Life of

Frances Power Cobbe.

By Herself.

With Illustrations.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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had the good fortune to stand on a balcony commanding a view of the whole procession. Victor Emanuel, riding his charger of Solferino, looked—coarse and fat as he is,—a *man* and a soldier, and more sympathetic than Kings in general. Cavour has a Luther-like face, which wore a gleam of natural pleasure at his reception. The people were quite mad with joy. They did not cheer as we do, but uttered a sort of deep roar of ecstacy, flinging clouds of flowers under the King's horse's feet, and seeming as if they would fling themselves also from their balconies. Our hostess, an Italian lady, went directly into hysterics, and all the party, men and women cried and kissed and laughed in the wildest way. At night there was a marvellous illumination, extending as far as the eye could reach, in every palazzo and cottage down the Val d' Arno and up the slopes of the Apennines, where bonfires blazed on all the heights."

In Florence my friends had been principally literary men and women. In Rome they were chiefly artists. Harriet Hosmer, to whom I had letters, was the first I knew. She was in those days the most bewitching sprite the world ever saw. Never have I laughed so helplessly as at the infinite fun of this bright Yankee girl. Even in later years when we perforce grew a little graver, she needed only to begin one of her descriptive stories to make us all young again. I have not seen her now for many years since she has returned to America, nor yet any one in the least like her ; and it is vain to hope to convey to any reader the contagion of her merriment. O! what a gift,—beyond rubies, are such spirits ! And what fools, what cruel fools, are those who damp them down in children possessed of them !

Of Miss Hosmer's sculpture I hoped, and every one hoped, great things. Her *Zenobia*, her *Puck*, her *Sleeping Faun* were beautiful creations in a very pure style of art. But she was lured away from sculpture by some invention of her own of a mechanical kind over which many years of her life

have been lost. Now I believe she has achieved a fine statue of Isabella of Spain, which has been erected in San Francisco.

Jealous rivals in Rome spread abroad at one time a slanderous story that Harriet Hosmer did not make her own statues. I have in my possession an autograph by her master, Gibson, which he wrote at the time to rebut this falsehood, and which bears all the marks of his quaint style of English composition.

"Finding that my pupil Miss Hosmer's progress in her art begins to agitate some rivals of the male sex, as proved by the following malicious words printed in the Art journal;—

"'Zenobia—said to be by Miss Hosmer, but really executed by an Italian workman at Rome';—

"I feel it is but justice on my part to state that Miss Hosmer became my pupil on her arrival at Rome from America. I soon found that she had uncommon talent. She studied under my own eyes for seven years, modelling from the antique and her own original works from the living models.

"The first report of her Zenobia was that it was the work of Mr. Gibson. Afterwards that it is by a Roman workman. So far it is true that it was built up by my man from her own original small model, according to the practice of our profession; the long study and finishing is by herself, like every other sculptor.

"If Miss Hosmer's works were the productions of other artists and not her own there would be in my studio two impostors—Miss Hosmer and Myself.

"JOHN GIBSON, R.A.

"Rome, Nov., 1863."

Gibson was himself a most interesting person; an old Greek soul, born by hap-hazard in a Welsh village. He had wonderfully little (for a Welshman) of anything like what Mr. Matthew Arnold calls Hebraism in his composition. There was a story current among us of some one telling him of a bet which had been made that another member of our

society could not repeat the Lord's Prayer; and it was added that the party defied to repeat it had begun (instead of it) with a doggerel American prayer for children:—

"Before I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

"Ah! you see," said Gibson, "He *did* know the Lord's Prayer after all!"

Once he sat by me on the Pincian and said: "You know I don't often read the Bible, I have my sculpture to attend to. But I have had to look into it for my bas-relief of the Children coming to Christ, and, do you know, I find that Jesus Christ really said a good thing?"

I smothered my laughter, and said: "O certainly, Mr. Gibson, a great many excellent things." "Yes!" he said in his slow way. "Yes, he did. There were some people called Pharisees who came and asked him troublesome questions. And he said,—he said,—well, I forget exactly what he said, but 'Deeds not words,' was what he meant to say."

The exquisite grace of Gibson's statues was all a part of the purity and delicacy of his mind. He was in many respects an unique character; a simple-hearted and single-minded worshipper of Beauty; and if my good friend Lady Eastlake had not thought fit to prune his extraordinarily quaint and original Autobiography, (which I have read in the MS.) to ordinary book form and modernised style, I believe it would have been deemed one of the gems of original literature, like Benvenuto Cellini's, and the renown of Gibson as a great artist would have been kept alive thereby.

A merry party, of whom Mr. Gibson was usually one, used to meet frequently that winter at the hospitable table of Charlotte Cushman, the actress. She had, then, long retired from the stage, and had a handsome house in the via Gregoriana, in which also lived her friend Miss Stebbins and

Miss Hosmer. Our dinners of American oysters and wild boar with agro-dolce-sauce, and déjeuners including an awful refection menacing sudden death, called "Woffles," eaten with molasses (of which woffles I have seen five plates divided between four American ladies!) were extremely hilarious. There was a brightness, freedom and joyousness among these gifted Americans, which was quite delightful to me. Miss Cushman in particular I greatly admired and respected. She had, of course, like all actors, the acquired habit of giving vivid outward expression to every emotion, just as we quiet English ladies are taught from our cradles to repress such signs, and to cultivate a calm demeanour under all emergencies. But this vivacity rendered her all the more interesting. She often read to us Mrs. Browning's or Lowell's poetry in a very fine way indeed. Some years after this happy winter a certain celebrated London surgeon pronounced her to be dying of a terrible disease. She wished us farewell courageously, and went back to New England, as we all sadly thought to die there. The next thing we heard of Charlotte Cushman was, that she had returned to the stage and was acting Meg Merrilies to immense and delighted audiences! Next we heard that she had thus earned £5,000, and that she was building a house with her earnings. Finally we learned that the house was finished, and that she was living in it! She did so, and enjoyed it for some years before the end came from other causes than the one threatened by the great London surgeon.

One day when I had been lunching at her house, Miss Cushman asked whether I would drive with her in her brougham to call on a friend of Mrs. Somerville, who had particularly desired that she and I should meet,—a Welsh lady, Miss Lloyd, of Hengwrt? I was, of course, very willing indeed to meet a friend of Mrs. Somerville. We happily found Miss Lloyd, busy in her sculptor's studio

over a model of her Arab horse, and, on hearing that I was anxious to ride, she kindly offered to mount me if I would join her in her rides on the Campagna. Then began an acquaintance, which was further improved two years later when Miss Lloyd came to meet and help me when I was a cripple, at Aix-les-Bains; and from that time, now more than thirty years ago, she and I have lived together. Of a friendship like this, which has been to my later life what my mother's affection was to my youth, I shall not be expected to say more.

On my way home through France to Bristol from one of my earlier journeys and before I became crippled, I had the pleasure of making for the first time the acquaintance of Mdlle. Rosa Bonheur. Miss Lloyd, who knew her very intimately and had worked in her studio, gave me an introduction to her and I reported my visit in a letter to Miss Lloyd in Rome.

"Mdlle Bonheur received me most cordially when I sent up your note. She was working in that most picturesque studio (at By, near Thoméry). I had fancied from her picture that she was so much taller and larger that I hardly supposed that it was she who greeted me, but her face is *charming*; such fine, clear eyes looking straight into one's own, and frank bearing; an Englishwoman's honesty with a Frenchwoman's courtesy. She spoke of you with great warmth of regard; remembered everything you had said, and wanted to know all about your sculpture studies in Rome. I said it had encouraged me to intrude on her to hope I might persuade her to fulfil her promise of stopping with you next winter, and added how very much you wished it, and described the association she would have with you, sketching excursions, *bovi*, and Thalaba" (Miss Lloyd's Arab horse). "She said over and over she would not go to Italy without going to see you; and that she hoped to go soon, possibly next winter. . . . . Somehow, from talking of

Italy we passed to talking of the North, which Mdlle. Bonheur thinks has a deeper poetry than the South, and then to Ireland, where she wishes to go next summer (I hope stopping at my brother's *en passant*) and of which country she said such beautiful, dreamy things that even I grew poetic about our '*Brumes*,'—to which she quickly applied the epithet 'grandiose,'—and our sea, looking, I said, like an angel's eye with a tear in it. At this simile she was so pleased that we grew quite friends, and I can only hope she will not see that sea on a grey day and think me an impostor! Nothing I liked about her, so much, however, as her interest in Hattie Hosmer, and her delight in hearing about her *Zenobia** (*triumphans*) in the Exhibition; at which report of mine she exclaimed: 'That is the thing above all others I shall wish to see in London! You know I have seen Miss Hosmer, but I have never seen any of her works, and I do very much desire to do so' . . Her one-eyed friend sat by painting all the time. She is not enticing to look at, but I dare say, not bad. I said I always envied friends whom I caught working together and that I lived alone; to which she replied '*Je vous plains alors!*' in a tone of conviction, showing that, in her case at all events, friendship was a very pleasant thing. Mdlle. Bonheur showed me three or four fine pictures she is painting, and some prints, but of course I was as stupid as usual in studios and only remarked (as a buffalo might have done,) that Roman *bovi* were more majestic and like Homeric Junos than those wiry little Scotch short-horns her soul delighteth to honour. But O! she has done a Dog, *such* a dog! Like Bush in outward dog, but the inner soul of him more profoundly, unutterably wise than tongue may tell! a Dog to be set up and worshipped as Anubis. Certainly Mdlle. Bonheur is a finer artist than Landseer in this, his own line. I wish she would leave the cattle and 'go to the dogs.'"

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* A statue of Miss Hosmer exhibited in London, purchased by an American gentleman for £1,000.

My last journey but one to Italy was taken when I was lame; and, after my sojourn at Aix-les-Bains, I spent the autumn in Florence and the winter in Pisa; where I met Cav. d' Azeglio as above recorded. Miss Lloyd rejoined me at Genoa in the spring to help me to return to England, as I was still (after four years!) miserably helpless. We returned over Mont Cenis which had no tunnel through it in those days; and, on the very summit, our carriage broke down. We were in a sad dilemma, for I was quite unable to walk a hundred yards; but a train of carts happily coming up and lending us ropes enough to hold our trap together for my use alone, Miss Lloyd ran down the mountain, and at last we found ourselves safe at the bottom.

After another very pleasant visit together to her friend Mdlle. Rosa Bonheur, and many promises on her part to come to us in England (which, alas! she never fulfilled) we made our way to London; and, within a few weeks, Miss Lloyd—one morning before breakfast,—found, and, in an incredibly short time, *bought* the dear little house in South Kensington which became our home with few interruptions for a quarter of a century; No. 26, Hereford Square. It was at that time almost at the end of London. All up the Gloucester Road between it and the Park were market-gardens; and behind it and alongside of it, where Rosary Gardens and Wetherby Place now stand, there were large fields of grass with abundance of fine old lime trees and elms, and one magnificent walnut tree which ought never to have been cut down. Behind us we had a large piece of ground, which we rented temporarily and called the "*Boundless Prairie*," (!) where we gave afternoon tea to our friends under the limes, when they were in bloom. On a part of our garden Miss Lloyd erected a sculptor's Studio. The House itself, though small, was very pretty and airy;

every room in it lightsome and pleasant, and somehow capable of containing a good many people. We often had in it as many as 50 or 60 guests. In short, I had once more a home, and a most happy one; and my lonely wanderings were over.