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# MEMOIRS OF THE LATE MRS ELIZABETH HAMILTON

WITH A SELECTION  
FROM HER CORRESPONDENCE,  
AND OTHER UNPUBLISHED WRITINGS

VOLUME 2

ELIZABETH BENDER



CAMBRIDGE

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and Other Unpublished Writings*

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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 Volume 2 contains selected letters and Hamilton's previously unpublished critique of the Book of Revelation.

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**SELECTIONS**  
**FROM THE**  
**CORRESPONDENCE.**

# MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

MRS. ELIZABETH HAMILTON.

WITH

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*HER CORRESPONDENCE,*

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BY MISS BENDER.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

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SELECTIONS  
FROM THE  
CORRESPONDENCE  
OF  
*Mrs. HAMILTON.*

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*To Mrs. —.*

Bath, April, 1801.

How sweetly, yet how forcibly, did my dearest friend's kindly solicitous letter touch my heart! I feel that I am not worthy half of what you feel for me; and yet there is not an earthly good that I would not sooner part with than one particle of your affection. I hasten to put an end to all your anxiety on my account, by giving you the assurance of my complete recovery. Clifton did much more for me than I expected: even the chilling breezes, so much complained of by others, were to me medicinal; and though they

prevented me from going out to enjoy the beauties of the country, had the happy effect of restoring my lungs to a proper tone. Our poor friend ——, who was my only visitor, lost his wife whilst I remained there ; after which I was quite in solitude. But books, for a certain length of time, are a charming substitute for common conversation. I do not know that I ever read one from which my mind received a higher degree of pleasure than *Currie's Life of Burns*. To me, its charm was enhanced by a thousand pleasing recollections, — a thousand associations, that gave a strong additional interest to every word. The strength of Burns's feelings, the character of his mind, had excited an enthusiastic admiration, at a period when my own enthusiastic feelings were in perfect unison with those of the poet ; and in him alone did I meet with the expression of a sensibility in which I could perfectly sympathise: in his emotions there was a strength, an energy, that came home to my heart ;

while the tender sorrows of all other poets had to me appeared mawkish and insipid. Even the strong light in which he saw the ridiculous, was, I fear, too agreeable to me. The idea I then formed of his mind has been confirmed by Dr. Currie's delineation of it. A mind conscious of superior powers, but placed by fortune in an inferior situation, must not only have uncommon magnanimity, but a judgment highly cultivated, to insulate itself, and stand, in a manner, alone in society. Poor Burns! wounded pride sought for solace in gratifications which called forth his animal spirits; these, unnaturally excited, called forth passion, and the man became degraded from the very same cause that would in other circumstances have exalted him; for I am persuaded, that had Burns been placed in an independent station, he would never have sunk into vice. He is, however, only one of a thousand instances which incontestably prove the inutility of

genius, either to promote the happiness of the possessor, or to produce much good to society. It is in vain that we look to second causes : all leads us to the Almighty Ruler, who adjusts the balance. But where am I wandering ? I began only to say that I liked the book, and I have been beguiled into writing an essay.

*To Miss B——.*

Rivers-street, Bath, Oct. 10. 1803.

Surely my dear friend must ere now have given me up as the most ungrateful of mortals, and concluded that the cold air of the north had congealed every genial feeling of the heart. There, however, the conclusion would be erroneous ; for that heart is as warm, and as warmly attached to its dear B—— as ever ; and soon I hope to have an opportunity of convincing her of this truth by *viva voce* evidence at the fire-side in Russel-street. It is time to give some account of myself, and of my wanderings, which are now happily concluded,

and at present appear to my mind like a pleasant dream. When you know more of our Edinburgh friends, you will be better able to calculate the regret we felt at leaving them ; but I cannot describe it.

On the 23d of August we bade farewell to the chosen seat of genius, and proceeded by Lanark, in order to gratify ourselves with a view of the celebrated falls of the Clyde, which more than answered our expectations, though they were very highly raised. Never did any of Nature's works produce in my mind such emotions of sublimity, such solemn and awful delight. Never can the impression made in the two hours we spent there be obliterated. But, alas ! we were forced to recollect, that the wearied horses and their driver partook not of our feelings, and, in compassion to them, were obliged to proceed. The country was, however, still interesting, and our whole journey to Keswick delightful.

At Keswick we met Mr. and Mrs. G——, and spent a fortnight with them there very agreeably. We got very pleasant lodgings, commanding a view of the lake ; and though I was unable to stir out the first week, I made such good use of my time in the second, as to see every part of the charming scenery, which, I must confess, is very fine ; but my partiality for Windermere is not in the least abated, and to it I shall give a decided preference. We went by Ambleside to Coniston, and spent two days with the ever-charming S——s ; — found them all at home, improved in spirits, and enjoying an increase of fortune and of comforts, in which we truly rejoiced. From them we proceeded to Calgarth, where we had the kindest and most friendly reception ; — spent a delightful day, as you may imagine, enlivened as it was by the animated conversation of the Bishop, and graced by the polite attentions of his amiable family. At night we reached

Bowness ; and no sooner stopt at the White Lion than we had all the family about us, man, woman, and child ; then came the old washerwoman, the boatman, — in short, if we had come to spend a revenue among them, they could not have given us a more cordial welcome. I pity the heart that would not have been penetrated by the simple kindness of these honest people. Mrs. B—— and you were enquired for by all, particularly by the B——s, who came immediately to see us. We gave a day to wandering through all our old haunts, and at every step thought of you. I should have been happy to have spent some longer time, but the approach of winter forbade. We set out the 14th for Manchester, or rather for Greenhill, the seat of Mr. J——s, two miles from Manchester. There we intended to stay a day or two, but found it impossible to get away from our kind friends till the elapse of nearly three weeks. We then left them with regret ; and on

Saturday evening found ourselves in Rivers-street, and I need not say were happy in again meeting the dear friends from whom we had been so long parted.

*To Miss B——.*

March, 1808.

Alas! my dear friend, how little did I imagine, when I wrote my last hasty scrawl that such a mournful event was near at hand! It was for yourself, and for my dear Mrs. G——, that I alone felt anxious; for often as I have by experience been taught the truth of Young's observations, and seen "the feeble wrap the athletic in his shroud," I still am tempted to look on apparent health as a security against the approach of sudden change. Since my constitution was first apparently broken, how many of my friends in the full vigour of life have fallen! How many have, within the space of one twelvemonth, been numbered with the dead! The last stroke has



been to me the heaviest. It is so on every account ; for, besides what I feel for dear Mrs. G——, which you can well estimate, I was attached to our departed friend by all the ties of gratitude and affection. His memory is endeared to me by acts of kindness that shall never be forgotten : nor has he left behind him a man in whose friendship I can place an equal degree of confidence.\* But thank God, that in mourning for him, we may mingle with our tears the triumph of hope ! It is here, my dear

\* The friend whose loss is here deplored, was not more distinguished by his own literary talents, than by the spontaneous liberality with which he seized every opportunity to procure for the talents of others, private encouragement, or public patronage. That a man of his various powers and attainments should have been sensible to the attractions of kindred merit, was naturally to be expected ; but it was the rare and peculiar attribute of his character, that his warmest partialities were engaged by misfortune ; and whilst in the comprehensive spirit of philanthropy, he was accustomed to advocate the general interests of mankind, he gave his heart to unfriended worth, and reserved his warmest welcome for meritorious though unhonoured poverty.