

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

MISS ANNE CLAY.

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SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

MISS ANNE CLAY:

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LIFE AND CHARACTER.

ANNE CLAY, daughter of Joseph and Mary Clay, was born on the 16th of July, in the year 1796, at Savannah. Early in life she removed with her parents to Boston—and while every pains was taken with her domestic education, she enjoyed the advantages of the best schools of that day ; advantages which she diligently and successfully improved.

She shared largely in the love and confidence of her parents, and by the warmth of her affections, the cheerfulness of her temper, the dignity of her manners, and the brilliancy of her mind, she gradually attained to a commanding influence in the family, with the hearty concurrence of every member, which was heightened by the purity and piety of her after life—and continued to increase with the progress of her years.

After the death of Mr. Clay in 1810, Mrs. Clay retired to Medford near Boston, where she remained.



ed until her family was educated. During the residence of the family at Medford, Miss Clay was seriously impressed with the claims of religion, and becoming satisfied with her evidences of conversion, applied for admission and was received into the Congregational Church of Medford, then under the pastoral charge of the Rev. Dr. Osgood, in the year 1817. She continued her connection with the orthodox portion of that church to the day of her decease.

The life of Miss Clay, so far as it relates to her residences and travels, to the changes which occur to us in this world, may be embraced in a few sentences.

The custom of her family has been to divide the year between the north and the south ; visiting the north for the purposes of health and the society of relatives and friends, during the summer, and returning to their plantation, for the promotion of their interests and the improvement of their people, during the winter.

For several years Miss Clay's health had been imperfect. It was greatly impaired the last year, and the serious apprehensions of her friends were excited in her behalf. In the month of March, 1842, she visited Bryan county, and spending a few weeks returned to Boston. Her disease,

which was originally an enlargement of the heart, accompanied for the last few months, with dropsy of the chest, increased ; and after extreme sufferings, which she bore with christian cheerfulness, patience and submission, she peacefully departed this life on the 28th day of October, 1842, at the age of 46 years, in full hope of a blessed immortality.

The intelligence of her death spread rapidly through the wide circle of her relatives and friends, and it has been received with that sincere grief and regret, which evidence the estimation in which her life and character were held, and the amount of affection which her virtues had centered in herself.

Nature had granted to her uncommon majesty and elegance of person, with a countenance which passed from the pleasing into the beautiful, yet with a noble and womanly cast, which while it secured admiration, commanded respect.

Grace merged itself into dignity in her manners, and gave weight and impression to her slightest actions.

Her dress never fell below her station in society, yet it was such as became the sobriety of a christian lady ; but her adornment was that of a cultivated mind and a benevolent heart.

Her intellect was strong and vigorous. It was essentially active. She craved, nay more, she required for her happiness intellectual excitement. The circle of her intimate friends and acquaintances, embraced many of the most talented as well as pious individuals of our country. With them it was her recreation to exchange views, and give full scope to the powers of reason. She carefully cultivated her mind by reading the standard authors of our language, in history, morals, and religion ; and kept pace with the literature of the day and the progress of opinions, by acquainting herself with works of value as they issued from the press. She consequently always had about her the impulse of the onward movement of events ; and no mind could come in contact with her own, which did not feel itself awakened, and impelled forward in the same course.

But her mind was cultivated and knowledge acquired, not for the gratification of taste, nor for the desire of admiration, but for her own improvement as an intellectual being, which she conceived to be her duty, and for the benefit of the world with which she stood connected. There was a practical cast to all her acquisitions. This was a distinguishing peculiarity. She loved the curious, the sublime and the beautiful, but their greatest

charm to her was, when they were blended with the useful.

Her judgment was distinguished for its purity, solidity and correctness. She was uniformly consulted by her family and friends in concerns of moment, and with a confidence which indicated the estimation in which she was held.

Miss Clay excelled in conversational powers. In this talent she may be justly ranked among the first. There was an ease and clearness of reasoning, a vivacity and readiness of wit—a warmth of feeling—a power of throwing the soul into one's thoughts—which rendered her conversation captivating. She readily, as by an intuitive perception of the fitness of things, adapted herself to all classes and conditions; and usually dwelt upon those subjects which belong most naturally to the female mind and station in society. The tendency of her conversation was towards truth, and that in order to godliness.

In imagination I behold her now. Her queenly person is before me. Her dress is the elegance of simplicity, bespeaking the lady and the Christian. There is her high expansive forehead, with the smoothness and softness of womanhood. Her full benevolent eye beams upon me. I mark the kindlings of intelligence and emotion. She speaks—

a smile accompanies the thought; it enlightens while it warms, and gives strength and energy to every virtuous principle and noble purpose of the soul.

Who that ever entered her society but acknowledged her power in conversation? Her language was copious, chaste and elegant, pointed and adapted to the thought. No one beheld either assumption or dictation. Personalities were unknown. You were little inclined to controvert her positions, for they were founded in reason and sanctified by religion. You could adventure upon no littleness, nor liberties in remark, for there was a self-respect and dignity on her part which commanded your homage. You could indulge in no excitement of feeling, for there was a kindness, and sincerity, and purity, which disarmed you. There was with most a straining of the mind, to reach the elevated ground upon which she moved. This elevated flow of thought and feeling was astonishingly uniform. The fatigues and lavish expenditure of the day at evening did not appear to lower it. The renewed strength and freshness of the morning did not appear to advance it higher. It was like a stream fed by copious and inexhaustible springs, upon which neither drought nor rain produces any impression.

The good which Miss Clay accomplished, independent of personal labor, was chiefly by conversation and correspondence. Her writings are letters, and those for the most part addressed to intimate friends and relatives. If she had a decided repugnance to any thing, it was to publicity in every shape, touching herself, her opinions, or her actions.

Her disposition was eminently social: of remarkable natural vivacity, with a keen perception of the ludicrous, and of a ready and searching wit; a talent, however, which she guarded with the greatest care. Capable of the warmest attachments, she did not hesitate to indulge them. She was the love, as well as the life of her family and friendly connections. Their interests were identified with her own, and over their reputation and character she watched with sleepless vigilance. Her faithfulness corrected their faults; her charity covered their failings; her liberality awakened their generosity; her tenderness of heart laid open the fountains of their joy and sorrow; her universal benevolence made them members of the human family; her purity confirmed their purposes of virtue; her sense of justice taught them to scorn oppression and wrong, and

her piety, to resolve all things into the glory of God. Thus was she in social life, ever endeavoring to exert these sacred influences; and like a guardian angel, she gave form and consistency to the characters with which she came in contact, especially those of the younger members of her own family. She will ever live embalmed in their affections. Memory will not more frequently recall her to mind, than gratitude will tell of her favors conferred. He who shapes my fortunes, gives me the impress of time; he who shapes my character, gives me the impress of eternity.

However much we may be captivated with the intellectual and social character of Miss Clay, it is when we contemplate her religious character, that we see most to admire and imitate.

Her piety was sound and uniform. No one who ever enjoyed her society could doubt for a moment her sound conversion to God. She bore the impress of the Redeemer's spirit and character; and there was a calm, settled, onward course to her christian life, free on the one part from the gloom of depression, and on the other from the extravagance of excitement. Her growth in grace—her advancement in christian perfection was evident to her friends, and perceptible to herself in that degree, which made her hope

from year to year wear the impress of assurance.

In her doctrinal belief, she embraced those views which we denominate Calvinistic.

At an early stage in her christian life, she was called upon to advocate these doctrines. While residing in Medford, Massachusetts, the Unitarian controversy absorbed the attention of the churches in that state, and had become so rife that it was incumbent upon all who loved these views of truth, to take their side and maintain it with decision. The town of Medford was invaded by this controversy. Here Miss Clay exerted herself perseveringly, patiently, and successfully, in resisting its encroachments and sustaining the Orthodox faith ; and perhaps no one individual in that community did more to this good end than herself.

Her mind became confirmed and settled on the cardinal doctrines of the Gospel, and ever maintained its hold upon them, with increasing spirituality and delight, to the day of her death.

Her piety justly laid claim to ardor. Her natural temperament was ardent ; in religion it assumed the glow of love and not the flashy, fitful flame of enthusiasm. She possessed remarkable discrimination of christian character, and preferred

that which approximated nearest to the purely spiritual and active, with the least possible noise and show. She was eminently catholic in her spirit ; and hence her intercourse with Christians of all denominations was unreserved and confidential. She loved the brotherhood and was prepared to bid every man God speed who was doing what she believed to be the work of God.

Her intercourse with those of an opposite and even an erroneous faith, was free from asperity and self righteousness. She sought to win by love—to convince by action. She rather lived than spoke her faith. If they could not embrace her faith, they could not but approve her life. Extensive intercourse with Christians of all denominations, extensive observation of peculiarities, excellences and defects of character gave her this catholic spirit. What travel does for us, when well improved in social life, intercourse with brethren of various denominations does for us in christian life. She cheerfully rendered to all their dues,—honor to whom honor—tribute to whom tribute.

There was an absence of ostentation in the piety of Miss Clay. She introduced not herself as a subject for conversation. Her works and experiences as a Christian, were communicated to

her most intimate friends alone, and at most, but in an occasional and incidental manner. Yet her conversation was, when she was drawn forth, highly spiritual; and although she spoke only of what belonged to the Christian, yet you could perceive that she was drawing from the rich stores of her own experimental piety.

A sense of her weakness and imperfections clothed her with humility. Yet through discipline, watchfulness and grace, her imperfections were seldom seen by any.

She did not thrust herself forward into the highest place. She possessed true magnanimity of soul. The littleness of personal collision with others, to be esteemed the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, was foreign from her nature. She envied none their reputation for piety and good works; she sought not to build up her own reputation, by detracting from theirs. She upheld and praised her enemies in that which was good. Yet in doing good, she regarded not the publicity of the act, if it might be necessary. Her assurance fell short of presumption; her boldness trenched not upon forwardness.

Her piety was active. It was an activity which drew its life from daily converse with God and the word of his grace; and hence it was perma-

ment and increasing. She certainly was "ready to every good work." Her wisdom, prudence, and judgment never forsook her in determining what the Lord would have her to do. Hence her efforts to do good were such as naturally and immediately fell to her sex, her relations and station in society, nor was she ever seen acting without or beyond her appropriate sphere. She was consequently always in place and in good taste in her efforts, and what she did was naturally done. You saw that as a Christian, she could feel and act no otherwise than she did. Our duties spring from our relations, as effect from cause. She fully comprehended both her relations and her duties. She sought to fulfil them, beginning with those nearest at hand and of most importance.

It was at home in the bosom of her family and surrounded by her domestics, that the activity of her piety mainly revealed itself. She was, if the expression may be allowed, the favorite child of her father. He said "he could not speak to Anne, her heart was so tender." This tenderness of heart, God sanctified to his own use, for the promotion of her own happiness and that of those around her. The rough contact of the world did not harden it. It was regulated and controlled, not suppressed and destroyed. Feeling and ac-

tion with her were inseparable. "She opened her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue was the law of kindness." A spirit of active piety breathed through her life in the family. She took the liveliest interest in the spiritual welfare of its members, and as well by her own example, as by her precepts and exhortations, she endeavored to promote religion in each, and to sustain every arrangement and regulation necessary to that end. If she sought distinction for her family, it was not the distinction of wealth, nor of honorable connections with the world, nor of intellectual greatness, but it was that highest style of distinction on earth, the distinction of justice, mercy and humble walking with God. The activity of her piety strikingly revealed itself in the religious instruction of the servants of the household.

For many years she was deeply interested on this subject. Her responsibility as a mistress and owner she felt, and labored to meet, as far as circumstances would allow. And she was the originator of the efforts made for the religious improvement of the servants of the household, which have been attended with such satisfactory results. She herself conducted, for sixteen or seventeen years, during the winter and spring, the plantation school for the religious instruction of the children

and youth. This school met daily, and the time occupied in its exercises, varied from an hour to an hour and a half. She confined herself not to their religious instruction alone, but attended to the improvement of the children and youth in manners, and inculcated habits of neatness, industry and order. Her influence over the adults was decided and beneficial. The grand impression which she seemed desirous of making upon the whole, was that of justice and virtue. It is said of her, by one who knew her intimately, "She possessed the most sleepless sense of justice of any human being he ever knew." Her decision, as a mistress, partook not of austerity ; her condescension degenerated not into familiarity ; and her kindness bore in it no tincture of weakness. Their confidence in her was unbounded. Her opinions were adopted as right, and her instructions as the fruit of a sincere and christian regard for their welfare. The effect of her faithful efforts, on the servants of the household, in conjunction with other members of the family is known to us all ; and for many years, that household has been appealed to, as a practical exemplification of the blessings attending judicious religious instruction on this class in our society. Many, very many in the southern country, upon visiting the

family, have had their minds enlightened and their hearts warmed on the subject, and have returned to their homes to commence efforts among their own people, and to become in turn centres of influence in their respective communities.

This subject lay upon her heart to her final hour. Upon her dying bed, she dictated this message to the people at Richmond* :—" That in imagination, she had passed from house to house, praying for every individual of every family ; and when she reached heaven she would watch to see who came from Richmond."

Miss Clay was not satisfied with the performance of her own duty to her servants, but sought to influence others to take up this important work : and it is but just to remark, that the commendable attention in this church and community to it, is owing in large measure to her unobtrusive and yet direct efforts. Her influence has extended along the sea-board of Georgia, and it has been felt in the same section of country in South Carolina, and wherever she has visited in the southern states, she has not failed to accomplish something for the religious instruction of the negroes. She

* The name of the plantation where she resided.

ever regarded the religious instruction of the negroes as the great duty of individual Christians and churches in the southern states, and although the subject had for so many years occupied her mind, and elicited her prayers and labors, and oft times amidst much discouragement, still her interest in it never failed. One of the last acts of her life on this subject was to arrange and consummate a conference of friends, to interchange views and compare plans, and offer united prayers to God for his blessing on this cause.*

The prosperity of this community, in a religious point of view, is what ever lay near her heart. She sought to maintain and to engage others in support of an elevated standard of morality and piety. Of fruitful invention, she left no means, calculated to secure this end, untried. She devised liberal things. To herself, as much as to any other individual, is owing a settled ministry, and the means of grace which you enjoy. She moved in this matter many years ago. It was one of the subjects which first interested her after her conversion. In all that she said, in all that she did for the good of others, for the advancement of religion, there was mingled a pru-

* Bishops Mead and Elliott, and Rev. C. C. Jones.

dence, and a kindness, which few could gainsay or resist.

There was a comprehensiveness in her pious affections. The progress of the light of truth on every subject connected with the real improvement of mankind, was to her matter of gratitude and of joy. She was not more conscientious in praying that the will of God might be done on earth—as it is in heaven, than in contributing her influence and her substance for that object.

From this sketch of her life and character we now turn to her illness and death. She died as she had lived, a Christian. On her last visit to her home in this county, some months before her decease, speaking of a severe attack from which there was little hope of recovery, she observed that she had no remarkable elevation of her spiritual affections, no unusual quickening of faith, no enrapturing views of heaven, such as she had read of in the death-bed exercises of God's people, and such as some of her friends expected she would have; but she felt a perfect calmness in view of approaching dissolution, an unreserved submission to the will of God, and a peaceful assurance of acceptance with God, through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. She uttered these words in the confidence of christian intercourse,

and she appeared to me then, as one whose mind was made up, to what she believed to be the will of God, a speedy departure from time and all its concerns. Her attachments to her relatives and christian friends and to the cause of religion, were as fresh and strong as ever, but in her general conversation, I could observe that there was a withdrawing from earth, yet all was natural, cheerful and happy.

On her return to Boston, she was confined for weeks to her chamber and her bed. Her cheerfulness in conversation—her patience under the severest sufferings—the exceeding tenderness of her affection for all around her, and her calmness and faith in view of approaching death, were wonderful to her attending relatives and friends. “Her hopes had always been clear and firm, and her mind staid upon God.” On the day of her decease, being perfectly aware of her situation, she said to her sister, “I believe the last enemy has come.” She then asked those present “to pray for her silently.” At her request her physician was sent for. He made a brief visit, and she said to him—calm in view of immediate dissolution—“It is death, I am ready to go, shall I just sit up as I am?”—Then, apparently free from

pain, her breathing became shorter every minute, until it ceased.

As the sun declines upon a summer evening, on a cloudless sky, brilliant to the last, so did her redeemed spirit sink and fade away from this darksome world. She hath left behind the light of her christian life : whose faith may we follow—considering the end of her conversation.

I think I may safely appeal to you, my friends, and ask if this was not the life and character of our departed friend? If so, what an impression should it make upon us all? It is not enough that we mourn her loss. We must rather imitate that life and character, which God has permitted to shine so long before us—that our last end may be like hers.

Yes, my friends, Miss Anne Clay is dead ! Oh ! how painfully does that announcement fall upon the ear. We all feel that we have lost a personal friend, one to whom we were all attached, and our church and society one of its brightest ornaments. A pillar has been taken down in the temple of our community. She who has been for so many years identified with this county, with the instruction of the negroes, with the weekly prayer-meeting, with the church, with every good word and work, yea with the best interests of every family among

you. Yes, she is gone—she will be seen among you no more ; a life giving spirit diffusing around her the fragrance of her many virtues.

You have all returned from your summer's absence, but she is left behind. These milder skies greet her not again. The snows of winter are falling upon her grave. We sympathize with her afflicted family and pray for them. Deeply do they feel the desolation which her death has brought into their house. But God has given them every consolation and support under it. Christ has come and received her to himself ; and if we live as she lived on earth, we shall hereafter see and embrace our departed friend in glory. During her sickness, folding her arms around her sister and weeping, she kissed her and thanked her for all her affection and kindness, and said, "I hope our best days are to come." Happy, happy thought ! Yes, our best days, christian brethren, are to come ; they will come to us when we meet in heaven ! The eye of faith beholds her now, walking in the light of heaven : she is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God has wiped away every tear from her eyes ; to her there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain. Her voice is united with the redeemed of the Lord in songs of salvation "unto

Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

"Let me die the death of the righteous—and let my last end be like his."

