http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382
© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

# MRS. ELIZABETH CARTER, 1717-1806

By Kathleen Spears

" . . . In deep learning, genius and extensive knowledge, she was equalled by few . . ." So reads the memorial to Mrs. Carter in Deal Church.

The facts of Elizabeth Carter's life are simple. She was born in Deal in the year 1717, the eldest daughter of Dr. Nicholas Carter, perpetual curate of the Chapel of St. George in that town. She died in London in the year 1806. Mrs. Carter (she assumed the appellation Mrs. at a certain age in accordance with the custom of the time) never married. It was not as her nephew and biographer[1] is at pains to point out, that she could not—she received numbers of offers of marriage, " some of them even advantageous ones " ; it was rather that she would not. Mrs. Carter's home remained in Deal throughout her life, but her time was shared between her family there and in other parts of the country where they settled and her friends, in her younger days, in Canterbury and London, and, in her later days, mainly in London. Elizabeth Carter described her life in Deal in a letter written in 1746— " and now I am up you may be like to enquire to what purpose. I sit down to my several lessons . . . and lay in a stack of learning to make a figure with at breakfast ; but for this I am not ready. My general practice about six is to take up my stick and walk, sometimes alone and at some times with a companion . . . towards the conclusion of our walk we make such deplorably ragged figures that I wonder some prudent country justice does not take us up for vagrants and cramp our rambling genius in the stocks. . . . When I have made myself fit to appear among human creatures we go to breakfast . . . After breakfast everyone follows their several employments. My first care is to water the pinks and roses which are stuck about in twenty different parts of my room ; and when this task is finished I sit down to a spinnet . . . after deafening myself for half an hour with all manner of noises I proceed to some other amusement, that employs me about the same time ; for longer I seldom apply to anything ; and thus between reading, working, writing, twirling the globes and running up and down stairs a hundred times to see how everybody is, and how they do, which furnishes me with little

[1] The Rev. Montagu Pennington, Vicar of Northbourn, in the County of Kent.

intervals of talk, I seldom want other business or entertainment. Of an afternoon I sometimes go out, not so often however as in civility I ought to do; for it is always some mortification to me not to drink tea at home . . . About eight o'clock I visit a very agreeable family where I have spent every evening for these fourteen years. I always return precisely at 10. . . ." Her biographer relates that Mrs. Carter's habits changed little even when she was far advanced in years, though in London she necessarily followed a somewhat different routine. In all one gets the impression of a life very like the one Jane Austen knew and described, with its highlights—Assemblies at Sandwich, gaiety at Canterbury on the arrival of officers from Flanders " very fond of music and dancing ", visits to friends and watering places such as Tunbridge Wells and Bath, with the added experience of at least two journeys abroad, to Spa in 1763 and to Paris in 1782. But Mrs. Carter was a much more robust character than Miss Austen's heroines—she travelled by stage coach; even in the care of her brother, Fanny Price travelled from Mansfield Park to Portsmouth by post. And Mrs. Carter, as she revealed in her letter about her daily routine, also walked; not only did she walk regularly in the mornings when she was in the country but on her journeys from London it was by no means unusual for her to finish her journey by walking from Canterbury to Deal. She writes in a letter in 1753: " we got to Canterbury about seven and indeed I did as you bid me enquire about a voiture to Deal, but I must confess I was heartily glad there was none. After making a few visits and withstanding many temptations to stay a few days at Canterbury I went to bed and set out the next morning in a fine, cool, cloudy air for Brook, where I found a good breakfast and the usual good humour of Mrs. Masters, whose original language quite exhilarated my spirits. About eleven I set out with great gaiety for my next stage of four miles, where though I did not absolutely eat two bones of mutton and wing of goose, I made a tolerable proficiency in gooseberry pye, then drank tea and between two and three proceeded four miles further and again rested an hour and a half which, considering Deal was full in my view, was surely a high effort of virtue. . . . About six I got safe to Deal and had the happiness of finding all my friends well. I was not half so fatigued as I was the day before, slept nine hours last night and except a little heaviness occasioned by a thundery sky, I am perfectly well and find no inconvenience from my walk."

Not only in small ways, however, did Mrs. Carter differ from the women of Miss Austen's circle. Hers was a wider world by far and in it she enjoyed a reputation far beyond what these simple biographical facts would suggest. Numbered among Mrs. Carter's friends and acquaintances were many of the eminent people of her day—Dr. Johnson, Samuel Richardson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Horace Walpole,

Lord Lyttelton,[1] Lord Bath[2] and Dr. Secker,[3] Archbishop of Canterbury (these last two were rumoured to be suitors of Mrs. Carter) and above all Miss Catherine Talbot[4] and the ladies of the original bas bleu (bluestocking)[5] circle, Mrs. Vesey,[6] Mrs. Montagu,[7] Hannah More. Among these friends and acquaintances and outside them Mrs. Carter was known from quite early in her life as a woman of great learning.

In the year 1738 when she was no more than 21, Dr. Johnson said: "I have composed a Greek epigram to Eliza" (the name under which Mrs. Carter wrote in the *Gentleman's Magazine*) "and think she ought to be celebrated in as many different languages as Lewis le Grand." In 1759 there was published in Russia in *Mélanges de Litterature* "Anecdotes au Sujet d'une savante fille en Angleterre, Mlle. Elizabeth Carter", and in 1784 Fanny Burney writes in her diary about Mrs. Carter "her talk was all instruction". Boswell records that in the same year Dr. Johnson dined at Mrs. Garrick's with Mrs. Carter, Miss Hannah More and Miss Fanny Burney. Dr. Johnson remarked to Boswell: "Three such women are not to be found." Boswell: "What had you them all to yourself, sir?" Johnson: "I had all as much as they were had; but it might have been better had there been more company there." How was it that Mrs. Carter achieved this fame among the literary figures of her day, a fame which penetrated even to Russia?

[1] George Lyttelton of Hagley, first Baron Lyttelton. Statesman and author, 1709-1773.

[2] Perhaps better known as William Pulteney, opponent of Sir Robert Walpole, 1684-1764.

[3] Thomas Secker, Bishop of Bristol (1734), Bishop of Oxford (1737), Rector of St. James's, Piccadilly, and then Dean of St. Pauls, held in plurality. Archbishop of Canterbury (1758), 1693-1768.

[4] Daughter of Edward Talbot, fellow of Oriel College, and friend of Thomas Secker; son of William Talbot, Bishop of Durham, to whom Dr. Secker owed his early preferment. Mrs. and Miss Talbot shared the home of Dr. and Mrs. Secker, sister to another friend of Edward Talbot, Martin Benson, Bishop of Gloucester. Miss Talbot died in 1770.

[5] Boswell's account of the origin of this name, though not his dating, is generally accepted as authentic. He wrote in his life of Johnson: "About this time (i.e., 1781) it was much the fashion for several ladies to have evening assemblies, where the fair sex might participate in conversation with literary and ingenious men, animated by a desire to please. These societies were denominated Blue-stocking Clubs, the origin of which title being little known, it may be worth while to relate it. One of the most eminent members of those societies, when they first commenced, was Mr. Stillingfleet, whose dress was remarkably grave, and in particular it was observed that he wore blue-stockings. Such was the excellence of his conversation that his absence was felt as so great a loss, that it used to be said, 'We can do nothing without the blue-stockings'; and thus by degrees the title was established. Miss Hannah More has admirably described a Blue-stocking Club in her 'Bas Bleu', a poem in which many of the persons who were most conspicuous there are mentioned."

[6] Elizabeth Vesey, daughter of Sir Thomas Vesey, Bishop of Ossory. Married (1) William Handcock; (2) Agmondisham Vesey, M.P., Accountant-General of Ireland. Died 1789.

[7] Elizabeth Montagu (*née* Robinson), wife of Edward Montagu, M.P., grandson of the first Earl of Sandwich. "The Queen of the Bluestockings". 1720-1800.

Primarily, her interests were linguistic. Her father gave her the same education as her brothers and she had an early grounding in the classics. She was sent to a Huguenot family in Canterbury to learn French ; she taught herself Italian, Spanish and German and later in life she learnt Portuguese and Arabic. Learning apparently did not come easily to her—there are tales of her sitting with wet towels round her head and taking snuff to aid her studies—but that she successfully overcame her early difficulties there is abundant proof. Her mastery of the Greek language was demonstrated by the translation she made and published in 1758 at the request of her friend Miss Talbot and with the advice of Archbishop Secker of the work of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus. The translation received great praise at the time (incidentally it brought to the translator a profit of nearly £1,000); it went into four editions and was republished at the end of the 19th century. One does not need to be a classical scholar to appreciate that the work is a scholarly one. There is a charming story, nor is it an apocryphal one, which relates to Mrs. Carter's facility in the Greek language. The story comes from correspondence between Mrs. Carter and Archbishop Secker. Mrs. Carter had, she tells the Archbishop, been kept awake at night by what seemed to be a mistranslation of a line of the Iliad, a mistranslation resulting from a failure to realize that the verb to pray never governed the dative case. She appealed to the Archbishop for confirmation of her translation. After chiding her for persecuting " a poor English Archbishop with Heathen Greek " and quoting Proverbs iv. 16, " They sleep not except they have done mischief ; and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall ", he concedes that she is right.

Before the translation of Epictetus, Mrs. Carter had made in 1739 a translation from the French of the Critique of Crousaz on Pope's Essay on Man, and in the same year a translation from the Italian of Algarotti's " Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy explained for the use of the Ladies ". A number of Elizabeth Carter's own poems are translations from the classics and from the Italian. Her biographer recounts that she made it a habit to read daily something in each language with which she was acquainted ; certainly references in her letters bear out that she kept her study of languages both classical and modern alive ; indeed some of her letters are written in French.

As a classical scholar and a linguist the present generation would fairly clearly accord Mrs. Carter the same respect and admiration as did her own. But in her day her fame derived not only from her achievements in the field of language but in the field of literature. It was in 1738 when she was in her early twenties that she published a selection of occasional verses that she had contributed to the *Gentlemen's Magazine*. In 1762 at the instigation of Lord Bath, Lord Lyttleton

and Mrs. Montagu she published a collection of poems and these passed into several editions. The poems were accorded high praise at the time—Richardson had already reprinted one, " The Ode to Wisdom ", in *Clarissa*. Some were translated into French ; Lord Lyttleton in an introduction to the 1762 edition, compared Mrs. Carter with Sappho to the latter's disadvantage (though perhaps it is only fair to point out that his judgment seems to have been a moral rather than a literary one). A modern estimation, however, would be likely to be rather different ; that this is so is reinforced by the fact that the poems have found no place in modern anthologies.

But poetry was not Mrs. Carter's only excursion into the field of literature. She tried her hand in one of those two parts of the field to which the 18th century made a distinctive contribution, the essay and the novel. It was in the essay that Mrs. Carter expressed herself, but all too rarely. Two numbers of Johnson's *Rambler*, No. 44 and No. 100, were written by Mrs. Carter. Austin Dobson has commented that both papers might have easily competed, if not with the Great Cham, at all events with Richardson and Hawkesworth. One cannot but feel sorry that Mrs. Carter did not exploit further this medium. There is in the essays a spark of originality which her poems lack. There is at least one further medium which Mrs. Carter might have exploited, but to this reference is made later.

No account of Mrs. Carter's literary interests would be complete without reference to her " imports " as well as her " exports ", her reading as well as her writing. Her letters contain constant reference to this. Mention has already been made of her reading in the classics and in foreign languages ; in addition philosophy and theology were among her interests. She was also very well read in the literature of her day. Examples abound, but it is possible to quote only a few. She writes in 1744, the year when Johnson's biography of the poet appeared : " I imagine you have seen the life of Savage." " Lord Chesterfield's letters are, I think, the most complete system of French morality that ever disgraced the English language ", she comments in 1774, the year that these letters were first published. She writes again at the time when Burke's essay appeared : " I read ' The Sublime and Beautiful ' with pleasure, but to do it justice shall think it necessary to read it again." " Have you seen Stanza's ' In a Country Churchyard ' and do you not greatly admire them ?" she asks soon after Gray's Elegy was published. " How do you like Mr. Johnson's dictionary ? I have only seen part of the preface which was like himself ", she writes in 1755. " Mr. Richardson has been so good as to send me four volumes of his most charming work " (Sir Charles Grandison), she tells Miss Talbot in 1753. She adds in a letter early the next year : " Shall I venture to tell you what I have told nobody else, though the love of

truth has sometimes almost extorted it from me, that in general I like Clarissa best." "I am sorry", she comments in an earlier letter, "to find you so outrageous about Tom Jones; he is no doubt an imperfect but not a detestable character with all that honesty, good nature and generosity of temper. Though nobody can admire Clarissa more than I do, yet with all our partiality I am afraid it must be confessed that Fielding's book is the most natural representation of what passes in the world and of the bizarreries which arise from the mixture of good and bad which makes up the composition of most folks. Richardson has no doubt a very good hand at painting excellence, but there is a strange awkwardness and extravagance in his vicious characters." It is evident that Mrs. Carter was both catholic and critical in her reading.

So far it has been possible to build up a picture of a learned, cultured woman endowed with some measure of creative ability, but this picture lacks the warmth of a living personality. Perhaps one cannot hope to feel the personality of Mrs. Carter—personality is after all a living thing, a relation of one living being to other living beings—but it is possible to get rather nearer the essential woman. Mrs. Carter's biographer, though he was in a position to know her well, is not very helpful here. He was after all very much her junior and only really knew her in her later years. His distinguished aunt was clearly the object of his veneration and he was quite frank about his moral purpose in writing her memoirs. He ends the preface to the work as follows: "It is . . . my hope that the work may not be wholly useless; and that the contemplation of so much piety, virtue and learning may be attended with better effects than the gratification of mere curiosity; that her precepts and example may serve to rouse the indolent while they confirm and strengthen the good."

It is thus to Mrs. Carter's letters that one has to turn to learn more about her, her opinions, her tastes, and that most elusive aspect, her essential characteristics. Mrs. Carter exhibits in herself that paradox of the 18th century the existence side by side of the classical and the romantic, of reason and emotion. Perhaps it is wrong to refer to a paradox—each age can no doubt show similar seeming inconsistencies; perhaps they are not even inconsistencies.

In matters of religion and politics Mrs. Carter was clearly an upholder of the establishment. As she writes from Spa in 1763 recounting her journey there: "The view of the idolatrous churches and the fortified towns, the abodes of superstition and the guards of despotism soon brought me back to a sense of all our happiness and the inferiority of all advantages, when put in competition with the Bible and Magna Carta." One might perhaps from this suppose that Mrs. Carter was an evangelical in religion, but this would be far from the truth. For her religion was certainly something very real. Her letters provide eloquent

testimony to this. Her biographer confirms it. "Among her studies", he says, "there was one which she never neglected, one which was always dear to her from her earliest infancy to the latest period of her life and in which she made a continual improvement. This was that of Religion which was her constant care and greatest delight." But to Mrs. Carter religion was a thing of the head rather than the heart, something equated with reason rather than with the feelings. She writes to Miss Talbot after Mrs. Secker's death in 1748: "You will be inclined to think that reason and religion are the only proper methods of relief; but to beings such as we are, these are no more to be depended on of themselves for removing the painful sensations of the heart than for the cure of a fever. They are no doubt highly and indispensably necessary, to form a decency of behaviour to calm the extravagancies of passion, and convince one that everything is right, but with all this conviction, and the most perfect resignation imaginable, may end in nothing better than a quiet unruffled melancholy. Neither religion nor reason can alter the constitution of human nature, which however patiently it may suffer, will not be argued out of feeling while it dwells on the object which gives it pain."

One gathers that the left wing of the English church, if it may be so called, as exemplified in Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon, was not very much more acceptable to Mrs. Carter than the Catholic Church. A meeting contrived by Lord Bath in Tunbridge Wells between Mrs. Carter and Lady Huntingdon had the result that ever-after Mrs. Carter avoided that noble lady and her enthusiasms. Mrs. Carter's journey abroad to Spa provoked some cold, and indeed prejudiced, comments on the practices of the Catholic Church. She writes from Brussels: "I think nothing but the testimony of my own eyes could have perfectly convinced me of the miserable trifling foppery of Popery . . . I feel extremely uncomfortable with hearing bells ringing all day long, without being able to go to church; but I hope this heathenish kind of life will be over when we get to Spa and we shall have a kind of worship in which I can join."

Similarly in politics Mrs. Carter appears to have been an upholder of the established order. Though at times critical of politicians, Mrs. Carter's letters contain many references expressed in terms of loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty. Her interest in politics was obviously an intelligent one. She writes in a letter in 1764: "Happy age of virtue and of genius in which Wilkes is a Patriot and Churchill a poet!" She comments elsewhere in her letters on the paradox by which the cause of freedom is often upheld by such characters as Wilkes. Mrs. Carter's comments on the war of American Independence and the loss of the one-time colonies are interesting. She writes in 1778: "The alarm at present seems much quieter and we seem to be pretty much in the same

state as a French Officer described his countrymen in the last war, 'Nous sommes écraséz, nous sommes abiméz et nous allons à l'opera'. The loss of the colonies will probably occasion great distress and convulsions for the present. In the next age perhaps the nation may be the happier for being rid of them. They may be useful and comfortable allies though they are got to a maturity that would prevent their ever being again tractable subjects. There may be in states as well as in regard to individuals a proper season for emancipation; and perhaps all parent countries would act with the wisest policy, whenever that period arrives, to submit to it with a good grace and to secure the affection and friendship of those whom they can no longer control." Mrs. Carter's comments on the death of Lord Chatham in 1778 are also interesting: "Much might be said", she wrote, "on the subject of this extraordinary phenomenon in the moral and political world. His worst enemies must, I think, allow that there were some particulars in his conduct of public affairs which unhappily for this nation, do not exist in every minister. He was superior to all the dirty corruption of election jobbing. He attended with unremitting diligence to the business of his post and he took care that those whom he employed should attend to theirs likewise." These quotations suffice to show that Mrs. Carter's judgement in the political field was both shrewd and wise.

No reference has so far been made to Mrs. Carter's interests in the Arts. To what extent was she interested in these fields? Her interest in literature has been touched on, but not her interests in the other Arts, in music, painting and drama. Mrs. Carter numbered among her friends Joshua Reynolds and Garrick, but on the whole her interest in these fields seems not to have been particularly deep. As a performer she apparently had little competence, or perhaps it was little application. She writes to Miss Talbot in 1745: "I am much obliged for the instructions you so kindly sent me about drawing, though I fear they will be of little use as I am in reality, what I believe you only to be in description, too volatile and impatient to apply myself long enough to any one thing to make any tolerable proficiency in it. My present reigning scheme is music . . . I am now sat down to a spinnet, which unfortunately stood in my way and before I can play three bars in one tune, am trying at a dozen, by which means I shall never finish any." Listening to music Mrs. Carter enjoyed, but she reflected that a love of music and the fine arts was often united with a dissipated head and a wicked heart. Similarly she expressed doubts about the moral effect of drama. She writes: "I do not know above half a dozen comedies but what endeavour to overthrow the principles of common honesty and take off all the horrors of vice; and the audience is by the wicked management of the writer prevailed on to wish success to the schemes

of people, who in real life would deserve to be hung. So much for my scruples concerning stage plays."

All this is not to say, however, that Mrs. Carter was not a woman of sensibility in the contemporary manner. True she had not the sensibility of a Marianne Dashwood (she was, of course, a much more intelligent woman) but she had all the enthusiasm of her time for the Gothic and the sublime. The scholar and rational upholder of the established order was also a romantic. The translator of the works of Epictetus the Stoic was also a reader of Walter Scott and Mrs. Radcliffe. Mrs. Carter had a real sensibility to natural and man-made beauty; her walking habits were formed not only for reasons of health but arose out of a very real enjoyment of the countryside. She writes in a letter about her sister's new house that it appeared " dreary because it has no prospect . . . its (her own house) riant airy situation which so much delights me had no charms for her and she, like many other people, could be happy without the view of a fine landscape gilded by the rising and setting sun ". She writes in another letter about Mrs. Montagu's home at Sandleford in Berkshire that it owed " the least to art and the most to nature of almost any place I ever saw. The prospect from the garden is soft and elegant and the riant to the highest degree and has such a singular air of liberty as renders it very peculiarly pleasing. Indeed the whole country, though it has little of the sublime, has the most of the beautiful that can be imagined and consequently the kind of situation in which one would most wish to reside. Great and sublime views afford a noble and striking entertainment, and are at proper intervals very useful to elevate the mind beyond the pitch of ordinary life; but the cultivated and good humoured and familiar scenes of nature are best suited to the general state and the purposes of social duty ". Mrs. Carter could, however, very well appreciate the sublime. She writes of a stay at Lambeth Palace in 1764: " I was lodged in one of the towers, separated from the rest of the house by the chapel and by other venerable buildings; and through these I used to pass every night under Gothic arches dimly lighted by pale lamps, with all the winds of heaven whistling round me followed by the echo of my own steps, and the deep hollow sound of the closing doors. In such a situation you may imagine I felt in great force the sublime of the storm on the 13th."

To Mrs. Carter's character there was yet another side. Wide though her interests and contacts were there remained at the centre of her life her family and her home with the interests, responsibilities and duties which they carried with them. These responsibilities and duties included the education of the younger members of her family. As an unmarried woman she deferred in her arrangements to her father (though in one important matter, that of marriage, she did not fall in

with his obvious wishes); as he got older she consulted his comfort before leaving him to go off on her many visits. Domestic affairs took up much of her time; some, like the care of her garden, one feels she enjoyed. She describes in a letter to Mrs. Montagu in 1763 her efforts to get the garden at her new house in order: "My garden is absolutely en friche, but I hope before the end of the summer to see it blooming (or that somebody else will see it) with roses and jessamines; and I have very magnificently ordered a wall to be built for their security, which will cost more than if I was to contract for all the roses and jessamines in the County of Kent by the year, but then I have a cherry tree with half a dozen blossoms, and an apricot that never bears, and all this in a piece of ground at least as wide and I think rather longer than your dressing room." Other domestic affairs like the sewing of shirts, which interfered with the translation of Epictetus, one gathers Mrs. Carter tackled with less enthusiasm. At cooking she seems to have been proficient. Though she complains mildly about the gatherings in Deal she obviously did not scorn the social round of the world in which she was brought up. One suspects it was that Mrs. Carter was saved by her sense of humour.

Mrs. Carter was a keen observer of the social scene and as the following quotations from her letters will show her observation was both perspicacious and tempered with humour, a humour which extended to herself. "I am", she writes in a letter in 1748, "grown desperately in love . . . All the world is charmed with him as much as I, and I have only the superiority of being the first of one half of it who ventured to express my admiration and now I have every lady in the place to keep me in countenance." She writes further about a journey she made from London in 1773 and about a storm she encountered at Dartford: "I was waked in the night at Dartford by a noble peal of thunder, and wished to know if you and some more of my friends, who love the sublime of the elements shared it with me. I thought of you all recommending you and myself to heaven; and then as none of you were visibly present to speculate with me on the tempest quietly returned to sleep in the midst of it." Mrs. Carter writes rather delightfully about Mrs. Talbot with whom she was staying in Miss Talbot's absence: "I do not know what supplement I can write to Mrs. Talbot's letter, unless it be to tell you what ten to one she may not have told you herself, how extremely well satisfied she is in your absence, which she proves beyond all contradiction by declaring every five minutes, that she never thinks about you when you are out of her sight." She writes in another letter about the ways of the world: "I have just drank my solitary tea in spite of the promise of a fine lady who had made me hope for her company; but as she is a fine lady 'tis no great wonder she should break her word." She writes in 1766 in reply to a letter from Mrs. Vesey:

" Your valley is delightful and you cannot think how much I felt myself obliged to you for wishing me to be of your party. I agree with you as to the effect such a scene might have on lovers as are really in love ; but as this is a circumstance which happens much less frequently than the misses are apt to suppose, the ballroom does better for small talk than an Arcadian solitude."

Another and well known voice seems to echo in these quotations : " Their joy on this meeting was very great, as well it might, since they had been contented to know nothing of each other for the last fifteen years."[1] " 'Let me know every thing that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him ?' 'It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began, but I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.' "[2] Inevitably they revert to an earlier comment to the effect that there was one possible medium in the field of literature which Mrs. Carter might have exploited beside the media which she did exploit. It would not be quite apposite to suggest that Mrs. Carter was a Jane Austen manquée, her interests were too wide and her scholarship too great, but one cannot help speculating what would have been the result had Mrs. Carter felt it worth while to try her hand at the novel as well as the essay, in particular at writing a novel of manners. The irresistible conclusion is that the result would have been very rewarding.

Be that as it may, however, one ends where one began, with Mrs. Carter's learning. Looking back from this middle of the 20th century which has seen the establishment by women of a right to an education hitherto confined to men and the entry of women into social, political and professional fields hitherto the preserve of men, one cannot help but compare the educated, but, in the modern sense, unemancipated Mrs. Carter with the emancipated products of the higher education of women whom this century has known. In many ways Mrs. Carter was very like the generation of Miss Beale and Miss Buss and their heirs. One glimpses the same slightly forbidding exterior, hiding as so often a heart full of kindness and family affection. There is perhaps also that similar self-consciousness of learning. But just because the word emancipation had not entered her mind Mrs. Carter was in other ways a very different woman. The ordinary domestic duties might be a little tiresome to her but she was prepared to accept their necessity cheerfully. Though in bluestocking circles husbands, at any rate, were not much in evidence, Mrs. Carter seems to have had no feeling of competition with men. She was prepared to accept the contemporary position of women

[1] Northanger Abbey, Chapter IV. The text based on Collation of the Early Editions, by R. W. Chapman, Oxford, 1926.

[2] Pride and Prejudice, Chapter XVIII. The text based on Collation of the Early Editions, by R. W. Chapman, Oxford, 1926.

in society. The nearest perhaps she came to an expression of feminism was in certain of her comments on marriage: "If I have suffered from the troubles of others, who have more sense, more understanding and more virtues than I might reasonably have expected to find, what might I not have suffered from a husband. Perhaps be needlessly thwarted and contradicted in every innocent enjoyment of life; involved in all his schemes right or wrong and perhaps not allowed the liberty of even silently seeming to disapprove them." The fact is that Mrs. Carter's learning was not a means to emancipation but an end in itself. And this is both her final strength and her final weakness. Later generations would have been that much richer had she given out more of her learning and wisdom, but one can have nothing but admiration for someone for whom the pursuit of learning was and, because of social circumstances, could be, its own justification.

### Select Bibliography

*Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, with a new edition of her Poems, etc.* Rev. Montagu Pennington. 2 vols. Second edition. F. C. and J. Rivington. 1808.

*A series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot from the year 1741-1770 to which are added letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Vesey between the years 1763 and 1787.* Edt. Pennington. Third edition, the 4 vols. printed in 3. F. C. and J. Rivington. 1819.

*Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu between the years 1755 and 1800, chiefly upon Literary and Moral Subjects.* Edt. Pennington. 3 vols. F. C. and J. Rivington. 1817.

*A Woman of Wit and Wisdom.* Alice C. C. Gaussen. Smith, Elder & Co. 1906.

*The Learned Mrs. Carter.* Later Essays, 1917-20. Austin Dobson. O.U.P. 1921.

*The Bluestocking Ladies.* Walter S. Scott. John Green & Co. 1947.