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THE WOMEN

OF THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

BY

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RACHEL CALDWELL.

THE history of the Rev. David Caldwell is in many ways identified with that of North Carolina. He was for almost sixty years the pastor of the two oldest and largest Presbyterian congregations in the county of Guilford, and kept a celebrated classical school, for a long time the only one of note in the State, in which for forty years nearly all its professional men, and many from adjoining States, were educated. Not only was he thus the father of education in North Carolina, but before and during the Revolutionary struggle, he exerted a strong influence in favor of the promotion of national independence, and bore an active part in the prominent events of that period. The influence of Mrs. Caldwell in his school was great and beneficial, increasing the respect of the students towards him, and disposing their minds to religious impressions. They bore uniform testimony to her intelligence and zeal, and to the value of her counsels, while her kindness won their regard and confidence. The success with which she labored to inculcate the lessons of practical piety, gave currency to the saying throughout the country—"Dr. Caldwell makes

the scholars, and Mrs. Caldwell makes the preachers." She was the third daughter of Rev. Alexander Craighead, the pastor of the Sugar Creek congregation, and a man of eminent piety and usefulness. In early life she had a share in many of the perils and hardships of the Indian war—the inroads of the savages being frequent and murderous, and her home in an exposed situation. She often said, describing these incursions, that as the family would escape out of one door, the Indians would come in at another. When Braddock's defeat left the Virginia frontier at the mercy of the savages, Mr. Craighead fled, with some of his people, and crossing the Blue Ridge, passed to the more quiet regions of Carolina, where he remained till the close of his life. Rachel married Dr. Caldwell in 1766.

For some days before the battle at Guilford Courthouse, the army of Cornwallis was encamped within the bounds of Dr. Caldwell's congregations; and most of the men being with General Greene, the distress fell on the defenceless women and children. In the detail of spoliation and outrage, their pastor suffered his share. He had been repeatedly harassed by the British and tories, who bore him special enmity; a price had been set upon his head, and a reward of two hundred pounds offered for his apprehension.* On the 11th of March, while he was in Greene's camp, the army was marched to his plantation and encamped there, the officers taking possession of his house. Mrs. Caldwell

* The reader is referred to the Life and Character of Rev. David Caldwell, D. D., by Rev. E. W. Caruthers, Greensboro', N. C.

was at home with her children when they arrived. They at first announced themselves as Americans, and asked to see the landlady; but a female domestic who had ascertained by standing on the fence and seeing red coats at a distance, that they belonged to the army of Cornwallis, quickly communicated her discovery to her mistress. Excusing herself by saying that she must attend to her child, Mrs. Caldwell retired within the house, and immediately gave warning to two of her neighbors who happened to be there, that they might escape through the other door and conceal themselves. She then returned to the gate. The party in front when charged with being British soldiers, avowed themselves such, and said they must have the use of the dwelling for a day or two. They immediately established themselves in their quarters, turning out Mrs. Caldwell, who with her children retired to the smoke house, and there passed a day with no other food than a few dried peaches and apples, till a physician interposed, and procured for her a bed, some provisions, and a few cooking utensils. The family remained in the smoke house two days and nights—their distress being frequently insulted by profane and brutal language. To a young officer who came to the door for the purpose of taunting the helpless mother, by ridiculing her countrymen, whom he termed rebels and cowards, Mrs. Caldwell replied, “Wait and see what the Lord will do for us.” “If he intends to do anything,” pertly rejoined the military fop, “’tis time he had begun.” In reply to Mrs. Caldwell’s application to one of the

soldiers for protection, she was told she could expect no favors, for that the women were as great rebels as the men.

After remaining two days, the army took their departure from the ravaged plantation, on which they had destroyed every thing; but before leaving Dr. Caldwell's house, the officer in command gave orders that his library and papers should be burned. A fire was kindled in the large oven in the yard, and books which could not at that time be replaced, and valuable manuscripts which had cost the study and labor of years, were carried out by the soldiers, armful after armful, and ruthlessly committed to the flames. Not even the family Bible was spared, and the house, as well as plantation, was left pillaged and desolate.

On the fifteenth was heard the roar of that battle which was to compel the retreat of the invaders, and achieve the deliverance of Carolina. The women of Dr. Caldwell's congregation met, as has been mentioned, and while the conflict was raging fiercely between man and man, wrestled in earnest prayer for their defenders. After the cold, wet night which succeeded the action, the women wandered over the field of battle to search for their friends, administer the last sad rites to the dead, and bear away the wounded and expiring. One officer who had lain thirty hours undiscovered, was found in the woods by an old lady, and carried to his house, where he survived long enough to relate how a loyalist of his acquaintance had passed him the day after the battle, had recognized him, and bestowed a blow and an

execration, instead of the water he craved to quench his consuming thirst.. Conscience, however, sometimes avenged the insulted rights of nature ;—the man who had refused the dying request of a fellow creature, was found after the officer's death, suspended on a tree before his own door.*

The persecution of Dr. Caldwell continued while the British occupied that portion of the State. His property was destroyed, and he was hunted as a felon ; snares were laid for him, and pretences used to draw him from his hiding-place ; he was compelled to pass nights in the woods, and ventured only at the most imminent peril to see his family. Often he escaped captivity or death, as it were, by a miracle. At one time when he had ventured home on a stolen visit, the house was suddenly surrounded by armed men, who seized him before he could escape, designing to carry him to the British camp. One or two were set to guard him, while the others went to gather such articles of provisions and clothing as could be found worth taking away. When they were nearly ready to depart, the plunder collected being piled in the middle of the floor, and the prisoner standing beside it with his guard, Mrs. Dunlap, who with Mrs. Caldwell had remained in an adjoining apartment, came forward. With the promptitude and presence of mind for which women are often remarkable in sudden emergencies, she stepped behind Dr. Caldwell, leaned over his shoulder, and whispered to him, as if intending the question for his ear alone, asking if it

* Sketches of North Carolina.

was not time for Gillespie and his men to be there. One of the soldiers who stood nearest caught the words, and with evident alarm demanded what men were meant. The lady replied that she was merely speaking to her brother. In a moment all was confusion; the whole party was panic-struck; exclamations and hurried questions followed; and in the consternation produced by this ingenious though simple manœuvre, the tories fled precipitately, leaving their prisoner and their plunder. The name of Gillespie was a scourge and terror to the loyalists, and this party knew themselves to be within the limits of one of the strongest whig neighborhoods in the State.

Sometime in the fall of 1780, a stranger stopped at the house of Dr. Caldwell, faint and worn with fatigue, to ask supper and lodging for the night. He announced himself an express bearing despatches from Washington to General Greene, then on the Pedee river. He had imagined that he would be free from danger under the roof of a minister of the gospel; but Mrs. Caldwell soon undeceived him on this point. She was alone; her husband was an object of peculiar hatred to the tories, and she could not tell the day or hour when an attack might be expected. Should they chance to hear of the traveller, and learn that he had important papers in his possession, he would certainly be robbed before morning. She said he should have something to eat immediately—but advised him to seek some safer place of shelter for the night. This intelligence so much alarmed the stranger that his agitation would not permit

him to eat, even when the repast was prepared and placed before him. But a short time had passed before voices were heard without, with cries of "Surround the house!" and the dwelling was presently assailed by a body of tories. With admirable calmness, Mrs. Caldwell bade the stranger follow her; and led him out at the opposite door. A large locust tree stood close by, and the night was so dark that no object could be discerned amid its clustering foliage. She bade him climb the tree, thorny as it was, and conceal himself till the men should be engaged in plundering the house. He could then descend on the other side, and trust to flight for his safety. The house was pillaged as she had expected; but the express made his escape, to remember with gratitude the woman whose prudence had saved him with the loss of her property.

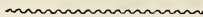
One little incident is characteristic. Among such articles as the housewife especially prizes, Mrs. Caldwell had an elegant table cloth, which she valued as the gift of her mother. While the tories on one occasion were in her house collecting plunder, one of them broke open the chest or drawer which contained it, and drew out the tablecloth. Mrs. Caldwell seized and held it fast, determined not to give up her treasure. When she found that her rapacious enemy would soon succeed in wresting it from her, unless she could make use of some other than muscular force to prevent him, she turned to the other men of the party, whose attention had been attracted by the struggle, so that they had gathered around her. Still keeping her hold on the tablecloth,

she appealed to them with all a woman's eloquence, asking if some of them had not wives or daughters for whose sake they would interfere to cause her to be treated with more civility. A small man who stood at the distance of a few feet presently stepped up, with tears in his eyes, and said that he had a wife—a fine little woman she was, too! and that he would not allow any rudeness to be practised towards Mrs. Caldwell. His interference compelled the depredator to restore the valued article.

It was not unfrequently that female prudence or intrepidity was successful in disappointing the marauders. The plantations of Dr. Caldwell and his brother Alexander were near each other. One evening, during Alexander's absence from home, two soldiers entered his house, and began rudely to seize upon every thing they saw worth carrying off, having ordered his wife to prepare supper for them. They were supposed to belong to the army of Cornwallis, at that time foraging in the neighborhood. Not knowing what to do, Mrs. Caldwell sent to her brother-in-law for advice. He sent word in answer that she must treat the men civilly, and have supper ready as soon as practicable; but that she must observe where they placed their guns, and set the table at the other end of the house. He promised to come over in the meantime and conceal himself in a haystack close by; and she was to inform him as soon as the men had sat down to supper. These directions were implicitly followed. The house was a double cabin, containing two rooms on the same floor. While

the men were leisurely discussing their repast, Dr. Caldwell quietly entered the other apartment, took up one of the guns, and stepping to the door of the room where they were so comfortably occupied, presented the weapon, and informed them they were his prisoners, and their lives would be the forfeit, should they make the least attempt to escape. They surrendered immediately, and Dr. Caldwell marched them to his own house, where he kept them till morning, and then suffered them to depart, after putting them on their parole by causing them to take a solemn oath upon the family Bible, that they would no longer bear arms against the United States, but would return to him upon a day named. This pledge was faithfully kept.

After the war, Dr. Caldwell resumed his labors as a teacher and preacher—his pastoral services being continued till within about four years of his death. He died in the summer of 1824, in the hundredth year of his age. His wife, who had accompanied him in the vicissitudes of his long pilgrimage, aiding him in his useful work, followed him to the grave in 1825, at the age of eighty-six. All who knew, regarded her as a woman of remarkable character and influence, and she is remembered throughout the State with high respect.



THE influence of Colonel Hamilton, of the British army, contributed greatly—at the time Lord Cornwallis, on his last ill-fated expedition, was in the neighborhood of Halifax—to mitigate the evils usually attendant upon