

A REMARKABLE WOMAN.

The distinguished woman whom death has just removed from the ranks of American letters, Miss Katharine Prescott Wormeley, was of a type which the world can ill afford to lose. She had a character in proportion to her great intellectual gifts; she was as noble as she was brilliant. Born in 1830, she belonged to a generation untroubled to any serious extent, if troubled at all, by revolutionary conceptions of woman's proper sphere. Queen Victoria, tartly exclaiming in one of her early letters that a certain Lady ——— should be whipped for her "advanced" ideas, gave rather violent expression to a general feeling that the sex could honorably perform its duties and achieve its happiness without abandoning any of its traditional reserves. Miss Wormeley had that feeling. She was content, down to the day of her death, with exercising a woman's gentleness and kindness, a woman's grace and wit, a woman's goodness. But she found it easily possible to exercise at the same time such powers of energy and brain as most men might envy.

Blest with a rich and eager temperament that delighted in work, she threw herself with ardor into the task of the Sanitary Commission during the war, and in after years her services to philanthropic institutions in Newport were marked by the same zeal and the same efficient practicality. But these public labors never made her a public personage—when once her duty was done she was quick to return to the privacy for which she cared most. There she devoted herself to her pen, enriching literature with the best English version of Balzac that has ever been made, supplementing this monumental production with many other equally sound translations from the French, and, through her voluminous correspondence, sharing in the interests of her friends. She was a letter writer of the old school, with traits of her own that made her unique. Her briefest note was touched with charm. She had seen much, read much, and always taken a vivid, penetrating, humorous view of things. Her memory was remarkable, and she seldom glanced at a subject without recalling some incident or anecdote which heightened the vivacity of her clear, spontaneous style. For letters like hers—and she was magnificently generous of them—one must go back to the French and English classics.

She herself would have scouted this idea. One of the most beautiful of her gifts was her delicate modesty. But she had a noble pride, an almost haughty aloofness from the feverish impulses, materialistic ideals and careless manners of which, from afar, she took regretful note. Nothing escaped her. She was as keen upon political and social developments as upon a chapter in the history of her beloved Balzac. What she saw moved her, on occasion, to wistful remembrance of other days and other standards. Yet even in the midst of her biting analysis of some current question she would break into laughter over its droll side—and she had a wonderful faculty for seeing the droll side. She hated pompous gravity as she hated eccentricity or any unwomanly foible. She would not have been at home with a George Elliot or a Harriet Martineau. But she would have been happy—and made affectionately welcome—in the company of a Jane Austen or a Mary Lamb.