Recollections of the public work and home life of Louisa and Flora Stevenson.

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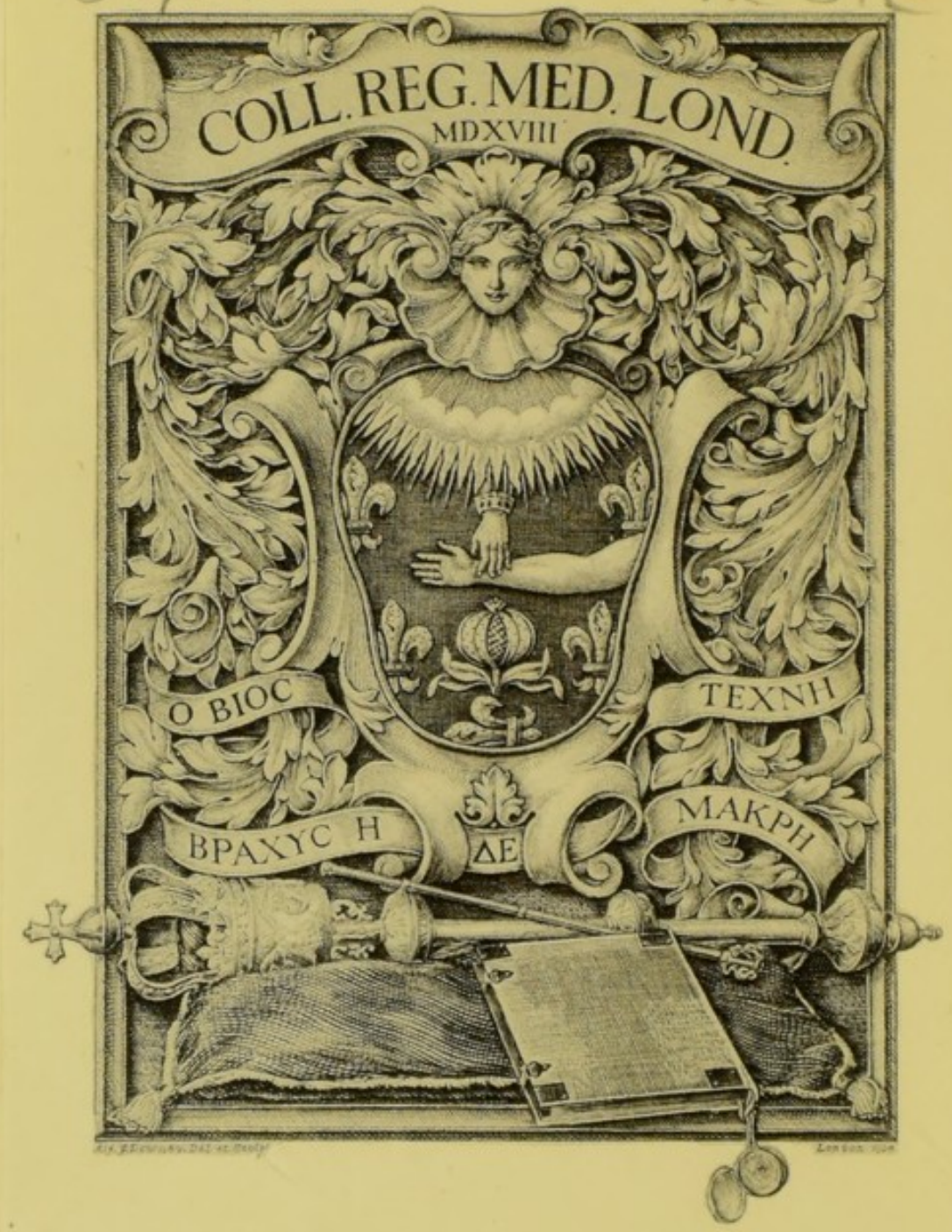

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INTRODUCTION

SOME of the nieces of Louisa and Flora Stevenson, knowing all that their aunts were to them in the past, and how proud they are of being related to them, wish some record to be left of what their aunts were, and what they did, that future generations of Stevensons may have some idea of their work, and of the love and respect they won in the world of their day.

These notes have therefore been put together; and their life-long friend, Miss E. T. M'Laren, has added some personal recollections of the home-life at 13 Randolph Crescent.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

LOUISA and Flora C. Stevenson were members of the large family of Mr James Stevenson of Glasgow, senior partner in the Jarrow Chemical Company, South Shields. No account of the sisters would be complete without mention of that background of brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, which was so familiar to all their friends, from the intense interest in each member of the family which bulked so largely in their busy lives. Mr Stevenson's family consisted of four sons, who all married, and six daughters, of whom two married. For their names and families, see Appendix.

When Mr Stevenson retired from active business in 1854, he moved to

Edinburgh, and settled eventually, in 1859, in 13 Randolph Crescent, where his four unmarried daughters continued to live after his death in 1866, for the rest of their lives. For a number of years this house was a centre for many of the keenest spirits in Edinburgh, and the entertainments given there by the four sisters were a feature of Edinburgh social life. There were to be met there, not only all prominent citizens, but most of the distinguished strangers, who, from time to time, visited the city, as, for example, on the occasions of the meetings of the British Association and the Tercentenary of the University.

LOUISA STEVENSON

LOUISA STEVENSON, LL.D.

LOUISA STEVENSON was born in 1835 and died in 1908, aged seventy-two years, after having been obliged by illness to give up her public work for about five years.

Her public work was of a most varied nature.

She worked to obtain medical education for women in the days, almost forgotten now, when this was stoutly opposed.

She was one of the band of pioneers who finally accomplished the opening of the Scottish Universities to women in 1894, after years of struggle to provide University teaching for them outside its walls, and the classes, held first at 117 George Street, and later at

15 Shandwick Place, will always be associated with her, by all who attended them. It was undoubtedly her evidence before the Commission of Enquiry into the matter, backed by that of Professor Masson, that turned the scale. At first there was much controversy about it, but, long after this subsided, the University acknowledged what she had done by conferring on her the degree of LL.D. in 1906. The following is taken from the account of the Graduation Ceremony in *The Scotsman* of April 19th, 1906:—

"Miss Louisa Stevenson was received with great cordiality on stepping forward to receive the honour. In presenting her to Sir William Turner, Sir Ludovic Grant said:—

"'Already fourteen years have elapsed since the Scottish Universities opened their gates to women students . . . and a generation is arising that recks not of

the time when they were not an integral part of the established system. The admission of women to University privileges was the culminating point of a long and laborious movement, and Miss Stevenson has been deemed worthy of academic recognition to-day because of her signal efforts in directing this movement to a successful issue. Strenuous in action, tenacious of purpose, and of high courage, Miss Stevenson proved a doughty champion of the cause to which she devoted herself unsparingly. It was during her administration as secretary that the Association instituted in this city for the higher education of women became, within its precincts in Shandwick Place, a medium of University instruction. It was under her auspices that the Council of the Association extended their aims, and pressed the claims of women for admission within the Universities themselves. When the Commission on Uni-

versity Education met here, the evidence given by Miss Stevenson produced a profound impression by its clearness, and the intimate knowledge and grasp of principles which it exhibited. In all that concerns the well-being of the women students in the University, she has shown a sympathetic and most generous interest, and, in particular, our academic sisterhood are beholden to her for her services in connection with the institution of the Masson Hall. While the advancement of the higher education of women has been the great work of her life, Miss Stevenson's activities have found many other outlets. As a Guardian of the Poor, and a member of various committees charged with important work in Edinburgh, she has abundantly shown how high an ideal she sets herself of the duties of citizenship.

"'It is fitting that one who was so instrumental in bringing University degrees

within reach of women should herself receive our highest degree.' "

The Residence for Women Students, 31 George Square, alluded to above, was founded in 1894, and, on Louisa Stevenson's suggestion, it was called the Masson Hall, in gratitude for Professor Masson's unwearied efforts for the cause of Women. After large additions had been made to the house, to the cost of which Louisa Stevenson was a generous contributor, it was opened in 1897, and she became its first Honorary Secretary, and took the greatest interest in all that concerned it till the end of her life.

She was one of the first two women to be elected a member of the Parochial Board in Edinburgh, which corresponds to the Board of Guardians in England. There she specially devoted herself to the nursing arrangements in the Poor-house, and she used to pay surprise visits late in the evenings to see if

the inmates were comfortable in their beds.

She also devoted much of her time to the management of the Scottish Branch of the Jubilee Nurses' Institution (now known as the Queen's Nurses), and to the Colonial Nursing Scheme, and that for the Registration of Nurses; and crowned her labours for the sick and suffering by going on the Board of Managers of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, to which she was re-elected six times. This was the beginning of women's serving on Hospital Boards, an innovation which had long been thought desirable by many, though it met with considerable opposition at first. As a tribute to her work, it may be recalled that after Louisa Stevenson had been a year on the Board, one of the Managers said that though he had been strongly opposed to the idea of women on such Boards, he had completely changed his

mind, as Miss Stevenson was the most useful Member the Board had had during all the twenty years he had been a Manager. She was also one of the founders of the Edinburgh School of Cookery and Domestic Economy, which has proved such an extraordinary success; and of all those who watched over its small beginnings, no one would have been more delighted than she, could she have seen the splendid Institution it has grown to be at the present day (1914). She, like her sister Flora, took a keen interest in the subject of Women's Suffrage, from the time the question was started till the end of her life.

Her natural gift of a singularly beautiful voice, and the readiness and ease with which she spoke in public, were powerful factors in the success of her appeals for social and educational reforms; and her business capacity and knowledge of finance also contributed

greatly to the success of all she undertook.

The following extracts from a letter written within a week of Louisa Stevenson's death to the group of nieces who were so constantly with her during her last illness, are added here by their desire:—

"May 20th, 1908.

"I have been thinking much of my dear old friend Louisa Stevenson since she was laid to rest last Saturday, and asking myself, what was the secret of her unique achievement, and of the extraordinary influence she exercised over so many?

"It seems to me that it lay in her intense earnestness, and her power of throwing herself into whatever she was doing at the time, almost to the exclusion of everything else. No doubt there was a certain danger in this—and a risk of

occasional failure. That the mistakes were so few—practically none of any importance—was due to the force of her intellect, and her faculty of grasping almost intuitively the facts and possibilities of a situation, which slower minds might have taken long to unravel. Her faith in these intuitions or decisions of hers was so unfaltering, that she went right on to her goal without hesitation, and without being hindered by the multitude of cross currents and confused lights that paralyse many people and make them pause, sometimes in cases where to hesitate means to be lost!

"There is no doubt she accomplished much which might — almost certainly would—have been done sooner or later; but which, it is equally certain, would not have been done nearly so soon but for her. And this is no disparagement to those who were associated with her in the varied activities of her life, and with-

out whose co-operation she could not have achieved what she did. But it was like the difference between the effect of blasting in removing masses of rock, and of steady work with the pickaxe. Her intellectual and moral energy supplied the dynamite which hurled away obstacles which would have been long in yielding to more ordinary methods of attack. She brooked no opposition, and her sweetness and courtesy almost always disarmed her opponents, though sometimes she may have erred on the side of being too sure she was right, and too determined to impose her iron will upon others. The result, however, almost always proved her wisdom and the correctness of her judgment; and she was always most generous in admitting she was wrong when she saw it, and in recognising the work and merits of others. It was a case of what the French call *les défauts de ses qualités*;

unless her outlook had been to a certain extent limited, and the development of her own life and interests possibly too one-sided, she could not have achieved what she did—for women, as doctors, nurses, and students; and for the poor and sick when on the Boards of the Workhouse and the Royal Infirmary, and the Committees of the Jubilee and Colonial Nurses. The work is easy now that she has led the way; for she was a born leader, of the stuff that pioneers are made of. She, like Browning, was "always a fighter"—a leader of forlorn hopes—and rushed, as I have said, positions to which others would have laid siege for years, and possibly would not have carried in the end.

"She loved her work as long as she was able to do it. She "tasted joy of battle with her peers," and had more zest in life, and joy in her own powers and achievements, and even in her pos-

sessions, than almost any one I have ever known; and this in spite of a certain vein of sadness, which I knew was there, though I only very seldom got a glimpse of it. It is well we should remember that she had this keen enjoyment for so long, as some comfort and compensation for what she suffered during the illness that darkened the last years of her life. Then the same deadly earnestness and absorption in one set of ideas, and inability to see any other point of view, which had characterised her all her life, caused much of the suffering and sadness of those last years. No attempt to understand her life would be complete if this were ignored. Her whole life was of one piece. Neither can it be understood without realizing what she seldom spoke of, but which was nevertheless a fact, that her work was in very truth a religion, though of an inarticulate and unconventional type.

"I would like in saying good-bye to my dear old friend, to recall one or two things which will always live in my memory of her. There was her wonderful smile, which if one met her in the street, as has been said to me, made one feel happy for the rest of the day; her keen sense of fun, which made a laugh with her, and I have had many, such an exhilarating experience; and her tender sympathy with the sorrows of those she cared for, always expressed in the fewest and most tactful words. I also recall how she used to break her heart over some of the sad cases which came before her when on the Parochial Board, and the delicacy and tact with which she sought to relieve them.

"I would like, too, to record the love and gratitude felt for her by the students at Shandwick Place (before the Universities were open to women), and later at the Masson Hall, which so many of

them have expressed to me from time to time. She helped and encouraged them in many ways, and none of them who knew her will ever forget her.

"Her memory, and that of her sister Flora, are a most stimulating possession for all who knew them. They were quite unique both in themselves and in their opportunities, for, a generation later, the same kind of pioneer work might not have fallen to them to do, though they would always have left a strong mark on their day and generation. Both had minds of no ordinary power; if Flora's was perhaps the saner and more balanced intellect, there was a fire of genius in Louisa, which made her the commanding personality she was, and which accounts for the immense influence for good she has left behind her."

FLORA CLIFT STEVENSON

FLORA CLIFT STEVENSON, LL.D.

FLORA C. STEVENSON was born in 1839 and died in 1905, aged sixty-five years. She was more fortunate than her sister Louisa, for, in spite of increasing illness, she was able to go on working to within a few weeks of her death, and died in harness as Chairman of the Edinburgh School Board. She was always deeply interested in education, and as a mere girl she organized and carried out in her own house an evening class for little message girls, whom she drilled in the "three R's."

She was elected a member of the first School Board, along with Miss Phœbe Blyth, in 1873, and sat for thirty-two years on every successive Board till her

death. In 1900 she was unanimously elected Chairman of the Board.

She was Convener of the Work Committee from 1888 onwards. In 1899 she was elected one of the School Board's representatives on the Edinburgh Educational Trust; and in 1890 she was chosen to represent the Board as one of the Governors of George Heriot's Trust, and served on most of the Educational Committees and in many of the special enquiries of that busy institution, including the Committee for revising the scheme to be presented to the Court of Session in 1896-97.

In 1883 she gave evidence before the Endowed Schools Commission; she was a member of the Habitual Offenders and Juvenile Delinquents Departmental Committee; and in 1898 she was made a member of the Departmental Committee appointed by Lord Balfour of Burleigh to advise the Scottish

Office as to rules for inebriate reformatories.

Besides all this she was a member of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor; an Honorary Fellow of the Educational Institute; a member of the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women; a Director of the Blind Asylum; a Director of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution; a member of the National Society for Women's Suffrage; and a Vice-President of the Women's Liberal Unionist Association, for she was a keen politician, being a Liberal Unionist and a Free Trader.

In her closing years many honours were given her. In 1899 the large new Board School at Comely Bank was named "The Flora Stevenson School."

In 1903 she was made an LL.D. of Edinburgh University.

In 1905 she was presented with her

portrait by a number of her friends and colleagues, and in the same year, during the last months of her life, she was presented with the freedom of the City of Edinburgh.

She was widely known as "a good friend to the children," as she took a keen and practical interest in the feeding and clothing of the more destitute of them, as well as in their education; and no one who was present will ever forget the sight of the long lines of children and their teachers, between which she was borne to her last resting-place in the Dean Cemetery on the afternoon of Saturday, 30th September 1905.

She died at St Andrews, and the following leading article from the *Scotsman* the day after her death is a fitting tribute to her life's work :—

"Flora Stevenson, LL.D., Chairman of the Edinburgh School Board, and Honorary Burgess of the City of Edin-

burgh, lies dead at St Andrews, and not Edinburgh only but the whole country mourns her loss. Yet the master feeling in the public mind on this occasion is not grief but pride. Her countrymen and countrywomen were proud of her while she lived, and they showed that they were proud of her. If she derived any satisfaction from the honours bestowed upon her in recognition of a life of public duty and high achievement in the public service, it is now some satisfaction to the community she served to reflect that, so far as in them lay, they paid their tributes to her in her lifetime. Their pride in her memory is thus undimmed by the self-reproach that sometimes accompanies posthumous honours. With the private grief of near relatives and intimate friends the public will sincerely sympathize, but its own sense of bereavement is tempered by the knowledge that her life was rounded

and complete—a life of high ideals nobly realized in active labour and solid achievement."

The following extracts are from an article in *The Scottish Review* of the week after her death :—

"She was a good business woman, with strong common sense, broad views, grasp of detail, and tenacity of purpose. She thoroughly enjoyed her work, and never missed even the most trivial committee meeting. She liked her own way, and usually got it. For nearly six years she has been chairman (of the School Board), a position she filled with capacity, dignity, and courtesy. She was firm in her rulings, and rather curiously her sex commanded obedience. . . . What Miss Stevenson did not know about education was not worth knowing. She had served on innumerable committees and commissions; she had agitated for and carried many Parliamentary Bills. . . . Her opinion was

asked by those in authority, and her influence was wide. It was beautifully characteristic of her that her keenest interest was in the poorest children. She attended faithfully the Board's meetings with defaulting parents, in order that she might understand the environment of the boys and girls. Her favourite schools were the Day Industrial (which she was responsible for instituting), and those located in the crowded districts of the old town. Her kind heart devised the charitable scheme for feeding and clothing destitute children on condition of their regular attendance at school.

"In her last public utterance (on receiving the freedom of the city) she pled earnestly that this duty should not be imposed on School Boards as a rate-charge, and no one had earned a better right to speak on the subject."

Her speech on that occasion was as follows:—

"I am deeply sensible of the high honour—the highest the city has to bestow—which has just been conferred on me.

"It is not easy to express in words all that I feel in accepting it, and while I do accept it as a recognition of your too high appreciation of what I have had the privilege of being permitted to do for education as a Member of the Edinburgh School Board and also for some years as a Governor of George Heriot's Trust (a position which I have highly prized), I like also to think I may accept it not only as a personal honour, but as a recognition of the principle now universally accepted, that there is administrative work on public Boards which can be, and is, fittingly and successfully carried on by hundreds of women in all parts of the kingdom.

"To me this honour is greatly enhanced by the circumstance that I receive it at the same time as two such distinguished

educationists as Lord Reay and Lord Young. It is a very special gratification to me to receive it at the same time as the author of the Education Act of 1872, which gave to Scottish women the educational franchise and the opportunity of undertaking work as members of School Boards.

"Lord Young's Act, unlike its precursor in England, which dealt only with the elements of education, rests on the broad foundation of Scottish educational traditions, and, as is set forth in the preamble, was passed to 'amend and extend the provisions of the law of Scotland on the subject of education, in such manner that the means of procuring efficient education for their children may be furnished and made available to the whole people of Scotland.'

"It is the Charter which confers on all Scottish children, whatever their state in life, the right to the highest education

which they have the brain and the capacity to receive.

"Many Acts have been passed dealing with Scottish education since 1872, but none of them have narrowed the broad, generous ideas of Lord Young's Act.

"There is one other subject to which I should like to refer. It is a subject which has been very prominently before the public in the last few months, viz., 'the underfed' school child.

"It seems as if, to some people, the existence of underfed school children was a new discovery, so warmly is their case being discussed at the present time.

"School Boards, and especially School Boards in large cities, were very early faced with the problem of how to enforce compulsory attendance at school on the part of very poor children. But we in Edinburgh, at any rate—and I know it is the same in other large centres of

population—have for the last thirty years been perseveringly trying to solve the problem, and without much help from the outside public. Now, the danger to be faced is not apathy and indifference on the subject, but unwise and indiscreet zeal.

"I am anxious to take this opportunity of stating my profound conviction, founded on many years' study of the question, and on many years' experience of administering a charitable fund for helping destitute school children, that it will be an evil day for Scotland if the Legislature puts on School Boards the duty of providing meals out of public funds for underfed school children.

"It is a sad fact that there are many children in our schools whose physical condition leaves much to be desired; but that condition is not alone due to underfeeding, it is due to wrong feeding, to living and sleeping in vitiated air, to being insufficiently clad, and the

mischief has begun long before the child has reached school age. I say unhesitatingly that the condition of our poor school children has improved enormously since 1872, and that enforced attendance at school has been nothing but an advantage to the poor children in our large towns. The evils of underfeeding are not to be counteracted by a universal provision of free meals in school. Parents are all too ready to throw off their responsibilities nowadays. What is wanted is an awakening of the public conscience, to make them realize and accept their responsibility. And any legislation which tends to weaken it—and this I consider equally important—which weakens a child's sense of dependence on his parents for food and clothing, will not be counterbalanced by the material gain to the child.

"I know it is said, parents who can, must be made to pay for the meals which it is proposed to provide for their

children. But when I ask, How? no answer is given. Those of us who have experience of the difficulty of recovering from parents the money for the maintenance of their children in Industrial Schools, know how utterly futile such a proposal is.

"I believe that what is wanted is better organized charitable funds for the help of children. But this means more individual work, personal investigation and co-operation with school authorities.

"I believe there is money enough, and more than enough, to do all that is required, if we had the personal work required for its right distribution.

"To the teachers in our schools we are all under a deep debt of gratitude, not only for the material help many of them give our poor children, but for their patient loving care, with which they brighten the lives of many loveless uncared-for little ones."

HOME LIFE AT 13 RANDOLPH CRESCENT

THE STEVENSONS — I would like in some degree to tell the generation succeeding us what these words mean to me, and perhaps give a glimpse of what they meant to a wider circle beyond that of personal friends.

One bright Sunday morning in the fifties, as we, Jane Omond (now Mrs J. J. Stevenson) and I, came out of the Free Church at Invercloy, Isle of Arran, where we had been admonished, scolded, denounced by the Rev. Peter Davidson, the last of the type of wrathful Scottish preachers of the Word, Jane whispered to me, "Look, there are the Stevensons! They have come to St George's, they sit in the front of the

gallery, but I don't know them." "Never mind," I said, "Go and speak to them," and I very nearly gave her a slight push in their direction—and she did go. The same evening (in those days there were no "half-day hearers") we were at the church before the hour of service, and, passing it, made for the bridge which crosses the burn at the end of the Invercloy road, intending to rest ourselves on it. As we neared it, we saw two girls seated there, Louisa and Flora Stevenson. I do not remember anything about Flora, but *Louie* I can see at this moment. As we came up her face was slightly turned from us, she was listening to the "murmuring sound" of the water, and "beauty born" of it, or something else *had* "passed into her face," for beautiful it was.

In the fifties, hats were not admissible on Sundays. She wore a white tulle bonnet; its only trimming small sprays

of fern, and the front was deep enough to have one fern placed inside, nestling in soft tulle, and all but resting on the ripples of her brown hair. Her complexion was clear, her grey-blue eyes looked as if they could be sad, but not now, while her curved lips combined sweetness and firmness to a marked degree, and were indeed a noteworthy index to her character.

I do not remember anything more as to that Sunday evening, but a day or two after, Elisa and Flora appeared at our little cottage on the moor at Strathwhillan, and asked to see Miss Omond. They did see Miss Omond, although at the time she was busily occupied in giving the finishing touches to a making of toffee, a wet morning having led us to this employment. But the day had cleared, and I think we went with them for some way along the beautiful Lamlash road on their homeward journey.

So began Jane Omond's intercourse with the Stevenson family, but five years passed before she became one of them.

It was only gradually that my acquaintance with them ripened. Flora I met oftenest, for it was she who came to 43 Charlotte Square (Jane Omond's home), and she asked Jane to bring her to see me at my home at George Square. I have no very distinct recollection of meetings at Royal Circus, but before the removal to Randolph Crescent, I seemed to know a good deal about each of them. I should think my knowledge was gained almost entirely from Jane Omond. Before I had even seen Jane, Flora's eldest sister, I knew that Jane Omond respected her most highly, that in many ways Flora was guided by her, and that her influence over both, and on other young girls, tended always towards what was highest and best. I knew, too, that Flora was genuinely proud of her sister's

handsome figure, her nearly perfect taste as to dress, and her power of domestic administration which told for good on the whole household. Elisa I heard of too. I saw she was very pretty, and sometimes she was fascinating. She had a true instinct as to works of art. "Elisa can be trusted," was her brother John's verdict, when he heard of any purchase made by her, and he was not easily satisfied. She had a very good, thoroughly cultivated voice, but a certain fastidiousness as to surroundings made her singing less available as a means of entertaining than I think her sisters had a right to expect. Indeed, this streak of fastidiousness ran through her whole character.

Perhaps it is best at once to own that Elisa—what she thought, felt, wished, did not wish—was a very powerful element in the daily life of the sisterhood. Her manner did not strike one as im-

perious, and yet there was a subtle wilfulness that could not be, or at any rate, never was, ignored. To outsiders, it seemed as if far too much was yielded to her, that quiet resistance would have been best for her as well as for her sisters. But as years went on, and "depression of spirits" became almost habitual with her, nothing could be done but attempts to lighten despondency, and in this sisterly affection never failed.

Thirteen Randolph Crescent, though in every way a most desirable residence, was emphatically a town house, and Jane longed for "a garden, a place where you could see the flowers growing, in which you could *sit*." Often she told me this. Her bedroom (by her own desire she had one on the top floor) had a magnificent view of the Forth, and grand highland hills, and the shutters being filled in with mirrors, the very most was made of it, but it looked north, and

the position and structure of the house made the going out and in to the fresh air, which she dearly loved, an impossibility. Had Elisa showed any inclination to have a house in the country, Jane would have carried out the project, but she never did.

No words can exaggerate the utter loyalty of the two younger sisters to the two elder, nor the way in which Flora especially bore the burden of a daily strain in trying to meet Elisa's wishes. It told on Louie, too, perhaps more severely. She had not Flora's imperturbable sweetness of temper, she could not smooth over difficulties as she did. But here my words on this subject have end. Louisa, when left sole survivor, expressed an earnest desire that on the tombstone which bears all their names it should be recorded that for fifty years the sisters had lived together in 13 Randolph Crescent. Family affection

held the first place in her heart, as it did in that of all the others.

When the Stevenson family left South Shields, Mr Stevenson was in his sixty-ninth year. He came to Edinburgh on his retiring from the management of the then very prosperous Jarrow Chemical Company. He had ample means, and, like many Scotsmen, the Scottish capital had for him many attractions, and his family felt sure that in Edinburgh, with its many benevolent associations, he would have a field for the exercise of his never-failing desire to help those who stood most in need of kindness. His own relatives were in Glasgow, his brother Nathan, a well-known and much respected citizen there, but with Edinburgh he had no links. Very soon, however, his generosity, his abounding kindliness, his shrewd common-sense, marked him out as a useful citizen. Before long he was made an elder in Free St George's.

This was in the reign of the famous Dr Candlish. Mrs Stevenson, an invalid when the family came to Edinburgh, did not long survive. She died in a furnished house, 47 Melville Street, before the family took possession of 12 Royal Circus, the first house occupied by them in Edinburgh.

For a good many years it was in May, during the meetings of the General Assembly, that Mr Stevenson's love of hospitality had full play. Kindness in every way was shown to ministers and their wives, and Edinburgh friends were asked to meet them, but the large rooms were never crowded to overflowing, as so often was the case in after years when the Misses Stevenson entertained some distinguished guest visiting the city, and invited Edinburgh "Society" (and Edinburgh Society came) to meet him—or *her!* Mr Stevenson never wearied of doing kindness. To many a manse in

the country a hamper arrived at Christmas with useful gifts in clothing and food, and it could only be *guessed* where it came from, but no doubt the guess was often a correct one. He once heard with astonishment his son John declare that to be on board a Clyde steamer during the Paisley Fair was "an abomination." "Dear me," he said, "I like it, so many bairns on board to whom you can give pennies."

Mr Stevenson died in 1866, and for some time after that, the sisters did not stay continuously in Edinburgh. Elisa needed change, and the winter after his death they took a furnished house in Richmond, and did not return to Edinburgh till the autumn of 1868.

It was in October of this year that Professor Masson delivered his Lectures on English Literature (the same as he gave to his class at the University) in connection with the Society for the

University Education of Women. The place of meeting was a hall in the Hopetoun Rooms. No opening of the University doors to women as yet seemed possible. Louisa and Flora at once enrolled themselves as students—so did I. I can remember our excitement when the first essays were returned, it was like a return to far-off school-days. I was asked to dine at 13 Randolph Crescent that day, and we each promised *not* to look at the Professor's remarks till we went to the drawing-room after dinner. Perhaps I may be forgiven for mentioning that the Professor's verdict on my essay was decidedly more favourable than on either of theirs. They attained so soon an altitude so far above me in regard to subjects educational, and many others, that this small piece of boasting is allowable. Indeed, it was remarkable that, while as pupils at these classes they did not take a high

place, when the scheme was formed for the education of women on a University basis they were at once regarded as leaders, and their powers as organizers gratefully acknowledged. Into the fight —for it *was* truly a fight—for the Medical Education of Women, Louisa put her whole heart, and for it she opened wide her purse.

One of the first skirmishes took place over the election of Managers of the Royal Infirmary, the one question being, "Opposed or favourable to the ladies?" The annual meeting of the subscribers to the funds of the Infirmary is held on the first Monday of each year, when managers are appointed, and is generally a formal one. The City Chambers is the place of meeting, but on this occasion, when the crucial question was as to the view managers would take of women students being allowed to visit the wards, the subscribers attended in

great numbers, and an adjournment was made to St Giles! Not St Giles restored, as the present generation know it, but when it was divided into three churches, whitewash covering the walls, galleries disfiguring, obliterating the nave. Many speeches were delivered, interrupted constantly by excited adherents on both sides. At last, anyone wishing to be heard, mounted into the pulpit (a high one) and addressed the excited audience from that coign of vantage. Elisa, Louisa, and Flora were all present. Their eldest sister, Jane, who never attended public meetings of any kind, waited at home, expecting the return of the carriage which was to take her a quiet drive. She waited in vain. Her sisters were too eager over the anticipated meeting to remember to give any order to the coachman, so the faithful "Kenneth" paced slowly, his no doubt wondering horses,

for four hours through Parliament Square.

Even at this early date the three sisters had taken distinctive lines of work. Elisa was one of the very earliest members of the National Society for Women's Franchise. Louisa had identified herself with the Association for the University Education of Women, and Flora was working steadily in connection with the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor, now the Charity Organization Society. It was the very efficient way in which she helped this Society that led to her being elected a member of the first Edinburgh School Board after the passing of the Act of 1873. I used often in fun to tell her that Edinburgh was indebted to me for paving her way to this her life-long work. She one winter took my place as Visitor to the Victoria Lodging in connection with the Society for

Improving the Condition of the Poor. The late J. R. Findlay of the *Scotsman* was Superintendent of the district—Merchant Street—and he very soon discovered what a very admirable worker he had secured. To the very end of her life she was a recognized authority in this Society. She told me that once she objected to some detail in the Society's work. The official in charge told her that he thought, as often happened, an accurate account had not been given of the transaction. He asked her if she had observed the man leaving the premises as she came in. She had. "Well, Miss Stevenson, he was telling me that everything had gone wrong since the reign of Jezebel had begun, meaning yourself." This anecdote gives an idea of the very good terms that existed between her and most of the officials.

She could, and sometimes did, assume a lofty manner, but generally her real

kindness of heart made itself felt. I remember a woman describing to me her appearance as she presided at the giving of tickets for provisions to the very poor. She said, "Eh! it was nae easy job to gang up to that table for your ticket when your name was ca'd. There she sat, a blaze o' grandeur and gold specs." But the same woman was brought into closer contact with her, and forgot both "grandeur and gold specs" as her story was listened to, and true help given. For many years she took the principal share of the work in connection with "Defaulting Parents," and the grand manner did good service on these occasions. One man, on being warned by the Inspector that if his children did not appear at school the next day, he would be dealt with, enquired, "Does that mean I'll hae to gang afore that Miss Steve'son?" And being answered in the affirmative he

remarked, "I'd rather gang to jail for a fortnight than I'd gang afore HER."

The "grandeur" the woman spoke of (as regarded dress) was only that she was never indifferent as to dress—what woman is?—and that her taste and her purse led her to suitable, handsome clothing. As a young girl she was most particular as to boots, shoes, and gloves. One of Edinburgh's most useful women citizens, on first hearing her mentioned as a candidate for the School Board, exclaimed, "Flora Stevenson! I thought her gloves were her first consideration."[1] This lady happily lived

[1] On one occasion, when a large party (composed chiefly of members of the Stevenson family) had reached the summit of Goatfell, and seats were being chosen, Flora rose from the one she had selected, remarking, "*That seat* won't do; my feet are in the shade." "Literally or metaphorically?" a friend asked, and at once her brother John remarked, "*Both*, and Flo cannot stand shade in either case."

It was on the same occasion that the eldest of the family, James C. Stevenson, so long M.P. for South

long enough to have many consultations with her over "cases" which seemed well-nigh desperate. Her belief in "Flora's sense" never failed, and their united efforts changed and saved many a young life. There is no doubt that in early life there was a trace of egotism in Flora's character, and perhaps it never entirely disappeared, but it is equally true that, as her responsibility increased, and her share in public work became more important, thought of self lessened. One explanation for the unparalleled position that she held for so many years on the Edinburgh School Board was that she never spoke unless she had something *real* to say—she never spoke

Shields, was pointing out to his two eldest little girls, map in hand, the various counties to be seen from the summit, and was somewhat delaying lunch, when again John was the spokesman. "Oh! hang topography," he exclaimed; "let us to our victuals." No two brothers could be more unlike in their aims and pursuits, and yet their respect for and pride in one another never faltered.

for speaking's sake. She had great balance of mind, and seemed to have an instinct as to how far she could venture in pressing her own views, but entirely fearless as to expressing her opinion. She prepared carefully for any occasion which she considered important, not with any desire for self-display, but because she most conscientiously used for the good of the community the influence which, as years went on, she could not fail to know that she had acquired. This was very markedly shown on her last public appearance, within four or five months of her death, when she received the crowning honour of her career—the freedom of the City of Edinburgh. Her effort that day, and the preparation for it, was nothing short of heroic, and a triumph of spirit over a frail body. She foresaw (what is coming to pass) that if children were to be fed by provision of the State,

the springs of private benevolence would be interfered with. As founder and chief administrator of the Committee for Feeding and Clothing Destitute Children, she was a competent witness, and passionately feared the drift of opinion which would lessen parental responsibility. It was literally a dying speech; in pain and weakness she spoke words that were, after her death, quoted in the House of Commons. She never faltered, and was clearly heard to the very end; and went home exhausted, but glad.

Indeed, I feel, on looking back, that it would be difficult to exaggerate her unselfishness during the last months, when she can scarcely have known one moment's freedom from pain. Louie, too, was far from well, and in my morning visits, her room being on a lower floor, I went to it first. When I came to Flora's, without one single

exception, her first question was, "How does Louie seem to-day?" She needed to know all I could tell about her before she said one single word as to her own health.

Flora's place of youngest in so large a family, though it concentrated affection on her in her girlhood, by no means made her a spoiled child, and, as years went on, and her elder sisters needed care and consideration, she gave them ungrudgingly. They looked to her for advice, clung to her as weakness increased; their well-being had first place in the ordering of her life. It grieved her exceedingly, if, her name being more prominently before the public, any good service done by Louie was attributed to her. This was very markedly the case when the degree of LL.D. was given her by Edinburgh University. "I have no pleasure in it," she said to me, "it might have been given to Louie,

rather." And she was right, for it was Louisa who worked hard for the opening of the doors of the University to women, and I have good authority for saying that the Senatus did not give sufficient weight to this fact, but bestowed it on Flora "in appreciation of her public services." The acknowledgment to Louie came years after, when she was almost too weak to stand the strain of the ceremony, and when Flora's life was ended.

Perhaps the part Louisa took as member of the Parochial Board was as useful as any work that she ever did, though necessarily not known to the public. Careful watching convinced her that it was undesirable that the key of the wine-cellar in the Poorhouse should be in the hands of the Governor. It took some time, but at last, by a resolution of the Board, it was ordered to be given to the Doctor. The day when it

was to change hands was known, and woman's wit led her and another lady member of the Board to make a chance visit the evening before. They interrupted a carousal, which fact led to the dismissal of the Governor, an event devoutly hoped for by Louie and her lady associate.

I remember her coming one afternoon to see me direct from a prolonged meeting of the Board. I did enjoy her recital. She had been named as Convener of a Committee in charge, I think, of provisions. One member strenuously objected, saying, "I object to Miss Steve'son *because* she's a wumman—now I'll be told that Queen Victoria's a wumman, but the Queen is only a kind o' figureheid. Now, Miss Steve'son's nae figureheid, she gangs into everything." Notwithstanding this warning, perhaps because of it, "Miss Steve'son" was appointed.

Though Louisa, unlike Flora, never occupied a position which necessarily involved public speaking, she often presided at annual meetings of the societies in which she was interested, and never failed to arrest the attention of her audience, and to arrest it persuasively. In the tones of her voice there was a wonderful mingling of sweetness and strength. Her power of will was strong, and sometimes she came very near to exercising it unduly, but it was over those to whom she had opportunity of showing her genuine kindliness that she had the deepest influence. Like her father, on board the Clyde steamer,[1] she delighted when she was able to give even passing pleasure to those whose lives she knew needed brightening.

Any record of the home life of the four sisters would be defective were no mention made of Mrs Pollock, nurse

[1] See p. 45.

from earliest days. Each one of the family of ten came under her care, and truly *she* was cared for to the end of her long life. She reached her ninety-fifth year. For the last half-dozen years and more one of the best rooms in the house was given up to her, and many a good talk I have had with her there. She was a staunch Baptist, and approved of me from the first because of my well-known Baptist relative. In the capacity of deacon, she was visited by Bailie Walcott, a very useful citizen, and through him, she used to tell me, "the leddies heard mony a thing they would never have heard but for him." He saw things from a different angle. "Miss Stevenson," who never was on a committee in her life, and Mrs Pollock took sweet counsel together, and had not a little fun over the numerous engagements of "Miss Louisa and Miss Flora."

On looking back on the lives of my two dear friends, I cannot help feeling that their many public duties did encroach somewhat on home life. They had truly hospitable instincts, but friends who visited them—nieces, perhaps, first of all—felt that it was necessary to adapt themselves to the current of thought which for the time flowed strongest round 13 Randolph Crescent. Quite legitimate pleasures had to be set aside till a more convenient season, which season never came. Often, Flora told me, it was with difficulty that she found time to read reviews of books in the *Spectator* and elsewhere, not to mention the books themselves. A tradition has arisen that she excelled in needlework, and some specimens of her work do survive. But it is fact, not tradition, that these specimens were long on hand. An embroidered frock, began with enthusiasm for one niece, was not

finished until she had outgrown it; however, it fitted to admiration the next small niece who appeared on the scene.

But those who knew them best and loved them most, dwell gladly, not on what they failed to do, but on the wonderful work they accomplished. When watching the growth of the Societies with whose origin the names of Louisa and Flora Stevenson are identified, they repeat to themselves the sacred words, "They rest from their labours and their works do follow them."

I have only spoken of the four unmarried sisters, emphatically "the Aunts," but would like to add a word or two about the other members of the family. Mrs Foulis I cannot say I knew. Her early marriage and invalid life gave me no opportunity, but I can recall often meeting Mrs Ker. She never failed to give one the impression of being busy—and happy. James C. Stevenson, M.P.,

I can scarcely say I knew in any other sense than that of a man pre-eminently serving his day and generation in different spheres of public life. But two or three times I was at Eltham, and can recall Mrs Stevenson's look of happy patience (not a very usual combination), an index to the way in which both she and her husband accepted their last years of limited activity. "Archie," I can remember on his occasional visits, always brightening the home outlook. He and I were allies on 4th April 1861, the day after John's wedding, when in celebration of that event we went for lunch and a walk on the sands to Portobello! And in the evening there was a gathering at No. 13. "Alick," I think I may say, I did know. Some days that I spent at Lamlash (the last year Mr Stevenson went there) he was of the party, and three or four days at his own beautiful home, Ach-na-Cloich, enable

me fully to endorse the words on his tombstone, "He lived, making others glad."

With real gladness I can say John and I were *friends*. At times he allowed himself great plainness of speech, and perhaps so did I, but we never misunderstood one another. His spark of genius showed itself in the rapid changes of expression which flickered over his interesting face. A portentous frown changed quickly to the sunniest of smiles. I like to remember that the last words he said to me (without the slightest thought in either of our minds that they were parting words) referred to our long years of unbroken friendship —"One generation passeth away and another cometh."

APPENDIX

MR JAMES STEVENSON, FATHER OF LOUISA AND FLORA STEVENSON: HIS PARENTAGE AND DESCENDANTS

JAMES STEVENSON, born in Paisley, April 28, 1786, died at 13 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh, June 13, 1866, was son of JAMES STEVENSON, silk manufacturer of Paisley and London, born 1739, died 1806, by his second wife, Margaret, daughter of John Cochran of Paisley; and grandson of JAMES STEVENSON, who died in 1772, also of Paisley, and his first wife, Jean Hastie.

Mr Stevenson married, in 1824, Jane Stewart, daughter of Alexander Shannan, merchant of Greenock, by his wife, Margaret, daughter of Daniel Miller.

Their children are:

1. JAMES COCHRAN, born Oct. 9, 1825, died at Eltham Court, Jan. 11, 1905; married Elisa Ramsay, daughter of the Rev. James Anderson, D.D.

   Their children are:

   EDITH, married William Richard Anderson

   AMY, married the Rev. William Malcolm Macgregor, D.D.

   FLORENCE MARGARET, died at Bexhill, 1909, married Mackay Donald Scobie Mackenzie

   JAMES SHANNAN

   ARTHUR GAVIN, married Catherine Grace Radford Wheeler

   HEW, married Agnes Veronica Cowell

   LOUISA MARY, married Sir Kenneth Skelton Anderson, K.C.M.G.

   CHARLES, died in New York, 1895

   HILDA, married the Right Hon. Walter Runciman

   ELISABETH FRANCES

RONALD COCHRAN, R.N.V.R., married Christina Katharine Cowell

DORA JANE, married John Charles Peace Thompson

2. ALEXANDER SHANNAN, born Nov. 10, 1826, died at Oatlands Mere, Weybridge, March 29, 1900; married Alice Isabel, daughter of George Kewney

Their only child is:

ELSIE, married Captain F. H. Leyland Stevenson, and died in 1912

3. MARGARET MILLAR, born Nov. 10, 1826, died at 14 Bonaccord Crescent, Aberdeen, Feb. 25, 1900; married the Rev. William Turnbull Ker

Their children are:

ALICE JANE SHANNAN, M.D., married Edward Stewart Ker

ISABELLA, married George Frederick Stout, F.B.A.

MARGARET STEWART

JOHN JAMES, died at Malcolm, Western Australia, 1903

ANNIE MARTHA, died at Cairnie Lodge, Fifeshire, 1874

LISA MARY (twin to Annie Martha)

WILLIAM POLLOCK, C.M.G., married Lucy Christine Murray

ALAN DAVID

LOUISA STEVENSON, married Alexander James, M.D.

4. JANE, born April 29, 1828, died at 13 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh, Nov. 28, 1904

5. ELISA CARLILE, born Oct. 28, 1829, died at 13 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh, May 21, 1904

6. JOHN JAMES, born Aug. 24, 1831, died at 4 Porchester Gardens, London, May 5, 1908; married Jane, daughter of Robert Omond, M.D.

Their children are:

EMILY, married Roderick Henry Macleod, I.C.S.

Oswald, died 1864
Mildred Shannan
Gilbert, died in Nyassaland, 1896
Mary, died at Barskeoch Farm, Galloway, 1892
Ethel
Jean Evelyn, married Frederick Eustace Batten, M.D.
Arnold
Robert Omond

7. MARY, born May 14, 1834, died at 3 Newbattle Terrace, Edinburgh, March 6, 1877; married Robert Foulis, M.D.

Their children are:

Jane Stewart Shannan
Susan
Mary Louisa, married Gilbert Deas Davidson
David, married Henrietta Watson

8. LOUISA, born July 15, 1835, died at 13 Randolph Crescent, May 13, 1908
9. A SON, born and died March 9, 1837

10. ARCHIBALD, born May 8, 1838, died at sea on a voyage to Australia, Jan. 19, 1877; married Margaret Jane, daughter of the Rev. Alexander Anderson, LL.D.

Their children are:

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, M.B., D.P.H., married Mabel Mary Beaty

MARY GAVIN, married Lawrence Pilkington

HAROLD, married Anne Bisdee Thorne

ALEXANDER GAVIN, D.S.O., R.E., married Elizabeth Nicoll Jobson

JAMES, born and died 1873

MAY MARGARET

11. FLORA CLIFT, born Oct. 30, 1839, died at Rusack's Hotel, St Andrews, Sept. 28, 1905