



# A Profile of Philanthropy: Elizabeth Rowell Thompson

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A Profile of Philanthropy: Elizabeth Rowell Thompson

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A Thesis in the Field of History  
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## Abstract

Elizabeth Rowell Thompson (1821-1899) is a forgotten philanthropist of the nineteenth century. Local to the Boston area, she had the great responsibility of acting as a conservator of significant wealth, a charge she took seriously. As a wealthy, independent woman, Thompson countered norms and supported numerous causes including nascent sciences, utopian communities, and was even granted freedom of the floor of the House. Drawing on interviews, newspaper articles, letters, art work, and scholarly literature, this research will examine the broad impact of Thompson's charity, which has been examined only in a piecemeal fashion, not comprehensively.

## Dedication

Dedicated to Keith and Bunny Beers.

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## Chapter I.

### Introduction

Elizabeth Rowell Thompson (1821-1899) is an overlooked philanthropist of the nineteenth century. The fiduciary of significant wealth, Thompson committed her adult life to supporting an array of causes. She once proclaimed giving away in excess of \$40,000 annually<sup>1</sup>; a small fortune in the late nineteenth century. To put this sum into perspective, \$40,000 in 1885 is the equivalent to approximately \$1,040,000 in 2018.<sup>2</sup> Thompson gave to myriad causes; one of her most famous contributions was the presentation of F.B. Carpenter's painting, "The Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by Lincoln" to the United States Congress. In gratitude, Congress granted Thompson the freedom of the floor of the House; at the time, it was a right provided to no other woman. Thompson gave generously to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, provided resources to research Yellow Fever, and supported the expansion of the western United States. Thompson's generosity enabled the establishment of Longmont, Colorado, Kinsley, Kansas, and Saline, Kansas; towns what still exist today, in part to Thompson's early support.<sup>3</sup>

Thompson was largely motivated by the contrast between her upbringing in rural Vermont and her married life in urban Massachusetts and New York. Her socializing

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<sup>1</sup> J. P. C. Winship, *Historical Brighton: An Illustrated History of Brighton and Its Citizens*, vol. 2, bk. 2, Historical Brighton (Boston: George A. Warren, 1902), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Inflation Calculator, Calculating Inflation in the U.S. < <http://www.in2013dollars.com/>>

<sup>3</sup> William P. Marchione and Linda Mishkin, eds., *Women of Vision: Brighton Allston Women's Heritage Trail Guide* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009), 4-5.

with likeminded, pioneering women and men across the Eastern seaboard and the resulting friendships influenced the direction of Thompson's philanthropy, some of which can still be observed today.

## Chapter II.

### Background

Elizabeth Rowell Thompson was born on February 21, 1821 in the town of Lyndon, Vermont. The seventh of twelve children, Elizabeth was the first daughter of her parents, Samuel and Mary (Atwood) Rowell. Growing-up, ERT was known affectionately as "Betsy" and was a bright, astute child. Born to a family with deep New England roots, ERT's father was a descendant of one of the incorporators of Salisbury, Massachusetts, and her mother was a native of Dorchester, Massachusetts.<sup>4</sup> By all accounts, the Rowell family farmed and was of minimal means; Elizabeth received formal schooling until the age of nine, when her parents removed her from the classroom and placed her in domestic service so she could contribute to the family's coffer. She

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<sup>4</sup> Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, P-Z (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 452.



earned twenty-five cents a day.<sup>5</sup> She was so employed until she met Thomas Thompson, the man who she would eventually wed in 1844<sup>6</sup>.

While stories of her childhood are scant, the broader Thompson family history is rich. Prior to farming, ERT's father, Samuel, worked as a tax collector. He enjoyed fox hunting and was a lover of animals; it was said that Samuel often cared more for his hound than his neighbor. In practice and in ideology, Samuel led a puritanical life. Nearly every day—even well after his ninetieth birthday—Samuel and his dog would walk either two miles to town or three miles on a local path. Samuel meticulously maintained his property, never allowing stray bushes to grow along the roadside, untoward stone heaps, or unkempt grass. Sundays were reserved for religious observance, marked by a fine suit, combed hair, and cordial socialization with fellow parishioners.<sup>7</sup>

Elizabeth's mother, Mary was orphaned as an infant, her father dying before she was born, and her mother unable to care for her. Mary was a handsome woman with a compassionate, patient, and sensitive disposition. Many of Elizabeth's significant childhood memories revolved around her mother. She held a fondness and sense of responsibility for Mary that she did not share for her father. Mary's only luxury in life

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<sup>5</sup> William P. Marchione and Linda Mishkin, eds., *Women of Vision: Brighton Allston Women's Heritage Trail Guide* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009), 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> J. P. C. Winship, *Historical Brighton: An Illustrated History of Brighton and Its Citizens*, vol. 2, bk. 2, Historical Brighton (Boston: George A. Warren, 1902), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Rowell, *Biographical sketch of Samuel Rowell and notices of some of his descendants: with a genealogy for seven generations, 1754-1898* (Boston: William E. Moore, 1898), 31-33.

was green tea. Elizabeth found great pleasure in knowing that her work outside the home would allow Mary to have this one indulgence.<sup>8</sup> Mary's start in life shaped not only her path forward, but also ERT's philanthropic destiny thereafter.

Elizabeth's parents demonstrated discipline, moral-aptitude, and grit. These traits were not singular to that generation of the family. Elizabeth's paternal grandmother was a folk hero named Hannah Dustin (also spelled Duston). Hannah was born in 1657 and lived in Haverhill, Massachusetts, where disputes among Native Americans, British colonists, and nearby French Canadians were rampant. This tension gave way to events of March 15, 1697 when a group of Native Americans—likely Abenaki—attacked residents of the town of Haverhill, including Hannah and her neighbor Mary Neff:

The Indians captured the women, along with some of their neighbors, and started on foot toward Canada. Duston had given birth about a week before. The captors are said to have killed her child early in the journey. The group traveled for about two weeks, and then left Duston and Neff with a Native American family—two men, three women, and seven children—and another English captive, a boy who had been abducted a year and a half earlier from Worcester, Massachusetts. 14-year-old Samuel Leonardson may have been adopted by the family; he certainly had their trust. At Duston's request, he asked one of the men the proper way to kill someone with a tomahawk, and was promptly shown how.

One night when the Indian family was sleeping, Duston, Neff, and Leonardson—who were not guarded or locked up—armed themselves with tomahawks and killed and scalped 10 of the Indians, including six children. They wounded an older woman, who escaped. A small boy managed to run away. Duston and her fellow captives then left in a canoe, taking themselves and the scalps down the Merrimack River to Massachusetts, where they presented them to the General Assembly of Massachusetts and received a reward of 50 pounds.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sheridan Paul Wait, "Elizabeth Thompson," *The New England Magazine*, Vol 6 No1 July 1887, 225.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Cutter, "The Gruesome Story of Hannah Dustin, Whose Slaying of Indians Made Her an American Folk 'Hero,'" *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 9, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/gruesome-story-hannah-duston-american->

Hannah quickly became a local hero and her story became legend. It was retold by celebrated individuals including Cotton Mather, John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau; memorialized in the painting “Hannah Duston Killing the Indians” (1847) by Junius Brutus Stearns; commemorated through several memorials in New England; and honored by the eponymous naming of a mountain in northern New Hampshire.<sup>10</sup>

Through a twenty-first century lens, the actions (particularly those against children) taken by Hannah and her fellow captors are likely viewed as unnecessarily violent, barbaric, and criminal. The seventeenth-century view on the matter, however, is quite different; during this time, women were often portrayed as gentle victims, and Native American populations were characterized as inhumane, animalistic, and as threats to the “new” American way of life. As such, the depiction of Hannah as a hero was fitting. Elizabeth likely viewed Hannah’s story as an example of the strength, unshakable will, and moral aptitude that trademarked her family.

Reports of Elizabeth and Thomas’ first meeting are scant and varied. The Thomas Thompson Trust (current and active fiduciary of Elizabeth and Thomas’ estate) reports that during the course of Thomas’ travels through Lyndon, Vermont, the pair met at a

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colonist-whose-slaying-indians-made-her-folk-hero-180968721/#jmCm5EMFDEoeEChC.99

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Cutter, “The Gruesome Story of Hannah Duston, Whose Slaying of Indians Made Her an American Folk ‘Hero.’”

boarding house where ERT was employed.<sup>11</sup> Edward T. James, editor of *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* provides an alternative report, stating that Elizabeth and Thomas met in December 1843 while Elizabeth was visiting Boston, where Thomas resided. Finally, an 1887 profile of ERT in *The New England Magazine* tells of the couple's first meeting as taking place in December 1843 at the Masonic Hall on Boston's Tremont Street, where both were attending a concert.<sup>12</sup> Given Elizabeth's limited means, and the Rowell family's dependency on her wages, it seems unlikely that ERT would have travelled to Boston. Much more likely is the Thompson Trust's report of the pair meeting in Lyndon, Vermont during the course of Thompson's travels.

Equally taken with each other, the pair wed less than a month after their initial meeting. Thompson's family and friends hosted a wedding celebration at the Tremont House, a hotel in Boston. The Tremont House first opened in 1829 and is, "(...)" considered to be the first modern hotel in the United States and (...) was a site of luxurious firsts: free soap, locked guest rooms, bellboys, a reception area, and perhaps most important of all, indoor plumbing."<sup>13</sup> The site of Thompson and Elizabeth's wedding is symbolic of the new world ERT was entering into. Never before had she been exposed to such opulence. ERT's social status and power were immediately raised to new

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<sup>11</sup> William B. Tyler, "History of the Trust: Profile of Founders." Thomas Thompson Trust. February 18, 2018. <http://thomasthompsontrust.org/history-and-background.html>

<sup>12</sup> Wait, "Elizabeth Thompson," 223.

<sup>13</sup> Madeline Bilis, "Throwback Thursday: When the First Modern Hotel in America Opened in Boston," *Boston Magazine*, October 15, 2015, <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2015/10/15/tremont-house/>

heights; any indulgence could have been met and any whim fulfilled. The trials of ERT's childhood, such as monotonous, physical labor, quickly became obsolete.

Elizabeth's rags-to-riches tale did not impact her in the way it would many. She did not forget her upbringing, nor did she shed her moral compass. In fact, this new wealth inspired ERT's philanthropic path. Shortly after her marriage, ERT was reflecting upon a portrait acquired by her husband that depicted a downtrodden family forcefully evicted into the street by a violent landlord. Experiencing compassion for those portrayed, ERT remarked, "Though the wealth of all the Rothschilds should be mine, never will I allow myself more than the bare necessities of life, so long as misery such as that stalks abroad!"<sup>14</sup> ERT rarely lost sight of this conviction, and it served as a mantra as she paved a diverse road of philanthropy that positively impacted the lives of individuals from coast to coast.

While Elizabeth did not ostracize herself from her new social circle, she placed little emphasis on frivolous high-societal affairs such as gossip and fashion trends. The *New England Magazine* noted, "As for wearing velvets, silks, and satins, a flannel gown forms, to her thinking, a far more sensible attire; and is much less suggestive of a life of prodigality and idleness."<sup>15</sup> In fact, ERT's disinterest in fashion became such a focus among her peers that a local newspaper asked, "We wonder how long Mrs. Thompson will continue to disregard public opinion."<sup>16</sup> Reportedly, Elizabeth responded to the

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<sup>14</sup> Wait, "Elizabeth Thompson," 224.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

editor of the paper: ““So long as I spend my own time and money instead of the public’s.””<sup>17</sup> ERT’s place in Boston society was somewhat irregular. While her philanthropic work did not truly erupt until after Thompson’s death, Elizabeth’s moral convictions and drive to influence social change were well established early in her marriage.

Relatively little is known about Thomas Thompson, a native of Boston, Massachusetts. The Thompsons were a well-established and successful merchant family that enjoyed great wealth. A seemingly eccentric man, Thomas attended Harvard College (AB 1817) with the intention to join the ministry; a path his family encouraged. About halfway through his studies, Thomas gave up that plan in favor of studying art. While at the College, Thomas participated in exhibitions and was fined on several occasions for infractions such as absence from public worship and failure to sign in upon return to campus.<sup>18</sup>

Following Commencement, Thomas returned home to live with his mother and sisters. He remained there until the age of forty-eight, when Thomas met Elizabeth, who was twenty three years Thomas’ junior.<sup>19</sup> While at home, it is likely that Thomas participated in the family business, although records are limited. It is clear that Thomas spent his leisure time as a patron of the arts, studying, purchasing, and selling works of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bertha Illsley Tolman, compiler. Index to University records, 1636-1870 and Sibley's private journal, 1846-1882. Thayer, F.-Townl. UAV 156.287 Drawer 62, Harvard University Archives. Thompson, Joseph Parrish (Hon. 1856) – Thoreau, Henry David (A.B. 1837).

<sup>19</sup> James, James, and Boyer, *Notable American Women*, 452.

art. Thomas' extensive and celebrated art collection was primarily housed in the Tremont Temple (formerly, Tremont Theatre). A multipurpose building, the Temple was a building located in downtown Boston and was home to local merchants, served as a place of worship on the weekends, and as a venue for concerts, meetings, and lectures during the week. There, space was also used by Thomas for storage of much of his art collection, including paintings and sculptures. It was here that an 1852 fire destroyed a majority of Thomas' collection. As told by William W. Clapp, Jr., editor of the *Boston Evening Gazette*:

[The Tremont Temple] was destroyed by fire the morning of Wednesday, March 31, 1852. At this conflagration, Mr. John Hall, a carpenter, lost his life, and George Estee, a fireman, was injured for life. The total loss of property was very large, as the building was occupied by artists, dentists, etc., whose actual loss could not be ascertained. Mr. Thomas Thompson, a gentleman of this city, had in the attic a large number of valuable paintings and statues, all of which were destroyed.<sup>20</sup>

The Tremont Temple fire of 1852 had a significant impact on the City of Boston and on Thomas himself; Thomas became determined to rebuild his lost collection and maintain his stature as a leading connoisseur of the arts. It is reported that Thomas spent in excess of \$500,000—a significant sum at the time—of his fortune on rebuilding his collection.<sup>21</sup> This renewed collection included a number of celebrated pieces, such as Jacob Fransz

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<sup>20</sup> William W. Clapp, Jr., *A Record of the Boston Stage* (Boston: James Munroe & Company, 1853), 386.

<sup>21</sup> Tyler, "History of the Trust."

van der Merck's, *Portrait of a Young Woman Holding a Basket of Fruit*, which is owned by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.<sup>22</sup>

During this time, Thomas traveled frequently between Boston, Vermont (for summer excursions), and to the Hudson River. Wary of technology, Thomas rejected the modern travel options available to him, including steamboat and railway. Thus, Thomas traveled primarily—and slowly—by horse and carriage. Thomas' unwillingness to embrace swifter and more comfortable means of travel reflect his often cantankerousness personality.<sup>23</sup>

This personality trait is further demonstrated by Thomas' considerable reaction to taxes levied upon him by the City of Boston. According to the William B. Tyler, senior trustee of the Thomas Thompson Trust, Thomas believed that the City unduly taxed his investments. Thomas was so enraged, he elected to move himself and his wife to New York City, where his wealth would be taxed at what he believed was a more reasonable rate. Further, despite his deep roots in and familiar ties to Boston, Thomas elected to reflect his anger toward City of Boston officials in his last will and testament; Thomas stipulated that trustees may not distribute any of his estate to the City.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas Thompson was a peculiar and likely shy man, who committed much of his wealth and time to curating his collection of fine art. There is little evidence that

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<sup>22</sup> "Portrait of a Young Woman Holding a Basket of Fruit." Museum of Fine Arts online. <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/portrait-of-a-young-woman-holding-a-basket-of-fruit-30859>

<sup>23</sup> Tyler, "History of the Trust."

<sup>24</sup> Tyler. "History of the Trust."



Thomas was philanthropic or acutely aware of the needs of those of lesser means. It was not until Thomas passed away and control of his estate was granted to his wife that his wealth influenced positive, charitable change.

Upon Thomas' death in 1869, ERT was left with an annual income in excess of \$50,000.<sup>25</sup> This significant sum provided healthy opportunity to effect meaningful change. ERT spent the next three decades sharing this wealth with individuals across the United States and throughout Europe. Despite her generous distribution of wealth, Thompson reportedly feared her work had little lasting impact: ““Oh! I believe my money has never done anybody any good; for twenty years I have sown it like chaff ... and it seems to have produced only misery.””<sup>26</sup> Thompson's reticence contrasts the tangible, broad, and lasting impact of her philanthropy.

Thomas and Elizabeth Rowell Thompson lived in Brighton, Massachusetts for a number of years, where they established themselves as prominent members of the community and devoted patrons of the arts.<sup>27</sup> Brighton—part of greater Boston—in the late nineteenth century was a city at the forefront of social reform and emphasized civic responsibility. Public administration and charity has been a vibrant thread in Boston's tapestry for years: as Elisabeth M. Herlihy, author of *Of Fifty Years of Boston* writes, “the Elizabethan Poor Law was passed in England in 1602, so that it was but natural that the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, in 1630, should have adopted the methods

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<sup>25</sup> James, James, and Boyer, *Notable American Women*, 453.

<sup>26</sup> Winship, *Historical Brighton*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Marchione and Mishkin, *Women of Vision*, 5.

with which they were familiar in matters of poor relief.”<sup>28</sup> The generosity of Thompson’s adopted home was abundant and standard setting. It is likely that her immersion in the city directly influenced her later widespread commitment to philanthropy. She may have in turn influenced her husband’s decision to amend his will with the stipulation that a trust fund be created, “for or towards the relief and support of poor seamstresses, needle-women and shop girls, who may be in temporary need from want of employment, sickness, or misfortune, in the towns of Brattleboro, Vermont and Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, New York, the amount being equally divided between the two towns.”<sup>29</sup> Thomas Thompson was not otherwise known for his philanthropy.

### Chapter III.

#### Comparisons

ERT largely remained in New York for the remainder of her life, conducting her philanthropy out of the home Thompson made for them prior to his death. Despite this, she preserved ties to Boston and New England, where many benefited from her support. Notwithstanding, the City of Boston’s recognition of her generosity is largely

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<sup>28</sup> Elisabeth M. Herlihy, ed., *Of Fifty Years of Boston: A Memorial Volume, Issued in Commemoration of the Tercentenary of 1930* (Boston: Tercentenary Committee. Subcommittee on Memorial History, 1932), 528.

<sup>29</sup> “Records of the Thompson Trust from the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, Northampton, Mass.” [http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss116\\_bioghist.html](http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss116_bioghist.html).

overlooked, while smaller efforts of other Boston-area female philanthropists living during the nineteenth century received public recognition.

Ellen M. Gifford, for example, was a resident of Brighton, Massachusetts and the beneficiary of a significant estate. Gifford committed the majority of her fortune to philanthropic causes in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. Notably, she served as the founder and primary benefactor of the Ellen M. Gifford Sheltering Home for Animals in Brighton. Gifford left the facility a generous endowment; today it operates as the Ellen M. Gifford Sheltering Home and functions as a cage-less, no-kill cat shelter.<sup>30</sup> According to Ann Gurka, a member of the Shelter's board of directors, the facility does not maintain information related to Gifford, despite the lasting impact of her generosity.<sup>31</sup> Nor are such materials kept at the Brighton Historical Society. This is indicative of the minimal attention paid to local female philanthropists of the time.

Additional comparison may be made to Alice E. Gallagher, namesake of Alice E. Gallagher Park. Gallagher lived in Brighton and was the first woman in Boston's history to be honored by having a park, street, or playground established in her name.<sup>32</sup> Gallagher was a woman with social capital and committed her time, rather than wealth, to the community. Unlike Thomas Thompson, Edward Gallagher, husband of Alice, was known throughout the City of Boston and an active participant in local politics. For many years, he served on the Boston City Council. While Edward Gallagher was on the

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<sup>30</sup> Marchione and Mishkin, *Women of Vision*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ann Gurka, e-mail to author, April 24, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Marchione and Mishkin, *Women of Vision*, 19.

Council, the land that is now Gallagher Park became property of the city. City officials intended to sell the land; Edward Gallagher successfully recommended that the land remain under the auspices of the city as a public recreational space. Soon thereafter, that land was formally converted into a public park and named for Edward's wife, Alice E. Gallagher. The plaque that welcomes guests to the park reads in part: "In memory of / ALICE E. GALLAGHER [sic] / Her faith and sympathy / Flowered in gracious acts / Of womanly kindness / Toward friend and neighbor / Toward young and old."<sup>33</sup> Alice's ties to the community are clear and undisputable, but they certainly do not surpass the contributions made by ERT.

#### Chapter IV.

##### Vassar

Elizabeth is credited with supporting a wide-range of causes, particularly those with missions in the sciences. In fact, no fewer than three sources note that she donated a telescope to Vassar College, along with the funds to build an observatory. The Brighton-Allston Historical Society notes that ERT provided the gift of an astronomical observatory to Vassar College.<sup>34</sup> J. P. C. Winship, author of *Historical Brighton: An Illustrated History of Brighton and its Citizens*, notes that Thompson, "contributed

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<sup>33</sup> Marchione and Mishkin, *Women of Vision*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Women's Historical Group of the Brighton Allston Historical Society. *Women's History Initiatives: Gender, Culture, People-Centered Development*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010.

largely to the purchase of the Vassar College telescope.” He goes on to state that ERT in fact acknowledged her gift of the telescope in an interview.<sup>35</sup> Further, accounts of ERT’s philanthropy and connection to Vassar College may be found in the necrology section of Volume I, “Report of the Commissioner of Education,” of the *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1902*. Here, a list of ERT’s gifts demonstrates that she “contributed to the purchase of a telescope for Vassar College.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, the story was repeated in 1917 by William Alexander Newman Dorland in, *The Sum of Feminine Achievement: A Critical and Analytical Study of Woman’s Contribution to the Intellectual Progress of the World*.<sup>37</sup>

The list of sources that identify ERT as integral to the purchase of the Vassar telescope and success of the astronomy program is varied and largely reliable. In contradiction to these sources, numerous representatives from Vassar, including Colton Johnson, dean emeritus and college historian, attest that Vassar College has no evidence of Thompson or records of philanthropy similar to hers.<sup>38</sup> Individuals from the school’s Departments of Special Collections, Archives, and Advancement Services found no record of ERT’s name or supposed donation.

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<sup>35</sup> Winship, *Historical Brighton*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> United States House of Representatives. *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior; Report of the Commissioner of Education*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903. 365.

<sup>37</sup> William Alexander Newman Dorland. *The Sum of Feminine Achievement: A Critical and Analytical Study of Woman’s Contribution to the Intellectual Progress of the World*. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010. 142-143.

<sup>38</sup> Colton Johnson. Personal interview. Cambridge, Massachusetts. June 1, 2017

This inconsistent reporting presents a problem; ERT's support of Vassar is a centerpiece of her philanthropy. It demonstrates ERT's commitment to the sciences—something that was not incredibly common at the time—as well as her sincere dedication to education. One must not assume that Vassar's records are incorrect or that ERT's philanthropy was ill-reported. The dichotomy may be due to atypical philanthropic practices. In other words, it is possible that ERT's commitment was received by Vassar College through uncommon channels.

In 1865, Maria Mitchell was named the first professor of astronomy at the newly-established Vassar College. A celebrated astronomer, Maria was born to William and Lydia Mitchell on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts in 1818. Maria was an enthusiastic student and discovered her interest in astronomy at an early age. Maria's father tutored her in the subject and by her early teenage years, Maria was conducting navigational computations for local sailors' whaling expeditions. Maria's reputation as a celebrated astronomer continued to grow. In 1847, Maria was "sweeping" (viewing) the sky through a telescope located on the roof of a local business when she noticed a small object that did not appear on any of her astronomical charts; Maria discovered a comet. The comet would later be named for Maria and earn her the attention of and a gold medal from the King of Denmark.<sup>39</sup>

Maria was not only a pioneer in the field of astronomy, she was committed to furthering the education of women in all fields and advancing myriad social causes. Maria was known to host regular gatherings at the Vassar Observatory dome, leading

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<sup>39</sup> Maria Mitchell Association. "About Maria Mitchell." Accessed May 2, 2018, <<https://www.mariamitchell.org/about/about-maria-mitchell>>

discussions that often focused on politics and women's issues. Intellectuals and influential member of society were known to attend these gatherings. In May 1875, Julia Ward Howe (composer of the Civil War anthem "The Battle Hymn of the Republic") attended and lectured fellow guests on "Is Polite Society Polite?"<sup>40</sup> Maria's social network and relationships in the academic world were broad and strong.

In addition to being a beloved professor, celebrated astronomer, and recognized social pioneer, Maria wore the hat of fundraiser. From time-to-time, she sought philanthropic support for the Vassar Observatory. According to Colton Johnson, Maria was known for sending "begging letters" to friends—including those who enjoyed the "dome parties"—as well as peers in the field, alumnae, and known supporters of the sciences.<sup>41</sup> In such letter written in 1886 to a friend based in San Francisco, Abby Hutchinson Patton. Maria expressed concern to her friend that funding was so limited, the Observatory might face closure. She asked Abby to use her extensive West Coast network to raise vital funds: "(...) please, talk & preach & beg! Go to every rich man in San Francisco & beg!"<sup>42</sup> Maria's commitment to her field of study, academic home, and to her students was unwavering and strong. Her drive to keep the Vassar Observatory open knew no boundaries.

Maria's ties to astronomy extended far beyond the Vassar campus. In fact, she established close connections with the Harvard College Observatory at a young age.

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<sup>40</sup> Vassar Encyclopedia Project. "Maria Mitchell." Accessed March 23, 2018, <<http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/original-faculty/maria-mitchell1.html>>

<sup>41</sup> Colton Johnson. Personal interview. Cambridge, Massachusetts. June 1, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Vassar Encyclopedia Project. "Maria Mitchell."

Maria's father, William Mitchell, was a trustee of the facility. The primary provider of Maria's education, is it very likely that Maria made regular trips with her father to Cambridge from their home on Nantucket. Familial ties to Harvard continued beyond Maria's life; Edward Pickering, Director of the Harvard College Observatory served as an advisor to the Mitchell family in the early the 1900s, during the establishment and early years of the Maria Mitchell Observatory.<sup>43</sup>

It is likely that Maria and ERT were connected, be it through social circles or the Harvard College Observatory. ERT corresponded with Maria. The note has been transcribed as follows:

Dear Miss Mitchell,  
 Your little note has just reached me.  
 So soon as I return to the States. I will let you know as you can write me here and if I have returned to N.Y., my mail will be forwarded to me.  
 With best wishes and pleasant memories,  
 I am very sincerely yours,  
 E. Thompson<sup>44</sup>

While Maria's letter, which prompted the above note is absent from records, one might conject that this was not the first communication between the two. Despite ERT's formal salutation ("Miss Mitchell"), which was not uncommon at the time, the tone of the note is warm; possibly friendly. Maria's communication to ERT was brief, which suggests that this was not the first correspondence the pair shared. If it had been, Maria's note would likely have been anything but "little"—requiring socially-guided pleasantries and an introduction. Further, ERT's message suggests that this is an ongoing communication; by

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<sup>43</sup> Dorrit Hoffleit. "The Maria Mitchell Observatory—For Astronomical Research and public Enlightenment," *Journal of the American Association of Variable Star Observers*, vol 30 (2001): 62.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Rowell Thompson, letter to Maria Mitchell, date unknown.



alerting Maria to the fact that she is back in the United States, and the status of her forwarded mail, ERT is suggesting that she anticipates additional communication from Maria.

Given Maria and ERT's shared interests, joint personal connections, and established communication, it is quite likely that ERT was the recipient of one of Maria's begging letters. Even more compelling is Maria's deep commitment to securing funding for the Vassar Observatory and ERT's known wealth and devotion to practicing philanthropy. There is a high probability that ERT would have reacted positively to Maria's solicitation for funding. Even more possible is that ERT gave funding to Maria personally. Today's standards and best practices of philanthropy were not as well-established in the mid-late nineteenth century. It would not have been unusual for a benefactor to directly fund an individual. That is to say, it is possible that rather than making a gift directly to Vassar, ERT saw fit to write a check or direct funds to Maria Mitchell, for her to apply to the Vassar Observatory as she saw suitable. If this had been the case, Vassar's lack of information on ERT and/or her philanthropy would be most appropriate.

The numerous and largely reliable accounts of ERT's support of the Vassar Observatory and the school's complete lack of records can be reconciled by the theory that ERT directed funding to Maria, not Vassar. It is probable that Maria shared the potential and real impact of ERT's generosity, which resulted in stories of ERT supporting the endowment for the Vassar Observatory and its first telescope.

## Chapter V.

### Elizabeth Thompson Science Fund

One of the earliest records of Elizabeth's commitment to the sciences occurred in 1873 when she made a gift of \$1,000 to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.<sup>45</sup> This tremendous generosity was formally recognized a year later; according to August 1874 notes from the executive proceedings of the twenty-third meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the standing committee successfully recommended that ERT be acknowledged as the first patron of the Association.<sup>46</sup> Norma Rosado-Blake, archivist and records manager of the Association confirms that ERT is recognized for her contribution, and received honorary membership.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, this historic honor is not broadly acknowledged on the Association's website or in their public files.

Ten years later, together with its British counterpart, the AAAS proposed to ERT a new global organization, to be known as the International Scientific Association (ISA). Intrigued by the promise of international collaboration and cross-cultural research, Elizabeth offered \$25,000 in seed research funding to one of ISA's founding to ISA. Unfortunately, ISA failed to materialize. In response to this disappointment, Charles S.

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<sup>45</sup> Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, P-Z (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 452.

<sup>46</sup> American Association for the Advancement of Science. "Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; Twenty-Third Meeting Held at Hartford, Conn." Salem: Permanent Secretary, 1875. 154.

<sup>47</sup> Norma Rosado-Blake, email message to author, August 8, 2018.

Minot, an architect of the ISA, physician in the Boston area, and a professor at Harvard Medical School proposed a new plan to ERT: the creation of the Elizabeth Thompson Science Fund (ETSF).<sup>48</sup>

The mission of the ETSF was focused on the, “advancement and prosecution of scientific research in its broadest sense.”<sup>49</sup> The Fund was available to scientists from across the globe, and representatives of all specialties, in particular to those whose work would not otherwise be supported. Trustees of the ETSF—including Charles Minot and Edward Pickering—reviewed applications annually with an eye toward projects that would benefit humankind, not just research of local importance. Examples of grants committed by the ETSF from 1900-1902 include:

\$200, to Dr. H.H. Field, Zürich, Switzerland, to aid in the publication of a card catalogue of biological literature.

\$300, to Professor P. Bachmetjew, Sofia, Bulgaria, for researches on the temperature of insects.

\$250, to Professor Jacques Loeb, Chicago, Ill., for experiments on artificial parthenogenesis.

\$300, to Professor W. Valentiner, Heidelberg, Germany, for observations on variable stars.

\$50, to A.M. Reese, Esq., Baltimore, Md. For investigation of the embryology of the alligator.

\$125, to F.T. Lewis, M.D., Cambridge, Mass., for investigation of the development of the vena cava inferior.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, P-Z (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 453.

<sup>49</sup> American Association for the Advancement of Science. “Elizabeth Thompson Science Fund,” *Science* Vol. 15, No. 372 (February 14, 1902): 276.

<sup>50</sup> American Association for the Advancement of Science. “Elizabeth Thompson Science Fund” 276.

This sampling of support provided over a two-year period demonstrates the breadth and depth of the ETSF's reach and philanthropy. Biologists, entomologists, and astronomers from mid-west and eastern United States to Europe received generous support.

The Harvard College Observatory was also a frequent beneficiary of the ETSF's charity. During his tenure as director of the Observatory, Edward Pickering successfully petitioned the Fund (of which he was a trustee). Frequently, in efforts to drum up additional support for the Observatory, Pickering would use the ETSF as an example of the terrific work that could be accomplished with the philanthropic support of public benefactors.

Pickering noted the importance of the ETSF in 1906 and 1914 issues of *Popular Astronomy*. In reference to the ETSF in the 1906 piece, Edwards notes:

Unfortunately, astronomical research has now become so expensive that large sums are required to carry it a step beyond what has already been accomplished. A word must therefore be said to men and women of wealth who desire to aid this science by gift. Many persons have learned how to accumulate great fortunes, but few have succeeded in giving away wisely large sums of money for scientific work of the highest grade...the Elizabeth Thompson Fund [is] thus well and wisely administered.<sup>51</sup>

Simultaneously praising her generosity and leveraging it for additional funding was a keen strategy employed by Pickering. It also speaks to magnitude of the Fund's impact. In a relatively short period of time, the Fund rose to international recognition.

Pickering was not the only ETSF trustee to publicly celebrate Elizabeth's philanthropy and vision. In an August 1885 issue of *Science*, Charles Minot outlined the

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<sup>51</sup> Edward C. Pickering. "The Aims of an Astronomer," *Popular Astronomy* Vol 14 (1906): 586.

establishment of the Fund, its mission, and guidelines. He also heralded ERT as a singular benefactor:

I wish to express my admiration for the wisdom shown by Mrs. Thompson. It is certainly very remarkable that a person not especially versed in science, not directly interested in any of its branches of investigation, should be induced by a desire to benefit her fellows, not to give for some temporary need, but, with exceptional insight, to give for the development of the very sources of progress. The same sound judgement governed her decision as to the conditions of her gift, for it is difficult to foresee any probability which will render this endowment futile. Very often the object of a public gift is determined by the donor's personal interests. I believe Mrs. Thompson was governed by her convictions as to the application of her money which would do most good. She is a devout person, and trusts in the peaceful union of true religion and true science.<sup>52</sup>

Elizabeth's seemingly unselfish motivation to give is a topic touched upon by a number of beneficiaries and observers of her life; as is the interplay of science and religion in her life. As demonstrated by Edward Pickering and Charles Minot, recipients of her support were often taken by her; they were proud to be a focus of her attention. While not unheard of, it was (and to an extent, still is) atypical for a philanthropist to support causes relatively unfamiliar to him or her, or causes that do not further a personal mission or address personal circumstances (e.g. a parent of a cancer patient giving to the American Cancer Society). This particular pattern—or method—of giving is one of the characteristics that makes ERT such an interesting and remarkable philanthropist.

As noted by Charles Minot, Elizabeth was characterized as a woman who successfully and peacefully blended religion and science. The marriage of these two distinct and powerful fields is something humanity has publicly and private struggled with for centuries. In 1885, a reporter for the *New York Daily Tribune* interviewed her

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<sup>52</sup> Charles Sedgwick Minot. "A New Endowment for Research," *Science* Vol. 6, No. 133 (August 21, 1885):145.

about a number of topics, including her relationship with organized religion. The interview was published in the August 25, 1885 edition of the paper. When the reporter asked ERT if she was connected to any particular religious organization, she aptly replied:

‘What is religion? I believe,’ she said, ‘in the true spirit of religion, of all religions, for I find good in all. I am not a church member, because I could never give my assent to any creed. Mr. Lincoln once said that when any church would write over its entrance the words, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.’ As its sole article of admission, that church he would join with all his heart. I can say the same. The truths of the Bible appeal to me, but not more than the wonderful revelations in Nature, written by God’s own hand. To me there can be no conflict between true religion and pure science. How can any one help seeing that they are the two sides of the same shield? Every new discovery in science, every invention in mechanics, awakens in me always the deepest interest.’<sup>53</sup>

ERT’s evolved view on the reconciliation of religion and science provides valuable insight into her personal philanthropic strategies and mission. Elizabeth appeared by all accounts to be confident in her belief that these two worlds are not mutually exclusive. Sciences explored with the support of ERT’s generosity were done so in the world of God’s creation; without him, the potential for such miraculous discoveries would not be possible. Perhaps it is this intermingling of faith in God and in science that provided her the desire to direct much of her philanthropy to an area otherwise unfamiliar to her.

ERT’s commitment to supporting the sciences is also interesting when viewed through the lens of her personal history. Given her husband’s staunch disdain for modern amenities and technology, it is surprising that Elizabeth elected to direct her charity in such a way. As described in Chapter Two, ERT and Thomas spent their married days

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<sup>53</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*. “A Talk with Elizabeth Thompson,” *New York Daily Tribune*, August 25 1885, 2.

traveling by horse and carriage—not by train like many of their peers. It is possible that the time Elizabeth spent absent from technology spurred her future attention to the sciences and enabling forward-thinking research.

## Chapter VI.

### Support of the Rowell Family

One of Elizabeth's few weaknesses was her relationship with her family. Several sources, including personal interviews, family history, and the *New England Magazine* note that ERT served as financial resource and personal bank to many of her acquaintances and relatives:

She was by nature so tender hearted that she could not resist an affecting entreaty, and her first impulse was to help all who appealed to her. Her intentions were always good, but her judgement was often bad. Her gifts to public institutions have been numerous and much money has been bestowed upon private individuals, much of which she afterwards had reason to believe had done more harm than good.<sup>54</sup>

ERT was aware of this weakness in her character, in fact, it was a significant source of self-doubt and shame throughout her entire adult life. A biographical sketch of Elizabeth identifies her brothers, sister, nieces, and nephews to be among the many beneficiaries of her wealth and social clout. They "...found their positions in life made much more attractive than they might have been without the generous aid she constantly extended, with the consent and approval of her always indulgent husband."<sup>55</sup> It is worth acknowledging that the support provided to the Rowell family began long before Thompson's death. Elizabeth opened the purse strings to her family quite early into her marriage to Thompson, and continued to do so up until her death.

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<sup>54</sup> Rowell, Roland. *Biographical sketch of Samuel Rowell and notices of some of his descendants: with a genealogy for seven generations, 1754-1898*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> Rowell, Roland. *Biographical sketch of Samuel Rowell and notices of some of his descendants: with a genealogy for seven generations, 1754-1898*, 52.



Samuel Rowell, ERT's brother, was one such relative who benefitted from the generosity of the Thompsons. Like ERT, Rowell had little exposure to formal education. He was married to a woman named Caroline Eveline Page, with whom Rowell had four children. The family lived in Concord, Vermont, where Rowell worked as a farmer for several years. Eventually, Rowell moved to Manchester, New Hampshire, where two of his brothers resided. There, Rowell found employment in a cotton factory. Unfortunately, due to health problems, Rowell's time in Manchester was cut short, and he was forced to find alternative employment opportunities. He traveled to Boston, where ERT and Thompson lived at the time. After a failed stint running a grocery store, Rowell turned to his sister and brother-in-law for aid. The pair agreed to provide Samuel the funds necessary to purchase farmland in Lancaster, New Hampshire. Having achieved success on the farm, and ready for a reprieve from the tiresome work, Rowell sold the land and returned to Massachusetts.<sup>56</sup> Rowell's success farming and the wealth he realized upon sale of the land would not have occurred without the significant support provided by ERT and Thompson.

Mary Ann Rowell was ERT's younger sister. Born in 1825, Mary Ann married Pliny B. Moore; the couple resided in Boston for much of their married life. Moore worked as a clerk in the Boston custom house until such a time that he enlisted in the Eighteenth Massachusetts regiment in service to the Union during the Civil War. Moore died while held in the Andersonville prison as a captive of the Confederacy. Following her husband's death, Mary Ann moved to New York City to live with her sister, ERT. Benefitting from ERT's generosity and hospitality, Mary Ann was able purchase a farm in Nuda, New York.

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<sup>56</sup> Rowell, Roland. *Biographical sketch of Samuel Rowell and notices of some of his descendants: with a genealogy for seven generations, 1754-1898*, 46.

Mary Ann and ERT's paths crossed once again many years later, when Mary Ann moved to Stamford, Connecticut, where ERT was residing, and recovering from a stroke. There, Mary Ann repaid her sister's generosity by providing care critical to ERT's recovery.<sup>57</sup>

George Washington Rowell was ERT's older brother. George lived an interesting life, compared to many of his siblings, and benefitted from ERT's altruism uniquely. As a teenager, George got into a rousing fight with his father that resulted in George running away to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he joined the crew of a whaling ship. He spent approximately six years on board and travelled the world, sailing as far as the eastern coasts of South America and Africa. George worked in various jobs throughout New England upon the conclusion of his tenure on ship. Eventually, he returned to New York shortly before the Civil War broke out; George was one of the first in his community to enlist. He participated in several critical battles, including Bull Run and Antietam. During the latter, George was severely injured and sent home to recover. Following the war, George briefly moved to Wisconsin and then to Kansas. There, George lived in the Boston Colony, a communal colony established through the generosity of ERT. Despite the challenges of living on the frontier and participating in a newly formed, experimental community, George remained committed to life in Kansas.<sup>58</sup> It is highly unlikely George's path would have brought him to Kansas were it not for his sister's aspirational support of co-operative communities.

Persis Anne Rowell was the daughter of ERT's brother, Samuel. Not only did Persis benefit from the generosity bestowed upon her father by ERT, but Persis also had the good

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 50-51

fortune of receiving direct support later in life when she joined her aunt on a trip to Europe in 1872. Shortly thereafter, ERT hosted Persis' wedding celebration to Frederick R. Marvin in her New York City home. Persis proudly continued the Rowel family legacy as a pioneering woman. Persis and her husband moved to Middletown, New York, where she was elected to the school board. Persis was the first woman to be voted into that office in the entire state of New York.<sup>59</sup>

Alice Mabel Rowell was the daughter of ERT's brother, Frederick. Alice received a formal education in Whitefield, New Hampshire and in Stamford, Connecticut. Following her academic pursuits, Alice enrolled in vocal and music lessons, likely at the generosity of her aunt. At twenty years of age, Alice became a companion to ERT; in this role, Alice accompanied ERT on journeys and provided companionship. Alice received compensation and was employed by ERT until her death in 1889.<sup>60</sup>

ERT's compassion for her family extended beyond monetary support; she also committed a great deal of personal time to improving the wellbeing of her kin. One event in particular well illustrates this point:

At one time, with trunks packed for a journey to the White Mountains for much needed rest, she received a telegram notifying her that a relative was stricken down by that dreaded disease, smallpox. Without a moment's hesitation, although herself far from well, she took the earliest train to his bedside. With untiring zeal, she watched over him and nursed him back to health, although several times given up by the attending physicians. It is safe to say that if it has not been for her care and attentions that result would have been different, and a valuable life lost. She even went so far as to blow into his mouth and nostrils, causing respiration to be again resumed when apparently the sufferer had breathed his last. The patient's ultimate recovery was also largely due to a certain magnetic influence she possesses that

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 101

quiets and eases those brought under her influence, as many a poor sufferer can testify.<sup>61</sup>

ERT's generous and sympathetic nature served strangers and family alike. The above are a small sampling of the altruism ERT and Thompson extended to several generations of the Rowell family.

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<sup>61</sup> Wait, "Elizabeth Thompson," 237.

## Chapter VII.

### Temperance

Elizabeth's philanthropy took several forms; not only was she financially generous, but she dedicated a great deal of personal time and energy to furthering causes she held close. The temperance movement is one such example. Temperance was a social movement that first swept the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Born largely out of the Protestant community, the movement first supported alcohol consumption in moderation, and later touted complete absence. Action was taken on local, state, and federal levels to eradicate drink socially and legally.<sup>62</sup> Supporters of the movement were generally motivated by the impact alcohol was having on local economies and families: the average American over the age of fifteen years old in the 1830s was consuming approximately seven gallons of pure alcohol per year. This is nearly three times the amount consumed by Americans today.<sup>63</sup> The effect of such consumption was significant; employers were unable to hire and retain sober, reliable staff, while wives and children—who had very few legal rights—remained dependent on their husbands and fathers for economic support and security.

The temperance movement progressed throughout the nineteenth century. While its roots in religion were never lost, the movement was largely propelled forward by

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<sup>62</sup> Ken Burns and Lynn Novik, "Roots of Prohibition," 2001, <<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/roots-of-prohibition/>>

<sup>63</sup>Alice W. Campbell, "Temperance Movement," Social Welfare History Project, Virginia Commonwealth University, October 2017 <<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/religious/the-temperance-movement/>>

mobilized women. Increasingly discontent with their lack of power, and unfortunate circumstances driven by effects of alcohol, women coast-to-coast unified to form the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The Union organized rallies and protests; promoted local laws; drafted educational campaigns; and gained support from female political leaders including Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.<sup>64</sup> Members of the WCTU, "...viewed alcohol as the underlying source of a long list of social ills and found common cause with Progressives trying to ameliorate the living conditions of immigrants crowded into squalid slums, protect the rights of young children working in mills and factories, improve public education, and secure women's rights."<sup>65</sup> The WCTU served as the base upon which a number of additional pro-temperance groups were built. In 1869, for example, the Prohibition Party formed and became the first party to accept women as members. In 1898, the Anti-Saloon League (ASL) formed as a men's group aimed at applying political pressure in order to achieve their goal of passing prohibition. Eventually, most Americans, be it due to personal circumstances, industrialization, or religion, joined the voices of the WCTU, Prohibition Party, and ASL, and called for prohibition. The Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the production, transportation, and sale of alcohol, was passed by Congress in 1917, subsequently ratified in 1919, and implemented in 1920.

Committed to lifelong scholarship and academic advancement, Elizabeth often immersed herself intellectually into the efforts she supported. ERT spent 1880-1881 corresponding with Loring Moody of Boston, Massachusetts on the matter of

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<sup>64</sup> Burns, "Roots of Prohibition."

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

temperance. Moody was a proponent of the theory of eugenics, another movement that gained momentum in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Early eugenics researchers alleged that heredity was the principal cause of delinquent behavior. They argued that the cost of criminality was so high on society that formal restrictions should be put in place to control the growth of “troubled” populations. In 1880, Moody established the Institute of Heredity in Boston. Focused on furthering the principles of eugenics, the Institute sought to educate and promote research on alleviating social ills (such as alcoholism) through restricted breeding. Moody issued a publication to announce the formation of the Institute, which was brought to the keen attention of Elizabeth. Firmly believing in a link between genetics and the abuse of alcohol, ERT was drawn to Moody’s scholarship, and wrote to him to exchange ideas. The two became regular correspondents; Moody collected and published their letters in the 1892 book, *Heredity. Its Relations to Human Development*.<sup>66</sup>

Through her letters with Moody, Elizabeth explores the laws of heredity, including associated abuse of alcohol, and its effects on society. ERT’s initial letter to Moody praises his ingenuity, identifies her frustration regarding the seemingly minimal impact of her philanthropy, and her desperation to minimize common maladies on society:

New York, September, 1880.

Dear Mr. Moody:—

I have read with great interest and satisfaction your circular containing a proposal to establish an Institute of Heredity for the purpose of inquiring into the

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<sup>66</sup>“Galton’s Children; Loring Moody,” Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Accessed September 18, 2018, <<https://collections.countway.harvard.edu/onview/exhibits/show/galtonchildren/galton-s-children/loring-moody>>

causes of this continued transmission of human disorders, vices and crimes from parent to child, generation after generation, in never-ending circles, with a view to applying our remedies to the roots of the tree of evil instead of wasting our strength in useless endeavors to destroy it by picking off its leaves. I have given much time, labor and money in aid of numerous schemes to palliate the evils of society, while leaving the causes of these evils to continue their destructive work (...) If I understand you rightly, you propose to carry (...) [an] investigation into the causes of all the moral, mental and physical disorders of society, for their removal. Will you please give me your opinions more fully as to the causes of these manifold disorders, and the conditions under which they are developed and transmitted from parent to child?

Deeply sympathizing with every movement that will ensure the permanent welfare of our race,

I am sincerely yours,

ELIZABETH THOMPSON.<sup>67</sup>

ERT does not attempt to mask her building frustration with what she perceives as unsuccessful philanthropic ambitions. Early in the letter, Elizabeth acknowledges that she believes she has wasted her considerable resources on bandaging social problems, while leaving root causes unsolved and festering. ERT's motivation for corresponding with Moody appears to be unblemished and inspired by a deep desire to implement positive change.

Treating the symptoms while ignoring the disease is a theme that continues throughout Elizabeth's correspondence with Moody. In November 1880, ERT wrote to Moody from her home in New York:

We have acted as if we could make an evil tree good by picking up its diseased, decaying fruit, and wrapping it up warmly in the mantle of our sweet charities. What a folly and waste! I am tired of applying the plaster of ready money to every effect, while the deep and malignant cause if left to fester, corrode and devour our substance year after year, while neither we nor those try to benefit are any better off. How short-sighted, and lazy, and even willfully blind, we all are. We give millions to cover up the effects, when a few thousands, judiciously used, might remove the cause, thereby giving us a healthful and self-sustaining population.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Loring Moody, *Heredity. Its Relations to Human Development* (Boston: Cochrane & Sampson, 1882), 21-23.

<sup>68</sup> Moody, *Heredity. Its Relations to Human Development*, 32-33.



Her commitment to promoting long-term societal health is clear; while many philanthropists of equal means and stature focus largely on the immediate impact of their generosity, ERT remains committed to broad changes that have the potential to influence generations to come. It is worth asking: what drove ERT's motivations? Likely, the ongoing support she provided her family played a role. Through two generations of Rowells, Elizabeth provided social and financial support to her siblings as well as their spouses and children. Undoubtedly, this ongoing familial generosity proved to be a source of frustration; she constantly struggled with the dichotomy of being unable to turn her back on those in need, while wishing they would evolve into self-sustaining individuals.

This confliction is one of the factors that led ERT to the idea of temperance. She witnessed the hamster wheel alcoholics ran on. Seemingly, regardless of how many individuals ERT helped, another was to be found just around the corner. For a solution to the problem, ERT looked to Moody:

What good have I and others done by all of the labors and gifts? If we reform a few drunkards, or offer temporary relief to their families, others come right up and take their places, with appeals quite as strong; and so it goes (...) Now, here stands this overshadowing drunken evil of our land; and how to deal with it is the perplexing question of the hour. But I feel sure that we have not yet gone to the root of this evil. Nor do we fully know how great the evil is. We know but little in regard to the physical, moral or mental effects of intemperance upon offspring. Everybody—the whole people—need them. If you have studied the subject attentively, you may be able to give such facts and reasonings on the subject as will be of great value, by aiding us to direct our welfare against this terrible destroyer more wisely hereafter. So, please tell what you know about this matter.

Yours, etc.,

E. THOMPSON<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

Elizabeth continues to seek validation in the gifts she has made thus far. She further seeks reassurance from Moody that her suspicions are correct; the effects of alcohol use spans beyond the direct consumer and significantly influence his (or her) family, friends, and employers. While ERT suspects that a dependency on such substances is driven by heredity, she looks to Moody to confirm this theory. It appears that Elizabeth's goal of this request is threefold: 1) endorsement of the greatness of her charity 2) validation that the movement for temperance is just 3) confirmation that heredity is a significant factor in the role intemperance plays on society.

As the pair's correspondence continues, Moody address each of ERT's three concerns. He graciously bows to her self-deprecation and reassuringly promises that every good done by her—regardless of its size or immediate impact—has a longer lasting outcome, for one cannot predict the ripple effect even the smallest act of good will has on a community. Moody assures Elizabeth that she is one of the few souls born into the world with a destiny meant for higher, charitable purposes; her mission is to selflessly better the future of mankind.

Moody addresses ERT's latter two concerns through case studies of the effects of alcohol consumption on generations of families. Moody calls on his personal observations in the Boston area, as well as reports from trusted colleagues:

Drunkenness is in the grain; and while we preach temperance we keep on breeding drunkards, with their brood of idiocy, lunacy, theft, assaults, murders and other evils; and I cite causes (...) some of them from a collection of facts by Magnus Huss and Dr. Morel (...)

'A man of excellent family was early addicted to drink, and died of chronic alcoholism, leaving seven children. The first two of them died of convulsions at an early age. The third became insane at twenty-two, and died an idiot. The fourth, after various attempts at suicide, fell into the lowest grade of idiocy. The fifth, of passionate and misanthropic temper, broke off all relations with his family. The sixth, a daughter, suffers from nervous disorders, which

chiefly take the form of hysteria, with intermittent attacks of insanity. The seventh, is a very intelligent man, but freely gives expression to the gloomiest forebodings as to his intellectual future.’ And well he may, in view of the fate of all the other members of his family.

How long the civilized world has slept over the question whether any man has the right to bring children into existence burdened in advance with these terrible hereditary maladies. In the last case, we see how the gratification of one drunken man’s passion foredoomed seven human souls to the perdition of death, idiocy, lunacy, neurosis, and all their direful horrors. And here, as will be more fully shown, is where the foundations of prison, the gallows, the idiotic and lunatic asylums, are laid; also, the tap-roots of our charitable and benevolent associations. Is it not time to speak out on this subject of generating disease and death? Or shall we remain dumb, and suffer the pestilence to riot on in darkness?<sup>70</sup>

Nearly all of Moody’s letters to Elizabeth contain such examples of families—generation upon generation—deeply impacted by alcohol. As in the above, he propagates the dangers of drinking, the importance of temperance, and the link between substance abuse and heredity. Moody postulates that the only end to the dangerous cycle of inherited alcoholism is to prohibit those inflicted from procreating. Through Moody’s lens, for far too long, responsible members of the human race have overlooked the depth and breadth of this problem; for too long they have treated and aided only a small fraction of those effected. The causes of lunacy and other “direful horrors” have been discounted by society, politicians, and the medical profession as a whole.

Lest there be any confusion, Moody further notes that drunkenness need not be a habitual problem for it to have a negative impact on a family. Moody shares with Elizabeth several cases in which an isolated incident of drinking results in lasting and severe consequences. Moody tells a tale of a soldier who was home on leave of absence, and celebrated his brief reprieve from service. The man met a local woman with whom he

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 40-43.

danced, sang, and drank: ““When heated with the dance, and their nervous systems were inflamed and unbalanced with the toddy, they left the cottage, and were afterwards found together in a glen in a state of utter insensibility. The result of this interview was the birth of a low-grade idiot.””<sup>71</sup> Moody notes that both parents were intelligent and not prone to over-indulgence. He suggests no other reason for the child to be born with learning differences other than her parents’ drinking on the night of conception.<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting that at no point in his exchanges with ERT does Moody consider possible alternative factors, such as genetics or the mother’s behavior or environment throughout the pregnancy. Moody—and as evidenced through later letters—ERT never entertain the myriad influences that lead to one’s medical, psychological, and emotional composition. Perhaps this was a symptom of the time; perhaps it was the result of the pair’s commitment to proving the importance of temperance and legitimacy of restrictive breeding on alleviating societal problems.

Communication between ERT and Moody continued through the fall of 1881. In October of that year, she wrote to Moody about the responsibility of parents over their children’s moral aptitude:

(...) parents are responsible for the physical, mental and moral characters of their children.

‘I cannot help it; it was not my fault; how am I to blame?’ is the weak apology and flimsy excuse of the miserably disordered parentage of this nineteenth century, which thus charges off upon Providence the evil which we bring upon ourselves and our children. If men were half as careful of the perfection of the germs which are to unfold into living souls as they are of the seed of their corn and potatoes, we should soon see brighter eyes and clearer complexions, as well as finer intellects and a stronger moral sense in our children.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

If women would lavish upon their unborn children the amount of care which they bestow upon their poodles and their toilets, they would find their reward in consequences which are eternal. Truly is a bad child a living reproach to its parents. What can be more shocking to the feelings or the understanding of the parent or philanthropist than these poor stupid, deformed, wretched children who fill our asylums and our highways? More knowledge of physiological law, and a more determined self-control, would enable us to avoid bringing mental and physical monstrosities into the world, and give it instead a population sound in health of body and mind.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout the course of her correspondence with Moody, Elizabeth asserts the importance of societal morals and educating the community on the behaviors expected of them. As the above excerpt demonstrates, ERT believes that a child's moral compass is established through the parents, and the factors that lift or degrade society are man-made.

Elizabeth alludes to her social peers in this particular note. Rarely does she or Moody explicitly reference social class. It is often suggested that the cases they discuss are focused on the lower class, but the distinction is only hinted at. Here, she makes reference to women's poodles and toilets; both topics that would have been reserved for the upper class during the late-nineteenth century. Just as ERT chided her local newspaper for writing about her fashion choices (or lack thereof), here she seems to judge her peers on the frivolity of where they focus their attention. It is clear that Elizabeth believes some women, including those of wealth, care more about superficial, material matters than those of any moral consequence. Similarly, ERT observes that many men dedicate more time to nurturing and cultivating the success of their crops than they do their children. While these judgements may appear excessively critical, they are likely the result of her personal experience of living with one foot in the world of the privileged elite and the other in the daily struggles of those in need.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

In addition to Elizabeth's observation of parents' interest in a child's moral growth and related long-term effects on society, ERT parallels a parent's emotional connection to their child with that of a philanthropist. She suggests that both a parent and philanthropist feel equally shocked by the multitude of children committed to asylums or otherwise negatively impacted by the poor health and ill-fated decisions of their parents. This provides further insight into ERT's deep-rooted dedication to the causes she supports and the emotional investment she commits to those in need. Indeed, Elizabeth's heart was open to anyone in need, especially children. Without children of her own, she invested a great deal into those seeking aid. Comparing her ties to children to those of a parent exemplify Moody's observation that ERT was destined for a singular life of charity, compassion, and moral superiority.

Approximately a year following her correspondence with Moody, ERT authored a book called, *The Figures of Hell or the Temples of Bacchus*. Dedicated to "the licensers and manufacturers of beer and whiskey," the piece is a scathing attack on the alcohol industry, those who support it, those who benefit from it, and those who indulge. It is an impassioned appeal to readers for prohibition and a dire warning to anyone who is blind to the dangers of the drink. Chapters are largely comprised of statistical reports and analysis ranging from the influence of alcohol on the vitality of men and crime rates to its impact on education budgets and poor efficacy in as a treatment for ailments such as fevers. Nearly every page includes footnotes that appear to be Elizabeth's personal and informal commentary on the topic.

ERT's intended audience likely spanned all social classes; as demonstrated in her communication with Moody, ERT understood that dependence on alcohol did not

discriminate. ERT's chosen title of the book further suggests that the piece was meant to reach literate individuals from all walks of life. *Figures of Hell* clearly indicates to all readers that the content of the forthcoming pages is damning and provides evidence of evil or wrongdoing. *Temples of Bacchus*, however, may have been directed toward Elizabeth's more highly-educated audience; perhaps the classmates of her husband, or individuals in her elite social circle. The son of Zeus and Semele, Bacchus (also known as Dionysus) is the god of wine and fertility. Bacchus is known to have two very distinctive personalities; one that brings about joy and divine elation, while the other inflicts ruthless fury and an unforgiving wrath. Thus, the two natures of wine.<sup>74</sup> ERT evoked the image of Bacchus in her book in an effort to speak to her more sophisticated readership and to remind them of the unpredictability and potential wickedness alcohol (Bacchus) may inflict upon those who chose to put themselves in its path.

The way in which Elizabeth crafted her book further suggests her commitment to reach as wide of an audience as possible. For those convinced by research, facts, and economics, ERT included information such as: during the year ending June 30, 1881, 7,556,603 gallons of alcohol were imported into the United State, with a pre-market value of \$9,610,576. ERT notes the retail value of liquor to be four to 10 times its import value. Taking an average value of seven times the import price, she informs readers that the total paid by the United States population for imported alcohol in 1881 was approximately \$67,274,032. In that same year, roughly 69,127,206 gallons of distilled spirits were produced and sold domestically, retailing at \$207,381,618. ERT goes on to

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<sup>74</sup> Greek Mythology, "Dionysus," Accessed September 10, 2018, <[https://www.greekmythology.com/Other\\_Gods/Dionysus/dionysus.html](https://www.greekmythology.com/Other_Gods/Dionysus/dionysus.html)>

share similar statistics for domestically fermented liquors. In total, the volume of imported and domestic alcohol equaled 520,325,677 gallons, costing Americans \$718,297,518.<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth dedicated much of the book sharing with readers how else this monumental sum may have been applied, if not on spirits. For example:

If the money expended for liquor in 1881 (seven hundred and eighteen million, two hundred and ninety-seven thousand, five hundred and eighteen dollars) had been devoted to the construction and equipment of new lines of railroad in the undeveloped portions of our country it would have built and equipped seventeen thousand, nine hundred and fifty-seven miles.

This would have increased the total mileage by nearly one-fifth, and would have produced at the same ratio as the present earnings, a net income of fifty million dollars, being more than the present mileage of all the railroads in the New England and Pacific states combined; more than all in the Southern states; more than all in the Middle states; and one-third of all in the Western states; nearly twice as many miles as are now running in Illinois, which state has nine thousand, three hundred and eighty-three miles, the largest mileage of any state; nearly three times as many miles as are now in Pennsylvania, and more than three times as many miles as are in the state of New York.

The increased income (fifty million dollars) would exceed the present incomes of all the railroads in the New England, Southern, and Pacific states combined; nearly two-thirds the income of the roads now running in the Middle states, and more than one-third the income of all the railroads in the Western states.<sup>76</sup>

This is one of many cases in which Elizabeth applies the cost of alcohol consumption to social and civic needs. Similar comparisons are made to public education, higher education, public buildings, pensions, the postal service, and efforts to reduce illiteracy, among other topics. While laborious for some audiences, this tactic was likely quite effective on ERT's business and analytic-minded readership. It was vital for her to convince as many individuals—and social groups—across the country as possible that

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<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Figures of Hell or The Temples of Bacchus* (New York: Oahspe Publishing Association, 1882), 5-9.

<sup>76</sup> Thompson, *Figures of Hell or The Temples of Bacchus*, 14-16.



consumption of alcohol was not to be tolerated in any form or amount. Reaching and persuading academics, professionals, and representatives from state and local governments was key to achieving this goal.

Elizabeth's second tactic was appealing to the reader's emotional sides. She used the footnote commentary for this purpose. With tones ranging from desperate and pleading to angry and indignant, ERT spoke to people's moral compasses. The following are eight such examples:

- 1) War is bad, but whom it kills, there is the end. Liquor poisons the blood, which entails its curse upon the offspring.
- 2) Prevention is a thousand times better than cure. Prevent the manufacture, importation and sale of intoxicants, and the cure will take care of itself.
- 3) The custom of offering wine to friends who call at New Years, should be discouraged. Examples of the evil effects of this habit on this day, are too numerous and too disgusting to mention.
- 4) Is any man so lost to shame and responsibility as to say the facts in this book do not concern him? And if so, has such a man a right to vote?
- 5) Why don't you, ministers, call a meeting of yourselves and try and strengthen one another in favor of Godliness? Put your feet right down and declare that every communicant in your church engaged in it shall give up this murderous business.
- 6) It is a very respectable and profitable occupation to be a grantor of licenses to sell intoxicating beverages. The license makes the selling of it respectable too. License to kill, to incite theft, robbery, murder!
- 7) As soon as the whistle blows for twelve, you must hurry out with a dirty can, to a dirty saloon, for a dirty pint of beer. How stupid you are, and how stupid it keeps you. Stop it.
- 8) Once, they said, 'O you can't free the slaves!' But the abolitionists kept pegging away, and, at last, they won the victory. Note the onward march of the temperance movement! It grows like a young tree in rich soil.<sup>77</sup>

This sampling exhibits the many ways in which Elizabeth attempts to appeal to her readers' moral and emotional sides. The first point, for example, echoes the theme of ERT's communication with Moody; a parent's consumption of alcohol directly impacts

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 34, 66, 76, 97, 99, 102, 134, 152, 164.

the health, wellbeing, and future failures (or successes) of their children. Through this point, she also boldly compares the effects, dangers, and trials of alcohol to those of war. In fact, ERT goes so far to proclaim that intemperance is worse than war; there is an end to war, a clear count of deaths and injuries, whereas the dangerous influences of alcohol are too fluid, too monumental to quantify. This brief but powerful argument forces feelings of guilt, fear, and tremendous responsibility onto readers. Similarly, the second quote also reflects communication between ERT and Moody, and places clear responsibility on the shoulders of individual readers. In the second point, Elizabeth reiterates her belief that the solution to this serious epidemic is prevention, not spot-treatment.

Quote three speaks to the causal or social drinker, who may believe that the dangers Elizabeth identifies only apply to those who overindulge. In the eyes of temperance supporters, even the most infrequent consumption of alcohol contributes to the downfall of society. This point is reminiscent of the story shared by Moody about a soldier on leave whose drunken relations resulted in the birth of a “low-grade idiot.” The success of this argument relies on the emotions and personal reaction of readers. ERT continues to question the judgement of those who drink (even casually) in the fourth quote. She appeals to readers’ sense of reason; if one does not have the logic and good common sense to appreciate the arguments set forth in the book, should one have the privilege and responsibility of voting—of making serious decisions for the greater community?

Through point five, ERT calls upon leaders of business and religious sectors. She suggests that the consumption of alcohol is an ungodly act in and of itself, and the heads

of faiths must assume responsibility for the behavior and moral wellbeing of their congregations. Elizabeth empathetically urges ministers to preach the dangers of drinking, and steer congregants towards the path of temperance. Given the Protestant roots of the movement, appealing to religious groups is a clear tactic. Leaders of these communities held significant power and influence during the late nineteenth century.

In item six, ERT uses sarcasm to make her point. She begins by praising the industry, heralding related occupations as economically sound and respectable. ERT shares that by virtue of having a license, the sale of alcohol is an honest profession. Elizabeth proceeds to show her hand by exclaiming that such the licenses are not signs of a respectful profession, in fact, they are passes to incite murder and robbery. In her eyes, anyone—regardless of stature or success—who touches the industry is guilty of providing the means for consumers to engage in debauchery.

Once again in sample seven, Elizabeth appeals to feelings of guilt and shame. She makes no attempt to forgive or overlook the embarrassment often felt by those who indulge, and aptly speaks directly to those guilty of daily alcohol abuse by using the pronoun “you.” In three short sentences, ERT employs the words, “dirty” three times and “stupid” twice. By using the more directive “you” rather than “one,” “him,” or “her,” she makes the reader feel like they are personally attacked and being identified as dirty and stupid. She reminds relevant readers that every step of their routine is filthy, disgraceful, and leads only to stupidity. She directs readers to stop. This quote in particular demonstrates ERT’s anger, disgust, and spite.

Through the final example, Elizabeth appeals to readers’ sense of history, social responsibility, and the importance of activism. This is similar to the tactic she used in

point one, comparing the consumption of alcohol to war. Paralleling prohibition to abolition, ERT urges her audience to be on the right side of history; temperance. She provides encouragement by explaining that even those fighting for the freedom of slaves met resistance. Those considering prohibition should not be discouraged or intimidated by the magnitude of its mission, nor should they be afraid of possible social stigmas. To support prohibition is to be on the right side of history and to directly benefit the greater good.

*Figures of Hell or The Temples of Bacchus* is Elizabeth's personal manifest warning the public of the dire consequences of alcohol, and the incredible good that can be done by abolishing it entirely from American culture and commerce. Using several methods, ERT appeals to a wide-ranging audience, with diverse motivators, backgrounds, and experiences with alcohol. Through an arsenal of fear, inspiration, guilt, and logic, she encourages readers to examine and reset their moral compasses to ensure they are on the right side of history, contributing to the solution of a large problem, thus improving and benefitting society immediately and for future generations.

## Chapter VIII.

### Settlements

ERT's staunch belief in and commitment to temperance manifested in ways beyond the academic explored in Chapter Six. Demonstrating her commitment to treating the cause, not the symptom, Elizabeth became engaged with a group of like-minded individuals from Chicago, Illinois, including Robert Collyer. Born in 1823, Collyer immigrated to the United States in 1850 from Yorkshire, England and worked as a hammer-maker and Methodist preacher. Collyer was a supporter of the Temperance Movement; in the early 1870s, he championed a group of business, religious, and military leaders from Chicago to establish the Chicago-Colorado Colony, a utopian, temperate society. Seth Terry was another pioneer who joined ERT and Collyer. Terry was a lumberman from Illinois; his wife arranged to have his entire lumber inventory shipped by rail to the new Colony. The banner, or motto of the Colony, inspired by ERT, Collyer, and Terry was, "temperance, industry, mortality."<sup>78</sup>

The Chicago-Colorado Colony was meticulously planned and founded on the basis of membership; a unique structure. Committed to developing a cohesive, model community, town leaders believed that growing the community via membership would allow for a carefully cultivated population with a shared sense of responsibility and pride. The Colony's by-laws and constitution pay particular attention to organized colonization.

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<sup>78</sup> City of Longmont, "Collyer Park," 2018, <<https://www.longmontcolorado.gov/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/28/56>>

There is no man integral within himself. We are all parts of one grand community, and it behooves every man to know what his neighbor is about. Hence we unite, for mutual benefit, large corporate interests to economize the movement of people by colonies, and immediately secure to members thereof all the home institutions, social and material. The advantage of the colonization system for the West, consists in simultaneous occupancy of the lands, and by co-operation of labor and mutual help, each makes a permanent, comfortable home on his own tract.

The maximum of each man's power is increased by unison with the labor of others as in public works, manufacturing, etc (...) Cattle, sheep, and hogs can be herded cheaper by co-operation. Home-sickness is prevented. Although the land is new and the country strange, there is a community of old friends;—a pure and healthy tone is given to social life. Communities made up of miscellaneous settlers from all sections and nationalities, require years to become homogeneous socially, and prosperous in their industries. Organized emigration secures within the landed limits of the colony the control of public affairs, the benefit and control of school lands and moneys donated by the State and National Government for common schools, and higher institutions of learning.<sup>79</sup>

The goal of town leaders is quite clear; establishing a new community free of division, vice, and differences. In fact, the underlying tone of the above text echoes basic goals of eugenics; cultivating a civil, safe, homogeneous, healthy society. Allowing membership into the Colony by virtue of strict selection helped ensure that the Chicago-Colorado Colony would be free from disingenuous, troubled, selfish, foreign neighbors.

The founders' commitment to a uniform, temperate society was so great that they inserted the following clause into each deed issued: "It is hereby stipulated by the parties hereto, that no spiritus or malt liquors shall ever be sold or given away, as a beverage, on the premises herein described by said party of the second part, his heirs, executors, administrators or assigns, upon penalty of forfeiting all right, title, and interest in the

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<sup>79</sup> James F. Willard and Colin B. Goodykoontz, eds., *Experiments in Colorado Colonization 1869-1872; Selected Contemporary Records relating to the German Colonization Company and the Chicago-Colorado, St. Louis-Western and Southwestern Colonies* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1926), 143-144.

above described premises, to parties of first part, and their successors in trust, forever.”<sup>80</sup> Members were held accountable to honoring the Colony’s mission, including living in accordance with virtues of the temperance movement. Not only were members held responsible for their behavior, but their heirs and successors were bound to adhere to the strict policies prohibiting the consumption and sale of alcohol as well. The Colony’s by-laws went so far as to protect against the misbehavior of signatories, immediate families, and descendants in perpetuity.

It was this clear and unwavering dedication to the prohibition of alcohol that drew Elizabeth to the Chicago-Colorado Colony. Restricting the sale and consumption of alcohol appealed to her deep desire to address root causes of social ailments. Holding members of the community as well as their families to these high standards would ensure a community that represented ERT’s ideal society.

Membership to such a utopian community came at a relatively high price. Initially, memberships were limited to 1,000 deeds. Each recipient paid \$150, which entitled him to a plot ranging in size from five to forty acres. For an addition fee ranging from \$25 to \$50, members could purchase a lot immediately in town. In addition to being held to high moral standards, residents were obligated to make clear improvements to their land and properties. Failure to do so could result in a loss of membership and expulsion from the community. After approximately a year of soliciting and vetting membership applications, the Colony had enough resources to formally establish a town.

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<sup>80</sup> Willard, *Experiments in Colorado Colonization*, 148.

They renamed the Chicago-Colorado Colony, Longmont, in recognition of Long's Peak, which is visible from the town.<sup>81</sup>

As one of the town's earliest benefactors, Elizabeth contributed vital funding for local infrastructure. Specifically, she provided the grounds, building, furnishings, and 300 books for the town's library. According to local reports, ERT expressed a desire to financing a building that would house the library, as well as the town hall and local meeting space. She was scheduled to visit the picturesque town merely a week after sharing this interest; it was clear that she expected a structure in place for her arrival. Several of the town's founding fathers, including Seth Terry and Chauncey Stokes committed to a design that could be completed in such a short window. Twelve men in total built what is known as Library Hall in record time. Far from a simple structure, it boasted a flag pole, vestibule, and bell and belfry. ERT was pleased with Library Hall, which still stands today. During that same trip, ERT enjoyed a dedication celebration of the library, along with a strawberry festival, which nearly the entire town attended. Delighted by her time and the already thriving community, Elizabeth generously provided the funding for the festivities.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to supporting the merriment and scholarship, Elizabeth gave vital resources to those wishing—but fiscally unable—to purchase a membership to the town. While details vary from report-to-report, the theme is unanimous; she ensured worthy

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<sup>81</sup> Cindy Maynard, "The Chicago-Colorado Company," Boulder County; Parks and Open Space. November 20, 2014. <<https://bouldercountyopenspace.org/i/history/chicago-colorado-company/>>

<sup>82</sup> Robert Nyboer, *Longmont Public Library; 1907-2007 A Centennial History* (Longmont: City of Longmont, 2007) 4.



acquaintances were afforded the ability to travel West and begin their anew as members of the Longmont community. ERT's commitment to sending friends to Colorado indicates the pride and confidence she had in the undertaking. Not only did Longmont provide Elizabeth the opportunity she desperately sought to address problems in their most nascent stages, but it allowed her to spread the message of temperance in a meaningful, immediate, and measurable way.

In addition to serving as benefactress of Longmont, ERT generously provided support to several other trial communal communities including three in Kansas: the Petersburg Colony, the Boston Colony (where ERT's brother George Washington Rowell resided), and the Thompson Colony. Along with like-minded, philanthropic New Yorkers, ERT founded the Co-operative Colony Aid Association. Her co-organizers included E.L. Godkin, Felix Adler, Joseph Seligman, Joseph Drexel, and E.V. Smalley.<sup>83</sup> Notable within the group, Godkin was a journalist and editor of the *New York Evening Post* and Adler was an academic committed to social reform, such as tenement house improvement. Together, the Association crafted, advertised, and facilitated the establishment the above-mentioned colonies. The Thompson Colony was organized as the most cooperative. Fields were worked communally, and tools, livestock, and machinery were held as common property. Each family lived in their own homes; in addition to the shared work and crop management, families had the opportunity to tend to their own small gardens.<sup>84</sup> According to some reports, Elizabeth was so deeply invested

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<sup>83</sup> Robert S. Fogarty. "American Communes, 1865—1914," *Journal American Studies*, vol 9, No 2 (Aug., 1975): 151.

<sup>84</sup> Richard C.S. Trahair, *Utopias and Utopians: An Historical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999) 400.

in the success of the Thompson Colony that she gave 640 acres of land and \$300 of discretionary funding to each settler who agreed to move to the new community. Despite the lasting and flourishing success of Longmont, Colorado, Thompson Colony existed for approximately one year before succumbing to severe drought conditions in 1880.<sup>85</sup>

ERT's commitment to providing root-based solutions was clearly demonstrated through her support of these unique communities. Unlike many philanthropists, Elizabeth's charity materialized financially as well as emotionally; not only did she give large sums to these experimental communities broadly, but she contributed to the success of individuals as well. ERT took pride in these groups and enjoyed the opportunity to travel long distances to visit and experience the impact of her generosity in person. Despite the few failures, Longmont, Colorado—a beautiful town still thriving today—is a tremendous acknowledgment of the lasting impact of her philanthropy and commitment to social reform.

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<sup>85</sup> Frances E. Willard and Mary Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in all Walks of Life* (New York: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 712.

## Chapter IX.

## Kindergarten Homes

Elizabeth's experiences as an impoverished young girl in Vermont and as a socialite in Boston collided with her advocacy for temperance and holistically addressing social problems in 1882 with the publication of *Kindergarten Homes*. *Kindergarten Homes* is a description of ERT's plan for revising the nation's education system for poor, desolate, and underprivileged children. A unique piece, the publication was written by an individual wishing to remain anonymous. Identified only as "Your Reporter" the author along with his or her coconspirator, the "Judge," seemingly fooled ERT (who was known to be exceedingly cautious when to speaking with reporters) into sharing her vision for kindergarten homes. The preface of the book, in fact, acknowledges Elizabeth's distaste for the press and identifies this hurdle the author faced and his or her method of overcoming the challenge:

These chapters are the result of a series of interviews with Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson, one of the most unselfish women God ever made. Your Reporter and the Judge are kept up throughout the work as nearly as possible to the facts so as to display the arguments. Mrs. Thompson had persistently denied interviewers a chance to know much about her. A reporter with a paper and pencil would frighten her. She was not ignorant of the fact that interviewers often misstate and distort an interview for the sake of making merchandise out of their manuscript (...) Mrs. Thompson had escaped interviewers. With all her publicity she still remained a private citizen, but traveling all over the country, so that there was after all a mystery about her being. She was getting to be a sort of Santa Clause that dropped into places of adversity, bringing sunshine, then flying away (...) Your Reporter knew about her avoidance of reporters, and her dread of being misrepresented in print, and so concluded that the best way was to obtain an introduction as a friend, and then obtain her ideas and write them down at different times when absent, and then afterward submit them to her. To do this the object

had to be kept concealed. In fact she was not to know she was being interviewed.<sup>86</sup>

In good time, Your Reporter revealed his or her true intentions to Elizabeth, who consented to the interviews being published, pending her review and approval. While ERT's well-documented shyness may have contributed to her hesitation to discuss the topic at hand, it is also possible that her theory and plans were not sufficiently developed and ready for public consumption. Your Reporter may have forced ERT's hand in sharing her plans for kindergarten homes. Irrespective of the path the led to its publication, *Kindergarten Homes* provides important insight into and supporting evidence of Elizabeth's philanthropic motivations.

Broadly, ERT proposed a new form of education and care for children who were often neglected by public systems and sent to live in poor-homes or asylums. She envisioned reversing the order of education, eliminating books as the cornerstone of teaching while introducing practical skills. ERT described her idea to Your Reporter and Judge:

'I would teach them how to work and how to do everything in the easiest and best possible way. Instead of making text books the base, I would make work the base, and make it easy, interesting and instructive. I would educate their hearts to be good and their little hands to be useful in industry. Instead of spending so much time and money on book education, I would appropriate largely from the city, state and national funds for practical work education.'<sup>87</sup>

Through this simple summary, one can identify Elizabeth's ongoing commitment to solving problems at their core rather than symptomatically. ERT intended to provide the

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<sup>86</sup> Your Reporter [pseud.] *Kindergarten Homes. For Orphans and Other Destitute Children; A New Way to Ultimately Dispense with Prisons and Poor-Houses. The Plans of Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson* (New York: Oahspe Publishing Association, 1882), 1-5.

<sup>87</sup> Your Reporter [pseud.] *Kindergarten Homes*, 10.

youngest, most vulnerable members of society with the tools to become productive adults, free from dependency on charity and vice.

Elizabeth notes that kindergarten homes should not be confused with kindergartens. The latter organizations, in her opinion, existed for the benefit of members of the middle and upper-class, while the former was specifically designed for children in need of homes, who would otherwise become charges of the state. Acceptance into kindergartens may have relied upon social clout or economic standing while children would be admitted into kindergarten homes by virtue of their less-fortunate circumstances:

We should gather up in infancy those who are likely to become inmates of poor-houses, asylums and prisons. These are the ones that need education; to be educated how to live and how to work, to be clean in body, clean in spirit, and frugal and industrious (...) Should not little helpless children and orphans, and castaways, of which there are in our great cities, thousands and tens of thousands, be the first considerations? (...) the city and state's first benevolence should extend to such children. For it is from this class the prisons and poor-houses are chiefly filled.<sup>88</sup>

Once again, Elizabeth demonstrates her mission of helping those in need from the beginning and providing critical resources to be able to help themselves in the future. Further, the above excerpt is highly reminiscent of her correspondence with Loring Moody in which ERT explored the effects of alcohol consumption on generations of families. She asserted the importance of long-term societal health and educating the community on expected, proper morals, and the behaviors expected of them. ERT envisioned kindergarten homes as a means of achieving a higher level of participation in accepted behaviors while breaking the cycle of dependence and delinquency that she so

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 11-14.

deeply wished to erase. By virtue of educating needy children from the youngest ages, ERT believed that she would be able to break the cycle of criminality driven by heredity.

Elizabeth, who spent much of adult life living in two major metropolitan areas, Boston and New York, furthered her point by indicating that all homes should be situated in the countryside; the impetus of all deviance was city life. She noted the importance of children connecting with nature early and often, for it provided a sense of health and calm. Cities were nothing but a breeding ground of temptation and risk:

The children of great cities are introduced to crime every day. And especially, the poor. They see nothing but misery, contention and filth (...) after school hours they go home to their tenement, where they witness drunkenness and fighting. Their beds are without comfort. They are not washed or taught to wash themselves. They hear profanity on all hands. They learn to smoke and to drink. Now, what should we expect to follow such an education? Why, crime of course. Then follows, what? The expense of police, criminal courts, etc., and then prison and poor-houses.<sup>89</sup>

Elizabeth passionately believed that a child's exposure to the city exponentially prohibited his or her chance of achieving a positive, clean, and productive future. It was much less likely that would one be exposed to dangerous vices while living in a peaceful, pastoral environment. One may imagine that the root of Elizabeth's fondness for nature is a direct result of her childhood in rural Vermont and her father's penchant for spending more time exploring the local woods and wildlife than socializing with neighbors. ERT came of age in an environment that valued and embraced nature over highly commercialized communities. Her exposure to rampant vice, homelessness, and corruption was limited until she moved to Boston. There, these societal troubles were much more widespread and far less hidden.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

Despite ERT's hardline views on societal morals and her frugal stance on fiscal matters, she demonstrated a compassionate and maternal side when envisioning how children would be cared for in kindergarten homes. Several times over the course of her discussions with Your Reporter and Judge did Elizabeth emphasize that the homes would not resemble asylums and publicly funded orphanages where children were treated like farm animals, had their heads shaved, and went without the empathy and simple acts of human affection such as a hug. ERT hoped that she could create an environment that holistically nurtured children and provided a sense of belonging, safety, and family.

In detail, she described the design of an ideal kindergarten home. Elizabeth illustrated the setting as a large plot of farm land featuring a body of water, such as a lake or river for the children to explore and enjoy. The home would be spacious, simple, and comfortable; comfort was a high priority. Exposure to the outdoors would be critical to the success of the children and overall mission of the home. Large windows, high ceilings, and many outdoor spaces, such as verandas that could be used as classroom, play, sleep, or dining space would be of the utmost importance, as access to pure, fresh air—even on a rainy day—was a key factor in a child's health and success. ERT further noted "The house should have every possible convenience, but no useless extravagance; and should be so constructed that it could be warmed perfectly in winter, and yet well ventilated."<sup>90</sup> Her compassion for the hypothetical residents of these kindergarten homes is tangible. As demonstrated in her communications with Moody, Elizabeth often viewed the children she aided as her own; her interests lay not just with achieving results, they

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 87.

rest with the personal accomplishments, health, and happiness of each child. This commitment is a positive example of the self-admitted “softness” of ERT’s character.

ERT explains to your Reporter and Judge that she chose the name “kindergarten home” quite deliberately, “I use the word Kindergarten home because I would in fact have each one of them in the midst of a garden on a good farm, and because they should be for children to be raised in.”<sup>91</sup> She asserts that in order to eliminate (or more reasonably, minimize) a child’s predisposition to delinquency, he or she must be nurtured from myriad angles; not simply from an academic, moral, or skill-based platform. ERT so deeply believed in this mission that she emphasized throughout her interview that if successful, kindergarten homes would lead to the elimination of prisons and asylums in a single generation, particularly if the temperance movement’s platform was nationally accepted.

Elizabeth expounded upon this point by describing the curriculum and long-term structure of kindergarten homes. The kitchen of the home for example, would be a place of study, similar to any classroom in a traditional schoolhouse; it would have equal importance as a physical or mathematics course in a college.

It should be a place of instruction, a place to train for practical work. In the kitchen should be demonstrations before children, in classes, in which they should learn the occupation of cooking and providing food for the tables. Cooking and housekeeping should be rendered high arts (...) Both boys and girls should grow up understanding every kind of work. This cooking trade is number one, which they would be master of.<sup>92</sup>

Demonstrating her progressive social viewpoints, Elizabeth committed herself and the homes to ensuring both boys and girls were equally educated in skills that would serve

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 93.



them well throughout life. She further stipulated that all children would have lessons in sewing and mending; shoe making; carpentry; watchmaking and repair; spinning and weaving; and blacksmithing, among other trades.<sup>93</sup> By virtue of such training, all residents would become masters of many skills, able to navigate nearly any path they crossed with a higher chance of success than many of their less fortunate peers.

Guaranteeing the futures of kindergarten home residents was not, however, Elizabeth's only goal. It was her vision that virtually all needs of the homes would be met by the occupants themselves.

Let us look still further on. Imagine the first crop of children growing up, and new ones being brought in. Now, it will turn out after awhile, that as fast as the first ones reach maturity the place will be supplied with infants. By such a time the Kindergarten homes will be amply supplied with practical teachers who will cost nothing.<sup>94</sup>

ERT makes it clear that her intention is not to create factories or sweatshops for profit; children should never be exposed in such a way or used as financial resources. Rather, she parallels the homes to a family farm where parents teach their children how to till the soil, rotate crops, manage livestock, and rely on the land. Once the farmer's children are old enough, they assume responsibility for the land and continue the family tradition. This practice also mirrors the communities Elizabeth supported in the Midwest, particularly in Kansas. Continuously drawn to the idea of self-sufficiency and strength in community, ERT committed a great deal of resources to encouraging utopian environments. In both examples—Kansas and kindergarten homes—ERT sought to encourage individuals to rely upon themselves for strength and success. Dependence

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

upon peers was a critical part of the process, but such need was different from the one-sided reliance individuals often required of philanthropy. The peer-to-peer relationship demonstrated in such communities are mutually beneficial, require trust, and result in true partnerships. Elizabeth wished to encourage the beneficiaries of her generosity to be practical, honest citizens whose children continue down a path of success, not helpless, dependent criminals or indigents.

During her visit with Your Reporter and Judge, Elizabeth acknowledges that even she would not have funding sufficient to establish and maintain kindergarten homes at a rate that would ensure a successful and notable impact on society nation-wide. ERT assures her audience that once well established, the homes would nearly eliminate all prisons and poorhouses, which would avail funding necessary for the homes. Until such a time, ERT proposes seeking the support of “rich elderly people.” Elizabeth speculates that those who are truly philanthropic wish to create an immediate impact on the lives of those in need in a measurable and deeply meaningful way; they hope to see and experience the good that their generosity achieves, rather than look at a stone monument or brass plaque bearing their name. Encouraging the elderly to support and invest in the nation’s youth rather than in self-inflating causes, ERT speculates, will bring joy and deep fulfilment to wealthy philanthropists.

Despite her thoughtful planning, detailed vision, and the most earnest of intentions, kindergarten homes did not come to fruition. It is possible, however, that Elizabeth’s vision had an impact in an unexpected way. Both *Figures of Hell* and *Kindergarten Homes* were published by Oahspe Publishing Association (OPA), based in New York. OPA also published *Oahspe, A New Bible, In the Words of Jehovih and his*

*Angel Embassadors* by John B. Newbrough. In fact, *Oahspe, A New Bible* was advertised at the close of *Kindergarten Homes*. Like ERT in her later years, Newbrough resided in New York where he practiced dentistry. Deeply spiritual, Newbrough is said to have been clairvoyant and wrote text, including *Oahspe, A New Bible* through automatic writing. Many of the teachings in *Oahspe* offered guidance on bettering society and caring for lost youth. Newbrough honored this mission by establishing a communal orphanage call Shalam. Newbrough and his followers, known as Faithists travelled to Doña Ana, New Mexico, where Newbrough bought thousands of acres of land to house Shalam Colony. Newbrough did not have sufficient funds to realize his vision, and turned to a wealthy Bostonian, Andrew Howland for support.<sup>95</sup> Newbrough, Howland, and the Faithists brought orphaned infants and children to Shalam to be raised and educated through communal efforts in a model environment. Reportedly, the group found children from across the country, including Boston, Kansas, Chicago, and Colorado. Newbrough's utopian community was intended to be an environment in which the most needy and disadvantaged children could be nourished, protected, and taught the skills necessary to thrive as adults. Shalam indeed benefitted many children, but like most of the utopian communities of the 1800s, it eventually dissolved.<sup>96</sup>

While Elizabeth's direct ties to Shalam are not clear, there are many paths that link her work with that of Newbrough. In addition to sharing the same, small publisher,

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<sup>95</sup> "About OAHSPÉ: John Ballou Newbrough," *OAHSPÉ Standard Edition: Spiritual Guidebook*, Accessed September 21, 2018, <[http://oahspestandardedition.com/About\\_Oahspe/John\\_B\\_Newbrough.html](http://oahspestandardedition.com/About_Oahspe/John_B_Newbrough.html)>

<sup>96</sup> Marc Simmons, "Trail Dust: Little came of idealists' colony for orphans on Rio Grande," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, February 6, 2015, <[http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/trail\\_dust/trail-dust-little-came-of-idealists-colony-for-orphans-on/article\\_ab880048-927c-5d60-b4cc-9680571ebf79.html](http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/trail_dust/trail-dust-little-came-of-idealists-colony-for-orphans-on/article_ab880048-927c-5d60-b4cc-9680571ebf79.html)>

the two were deeply involved in the small network of utopia activists. Further, it is possible that Elizabeth and Howland's paths crossed as members of the social elite in Boston. It is also noteworthy that Newbrough sought orphans from areas of the country to which ERT had close ties: Boston, Kansas, Colorado, and Chicago. Given these varied connections, one may speculate that ERT and Newbrough were acquainted and shared ideologies and visions for a more prosperous, socially responsible future.

## Chapter X

### Conclusion

The charity and influence of Elizabeth Rowell Thompson was felt by countless individuals, spanned the nation, and impacted many generations of individuals. A largely under-recognized pillar of philanthropy, ERT deserves recognition for her pioneering and wide-ranging commitment to missions that were often unpopular in the nineteenth century including addiction, hard sciences, and prison reform.

As noted in earlier chapters, Elizabeth had a deep-seated fear that her efforts and considerable funds went to waste. She spent much of her adult life trying to achieve a sense of fulfillment, success, and meaning. The impact of ERT's generosity felt by so many was unfortunately lost on her. Elizabeth was only able to see herself as a fool and feeble opponent for those seeking easy money and a deep pocket. Indeed, many did take easy advantage of ERT, including her own family. Those losses, however, do not supersede the many goods ERT facilitated and achieved. Despite the praise of highly respected socialites and academics, including Pickering, Minot, and Loring, Elizabeth simply could not view herself through the lens through which others saw her. This is likely her greatest failure.

While on the surface, much of ERT's philanthropy appears to be disconnected and varied, there is a significant common thread. From supporting the Elizabeth Thompson Scientific Fund and research of yellow fever to encouraging temperance and funding utopian communities, ERT was consistently dedicated to solving society's problems at their earliest stages. She deeply wished to solve the root of a problem, rather

than providing temporary help to an individual or inconsistently bandage a much larger problem. This high-reaching goal may have contributed to Elizabeth's sense of failure. Her hopes were so lofty—eliminate the need for prisons throughout the United States and rid the population of addicts—that Elizabeth would never achieve the success she sought. The successes she found along the way, however, were great and impressive.

The role Elizabeth's husband played in her life story is short but significant. It was of course, his fortune that provided ERT the means necessary to undertake such terrific missions. Without him, Elizabeth may never have travelled to Boston and experienced life in the city; a place she believed was an undeniable factor in society's delinquency. Further, the wealth ERT assumed through marriage gave her the unique opportunity to understand the vast inequities between the wealthy and the poor. While many in her position may have embraced wealth and social standing and never looked back, ERT found that her new life inspired philanthropy and a commitment to never turn her back on those in need.

The Rowell family and Elizabeth's upbringing undoubtedly influenced her philanthropic career and select social causes. As noted previously, ERT grew-up in a rural setting and with a family that greatly valued the importance of the outdoors. Elizabeth carried these values for her entire life and rarely stayed too far from lessons learned by virtue of her rural roots. Her vision of what life would look like for residents of kindergarten homes, for example, included ample open space in the country with access to fruitful land and water to explore. Elizabeth hoped for homes with ample sunlight and outdoor space so fresh air could be enjoyed by children even on a dreary day. ERT's childhood further impacted her adulthood by virtue of her mother's early life.

Born an orphan, Elizabeth's mother was lucky to be shown kindness and given opportunities that many others in similar positions did not receive. It is likely this story that inspired ERT's passion for helping orphaned and disadvantaged children from a young age. Finally, Elizabeth's experience as a domestic servant provided groundwork for her commitment to ensuring all children—both boys and girls—should learn many skillsets so they may care for themselves and their families regardless of virtually any obstacle placed before them. These humble means also ignited in Elizabeth a genuine interest in and desire to support the sciences. Representing great opportunity, ERT was committed to furthering research in the hard sciences so many could benefit from their discoveries and advancements.

Elizabeth's life took a serendipitous course that resulted in the betterment of society from many arenas. A previously underappreciated philanthropist and social reformer, Elizabeth Rowell Thompson deserves recognition and celebration for her many contributions to the United States in the nineteenth century and beyond.

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