

**THE LETTERS OF NOBLE
WOMAN
(MRS. LA TOUCHE
OF HARRISTOWN)**

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The letters of noble woman (Mrs. La Touche of Harristown) by Mrs. La Touche

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MRS. LA TOUCHE

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THE LETTERS OF
A NOBLE WOMAN

THE LETTERS OF A NOBLE WOMAN

(MRS. LA TOUCHE OF HARRISTOWN)

EDITED BY

MARGARET FERRIER YOUNG

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & SONS
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1908

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INTRODUCTION

THIS selection of the late Mrs. La Touche's letters has been made that some slight memorial should exist of one who certainly understood the art of letter-writing—an art that is rapidly dying out in these strenuous and unrestful days. It is to be regretted that very few letters of her early years exist, and those that were obtainable of no general interest. But when one remembers the stirring times Ireland has passed through, and the many political ups and downs of the island, one wishes it had been possible to obtain some of those letters that described these events.

With few exceptions, none of her correspondence with her own family is included, and in preparing the slight sketch of her life for the press, only such details as would render the letters intelligible to the general reader have been retained: her family justly feeling that a long memoir was as unnecessary as it was undesirable.

Among her earlier correspondents was Louisa Lady Waterford, and in writing in 1860 to her friend Mrs. Bernal Osborne, she says: "How I wish you knew Mrs. La Touche! How you would enjoy her letters; here is a bit I thought so clever which she wrote to me lately:

"Her¹ outward life is very uncongenial to mine,

¹This referred to a friend.

and becomes more so every year. I feel as if I were a black-beetle, and she a great blue dragon-fly. She buzzes past me with a flash of colour and loud metallic hum, and I clap my two black wing-cases to my sides, and crouch in the shadow.'

"I think there is such fun and cleverness in that description."

To the end of her life Mrs. La Touche kept in touch, by means of the post, with a social world from which she had long severed herself, her most constant correspondent being her life-long friend and cousin, Mrs. Bishop. Unfortunately all this correspondence was destroyed on Mrs. Bishop's death in 1898, but the almost daily letter was continued to Miss Bishop (now Mrs. Hubert Burke), who lends a number for publication, and to whom for more than ordinary help and interest my grateful thanks are due.

Writing to Mrs. Bishop in 1892, Mr. R. H. Hutton (of the *Spectator*) mentions that in his opinion those letters he had seen¹ of Mrs. La Touche's were "real literature"; while, in the letters included in this volume, Ruskin's appreciation of her as a correspondent and a student of Nature is not lacking.²

Judge O'Connor Morris describes Mrs. La Touche as a "woman of singular charm and gifts. I would place her letters beside those of De Sévigny, if not exactly of the same style."³

The letters chosen for publication were addressed

¹ He himself was not a correspondent of hers.

² See pp. 72-73, 80-84, and 117-118.

³ "Thoughts and Memories of a Life," by W. O'Connor-Morris.

to intimate friends, and are on the ordinary everyday topics—her garden, the weather, the books read, and occasionally on politics. Like most Irish-women of her class, she was a keen follower of what went on in Parliament, but her political opinions, like her ideas on sport,¹ were often more decided than entirely correct.

It is hard to realise that the later letters included were written when nearing her eightieth year—at a time too, when she was enfeebled in health and almost crushed by sorrow—so little do they show signs of age, diminution of mental power, or lack of interest in the affairs of her household, or her friends.

The task of preparing this volume was made more difficult by the fact that few letters were dated, and all envelopes destroyed; and though in almost every case the dates have been sought for, mistakes may have been made, and inaccuracies will have crept in.

For leave to edit the book in the first place, and for much help and encouragement as the work went on, grateful acknowledgment is here made to Mr. Percy La Touche of Harristown, and to Mrs. John Hotham (Mrs. La Touche's only granddaughter). The illustrations were for the most part selected by Mr. La Touche, and permission accorded to reproduce family miniatures, &c., while to Mrs. Hubert Burke the same acknowledgment is due for allowing her sketch of Miss Rose La Touche to be copied.

To the Ruskin executors (including Mrs. Arthur

¹ See pp. 53-57, 109-113, and 124-126.