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LIVERMORE, MARY ASHTON RICE

December 19, 1820–May 23, 1905

CIVIL WAR WORKER, LECTURER, TEMPERANCE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS REFORMER

Bostonian Mary Livermore became a Union heroine in Chicago, working for the Northwestern Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. She drew upon this fame and her network of coworkers for thirty years as a reformer and as one of the most successful public lecturers of her day. The fourth child of Timothy and Zebiah Vose Glover (Ashton) Rice, she was their first to survive infancy; she had two younger sisters. Her father was a Calvinistic Baptist, holding twice-daily religious services and requiring his children to read the entire Bible each year. Although Timothy Rice was a veteran of the War of 1812 and had family connections in Boston, he supported his family as a laborer. Zebiah Rice, the daughter of an English sea captain, taught her daughters to admire Ann Hasseltine Judson, an early missionary to India. While Mary Rice saw herself as the protector of weaker and poorer children, she also feared being a burden to her parents and felt their relative poverty.

Mary Rice was a large, vigorous child and a brilliant student. In adolescence, her impressive homework prompted a teacher to charge her with plagiarism, which she disproved by composing an essay on the spot. She grew up in Boston, except for two years in western New York in the 1830s while Timothy Rice tried farming. Graduating as a prize-winning scholar at age four-teen from Boston's Hancock Grammar School, Mary Rice served a brief apprenticeship to a dressmaker before her parents sent her to the Charlestown Female Seminary. After two years she taught Latin and French while continuing to study Greek for another year.

Mary Rice experienced a religious crisis during her adolescence. At fourteen she was converted and joined the First Baptist Church of Boston. After several years attempting to convert her invalid younger sister, Mary was inconsolable when Rachel died unconverted. Her conviction of her sister's damnation led to a revulsion against religion and a permanent rejection of orthodox Christianity. Alienated from home, she worked for several years as a governess on a Virginia plantation, coming to know slavery firsthand. Her access to her elite employers' house-hold and extensive library provided valuable social and intellectual experience.

Mary Rice returned to Massachusetts around 1842 and took charge of a private secondary school in Duxbury. An abolitionist, she subscribed to the antislavery newspaper the *Liberator*. She became an active worker in the Washingtonian temperance movement; she organized children, edited a juvenile temperance paper, and published a book of songs and stories, *The Children's Army* (1844). In Duxbury, Mary Rice was converted to

Universalism by clergyman Daniel Parker Livermore. The Universalist rejection of hell and emphasis on a forgiving God offered her a return to faith.

She married Livermore against her father's wishes on May 6, 1845; they were married for fifty-four years. Between 1845 and 1857, she followed him to pastorates in Fall River, Massachusetts; Stafford, Connecticut; Malden and Weymouth, Massachusetts; and Auburn, New York. Her three daughters, Mary Eliza (1848), Henrietta White (1851), and Marcia Elizabeth (1854) were born during this period; her firstborn died at age five. Daniel Livermore shared his wife's commitment to temperance; he resigned his pastorate at Stafford, Connecticut, rather than modify his temperance views. During this period, Mary Livermore published regularly in religious and women's publications and occasionally in general-interest magazines. *Thirty Years too Late*, a prize-winning temperance story published by the Washingtonians, a temperance organization, around 1848, had an international circulation and was republished in Boston in 1878.

Daniel Livermore persuaded his wife to join abolitionists moving to Kansas in 1857, but the plan was abandoned when, en route, their youngest daughter Lizzie developed "a most hopeless and mysterious illness" (Livermore, *My Life*, 455). By 1873, Lizzie was a permanent invalid. The Livermores lived in Chicago from 1857 until 1869. Daniel Livermore bought the Universalist weekly newspaper, *New Covenant*, publishing it with his wife's help until 1869. Mary Livermore's name appeared below his on the editorial page, and many articles were signed by her.

Chicago, growing at the rate of about twenty thousand people per year in the 1860s, needed social services. Robustly healthy and a prodigious worker, Mary Livermore soon emerged as a philanthropic leader. She was a mainstay of the Universalist Church of the Redeemer, and in 1858 she joined with JANE HOGE and other prominent Chicagoans to found the Home for the Friendless, serving on its board until 1869. Although the officers were men, the board of women directors did all the work, providing help to women and children applicants. Mary Livermore also cofounded the Home for Aged Women (1861) and the Hospital for Women and Children (1863).

Mary Livermore's initial fame resulted from her Civil War work as an organizer, fund-raiser, and executive for the Chicago (later Northwestern) branch of the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC), a government-sanctioned organization of civilians created by elite northern men in the fall of 1861 to aid Union soldiers. The USSC took over control of women's voluntary work in soldiers' aid societies, superseding the leadership of the Women's Central Association of Relief, which had initiated civilian volunteer efforts in April 1861. As with prewar charities, most of the commission's workers were women, while its officers were men. However, USSC's dependence on women as producers, leaders, and nurses in the long national emergency gave northern women like Mary Livermore new leverage. As "associate managers" of USSC branches, women learned how to run mass organizations and how to inspire other women to join a national cause.

In Chicago, Livermore hired household help and volunteered for the duration of the war. She and her friend Hoge

raised money for the commission through a festival in December 1861. Their report on their tour of army hospitals in the spring of 1862 led to appointments by Sanitary Commission head Dr. Henry Bellows as associate members of the commission. During the national Woman's Council meeting in Washington, D.C., in November 1862, they were authorized by Dorothea L. Dix, superintendent of women nurses, to recruit nurses in the West. In December, they succeeded ELIZA PORTER as the Northwestern commission's associate managers.

Livermore and Hoge transformed the Northwestern Commission branch into the "first in importance in the list of our auxiliaries at the West" (Newberry, 111), creating a reliable supply system via local aid societies throughout a largely rural, frontier region. They accomplished this system by a massive letter-writing campaign (120 letters a day), followed often by personal visits and public speaking. Livermore was also writer and publicist for the commission, turning out circulars, monthly bulletins, and news articles. The women's tasks were complicated by the existence of such rival organizations as the Christian Commission and by unfounded accusations that the Sanitary Commission was incompetent or dishonest. Nevertheless, about three thousand aid societies contributed to the Northwestern Sanitary Commission, many organized directly by Livermore and Hoge.

In 1862 and 1863 Livermore made extensive tours of federal encampments to deliver supplies, evaluate needs, and publicize conditions. In battlefield hospitals, ministering to suffering and dying soldiers, she gained both authority as an organizer and new respect for "the lowest tier of human beings" (Livermore, *My Story of the War*, 178). Responding with Hoge to an emergency call for vegetables and fruits to save Grant's army at Vicksburg from scurvy early in 1863, Livermore's tour of hospitals from Illinois to Tennessee prompted her to propose a major fund-raising fair to restore depleted resources. The male commissioners greeted the suggestion skeptically. Livermore and Hoge convened four hundred women from all over the Northwest to plan the event and canvassed the East for donations. Their network of aid societies donated enormous quantities of goods, and the fair became a national event, lasting two weeks in October and netting more than eighty thousand dollars. The prototype of later Sanitary Commission fairs, it offered both entertainment and opportunities for public patriotism. The women's leadership was widely publicized; Mary Livermore and Jane Hoge became "household words throughout the country" (Henshaw, 94).

By 1865, Livermore was persuaded that women's help was needed in governing the country, as it had been in winning the war. In March 1867 she spoke out for woman suffrage in the *New Covenant* and offered her services to Susan B. Anthony. She also worked with her husband to increase opportunities for Universalist women ministers. In June 1868, inspired by New York's Sorosis, the first formal women's club in the United States, Mary Livermore joined former Sanitary Commission worker Elizabeth J. Loomis and editor M. L. Rayne to form a Women's Association, later the Chicago Sorosis. Livermore took leadership in one faction of the group, with longtime neighbor and friend, MYRA BRADWELL, and KATE NEWELL DOGGETT, both fellow war workers.

Livermore organized Chicago's first woman suffrage convention in February 1869, featuring suffragists Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Anna Dickinson, along with local clergymen and judges. The Chicago convention outdrew Anthony and Stanton's convention in New York several months later and resulted in the founding of the Illinois Woman Suffrage Association. A spin-off committee, lobbying the Illinois legislature for women's rights, helped to get Myra Bradwell's married women's property bill passed in March. Stanton praised Livermore as the West's Susan B. Anthony.

Livermore established a suffrage newspaper, the *Agitator*, in March 1869, and Daniel Livermore sold the *New Covenant* in May to help her. Livermore drew upon suffragists Kate Doggett, Kate Boynton (see ELIZABETH BOYNTON HARBERT), CATHARINE WAITE, and male suffragists, including Unitarian minister Robert Collyer and Catherine Waite's husband Judge C. B. Waite.

Livermore's second suffrage convention, held in Chicago in September, was a battleground; Stanton and Anthony of New York and Lucy Stone of New England vied for leadership of the national woman suffrage movement. Livermore chose the Boston wing and used her influence to bring Illinois into Stone's American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). She sold the *Agitator* to Stone that fall, agreeing to edit it in Boston as the *Woman's Journal* for two years.

Mary Livermore maintained her Chicago connections after her move in 1870 to Massachusetts. She worked with Doggett and Bradwell in the Association for the Advancement of Women (AAW) and in AWSA. In 1871, helping Hoge raise funds for the Evanston College for Ladies, Livermore met and befriended FRANCES E. WILLARD, nearly twenty years her junior. Livermore supported Willard's decision to make a career of temperance work in 1874 and became her lifelong ally in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), both as president of the Massachusetts WCTU from 1875 to 1885 and as a popular temperance speaker.

Livermore left full-time woman suffrage work when her editorship of *Woman's Journal* ended in 1872, though she served as AWSA president 1875–78. For the rest of her life Livermore was an active member of women's organizations such as WCTU, the New England Woman's Club, and the Boston Women's Education and Industrial Union; she served as the first president of AAW in 1873–74. She also worked with both men and women in a wide variety of causes, from the cooperative housekeeping movement (which advocated communal cooking arrangements to free women for other work) and prison reform to spiritualism (the American Psychic Society) and various veteran's aid groups. She was attracted to socialism, which she viewed as "applied Christianity" (Livermore, *New Nation*, June 6, 1891) and, prompted by Nationalist supporter Frances Willard, joined the short-lived Nationalist movement led by Edward Bellamy to advocate the cooperative socialist system dramatized in his popular novel *Looking Backward* (1888); she also supported the Society of Christian Socialists. Her socialist views did not prevent her from supporting the Republican party, and though unable to vote she was twice elected a delegate from Melrose to the Republican state convention.

Though Livermore worked for many organizations and

causes after the Civil War, she was not a full-time reformer like Willard and Susan B. Anthony; she neither founded an important organization nor created new strategies and arguments to further her goals. Her role instead was to popularize ideas she shared with a national network of women reformers about the importance of women's organizing to secure their own rights to citizenship, education, and employment and to protect the interests of other women and children. Her principal work for twenty-five years after 1872 was lecturing to general audiences, most often in former Union states, on topics of public interest, booked by the leading agent of the day, James Redpath's Lyceum Bureau. Livermore was among the early women to make a commercial success of public lecturing. Initially, audiences came to see a Civil War heroine, but she continued to draw bookings for decades on the grounds of her reputation as a speaker. Responding to requests, she usually lectured about women—their history, their rights, their duties, their future—though she was careful not to urge reforms upon listeners unless invited. Her most popular topic was “What Shall We Do with Our Daughters?” and she proposed equal education and “careful moral culture” (Livermore, *My Life*, 492) for women. She averaged 150 lectures a year for a decade and continued lecturing well into her seventies, consistently promoting wider opportunities for women and a maternalist vision of a morally progressive future. Henry Blackwell, widower of Lucy Stone and lifelong reformer, claimed about Livermore that “no man or woman of her generation addressed audiences so numerous, on topics so varied and inspiring” and that she “molded the thoughts of millions” (Blackwell, 82). She also reached out to a general audience in her two popular autobiographies, *My Story of the War* (1887) and *The Story of My Life* (1897), and in articles she wrote for national magazines.

Daniel Livermore died in 1899; committed to women's equality, he had been his wife's chief supporter. She died in 1905 of heart disease after a brief illness, and her ashes were buried in Wyoming Cemetery, Melrose, Massachusetts.

Mary Livermore's long career as a public speaker, built upon her Chicago experience and western connections, demonstrated that a woman's patriotic work could win a hearing on national issues. Livermore mounted the public platform as a middle-aged woman to argue the importance of expanding women's participation in American public life, and because she was famous for wartime national service, she reached a middle-class audience that rejected women identified principally as reformers. Ironically, Livermore's fame dwindled after her death for the same reason she was effective during her lifetime—she did not leave behind an organization or single reform with which she was principally identified. Nevertheless, in Gilded Age America she commanded popular attention on the grounds of pioneering public service and good sense, and her career enabled other women to claim authority in public forums.

Sources. The major archival collections for a study of Livermore include the Mary A. Livermore Collection, Princeton Univ.; the Kate Fields Collection, the Boston Public Library; the National American Woman Suffrage Papers, the Library of Congress. Livermore published two autobiographical works: *My Story of the War* (1887) and *The Story of My Life* (1897). She also wrote *The Two Families* (1848), *Christmas Child*

(1859), *Pen Pictures: Or Sketches from Domestic Life* (1862), *What Shall We Do with Our Daughters?* (1883), and articles in *Arena*, December 1889, August 1892; *North American Review*, January and December 1890, September 1891, February 1896; *New Nation*, June 6, 1891; as well as other periodicals. There are biographical entries on Livermore in *NAW* (1971) and Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century* (1893). Contemporary views of Livermore appear in Mrs. E. R. Hanson, *Our Women Workers* (1882); Mrs. Sarah E. Henshaw, *Our Branch and Its Tributaries: Being a History of the Work of the Northwestern Sanitary Commission* (1883); Phebe A. Hanaford, *Daughters of America* (1882); L. P. Brockett and Mary C. Vaughan, *Woman's Work in the Civil War* (1867); John S. Newberry, *The U.S. Sanitary Commission in the Valley of the Mississippi* (1871); Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vols. 2 and 3 (1881–[1922]); Lillian Whiting, *Women Who Have Ennobled Life* (1915); Henry McCormick, *The Women of Illinois* (1913); Sarah Bolton, *Lives of Girls Who Became Famous* (1914); and Henry Blackwell, editorial, *Woman's Journal*, May 27, 1905. Mary Livermore is one of the women analyzed in Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex* (1978); Livermore's views on cooperative housekeeping are discussed in one chapter of Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981). Livermore as part of a Chicago network of women is treated in Lana Ruegamer, “The Paradise of Exceptional Women: Chicago Women Reformers, 1863–1893” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana Univ., 1982).

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