

**FAMILIAR LETTERS  
OF ANN WILLSON**

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Familiar Letters of Ann Willson by Ann Willson

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“The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.”

“Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw herself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

ANN WILSON was the daughter of John and Rebecca Willson, of Rahway, East Jersey. Her childhood was marked by an ardent and affectionate temperament, and while her timorous and sensitive nature shrank from the observation of strangers, in the domestic circle were developed those various traits that so conspicuously adorned her more matured character. In the twenty third year of her age, she had first to drink of the cup of affliction, by the death of her beloved father, to whom she was not only attached by nature's tie, but by a strong spiritual affinity.

About five years after, her maternal support was also removed. Her feelings on these occasions are more fully portrayed in her letters to her friends, than they could be by the language of another. Her brother Samuel, four years older than herself, she and a younger sister, now composed the family. The latter married in the spring of 1827, and removed to the southern part of Jersey; and in the 10th mo. following, he to whom she clung with peculiar tenderness, and who was emphatically her *earthly* stay, was called to his eternal home. Under these repeated bereavements she evidenced a holy resignation, in which was uttered from the depths of feeling, "Thy will be done." Soon after the decease of her brother S., she went to reside with her brother and sister at Port Elizabeth, N. J. Her frequent allusions to her home with them, prove the affectionate solicitude with which they were regarded. Notwithstanding her delicate and slender constitution, she was here eminently useful, blending the characters of aunt and mother in the full adoption of the children. And it is principally that these objects of her care may have a knowledge of

one who watched their infantile years with unremitting anxiety, and who appeared to live for them rather than for herself, that this little volume of "Familiar Letters" has been compiled,—believing they present a more faithful portrait of her pure and cultivated mind than could be otherwise drawn. And for the more full accomplishment of this, though they were often written in a hurried moment, and not with the most remote view to publicity, from which her humility would have recoiled, they are given in their native dress, except an occasional transposition of a word or two, and the omission of such parts as were of interest only to those concerned.

The love of the beautiful and good is so strongly depicted throughout them, that it scarcely requires a notice here, and yet it was so interwoven with each word and deed, that it seems inseparable from thought of her.

The crowning virtue, charity, was her diadem; if fault was found with another in her presence, she invariably had some palliative to offer, thus bearing an uncompromising testimony against detraction.

Contrary to her usual practice in matters of duty, when her feelings were arrested on the subject of Free Produce, she turned from the requisition, unwilling to yield, and for a long time carefully avoided reading anything upon the subject; but one day, on opening the New Testament, her eye rested upon the 23d verse of the 14th chap. of Romans; she closed the book disarmed of all opposition, and continued through the remainder of her life, a period of more than twenty years, faithful to her convictions by abstaining as far as possible from the use of the products of unrequited labor.

In 1834, after many seasons of secret suffering, she appeared as a minister. To use her own simile, she "was obliged to expose her simple wares for the sake of a livelihood." Her offerings were distinguished for their vitality and originality—often exemplifying the proverb, that, "A word fitly spoken, is as apples of gold in pictures of silver."

She became a member of the meeting for Ministers and Elders in 1836. During that winter, she accompanied her

friend, J. J., in a visit to the Particular and Monthly Meetings of Salem Quarter, and to some meetings within the limits of Burlington and Haddonfield. She subsequently visited the families of her own Monthly Meeting, (Maurice River,) also those of Woodbury, Piles Grove, Rahway, and Plainfield, and a number belonging to Kingwood. For this service she was peculiarly qualified, possessing in an eminent degree, the gift of quick spiritual discernment. Her religious missions were not frequent; the most distant was that to the land of her nativity, which is touchingly alluded to in one or more of her letters.

The death of her brother-in-law, I. Townsend, Jr., in the summer of 1839, opened again the floodgate of affliction. In this hour of trial she not only sought refuge herself beneath the wing of Divine Love, but extended a hand to gather the widow and the fatherless under its shadow.

Her health, which had never been strong, was now evidently declining, attended with much suffering.

In the spring of 1842, she removed with her sister and family to Philadelphia. Her indisposition continuing to increase, she yielded to the wishes of her friends, who hoped a visit to New York might be useful; but after a tarrance there of several months, she returned, without being materially benefited. Her mind during this period was quiet and peaceful. She significantly remarked, "that her work basket was empty, and she seemed to have nothing to do." A few days before her close she observed to a friend, that she "felt as a child resting upon a paternal bosom." Thus ended her excellent life on the 4th of 12th mo. 1843, in the 46th year of her age.





## LETTERS OF ANN WILLSON.

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To H. S—.

*1st month 29th, 1820.*

With friendship's request I would willingly comply, could the effusions of my heart in any wise interest, but thou knowest, my dear H., 'tis with me mentally a season of gloom and dejection, and Anna's mind well accords with the sadness of nature over which winter has cast her freezing mantle—even so has sorrow thrown her sable garb over the gaiety and cheerfulness of my thoughts. Can then a solitary recluse light up a ray of pleasure in the peaceful heart of her absent (though well-loved) friend! but this may my dull scrawl say—though adversity has way-laid my path, yet has she not been able to chill the genial stream of love which full oft flows towards thee.

New things are not for Anna to communicate, for she has remained in home's vicinity ever since thou left us, and had it not been for the kindness of some friends who called a few minutes, I should, I suppose, have remained ignorant of thy departure. I rejoiced to hear thou hadst set out on a little jaunt of enjoyment, though I am a loser thereby.

Notwithstanding the snow has thrown her fleecy carpet over earth's surface, and wrapt in white each little twig, and clouds have veiled the fair face of the spangled

sky, yet have I been a nocturnal rambler with Hervey, and listened with interest to his nightly contemplations. I think he has a peculiar faculty for drawing an importantly pious inference from even trifling subjects. Dost thou not, with me, when reading works of this kind, feel respect approaching to veneration for their author ?

Father has not been so well for a day or two past ; his is so variable a complaint that I am oft ready to tremble lest the next change may be a final one. Thou may'st, my dear, conclude, I lack magnanimity to bear with becoming firmness the ills of life ; of this I am sensible, yet still trust my friends will cherish for me a sympathetic feeling, well knowing 'tis difficult for nature passively to yield to so trying an allotment, and resignedly to say "not my will but thine," Parent of Wisdom, "be done." Assuredly believing that charity abideth among the inmates of thy heart, to her I refer thee for a palliation of each fault, and am, in affection sincere, thine, &c.

ANNA.

To H. S—.

1820.

I have for days past, been waiting an opportunity verbally to thank thee for the plant of feeling,\* well assured it accords with the delicacy of thy own sympathy, which, though words have seldom expressed, I have deeply felt—for silence possesses a voice more eloquent than language. Suffice it to say, I have understood and acceptably received it—but acknowledgement therefor has only been mentally uttered ; well I knew, did I orally make known the gratitude which rested on my heart, it

\* Sensitive Plant.