those days, towards a fresh inquiry into the foundations of social science. The Brook Farm experiment was at its height; and though she did not call herself an Associationist, yet she quoted Fourier and Swedenborg, and other authors who were thought to mean mischief; and her highest rhapsodies about poetry and music were apt to end in some fervent appeal for some increase of harmony in daily life. She seemed always to be talking radicalism in a greenhouse; and there were many good people who held her all the more dangerous for her perfumes. There were young men and maidens, also, who looked to her as a teacher, and were influenced for life, perhaps, by what she wrote. I knew, for instance, a young lawyer, just entering on the practice of his profession under the most flattering auspices, who withdrew from the courts forever—wisely or unwisely,—because Mrs. Child's book had taught him to hate their contests and their injustice.

It was not long after this that James Russell Lowell, in his "Fable for Critics," gave himself up to one impulse of pure poetry in de-

scribing Mrs. Child. It is by so many degrees the most charming sketch ever made of her that the best part of it must be inserted here:—

"There comes Philothea, her face all aglow,
She has just been dividing some poor creature's woe,
And can't tell which pleases her most, to relieve
His want, or his story to hear and believe;

"The pole, science tells us, the magnet controls,
But she is a magnet to emigrant Poles,
And folks with a mission that nobody knows
Throng thickly about her as bees round a rose;
She can fill up the *carets* in such, make their scope
Converge to some focus of rational hope,
And with sympathies fresh as the morning, their gall
Can transmute into honey,—but this is not all;
Not only for these she has solace, oh, say,
Vice's desperate nursling adrift in Broadway,
Who clingest with all that is left of thee human
To the last slender spar from the wreck of the woman,
Hast thou not found one shore where those tired drooping
feet

Could reach firm mother earth, one full heart on whose beat
The soothed head in silence reposing could hear
The chimes of far childhood throb back on the ear?
Ah, there's many a beam from the fountain of day
That, to reach us unclouded, must pass on its way
Through the soul of a woman, and hers is wide ope
To the influence of Heaven as the blue eyes of Hope;
Yes, a great heart is hers, one that dares to go in
To the prison, the slave-hut, the alleys of sin,
And to bring into each, or to find there, some line
Of the never completely out-trampled divine;
If her heart at high floods swamps her brain now and then,
'Tis but richer for that when the tide ebbs again,
As after old Nile has subsided, his plain

Overflows with a second broad deluge of grain;
 What a wealth would it bring to the narrow and sour,
 Could they be as a Child but for one little hour!"

The two series of "Letters from New York" appeared in 1843 and 1845, and went through seven or more editions. They were followed in 1846 by a collection of tales, mostly printed, entitled "Fact and Fiction." The book was dedicated to "Anna Loring, the Child of my Heart," and was a series of powerful and well-told narratives, some purely ideal, but mostly based upon the sins of great cities, especially those of man against woman. She might have sought more joyous themes, but none which at that time lay so near her heart. There was more sunshine in her next literary task, for, in 1852, she collected three small volumes of her stories from the "Juvenile Miscellany" and elsewhere, under the title of "Flowers for Children."

In 1853 she published her next book, entitled "Isaac T. Hopper; a True Life." This gave another new sensation to the public, for her books never seemed to repeat each other, and belonged to almost as many different departments as there were volumes. The critics complained that this memoir was a little fragmentary, a series of interesting stories without sufficient method or unity of conception. Per-

haps it would have been hard to make it otherwise. Certainly, as the book stands, it seems like the department of "Benevolence" in the "Percy Anecdotes," and serves as an encyclopædia of daring and noble charities.

Her next book was the most arduous intellectual labor of her life, and, as often happens in such cases, the least profitable in the way of money. "The Progress of Religious Ideas through Successive Ages" was published in three large volumes in 1855. She had begun it long before in New York, with the aid of the Mercantile Library and the Commercial Library, then the best in the city. It was finished in Wayland, with the aid of her brother's store of books, and with his and Theodore Parker's counsel as to her course of reading. It seems, from the preface, that more than eight years elapsed between the planning and the printing, and for six years it was her main pursuit. For this great labor she had absolutely no pecuniary reward; the book paid its expenses and nothing more. It is now out of print and not easy to obtain.

This disappointment was no doubt due partly to the fact that the book set itself in decided opposition, unequivocal though gentle, to the prevailing religious impressions of the community. It may have been, also, that it was too

learned for a popular book and too popular for a learned one. Learning, indeed, she distinctly disavowed. "If readers complain of want of profoundness, they may perchance be willing to accept simplicity and clearness in exchange for depth." . . . "Doubtless a learned person would have performed the task far better in many respects; but, on some accounts, my want of learning is an advantage. Thoughts do not range so freely when the storeroom of the brain is overloaded with furniture." And she gives at the end, with her usual frankness, a list of works consulted, all being in English except seven, which are in French. It was a bold thing to base a history of religious ideas on such books as Enfield's *Philosophy* and Taylor's *Plato*. The trouble was not so much that the learning was second-hand, — for such is most learning, — as that the authorities were second-rate. The stream could hardly go higher than its source; and a book based on such very inadequate researches could hardly be accepted, even when tried by that very accommodating standard, popular scholarship.

In 1857 Mrs. Child published a volume entitled "*Autumnal Leaves; Tales and Sketches in Prose and Rhyme.*" It might seem from this title that she regarded her career of action as drawing to a close. If so she was soon unde-

ceived, and the attack of Captain John Brown upon Harper's Ferry aroused her, like many others, from a dream of peace. Immediately on the arrest of Captain Brown she wrote him a brief letter, asking permission to go and nurse him, as he was wounded and among enemies, and as his wife was supposed to be beyond immediate reach. This letter she inclosed in one to Governor Wise. She then went home and packed her trunk, with her husband's full approval, but decided not to go until she heard from Captain Brown, not knowing what his precise wishes might be. She had heard that he had expressed a wish to have the aid of some lawyer not identified with the anti-slavery movement, and she thought he was entitled to the same considerations of policy in regard to a nurse. Meantime Mrs. Brown was sent for and promptly arrived, while Captain Brown wrote Mrs. Child one of his plain and characteristic letters, declining her offer, and asking her kind aid for his family, which was faithfully given.

But with this letter came one from Governor Wise, — courteous, but rather diplomatic, — and containing some reproof of her expressions of sympathy for the prisoner. To this she wrote an answer, well worded and quite effective, which, to her great surprise, soon appeared in the New York "*Tribune.*" She

wrote to the editor (November 10, 1859): "I was much surprised to see my correspondence with Governor Wise published in your columns. As I have never given any person a copy, I presume you must have obtained it from Virginia."

This correspondence soon led to another. Mrs. M. J. C. Mason wrote from "Alto, King George's County, Virginia," a formidable demonstration, beginning thus: "Do you read your Bible, Mrs. Child? If you do, read there, 'Woe unto you hypocrites,' and take to yourself, with twofold damnation, that terrible sentence; for, rest assured, in the day of judgment, it shall be more tolerable for those thus scathed by the awful denunciations of the Son of God than for you." This startling commencement — of which it must be calmly asserted that it comes very near swearing, for a lady — leads to something like bathos at the end, where Mrs. Mason adds in conclusion, "No Southerner ought, after your letters to Governor Wise, to read a line of your composition, or to touch a magazine which bears your name in its list of contributors." To begin with double-dyed future torments, and come gradually to the climax of "Stop my paper," admits of no other explanation than that Mrs. Mason had dabbled in literature herself, and knew how to pierce the soul of a sister in the trade.

But the great excitement of that period, and the general loss of temper that prevailed, may plead a little in vindication of Mrs. Mason's vehemence, and must certainly enhance the dignity of Mrs. Child's reply. It is one of the best things she ever wrote. She refuses to dwell on the invectives of her assailant, and only "wishes her well, both in this world and the next." Nor will she even debate the specific case of John Brown, whose body was in charge of the courts and his reputation sure to be in charge of posterity. "Men, however great they may be," she says, "are of small consequence in comparison with principles, and the principle for which John Brown died is the question at issue between us."

She accordingly proceeds to discuss this question, first scripturally (following the lead of her assailant), then on general principles; and gives one of her usual clear summaries of the whole argument. Now that the excitements of the hour have passed, the spirit of her whole statement must claim just praise. The series of letters was published in pamphlet form in 1860, and secured a wider circulation than anything she ever wrote, embracing some three hundred thousand copies. In return she received many private letters from the slave States, mostly anonymous, and often grossly insulting.

Having gained so good a hearing, she followed up her opportunity. During the same year she printed two small tracts, "The Patriarchal Institution" and "The Duty of Disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Law," and then one of her most elaborate compilations, entitled "The Right Way the Safe Way, proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies and Elsewhere." This shows the same systematic and thorough habit of mind with its predecessors; and this business-like way of dealing with facts is hard to reconcile with the dreamy and almost uncontrolled idealism which she elsewhere shows. In action, too, she has usually shown the same practical thoroughness, and in case of this very book forwarded copies at her own expense to fifteen hundred persons in the slave States.

In 1864 she published "Looking towards Sunset," — a very agreeable collection of prose and verse, by various authors, all bearing upon the aspects of old age. This was another of those new directions of literary activity with which she so often surprised her friends. The next year brought still another in the "Freedmen's Book," — a collection of short tales and sketches suited to the mental condition of the Southern freedmen, and published for their benefit. It was sold for that purpose at cost,

and a good many copies were distributed through teachers and missionaries.

Her last publication, and perhaps (if one might venture to guess) her favorite among the whole series, appeared in 1867, — "A Romance of the Republic." It was received with great cordiality, and is in some respects her best fictitious work. The scenes are laid chiefly at the South, where she has given the local coloring in a way really remarkable for one who never visited that region, while the results of slavery are painted with the thorough knowledge of one who had devoted a lifetime to their study. The leading characters are of that type which has since become rather common in fiction, because American society affords none whose situation is so dramatic, — young quadroons educated to a high grade of culture, and sold as slaves after all. All the scenes are handled in a broad spirit of humanity, and betray no trace of that subtle sentiment of caste which runs through and through some novels written ostensibly to oppose caste. The characterization is good, and the events interesting and vigorously handled. The defect of the book is a common one, — too large a framework, too many *vertebræ* to the plot. Even the established climax of a wedding is a safer experiment than to prolong the history into

the second generation, as here. The first two thirds of the story would have been more effective without the conclusion. But it will always possess value as one of the few really able delineations of slavery in fiction, and the author may well look back with pride on this final offering upon that altar of liberty where so much of her life had been already laid.

In later life Mrs. Child left not only the busy world of New York, but almost the world of society, and took up her abode (after a short residence at West Newton) in the house bequeathed to her by her father, at Wayland, Mass. In that quiet village she and her husband peacefully dwelt, avoiding even friendship's intrusion. Times of peace have no historian, and the later career of Mrs. Child had few of what the world calls events. Her domestic labors, her studies, her flowers, and her few guests kept her ever busy. She had never had children of her own,—though, as some one has said, she had a great many of other people's,—but more than one whom she had befriended came to dwell with her after her retirement, and she came forth sometimes to find new beneficiaries. But for many of her kindnesses she did not need to leave home, since they were given in the form least to be expected from a literary woman,—that of pecun-

iary bounty. Few households in the country contributed on a scale so very liberal, in proportion to their means.

One published letter, however, may serve as a sample of many. It was addressed to an Anti-Slavery Festival at Boston, and not only shows the mode of action adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Child, but their latest opinions as to public affairs:—

WAYLAND, January 1, 1868.

DEAR FRIEND PHILLIPS,— We inclose fifty dollars as our subscription to the Anti-Slavery Society. If our means equaled our wishes, we would send a sum as large as the legacy Francis Jackson intended for that purpose, and of which the society was deprived, as we think, by an unjust legal decision. If our sensible and judicious friend could speak to us from the other side of Jordan, we doubt not he would say that the vigilance of the Anti-Slavery Society was never more needed than at the present crisis, and that, consequently, he was never more disposed to aid it liberally. . . .

The British Anti-Slavery Society deserted their post too soon. If they had been as watchful to protect the freed people of the West Indies as they were zealous to emancipate them, that horrid catastrophe in Jamaica might have

been avoided. The state of things in those islands warns us how dangerous it is to trust those who have been slaveholders, and those who habitually sympathize with slaveholders, to frame laws and regulations for liberated slaves. As well might wolves be trusted to guard a sheepfold.

We thank God, friend Phillips, that you are preserved and strengthened to be a wakeful sentinel on the watch-tower, ever to warn a drowsy nation against selfish, timid politicians, and dawdling legislators, who manifest no trust either in God or the people.

Yours faithfully,

DAVID L. CHILD,
L. MARIA CHILD.

Mrs. Child outlived her husband six years, and died at Wayland, October 20, 1880. She was one of those prominent instances in our literature of persons born for the pursuits of pure intellect, whose intellects were yet balanced by their hearts, both being absorbed in the great moral agitations of the age. "My natural inclinations," she once wrote to me, "drew me much more strongly towards literature and the arts than towards reform, and the weight of conscience was needed to turn the scale." In a community of artists, she would

have belonged to that class, for she had that instinct in her soul. But she was placed where there was as yet no exacting literary standard; she wrote better than most of her contemporaries, and well enough for her public. She did not, therefore, win that intellectual immortality which only the very best writers command, and which few Americans have attained. But she won a meed which she would value more highly, — that warmth of sympathy, that mingled gratitude of intellect and heart which men give to those who have faithfully served their day and generation.