

CHAPTER V.

IN the old family Bible that belonged to General Schuyler may be seen, in his hand-writing, this record : "In the Year 1755, on the 17th of September, was I, Philip John Schuyler, married (in the 21st Year, 9th Month, and 17th Day of his Age,) to Catharine Van Rensselaer, aged 20 Years, 9 Months, and 27 Days. May we live in peace and to the glory of God."

This was the "sweet Kitty V. R." mentioned in Philip's letter in the preceding chapter. She was a daughter of Colonel Johannes Van Rensselaer, of Claverack, in the present Columbia county, New York. They were married by that excellent minister of the Reformed Dutch church in Albany, Dominie Frelinghuysen. She was delicate but perfect in form and feature ; of medium height, extremely graceful in her movements, and winning in her deportment; well educated, in comparison with others, of sprightly temperament, possessed of great firmness and tenacity of will, and was very frugal, industrious and methodical.

The benediction implored by the husband in his marriage record appears to have been granted in full measure, for his spouse, who bore him fourteen children, and was his companion for eight-and-forty years, was all that a man could desire as the wife of his bosom, the joy and solace of his life, and the mother of his offspring. They loved each other tenderly, bore the burdens of life together lovingly and patiently, enjoyed God's blessings abundantly and

thankfully, and ended their pilgrimage almost at the same time, only the space of twenty months separating them on earth. Of her it might have been truthfully said, at every period of her life, she was

“ A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
A Traveler between life and death ;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill ;
A perfect Woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, and command ;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright,
With something of an angel light.”

Mrs. Grant, in her admirable sketches of persons and events during her residence with “ Aunt Schuyler” at the Flats, has given a brief outline of the portraiture of Philip as it was impressed upon her memory ten years after his marriage. He was then known as “ Philip Schuyler of the Pasture,” to distinguish him from a kinsman of the same name, who lived with the Colonel at the Flats as his expectant heir. “ He appeared,” says Mrs. Grant, “ merely a careless, good humored young man. Never was any one so little what he seemed with regard to ability, activity and ambition, art, enterprise and perseverance, all of which he possessed in an eminent degree, though no man had less the appearance of these qualities. Easy, complying, and good humored, the conversations, full of wisdom and sound policy, of which he had been a seemingly inattentive witness at the Flats, only slept in his recollection, to wake in full force when called forth by occasion.”

Mrs. Grant’s picture of society and of domestic life at the Flats is so charming, and also so useful in forming a truthful estimate of the home life of young Schuyler and his youthful wife, (for their own household was modeled in a manner after that of “ Aunt Schuyler’s,” under whose

roof they spent much time,) that no apology is needed for giving it here almost entire. At this time "Aunt Schuyler" was on the evening side of life, and was so corpulent that she moved about with difficulty, yet she entertained her guests with delightful ease, and enjoyed society with a zest that many might envy. "After the middle of life," says Mrs. Grant, "she went little out; her household, long since arranged by general rules, went regularly on, because every domestic knew exactly the duties of his or her place, and dreaded losing it as the greatest possible misfortune. She had always with her some young person, 'who was unto her as a daughter,' who was her friend and companion, and bred up in such a manner as to qualify her for being such, and one of whose duties it was to inspect the state of the household, and 'report progress' with regard to the operations going on in the various departments. For no one better understood, or more justly estimated, the duties of housewifery. Thus those young females who had the happiness of being bred under her auspices very soon became qualified to assist her instead of encroaching much on her time. The example and conversation of the family in which they lived was to them a perpetual school of useful knowledge, and manners easy and dignified, though natural and artless. They were not, indeed, embellished, but then they were not deformed by affectation, pretensions, or defective imitation of fashionable models of manners. They were not, indeed, bred up 'to dance, to dress, to roll the eye, or troll the tongue;' yet they were not lectured with unnatural gravity or frozen reserve. I have seen those of them who were lovely, gay, and animated, though, in the words of an old familiar lyric,

'Without disguise or art, like flowers that grace the wild,
Their sweets they did impart whene'er they spoke or smiled.'

“Aunt,” continues Mrs. Grant, “was a great manager of her time, and always contrived to create leisure hours for reading; for that kind of conversation which is properly styled gossiping she had the utmost contempt. Light, superficial reading, such as merely fills a blank in time, and glides over the mind without leaving an impression, was little known there, for few books crossed the Atlantic but such as were worth carrying so far for their intrinsic value. She was too much accustomed to have her mind occupied with objects of real weight and importance to give it up to frivolous pursuits of any kind. She began the morning with reading the Scriptures. They always breakfasted early and dined two hours later than the primitive inhabitants, who always took that meal at twelve. This departure from the ancient customs was necessary in this family, to accommodate the great number of British as well as strangers from New York, who were daily entertained at her liberal table. This arrangement gave her the advantage of a long forenoon to dispose of. After breakfast she gave orders for the family details of the day, which, without a scrupulous attention to those minutiae which fell more properly under the notice of her young friends, she always regulated in the most judicious manner, so as to prevent all appearance of hurry and confusion. There was such a rivalry among domestics, whose sole ambition was her favor, and who had been trained up from infancy, each to their several duties, that excellence in each department was the result both of habit and emulation; while her young protégés were early taught the value and importance of good housewifery, and were sedulous in their attention to little matters of decoration and elegance which her mind was too much engrossed to attend to; so that her household affairs, ever well regulated, went on in a mechan-

ical kind of progress that seemed to engage little of her attention, though her vigilant and overruling mind set every spring of action in motion.

“ Having thus easily and speedily arranged the details of the day, she retired to read in her closet, where she generally remained till about eleven, when, being unequal to distant walks, the Colonel and she, and some of her elder guests, passed some of the hotter hours among those embowering shades of her garden, in which she took great pleasure. Here was their Lyceum ; here questions in religion and morality, too weighty for table-talk, were leisurely and coolly discussed, and plans of policy and various utility arranged. From this retreat they adjourned to the portico, and while the Colonel either retired to write, or went to give directions to his servants, she sat in this little tribunal, giving audience to new settlers, followers of the army left in hopeless dependence, and others who wanted assistance or advice, or hoped she would intercede with the Colonel for something more peculiarly in his way, he having great influence with the colonial government.

“ At the usual hour her dinner party assembled, which was generally a large one ; and here I must digress from the detail of the day to observe that, looking up as I always did to Madame with admiring veneration, and having always heard her mentioned with unqualified applause, I look often back to think what defects or faults she could possibly have to rank with the sons and daughters of imperfection inhabiting this transitory scene of existence, well knowing, from subsequent observation of life, that error is the unavoidable portion of humanity. Yet of this truism, to which every one will readily subscribe, I can recollect no proof in my friend’s conduct, unless the luxury of her table might be produced to confirm it. Yet this, after all, was

but comparative luxury. There was more choice and selection, and perhaps more abundance at her table than at those of the other primitive inhabitants, yet how simple were her repasts compared with those which the luxury of the higher ranks of this country offer to provoke the sated appetite. Her dinner party generally consisted of some of her intimate friends or near relations ; her adopted children, who were inmates for the time being ; and strangers, sometimes invited merely as friendly travelers, on the score of hospitality, but often welcomed for some time as stationary visitors, on account of worth or talents, that gave value to their society ; and lastly, military guests, selected with some discrimination on account of the young friends, who they wished not only to protect, but cultivate by an improving association. Conversation here was always rational, generally instructive and often cheerful.

“The afternoon frequently brought with it a new set of guests. Tea was always drank early here, and, as I have formerly observed, was attended with so many petty luxuries of pastry, confectionery, etc., that it might well be accounted a meal by those whose early and frugal dinners had so long gone by. In Albany it was customary, after the heat of the day was past, for young people to go in parties of three or four, in open carriages, to drink tea at an hour or two’s drive from home. The receiving and entertaining of this sort of company, generally, was the province of the younger part of the family, and of those, many came, in summer evenings, to the Flats, when tea, which was very early, was over. The young people, and those who were older, took their differing walks, while Madame sat in her portico, engaged in what might comparatively be called light reading—essays, biography, poetry, etc., till the younger party set out on their return

home, and her domestic friends rejoined her in her portico, where, in warm evenings, a slight repast was sometimes brought; but they more frequently shared the last and most truly social meal within. Winter made little difference in her mode of occupying her time. She then always retired to her closet to read at stated periods.

“The hospitalities of this family were so far beyond their apparent income that all strangers were astonished at them. To account for this it must be observed that, in the first place, there was perhaps scarce an instance of a family possessing such uncommonly well-trained, active, and diligent slaves as that which I describe. The set that were staid servants when they were married had some of them died off by the time I knew the family, but the principal roots, from whence the many branches then flourishing sprung, yet remained. There were two women who had come originally from Africa while very young. They were most excellent servants, and the mothers or grandmothers of the whole set, except one white wooled negro-man, who, in my time, sat by the chimney and made shoes for all the rest.

“The great pride and happiness of these sable matrons was to bring up their children to dexterity, diligence, and obedience, Diana being determined that Maria’s children should not excel hers in any quality which was a recommendation to favor; and Maria equally resolved that her brood, in the race of excellence, should outstrip Diana’s. Never was a more fervent competition. That of Phillis and Brunetta, in the Spectator, was a trifle to it, and it was extremely difficult to decide on their respective merits; for though Maria’s son Prince cut down wood with more dexterity and dispatch than any one in the province, the mighty Cæsar, son of Diana, cut down wheat and thrashed

it better than he. His sister Betty, who, to her misfortune, was a beauty of her kind, and possessed wit equal to her beauty, was the best seamstress and laundress by far I have ever known ; and the plain, unpretending Rachel, sister to Prince, wife to Titus, alias Tyte, and head cook, dressed dinners that might have pleased Apicius. I record my humble friends by their real names because they allowedly stood at the head of their own class, and distinction of every kind should be respected.

“Of the inferior personages in this drama I have been characterizing it would be tedious to tell ; suffice it that, besides filling up all the lower departments of the household, and cultivating to the highest advantage a most extensive farm, there was a thorough-bred carpenter and shoemaker, and a universal genius who made canoes, nets, and paddles, shod horses, mended implements of husbandry, managed the fishing, in itself no small department, reared hemp and tobacco, made cider and tended wild horses, as they call them, which it was his province to “break.” For every branch of domestic economy there was a person allotted—educated for the purpose ; and this society was kept immaculate in the same way that the Quakers preserved the rectitude of theirs—and indeed in the only way that any community can be preserved from corruption—when a member showed symptoms of degeneracy he was immediately expelled, or, in other words more suitable to this case, sold.

“The habit of living together under the same mild though regular government produced a general cordiality and affection among all the members of the family, who were truly ruled by the law of love ; and even those who occasionally differed about trifles had an unconscious attachment to each other, which showed itself on all emer-

gencies. Treated themselves with care and gentleness, they were careful and kind with regard to the only inferiors and dependents they had, the domestic animals. The superior personages in the family had always some good property to mention or good saying to repeat of those whom they cherished into attachment and exalted into intelligence ; while they, in their turn, improved the sagacity of their subject animals by caressing and talking to them. Let no one laugh at this, for whenever a man is at ease and unsophisticated, when his native humanity is not extinguished by want or chilled by oppression, it overflows to inferior beings and improves their instincts to a degree incredible to those who have not witnessed it.

“The Princes and Cæsars of the Flats had as much to tell of the sagacity and attachments of the animals as their mistress related of their own. * * * Each negro was indulged with his raccoon, his gray squirrel or muskrat, or perhaps his beaver, which he tamed and attached to himself by daily feeding and caressing him in the farm-yard. One was sure about all such houses to find these animals, in which their masters took the highest pleasure. All these small features of human nature must not be despised for their minuteness. To a good mind they afford consolation.”*

Such was the pattern of a home after which Philip Schuyler and his wife arranged their own, though on a less extensive scale at first, for his fine mansion, yet standing at the head of Schuyler street, in Albany, where hospitality was dispensed to friends and strangers with almost princely plenitude for forty years, was not erected until about 1765. As the elder son he came into possession of the real estate of his father when he attained his majority

* *Memoirs of an American Lady.*

in the autumn of 1754, and his residence, during the earlier years of his married life, was in the family mansion at Albany, with his mother and sister. The property which he received by entail was large, but his nature was too noble to be governed by the selfishness which the laws of primogeniture allowed and which universal practice sanctioned, and he generously shared his patrimony with his brothers and sister. This act was more remarkable because his life and experience were intimately connected with the aristocracy of the province, who held the largest landed estates in the country. With these the justice of primogeniture laws was never questioned, nor their privileges ever refused by the fortunate elder son ; and a relinquishment of these privileges and advantages for the benefit of others was a thing unknown. But Philip Schuyler was innately just, noble and generous, and his act was nothing but a natural manifestation of these qualities. His sense of right and the fraternal yearnings of his spirit would have been outraged by any other course ; and so, governed by his natural impulses, and with a beautiful loyalty to conscience which no pecuniary advantages could bribe, he divided his houses and lands, and gave to each of his mother's children an equal share with himself.

The nuptials of Philip Schuyler, like those of his great compatriot and friend, George Washington, were celebrated at the close of the most active duties of a campaign in which he had been engaged. The treaty at Aix-la-Chapelle had secured nothing but a hollow truce for the colonists. Peace reigned in Europe, but war was again raging between the English and provincials on one side and the French and Indians on the other, in the forests of America. Blood had already flowed profusely near the banks of the Monongahela and of Lake George ; and the shifting scenes of poli-

tical events in the New World, and especially in the province of New York were now grand and imposing, for the magnificent drama of the FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR—the memorable Seven Years War, performed upon two continents and the stormy ocean that separated them—was in full progress.

Rightly to understand that drama, we must become familiar with the leading facts in the history of its rehearsals in the colonies, and view, if only in hurried glances, the progress of its preparations until the curtain was lifted and the actors appeared in character before the great audience of nations. To do this let us go behind the scenes for a moment, and in the green room of retrospection hold familiar conversation with individual players. With the acts of the drama that were performed in the Old World we need have little to do except to observe the links of their connection with the plot; for Philip Schuyler, whose life and times we are delineating, and who now, for the first time, appeared as a public actor, had no part in transatlantic scenes. His sphere of action and influence was in the colony in which himself and family for three generations had lived. From the colonial governor he received his first commission as a military officer, and among colonial troops he first drew his sword in defense of his country and the honor of the British realm.