

BRIEF AND IMPARTIAL NARRATIVE

OF THE

LIFE

OF

SARAH MARIA CORNELL.

Who was found dead (suspended by the neck, and sus-
pected to have been murdered) near Fall River,
(Mass.) December 22, 1832.



WRITTEN BY ONE, WHO,
Early knew her—when her mind
“Untainted then by art,
Was noble, just, humane and kind
And virtue warm'd her heart—
—But, ah! the cruel spoiler came!”

NEW-YORK,

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LIFE

OF

SARAH MARIA CORNELL.

Entered according to an act of Congress, in the year 1833, by Gurdon Williams, in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the United States for the southern district of New York.

THE Narrative of this unfortunate female, will undoubtedly blend some strong points of interest with its sadness, and as any thing relating to it will be read with avidity, we shall give such a sketch of it, as the writer has been made personally acquainted with (having in early life, not only been a school-mate of one of her parents, but acquainted with their daughter from almost the period of her birth, until nearly seventeen years of age) as well as from information communicated by others, who were her intimate acquaintance from the period mentioned, until within a few weeks of her death. The writer cannot but flatter himself, that in his attempt to furnish the public with what he deems a correct and impartial narrative of the life of this peculiarly unfortunate female, if decency, as well as the high re-

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spect which he professes to entertain for her many respectable connections, should cause him to omit speaking very particularly of the unpleasant traits which marked the character of the deceased, it will not be viewed as a disposition on his part, to do injustice to any one who have been, or may hereafter be suspected of being the author of her untimely exit, by representing her more innocent, and her character less impure than it really was—whatever events may have transpired to fix suspicion on any individual, we profess to believe, that after a fair and full investigation of every circumstance relating thereto, it must be left to an impartial jury to convict or acquit—hence, with a sincere desire not to wound the feelings of either the relatives or friends of any one on whom suspicion may have fallen, or who may be still suspected, or those of the unfortunate deceased, by a public exposure of unpleasant incidents, which, in the opinion of the writer, ought to have been buried in one and the same grave with the deceased, and never after brought up in charge against her—he will proceed with the proposed narrative:—

SARAH MARIA CORNELL, was the daughter and youngest child of James and Lucretia Cornell, (the former of Providence, Rhode Island, and the latter of Norwich, Connecticut,) and was born in the year 1803. Her mother was the daughter of a wealthy and much respected gentleman of the city of Norwich, and to whom, in the year 1791 (being then

extensively engaged in various manufactures) the said James, the father of Sarah Maria, was apprenticed, to the business of hat manufacturing—when about twenty years of age, it was discovered by the parents that there was a strong attachment existing between him, the said James, and their daughter, which they at first disapproved of, but at length became so far reconciled to, as to consent to their union. Soon after their marriage, receiving a small patrimonial portion, the said James removed with his wife to the western part of the State of Vermont, where he commenced business with fair prospects, but at the expiration of between five and six years, having become more unfortunate therein, he, with an increased family of four children (of whom the unfortunate Sarah Maria was the youngest) either consented to, or advised his wife to return with her young and helpless family, to her father in Connecticut, whom he believed better able to support them than himself—they accordingly returned, and were severally provided for by the grand-parent of Sarah Maria, who, at the age of 15, was apprenticed to a maiden lady (Miss S. who resided in Norwich, Chelsea parish) to obtain a knowledge of the mantua-making business; where, for reasons we know not, she continued but a short time—she next became the apprentice of a Mr. M. who carried on the Tailoring business in first parish of said city; and while there, was so unfortunate as to lose that valuable friend to whom she had not only looked for

support and protection, but that advice which he^d situation (young and unexperienced as she was) required. By the death of her grand-parent, she became destitute of paternal care and instruction—she was to this period, virtuous, respected, and apparently happy.—Her personal appearance and address attractive—she was of middling stature, of dark complexion, with dark hazle eyes, and black hair—in her address and manners she was easy, unassuming and familiar perhaps to a fault—in her conversation she was intelligent, sprightly and interesting, and in every respect admirably fitted to secure the esteem and friendship of her associates—but, alas! with all these endowments, the poor misguided girl suffered herself too early to become the victim of contending passions. At the age of sixteen, she became extremely fond of dress, as well as of gay and lively company; and as fond of visiting with her female companions scenes of innocent amusement and pleasing—her associates were respectable, but by indulging too frequently a fondness to enjoy their society, she became somewhat negligent of her needle, and consequently was (for no other fault) dismissed by her employer.

Soon after this Sarah Maria left Norwich for Providence (Rhode Island,) to visit the connexions of her father, who were respectable and wealthy, and among whom she met with a welcome reception, and no doubt with them might to the present moment have enjoyed a peaceful and permanent home.

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 SARAH M. CORNELL.

had not her extreme fondness for gaiety and dress, led her astray, and to the commission of an act, which we forbear to name—it may have been, nay, in the opinion of the writer, was her first fault. Believing that by her imprudence she had too much wounded the feelings of her friends, to obtain their forgiveness, she returned to Norwich, where through fear that her former friends and associates, might have been made acquainted with the unhappy circumstance mentioned, she for sometime remained secluded from their society at the house of a distant connexion of her mother—and while there, we believe that she seriously reflected on, and truly repented that she had been so unwise as to be guilty, in an unreflecting moment, of an act so calculated to destroy the good opinion which her most valuable and respected friend had entertained for her—and, in that repentance, we believe her to have been sincere—and, fortunate indeed would it have been for the poor misguided girl, had she continued from that period to have preferred a life of seclusion, to that of mingling with the giddy and thoughtless of this vain and delusive world!

A few weeks after the return of Sarah Maria, the town was visited by a revival of religion, and she professedly became a subject of the work—with a temperament naturally ardent, and a high flow of spirits, it is not surprizing that she should be wrought up to a high degree of feeling and excitement on all subjects in which she might take a deep and abiding

interest, particularly in the all absorbing subject of the salvation of the soul—but there is a line where religion and piety terminates and enthusiasm begins, and it is supposed that Maria overstepped this line and wandered away into the mazy and unexplored regions of religious fanaticism;—having lost sight of the simple precepts and spirit of the gospel, and committed herself to the guidance of a vivid and perverted imagination, it is not irrational to suppose, that the most extravagant notions and conduct would follow.

Soon after this she became a wanderer, and like one friendless and forlorn; but might be probably yet have been saved, and her chastity preserved, had she not at this important period of her life, unwisely preferred the society of those who could feel but an indifferent interest in her welfare, to that of those who would have gladly imparted that advice, which if attended to, would have led her to other paths than that productive of infamy and ruin. Maying through negligence obtained too imperfect a knowledge of either the Tailoress or Mantua-making business, to obtain employ thereat, Maria unwisely sought employment in a Cotton Factory, at which business her time was devoted. (with the exception of a few months) until the day of her death; and in which time she was thus employed in no less number than eleven different factories, situated in various parts of four of the New-England states—nearly two years were spent in the flourishing manufacturing

village of Lowell (Mass.)—and while thus employed, although many reports derogatory to her moral character were industriously circulated, yet, in several instances, so much was her good behaviour and amiable disposition approved of, by her employers, that at her departure, they did not hesitate to present her with such recommendations, as those of the most unexceptionable characters would have been proud to have received.

But, wandering from place to place, inexperienced and unprotected, however much disposed she might have been to reform, it is indeed surprising that she should so long have escaped the snares artfully laid for the innocent and unwary of her sex, by those class of unprincipled villains, who are continually on the look out for new victims. . . .

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