



IN her new volume of poems entitled "A Winter Swallow," Edith Thomas concludes a sonnet entitled "Sunset," thus:—

Give me a window opening on the west,
And the full splendor of the setting sun,
There let me stand and gaze, and think no more
If I be poor, or old, or all unblest,
And when my sands of life are quite outrun,
May my soul follow through the day's wide door.

Concerning J. M. Barrie's "Margaret Ogilvy," which we discussed in our page last month, no few critics are disposed to view it as a revelation of things that should be held too sacred for publication, and assert that the author has shown lack of delicate reserve.

Those who speak thus, do so out of a very natural first impulse, one which every reader must feel. But might not a similar accusation be made against St. John, who revealed the sacred scene and speech at that Last Supper, or St. Luke for unveiling an Incarnation, or St. Matthew a Gethsemane Agony.

May we not, in this case, apply holy words and say, "This has been told for a memorial of her." For a surety no more beautiful memorial has ever been upraised than this of Margaret Ogilvy by her son.

And in delicate literary beauty all other works of the gifted author are as dust beside it.

This month our book is "Chapters From a Life," by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

There is not much need to say introductory words about the author. Surely there are few women who have not read "Gates Ajar," even if they are unfamiliar with "The Story of Avis," "A Madonna of the Tubs," and "Men, Women and Ghosts." Yet two recollections come to me always, with the author's name. The first is of a sunny sitting-room in a rambling country parsonage. Between the two big southern windows is a book case on the floor in front of it sits a little girl of twelve, with a feather duster beside her, and a small blue covered book entitled "Gates Ajar," in her lap. Some one enters the room, but she neither hears nor sees, until a severe voice asks, "Have you finished dusting?" Then the little volume is taken from her with the words, "I do not consider this book fit or safe reading for you," and it is put on the topmost shelf, while the child looks hungrily up after it. It was her introduction into the New Theology, although she did not realize the fact for many years.

The second recollection is much later. The child is a young woman now, standing in a fascinating apartment in Park Street, Boston—the private office of Mr. Houghton, head of the great publishing house.

The genial face of the tall, kindly, old gentleman is smiling as she bends enchanted over the autographed portraits of noted authors that adorn walls, tables and mantel.

"That is Elizabeth Stuart Phelps," he says, as she pauses before one unusual mystic face, and then laughs amusedly at the eager, awed questionings of his guest.

"O yes, I know her well. She is a woman of unusual personality, remarkable in many ways," he answers.

Then his talk drifts to other famous writers; but his visitor's eyes are intent upon that one woman's face.

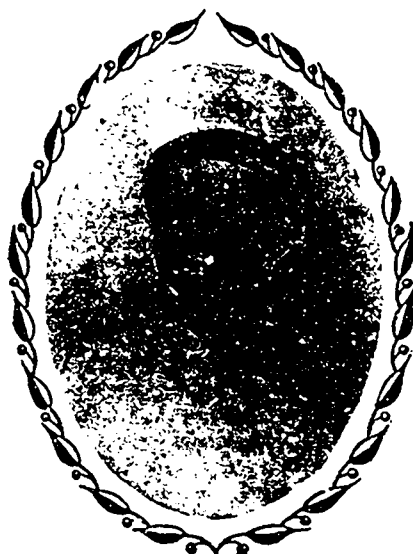
"Chapters from a Life" is a delightful book, both in literary finish and material. How could it be otherwise when it is of her own life that the author writes, in her own inimitable fashion?

Not a detailed autobiography does she give us, but only "chapters" from a full and tense woman's life; and reading these, we who are like-minded, can in some measure fill in the silences and fine reserve which she maintains concerning many relationships.

And as we read these Chapters, we grow to understand this tense woman writer, in whom, as she says, "the grandfather who belonged to the underground railway, and the grandfather of the German lexicon must have contended; for the reformer's blood and the student's blood have always had an uncomfortable time of it, together, in my veins."

Miss Phelps' (it is not easy to call her Mrs. Ward) literary abilities, she asserts, "all belong my ancestors."

It is humbling to feel that whatever may be "worth mentioning" in my life is no affair of mine, but falls under the beautiful and terrible law by which dead men and women, whose blood bounds in our being, control our destinies.



ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS WARD.

And looking back into the dimness of early childhood, she gives us sufficient glimpse of these ancestors to make clear the possible complexity and tensility of her own nature.

Andover life—its theology, its college decorum, its people are touched upon in light, yet most kindly recollection, the lectures, concerts and anniversaries, the weekly prayer meeting in the lecture-room,

I think its chief usefulness was as a training school for theological students, whose early efforts at public exhibition (poor fellows!) quaveringly besought their professors to grow in grace and admonished the families of the Faculty circle to repent.

Very amusing is her description of "tea-parties— theological of course—where the students came to tea in alphabetical order," and also of feminine triumphs, legends of which were handed breathlessly down among Andover daughters.

The maiden laides of Andover, always, I fancied, regarded each other with a peculiar sense of peace. Each knew—and knew that the rest knew—that it was (to use an Andover phraseology) not of predestination or foreordination, but of free will absolute, that an Andover girl passed thro' life alone for the proportion of masculine society was almost Western in its munificence.

The severe theology of Andover, the author

touches very gently in the chapter entitled "School Life."

I was taught that God is Love, and Christ His Son our Saviour; that the important thing in a woman's life was to be that kind of a woman, for which there is really, I think, no better word than Christian, and that the only road to this end was to be trodden by way of character. I was taught that I should speak the truth, say my prayers and consider other people; it was a wholesome, right-minded, invigorating training and I have lived to bless it many troubled years.

One longs to linger over each chapter; of the war time; of the influences that induced "Gates Ajar"—a book leaping forth from a young girl's heart, out of her fresh, strong sympathy for other women, yet that roused a theological world fearful for its pet doctrines. Many are the amusing incidents connected with its great popularity, many are the sorrowful ones also; but space is not given us in which to tell them, yet the author writes:—

For many years I was snowed under by those mourner's letters. In truth they have not ceased entirely yet, though, of course, their visits are now irregular; for the book will soon be thirty years old.

It was a singular experience for a girl of twenty-one.

Two or three of the Chapters are given over to brief personal recollections of eminent litterateurs, whom it has been Miss Phelps' delightful lot to count as friends, and she gives us little etchings of Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Mrs. Stowe, Phillips Brooks and others, which serve to enrich our knowledge of them.

Of Gloucester—for twenty years her summer home, and made memorable by her story of "Jack," "The Old Maid's Paradise," and "A Singular Life,"—the author writes in loving, lingering detail. Here it is evident the most strenuous and sweetest portion of her life has been passed; here she has suffered, loved and labored and here therefore her heart is enchained.

Perhaps the climatic Chapter in this most interesting glimpse of Miss Phelps' life is that entitled "Shut In" the record in delicate suggestion of her own physical disabilities, and by implication of the sufferings and solemn limitations of invalid writers at large. It is a chapter written out of a deep inherent tragedy of nerves, and worthy of most thoughtful reading by the physically robust.

"No truly sensitive man," said Longfellow once to me "can be perfectly well." He might have added that one of the cruellest problems of life is to make the perfectly well understand that he is not perfectly sensitive, and therefore may be disqualified from the comprehension of those who are. . . . Ideally speaking, the robust mind in the robust body ought to be the keenest as well as the finest in the world. In point of fact it often partakes too much of its own muscle; the nerve of perception is bedded a little too deep in the fibre.

In the closing Chapters Miss Phelps discusses literary art; but in the last few pages she turns again, and with an evident breath of deep delight, to her new home, which is the old home, the Gloucester cottage. Not an Old Maid's Paradise now, since Mr. Ward came into her life, but yet the same house moved bodily from the sea rocks to an inland farm that gives the sea only in vista, and that surrounds the famous author—the most intense combination of woman and author since Mrs. Browning died—with rolling hills, wood and valley; yet gives to her the salt sea breeze.

In this shelter of snow and silence we spend eager winters, for our hardest work is done between October and June. Life seems to grow busier as middle age strikes step with one. I wonder is this always so?

But we care only to push on steadily wishing less for cessation and toil than for strength to keep at it; and wisdom to make it worthy of the idea of labor and of life which we believe to be the most precious gift of Heaven to any human soul.

"Chapters from a Life," by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Price, \$1.50. Houghton, Mifflin, Boston; Fleming, Howell Company, Toronto.