

1900

# Women in the Revolution

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WOMEN IN THE SOUTHWEST.

EDITH TODDARD.

1900.

## Women in the Revolution.

Little did the dense seidens of the years preceding the Revolution, know of the important part which they were to play in a nation's history. Their hopes and fears were like our own and they looked into the future with untroubled gaze. Life lay before them alluring, unfeared. Fearless and strong, they lived healthy, simple, normal lives, their minds occupied with various duties. As they looked ahead they saw merely a growing oppression and a growing resistance whose outcome could hardly be imagined.

During their early years, they received the training that was to fit them for the period of privation and suffering which was to follow. From earliest childhood, the days were full to overflowing with household cares. "An heroic occasion was not necessarily an occasion for letting the kettle boil over." The daughter of Mrs. Greene, the General's wife, tells interesting tales of her early years. Each day was mapped out and there was no deviation from its course. There was a time to sew, to play upon the spinnet, to embroider, to dust, to knit, and oh! endless other little tasks. One tedious duty was that of sitting in the stocks for an hour each day. The small back must be as strong and as straight as a young sapling to support the mental growth. So Mrs. Greene's pretty little daughter must needs sit for an hour sewing, in the straightest of straight-back chairs, her head in a support

and her feet in wooden rests. Such training taught self-control and obedience, surely. The modern methods of disciplining children would not have appealed to this, strict, independent mother, I fear.

One day, Gen. Washington was expected to spend a few hours with Gen. Greene and his wife and great were the preparations against his coming. Jorueila, the small daughter, was instructed most minutely, how to courtesy, drop her eyes modestly and reply to his probable questions. Each day she was dressed in her best muslin frock and taught how to enter the room- slowly, quietly, to courtesy, make answer, punctuating her set speeches with a droop of her eyelids and depart without once turning her back upon the mighty General or gazing with an ailed glance at his majesty. The day came. The routine was clock-like in precision; the General arrived and later asked for the child. She was waiting, all prepared, with beating heart, above stairs and came down looking pale and very scared to meet the distinguished guest. She stood one moment before him, her fingers knotted together, confused, then all ideas left her and she fell at his feet in a flood of tears. Poor little child? she felt as if she could never be forgiven. What would her mother say? At the same instant the General stooped and raised the small body prostrate before him, saying with a very kind note in his voice, "Why? what is the matter with this silly child? Let us go into the garden." So out into the garden went he too, the tall mighty General and the

tiny girl, hand in hand. Up and down the among the flower beds, they walked, talking like old friends. The tenderness of the man, with the fresh air and sunshine, revived the child and she prattled away to him unreservedly. Such was Washington among children.

Explicit, unquestioning obedience was also demanded from all young people. But since the children possessed the same independence and force of character as their parents sometimes there were differences of opinion. Daughters exhibited, without any restraint, a strange inconsistent spirit of insubordination most upsetting to parental discipline. Picture to yourself stern Gen. Schuyler waking up to the fact, four times repeated, that one of his daughters had married a forbidden suitor. Such feminine wilfulness could not be reached by army discipline. The gratification of the parents was great when their daughter Betsey married Alexander Hamilton. Marriages occurred when the bride and groom were younger than they are to-day. A wife was truly a help-met, helped to earn the money, soothed and stimulated the husband. They understood and sympathized with a man's life work; and when the outlook darkened and war clouds threatened, the strength of the womanhood of '76 was a fact.

As one act of oppression followed another, making women scowl and men set their lips more firmly the truth was forced upon the

colonists. Men turned to face the situation unflinchingly while over a  
 and through it all penetrated the influence of the colonial women. Did  
 England tax tea? Our great-grandmothers had no use for tea. What  
 matter if the flavor of herbs was not so delicately aromatic, the  
 taste of independence was sweeter. Did England close our ports? It  
 made no difference. Factories and spinning wheels were set a-humming  
 north and south. Homespun did not feel so soft, but freedom was bet-  
 ter than king's apparel. Did I say that it made no difference? Ah!  
 but it made all the difference in the world. It knit together all  
 parts of our scattered colonies. Women organized clubs and afternoon  
 teas, without the tea, at which the conversation was not of neighbor-  
 hood, this or that, but of the Boston Port Bill, Stamp Act or the Boston  
 Massacre. No one knows how many garments these "outrageously" pa-  
 triotic creatures, as a British lady has called them, made during these  
 hours of doubt. Another has described them as "zealous to madness" and  
 zealous to madness some of the Southern women may have appeared when  
 they refused to receive attentions from disloyal suitors. This same  
 person said that the New England women were large, independent and  
 impudent; but the author of the remark was a prisoner at the time  
 and may have been somewhat biased in judgment. No relative there to  
 have been strong, dauntless, God-fearing wives, mothers and daughters,  
 who followed the right at whatever cost.

When the war actually opened and soldiers, undisciplined country fellows many of them, hurried from their farms to the center of action there was need of a patriotess, elevated above family, above self. Mothers bade God-speed to sons, some of them barely sixteen, and to husbands whose faces they might never see again. Fathers and sons went out to action, to fight for liberty, to die if need be; but in the hearts of those at home there was an agony of waiting.

One woman living in Massachusetts, after the news of Lexington and Concord reached her, arose before dawn and prepared her husband and sixteen-year-old son for active service and sent them forth. What more did she do? She knew well that volunteers would flock past the house dusty, hot, tramping on to Boston. She piled her fires high with wood and mixed great quantities of flour and meal for brown-bread. The loaves were baked in her huge oven, not half a dozen, and when they were brown, were carried steaming and put on a long bench by the roadside for the wayfarers. There were also jars of home-brewed ale and tin cups near by. Fager were the faces and eager the questions on both sides. A powerful bond had united that woman with every soldier in the land. But when the last man had disappeared, when the noise of the last footstep had died away and the excitement was stilled, the wife and mother turned and went into her empty house

as the sun sank and the shadows began to creep slowly over the land. The awful truth poured over her in a mighty rush. Was it all a dream? Did God support the weak in his powerful hand? What next? Nothing for her but homely household cares and more of them day by day, for the man's work must be done in addition to her own. Throughout the country this was the condition of affairs. Women ploughed, sowed, reaped, cared for cattle and with it all spun and knit for the soldiers. It was their mile toward furthering the great cause. One would hardly dare say that affairs flowed so smoothly on the farms without the men but the women proved themselves capable of shouldering heavier and heavier responsibilities and there was by no means a stand still in the home life.

When Gen. Schuyler left his summer residence on the banks of the Hudson for the battle field, his wife became master and mistress in one. The grand old house of yellow brick lay stretched upon the top of the low hills which rose from the river. Long wings reached hospitably out on either side and behind clustered numerous outbuildings. There was an atmosphere of ease, well-being and good about the estate. There were orchards, fields of grain and gardens checkering the country for miles. Herds of cows, flocks of sheep roamed at will, returning to the generous barn at night. There were all



sorts of fish in the rivers and all manner of game in the forests. Nature was very lavish to her favourites and her bounty was reflected by them on all who would receive it. Mrs. Schuyler saw the center of this little world of life which and which doors glided swiftly under the leadership of their appointed leader. The household life in the days of great harvest, abundance and plenty, just as the birds the large ones, swans, geese, wild ducks were very few and far between. It is remembered to picture them singly, dressed, far from figures, clad in skins and coarse woollen, sitting at the table in this mighty white chief's house on terms more than that of friendship. They expressed their appreciation by bringing the results of hunting and fishing expeditions to the door. Hospitality was a strong factor in those times.

During the war the guests were chiefly officers and soldiers and life grew darker and more serious. News came of battles in the woods of flights and massacres and then of Gen. Schuyler's wounds. The wife left at once almost unattended, crossing mountains, swollen rivers, penetrating untrodden woods, sometimes on foot and then on a dog-boy's back, until she reached camp where he lay in danger and needing most usefully, the touch of a woman's hand. He improved quickly so that she went back again, this time to her Albany winter home.

Months dragged on; another spring was born. Spasmodic reports reached her of butchering to the north and of a nearer approach of the enemy. There lay her summer home in the direct line of the foe, with ripe grain, sleek cattle and such silver. The thought drove her north, deaf to all the warnings from fleeing women and children. She only said, "A General's wife should not know fear," and hurried on. A black servant was ordered to set fire to the grain with a torch. He shamefacedly refused, his eyes rolling with terror lest the enemy appear. Mrs. Schuyler seized the torch from his great useless hands, lighted the grain and turned quickly toward the house in order that she might not see the horrid sight. After she had buried some of the silver, she went back leaving the place to the plunderers. Rumor was right. The enemy descended breeding discord, upset the law and order, ran riot for days, and after burning the house and barn, went on. Had their passage not been checked at Saratoga, history would now read differently. As it was the check was absolute and the spell broken. The wretched remnant of an army was to be shipped to Boston for passage to England. The Schuyler house in Albany was open to the prisoners of war. Officers, soldiers, women and children were given shelter without fear. Burgoyne proudly made apology for devastating the estate by the Hudson. "No more," said

Schuyler firmly, "it is the fate of war." It was a speech worthy of a Roman.

Many women followed their husbands to camp, realizing that there was great need of encouragement and inspiration during hours of waiting. Mrs. Washington heard the opening and closing cannon-shot of every campaign during the war. General Mrs. Knox was always present and great was the rejoicing among the soldiers when the coach, and four white outriders in scarlet and white drove up. The General, too, felt more keenly than was evident from his calm face, as he handed his wife from the carriage. It must be confessed that such life was not fitted for women and often Mrs. Washington longed for the ample cleanliness and abundance of Mt. Vernon. It was painfully monotonous at times, too, amounting to little but a steady series of drills for the bulk of the army was absolutely undisciplined and too independent. Baron Steuben, in writing to a Prussian friend, says after having drilled our soldiers for months, "You say to your soldier do, this and he doeth it but I have to say to these Americans This is the reason why you ought to do this, and then he does it."

The winter in Valley Forge, that valley of want, sickness, hopelessness, was the hardest of all winters but it was invaluable as discipline. The men were wretchedly sheltered in tents and

and huts which admitted everything but sunshine and cheer. Food was scanty, their clothing ragged, they were sick and discouraged. Even their great leader grew faint-hearted sometimes, when he saw the conditions in camp and abroad; no money, short enlistments, dissention among the legislatures, and Jews in Philadelphia, eating and drinking. Then was Mrs. Washington's influence potent. She went from day to day through the camp with flowers for the sick or dainties if persuasion she could produce them. She spared what she could from her own store which was not over ample; for a soldier and a soldier's wife knew what hardship meant. The army was secretly fed by the Philadelphia women who were most ingeniously busy. They received passports from the officers to go into the country and departed looking very comfortably stout to return noticeably thinner. This went on until the British became suspicious and organized a search. Some smuggling was stopped but not all; for a woman with a husband and four sons in active service, knowing their destitution, is a rather difficult person to circumvent.

The ravages of war passed over the country from north to south. Nothing could be accomplished with fiery little New England. The South was at first believed to be loyal to the mother country, who preferred it to the more independent north. More honor to the south

then that she stood by her own. Yet it went hard with them when the British once got a foothold there. They bribed, riddled, even crushed the patriots into submission. A few resolute bands, however, true to the American cause, collected in the mountains and made rather ineffectual sallies on the foe. Here a British captain tried to negotiate with Marion for an exchange of prisoners. As it was supper time he was invited to stay to tea. The two sat by the campfire as the potatoes were cooking; and when they were done, Marion offered his guest a hot one upon a bit of bark. The latter naturally asked if the customary fare were no better. Marion said, "No." "How much pay do you take?" the other questioned again. "Not a cent," was the answer. This was their attitude.

In a valley in South Carolina lived a little company of patriots in great contentment. When news reached them that the British were massing around them, the old minister arose in open air meeting and exhorted them, beginning with these words, "My hearers! we must fight. Go see the tender mercies of Great Britain. In that church, you say find me though still alive, hacked out of the very semblance of humanity." Every man arose and every woman promised to do the man's work and her own in addition until the life should turn. black-wights, white-wights, boys, girls were all called

used for bullets. Bed-spreads, table-cloths, curtains were stripped up for bandages. Men had to hide in the swamps for months to escape the British and were fed not by carrots but by their slaves' hands. The latter were threatened with all the tortures of earth if they refused to confess the hiding places. Mowat said, "No," straight into the very muzzle of a pistol when almost terrorized into confession. Nancy Hart, a vigorous, alert old lady, lost her little "all" by the continual raids of the British. Her chicken yard was quite chicken-less except for one tough specimen, her larder empty, when another band of soldiers strolled in and ordered dinner. The old bird was cooked and while they were eating it, Nancy got one of the guns into her own hands. In the struggle which ensued, she shot one man and two were taken prisoners. The others left hastily. When Mr. Hart returned, the old couple together hung the two captives. Such was the pitch to which they were raised. Time and again did the army have to thank a fearless girl for news of an ambushed foe, for a basket of food or some clothing.

And so the war neared its close. British and American passed each his men for the final blow. At Yorktown, England lost a continent and the colonies were free - free from tyranny without, but not from discord within. The thirteen states fell apart, the legislatures

disagreed, business was dead, a great, hungry, ragged, army of men was disbanded and sent home. What changes! husbands, thin white, aged, set wives no less changed; but fortunate she who had husband or none to welcome back. It was a time full of sadness and joy. What could a man who had spent his vitality in the army do? What was the country to do? Then as before there was no flinching nor shadow of turning. The situation was squarely faced and our country is to-day a monument to the courage and fearlessness of the patriots. As before the woman was to prove herself helper of the man. Together they stood for union inseparable - for honor - for right.