


THE WRITINGS OF  
LAURA BRIDGMAN

BY  
E.C. SANFORD

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February the eleventh, 1889.

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REPRINTED FROM *The Overland Monthly*.

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WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY FRODO G. STANLEY, JR.

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THE OVERLAND MONTHLY PUBLISHING COMPANY,  
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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE INGENIOUS methods by which the blind, deaf-mute Laura Bridgman was educated by Dr. Howe of the Perkins' Institute, Boston, now presided over by Dr. M. Anagnos, his son-in-law, still remain one of the great monuments of pedagogic skill and devotion. His studies of his pupil during the most interesting period of her education was published in occasional Reports, which were at once translated into several European languages, and which—though they are now mostly out of print, and, strangely enough, have never been printed in connected form,—rank among the most valuable pedagogic literature. He designed that no stage in the strange and rapid process of her mental development should pass unrecorded. An accomplished lady teacher was engaged for years expressly for her, who, in her own book, has added materially to the information contained in Dr. Howe's Reports, and Laura was herself taught to keep a diary for about ten years, which has not been utilized by either Dr. Howe or by Mrs. Lamson. The large body of manuscript (*v. p. 3, within*), all written with pencil, and now often faded and indistinct, was committed some years ago to the keeping of the undersigned by a member of Dr. Howe's family. It was at one time the writer's intention to examine these papers and to edit Dr. Howe's Reports in one volume, the introductory chapter of which was finally published [*Aspects of German Culture*, pp. 236-76] without scrutiny of Laura's papers. This was at length undertaken by Mr. E. C. Sanford, who is Graduate Student of Psychology in this University, and has been accomplished with such care, and has yielded results of such interest and value as to justify the present form of republication.

G. STANLEY HALL.

*Johns Hopkins University, Jan. 22, 1887.*



THE  
WRITINGS OF LAURA BRIDGMAN.

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BY  
E. C. SANFORD.

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I.

LAURA BRIDGMAN'S name is a household word; forty years ago her education was followed with the most eager and general interest, and her case has become a classic in psychological literature. To preface a short study of her writings with an account of her life and of the method of her education, may seem, to say the least, unnecessary. Still, current information is often inaccurate, and the psychological value of what she wrote depends so completely upon her condition before and after instruction, that a very brief review of the facts is here presented.

Laura Bridgman was born December 21st, 1829, into the family of a moral and respectable farmer of Hanover, New Hampshire. She inherited a rather sensitive nervous organization, the advantages and disadvantages of which are apparent in the record of her years of study in the Perkins Institute. She was born with her full quota of senses, but in her babyhood was subject to a nervous affection, then known as "still fits," which for a time retarded her development. This, however, she outgrew in her first eighteen months, and from that time till she was two years old, she was considered a well child, and, under the circumstances, a bright one. She learned to talk a little, and knew a few of her letters. Just

after her second birthday she was taken sick with scarlet fever, and it was only after weeks of disease, and after two full years and more of feebleness, that her general health was fairly reëstablished. The disease left her with hearing totally destroyed, and with sight so nearly in the same condition, that, though she continued for several years to distinguish light and darkness, and perhaps even to notice certain striking colors, she was found completely sightless, when, at about eight years of age, she was examined by Dr. S. G. Howe. Her senses of taste and smell were blunted, and touch alone of the five remained intact. By the use of this sense alone, or, we should say more truly, this undifferentiated complex of senses, she began to renew her acquaintance with the world, to satisfy her growing hunger of mind, and to communicate by the simplest signs with those about her. Between her fifth and her eighth years she learned something of tangible objects, something of the proprieties of conduct, to knit, to sew, to set the table, and to help a little about her home.

In her eighth year her case came to the

What is known to popular psychology as the single sense of touch, resolves itself upon more scientific examination into a complex of senses. Sensations of temperature, pressure, and muscular exertion, with others of a less distinct character, unite in it. It is the material, so to speak, from which the higher senses have been developed. In picturing Laura's defective condition, it is well to remember how wide was the range of experience to be gained through this so-called single sense—certainly wider than that to be gained through any other of the five.

notice of Doctor Howe, of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, and through his influence she was brought to Boston and placed in that institution in October, 1837. There her formal education began.<sup>1</sup> The first thing to be done was to come at a ready means of communication with her. Two ways were possible: the first, to develop the natural sign language, of which she already had the rudiments; the second, to teach her arbitrary language, using signs only while her knowledge of this was being established.

The second and more difficult way was chosen, as promising the larger results. Labels of raised letters were pasted on a spoon, fork, and mug, and Laura was taught to associate the word-sign as a whole with the object that it represented. Next she was taught to form the word-sign from the simpler letter-signs, by means of several sets of movable types, and a board in which they could be set up. The formation of words she quite readily learned, but weeks of steady work were necessary before she finally caught the real bearings of the process. The manual signs of the mute alphabet were soon given her, the signs being made into her hand and followed by her fingers, and came to bear, perhaps, the same relation to the literal forms for her as the vocal sounds do for us. She learned at first only nouns, as the names of objects; later, verbs and adjectives of such actions and qualities as she could perceive. After a year she began to write, that is, to print, using a lead pencil and a grooved pasteboard under her paper to keep the lines, such as is commonly used by the blind. By degrees her vocabulary was increased by other parts of speech, by the inflectional forms of the verbs, and by new classes of words, including some verbs of mental action, "re-

member," "forget," and the like. Her language study was continuous from the beginning to the end of her formal teaching. Early in her course she also began arithmetic.

In June, 1841, two years and eight months after her entrance into the institution, Miss Mary Swift (later Mrs. Mary Swift Lamson) became her teacher, and continued as such for four years—after the first year and a half, as her special teacher. In Laura's case the naturally close relation of teacher and pupil was made of necessity even closer; her teacher was with her almost constantly. She had to be told a thousand things that children with their eyes and ears learn for themselves. She had lessons on trades, lessons in the barn and the pantry, lessons on the materials necessary to furnish a room. She took long walks for exercise with her teacher, and filled the time of them full, whenever the ground would permit, with manual conversation on subjects about which she was curious. In the same direct and personal way she was taught morals and manners. A part of her teacher's work was to read to her, using the mute alphabet. In this way some of Abbott's stories were read, and other books of a similar nature. She went on with her arithmetical studies under Miss Swift, completing Colburn's Mental Arithmetic in a year, and working at written arithmetic with the ciphering board. She studied geography, and began grammar and elementary physics.

From 1845 to 1850 Laura's teacher was Miss Wight. The work of the previous years was for the most part continued as before, but greater attention was given to her religious teaching. She studied history and physiology, and something of algebra and geometry, and gave more time to her correspondence. Miss Wight was her last special teacher, and at her departure Laura's formal education may fairly be said to have ended. With the exception of a short

<sup>1</sup> The best accounts of Laura Bridgman's education are to be found in Mrs. Lamson's book, "Life and Education of Laura Dewey Bridgman," and in Doctor Howe's Reports, from which she makes many extracts. The Reports are now, unfortunately, out of print, but it is probable that they, or some portions of them, will be republished in the near future.



interval, from that time to the present her home has been the Perkins Institute.

Considering her difficulties, Laura Bridgman's attainments are phenomenal, but in her studying she has always had that most efficient of all allies, a burning desire to learn. It has been said that in all her learning she probably never exceeded the tendency to spontaneous activity.

The detail of her education was executed by the faithful women that were her teachers, but to Dr. Howe belongs the credit of having devised the way, and, not only by supervision, but by actual work with her, of having helped her to what she is. It was his express desire that her religious instruction should be left to himself, and his plans were for such instruction as should lead one of her restricted experience by natural steps to a symmetrical Christian faith; but in this his wishes were not respected, and while nominally her sole religious instructor till she had been some time under Miss Wight's charge, he was not allowed to be so in fact.

The writings of Laura Bridgman are a journal, three autobiographical sketches, several so-called poems, and numerous letters. The journal, with some intervals, covers a period of about ten years, 1841 to 1850. It consists of some forty or more thin manuscript books, of different shapes and sizes; some of the earlier being large folios, 14x10½ inches; the latter, except the very last, uniformly smaller, 12½x9. The total number of pages, large and small, falls a little short of six hundred, and the whole, if set up in type of this size would cover nearly seven times the number of pages filled by this study. The matter of her record is at first only the routine of the institution, and the style, if style it may be called, very much that of a learner. The following are fair sample sentences of early date: "mary washed the many clothes." "i ate some cake good." "rogers taught me to talk good about all things very little." After she had acquired a greater facility of

expression, the custom was for her to re-write each day in her journal what had been read to her the day before; and so, many pages are filled with rescripts of children's stories. So far her writing was nothing but a school exercise. But towards the very last her entries come to have a certain sort of maturity, and something of the interest of a personal diary. In these last books she records, besides the mere events of the day, an occasional bit of pleasantry, a play of fancy, her hopes and doubts of the future, and some evidence of her religious feeling. The manuscripts show the growth of her chirography from a sprawling and scarcely legible hand, to one of print-like clearness<sup>1</sup>; a gradual increase in use of capital letters and the marks of punctuation, and an increasing mastery of language. The journal, on the whole, cannot be said to contain much of interest to the general reader, but in this respect the autobiographies are better. They deal exclusively with the interesting early portion of her life, for the most part with that before she came to Boston; and though they offer no new historical matter of any consequence, they have the peculiar interest of autobiography in a marked degree. In a most naive way they open to the reader her early home life, and throw light by their style of thought upon the peculiarities of her maturer mind. Mrs. Lamson quotes at some length from one of these sketches, but in the preparation of her book she did not have the best and fullest of the three, the better part of which appears below.

In making the following abbreviation of it, the aim has been to omit only repetitions and passages of little biographical and psychological moment, and to present the remainder as it stands in the manuscript, except in the following particulars: Laura's paragraphing and punctuation have been somewhat changed in the interest of clear-

<sup>1</sup>Fac similes of her manuscript are given by Mrs. Lamson and by Dr. Francis Liebers in his study of the vocal sounds of Laura Bridgman: Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge. Vol. II, Art. 2.

ness. Paragraphing, being a kind of spacial separation of ideas, might seem to be a thing to appeal directly to one whose single active sense was one so well suited to the perception of space relations, yet she makes the breaks in her manuscript rarely and without discrimination. The further liberty of rearranging the incidents of her narrative has been taken because, though following in general a chronological order, she seems, in the more detailed ordering of them to follow mere suggestion. One or two of the commonest abbreviations, also, have been expanded.

The record begins with her attack of scarlet fever in 1832, and comes down to her visit to Mrs. Morton, her first teacher, in the winter of 1841. The sketch is dated February 20, 1854. The author was therefore at the time of writing a little more than twenty-four years old, and had been something over sixteen years at the Institute. Her style and her mastery of idiom, though more perfect than in her journal, except toward the very last, had not become finally fixed, and what is here found must not be taken as her highest attainment in these matters.

Errors of three kinds are to be expected in her writings: first, simple graphical errors, such as every one makes, which are in no way surprising in the manuscript of one that could not revise what she had written, nor see the beginning of a sentence from the end; second, errors of simple ignorance, inexperience, or misinformation, arising from her misunderstanding of her teachers, or from a too general application of some of the rules of language; and third, errors resulting from mental peculiarity, if any such exist. Numerous examples of the first and second classes will be found in the following extracts.

“THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE.

“I should like to write down the earliest life extremely. I recollect very distinctly

how my life elapsed since I was an infant. But that I have had the vague recollection of my infancy. I was taken most perilously ill when I was 2 years and a half. I was attacked with the scarlet fever for three long weeks. My dearest Mother was so painfully apprehensive that there was great danger of my dying, for my sickness was so excessive. The Physician pronounced that I should not live much longer. my Mother had a watch over me in my great agony many nights. I was choked up for 7 weeks as I could not swallow a morsel of any sort of food, except I drank some crust coffee. [Here “as”=“so that”; two or three times in one of the later books of her journal she uses “as” somewhat similarly for “that.”] I was not conveyed out of the house for an instant for 5 months, till June or July. I was saturated with very bad sores on my chin and neck and on my lowest right leg and other parts of the body.

“As soon as I began to get a little better, it delighted my Mother very highly, who had been so gloomy watching me constantly. I used to recline in a very nice and comfortable cradle for a great number of months. I enjoyed myself so very much in lying in my nest. Many of different persons were very attentive and tender and patient to me whilst I resided with my Parents until I attained not exactly the eighth year.

“I fancied having a veil drawn along my poor head whenever I lay myself in the cradle. The light was so very brilliant and striking that I could not bear to see the reflection of the sun shine an instant once, because my tiny eyes were very weak and painful many months. [Referring probably to this “reflection”—*i. e.*, the sunshine on the floor—Laura says in the sketch quoted by Mrs. Lamson: “It was from ignorance of the fact that I imagined that the sun always shone beneath, through the floor in my mother’s kitchen upon which I reflect with my eye, near her right window,”] it made the tears flow from my eyes like a



heavy shower. I dropped down my head in to my little hands as the ray of the light stung my eyelids like a sharpest needle or a wasp. my poor head and eyes continually tormented me so that I entered [in]to the snug bed chamber and staid there for a short time."

"My Mother set me so cautiously in a chair and tugged the chair along the floors on the two hind feet of the chair from the bedroom to the kitchen. I fancied to have her draw me backward in the chair very much indeed. My poor feet were wrapped in a poultice, and I made a great effort in sauntering so leisurely across the floor. my Mother took hold of my cunning hands to assist in supporting me to walk so feebly; it gave me some difficulty. I was so very restless and unwell that it gave her very great anxiety and trouble continually whilst in tending to me."

The house and its furniture naturally filled a large place in Laura's world; she writes:

"My Mother had a very nice and long, large pantry for many purposes, and a big sink room and two very snug and close chambers and three very large and better chambers, but she had a bed in her best parlour and one in the sitting room. she never had a carpet spread on a single floor in her house, but she occupied [=used] some rugs for the hearths in the parlour and sitting room only. She was so very [fru]gal and tidy and very clean in many respects. She furnished the whole house with much simpler furniture than some years since." "There used to be a small crevice in the narrow wall between two doors, through [which] the cat could crawl forward and backward. there was a little wooden curtain which suspended [=hung] along over the hole in the wall to prevent the draughts from going through into the kitchen. I do not know whether the cat could determine to open the curtain with her paws when she chose to go through."

"My Mother had a very long and small clock which stood from the ground to the top of the ceiling almost, in her south sitting room, in one of the corners of the room. I glanced at its weights and pendulum with much curiosity." [Laura uses such words as "glance," "look," "see," etc., very frequently, for the getting of information by the sense of touch.] "Before I was conducted to pearl st. Boston from my first region, my Father obtained a very tall and huge chest within several shelves [*i. e.*, with several shelves in it] for my Mother to put a great many large cheeses in. the chest had a folding door, erected with some crash cloth." "She had a good many very plain dishes. She has a very nice chest in her parlour, in which [are] contain[ed] many best dishes, etc. She always has a comical habit of having her big waiter stand over the shelf before the eyes of individuals." "I had two little cunning chairs, one of them was a rocking, and both of them were armed. the seats were changeable, made of cane; they last for ever. My dear grand Father made them. I seated myself in the little rocking chair before [the] fire a great many mornings whilst my Mother was preparing breakfast which was absolutely essential to the family's lives. I enjoyed myself in rocking back ward and forward constantly. My dearest friend Mr. Tenny gave me a thin tin plate with the edge printed in the blind alphabet. I occupied [=used] it daily with much pleasure."

The family grindstone is described as follows:

"My Father had a large portion of a log hewn. there was a deep hollow in the center of the log, in which he poured water, and there was a wheel so smooth. I used to turn it around in the pure water; it amused and delighted me very much to do it. I believe that it was for the purpose of sharpening my Mother's knives and such other things."

The business of the house was of unflinching interest to the little girl. She used to follow her mother about the house, and watch with her fingers what was going on. She mentions the picking of chickens, the baking, the making of candles and soap, and the boiling of potatoes for the pigs, and tells of trying to draw water from the well for her mother.

“ I enjoyed myself in observing her [*i. e.*, her mother] spin and weave and wind yarns and doing other things exceedingly. She had a couple of carving [=carding] boards which she meant to rub some very soft things some what like cotton wool with between them. See had a very huge and complex loom. I could not perform the labor; for it seemed too prodigious.” “ My Parents always built fires on the brick hearths in the grate places for a number of long years. They were never provided with matches or lamps or many other things then. I do not know how they captivated [=captivated] the flame of the fire by not using a match. they always took up tongs and pluck[ed] a spark of fire out of the grate place and lit a candle put in a brass stick.” “ My Mother used to put pieces of brown crust in a very hot fire and let them burn till they became consolidated rusk which I pulverized it by pounding it in a mortar. [Laura had forgotten the first clause of her sentence while writing the last.] I liked it soaked in milk extremely for my best diet.” “ She used to have a square frame on which she wadded and quilted very many comforters. It attracted me very much to rush toward the frame, put above the head of chairs, and look at her work.” “ My Mother used to pound her clothes with a wooden shovel upon a slanting bench while washing. She never had any line for hanging her wet clothes upon, but she spread them on the snow and grass for many long years. she was so particular as to have all things look very snowy or clean always.” “ My Mother never was in the habit of

scouring or cleansing her floors with her own hands within a cloth as of latter. she had a mow [=mop] with some pieces of cloth sewed on one end which enabled her to wash the floors with less trouble and more expert[ness.] it was much more convenience for her to have a mow than her poor hands. She never had a brush like what we use for sweeping bare floors. she had a broom combined with some split cane around the bottom. my grand Father used to make a great many brooms for her and others. My Mother knit many pairs of woollen gloves, etc., for her family. it was much cheaper for her to make them than to buy at a shop.”

Laura tells how she used to amuse herself:

“ I was very full of mischief and fun. I was in such high spirits generally. I would cling to my Mother so wildly and peevishly many times. I took hold of her legs or arms as she strode across the room. She acted so plain, as if it irritated her very much indeed. She scolded me sternly. I could not help feeling so cross and uneasy against her. I did not know any better. I never was taught to cultivate patience and mildness and placid[ity], until I came away from my blessed family at home.” “ My Mother had some very tiny books, which I loved to hold in my own little hands. I do not remember how the printed letters looked in my sight.” Mrs. Bridgman says that the last word Laura said before her sickness was “ book.” “ I had a man's large boot, which I called my little baby. I enjoyed myself in playing with the artifice[al] [=artificial] Baby very much. I never knew how to kiss my boot, nor any of my folks. I did not feel so solitary with a Baby as I should have felt if I had not [had] one. My Mother had some rags [of] which she purposed to make a doll for me. I never had a prettier doll than [that] which she only gave me in her home. I presume that there was not a good doll made for a

sale in my native state of N. H. I liked my living Baby the cat much better than the boot." "Some times I took possession of a small room in the attic. I slept and sat there with some of my dear friends. I observed many different things in the garret, barrels containing grain and rye etc. and bags filled with flour wheat. I was very much alarmed by not finding a banister on the edge of the floor above the stairs." "I recollect most truly that I used to chop some little living beings in my Mother's mortar for my own amusement." [This seems quite improbable, but, if true, it may be taken, perhaps, as showing latent possibilities of cruelty in Laura which, had she remained uneducated, might have developed into that insensibility to suffering in others which is said to be common among untrained deaf-mutes.]

"I was very fond of picking fruit during the favorite Summer and Fall with different persons. I reached a great abundance of sour and sweet apples suspending [=hanging] on the branches of the trees. [In retelling the story of Judas, Laura says: "He suspended himself."] I treaded over them with my feet. I went bare-footed many times some times. the green grass used to irritate my sensitive feet very badly. it amused me so much to ramble about on a carpet of the grass."

Laura probably uses the color adjective above, not from recollection of the color, but from hearsay. It is even very likely that the grass which hurt her feet was not green at all, but that she "rambled about on" a stubble field.

Her early experiences with fire were some of them somewhat painful. The following must have happened quite early:

"A spark of coal snapped directly upon my neck, and the flame of fire spread over my chin from my neck, so [that] they re-joined together for some time as they were scorched so badly. there is the old scar remaining on my neck and chin."

"I loved to sport with the cat very much. One morning I was sitting in my little rocking chair before the fire. I stretched out my hand toward the old cat and drew her up to my side. I indulged myself in having a game with her. it was so cruel a sport for the poor living being. I was extremely indiscreet and ignorant. I rejected the poor creature in to the hot fire. my Mother came rushing suddenly and rescued the cat from her danger. She seemed very impulsive with [=for?] the insent [=instant?] she shook and slapped me most sternly for my committing a sin against her dear cat. she punished me so severely that I could not endure the effect of it for a long time. [How severe this punishment really was may perhaps be judged from what she says later of Dr. Howe's punishment of her: "When I committed a sin in his sight he used to inflict a most severe punishment upon me by putting me in a closet or shak[ing] me gently." She held two of the cat's paws up for me to discern the mark of the flame of fire. my conscience told me at length that it was truly very wicked in me to have done a harm to her. It was very strange for the cat to go with the greatest fearful suspicion [=suspicion]. she concealed herself so lucky [in] some [woods]. The old cat never brought her company to her oldest home since she was banished from our sight. I cannot ask her the reason why she never retraced her natural steps. I am positive that it must be reality of her death now. The favorite cat had not faith in us that we should treat her more kindly and tenderly again."

"Once I set a chair by the fire-place; I was trying to reach the shelf to search for some thing. I drooped [dropped] my central gravity down and I scorched my stomach so terribly that it effectually made me very unwell and worrisome."

The larger animals were in these years a mystery not unmixed with terror for Laura. She says:



“ I took off my clean apron and threw it into the pig’s sty for a joke. the ugly pig scumped [=scampered] out of the sty and rushed against me suddenly. he alarmed me exceedingly. my Mother was standing and watching with great rigor by my side. She defended me from the harm from the silly beast. I did not know [how] very dirty and filthy it was for me to do so.” “ I was much discouraged [afraid] to see some persons obtain the warmest new milk from a cow. I was too much afraid of touching the beasts. But I was so very carefully warned against the enormous creatures by my dear Mother and other kind persons. I was never sadly injured by a[ny] sort of beasts.” “ A huge beast was induced to go in my Mother’s house frequently. he liked to ramble all over the house with a speed. I despised his fancy so much, but he would be obliging to run off. it tormented me most sadly. I never like to see a large animal in any situation of [the] house, except cats and smallest creatures.” “ I once was much alarmed to take a notice of a big bird which came flying so violently through the sink room. my Mother got out of patience and expelled the long necked bird so suddenly. I should imagine that it was a turkey, but I doubt entirely indeed.” “ Once in the night as I was laid in the bed in a solitude for a short time, in the snug room adjoining the kitchen, a large animal crept in and jumped upwards on me. it terrified me [so] extremely that I could not enjoy my sleeping, unless some one would come and shuffle the unpleasant guest away from me. One night I was sleeping so sweetly with a most lovely mistress [=mistress] in the identical room. a cunning and harmless cat came and got on my little head and roused me out of my [sleep]. the good mistress took out her hand and gave the sociable cat a violent blow that rendered her start off with great speed.”

It has been said, and it seems to the

writer with truth, that the two cases last mentioned were not real happenings, but dreams of animals in terms of touch.

The following are her childish experiences with death :

“ My Father used to enter his kitchen bringing some killed animals in [It was then customary for farmers to do their own butchering], and deposited them on one of [the] sides of the room many times. as I perceived it, it make [=made] me shudder with terror because I did not know what the matter was. I hated to approach the dead. One morning I went to take a short walk with my Mother. I went into a snug house for some time. they took me into a room where there was a coffin. I put my hand in the coffin and felt something so queer [The little girl was allowed great freedom of observation after her manner] ; it frightened me unpleasantly. I found something dead wrapped in a silk h’d’k’f so carefully. It must have been a body that that [=had] had vitality. I did not like to venture to examine the body for I was confounded. there stood some person on one side of the floor very calm, gazing upon the dead, and they touched its clouded eye and stroke [d] it as if the tears were shedding along his face.”

Very many of the incidents here recorded must have been remembered by Laura as inexplicable sensations, the real meaning of which she had to learn from others after she could communicate with them.

Notwithstanding her condition, the social instinct has always been strong in Laura Bridgman. Very much of the record of this early time, even, has to do with people. Of her mother she says:

“ My Mother used to have the privilege of going to church very many Sundays with my dear Father. I was very well contented and happy to be left at home many hours. Mother used to wear a very costly satin dress with a wide belt around her waist, on that occasion, and she also had a cape to match her dress. She had a very original

silk plush, drawn with many rows of wires. it was edged with a double and piped ruffle." "My Mother always was in the habit of wearing plain gold beads around her neck. I used to have some different from hers." "My Mother had never the privilege of studying a *Physiology*. she never knew that it would have been of a very vast benefit for me to bathe in cold water in general. It was a compassion [=pity] on her who was not able to have many books. she did not devote her time in reading or doing different and most profitable purposes. She lived most monotonously in her own domestic affairs in her household. She cooked and washed [and] ironed and doing such things so independently; she enjoyed her life exceedingly. Once She had a very thick and warm flannel dress, which she wore every intensely cold day in Winter. I was supplied with such a gown like hers. I had some cutting capes with a ruffle on the binding of the top of them. I admired them much on my neck. I was always so much attached to all little articles in my childhood." "My Mother was never fond of dressing gaudily. she never received a wedding ring from her Beau to wear on her left finger. She always was very tidy and nice and so orderly." "I once had a very tedious day. it made me feel very sad,—my dear Mother lying in her own bed in her sitting room all day long. they would not admit me into her room at all, but expelled me out. my Mother had not been well. I felt so extremely sad and lonesome without going to see her a moment." "My Mother could not spell a single word to me with her fingers wishing me good night, nor good morning, [nor] Adieu, except that she gave a most welcome kiss on my face. I did not know how to repay her for her welcome and cordiality; it must have been a pity in me. I murmured so sadly when she made escape from me for hours. I did not like to be deserted [=left] at home by her. I vinced the most confidence and faith in her on the

earth. I always recognized her instantly, as soon as I knew of her presence on her arrival."

As the intellectual nature of those in Laura's unfortunate condition is in danger of starving into idiocy, so their moral nature is in danger of degenerating into complete lack of self-control. An ever present motive for right conduct in our social relations is our perception of the effects of our actions on others, as witnessed to our eyes and ears by their subsequent conduct; but so much of this perception is denied to deaf-mutes, that, where they grow up with no better means of communication than the natural sign language, they, as a rule, become passionate, self-willed, and often ungovernable. As Laura outgrew her babyhood, she began to develop a temper and will of her own, which, before she went to the Perkins institute, had outgrown her mother's control, and necessitated the sterner government of her father. As has been well said, she was in a fair way to yield to nothing but superior force. Of her father and his discipline, she writes:

"When it was time for me to retire to bed at night, my dear Father stamped on the floor so hard that I might obey my Mother quickly. he was so rigorous and determined for my good. I was more liable to conform [to] his command than my Mother. I disliked to do anything with regard to my dear Father."

She reflects upon other members of the family:

"I do not remember of the very great blessing which was bestowed on me at the age of two years. I had two first little Sisters, Collina and Mary. Mary was 6 years old; Collina was 4 years of age. They were taken very sorely ill at the same time. they died of the scarlet fever suddenly. It was too unavoidable for me to be secured from the con[t]agious fever that was settled in my Sisters' systems. Mother suffered a most painful larmentation of their loss many

months. I had a Brother named Milo; he died of a kind of fever when he was 6 months old; his constitution was naturally very weak and ill. I wish most earnestly that my first Sisters and Brother Milo would have been spared on this beautiful earth, but my heavenly Father knew what was best for them. I am very positive that they love me so much more than if they lived with me. They are yet free from the suffering." "I never knew of my grandMother in my childhood. Perhaps that she must have been dead before I was born on my mother's hand. [This possibly means "on my mother's part," that is, as my mother's mother bore her, so my mother bore me.] I only was intimately acquainted with my grandfather who was my male Parent's Father. My grandfather had a very curious pipe which was used for a cigar. he loved to smoke along his throat so extravagantly. I hated to smell the smoke in the air. My Father was much more tender and mild and moderate than grandfather. I always love him more dearly than I did my grandfather. My grandfather was most fond and sportive in my child[hood]." "My dearest Aunt Phebe was invited to pass many months with me. I was so very happy to be consigned to her care. I did not know that she was one of my own relatives until some years after I was brought up to be educated in Boston. She was my Father's only Sister whom he loved the most of his friends." "I used to be threatened very tsernly and absurdly by some serva[n]ts who used [to be] with my Mother. One, a hired girl, abode with my mother, by the name of Miss Hall. I once was standing by the table whilst she washed some things for my Mother. she drew her wet hand out of the water and repulsed me so violently down on the kitchen floor, because she was much vexed and nervous without a real reason. She caused me to sob so bitterly. when my dear Mother came running toward me as quickly as she could, it injured the feelings in her heart

very much to discern me on being so ill-treated and in distressed. my Mother censured her girl, telling her how wicked and unjust it was in her to treat me so, and it brought the girl up with a tempest. she disliked to have me standing in silence near her side. my Mother rescued me so suddenly from the fall."

Of Laura's early friends, none claimed more of her affection than "Uncle Asa" Tenny, a man of not quite normal intellect, who used to support himself by working for the farmers about Hanover. Laura's recollections of him fill more space in her autobiography than those of all others together.

"Mr. Tenny was one of my greatest and best benefactors; he loved me as much as if I was his own Daughter; I always loved him as a Brother. I was so much attached to him. He used to lift me up in his arms and transport me from one place to an other. I liked to be carried as a little Babe in his great arms. I loved to breathe the purest fresh air very much indeed; the air out of the doors was very indispensable to my life." "Mr. Tenny was very tender hearted and [of a] most amiable and affectionate disposition. I was so very happy to stay with him constantly and forever." "I felt much farther familiar with him than my Father." "Whenever he was obliged to step off from me, it made me think that he meant to forsake me, and I felt very badly to have him desert so shortly. He did not know how to talk with his fingers for my sake, but he contrived how to make me understand by some signs which he showed me. He used to hail me most ardently by stroking my cheeks always. I could instantly recognize him from the manner of his moving hands and by his feet. it always delighted my heart much to feel him step along; for I felt so much attached to him. He proffered me some straw and rasp berries in a bowl filled with some very rich milk and maple molasses and bread many times. I relished it greatly with him. Once I seized his specta-



cles from his poor eyes and crushed them with great fury. he never had a mind to scold or punish me for doing a harm. He never got impatient with me or other children while he lived with me at home." "My dear Mother liked to accommodate him to my blessed home for a great while on account of my happiness. Whenever he was at liberty to go out of the doors with me, he would take hold of my cunning hands so tenderly; occasionally, he would lift me up in his arms very cautiously. I used to sit down with him on a very green carpet of grass very frequently. I always loved to protract my time in the most pure and balmy air. I was very fond of rambling about the world with him. We used to proceed through the meadows during the delightful weather. some times he picked up a tiny switch from the ground and mangle [=managed?] it in my little hand to stoop low on the coast of a brook or of a pond and hold the stick in the water and feel the flowing of the water that flowed down from time to time. I do not recollect how the water naturally glided; and how it looked so blue by the sky. he took numerous stones and induced me to throw them in to the water for my amusement and also a lesson, but he was very incapable of instructing me Geography. I do not know how long he resided with my Mother. I used to recline myself upon the comfortable bed beside of him sometimes; whilst he rested himself he took a news paper and read from it. I used to go with him to various barns, houses, etc. I could not bear to have him escape from me for an instant when I was conducted to a strange house, because I was too shy and timid. [This fear of being alone in a strange place was a lasting one with Laura. It is said that on one occasion after she was of some age, she was so moved by being obliged to go up stairs alone in a strange house, that she even struck one of her best friends. It is just to her, however, to add that she returned soon after, repentant.]..

Mr. Tenny would never abandon me by all [=any] means.... I did not know the certain number of miles we journeyed on foot each day. I was too far ignorant in Arithmetic or any kind of studies in the earliest days of my life." "He used to enter my Father's shed with me very frequently. We found something which gratified me extremely. he put me in it and then he got in also. I do not know what it was called" [A swing?] "My best benefactor, Mr. Tenny never had an idea of contracting a habit of wear[ing] a pair of gloves at any season. I never saw him wear a new raiment but shabby clothes over him." "He was in shabby clothes because he was never taught how to keep him in a good apparel when a little boy." "He always kept himself very clean and not grim[y] like a gipsy." "He had a very original and plain hat that was not similar to other men's or boys'; such a kind of hat lasted him a very long time." "He was always most honest and faithful, but very ridiculous and droll in his speeches many times." "He could not talk audibly [*i. e.* in such a manner as to be understood,] in the ear of a single individual; his mind was not in the natural state since a Boy." "He felt very much discouraged and sad to part with me suddenly, when I was almost 8 years of age. He was so suspicious of my being so cruelly stolen from his hands. he thought that some one was decided to cast me in prison. but he was very ignorant and imconpr[e]-hensible [=uncomprehending] about my loss, which made him mourn greatly. He was much confused in his poor mind; he could not help thinking of me constantly. It seemed to him as though that he was my own Father. I deserved [=owed it] to him to be a very valuable pet or child in this immense world. I wish most truly that I had [had] the privilege of communing with the blessed man as long as I saw him at my own home. I should have enjoyed my life much more, had I had the capacity of making the

finger alphabet. I could have made a great exertion in teaching my Mother and friends how to talk with their own fingers. I do not think that I should have been so happy as a bird, if Mr. T. was not [=had not been] my best acquaintance. He was much older than my Father. Mr. T. was much prejudiced [=prejudiced] against many persons in many things; he did not know how wise and judicious and talented they were." "My beloved friend Mr. Tenny missed me so extremely in my long absence from his hands that he felt unhappy and forlorn. he made a great resolution to write a letter to me many times while in his solitude [=loneliness] from my departure. he did not know how to use the language accurately and comprehensibly in writing to me. Some of my dearest friends with whom I dwelt in this Perkins Insti. mentioned that Mr. T. was a very droll and absurd writer and also he seemed in his accent like a Greek. [Probably they said his letters were Greek to them.] they could not help laughing so heartily at his writing. they could not understand by all his meant words, nor could puzzle out in any way. He was not intelligent in his nature. He made the people laugh very much at his remarks. He said that I should be too unhappy to be induced to reside here, because I was so far off from his company and my own home. he did not like to have such a thought for my being amongst numerous strangers. he trusted in my Mother much more than in any one else in this world that she might have much more claim for me, as it was very natural to her. . . . he never came to see me since I abandoned my blessed home. I never asked him the particular reason which he could have revealed to me. I should have felt so much delighted to see him previous to his limited vitality [i. e. death] I presume that he was too poor to afford to pay his expense; he had not much money." "I do not know whether he understood that I felt very thankful to him as long as I was in

his presence at my home." "He loved to see me indulged in everything for my own pleasure unless some circumstances should occur most perilously and wickedly. [Against] that he was very cautious to defend me; so I felt good effects of his caution. He saved my life against God's mighty [i. e. under God?] I felt so very thankful to him as if he was an Angel and the messenger to me from the hands of God."

Up to her twenty-fourth year, when this autobiography was written, Laura seems to have little knowledge of social distinctions, either as regards the position of her friends or that of her own family. She speaks of those that received her in their kitchens with as thorough respect and as hearty affection as those that received her in their drawing rooms, and she has apparently not even a shadow of a suspicion that any one could do otherwise. Taken in connection with her enthusiastic account of Mr. Tenny given above, the following journal entry of some years earlier becomes a further illustration. It is from a very early book, before she had learned the titles, Mr., Mrs., etc., and the "sumner" who had been playing with her was the great Massachusetts statesman. She says: "i bit sumner, because he squeezed my arm yesterday; he was very wrong." In a conversation of about the same time, reported by Miss Swift, she said: "Sumner is not gentle like Doctor [i. e. Doctor Howe.] Why does Doctor want Sumner to come here if he is not gentle?" But some premonition of the feeling of such distinctions is to be found, perhaps, in her apologies for Mr. Tenny's ignorance and his poor clothes. She certainly had a perception of the differences of people, which of course lies at the bottom of social differences.

The autobiography throws some light upon the interesting question of the exact condition of her senses before her examination by scientific observers. If we are to take the statement that she smelled the smoke of her grandfather's tobacco *in the air*, as



meaning that she perceived the diffused odor of it, not that she inhaled the smoke itself, we must admit a considerable variation in her sense of smell; for Dr. Howe found it quite obtuse during her first months at the Institute, and at the end of the year 1840 reported as follows: "It was stated in the first report that she could perceive very pungent odors, such as cologne; but it seemed to be as much by the irritation it produced upon the mucous membrane of the nares, as by any impression upon the olfactory nerve. It is clear that the sensation cannot be pleasurable, nor even a source of information to her respecting physical qualities; for such is her eagerness to gain this information, that could smell serve her she would exercise it incessantly." "Those who have seen Julia Brace, or any other deaf-blind person, would hardly fail to observe how quickly they apply everything which they feel to the nose, and how, by this incessant exercise, the smell becomes almost incredibly acute. Now with Laura this is not the case; she seldom puts a new thing to her nose, and when she does, it is mechanically, as it were, and without any interest." The next year, however, she was able to recognize the odor of an orange which was being peeled in the same room with her, and, in the year 1844, to enjoy the perfume of roses. That there should have been such a variation is not impossible; for she was at the time troubled with catarrh, and it may be that her sense of smell was by some variation in this disease made less acute at the time of her entrance into the Institute than before or afterward.

Of her sense of taste she writes:

"I did not discriminate the kind of meat that I was eating with avidity. I was perfectly conscious of the great difference between meat and vegetables, though I did not have the knowledge of the name for victuals etc. in the immense world." By 1844 her taste had become somewhat more delicate; she said to her teacher: "I thought

turkey and chicken and ducks were all the same; they taste alike to me. I can tell beef from mutton, why can I not know turkey and chicken?"

No mention whatever is made, either in her autobiography or journal, of anything that would imply a conception of sound as sound. Once, in conversation with her teacher, she asserted that she heard the report of a cannon, adding that she heard very loud sounds in her ears. But it seems more probable that what she perceived was the stroke of the air upon her face. At another time she said she dreamed of talking with her mouth, but she could give no account of what she had said in her dream. Before that time she had been taught to vocalize a few words, and her dream, probably, was of some action of the same kind, and did not imply any unconscious recollection of hearing or speaking.

Of her power to see she makes this very curious statement: "I recollect very plainly how my hand looked beyond my sight; the light struck my poor eyes so violently. I cannot know of the reality of the things [*i. e.*, how they really were] when I could see or hear or articulate once." The sense of the sentence is obscure: does she mean "how my hand seemed as I felt of it when it was too far away from my eye to affect my sight"? or does she mean "how my hand perceived objects at a greater distance than my sight perceived them"? or "how my hand seemed (or how it perceived objects) *after* my sight, that is, after my time of seeing"? or was it her intention to imply that what she knew as a sense of sight was not referred beyond the eye itself, and that in some such way her hand was beyond her sight? The sentence has the qualities of a superior oracle, information of great possible interest, and perfect incomprehensibility. In another place she says: "I used to throw some things across the room with great expert [=expertness?] and did not hit any one in that direction; I was half sighted then."

How restricted her means of communication were, appears from the following:

“I could not talk a single word to him, [Mr. Tenny] nor any one else with my own fingers. I only knew how to make them comprehend some of my wishes. I offered my tiny hand unto my dear Mother, entreating her that she might know of my want for some thing to eat or drink. I stroked on my hand for some butter spread on a piece of bread. I could not assure her whatever I should like for a drink or nourishment, because I was incapable of making the deaf alphabet. I was generally satisfied with any kind of food or liquids that they procured for me.” “I used to make a sign for my dear Mother that I wished to lie down on the bed. I nodded my head on my hand for that want of putting me immediately on the bed. she always understood me in all respects.” Similar signs for general approval or disapproval, and for “come” and “go,” had been established.

From extracts already given, some idea may be formed of what was done for her moral and intellectual instruction. Her home education was, however, largely manual.

“My Mother taught me how to knit and make butter, iron, wash, etc.” [She was still under eight years old, so that her knowledge of these things was probably not large.] “I was never trained to make beds nor how to put things in perfect order.” “I was never taught to make a bed or how to sew.”

Of the limits of her general knowledge she says:

“I did not know what was my region, nor any object of the world. I did not know that my Parents had a farm upon which we lived.” But by this she probably means no more than that she did not know the names of her State and town, nor what her father’s occupation was called.

The great event of Laura Bridgman’s life, the turning point at which her fortune changed from the prospect of an existence

so low and narrow that death itself would rather be chosen, to the prospect of a life of intellectual activity and moral beauty, was the visit of Doctor Howe, which resulted in her going to Boston and her entering the Institute. We will let her give her own account of this first interview and its results:

“When I attained the 8th year living with my very dear Mother, A gentleman went to see me at my home. I would not venture to go to her spare parlour with her; for I was so very shy and timid. she introduced me to the noblest visitor, but I shrunk myself as hastily as I had strength. He took my tiny hand and greet[ed] me most cordially. he seemed to be [such] a very unusually tall [man] to me, that it made me feel much repelled, because I never saw so tall a man before in my life. It was Dr. S. G. Howe whom I could not know or like. It was perfectly kind in him to leave the first Insti. and go so far to beseech [seek] me at Hanover which was so much more expensive for him to travel than of late. A person discovered a little girl whose name was Lily Bridgman [so it seems to read in the manuscript] and brought news to the good Dr. he was greatly interested in me; so he hastened himself and hunted for me for various reason[s]. The noble Dr. brought me a silver pencil to my home. he lay it in my little hand, but it agitated me so much that I disputed [?] the nice gift and lost it some where. I did not calculate his generosity and love in me. I do not know how long he passed with my Mother. He communed with my parents about my leaving them in this particular case for use of [=for the sake of] my education. he was so extremely anxious that I should come to be taught immediately. My dear Mother and Father were exceedingly gratified at the proposal he gave them for my important exercise of mind and faculties.

“I felt much grieved and tormented to leave my native town so suddenly. My parents conducted me to the Insti. in pearl

street when I was not exactly [=quite] 8 years old, in Oct. I took a long ride in a chaise with them. I do not know whether we traveled in a stage or the cars, nor how long it took us to take our journey from my blessed home toward the 1st Insti. I dreaded leaving home so much that it made me shed an abundance of tears from my eyes many long days. the time elapsed so very heavily and painfully that I did not know what to do with myself. I kept clinging on my dear parents, so as to not let them escape from me, but did not succeed in detaining them. I was removed from them; they attempted to avoid me as quickly as possible. at the very moment that I lost them I burst in[to] bitterest tears. Miss J. Howe, one of Dr.'s Sisters, was with me then. She tried to pacify and sooth me, but my poor heart was too full of sorrow and trouble. I was so much more homesick to retrace my steps home than I could bear in my power. I believe that I was drawn along toward my trunk, and I put my hands in for something to taste of, which my Mother put in my trunk. I had a very sad and pleasant time with Miss J."

Laura's first lessons at the Institute are a center of almost romantic interest to the student of her history. Here for the first time was the attempt made to reach and systematically to instruct one so bereft. The spirit of the parties to the experiment was so rare—warm-hearted and scientifically guided benevolence on one side, and real knowledge hunger on the other—the matter at stake was so momentous—no less than a mind's life or death—and the final result was so much what had been desired and worked for, that the whole incident seems less an actual fact than the fancy of a storyteller. In these first lessons the great success was won, the Archimedean fulcrum gained, which made the world of after difficulties relatively light.

"The Dr. devised a way of having some words printed on bits of paper, which he

glued on a mug and spoon, knife, fork, etc.,<sup>1</sup> for me to begin to feel on a single word by my finger. I could not know how to spell one letter with my own fingers for some time. Dr. H. was my first instructor. Miss Drew was my first instruct[r]ess in her ladyship. I loved them so dearly for a great many excellent reasons. It would lengthen my time very much indeed to describe all the reasons in this first book, but I can only write a little of them down. Dr. and Miss Drew set me a most excellent example. I felt so very glad to receive education from them. I enjoyed my new lesson much more than I can say. I never felt weary of studying, as it was very difficult for me to understand such simple and short words. [On the principle of "Let courage rise with danger."] Dr. made some signs that brought me up to understanding naturally. he boxed [patted] my head meaning 'right'; he knocked at my elbow for 'wrong.' He checked at me by his finger for 'shame' or 'folly' and when he was displeased in seeing anything which I had done wrong. He stroked my hand when when he perceived how dirty or shabby I looked; he patted my cheeks expressing me his love and affection. [These signs were established, of course, by repetition, in about the same way that a dog is trained to obey his master's word or gesture.] When I committed a sin in his sight he used to inflict a most severe punishment upon me by putting me in a closet or shake-[ing] me gently. then it caused me to weep so sadly. he would always forgive me for the disobedience." "He procured a thing curious for me. [Several such inversions are found in the journal, *e. g.*, 'room school' for 'school room,' 'not was much afraid,' etc.] it was a type case. I could set types in a space of lined edge for the purpose of writing some words instead of the use of a pencil. I had a great deal of interest in set-

<sup>1</sup> The account given of the method of her education in "Mind," vol. I., p. 263, though made up from a late report of Dr. Howe's, differs in some details from that given in his early reports, from that given by Mrs. Morton (Miss Drew) in Mrs. Lamson's book, and from that given here.



ting the types with an impression of letters. [She does not mean that the letters were cut in intaglio-wise; they were cameo.] A great many people admired to examine the sentences I made very much." He [Dr. Howe] had a little book entitled 'a child's book' raised in blind letters; he gave it to me. I was much pleased with it. He taught me how to read the words with my own finger. I was so very fond of reading." "She [Miss J.] and her best Brother Dr. learned to make the finger alphabet before I came away from my home." [Mrs. Morton, however, says in her account in Mrs. Lamson's book: "Dr. Howe had been absent for some time, and on his return was much delighted with the progress she (Laura) had made, and at once learned the manual alphabet himself.]

"My dear Mother came to make me a visit several times. I was so violently struck with delight to see her since I was parted from my home. I do not know how many times she came to visit me. She used to bring me a great many nice things. She could not make the letters with her fingers then. I enjoyed her visit very much, though she could make no word with me. My dear Father came with my Mother occasionally. . . . My Mother brought me a quantity of maple sugar which I loved very much."

"Miss Drew taught me to write and read and sew and different things. . . . I was so happy to have the advantage of learning to make the blind letters. Miss D. had a long piece of patience in me in many respects. I was very strongly attached to her. She went to Boston with me many times. we had such a pleasant long walk every day. I used to sleep with her in the little room Miss Paddock is occupying now. . . . She had a very small room opposite to the larger one. I used to take a cold sponge bath in there as soon as I got up in the morning. she put a china basin in a chair and a nice sponge in the white water. [In speaking of

Laura's idea of color, Dr. Howe says: "She thinks that black is a dirty color." It is not unreasonable to suppose that, hearing black and white and dirty and clean constantly contrasted, she should associate whiteness and cleanness. She would then mean by "white water" not "white like the china basin," nor "transparent," but simply "clean." It is possible, also, that the coolness and liquid smoothness of water may have been associated in her mind with the coolness and smoothness of fresh laundried white clothing.] after my sensitive body was washed, she wiped me with a crash towel. She combed my hair daily. she used to twist my hair with some paper at night many times when I was ready to retire. I liked to have her curl my hair so beautifully around my neck. [The blind, as a rule, are careful about the elegancies of toilet and dress. With Laura this seems to have been the case in an extraordinary degree.] I had such a very pleasant time with her for 4 years or longer. I felt in my own heart as if she was my real Mother. she always loved to caress and pacify me very much indeed. I never liked to have her leave me alone a second.

"One day I went to the city of Boston with my dear teacher, Miss Drew. we sojourned at a confectioner's shop for some time. she got me some feast which I liked very much. She left me in the conspicuous room for a few minutes. I was sitting in a very nice chair at the table. I was so shy and afraid to be alone amongs[t] the strangers that I made a shriek noise which caused her to rush along to me as quickly as she could. She reproved me most kindly for my doing so frightfully. I felt much abashed [=ashamed] of it. I doubt not, of course, that they must have felt disgust[t]ed to think that there was a wild beast who had entered into the shop."

The last few pages of the autobiography are filled almost entirely with Laura's recollections of three visits to her teacher's home

in Halifax, Mass., and of a visit to Hartford, on which she met, among others, Julia Brace and Mrs. Sigourney.

“I used to accompany Miss Drew several times to her native state [=place] in Mass. . . it was a most benevolent duty [=kind deed] in her to have the claim upon me [=the desire for me?]. I did not like to be introduced to her dear Mother and Father and two Sisters and Brothers at first; for I felt too shy and timid. I was much more homesick than I could bear. But my best Miss Drew tried so hard as to sooth and content me as far as was in her power. I disliked much to be put out in the sight of a stranger for many long months. They would not let me alone for many reasons. One of them was because I could not utter or hear or manage myself comfortably and contentedly; and another was that they took so much interest in me; they were so strongly attached to me.”

“I had a great deal of interest in one of Miss Drew’s Brothers because he had a store about a few steps from her own house. His name was James. I was so much pleased to know of something very luxurious. I went to call on him many times with the Misses Drew. He was very liberal to me; he gave me some sorts of candy. I loved it extremely. He was so desirous to sweeten me like sugar.” [In Laura’s case, taste formed so large a part of the field of sensation, that her love of candy is not to be wondered at. It is said that now, though fifty-six years old, she still retains the fondness of a child for it.]

“One morning I committed an evil in the sight of God, which my first teacher, Miss Drew, considered was really wrong in my heart. She inflicted a severe punishment upon me by putting me in her chamber closet. she shut me in and took the precaution [=precaution] of locking [=locking] the door for some time. At length of time I burst in a loud fit of crying; the tears showered along my little cheeks, which made Miss

Drew know that I felt so sad for having done wrong. [Such an expression as “showered along” suggests that Laura’s idea of a shower may have had in it rather more of the notion of running water than of falling, though she must certainly have felt at some time the stroke of the falling drops.] She felt all ready to forgive me with her whole heart by giving a cordial kiss upon my face. I was repulsed by her most sadly when I felt so anxious to beg her pardon by putting my arm around her neck and make[ing] a gesture for a kiss on her fabby [?] cheek occasionally. She at first thought that I had not really repented of my temptation until [=until] she took a notice of the expression of my sorrow. She would try to cheer me as far as possible in many ways.”

“Miss Mary Drew had a little doll with a painted wooden head. she was so good as [to] let me have the tidy doll for playing in my solitude. I believe that she had the means [=intention] of giving the tidy doll to me. the poor child without vitality was not provided with the legs not [=nor] arms, I thought.”

“I went to visit some of Miss L. Drew’s friends, Mrs. and Dr. Morton, several times; the distance was two miles from Mr. Drew’s house. While I spent some time with Miss D. at the Dr’s house, I was very much frightened to know of a new thing; it was a little cunning dog, whose [=which] was Dr. Morton’s favorite. the little dog had such a pretty name, Carlo. [Probably some one else’s comment to Laura.] I abhor[r]ed to touch him in the least. I was a great mind to plash him by my foot whenever I was aware of his approach. I disliked much to protract my time staying in the Dr’s house on account of his dear little petted dog.”

“One day Miss Drew was most kind to lay me upon Mrs. Morton’s bed in her snug chamber. I felt so timid being left in a solitude, because it seemed too strange a place to me, and also for [=because] it alarmed me so much to brood over the subject of little Carlo. I was so fearful that he might

be in dangerous time to jump upon me whilst [I] reclined upon a very soft feather bed, but I fell asleep unconsciously. I was almost congealed in the cold bed chamber. As soon as I awoke I cried aloud for Miss Drew to hear me. she came very quickly and took me from the bed so mildly and kindly. I was so glad as to see her again."

Unless Laura is here projecting her later experience backward, and writing of what she did unconsciously, as though it were done with intent, she had at this time the knowledge that by making a sound of a certain power (perceived by her, of course, as muscular tension accompanied by vibration of the vocal organs), other people could be called, and to that extent she had a conception of vocal language. The "shriek noise" in the confectioner's shop is not quite so good an example, for that may have been a mere cry of fear as unconsidered as the cry of a new-born child. In his report for 1843, page 28, Dr. Howe says: "Now, as she cannot hear a sound, as she never attempts, like deaf and dumb persons, to attract the attention of others by making a noise," etc. The visit of which this calling is an incident was made before the end of the year 1841. It is probable that this, having happened away from the Institute, had never been brought to his notice.

In May, 1841, Laura made her second visit to Halifax, driving over from Boston with some of her lady friends.

"as soon as we advanced [=approached] Miss Drew's home, it began to grow dim according to the ending night [=day]. I was so very glad as to hunt for Miss D. she came rushing toward the front door to hail me with her whole heart.

"[The] Misses Howe and Miss Marshall passed a few long days with my best teacher, Miss Drew. ['Long,' before divisions of time, has no implication of tediousness with Laura]. afterwards the guests all abandoned [=left] us together at home; they went to Duxbury to make some visits on some of

their friends. I staid a week longer with Miss Drew. It was so modern [=late] in June as she and I left her home which must have caused her to miss [it] most sadly for the present [=the time being]. we went to the blind 'Sylum.

"Miss Drew prolonged in staying with me until the last month in the Autumn. she renounced [=gave] up my instruction at that time in the year 1841. She felt so very sad indeed at the notion of departing from me with so many other friends in the Institution. She went back to her native place for some excellent reasons. She was prom[is]ed to go to be with her lover, Dr. Morton, 2 miles from Mrs. D. She entered into the state of marriage. She is no longer Miss Drew."

Her third visit was made in the winter of the same year, to Mrs. Morton, in her new home.

"I passed almost a week with my very first teacher Mrs. M. in her destined home, who was just married to the poor Widower, by the name [of] Dr. Morton, who had a most lovely and cunning Wife until it took this place for her to depart from her earthly Husband and 2 oldest Sons, Lloyd and cyrus. [A longer sentence than usual for Laura.] I suffered so greatly from the intensely cold weather that it caused me to feel so fretful and shivery. . . . . We lay our poor and shivering bodies in a bed made of most soft and balm[y] feathers, but I was not able to resist the vast coldness; my poor nostrils felt so sadly icy, that it make me so very chilly breathing the dreary and icy air. We were supplied with a great blessing of fire which our heavenly Father gave us. we kindled the lustrous flame of fire on the icy hearth in Mrs. Morton my prime [=first] teacher's, spare chamber, which diffused its most pleasant heat to the room [in] which we made our toilet.

"I perceived a very nice green slipper being warmed which was Miss J's own. at length the poor friendly [?] slipper got burnt



or shirved [shriveled] [so] that it tormented her sadly. It was a fault in her not watching her shoe whilst [it] was warming so nicely."

Earlier in the same year, 1841, Laura made her visit to Hartford.

"Once before the time came on for Miss Drew to be espoused, She and I left my dearest and lovely home in N. H. we went to Springfield to sojourn two nights, when my very best Benefactor and friend, Dr. S. G. Howe, was there to welcome us most cordially. We spent a Sunday there, till Monday in the very early morning. he accompanied us in a stage and we left Springfield to go into a steam boat. I enjoyed such a time in going to Hartford. I was so very glad to have the greatest pleasure of making a short visit to my newest acquaintance by the name [of] Julia Brace,<sup>1</sup> who was very sadly pitied by numerous people, because she was blind and deaf and dumb and who was not educated since when she was born. she could not spell a whole sentence or a word to me with her fingers. I was having such a fine time at Hartford in meeting many kind and good people, Mr. Weld and Mrs. White and Mrs. Signourey and others." [Laura rarely misspells a word, but twice spells Mrs. Sigourney's name as above.] "We staid 1 night with the poor, unfortunate, old lady Julia, who could not enjoy our visit much. She seemed to recognize me in a minute. Next day in the P. M. Miss Drew and I went to spend the fine P. M. with Mrs. Signourey. we took tea there with so much pleasure. My great friend Dr. Howe went also with us. I had a very fine and pleasant time in Hartford with Miss Drew and the noble Dr."

Laura mentions their return to the Institute, and then closes her sketch of her early

<sup>1</sup> Julia Brace was at the time the only other well-known blind-deaf-mute in the United States. She was then a woman grown, and had been taught only in the sign-language, and with but partial success. Later, she was for a time at the Perkins Institute, and an effort was made to teach her language by the method which had been used in Laura's case, but her mind had lost its elasticity, and her own desire and interest were insufficient to carry her through the early drudgery.

life with an incident of the journey, and one more expression of her discomfort in the presence of strangers.

"I was informed by Miss D., whilst we were seated taking tea or Breakfast at the table, that a Waiter who was a Negro gentleman waited upon us. I slept with Miss Drew in a snug chamber adjoining the sitting room. I did not enjoy myself in staying at Springfield much amongst strangers."

A word upon Laura Bridgman's "poems" is sufficient. She can, of course, know nothing of audible rhythm, and as little of audible rhyme, but a kind of visible rhyme would be possible to her; indeed, the following sentence from one of her letters, though possibly not of her own composition, seems to show that she had noticed the similar arrangement of letters in similarly placed words: "Pray ye the Lord; praise ye the Lord; prize ye the Lord." But such resemblance of words, except when, as above, they mark like parts of speech in like position in their clauses, would be a senseless artificiality to her. Of rhyme, as emphasizing and marking meter, she can have no conception. But, on the other hand, the rhythm of thought and the parallel structure of the psalms and the chants of the Hebrew prophets, are things perfectly comprehensible to one in her condition. Laura had read Scripture, and when she came to desire to express similar emotion (two of her three pieces are religious), it is natural that her thought should flow in channels already worn. Mrs. Lamson, in her book, published 1878, writes: "She has written, within a few years, two compositions which she calls 'poems.' The first is on 'Light and Darkness.' As she has access to very little poetry in the books she can read herself—and she seems not to have aimed at any imitation of this—we think she must have taken the general idea from some parts of the Bible." I have had in my hands a manuscript of Laura's, dated

1867, which contains another of these compositions, very probably her first, and in a connection which seems to make it almost certain that she had the Scripture consciously in mind in writing.

"Oct. 6th, 1867.—I will compose a poem for my blessed Sister Julia.

"God is love. his love is like sun. love is unquenchable.

Love of the Lord is everlasting.

It is hard to appreciate his love.

The sun manifests love of God.

Jesus Christ is our love.

Jesus died loving us on earth.

No man can expire [=express] love of God.

Are we saved by thy love?

Love is much brighter than light below the skies.

Let your heart rest in the love of the almighty Lord.

Love is the spirit of God, love blazes more than fire.

A heart is the candlestick and is lighted by love of Jesus.

Let not thy love dim. admit friends with out inviting them.

Yield the beam of sun to those around thee.

A candle cannot be overblown which is hid in the midst of the pure heart.

Ye shall not die if ye dwell in the love of the Lord."

On the same paper, and immediately after the "poem," stands the heading, "A proverb," and for her proverb she has quoted, with the omission of a couple of words, the first six verses of the fourth chapter of Proverbs, even to the numbering of the verses. Then follows what she entitles "A Sabbath-evening prayer," and, closing the whole, "I praise God that I am your chosen friend L. D. Bridgman.

The one on "Light and Darkness" is the best of the three.

"Light represents day.

Light is more brilliant than ruby, even diamond.

Light is whiter than snow.

Darkness is night like.

It looks as black as iron.

Darkness is a sorrow.

Joy is a thrilling rapture.

Light yields a shooting joy through the human [heart].

Light is sweet as honey, but

Darkness is bitter as salt and even vinegar.

Light is finer than gold and even finest gold.

Joy is a real light.

Joy is a blazing flame.

Darkness is frosty.

A good sleep is a white curtain.

A bad sleep is a black curtain."

The figures of speech in these compositions should be noticed. In the first place, they are so numerous that the few lines above contain more than are consciously used in the whole of her autobiography. Then it is interesting to see to what senses they appeal. More than half of them are addressed to sight, but require little clearer seeing than is needed to distinguish light and darkness, or to perceive the sudden blazing up of a flame; in a word, scarcely more power of sight than Laura in her early years possessed. The reference to the sweetness of honey may have been suggested by her models, while that to the bitterness of salt and vinegar, would argue obtuseness of taste for what is really bitter, were it not possible that bitter is used with some confusion as to its signification. The appeal to the temperature sense is unmistakable, as also that in the seventh and eighth lines above to the sensation accompanying sudden action of the heart. With Laura's emotional temperament, these sensations were frequently experienced and are frequently referred to. The figure in the last couplet seems to refer to the general feeling of well-being, or its opposite, which results from a restful or a broken sleep, and so may be fairly said to be based on somatic sensation, a thing not often done in literature. To the writer the figure seems a peculiarly appropriate one, but these body sensations are so often below the reach, not only of conscious language, but of consciousness itself, that others may find in it no aptness at all. There are no figures of speech in any of the three pieces that appeal to the sense of smell or that of hearing. The first is not much to be wondered at, for such figures are rare in normal lan-



guage; but that there should be none of the second, is more remarkable. Indeed, her whole use of figures in these compositions is in strange accord with what is otherwise known of the condition of her senses before her coming to Boston.

The interest which centered about Laura Bridgman in her early life was two-fold—humanitarian and philosophical. The former has in large measure accomplished its mission and declined. The latter also has in part declined, because Laura's case has not furnished the evidence expected from it, upon certain philosophic questions. Her condition was supposed to be essentially that of a person blind and deaf from birth, and consequently, because she was thus cut off from receiving ideas from others, fitted to furnish a practical test of the doctrine of innate ideas. Subsequent study however, has thrown doubt upon the trustworthiness of her case in this regard.<sup>1</sup> The contents of her mind and its mode of action, if they could be come at, ought to furnish further evidence, pro and con on the question, and it is for what her writings may furnish toward this end, that they are worthy of further consideration.

But too much must not be expected from this source. Though language is the chief index of mind, and in the main we are justified in arguing peculiarity of thought from peculiarity of expression, such inferences must be made with the utmost care, for the possibilities of error are manifold. This is especially true when the quantity of lan-

guage to be studied is small and the meaning of the words themselves somewhat uncertain. Both these causes operate in Laura's case, and we must content ourselves with broad and sketchy outlines of her mind and its furniture instead of the minutely accurate pictures that could be desired.

In considering her use of language, some of her simpler mistakes will first be noticed, and afterward such usages as bear more directly upon the mental state.

It should be observed by way of preface that in her girlhood at least, Laura was more liable to errors in writing than in conversation. Mrs. Lamson quotes from her journal as teacher, an entry made in December, 1843, as follows: "Her written abstracts do not compare favorably with the oral ones, for she cannot be made to feel that it is necessary to take time and paper to write fully as she talks, and in attempting abbreviations she makes mistakes." How far her later writings were affected by this carelessness, it is difficult to determine.

As was said above, three kinds of errors may be expected in the form of her writings as opposed to their substance: first, mere graphical errors, such as every one makes; second, errors of misinformation arising from her misunderstanding of her teachers or from a too general application of the rules of language; and third, errors resulting from mental peculiarity, if any such exist. These will be briefly taken up in their order.

Graphical errors are not on the whole very numerous. One as frequently found as any is the dropping of a letter; as "huner" and "huger" for "hunger," "hal" for "hall," and "boo" for "book." Sometimes a final letter is dropped by anticipation, as "bes things," for "best things," or the process is reversed, and by recollection of the final letter of the preceding word one or more are omitted from the following one, as "have en" for "have been" and "dearents" for "dear parents." She makes a few careless substitutions of letters; for

<sup>1</sup>When we reflect on the rapidity with which relations of time, space, and the properties of matter are learned during the first few months of infancy, we must believe that some trace, though it be vague as Platonic reminiscences, of these experiences must remain. The right eye distinguished the light of a candle, the window, and possibly some shades of color, up to the seventh year. The facility with which Laura learned to run about, to knit, sew, braid, etc., before she left her home; the suddenness and completeness with which, after a few lessons with objects and labels at the asylum, the idea of thus communicating with others came to her mind; her freedom at all times from what instructors of the blind designate as *blind-mindedness*, or want of capacity to comprehend space-relations, all indicate that possibly her condition, when she came to the asylum, was not so identical with that of a child blind from birth as even Dr. Howe supposed, and that thus her marvelous curiosity, as well as her quickness of comprehension may be in part accounted for.—Professor G., Stanley Hall, *Nation*, Vol. 27, p. 259.

example, "smope" for "smoke" "foylful" and "fourney" for "joyful and journey" and "cottabe" for "cottage." In one respect, however, her *lapsus penne* seem to differ from those found in ordinary manuscript. The substitution of letters there seems at times influenced by the *sound* of the letters; in Laura's manuscript this is seldom or never the case.<sup>1</sup>

With syllabication, she had difficulty certainly, if any attempt was made to teach it to her. Though sometimes dividing a word correctly, she gives us such examples in her autobiography as "mola-sses" and "mischief;" and in her letters, such as "ble-st," "shou-ld" and "contain-s."

The causes that lead her into literal errors lead her into similar verbal ones. Occasionally in the journal a sentence is quite unintelligible, and at times, though not often, her inability to see betrays her into anacolutha in quite simple sentences. She proposes to write to her "very pleasant and thriving feelings which I am very eager to have you read some of my ideas," and again, "he [the whale] eats very many little fishes and other animals that he likes them very much to eat himself." In the same way it happens several times that she inserts a negative when the sense of her sentence obviously requires its omission, or omits one where it should be retained; for example: "he wished that he would [=had] give[n] his fishe[s] to the boys, he did not think it would not be good to carry fishes home in his hands," and "I hope that she will hurt my tiny, tender and fragile heart, when she feels vexed in her heart." For the same reason, probably, she wrote a few times sentences in which verbs that should be co-ordinate throughout, do not agree in tense, as: "they were gay and run in the fields much."

The errors of misinformation as found in

<sup>1</sup>There are instances in her manuscript where a letter is influenced by an adjacent one, as "ggain" and "ggo," and some which suggest that the graphical form of the letter led to the confusion, and others where the interchanged letters are made in the mute alphabet with a somewhat similar position of the fingers; but in no case are the data sufficient to show anything conclusive.

her use of language, are of two kinds: errors of vocabulary—that is in the meaning and use of single words—and errors of syntax.

The first words of a child's vocabulary are learned by associating the verbal sign with the thing which it signifies. The baby sees a dog and his mother repeats the word till a connection is established in his mind between the impressions made on his eyes and ears. A large number of words is learned in this way by the senses, and as it were, unconsciously. Later, words that stand for supersensual things are learned, through their metaphorical connection with words already learned, by analogy and derivation, by observation and introspection, or by a combination of processes; very many of them, in spite of their signification, depend for their complete understanding upon the action of the senses. But there are still others, words like the technical terms of mathematics and logic, the meaning of which must be learned laboriously and consciously by definition. This method is well enough suited to the exact nomenclature of science, but not to the more picturesque language of conversation and literature. It may not be difficult to frame a botanical definition of a tree, but to make a definition that should convey any real notion of a tree to one totally ignorant of such a thing, would be difficult if not impossible. In attempting such a thing we begin at once to prop our verbal effort with pictures or examples, thus confessing the insufficiency of pure definitions.

The number of words that Laura could learn, either directly or indirectly, through her senses, was, on account of her loss of sight and hearing, greatly diminished, and the number that she was obliged to learn by definition was greatly increased. The process of definition itself was, at first, made more than ordinarily difficult by the smallness of her vocabulary. Words whose objects appealed to her sense of touch, she

learned rapidly and used with few mistakes; but where the help of her senses was wanting she learned slowly and with difficulty, and made frequent mistakes.

But imperfect definition is not a hopeless bar to the understanding of new words. It is possible to supply its defects, in part at least, by observation of the use of words in the discourse of others. Indeed, we learn the fine distinctions of language, and fit our tongues to the intricacies of idiom, by this kind of unconscious study, to an extent at first thought quite surprising. In no other way is it possible to account for the exactness and certainty with which subtle shades of meaning, which no dictionaries notice, are recognized by all educated people. Yet even this means of correcting her verbal aberrations was not possible to Laura in full measure. It is true that she was not wholly without opportunity for observation; she had prolonged manual conversations with her teachers and friends, and her own social disposition made her inclined to converse. Nevertheless, her opportunity was limited; she never could profit from the talk of third persons, for she could only perceive what was addressed to her directly; and besides, in spite of the rapidity with which she could receive and her special teachers could communicate, the rate for the average of all who talked with her must have been quite slow; so that even if she had spent as much time daily in the observation of language as other children do, she could not, other things being equal, have had their language experience.

Some help in this matter might have been expected from her books; but she had not many, and her reading, if we may judge by her success with the Scriptures, seems, even as late as 1847, when she was seventeen years old, to have been laborious, and her understanding of what she read somewhat uncertain.

The age at which she began to learn probably increased her difficulty; for it is reas-

onable to suppose that the time when children learn language in the natural course of things, is the time in which it is to be learned most easily. But Laura began to learn at an age when other children can express themselves freely. This made it less a matter of imitation with her and more one of conscious effort.

The difficulties already mentioned seem to be the chief causes of Laura's errors of vocabulary, though others coöperated. She had something of the preference of the half-educated for long words in place of short, and Mrs. Lamson notes in addition a desire to use newly learned words in place of familiar ones, which sometimes resulted in the use of those not quite learned. But tendencies such as these are often outgrown; and the other, more radical difficulties also, except those directly dependent upon the state of her senses, from their nature disappear in a widened vocabulary and an enlarged language experience; so that there has been no necessary limit to her continuous improvement in many matters of language, except that which rests in her powers of observation and memory. It must therefore be borne in mind that part at least of the verbal errors even of her mature writing have no sure evidence of permanency.

Examples to illustrate these errors of vocabulary are not hard to find. Many were indicated by the bracketed corrections in the extracts from her autobiography, and further instances will be given below. By far the larger number of them are cases of what might be called false synonyms; that is, Laura replaces the normal word by one of similar but not identical meaning, without apparently knowing that she has altered the sense of her phrase; as, for example, when she says, "she searched her couch," for "she sought her couch;" or, "I could scarcely feel with my hands in making the benumbed beds." Sometimes the grammatical setting of a word is such that the substitute not only does not fit, but the re-



jected synonym may be at once determined, as in the following case from the autobiography, where she says of Mr. Tenny's teaching, "he was very incapable of instructing me geography," in which the double object points to the insertion of "instructing," for the more familiar "teaching." In other cases the exact word cannot be so easily determined, though something of the same kind has taken place. The following are a few of the many examples to be found in her journal, the bracketed dates give the approximate time of the entry: [Dec. 1843, or Jan. 1844,] "god put [=made] grass and all things good." "i held it [*i. e.* a baby] all the time and made [=put] him to sleep and sang for it," "they make [=put] it [*i. e.* hair] into lime and sand and water [to make mortar.] [March, 1845] "help find [=hunt] for the poor boy." [Jan. 1848] "I exerted myself to articulate [=communicate] with the people, but I was inarticulable or incomprehensible." [May, 1848] "religious [=holy] angels." [June, 1848] "It might have deposited the dust and heat down [if it had rained]." But a few days later she writes: "The rain was very useful to lay the dust also to cool the hot earth." [July, 1848] "I could not utter [=speak] to them or talk to them with my own fingers." In a paper which cannot be earlier than the fall of 1850, are found the following: "it rendered [=caused] my long sighs to come so high from my poor lungs;" "She daily went out to reap most delicate oranges, bananas, etc." An example or two from her letters will show that the failing was not a temporary one. [Feb. 1870] "I should enjoy the observation from [=of] the style of those strangers and to survey the arrangement of the gifts by your help." [Aug. 1876] "How highly hilarious, if we could greet one another and have an interview with great pleasure and delight." Several times in the course of her journal she gives words with definitions of them as she had

understood them from the explanations of her teachers; a few are here given as illustrating the difficulties under which she labored. [March, 1844] "goodness and badness is bad quality; sour bread is bad quality, sweet bread is good quality;" "upper and under are surface," . . . "all things are surface." [Feb. 1845] "some colors are principally than anything else, but some cotton cloth is all white" . . . "Spanish people are brown; they are nearly principally." [Sept. 1845] "necessity is to want;" "relieve is to make better;" "circumstance is anything that is pleasant, we had a pleasant circumstance of going to see miss j. in dorechester;" "scanty is little," "we had a nice supper in our room on a scanty table, and we had a pleasant circumstance in the evening." These last examples, as will be noticed, are chosen from an early year of her journal, and must not be taken as showing her final understanding of the words defined.

Laura's syntactical errors are mostly errors of clause construction, but a few are of a simpler nature. She sometimes puts a verb in a wrong tense ("is" for "was" or "had had" for "have had"); she rarely confuses the potential auxiliaries, and a few times seems to have written the uninflected present of a verb for an inflected form (as "pluck" for "plucked"), possibly by an unconscious reversion to her use of verbs in that way before she had learned their inflection. There are, however, no errors that are repeated often enough to warrant any conjecture as to their cause, beyond that of carelessness. A little more marked is her use of certain verbs. "Suspend," for example, commonly transitive in the sense of "hang," is used both transitively and intransitively, and "recline," is made reflexive, as she "reclined herself."

Her use of the superlative degree of comparison is interesting. Usage allows the superlative form of adjectives made with "most"

to stand regularly for the intensive form made with "very," but much less frequently allows the form in "est," though examples are found. In most cases the use of the latter strikes the ear as strange and the mind as illogical. Laura, however, uses the "est" form and the other with almost equal freedom; for example, "like a sharpest needle," "to breathe the purest fresh air," "Mr. Tenny was very patient with a slightest or greatest trifle." It is to be noticed here, and it may be laid down as a general principle for nearly all of Laura's syntactical peculiarities, that she simply extends legitimate idiom.

Laura's sentences are almost without exception short and simple, and errors of arrangement are not frequent. The only mistake of the kind worthy notice is that of separating the relative and its antecedents; as, "She is going to reside in Concord during the summer, whom I shall miss very much." This she does not a few times in her later journal entries, and there are examples even in her autobiography.

In the matter of clause constructions, as in that of verbal forms, much allowance is to be made for Laura's having written without revision. For this reason certain scattering cases of error in the formation of conditional sentences will be passed over. But some of her temporal clauses are a little better authenticated and offer interesting parallels to idioms foreign to English, but native to kindred tongues. The following examples suggest French and German constructions: [Nov., 1849] "I am . . . strong and well for a fortnight." [June, 1861] "I am visiting a friend, a Mrs. Glass, a month since." [March, 1873] "It is much milder weather for six days past." The extension of the intensive use of the superlative noticed above has parallels in classical usage. Laura's hitting upon the idioms of a foreign language of course proves nothing. But in view of the fact that the same thing is common in the early language of children, it

suggests the question whether the peculiar constructions of any language are not the result of causes accidental rather than inherent in any so-called genius of the language, as for example, to the popular imitation of the accidental personal idioms of a dominant writer of class, (as Luther, say, or the influential court circles). A child then in learning the language would not follow any inner necessity in the choice of its idioms, but after some experimenting of its own would simply yield to the current usage of those about it.

Another syntactical peculiarity of Laura's is her use of the infinitive. In this she follows the general principle before laid down; that is, she merely extends what in a more restricted way is common and established idiom.

The following may stand as typical examples: [1845] "tremont street and park street and beacon street are filled with people to look out of the windows." [1854] "sometimes he picked up a tiny switch . . . and managed it in my little hand to stoop low . . . and hold the stick in the water . . ." These seem to be related to the common infinitive of purpose, as: "A. came to dine." [Quite early] "when he [i.e., a dog] is very tired he breathes very fast to run and jump and hop much." [Probably still earlier] "swift was very sick to get cold." These seem to be extensions of the usage in such phrases as the following: "The farmer was a fool to plant corn." [1848] "She was too obstinate and heedless to use her poor, sore, weak lungs, who was unwilling to follow her uncle, the physician's, best advice." [1849] "for the purpose tomorrow to examine the school." [1850] "So powerful to leap a great distance." The first of these becomes normal on the dropping of "too" or by changing it to "very"; the second, by putting "on" in place of "for the"; the third is archaic usage as it stands, and seems perfectly natural when "able" is substituted for "so powerful." The expres-

sion "dream to hear" or "dream to see" for "dream that you [or he or I] hear or see" is said to be established in Laura's daily speech. Similar expressions are found in the colloquial phrase "She said to come," and the like.<sup>1</sup>

Laura had considerable difficulty with what the Latin grammars call indirect discourse, at least, when she was required to write out from memory the stories that had been read to her. In 1843 she wrote the sentence given below. The parallel is what seems to have been its direct form.

"Mrs. Taboul said you must not put her bonnet and shawl and books in the chairs. She hopes you will try to be gentle a week. She said she will try to be good."

Mrs. Taboul said to her daughter: "You must not put your bonnet and shawl and books in the chairs. I hope you will try and be gentle a week." She replied: "I will try to be good."

The difficulty probably was that she had had scarcely a chance to compare the direct and indirect forms of any remark; that is, she had had too narrow an experience in language. In 1871 she made the following indirect quotation without difficulty, though to be sure the case is slightly simpler than the one just noticed. "I had 1 long pricked letter from dear George. He said in it that he is in hope for me to be spared to him for many years, if [it] is the will of our Heavenly [Father]."

<sup>1</sup>The following sentences from the note book of a teacher of deaf mutes show many errors remarkably like those of Laura.

- "I must go in the house."
  - "The mother lets the child to play in the yard."
  - "The man told the boy that he stayed in the wagon [told him to]."
  - "I asked a boy that I wanted his help."
  - "The girl changes [puts on] an apron."
  - "The girls ask their mother to play each other."
  - "The bird is tired to fly."
  - "John refuses to me to take his top."
  - "The grass is little tall."
  - "I am afraid to the snake."
  - "Once day a cat watched a bird to come."
  - "The water out of which fish is taken, will die."
  - "I got a letter because I was glad."
  - "The child loves and obeys to her mother every days."
- He also quotes as deaf-mutisms, the following:
- "The statute of woman is a beautiful art."
  - "The people often shudder to see, with much interest, the works of Nature."
  - "A teacher must exercise kindness to the pupils."
  - "We must work, or poverty will be our residence [we shall live in poverty]."
  - "It was a great bore to me in being a farmer."

*Douglas Tilden, OVERLAND, May, 1885.*

More space may seem to have been devoted to these errors than their importance warrants, since many of them could be duplicated from the written exercises of any district school. But it is perhaps for that very reason that the space given them has not been wasted; for the resemblance shows how nearly Laura's case was like that of a normal child; and the differences which do exist show how little her mind, considered by itself apart from her conceptions, was affected by her condition.

One more peculiarity of Laura's writings remains to be spoken of in this connection, namely, her strange style. Its strangeness is due in part to the youthfulness of her thought, which will be considered presently, and to her small use of even ordinary figures of speech, but in a much greater degree it is the result of overloading simple sentences with ponderous and unaccustomed words. Her style has been described as Latinistic and such a term represents in some degree the effect of some passages; but there is little Latinity in the structure of the sentences and she does not choose Latin words as such. Her preference, as noted above, was for words newly learned and for long words. This would lead in the main to the choice of words of classical origin, though, on the other hand, an unusual Saxon word would displace a commoner one of classical derivation.<sup>1</sup> Except, therefore, what may be implied by the immaturity of its thought, her style shows nothing of defect beyond insufficient familiarity with the language.

<sup>1</sup>It has been suggested that Laura's preference for long words may have had a root in the importance of tone in the circle of her senses, bringing it about that words should seem strong or weak according to the space they occupy. Or, again, that she used long words for the reason that children, according to some systems of teaching writing, are taught to make the letter large so that the points of difference, though relatively unchanged, may be actually made more apparent.

The spare character of words had little, if any influence in guiding her choice; the causes mentioned in the text are by far the more important. It must be remembered that but a small part of all Laura's use of language was in writing, the larger part being manual conversation in which words would have no space relation at all.

The second suggestion also seems insufficient; for long words offer more points of resemblance as well as of difference, so that the scales may sometimes be turned in favor of short ones: for example, "precious" and "previous" (which Laura at least once confuses) differ in a single letter, while "dear" and "before" have only "e" and "r" in common.



Turning now from the form to the meaning of Laura's language, it will be interesting to see first, in what degree she had correct conceptions of the senses of which she was deprived. But too much in the way of evidence must not be expected from this source. People are common enough who use glibly the language of subjects of which they are ignorant. The frequency of color-blindness was unguessed till more searching tests than those of language were applied.

That she had some general notion, however, of the powers of sight will appear from the following quotations: [1849] "I think that he would admire to contemplate the country." [1869] "How do you like yourself in the West? do you like the view of the place?" [1850] "My friends would be struck with astonishment by noticing my approach a great way off." This from the journal of her teacher adds further evidence. "May 27 [1842]. Laura has been told often that she must not displace things in the parlor, and yet the figure of a monk and a little dog belonging to her are always found turned round facing the wall. To-day I asked an explanation and the reply was "To have them see the pictures on the wall." The following is her version of an account which had been read to her of the prospect from the top of Bunker Hill Monument; it would seem to indicate a little confusion as to the *modus operandi* of sight: [1845] "marco was very much pleased with a brightness of variety of view. it seemed to go down by houses and churches and fields and streets and orchards and charlestown and cities and bays and harbours. he could see very far off. they looked very small." Of many of the facts of sight she was of course ignorant. She thought the zinc sheets in some of the veranda windows of the Institute were transparent like the glass above them, and that because her teacher could see the windows in the houses in Boston that she could also look through them and see what was going on inside.

The words of sight which Laura uses show still further the limitations of her notion of that sense. Such verbs as "see," "look," "gaze," "glance," "survey," are used, sometimes of herself, sometimes of others, which might imply that she conceived her method of perception to be not unlike that of seeing people. She uses such adjectives as "bright," "brilliant," "glorious," "splendid," but under circumstances which suggest that the first two were terms which she had learned from others as applying to the heavenly bodies and the like, and that she attached no meaning to the last two except a metaphorical one, in which they might characterize the weather or a fancy basket. It is suggestive that she uses few or none of the picturesque sight-words like "flash," "glitter," and "dazzle."

What were her conceptions of color, or if she had any, it is almost impossible to tell from any indications in her writings. She uses the words of color, to be sure, and in more than a hundred cases collected, in which she speaks of over twenty shades, she only makes one decided and certain error. That time she speaks of the "blue and pink roses." It is, however, a single case, and may very well be a mere slip in composition. On the other hand, it is certain that she uses words of color only where she might easily have heard them applied by others; so that her use of color language proves nothing either way.

The following strange expression occurs in her account of a call she once made: "a very estimable lady sat so closely to us. . . . It produced an impression on my eye, it puzzled me that it was natural for this lady to be very lovely, [and] placid in her personal appearance and manner."

The testimony of her writings is in a degree conflicting, but this much at least seems clear; she knew that sight was a sense which perceived objects at a distance, perhaps that their apparent size dimin-

ished as their distance increased, and that the eyes must be turned in the direction of the objects to see them. She possibly thought sight was something like touch, and when seeing is reduced to the distinguishing of light and darkness, it certainly has great likeness to the temperature section of that sense. When her friends did not seem to notice some new part of her clothing she placed their hands upon it, as was her custom in showing things to the blind. But to her mind this resemblance did not extend to a restriction of the range of vision. She seems to have had enough conception of light to understand the reason for day and night when the thing was illustrated by a ball hung before the fire. In short, and this is about all her writings show in the matter, though her conception of the sense was vague in its detail, she was not blind-minded.

For a conjecture as to her notion of the sense of hearing, there are even fewer data than for that of sight. In the stories which she wrote out from memory, she often had occasion to tell how one and another heard, and she uses the words correctly. But in the matter of her own composing, she speaks of hearing less freely than of seeing. She knew it, however, as a sense that her teachers and others possessed. She refers to their going to hear music; she knew that she must move silently, if she wished not to waken sleepers; she knew that others could be summoned by calling. Once being told of the great distance at which the roar of Niagara could be heard, she asked if it could be heard where she then was. But altogether there seems to be nothing to show that she had any idea of sound as sound, or of hearing as a sense. It is worth noticing in passing that though the contribution that Laura's writings make to our knowledge of her ideas of the senses of sight and hearing is so small, nevertheless what evidence there is concurs with what might have been argued *a priori* from the

fact that her sight did not altogether fail till fully four years after she ceased to hear.

The office of the sense of hearing was in part performed by her extremely delicate perception of vibrations. To use her own expression she heard with her feet. In 1850 she writes: "I placed a little chair before me. I put the musical box on it so I could feel it play with my feet [on the rounds of the chair]." She had a watch of some sort, of which she says: [1848] "As [=when or although] I was extreme sound asleep the watch aroused me from slumber. It makes much louder noise than usual, for it was thoroughly repaired accurately [=just?] last week." But a few days earlier she says: "I felt the watch ring at 4 o'clock." Her feeling for such vibration was so acute that sitting once in a room where two persons were conversing she got knowledge of the fact from the vibrations caused by their voices, and at another time she noticed the resemblance of the heavy voice of a lady friend to that of a man.

The correlative of hearing is speech. In the ordinary sense of the word Laura had no vocal language, but she had in fact a large number of sounds by which she designated persons of her acquaintance. They had to her mind a certain fitness in each case and served in a degree for proper names with appropriate adjectives. She had besides certain emotional sounds of the nature of interjections. All of these she unfailingly distinguished, but not as sounds; they stood to her as muscular adjustments and accompanying vibrations. She writes of laughing or crying *loud*, which only means with explosive breathing and forceful vibration in the throat. That she had any true idea of the letters as signs of sound seems improbable, at least, when the following journal entry was made. "I talked with my mouth *mother* and *father* and baby and abby." What she really pronounced was "ma" and "pa" or "mamma" and "papa."



The language of the other senses, taste, smell, touch, beside that of the internal sensations (heart-ache and the like), is used by Laura, but need not detain us further than to mention that touch, especially the temperature sense, fills a large place in it.

Another interesting question is whether or not Laura brought through her early sickness any recollection of the time before it. If by recollection is meant conscious and definite reproduction, it is quite certain that she recollected nothing; few normal people remember anything that happened before they were twenty-eight months old. Her earliest real recollection, according to Dr. Howe, was that of lying in her mother's arms and taking medicine, probably during her convalescence. Another more indefinite and unconscious kind of memory—one perhaps more likely to survive the shock of sickness, but less easy to demonstrate—is found in a ready understanding of certain optical ideas, like perspective, in the preservation of certain gestures, in preferences otherwise unaccountable, and in things of a similiar nature. No one, of course, can say certainly that her comprehension of the matters of sight was not the result of experience later than her sickness, till it can be known exactly how well her sight was preserved while it remained. If it was at no time better than it was a few months before she went to Boston, she could have learned little from it. She can, however, understand that it is impossible to see the opposite sides of a house at the same time, a thing that often puzzles those born blind. A case of the second, preserved gesture, is found in the nod or shake of the head which Laura used like others in affirming or denying. This is something which children learn when very young, and she probably had picked it up by imitation before she was two years old.<sup>1</sup> A case of the third, unaccountable preference, seems to me to be found in her liking after her sickness for the little hymn-book, which had been her play-

thing before, and the word for which she had learned to pronounce.

The general features of Laura's mind have been sufficiently brought out by what has gone before, but it will be interesting perhaps, to follow particular powers further. Imagination, for example, was exhibited in a certain degree by some of Laura's plays, both before and after she went to the Institute. Her journals when she was about eighteen or twenty years old show a considerable development of this faculty in a more conscious form. She amused herself at times by the thought of flying; once she works out in some detail a plan for giving gas to her brother and treating his disabled eyes, and concludes by saying: "I enjoyed building such an incredible castle in the air very much."

Related to the power of imagination is that of understanding and using figurative language. But she had herself difficulty sometimes in knowing what was meant by it. In 1849 she writes of a friend: "I fear that it would consume my body and my spirits, if she delays too long writing to me. She could feed my poor heart and mind;" and then adds in explanation: "I love to write such figurative sentences to make my friends puzzle out."

Though not understanding a joke readily, Laura nevertheless, has a sense of the ludicrous. She laughed at the identity of name between her teacher (Miss Swift) and the swift which her mother used in winding yarn. When she had mastered the use of a word, it amused her to find others misusing it. Once she conducted a mock wedding ceremony, marrying a couple of her lady teachers. She says of one of them: "R—was

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Francis Lieber in his paper on the Vocal Sounds of Laura Bridgman, takes exactly the opposite ground. He says: "Laura constantly accompanies her *yes* with the affirmative nod, and her *no* with our negative shake of the head. Both are with her in the strictest sense primitive symphenomena of the ideas of affirmation and negation, and not symphenomena which have gradually become such by unconscious imitation, as frequently may be the case with us." Both caution and modesty would forbid a difference of opinion with a scholar of such eminence, but the explanation which I have given seems to me the more natural and probable. Why should she not nod *up* like a Greek?

a very haughty and wrong husband to desert her best wife," and jokingly proposed tying them together. At another time she says of a thievish rat: "I must ask W—to please teach him about right and wrong and [being] honest in the night."

In a certain way she was even introspective. When quite little she used to say, "think is tired," when weary of study. Later she observed her mind more consciously. In 1849 she writes: "I had very numerous very pleasant and comical thoughts in my mind." About the same time also: "It made a very strong and hollow impression upon my external mind, as well as [=like?] a eup, because I did many very arduous sums with so perfect accuracy and great zeal." "It sounded [=seemed] as if an angel had been so near to my mind that it could help me think of arithmetic very attentively."

Two general peculiarities of her mind ought to be noticed: the youthfulness of her thought, mentioned in connection with what was said of her style; and her matter of fact way of receiving what she was told. Her thought gives an impression of youthfulness partly because it is so much occupied with particulars as opposed to generalizations. A certain amount of this is not unnatural in journals, autobiographies, and personal letters, and alone would be of no great weight; but there is, besides, a lack, even in the latest productions that have come to my hands, of thought upon those subjects, except religion, that exercise mature minds. The age at which she came to the conscious power of

imagination and introspection argues that her development was somewhat retarded, and the youthfulness of her style would add that she never reached full mental ripeness. How much of this was due directly to her state, and how much to the asylum life and her ignorance of the common emotional and other experiences of life which that necessitated, is hard to determine.

Her matter of fact attitude again shows a certain childlikeness of mind. She found figurative language difficult, as was mentioned above, because her tendency was to take it as literally true. A like incapacity was found in the celebrated Caspar Hauser, and is said to be somewhat characteristic of the blind, which would point to its cause in Laura's case.

To gather all the evidence of Laura's writings as to her mental constitution into a single sentence, it may be said that she was eccentric, not defective; she lacked certain data of thought, but not in a very marked way the power to use what data she had.

The history of Laura Bridgman abounds in pedagogical as well as psychological suggestiveness. Though her case may have been unproductive to philosophy, her present state remains an inspiration to teachers and a masterpiece of education. An education, it may be observed, of which the staple was language, not taught as grammar by inflections and syntax, nor yet as philology, but by a method near to that of nature, as the means of receiving and communicating thought.

*E. C. Sanford.*



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