

*All this,
and Heaven too*

BY RACHEL FIELD



NEW YORK 1938

The Macmillan Company

Copyright, 1938, by
RACHEL FIELD PEDERSON.

All rights reserved—no part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in magazine or newspaper.

Reprinted September, 1938; October, 1938; November, 1938 (twice); December, 1938 (twice).

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AMERICAN BOOK-STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
ARTHUR PEDERSON

The title of this book is accredited to Matthew Henry (1662–1714), who wrote of his father, the Reverend Philip Henry: “He would say sometimes when he was in the midst of the comforts of this life—‘All this, and Heaven too!’”

Contents

A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Page 1

PART I

“MADEMOISELLE D.”

1841-1848

Page 7

PART II

MADEMOISELLE HENRIETTE DESPORTES

1849-1851

Page 349

PART III

MRS. HENRY M. FIELD

1851-1875

Page 429

A Letter of Introduction

DEAR GREAT-AUNT HENRIETTA,

Although I never knew you in life, as a child I often cracked butternuts on your tombstone. There were other more impressive monuments in our family lot, but yours for some unaccountable reason became my favorite in that group erected to the glory of God and the memory of departed relatives.

Knowing what I know of you now, I should like to think that some essence of your wit and valor and spice still lingered there and had power to compel a child's devotion. I should like to believe that the magnetic force which moved you to plead your own cause in the murder trial that was the sensation of two continents and helped a French King from his throne, was in some way responsible for the four-leafed clover I left there on a summer day in the early nineteen hundreds. But I am not sentimentalist enough for such folly. You had been dead for more than thirty years by the time I came along with my butternuts and four-leafed clovers; when I traced with curious forefinger the outlines of a lily, unlike any growing in New England gardens, cut into the polished surface of your stone.

My forefinger has grown none the less curious in the thirty more years that I have been tracing your legend from that inscription, bare as a detached twig, stripped of leaf or bloom:

HENRIETTE DESPORTES
The Beloved Wife of Henry M. Field
Died March 6, 1875

There it is, almost defiant in its brevity, without date or place of birth; with no reference to Paris; nothing to suggest the transplanting of a life uprooted from obscurity by an avalanche of passion and violence and class hatred.

Half a century ago no memorial was complete without some pious comment or a Biblical text chosen to fit the life and works of the departed. Why should yours be the only one in that group of marble and slate that asks nothing of God or man? Why is there no hint of the destiny which was reserved for you alone out of a world of other human beings? Only you know the answer, and only you could have written the epitaph that was omitted from your stone.

The omission must have been deliberate. I know that as surely as if you had told me so yourself.

"My dear great-niece," I think you would answer me with the wise, faintly amused expression which is yours in the only likeness I have ever seen of you, "some day you will learn as I did to make a virtue of necessity." Then, with that slight Parisian shrug you were able to subdue but never entirely shed, you might add, "Who knows most speaks least."

Still, legends are not easily shed. Silence and obscurity may not be had for the asking. You had your way at the last, and your stone is bare and impersonal; but you could not erase your name from those records of crime, or do away with the files of French and English newspapers for the year 1847. It is your fate to be remembered against your will. You must have waked sometimes in the big Empire bed of polished mahogany that stands now in my room, turning from memories of words spoken and looks exchanged in the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré; from the din of newsboys calling out your name on crowded boulevards; from the gray walls of the Conciergerie where you walked under guard with curious eyes pressed to the grating. I, too, have lain wakeful in that same bed half a century later, trying to piece together from scattered fragments of fact and hearsay all that you spent so many years of your life trying to forget.

I have grown up with your possessions about me. I know the marble-topped mahogany bureau that matches your bed; the pastel portrait you made of the little girl who became your adopted child; I know the rosewood painting table that held the brushes

and paints and crayons it was your delight to use; I know your silver forks and spoons with the delicately flowing letter D on their handles. On my hand as I write is a ring that was yours, and I never take out a certain enamel pin from its worn, carnelian-studded box without wondering if it may not have been some bit of jewelry tendered as peace-offering by the Duchesse after one of her stormy outbursts. Strange that these intimate keepsakes should survive when I have never seen so much as a word in your handwriting.

Your portrait, painted by Eastman Johnson, has made you visible to me as you looked in the years when you were no longer the notorious Mademoiselle Deluzy-Desportes riding rough seas alone, but a married woman of assured position, presiding over the house near Gramercy Park where men of letters, artists, philanthropists, and distinguished visiting foreigners gathered and expanded under the stimulating spell of your presence. I know your calm dignity of expression even as I know your bodice of coffee-colored silk and that single tea rose tucked in the fall of black lace. Yours was a strongly marked face, square of chin and broad of brow. The thick chestnut hair was smoothly parted after the fashion made familiar by your contemporaries Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. Your eyes, not particularly large or beautiful in themselves, were keen, full-lidded, and intent above well defined cheek bones and a rather flat nose with a wide, spirited flare to the nostrils. But, of all your features, the mouth was the most dominant, speaking for you from the canvas in eloquent silence. Too large and firm a mouth for the accepted rosebud model of your day, it must have been a trial to you in your youth. Humorous, sensitive, and inscrutable—one could tell anything to the possessor of such a mouth and never know what response might be forthcoming except that it would most certainly be wise and shrewd and worth hearing.

Fragments of your wit and sagacity have survived, like chips of flint left where arrowheads were once sharpened. But the arrowheads themselves, those verbal darts for which you were famous,

having found their mark, did not remain for our time. A phrase here, tinged with foreign picturesqueness; a quick comment still vivid with personal pungency; a half-forgotten jest; some humorous anecdote, they make a meager and strangely assorted sheaf for your great-niece to cull.

And I am only your great-niece by marriage. You left no legacy of flesh and blood behind you. Fate played many tricks upon you, yet this was the one you most bitterly resented. You were barren, who should have been the most fruitful of women. To you children were more than amusing puppets to be dressed and coddled and admonished after the manner of the Victorian era to which you belonged. They were a passion, as absorbing as if each had been an unknown continent to be explored and charted. Even your most disapproving censors admitted this power, and your sway over the young Praslins was certainly one of the strongest links in the chain of evidence brought against you. Youth was a necessity to your nature, and so you took a child from your husband's family into your home to be a substitute for your own.

"*Eh bien,*" I can almost hear you saying, "one has not the choice in this world. But to live without a child in the house—that would be tragedy. Is it not so, my leetle Henri?"

Your leetle Henri, who was my great-uncle, agreed, as he agreed in most of your projects, marveling not a little at the Gallic sprightliness and wisdom of that extraordinary lady who had done him the honor to become his wife. A bird of rare plumage had taken possession of his home; a strange blend of nightingale and parakeet was gracing the nest he had vaguely expected to be shared by some meek, dun-feathered wren. He never quite knew how it had happened, but he knew his good fortune in having won you. He was proud of your elegance and wit; of your charm and intelligence, and, yes, of your slightly arrogant ways.

Great-Uncle Henry was small in stature and was your junior by ten years; but there was fire in him, and you knew how to

kindle what lay beneath that New England exterior so different from your own. He may have lacked the shrewdness of your judgment, the whiplash of your wit; but his enthusiasm, his warmth and idealism fused with the sterner stuff of which you were made.

I can just remember Great-Uncle Henry as a small, elderly man with a vague smile, whose mind had a disconcerting way of wandering off without warning into labyrinths of the past where a matter-of-fact seven- or eight-year-old might not follow. But that memory has nothing to do with an eager young man, who, for all his Puritanical upbringing and ecclesiastical turn of mind, was born with feet that itched to walk in far places, and an imagination that kindled romantically to the plight of a French governess suddenly faced with the charge of instigating a murder that shook the Empire. He was twenty-five years old when he first heard your name echoing through Paris that summer of 1847. There he stood, fresh from a boyhood in the Berkshire Hills where his father had followed Jonathan Edwards with more hell-fire and brimstone sermons in the meetinghouse that faced the village green. A Williams College valedictory delivered at sixteen, and those first years of preaching sermons of his own from pulpits that only accentuated his boyishness, were behind him. There he stood, earnest and young and unaware that you and he were to spend twenty years together across the Atlantic.

It may be that, like Victor Hugo who described your enforced exercise under guard in the Conciergerie courtyard, Great-Uncle Henry had his first glimpse of you through iron bars. We shall never know. I set down here only what may have happened. Perhaps I have put words into your mouth that you would never have said. My thoughts, at best, can never be your thoughts. I know that, and still I must write them, since you yourself emerge from the web of fact and legend as definite as the spider that clears the intricate maze of its own making. I shall not claim to be unprejudiced, though I shall try to tell the truth as I know it.

For the more complex the subject, the more each separate version must vary with the teller. So, each hand that touches the piano strikes a different chord.

Dear Great-Aunt Henrietta, you will never know what I think of you, but here it is—the letter I have always wanted to write; the story I have always wanted to tell.

PART I

“Mademoiselle D.”

1841-1848

Chapter One

AMONG THE ILL ASSORTED GROUP of passengers waiting to leave the small steamer that had brought them across the Channel from Southampton to Le Havre, a woman stood erect and alone with her luggage piled about her. It was unusual in the year 1841 for a woman of her age and appearance to be traveling unaccompanied. Not that she showed striking beauty, but a certain spirited grace of carriage distinguished her from her fellow travelers.

Late March was not the most propitious time for crossing, and the English Channel had lived up to its reputation for choppiness. The night had been rough and rainy, and a general air of limp resignation prevailed in the little group so soon to be scattered. Curls and once crisp feathers drooped damply against wan faces; eyes were circled in unbecoming dark hollows; huddled forms in shawls and steamer rugs slumped miserably on benches as the edged wind of early morning blowing across salt water strove with the thickness of the ship's saloon. The stale scents of food and tobacco and human occupation mingled with that unmistakable smell peculiar to all such vessels, a combination of tar and rope and brass polish, of varnish and smoky oil lamps—hardly an atmosphere to enhance a woman's charm. But this solitary female bore up well under the ordeal. She was young—at least she could not be called old—and she appeared considerably less than her twenty-eight years; she was vigorous and full of a lively interest in the world and her temporary companions, and she had learned long before this how to conduct herself alone.

A shaft of salty air came in with the opening and closing of doors as men went out into the rapidly thinning dimness on deck. In response to the freshness her head lifted and her nostrils dilated as she breathed deeply. Involuntarily she made a half-move to

leave the overcrowded saloon; but the impulse was checked almost at once. Much as she would have welcomed fresh air, it would not do to go out and join the men who tramped the damp decks in masculine freedom, untrammelled by billowing skirts of cashmere or taffeta, by yards of petticoat and bonnet strings that were prey to every current of air. Besides, there were all her possessions in the neatly roped bandboxes and bags and the new leather portmanteaus with the brass-headed nails driven into the lid to form the letters "H. D." There was no one to whom she might entrust them.

"Ah, well," she thought, and her shoulders shrugged ever so slightly under the Paisley shawl, folded to display the richly patterned border to best advantage, "it would hardly be *comme il faut* at this hour of the morning, and with so few women about."

It was pleasant to hear the sound of her native tongue again from one or another of the passengers. Though she had spoken English fluently from childhood, and though she had even come to think as easily in one tongue as in the other during the years which she had spent in London, yet she quickened to the familiar accents. Already she felt younger and lighter of heart for the sound. She had been away too long. Yesterday, to be sure, she had shed courteous tears at parting from the Hislop family—especially from the grave and gentle girl who had been her sole charge, and who turned to her with such reverent adoring eyes. Those candid blue eyes had been red-rimmed almost from the moment the matter of a change had been mentioned. It had been affecting to see the child's genuine emotion.

"Come, *chérie*, you have shed too many foolish tears. The time has come when you no longer need a governess. You are a young lady, almost sixteen, and ready to attend finishing school. Why, you will be marrying in a year or two more."

"But, mademoiselle, you have always been so much more than a governess. Papa himself says so, and you know he is not easy to please."

That was true enough. Sir Thomas Hislop expected much of

those who served him, especially of the one into whose charge he had given the training of his only child. She had never given him cause to regret the confidence he had placed in her, and as time went on he had added unusual household privileges to those customarily accepted as fitted to the station of nursery governess. As his daughter had said, Mademoiselle had grown to be far more than governess in that home, and never once had she overstepped. His letter of recommendation, on paper bearing the family crest, was for an Englishman lavish of praise, informing the world in general and the Duc and Duchesse de Praslin in particular that Mademoiselle Henriette Desportes had served him for the better part of eight years as governess and companion to his daughter `Nina, and that, in all things pertaining to deportment, personal integrity, and tact, she had proved herself a model and an ornament to her sex. Her gifts, also, he had added as an afterthought, were considerable, for besides being qualified to teach the rudiments of learning she spoke French and English fluently, was familiar with literature and the classics, and had a charming talent for flower painting and crayon portraiture.

There had been farewell gifts in token of the Hislop family's esteem—the handsome shawl which had cost more than twice what she might have contrived to save out of her wages; the umbrella with the ivory handle now crooked over her arm; the beaded bag worked by her young charge's own devoted fingers. All these were tangible signs of her personal conquest. She smiled with satisfaction, and then sighed, remembering that these conquests were now behind her; remembering, too, certain disturbing rumors that had reached her ears concerning the household which she would so soon be entering.

"On arrive," a Frenchman was telling his plump wife, while the sound of chains and churning water and the sudden bustle of landing filled her ears.

It required all her attention to marshal her belongings, seize a blue-smocked porter, and get herself safely ashore. No husband