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# MEMOIRS OF THE LATE MRS ELIZABETH HAMILTON

WITH A SELECTION  
FROM HER CORRESPONDENCE,  
AND OTHER UNPUBLISHED WRITINGS

VOLUME 1

ELIZABETH BENDER



CAMBRIDGE

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and Other Unpublished Writings*

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108068987](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108068987)

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This edition first published 1818  
This digitally printed version 2014

ISBN 978-1-108-06898-7 Paperback

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### **Memoirs of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton**

The novelist and essayist Elizabeth Hamilton (1756?–1816) wrote with especial distinction on the subject of education. Inspired by her older brother, the orientalist Charles Hamilton, she pursued her literary ambitions, informing her work with a knowledge of history, philosophy and politics. Her ability to present complex ideas in an accessible manner did much to secure her an appreciative readership. Establishing her reputation with a satirical attack on radical thought, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), she enjoyed her greatest literary success with *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), a tale of moral reformation. Her *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* (1801) is also reissued in this series. The present work was first published in two volumes in 1818 by her friend and fellow novelist Elizabeth Benger (1775–1827). Volume 1 includes a biographical fragment by Hamilton, along with a selection of journal extracts and satirical essays.

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MRS ELIZABETH HAMILTON,

*From an Original Picture by Raeburn.  
Engraved by W. T. Fry.*

*Published by Longman & Co. March, 2<sup>d</sup> 1818.*

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BY MISS BENDER.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,  
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1818.

Printed by A. Strahan,  
Printers-Street, London.



## ADVERTISEMENT.

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A CONSIDERABLE period has elapsed since the following work was announced; much time having unavoidably been expended in collecting the Letters which appear in the Correspondence, and still more in submitting to the perusal and revision of Mrs. Hamilton's literary friends those MSS. of which a very small portion is presented to the public. To account for the exclusion of so many papers, it will be sufficient to state, that, as it appeared

not desirable to extend the publication beyond two small volumes, it became necessary to preserve in these a certain harmony and consistency of character.

The Religious Tract which concludes the second volume was destined for posthumous publication by the lamented Author. For the admission of the Sunday papers it is presumed no apology is required ; but it may be satisfactory to know that they were selected by the express desire of that person to whom the publication owes its existence, and that they were, even by her, considered as the best and purest tribute which could be offered to the memory of a beloved sister.

In the second volume, the reader will observe that two or three of the latest of Mrs. Hamilton's letters are inserted, by mistake, at the beginning of the Correspondence; but, after the sixteenth page, they are all placed in the order of their date, as nearly as that could be ascertained.



# MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

MRS. ELIZABETH HAMILTON.

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THAT memoirs of literary persons are, in general, barren of incident, is a trite objection, which may be made to many other subjects of biographical composition ; since, with the exception of warriors and adventurers, there are few individuals whose domestic annals might not be epitomised in a monumental inscription. But has biography no higher object than to collate facts and dates, and chronicle events ? Should it not rather trace the progress of character, as developed in those habits and principles which operate universally on the happiness

or misery of mankind? The history of the individual, to be complete, must include the history of his mind, and exhibit all its passions—its prejudices—its affections—whatever belongs to its moral system.

In a life devoted to quiet and seclusion, there may have occurred revolutions of opinion and vicissitudes of feeling, which, to those who would study human nature, are no less curious, and even more interesting, than the external changes of fortune which popularly arrest attention, and awaken sympathy.

The name of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton has been long endeared to an intelligent class of readers, who, from a better spirit than vulgar curiosity, are prompted to enquire, not only by what gradations and by what efforts she advanced to distinction, but how far cultivation contributed to the development of her talents, in what degree her happiness was augmented by liter-

ary pursuits, or commensurate with moral and religious attainments.

From the fragment which comprises the most precious part of these volumes, it is evident that such enquiries had been anticipated by Mrs. Hamilton, and that she had even commenced a biographical sketch, which, in a finished state, must have formed a supplement to her other writings equally interesting and instructive. That so little of this should have been written, is a subject of regret, not only to the friends and admirers of the author, but to all who are interested in the study of the human mind. That she should have planned such a work, affords, however, an apt illustration of her firm, decided character; and in whatever degree it had been completed, it would, in an equal degree, have confirmed the testimony, or superseded the labour of her biographer. In the present defect of her own animated delineations, all that remains to be attempted, is simply to collect from her early

correspondence, or from some other equally authentic source, such evidence of her principles and habits, her feelings and conduct, as may enable the reader to form an opinion from the suggestions of his own unbiassed judgment. On the specimens from her early compositions, the extracts from her private journal, and the selection from her correspondence, it is not necessary to offer any observations : but it may be proper to state, that the sketch of her childhood and education, with all the subsequent domestic details, are communicated on the authority of her beloved sister, (Mrs. Blake,) and nearest surviving relative.

The writer of these pages had, for some years, the privilege of being often admitted to that familiar domestic circle, in which Mrs. Hamilton occasionally reverted to the scenes of her early youth ; and, by the vivacity of her descriptions, irresistibly brought them before the eye. This happy circle exists no longer ; that little society, com-



posed of various elements, is dissolved; they who sympathised so cordially in admiration for one object, are for ever divided; the prosperous and the gay form new associations, whilst the melancholy and the unfortunate are replunged in the gloom of care, or left to the desolation of solitude and neglect. Yet, however different in their pursuits, however remote their destiny, all must participate in recollections of their departed friend; and each, from the testimony of his own feelings, will readily believe that her sentiments could not have been misconceived or misrepresented, whilst her image is indelibly impressed on the memory of the writer. Each will recal the simplicity of her manners, the sincerity that stamped all her actions, the love of truth which she was formed to inspire in those by whom she was tenderly beloved, and in whose hearts is a register, not of her words only, but of those looks and accents which can never be forgotten.