

**LETTERS TO IMLAY;  
WITH PREFATORY  
MEMOIR**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649101658

Letters to Imlay; with prefatory memoir by Mary Wollstonecraft

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](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT**

**LETTERS TO IMLAY;  
WITH PREFATORY  
MEMOIR**



*MARY* *Goswin*  
*WOLLSTONECRAFT*

*LETTERS TO IMLAY;*  
*WITH PREFATORY MEMOIR BY*  
*C. KEGAN PAUL.*



LONDON :  
C. KEGAN PAUL & Co., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE,  
1879.

## MEMOIR.



THE name of Mary Wollstonecraft has long been a mark for obloquy and scorn. Living and dying as a Christian, she has been called an atheist, always a hard name, but harder still some years ago. She ran counter to the customs of society, yet not wantonly or lightly, but with forethought, in order to carry out a moral theory gravely and religiously adopted. Her opinions, save on one point, were those which most cultivated women now hold. Mary Wollstonecraft loved much and suffered much; she had the real enthusiasm of humanity before the words were known which designate a feeling still far from common; and, like many more who think always of others rather than self, she has been

one of the martyrs of society. Nor did she win, like some other such martyrs, any immediate recognition when her sufferings ceased in rest, nor had she a certain pride in her rejection while here. She did not carry about in men's sight, as has been said of Byron—

“ The pageant of her bleeding heart.”

For the most part her great sorrows were hidden, herself was unrecognised, and her name despised.

Known to and loved by only a very few, her writings have been almost unread, the facts of her life ignored, and only eighty years after her death has any serious attempt been made to set her right in the eyes of those who will choose to see her as she was. As the wife of Godwin, her life found place in a memoir of the philosopher published by me in 1876. How completely ignored she has been may be judged from the fact that when Miss Yonge, the well-known authoress of *The Heir of Redcliffe*, prepared some few years since a new edition of *The Elements*

*of Morality*, a book for children, translated by Mary Wollstonecraft from the German, she did not even take the trouble to discover the right name of her whose work she was reproducing, and spelt it *Wolstoncroft* and *Woolstoncroft*.

The following pages reproduce in part, and in part supplement, what was said in my *Life of Godwin*, in order to do justice to the memory of a woman as good as she was fair, and lovable as she was unfortunate.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born at Hoxton on April 27, 1759. Her father had once been rich, the son of a respectable manufacturer in Spital-fields who had realised a considerable fortune. The family was originally Irish; and Wollstonecraft the younger married an Irishwoman of good family, Elizabeth Dixon.

Never bred to any profession, Mr. Wollstonecraft, when he had spent great part of his patrimony in drink, tried farming, an occupation in which shrewdness, vigilance, and early hours



are, above all things, requisite. He got into deeper difficulties, and began a wandering, shifty life, marking each change of residence by a deeper fall in poverty and disrepute. The family roamed from Hoxton to Edmonton, to Essex, to Beverley in Yorkshire, to Laugharne in Pembrokeshire, where he seems to have had some little property, and back to London again.

Mrs. Wollstonecraft died in 1780, leaving six children : Edward, an attorney, in business near the Tower ; Mary, Everina, and Eliza ; James, who went into the Navy ; Charles, who finally emigrated to America. There are some of the name now settled in Australia. I am unable to say of which son they are the descendants.

Mr. Wollstonecraft soon married again ; and his wife appears to have done what she could, but quite in vain, to keep him steady and respectable. His home became no fit place for his daughters, and, indeed, the circumstances of the family drove them out to endeavour to earn a livelihood.

The sisters were all clever women, Mary and Eliza far above the average ; but their opportunities of culture had been few. They all had a real desire to learn, and were fair French scholars. They all, therefore, turned their thoughts towards teaching, as a profession ; and Mary, the eldest, was to make the venture first. In the meantime she went to live with her friend, Fanny Blood, a girl of her own age, whose home life was also unhappy, whose father was much such another as Mr. Wollstonecraft. Fanny Blood was an artist, and supported her family by her profession, or nearly did so, for Mrs. Blood gained a small sum by taking in needlework, in which, so long as they lived together, Mary aided her. Everina went to keep house for Edward ; and Eliza made a hasty marriage with Mr. Bishop, in order, it may be supposed, to escape from the shame of her home life and the irksomeness of a teacher's career.

I am not able to discover what position in life Mr. Bishop held : he was, however, what is

called a gentleman, and I have some notion he was a clergyman. The marriage was from the first unhappy. It is more than probable there were faults on both sides. All the Wollstonecraft sisters were enthusiastic, excitable, and hasty tempered, apt to exaggerate trifles, sensitive to magnify inattention into slights, and slights into studied insults. All had ill health of a kind which is especially trying to the nerves; and Eliza had, in excess, the family temperament and constitution. She had little actual education, she was very young and inexperienced—scarcely more than seventeen, I take it—at the date of her marriage, so that there was little to counteract the waywardness of a hasty disposition. Yet there can be no doubt, on the other hand, that Bishop was a man of the most furious violence; and this, the third married home which Mary knew intimately, was far worse than even that of her own parents or of the Bloods.

Mary, much attached to her family, was de-