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Home College Series.

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MARGARET FULLER.

BY MISS JENNIE M. BINGHAM.

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135

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And what a young man may do in this respect, a young woman, and both old men and old women, may do.

J. H. VINCENT.

NEW YORK, Jan., 1883.

## MARGARET FULLER.

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MARGARET FULLER was born in Cambridgeport, Mass., May 23, 1810. Of her mother, she writes : "She was one of those fair and flower-like natures which sometimes spring up even beside the most dusty highways of life. Of all persons whom I have known, she had in her most of the angelic—that spontaneous love for every living thing, man, beast, and tree." This trait Margaret fully inherited. Her father was a practical New Englander. "To be an honored citizen and have a home on earth were made the great aims of existence." Margaret says : "His love for my mother was the green spot on which he stood apart from the commonplaces of a mere bread-winning, bread-bestowing existence." He had ranked high in college, and early determined to make his child the heir of all he knew, and as much more as the most thorough instruction could give. Thus she had tasks given her as many as the hours would allow, and on subjects beyond her age.

She began to read Latin when six years old, and when eight years old, her recreation consisted in reading Shakespeare and Cervantes. The consequence of this forced education was a premature development of the brain that made her a youthful prodigy by day, and by night a victim of haunting dreams and somnambulism. "Poor child," she says of herself, "I look back on those glooms and terrors wherein I was enveloped, and perceive that I had no natural childhood." Her study of Rome through its language gave her a love for that nation which afterward led her to sacrifice for its liberty. "The tramp and march of the language," she says, "would give one the thought of Rome. Who that has lived with those men, but admires the plain force of fact, of thought,

passed into action,—no divinity, no unfulfilled aim, but just the man and Rome, and what he did for Rome.”

She was afterward sent to a boarding-school, where she was an enigma to teacher and school-mate. Her power to influence her associates, which later became so marvelous, was used by turns to attract and repel them. When fifteen years old this precocious young lady was studying Greek, metaphysics, French, and Italian literature. James Freeman Clarke, who knew her intimately when she was living so near the Cambridge College, has written an important part of her memoirs. “One thing only she demanded of all her friends—that they should not be satisfied with the common routine of life—that they should aspire to something higher, better, holier, than they had now attained. Margaret possessed, in a greater degree than any person I ever knew, the power of so magnetizing others by the power of her mind, that they would lay open to her all the secrets of their nature. She was the center of a group very different from each other, and whose only affinity consisted in their all being drawn toward herself. Some of her friends were young, gay, and beautiful; some old, sick, or studious. But all, in order to be Margaret’s friends, must be capable of some aspirations for the better. And how did she glorify life to all! All that was tame and common vanishing away in the picturesque light thrown over most familiar things by her rapid fancy, her brilliant wit, the inexhaustible resources of her knowledge, and the copious rhetoric which found words always ready. Even then she displayed her wonderful gift of conversation which afterward dazzled all who knew her. She had no pretensions to beauty, but escaped the reproach of positive plainness by abundant hair, sparkling, busy eyes, usually half closed from near-sightedness, and the very graceful carriage of her head, which was the most characteristic trait of her personal appearance. Though her love flattered and charmed her friends, it did not spoil them, for



they knew her perfect truth. They knew that she loved them, not for what she imagined, but for what she saw, though she saw it only in the germ. She was a balloon of sufficient power to take us up with her into the serene depths of heaven. Earth lay beneath us a lovely picture—its sounds came up mellowed into music. All her friends will unite in the testimony that, whatever they may have known of wit and eloquence in others, they have never seen one who, like her, by the conversation of an hour or two, could, not merely entertain and inform, but make an epoch in one's life. We all dated back to this or that conversation with Margaret, in which we took a complete survey of great subjects, came to some clear view of a difficult question, saw our way open before us to a higher plane of life, and were led to some definite resolution which has had a bearing on all our subsequent career."

She wrote to Mr. Clarke: "If I were a man, the gift I would choose should be that of eloquence. That power of forcing the vital currents of thousands of human hearts into the current, with that most delicate instrument, the voice, is preferable to a more permanent influence."

Up to this time the whole aim of Margaret Fuller's life had been self-culture. She felt that she owed to herself the full development of all her powers. Afterward she learned that we must often be content to enter the kingdom of heaven halt and maimed. A letter to her mother says: "In earlier days I dreamed of doing and being much, but now am content with the Magdalene to rest my plea hereon, 'She has loved much.'"

She was a Transcendentalist in her reverence for individual reason and belief that divinity dwells in every human soul. When the movement developed into Socialism and founded Brook Farm, she visited the colony, but could not be induced to join it.

It is believed that Hawthorne's character "Zenobia," the

heroine of "Blithdale Romance" and his noblest creation, represented Margaret Fuller, whom he met at Brook Farm.

Margaret had a friend who was a very devoted Christian, and she was never weary of talking with her about her faith. "I would gladly give all my talents and knowledge for such an experience as this," she said. "Several years afterward," says this friend, "we were speaking of God's light in the soul, and in answer to my question whether it had dawned on her, she answered, "I think it has. But, O! it is so glorious that I fear it will not be permanent, and so precious that I dare not speak of it lest it should be gone."

In 1833 her father removed to Groton, where, two years later, he died. She was just ready to accompany Miss Martineau, on her return to Europe, when her father's death left her mother with five children to be educated on an embarrassed estate. Margaret at once relinquished her plan, and went to Boston, where she taught in Mr. Alcott's school, and had a class in modern languages outside. R. W. Emerson writes: "I became acquainted with Margaret in 1835. I still remember the first half hour of her conversation. She was rather under the middle height, always carefully and becomingly dressed, and of lady-like self-possession. Her extreme plainness—a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids, the nasal tone of her voice—all repelled; and I said to myself, we shall never get far. She often made a disagreeable first impression on those who afterward became her best friends. She was every-where a welcome guest. All the art, thought, and nobleness in New England seemed related to her, but she was infinitely less interested in literature than in life. She drew her companions to surprising confessions. She extorted the secret of life which cannot be told without setting heart and mind in a glow; and thus she had the best of those she saw. She was perfectly true to this confidence. The day was never long enough to ex-

haust her opulent memory, and I, who knew her intimately for ten years, never saw her without surprise at her new powers. The test of this eloquence was its range. It told on children and old people, on men of the world and sainted maids. She could hold them all by her honeyed tongue. I regret that it is not in my power to give any true report of Margaret's conversation."

The high estimate she placed on every human being included herself. She said to her friends: "I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own." Meantime her letters are marked by humility. Her *Journal* has this bitter sentence, "Of a disposition that requires the most refined, the most exalted tenderness, without charms to inspire it!"

Mr. Emerson says: "The loveliest and the highest endowed women were eager to lay their beauty, their grace, the hospitalities of their sumptuous homes, and their costly gifts, at her feet. When I expressed, many years after to a lady who knew her well, some surprise at the homage paid her by men in Italy—offers of marriage having there been made to her by distinguished parties—she replied, 'There is nothing extraordinary in it. Had she been a man, any one of those fine girls who surrounded her here would have married her; they were all in love with her, she understood them so well.' Of personal influence she had more than any person I have known. An interview with her was a joyful event. Worthy men and women who had conversed with her could not forget her, but worked bravely on in the remembrance that this heroic approver had recognized their aims."

In a copy of Mrs. Jameson's "*Italian Painters*," against a passage describing Corregio as a true servant of God in his art, above sordid ambition, devoted to truth, Margaret wrote on the margin, "And yet all might be such." This book lay long on the table of the owner in Florence, and chanced to be read there by a young artist of much talent. "These

words," said he, months afterward, "struck out a new strength in me. They revived resolutions long fallen away, and made me set my face like a flint."

She treated persons as a true portrait-painter does, who paints the face not as it actually is, but as creation designed, omitting the imperfections arising from the resistance of the material worked in. She saw them as God designed them, omitting the loss from false position, from friction of untoward circumstances.

The peculiarity of her power was to make all who were in concert with her feel the miracle of existence. Channing says: "Her presence seemed to touch even common scenes and drudging cares with splendor, as when, through the scud of a rain-storm, sunbeams break from serene blue openings, crowning familiar things with sudden glory."

About this time she wrote: "After much troubling of the waters of my life, a radiant thought of the meaning and beauty of earthly existence will descend like a healing angel."

Concerning her wonderful power of conversation, it is said there has been no woman like her since Madame de Stael; but while Margaret Fuller's conversation, in eloquence and effect, in sparkle and flow, was fully equal to that of the gifted French woman, it had, superadded, a merit which the latter could not claim—her power to draw out others. She not only talked surprisingly herself, but she made others do so. While talking with her they seemed to make discoveries of themselves, to wonder at their own thoughts, and to admire the force and aspiration of their own characters. She made those who conversed with her forget to admire her in wondering at themselves.

As a friend, she is tenderly and devotedly remembered by the large and miscellaneous class who knew and loved her. What an assemblage they would make if gathered together! The rich and the refined, the poor and the humble, the men

and women of genius struggling with destiny, the poet with his scorned and broken lyre—all these found in her a confidant to soothe their sorrows and a friend to encourage and point onward.

“‘Sincere has been their striving; great their love,’ is a sufficient apology for any life,” wrote Margaret.

The events in Margaret’s life up to 1840 were few, and not of that dramatic interest which readers love. She organized, with great success, a school in Providence, where she taught two years. She translated and published works from the German, and having made the tour of the great lakes wrote an agreeable narrative of it, called “Summer on the Lakes.” For two years she edited the “Dial,” a philosophical magazine. In 1839, in answer to the wishes of multitudes of her friends, she opened a class in conversation. Seventy-five of the most intelligent women of Boston and vicinity were present at the first meeting. The reporter closes her account of it by saying: “Miss Fuller’s thoughts were much illustrated, and all was said with the most captivating address and grace, and with beautiful modesty. The position in which she placed herself with respect to the rest was entirely lady-like and companionable.” The interest increased, and a new series of thirteen more weeks followed. Margaret began them with an exordium, in which she gave her leading views. Of course, it was not easy for every one to venture a remark after an eloquent discourse, and in the presence of twenty superior women who were all inspired. But whatever was said, Margaret knew how to seize the good meaning of it, and to make the speaker glad, and not sorry, that she had spoken. In writing she was prone to spin her sentence beyond the sympathy of her reader, but in discourse, never. When she was intellectually excited, as often happened, all deformity of feature was dissolved in the power of the expression, and the young people came away delighted with her “beautiful looks.” A remark made by

an eminent lady, who had previously been prejudiced against Margaret, was only an expression of the class: "I never heard, read of, or imagined conversations at all equal to these."

The classes thus formed were renewed each year until Margaret's removal to New York, in 1844. Thither she came as a contributor to the "New York Tribune," living in Mr. Greeley's family. Mr. Greeley says: "I did not fully appreciate her nobler qualities for some months afterward. Fortune seemed to delight in placing us two in relations of friendly antagonism. Margaret was always a most earnest champion of woman's social and political equality with man; her free access to all professions. To this demand I heartily acceded. But in my mind the equalizing theory can be enforced only by ignoring the discrimination of men and women, and regarding all alike as simply persons. In this view Margaret did not at all concur. Whenever she said or did any thing implying the usual demand of women on the courtesy and protection of manhood, I was apt, before complying, to look her in the face and exclaim, with marked emphasis, quoting from her book, 'Woman in the Nineteenth Century,' 'Let them be sea-captains, if they will!' Personally, I regarded her as my wife's cherished friend, than as my own, possessing many lofty qualities and some prominent weaknesses, and a good deal spoiled by the unmeasured flattery of her little circle of inordinate admirers. For myself, I resolved to escape the fascination which she seemed to exert over the eminent and cultivated persons, mainly women, who came to visit her, and who seemed to regard her with a strangely Oriental adoration. But as time wore on, and I became inevitably better acquainted with her, I found myself drawn almost irresistibly into the general current. I found that her faults and weaknesses were all superficial. I learned to know her as a most fearless and unselfish champion of truth and human good, at all hazards ready to be their stand-

ard-bearer through danger and obloquy, and if need be, their martyr. I never met another in whom the inspiring hope of Immortality was so strengthened into profoundest conviction. With a limited income she was yet generous beyond the bounds of reason. Had the gold of California been all her own, she would have disbursed nine tenths of it in eager and well-directed efforts to diminish the flood of human misery. I think few persons in their pecuniary dealings have experienced and evinced more of the better qualities of human nature than Margaret Fuller. Her love of children was one of her most prominent characteristics. She could narrate almost any story in language level to their capacities. Her powers of observation and imitation were so marvelous that, had she been attracted to the stage, she would have been the first actress America has produced, whether in tragedy or comedy.

“One characteristic of her writings I feel bound to commend—their absolute truthfulness. She never asked how this would sound nor whether that would do, but simply, “Is it the truth?” And if her judgment answered, “Yes,” she uttered it, no matter what odium it might draw down on her own head.

“Profoundly religious, she won the confidence and affection of those who attracted her by unbounded sympathy and trust. She probably knew the cherished secrets of more hearts than any one else.”

W. H. Channing, one of her biographers, tells us how he was at first repelled by Margaret's decisive tone, her satire, and contempt of conventional standards. “But soon,” he says, “I was charmed unaware with the sagacity of her sallies, the breadth and richness of culture manifested in her allusions, and, above all, her truthfulness. To her might have been applied the words used in describing George Sand, ‘Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man.’”

Margaret's charities and courtesies were not limited to her

kindred. She fell at once into agreeable relations with her domestics, became their confidant, and rejoiced to gratify their tastes; and, in return, no lady could receive from servants better attendance. "Around my path," she writes, "how much humble love continually flows. These everyday friends never forget my wishes, make no demands on me, and load me with gifts and uncomplaining service.

Even in extreme cases of debasement she found more to admire than to contemn. She accepted an invitation to visit Sing Sing prison, and thus writes of it: "Sunday morning we attended service in the chapel of the male convicts. I never felt such sympathy with an audience as when, at the words 'Men and brethren,' that sea of faces marked with the scars of every ill were upturned, and the shell of brutality burst apart at the touch of love." So much were her sympathies awakened by this visit, that she rejoiced in the opportunity, soon after offered, of passing Christmas with these outcasts, and gladly consented to address the women in their chapel. "There was," says one present, "a most touching tenderness blended with dignity in her air and tone, as seated in the desk she looked around on her fallen sisters, and begun: 'To me the pleasant office has been given of wishing you a happy Christmas.' A simultaneous movement of obeisance rippled over the audience with a murmured 'Thank you,' and a smile was spread upon those sad countenances like sunshine sparkling on a pool. The address was full of good sense, hearty fellow-feeling, and pathetic hopefulness, which made so effective her truly womanly appeal."

This intercourse with the most unfortunate of her sex led Margaret immediately on reaching New York to visit the prisons on Blackwell's Island. It was while walking among the beds of the hospital that an incident occurred as touching as it was surprising to herself. A woman was pointed out who bore a very bad character, being hardened,



sulky, and impenetrable. She was in bad health and rapidly failing. Margaret requested to be left alone with her, and to her question, "Are you willing to die?" the woman answered "Yes," adding, with her usual bitterness, "not on religious grounds though." Margaret then began to talk with her about her health and few comforts until the conversation deepened in interest. When Margaret rose to go, and asked, "Is there not any thing I can do for you?" the woman replied: "I should be very glad if you will pray with me."

Of the impression produced by Margaret on those who were but slightly acquainted with her, some idea may be formed by the following sketch: "In general society she commanded respect rather than admiration. All persons were curious to see her, and in full rooms her fine head and spiritual expression at once marked her out from the crowd; but the most were at first shy of what seemed conceit, and a harsh spirit of criticism, while on her part she seemed to regard those around her as frivolous and conventional. I remember I was surprised to find her height no greater, for her writings had always given me an impression of magnitude. Thus I studied though I avoided her, admitting the while, proudly and joyously, that she was a woman to reverence. A trifling incident, however, gave me the key to much in her character, of which, before, I had not dreamed. It was one evening after a company where Frances Osgood, Margaret Fuller, and other literary ladies had attracted some attention, that as we were in the dressing-room preparing to go home, I heard Margaret sigh deeply. Surprised and moved, I could not resist saying, 'Why?' 'Alone as usual,' was her pathetic answer, followed by a few sweet womanly remarks, touching as they were beautiful. Often after, I found myself recalling her look and tone with tears in my eyes; for before, I had regarded her as a being cold and abstracted, if not scornful."

Mr. Channing says: "Here was one fitted by genius and culture to mingle as an equal in the most refined circles of Europe, and yet her youth and early womanhood had passed away amid the drudging descendants of the prim Puritans. Trained among those who could have discerned her peculiar power, and early fed with the fruits of beauty for which her spirit pined, she would have developed into one of the finest lyrists, romancers, and critics that the modern literary world has seen. This tantalization of her fate she keenly felt. But the tragedy of Margaret's history was deeper yet. Behind the poet was the woman, the relying and heroic woman. The very glow of her poetic enthusiasm was but an outflush of trustful affection; the very restlessness of her intellect was the confession that her heart had found no home." "Faith almost gives way," she says, "to see man's seventy years of chrysalis."

In 1846 Margaret had an opportunity to make the tour of Europe with some valued friends, and sailed in August. Her letters are full of adventure and interesting interviews with eminent people. Italian boatmen and maidens and Venetian gondoliers became her friends. She writes of a *contadina* who came every week in her rich holiday dress, bringing on one arm an immense basket of fruit, in the other a pair of live chickens, to be eaten, "for the honor and pleasure of her acquaintance." The old father of the family never met her but he took off his hat and said, "Madame, it is to me a consolation to see you."

She spent the winters of 1847-48 in Rome. Here she met Marquis Ossoli, whom she afterward married. The circumstances of their first meeting were peculiar. Soon after coming to Rome, she went with a party of friends to St. Peter's, the evening of Holy Thursday, to hear vespers. A place in the church was designated where, after the services, she and her friends should meet—Margaret being inclined, as was her custom always in St. Peter's, to wander alone

among the different chapels. When, at length, she returned to the place assigned, her party had gone. In some perplexity she walked about, with her glass, carefully examining each group. Presently a young man of gentlemanly address came up to her, and begged if she were seeking any one, that he might be permitted to assist her, and together they continued the search. At last it became evident that her friends had gone, and as it was then quite late they went out into the piazza to find a carriage. Owing to the delay there were then none, and Margaret was compelled to walk with her stranger friend the long distance between the Vatican and Corso. At this time she was able to converse but little in Italian, but their words, though few, were enough to create in each a desire for further acquaintance. This chance meeting prepared the way for many interviews, and before Margaret's departure for Venice he offered his hand and was refused. After her return to Rome, he became her constant visitor. She was watching with intense interest the tide of political events, and their bond of sympathy was their longing for liberty and better government. His brothers were in the employ of the Papal Government, and thus it became necessary that his marriage with so pronounced a liberal as Margaret, which occurred soon after, should be kept secret, else he would have been banished from Rome when he was most needed.

When Mazzini was called to Italy, made a Roman citizen, and elected to the Assembly, Margaret's hopes were high. He had several interviews with her, and her admiration for him was unbounded. "Freely would I give my life to aid him," she says. From her window she looked out on the terrible conflict. When it was certain that the French would attack Rome, Ossoli took station with his men on the walls of the Vatican gardens, where he remained faithfully to the end of the attack. Margaret had at the same time the entire charge of one of the hospitals. Besides the little money

raised from the Americans in Rome, they had scarcely any means to use. "I have walked through the wards with Margaret," says a correspondent, "and seen how comforting was her presence to the poor, suffering men. 'How long will the Signora stay?' 'When will the Signora come again?' they eagerly asked. To one she carried books, to another she told the news of the day, and listened to another's oft-repeated tale of wrongs, as the best sympathy she could give. They raised themselves up on their elbows to get the last glimpse of her as she was going away. There were some of the sturdy followers of Garibaldi's Legion there, and to them she listened, as they spoke with delight of their chief, of his courage and skill."

Thus while her husband was in danger, and her child far away from her in the country, she was serving Italy. In a letter to Channing, she says: "You say I sustained them; often have they sustained my courage; one kissing the pieces of bone that were so painfully extracted from his arm, and hanging them around his neck as a memento that he had done something for his country. One fair young man, who is made a cripple for life, clasped my hand as he saw me crying over the spasms I could not relieve, and faintly cried, 'Viva l'Italia.' (Long live Italy.) 'Think only, dear good, lady,' said a poor, wounded soldier, 'that I can always wear my uniform on *festas*, just as it is now, with the holes where the balls went through, for a memory.' 'God is good, God knows,' they often said to me when I had not a word to cheer them."

Before the coming of the French, while Margaret was traveling alone on a return from a visit to her child, she rested for an hour at a wayside inn. While there she was startled by the landlady, who with great alarm rushed into the room, exclaiming, "Here is the legion Garibaldi, and if we do not give all up to them without pay, they will kill us." For a moment she said she felt uncomfortable, thinking it quite pos-

sible that they would take her horse and leave her helpless. But she had faith that gentleness and courtesy were the best protection from injury. Accordingly, as soon as they rushed boisterously into the house, she arose and said to the landlady, "Give these good men wine and bread on my account; for after their ride they must need refreshment." Immediately the noise subsided; with respectful bows to her, they seated themselves and partook of the lunch, giving her an account of their journey. When she was ready to go they waited upon her down to the steps with such gentleness and respectfulness of manner, that she drove off wondering how such men could inspire fright.

Another instance of Margaret's power over people was shown when she stepped between two Italians who had rushed at each other with drawn knives. Before the spell of her calm voice their fury melted away. With a sudden impulse the offender flung his knife upon the ground. Turning to Madame Ossoli, he knelt to kiss her hand, and then met his brother in a fraternal embrace.

While she was shut up in the beleaguered city, she seemed to hear, above the roar of the cannon, her child calling to her, and when she could get to him he was starving to death. "Every thing I had endured seemed light to what I felt when I saw him, too weak to smile, or lift his wasted little hand," the mother says. But incessant care brought him back to health. "I am tired out," she wrote; "tired of thinking and hoping—tired of seeing men err and bleed. Faith soars and sings no more." But rest and peace brought an end to the home tragedy, and the following autumn and winter passed in Florence were the happiest of her life. She was writing the history of Italy's struggle while her beautiful boy, Angelo, grew strong again, and her husband, "who was a Roman noble, and more—even a noble Roman," became more and more a true companion.

On May 17, 1850, they set sail for America. Dark pre-

sentiments concerning the voyage so overshadowed Margaret, that she would have turned back had it not been for her longings to see home and the necessity of getting her book published. July 16, the vessel was off the Long Island coast, and the pilot promised to land them in New York in the morning. But the breeze rose to a fierce gale, the boat was driven on to the sand-bars of Fire Island, and lay at the mercy of the maddened ocean. Several of the passengers reached the shore, and it is believed Margaret might have been saved, but she would not be separated from her husband and child. After twelve hours of communion with death, the wreck sank with all on board. The only one of Margaret's treasures which reached the shore was the lifeless body of Angelo. The tribute which Margaret Fuller Ossoli would have paid to Italy's heroes was lost with her valuable life. But her prayer was granted, "O, that Ossoli, Angelo, and I may go together."

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## MARGARET FULLER.

[THOUGHT-OUTLINE TO HELP THE MEMORY.]

Where and when born? Parents? Early education? Study of Latin and its influence on her? What J. F. Clarke says of her and her friends? Self-culture? Transcendentalism? Zenobia? Christian faith? Teaching? What R. W. E. says of her personal appearance? Eloquence? Influence? Young artist? Books? Dial? Class in conversation? Mr. Greeley? Channing? Sing Sing prison? Woman in hospital? Impression on society? Europe? Marquis Ossoli? St. Peter's? Mazzini? Hospital? Incidents with Italians? Florence? Home? Shipwreck? Her last work?

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