Maryland Poet Who Is Little Known In Her Own State Is Lucy Mitchel

Born In Cambridge And A Member Of The Old Family Of Mitchells, Her Father A Shipbuilder, This Daughter Of Maryland, Who Lived And Was Educated In Baltimore, Merits More Extensive Recognition Than She Has Received.

By Emily Emerson Lantz.

HAVE you ever motored through the Upper Gunpowder region, through the beautiful wild country near the Pennsylvania boundary line? Have you glimpsed Parkton, Md., as you passed along and then speeded onward to Buckleysville and thence some two and a half miles farther north until you came to a little hamlet called Shamburgh? Shamburgh is something more than 20 miles beyond Towson. It lies not exactly upon the line of Baltimore's water extension, as indicated in plans of Engineer Lee, yet doubtless the river current flowing past the hamlet will eventually be included in Baltimore's water supply.

And here at Shamburgh having reached the end of a literary pilgrimage, should such be your mission, you will find a cottage environed by a garden, owned and occupied by Miss Lucy Mitchell, a poet of Maryland and a former resident of Baltimore. In childhood and the years of her youth Miss Mitchell resided at 1650 East Fayette street, just around the corner from the Church Home and Infirmary. The few old neighbors who still remain in what was once a fashionable residence section opening into Broadway recall Miss Lucy Mitchell as a dark-eyed, dark-haired, somewhat reserved young woman who lived in a large house filled with valuable heirlooms and who, as a girl, used to sit and dream and write poetry at an elevated window looking eastward toward Broadway.

One by one members of Miss Mitchell's family died until she alone survives and some years ago she sold the big lonely house on Fayette street and removed to Baltimore county, where she finds solace in her garden and companionship in nature.

Contributor To Springfield Paper

Here she has written much verse and while practically unknown in Maryland she has been for 20 years a constant contributor to the Springfield Republican.

While not always perfect in construction, Miss Mitchell's verse is intensely poetic in conception and treatment. Her poems have usually a tinge of melancholy resultant doubtless upon long years lived much alone. She possesses power to vividly visualize familiar things of life and endow them with spiritual significance. There is delicate spirituality within her lines that is both rare and beautiful. Her perception is keen and her emotional force carries her message to the heart of the reader. A certain tender wistfulness in what she writes combined with firm faith in the guardianship of God suggests the poems of Emily Dickinson.

Very lovely are the following lines:

ENDYMION.
(Rinehcart's Statue, Over His Grave In Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore.)

On my slow way through Greenmount still and fair
I paused, arrested by Endymion couched
In slumber sweet and deep o'er Rinehcart's grave.
It captured sight; I could but gaze and gaze;
Nor did the thought, "This is a tomb," subdue.
As with the emerald hillocks thick around.
For who could pity even in death the hand
Which carved this almost breathing shape, the brain
Whence came the godlike fiat, "Let it be!"
And lo! it was, and is and is to be
To eyes unopened yet to Beauty's light.

Dead? Then 'tis death between the zephyr breaths
Indrawn and issuing from his parted lips;
See! he inbreathes, and curves the outbreath wait.
Such is the death immortal Genius dies;
Yet is her thought so spiritual, 'tis hard
Fit form to find for its embodiment
Above her dead, whereof it may be said,
"Be his in lieu of time,"—but here 'tis done.
And even so well, 'tis more than mortal mood—
Yea, hath rich share of immortality.

Oh if 'tis meet to look upon a grave
As warning—a memento we must pass—
Here may we read a deeper lesson still:
Man in idea perfected lives again—
Still speaks to new-born and undying souls!

The passing of human life is graphically pictured in:

THE DEPARTURES.
("Time stays; we go."—*Andrew Lang.*)

Ne'er yet were leaves so emerald green,
Nor flowers so vivid and so sweet,
As those that through a hazy sheen
The eyes in early autumn greet.

With purple piles of jagged cloud
And singing winds the rains begin;
And leaves in frightened masses crowd,
And roses of their petals thin.

Gray dawn the days, the nights are cold;
Summer in rarest prime seems dead;
Wet roses in her hand afold,
No trace of frost upon her head.

The clouds break up, the sun shines through;
Summer must die—she dies not yet!
New flowers bloom; the skies are blue;
But ah, my soul, do not forget!

Do not forget you go, these stay,
To smile again with spring's return;
'Tis you who pass them on your way
To where their mystic source doth burn!

And strong, enduring faith in:

SOMETHING BETWEEN.

There's something between thee and grief, O heart!
Nearer than thy despair;
Thou dost not stand at the outer edge—
Another than thou is there;
Another, and yet thyself,
An infinite spirit of prayer.

There's something between thee and pain, O flesh!
Anguish is not more near
Than the human tears and the touch divine
That owned thee kin and dear—
Than the nail-torn palms and the riven side
Pierced by the Roman spear.

There's something between thee and death, O mind!
Asleep on the face of the dead,
Time and decay wrought thine image there—
A moment it will have fled,
Wrapt and laid by itself the cloth
That had bound His human head.

There's something between thee and fear, O soul!
Fear of the dread, the unknown;
Something that shines like the light of home.
Viewed from the dark, alone;
Aye, the light of faith in each soul is built
Upon its own hearthstone.

Concerning her past life and literary work, Miss Mitchell said recently: "I am not, strictly speaking, a Baltimorean, although most of my life has been spent in that city. I was born in Cambridge, county seat of Dorchester, or, as the natives call it, 'Dosset' county. I was about 8 years old when my family removed to Baltimore, and an elder sister, taking my hand, led me to a primary school a few blocks distant from our home. I found my own way to the grammar and high school and the public library did the rest.

"Miss E. A. Baer was the guiding mind at the helm of English literature at the time I was a pupil at the Eastern High School. She was broad of mind and infinite of patience, and to such of her pupils as continued their literary studies after graduating her wide knowledge and appreciation of English letters, past and present, made her at once an invaluable guide and a sympathetic critic. Her very memory awakens my deep emotion.

"To her primarily and to Charles Goodrich Whiting, editor of the Springfield Republican, who seconded her work as my kind though unsparing critic, I owe the best of whatever I may be in literature. At the Eastern High School Miss Baer was succeeded by her friend, Miss Laura Devalin, the mentor and close and lifelong friend of Miss Lizette Woodworth Reese. I knew and valued Miss Devalin as a friend, but she was never my teacher. Miss Reese also succeeded me at the high school, though I think she, too, felt the influence of Miss Baer. As to poetry, I have been writing for the Springfield Republican for considerably over 20 years."

Father Had Shipyard.

Asked concerning her family, Miss Mitchell said: "My father, Capt. Richard Mitchell, died in Baltimore, aged 82, in 1886. He was a master boat builder, who before the Civil War conducted a shipyard at Cambridge, though no ships were ever built there, only bay and river craft, schooners, sloops, pungy boats, large canoes and so on. He contracted for and constructed the long pier at Cambridge, subsequently rendered nugatory by the discovery of a better steamboat landing on Cambridge creek. All transportation in my father's day was done in that vicinity by water. A boat, therefore, was not only an object of interest, but one of great importance and my father's activities were not confined to Cambridge.

"The farms or plantations on the Eastern Shore are company grants from Lord Baltimore. My father's progenitor was a member of one of the 15 English families headed by Trypp, Owens and Raven to whom the grant was made which settled on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 1665. As these families did not strictly follow the law of primogeniture, subdivisions increasingly lessened the size of individual farms. Still, as the original grants were liberal, up to the Civil War, few farms were less than 100 acres and all well wooded.

"Only one son of the planter could succeed to the land. Yet frequently a planter had 12 sons. Professional careers could scarcely be provided for all, hence when a son attained his majority his father sent for a master boat builder, native if possible. Plans for a definite kind and tonnage of boat were discussed and determined and the builder went his way to draft the keel. Pretty soon all the male workers on the farm were hauling shipbuilding timber previously selected, cut and seasoned. This was deposited at a given location near the shore. Rough sheds were erected nearby where a colored man cook was installed in the cooking shed facing a long table built in the open.

"Next the builder arrived with his apprentices and his regular hands and in the sunlight broadaxes and adzes glittered and the hum of the saw, the chip of the adze, the reverberation of hammers were heard all day and day after day. Sooner than one might suppose a new boat winged her way above the skids into the rising tide while on her deck rode the proud young captain and owner. He had received his heritage. He did not have to learn navigation. Being an Eastern Shore man he had 'picked it up.' In that way captains became as numerous on the Eastern Shore as colonels in the South after the Civil War. A feast for all, workers and neighbors, was spread in the open at the conclusion of the boatbuilding.

Was Youngest Daughter.

"I have no portrait of my father—he never could be induced to sit for one, but he was very individual. He was of ordinary height, but his shoulders being rather broad made him seem slightly shorter. His complexion was ruddy, of an outdoor look, his hair was an abundant lustrous iron gray, with the side parting barely indicated; his mouth and lower jaw were expressive of great firmness and his eyes a truthful, benevolent blue. As the youngest and smallest of his girls—there were seven of us in all, boys and girls—he petted me a good deal and could never be brought to punish me. 'Well, you won't do it any more, will you?' he would ask, and, of course, I would answer, 'No, Sir.' Then the incident would be closed. He always wore fine white, roomy shirts with the collar attached, rather loosely fitted coats and trousers, seldom of black material, a broad black silk necktie tied in a careless double bow and a low-crowned rather broad-brimmed black felt hat. He renewed his clothes of course, but not within my memory did he alter their cut, style or color.

"His name, Richard, had come down in the family and been repeated all the way from the son of the settler. I have the signature to a deed of Richard Mitchell, Jr., dated 1744. Of course, there was a Richard, Sr., living at that time. But my father's hands and apprentices did not call him Richard Mitchell; they called him Captain Dickey, thus distinguishing him from about half a dozen Captain Mitchells that must have been about the bay and rivers at that time. My mother was a Mitchell and had several brothers who were captains either of steamboats, bay schooners or seagoing vessels.

"I am obliged to admit that my father probably never read a line of poetry in his life. He read his Bible, Josephus, and his ship-building books and, except The Sun, these were about all he read while living in Baltimore."