

**MRS. BARBAULD AND HER  
CONTEMPORARIES: SKETCHES  
OF  
SOME EMINENT LITERARY AND  
SCIENTIFIC ENGLISHWOMEN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649543014

Mrs. Barbauld and Her Contemporaries: Sketches of Some Eminent Literary and Scientific Englishwomen by Jerom Murch

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Cover @ 2017

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# MRS. BARBAULD

AND HER CONTEMPORARIES;

*SKETCHES OF SOME  
EMINENT LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC  
ENGLISH WOMEN.*

BY

JEROM MURCH,

PRESIDENT OF THE BATH LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL  
ASSOCIATION.

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"We live by Admiration, Hope and Love;  
And even as these are well and wisely fixed  
In dignity of being we ascend."

WORDSWORTH.

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LONDON:  
LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

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1877

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1878, March 11.  
Minot fund.

TO  
THE COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
BATH ROYAL LITERARY  
AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION,  
THESE PAGES ARE DEDICATED  
BY ONE WHO THROUGH MANY YEARS  
HAS HAD THE GREAT ADVANTAGE  
OF THEIR CO-OPERATION AND FRIENDSHIP.

*This Book originated in the last of four Papers which were read in different years at the Bath Institution and printed for the perusal of friends. I did not expect that "Mrs. Barbauld and her Contemporaries" would be sought beyond the circle within which my former efforts had been kindly received. The subject, however, proved to be more interesting, and I was requested to offer to the public this portion of the fruit of the little leisure of a busy life. In complying with the wish I have been glad to find myself unfettered by the necessity of compressing what I had to say within the time allowed for an evening meeting. I have now tried not only to make sketches which were much too meagre more satisfactory but also to introduce others which I unwillingly omitted, though important to my object. These, with some extracts, original letters, and similar biographical illustrations will be found in an appendix; may they give a better idea of the period to which they relate and of the eminent women by whom it was adorned.*

J. M.

Cranwells, Bath;

May 1st, 1877.



# MRS. BARBAULD

## AND HER CONTEMPORARIES.

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### PART I.

The period of English Literature for our consideration is the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Barbauld was born in 1743, published her first work in 1773, continued to write as late as 1822 and died in her eighty-second year in 1825. The contemporaries of whom I propose to speak are the more distinguished of the women who first followed Mrs. Barbauld in giving to the world books on various subjects. Some of them both began and continued to write later than she did, remaining on the stage after a younger generation had entered upon it, but all may be regarded as belonging to the same period.

I have chosen this subject because I fear it is either not generally known or not sufficiently remembered how much English Literature owes to these women.

They did more than give to the world books of high repute; they suffered under great discouragements connected with the times in which their lot was cast. Men alone were then thought worthy of the privilege of writing; women were generally considered incapable of any important intellectual effort. I am far from thinking that Mrs. Barbauld and her contemporaries were on the whole superior to the literary ladies of a generation nearer our own; but more praise is due to the former because their difficulties were greater. "Two powers," says Max Müller, are necessary to every thing really great, one creative, the other receptive." "Where love and sympathy are wanting in a people, there poetry flourishes as little as the rose will yield its fragrance without sunshine."\* To these remarks of the eminent German writer I may add that love and sympathy were awakened by Mrs. Barbauld and her contemporaries; they were in full vigour to quicken the inspiration of their successors.

Perhaps we shall better realise the position of both if we look a little farther back. The history of the English Literature of the last three hundred years is well known to be marked by great alternations. From

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\* Correspondence between Schiller and the Duke of Schleswig Holstein. "Macmillan's Magazine," August, 1876.

the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth there was marvellous intellectual vigour and brilliancy. It was the age of Spencer, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Lord Bacon, Milton, Hooker, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Clarendon, George Herbert, John Bunyan and Jeremy Taylor. From the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth there may have been greater refinement and wider diffusion of taste but there was also considerable diminution of power. Dryden, Addison, Pope, Swift, Bolingbroke, Hume, Smollet, Fielding, Richardson, all wrote works which commanded and still command many readers while decidedly inferior to those of the preceding generation. Dr. Johnson of course stands out in bold relief, but his *magnum opus*, indeed the *magnum opus* of the period, was his Dictionary, a marvel of industry though not a work to promote much mental development. Lower down in the scale between 1700 and 1750 we have Garth, Rowe, Prior, Congreve, Blackmore, Fenton, Tickell, Savage, a race who had their rank assigned them in the great lexicographer's Lives of the Poets, and it was anything but an elevated rank. From 1750 to 1800, however, the tide began to turn; the imaginative faculty revived; Gray, Collins, Goldsmith,

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