

**A MEMOIR OF MRS. SUSANNA
ROWSON, WITH ELEGANT AND
ILLUSTRATIVE EXTRACTS FROM
HER WRITINGS IN PROSE AND
POETRY**

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A memoir of Mrs. Susanna Rowson, with elegant and illustrative extracts from her writings in prose and poetry by Elias Nason

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ELIAS NASON

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PROSE AND POETRY**

May 1864



S. Rowson

DEDICATORY.

TO HIS

ESTIMABLE AND LONG TRIED FRIEND,

JOHN WARD DEAN, A. M.,

WHO BRINGS TO

THE STUDY OF EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE,

A RETENTIVE MEMORY, A SOUND JUDGMENT, A REFINED TASTE,
AND AN ARDENT ZEAL;

AND

WHOSE MENTAL ACQUISITIONS ARE EQUALLED ONLY BY
HIS MODESTY AND GOOD SENSE,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE MOST RESPECTFULLY

Inscribed,

BY

HIS VERY OBEDIENT SERVANT,

ELIAS NASON.

BRIGHTSIDE, Jan. 1, 1870.

The excellent Portrait of Mrs. Rowson was engraved expressly for this work, at the expense of Mrs. John J. Clarke, née Rebecca Cordis (see p. 190), in testimony of her affectionate regard for the memory of her distinguished relative.

Publisher.

A MEMOIR
OF
MRS. SUSANNA ROWSON.

CHAPTER I.

Dear to memory are the scenes of our early days, though then the cup of existence was often mingled with the tear of affliction.—
MRS. ROWSON.

The ship hangs hovering on the verge of death.—*Falconer.*

Mrs. SUSANNA ROWSON was one of the most remarkable women of her day. Her life is as romantic as any creation of her gifted pen, and is a beautiful illustration of the potency of a large, glowing heart, and a determined will to rise superior to circumstance and achieve success. She was the only daughter of Lieutenant, afterwards Captain William Haswell, of the British navy, and was born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, England, in 1762. Her mother's maiden name was Susanna Musgrave,¹ and she died in giving her infant

¹The Musgrave family is of German origin, and settled in England as early as the Norman conquest. Camden styles it "the martial and warlike family of Musgrave." *Mus* signifies fen; *grave*, governor; i.e., the governor of the fens, as landgrave, etc. Arms: az. six annulets, or.—*Burke's Commoners of England*, Sup., p. 15.

daughter,¹ whom she named with her own name, and baptized with her blessing, to the world. Lieutenant Haswell, being then engaged in the revenue service on the American station,² married sometime afterwards, Miss Rachel, daughter of Ebenezer and Elizabeth (Hudson) Woodward,³ of George's island, in Boston harbor, by whom he had three sons, Robert, William, and John Montresor, an account of whom will be found in a subsequent part of this work.

The infancy of Mrs. Rowson was passed in England, under the "watch and ward" of a most faithful nurse, of whom she ever spoke in terms of grateful praise.

Having settled pleasantly with his family in a delightful valley at Nantasket, Mr. Haswell now desired to bring his little daughter to America, to be nurtured by his excellent and pious lady under his own roof; and for this purpose he returned to England in 1766, and receiving Susanna and her

¹ In the preface to the *Trials of the Human Heart*, Mrs. Rowson says: "My mother lost her life in giving me existence." She lies buried under one of the churches in Portsmouth, England.

² W. Musgrave, Esq., was one of the commissioners of the customs in England, 1767.

³ Ebenezer Woodward was the son of Smith Woodward of Dorchester. The will from which the pedigree is derived, bears the date of 1738. His daughter Mary married Hezekiah Hudson, of Cohasset, and had issue, Scarlet Hudson, born January 20, 1775.

affectionate nurse, embarked with them in October, at Deal, on board a brig bound for Boston.

The voyage was long and perilous.¹ The brig encountered the fearful storms and contrary winds of that inclement season, and the provisions failing, each passenger was finally put upon an allowance of a single biscuit, and a half a pint of water per day. Mrs. Rowson often spoke in after life of the intense thirst she then experienced, and of her bitter disappointment, when her father, with a tearful eye, presented her a cup of wine instead of water. Her faithful nurse subsisted many days on half of her own scanty allowance, affectionately reserving the other portion for her beloved Susanna, should they be reduced to a more terrible necessity. Having thus been driven to and fro by wintry storms for many weeks, and having endured the pangs of famine to the last extremity, their hearts were overwhelmed with joy when the sweet cry of "Land ahead!" was heard late in the afternoon of the 28th of January, 1767. They were approaching Boston harbor, and anticipating quick relief from their protracted sufferings; but a severer trial yet awaited them. The wind rose suddenly; the night fell darkling over the ill-fated vessel; the

¹ For a graphic description of this wintry voyage, see Mrs. Rowson's *Rebecca*, p. 152.

sleet encased the ropes in ice; the sailors were benumbed with cold; the brig became unmanageable; and to add to their dismay, they lost sight of the beacon¹ at the entrance of the harbor, and were drifting hopelessly in amongst the rocks and breakers. At ten o'clock that dreadful night, their fears were realized. Suddenly the vessel struck a rock. It proved to be upon that long, low point running out north-westwardly from Lovell's island,² opposite Ram's head, in Boston harbor. The floods came beating violently over deck, and there, all through that long, cold, dreary, stormy night, the little weather-beaten company remained in agony, anticipating instant death. But the good brig held together; and when the tide receded in the morning, the kind people of the island wading into the sea and placing a ladder against the side of the vessel, received the passengers and conducted them safely to the land; the rounds of the ladder, however, being soon covered with ice, Lieut. Haswell did not dare to risk his little daughter on

¹ This was the Boston lower light. There was but one lighthouse in the harbor at that period.

² This island, lying between Long island and the Great Brewster, is about six miles from Boston. Many ships have been wrecked upon the shoal extending from it on the north-west side. "One ketch was carried out to sea, and wrecked on Lovell's island, December 25, 1645."—*Drake's History of Boston*, p. 291.