



The Women of the American Revolution - Volume I of II (Illustrated)

Elizabeth F. Ellet

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All Americans are accustomed to view with interest and admiration the events of the Revolution. Its scenes are vivid in their memory, and its prominent actors are regarded with the deepest veneration. But while the leading spirits are thus honored, attention should be directed to the source whence their power was derived—to the sentiment pervading the mass of the people. The force of this sentiment, working in the public heart, cannot be measured; because, amidst the abundance of materials for the history of action, there is little for that of the feeling of those times. And, as years pass on, the investigation becomes more and more difficult. Yet it is both interesting and important to trace its operation. It gave statesmen their influence, and armed heroes for victory. What could they have done but for the home-sentiment to which they appealed, and which sustained them in the hour of trial and success? They were thus aided to the eminence they gained through toils and perils. Others may claim a share in the merit, if not the fame, of their illustrious deeds. The unfading laurels that wreath their brows had their root in the hearts of the people, and were nourished with their life-blood.

The feeling which wrought thus powerfully in the community depended, in great part; upon the women. It is always thus in times of popular excitement. Who can estimate, moreover, the controlling influence of early culture! During the years of the progress of British encroachment and colonial discontent, when the sagacious politician could discern the portentous shadow of events yet far distant, there was time for the nurture, in the domestic sanctuary, of that love of civil liberty, which afterwards kindled into a flame, and shed light on the world. The talk of matrons, in American homes, was of the people's wrongs, and the tyranny that oppressed them, till the sons who had grown to manhood, with strengthened aspirations towards a better state of things, and views enlarged to comprehend their invaded rights, stood up prepared to defend them to the utmost. Patriotic mothers nursed the infancy of freedom. Their counsels and their prayers mingled with the deliberations that resulted in a nation's assertion of its independence. They animated the courage, and confirmed the self-devotion of those who ventured all in the common cause. They frowned upon instances of coldness or backwardness; and in the period of deepest gloom, cheered and urged onward the desponding.

They willingly shared inevitable dangers and privations, relinquished without regret prospects of advantage to themselves, and parted with those they loved better than life, not knowing when they were to meet again. It is almost impossible now to appreciate the vast influence of woman's patriotism upon the destinies of the infant republic. We have no means of showing the important part she bore in maintaining the struggle, and in laying the foundations on which so mighty and majestic a structure has arisen. History can do it no justice; for history deals with the workings of the head, rather than the heart. And the knowledge received by tradition, of the domestic manners, and social character of the times, is too imperfect to furnish a sure index. We can only dwell upon individual instances of magnanimity, fortitude, self-sacrifice, and heroism, bearing the impress of the feeling of Revolutionary days, indicative of the spirit which animated all, and to which, in its various and multiform exhibitions, we are not less indebted for national freedom, than to the swords of the patriots who poured out their blood...

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