

**EMINENT WOMEN
SERIES:
MRS. SIDDONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649653096

Eminent Women Series: Mrs. Siddons by Mrs. A. Kennard & John H. Ingram

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

MRS. A. KENNARD & JOHN H. INGRAM

**EMINENT WOMEN
SERIES:
MRS. SIDDONS**

Eminent Women Series

EDITED BY JOHN H. INGRAM

MRS. SIDDONS.

MRS. SIDDONS.

BY

MRS. A. KENNARD.



LONDON:
W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE, S.W.

1887.

(All rights reserved.)

909
S568
K3

PREFACE.

IN spite of Mrs. Siddons's professed shrinking from the celebrity that biographers would confer upon her, and her preference for the "still small voice of tender relatives and estimable friends," we know that she bequeathed her Memoranda, Letters, and Diary to the poet Campbell—an intimate friend during her latter years—with a request that he would prepare them for publication. How, with the ample material at his command, Campbell wrote so bad a life, it is difficult to conceive. He seemed conscious himself that he was not doing justice to his subject. The task of finishing it weighed on him like a nightmare. To secure himself from interruption he would fix a placard on the door of his chambers announcing that "Mr. Campbell was engaged with the biography of Mrs. Siddons, and was not to be disturbed."

Though performing the task unwillingly, he stubbornly refused to allow anyone else to attempt it. When Mrs. Jameson contemplated writing a life of the great actress he was most indignant, and expressed himself as unable to understand how Mrs. Combe (Cecilia Siddons) could patronise a life of her mother

by Mrs. Jameson, knowing that he had been appointed the biographer.

Boaden's account of Mrs. Siddons is sketchy and meagre, and his style, if possible, more pedantic and ponderous than Campbell's. Crabb Robinson declared it to be "one of the most worthless books of biography in existence."

In writing an account of a woman like Mrs. Siddons, or, indeed, of anyone whose life has been passed entirely before the public, it is necessary to divest the character as much as possible of the legendary traditions adhering to it. It must be brought down into the regions of ordinary life, and the only way to accomplish this is to transcribe her actual words and expressions written without thought of publication. We must therefore ask our readers to forgive us for quoting so many of her letters in full. When we attempt to shorten or interpolate, all their easy charm and freshness seems to evaporate.

Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, in his *Lives of the Kembles*, has incorporated Mrs. Siddons's history with that of her brother, John Kemble, and written by far the best biography yet done of the great actress. To him we must express our deep obligation, and almost our contrition, for venturing to treat a subject already so ably handled in his interesting volumes. We must also express our gratitude to Mr. Alfred Morrison and Mr. Thibaudeau for allowing us to make use of the valuable documents contained in the Morrison collection of autograph letters.

NINA A. KENNARD.

February, 1887.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—PARENTAGE AND CHILDHOOD	1
CHAPTER II.—MARRIAGE	18
CHAPTER III.—“ DAVEY ”	88
CHAPTER IV.—WORK	48
CHAPTER V.—SUCCESS	67
CHAPTER VI.—DUBLIN AND EDINBURGH	81
CHAPTER VII.—CLOUDS	95
CHAPTER VIII.—LADY MACBETH	115
CHAPTER IX.—FRIENDS	180
CHAPTER X.—1782 TO 1798	149
CHAPTER XI.—SHERIDAN	172
CHAPTER XII.—HERMIONE	186
CHAPTER XIII.—SORROWS	202
CHAPTER XIV.—WESTBOURNE FARM	216
CHAPTER XV.—RETIREMENT	239
CHAPTER XVI.—OLD AGE	255

MRS. SIDDONS.

CHAPTER I.

PARENTAGE AND CHILDHOOD.

THE lax morality prevailing in England at the time of the Restoration, produced a literary and dramatic school of art suited to the taste of the public. Congreve wrote *Love for Love*, and coolly remarked, when accused of immorality, "that, if *it* were an immodest play, he was incapable of writing a modest one."

The reaction from the almost overstrained energy and chivalry of the Elizabethan age, which a century of Stuart rule effected in the minds of Englishmen, had brought them thus low. Manners were looked upon as better than morals. Scepticism as better than belief, as well when it concerned the tenets of the Bible as the honour of their neighbours' wives.

The stage—especially when the public has no other intellectual outlet—is invariably the test by which we can discover the moral condition of a country. When that condition is unnatural and feverish, proportionally artificial and stimulating must be the mental food presented to it, until the audience gradually

becomes incapable of digesting any other. The want at the end of the seventeenth century] produced the supply. A drama arose which was polished, dainty, finished in detail, but from the stage of which virtue was excluded like a poor relation, who, clad in fustian, and shod with hob-nail boots, is not supposed to be fit company for profligate gentlemen in gold-embroidered coats and lace ruffles.

Shakespeare was too strong food for the digestive capacities of an age whose poets preferred falsehood to truth. Pepys speaks of *Henry VIII.* as a simple thing made up "of a great many patches." *The Tempest*, he thinks, "has no great art, but yet good above ordinary plays." *Othello* was to him "a mean thing," compared to the last new comedy. He is good enough, however, to allow that he liked or disliked *Macbeth*, according to the humour of the hour, but there was a "*divertissement*" in it, which struck him as being a droll thing in tragedy.

The fiery energy of Pitt was needed to galvanise the paralysed enthusiasm, the fanatical earnestness of John Wesley was needed to arouse the deadened moral sense of England. Religion and patriotism come first as important factors in the education of a people, but they are closely followed by poetry and the drama. If Pitt and Wesley did much to elevate the political and religious tone, as much was done to elevate the literary and dramatic by Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, and Sarah Siddons.

Our readers may be inclined to think we exaggerate the importance of the stage, by thus classing poets and players together; but if we wish to appreciate the influence wielded by players a hundred years ago, we have but to examine the careers of these last two great