

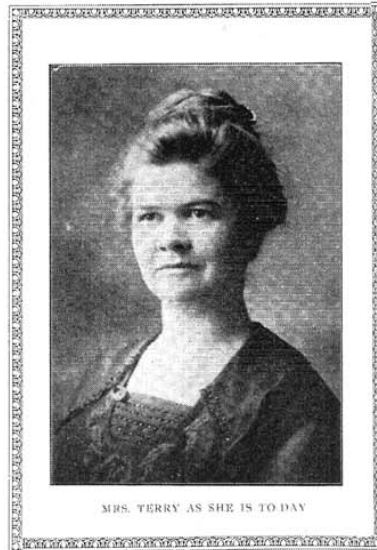
An Autobiography of My Childhood

By ALICE T. TERRY

MR. ALVIN E. POPE, the editor of the *Silent Worker*, has asked me for the story of my childhood. Like the editor of the popular and enterprising *American Magazine*, Mr. Pope believes preeminently in the individual, and in individual effort. Our effort, our trials, our success, and our optimism, when told truthfully in an autobiographical manner, constitute some of the most helpful reading matter in magazines. Mr. Pope has the right policy; he is high-minded, and bids fair to make the *Silent Worker* the chief attraction of the deaf of the world.

It is more than fifteen years ago since my first article appeared in this paper. For the past eight years or so, I have written regularly every month, with few exceptions. If I have helped to make the paper what it is, I am indeed glad, for the work has been a never failing source of pleasure and inspiration to me.

As a very small child, I was sickly and delicate. My first illness, when scarcely old enough to walk alone, resulted in serious eye trouble, from which I went almost blind. We lived in a new and sparsely settled farming community; I remember the village doctor treating my eyes. They improved slowly, however; I could hear in those days. One thing I heard a good deal was superstitious talk. It was suggested that the



MRS. TERRY AS SHE IS TO DAY



- ① The little weed that went to Fulton when twelve years old.
- ② After three years at Fulton.
- ③ At Galladuet College in 1897.

remedy for my eye trouble would be "to punch holes in the ears." Nobody objected, not even the doctor; so the superstitious belief was carried out. I remember distinctly the sharp needle, the process, and the pain. But I did not cry; some body had bribed me with a bright coin. Strangely enough, my eyes soon healed—and have never bothered me since.

But for several years yet I had wretched health. I had spells of fever, stomach trouble, prolonged dizzy spells, in which I remember the sickening sensation of trying to swallow objects as big as houses; half the time I was lame, too. From such a complication no doctor ever attempted to diagnose my case. Out of a family of eight children I was the only one to suffer misfortune,—with the exception of one sister, who at the age of twelve, developed serious eye trouble. She died soon afterward.

At the age of nine, however, my health was so much im-



proved that I was able, for the first time in my life, to get a little uninterrupted schooling at the little red school-house, just a mile away from my home. But that blessing was short-lived. For one cold and icy November morning I woke to find my self in another world, so it seemed to me, a strange, new world filled with muffled sound. I was vexed, and frightened; while I dressed I could hear my brothers and sisters talking in the next room, but I could not understand them. I yelled at them angrily to ask, "What is the matter, what has happened to you?" For several days we did not know that the fault was mine, not theirs.

The folks, however, took my complaints lightly, and that first morning after breakfast I was hurried off to school as usual. That day in school was the ordeal of my childhood life. I could hear my teacher and the recitations, but for the life of me I could not understand them. Everything was so dreadfully muffled. I fidgeted about and acted queerly, and of course greatly puzzled my teacher. To my pleading that I could not hear or understand, the school seemed only amused at me. I remember distinctly how I sat looking out of the window at the raging storm of wind, sleet and snow, trying to console myself with this thought, "Perhaps a strange new trouble time like this comes once into every one's life." Thus early, at the age of nine, I began to philosophize. I was confident that my trouble would soon pass away, and that I would be allright again.

The next day I was sent to school again, greatly against my will. The ordeal of the previous day was sufficient warning for me to know what to expect this time. Throughout the day I clung tightly to my seat. I studied hard, but tried desperately to ignore the teacher every time that he looked or spoke to me—for I could not understand.

I refused to leave my seat to join my class in recitation. This angered the school master, and he finally attempted to move me by force. With one hand in a vise-like grip on the edge of my seat, and the other hand tightly clutching my seat-mate's dress I tearfully begged him to spare me. That night the story of my struggle reached my father and mother, and they did not send me to school again.

By that time my mother's rapidly failing health had reached such a state that she was unable to leave her bed. When the order was given that I would not go to school again, I remember that my brothers and sisters were sort of glad, for they whispered around that I could pass the time profitably, to the family, spying around on the notorious mistakes of the hired woman in our house. But I didn't dare, for Rose was such a big woman, not at all alert, and I was such a tiny creature, that had she suspected me of undue spying it is certain that she would not have hesitated boxing my poor ailing ears, and that in the face of my helpless mother.

I was sent again to the village doctor for treatment. It may sound like a miracle—but it is true—he actually restored my hearing! For a few days I chatted pleasantly with my family again. How happy I was; a dark and threatening cloud had passed away from my childish horizon; the world looked good and bright again. But it proved a period of short rejoicing. We were all fooled again, including the doctor, for no sooner had he stopped the treatments than I immediately became deaf again. This time stone deaf,—never to hear or know sound again.

My father was told about the State School for the Deaf, at Fulton, Missouri. He was anxious to send me there. But my mother refused—not for the worlds would she consent to part with me. In her very delicate condition my father would not argue with her. So I was left at home

and out of school—a veritable little weed run wild. Two years later, my mother died. That was in February. The following September my father ushered me off to Fulton.

I liked my surroundings immensely. I knew the manual alphabet, but I had never seen the sign language before. Therefore, I viewed it with curiosity and charm. The happy expression on the faces of the sign-users told me more powerful than words have ever told me, that it, this sign-language, is the one reliable means in the world to drive away the sense of isolation and deafness. I gave up playing with the small girls as much as possible, in order to stand around with groups of larger and older girls—to watch them talk. In that way I picked up signs fast. A sense of rhythm was not lacking either, for the happy and care-free girls kept the floors vibrating with the music of their feet, in the rhythmic step of some old fashioned dances. Even today I consider that method of rhythm stronger and better drawn out than the very latest fad of training the deaf through intricate voice and instrumental vibrations. Two years later I remember how proud I was to declare myself the MASTER of the sign language. Indeed, that proud sense of accomplishment has not left me yet!

I suppose that the authorities classed me with the backward children when I first arrived at Fulton. Some one must have told them that I had not yet been to school six months in my life; for they placed me way down in the beginner's class, or the one just above that. My teacher, however, found that I could speak well, also read fluently out of the primary books. But that knowledge did not seem to move her to promote me—until I finally pleaded her out with my incessant pleading to go to a higher class. After that I went to an articulation class once or twice a day, which suited me so much better than in the beginner's class where we had to forgo everything else in order to watch the teacher's lips almost constantly. It gave me an expressive sense of void—because I was not cut out for lip-reading.

I was enjoying good health. My progress was satisfactory. I won prize for scholarship and deportment. But I know now, as my teachers probably knew then, that somehow I was not doing my best—was not showing quite up to my highest capacity. In other words, my progress was mechanical, just as teachers everywhere are saying of the average pupil today. I remember how teachers again and again selected me for the brightest pupil in some particularly hard lesson—anything except arithmetic, I was poor in that—and when the grilling was at its height how I invariably disappointed them by proving as stupid as the rest of the class, long since ordered to their seats. Nevertheless, they gave me high marks and prizes. I still wonder at it!

This problem of the teachers—the mechanical tendency of the average boy and girl—I do not believe there is not any remedy for it. I think that only with knowledge, experience, and maturity, does the real mental awakening come when the individual can think and reason for himself, regardless of custom—if ever it comes at all. Such was my case, at least.

While my classroom work was chiefly memory work, I was not quite without ideas. In fact, I was more or less a dreamer. I had not been at school many months before I fell in love with—well, with history. My knowledge of life and the world was small, oh, very small! I do not think that I exaggerate if I say that an ordinary nine-year old child knows more than I did when I was fifteen. So history was sort of a discovery for me, and I was wild over it. Under the solicitous guidance of one of my teachers, I went to town and spent all my money buying histories, a history of Rome, of France, of England, of the United States, and a story of the Indians. I thought that

I was rich, or that now I had the world in my hands. I was, moreover, generous and sympathetic. I had a distressed feeling that my brothers and sisters at home might always remain on the farm, and never enjoy the educational advantages which I felt that I was getting. I remember writing to my brothers, particularly, telling them about my histories, and sending them the Story of the Indians, with the promise that more books would follow. Those brothers of mine, three of them, I could not ease wholly my conscience about them; often at night I would cry softly in my bed to think that they might forego education. In turn, they must have been amused at my fears, for they never called me anything but Pet.

I think I was fifteen years old when I declared to the whole school that some day I would be a Philosopher. It must have been a rather startling announcement, for the authorities took due notice of it—an item to that effect coming out in the school paper, *The Missouri Record*.

I have the clipping yet. One of the teachers jokingly remarked that to be such I would have "to cut my hair short and carry a green umbrella."

In the same sense that philosophy means altruism, high endeavour, calmness, and endurance, have I succeeded? Ask those who know me best. For the benefit of that teacher, who is still at Fulton, I want to say that my hair is not short, nor do I have occasion to carry a green umbrella, except possibly as a precaution against sunburn when indulging in sun and ocean baths at the nearby beaches.

A little way back I mentioned my generous and sympathetic nature. On one or more occasions this got me into serious trouble at school. I will mention one instance: It was the custom for the older girls to take turns waiting on the teacher's table in the dining room. For this service, while it lasted, a week at a time, we were privileged to partake of the teacher's menu, which was more varied and tempting than that served to the pupils. One of my girl friends, Louise by name, was inordinately fond of eating. She did not have an opportunity to wait upon the teachers' table much. So she was always asking me to take dainties for her. It was strictly against the rules to do so. And I knew it; but somehow I could not refuse Louise's pleadings. So I began the practice of smuggling generous portions of choice steaks and dainty desserts for her. Of course, we were found out, and promptly summoned to the Superintendent's office to explain.

Thoroughly frightened and penitent, we did not have much to explain. Poor Louise got an awful whipping right before my eyes; as for me I merely got a severe scolding. But that hurt just as much, or worse, for I cried and cried for hours afterward and would not be comforted. Louise, on the other hand, after the manner of "the fardend criminal" (shall I say?) had quickly dried her tears.

In fact, I never received a whipping in my life. My father never hesitated to punish the other children, but somehow he always spared me. My mother, however, once came nearly giving me a whipping that I know I deserved. We, a brother and I, were unduly noisy one day while she entertained company. I must have been five years old then. We kept climbing upon the flat-topped heating-stove, and then jumping off—assuredly, making noise enough. As long as the company lasted we felt safe, for my mother never punished her children before others. But when they left it was another story. My mother got her switch. Meanwhile, we had fled to the barn, and climbed high up into the hay loft, way back under the eaves, out of reach of any one. There we remained for a long time—until we felt sure that the storm was over. We finally sneaked back to the house—to have that indulgent, worshipful mother of ours receive us with open

arms! So I missed perhaps the only whipping that I really deserved.

It was toward the close of my third year at Fulton that the next great sorrow, since the death of my mother came into my life. That was the death of my favorite sister, Sella. I was called home suddenly, and made the long thirty-six hour railroad trip alone—only to get there to find her, the Guardian Angel of my life then (and I doubt not, now too, were she living) cold and stiff, removed from me forever. On account of an unprecedented torrential rain fall and the rapidly swelling streams that they must cross to get to the cemetery at all, they had been compelled to bury her before I could get home. For a long time the memory of her saddened me.

At the end of my fifth year at Fulton I graduated. The subject of my graduating essay was Duty. After the exercises the President of the Board of Managers asked me if I would like to return to my alma mater to teach after first going to college. I did not encourage him, because teaching was not my ambition, and never has been. But that does not mean that I do not approve of deaf teachers where they are fitted by training and heredity to do so.

This instinct for service, I must have inherited. On my father's side, I am English, on my mother's side, I am Dutch. Oh, Dutch all right, you may say. My paternal grandmother was widowed early in the Civil War. With five little children about her, she struggled on alone, raising them to exemplary manhood and womanhood—the oldest of whom was my father. Grandmother never married again; she survived her hero husband by more than fifty years, spending her life wholly in loving and helpful service to others.

I may well end my childhood story here. But I will add that a year after leaving Fulton I went to Gallaudet College. For reasons, purely voluntary, I stayed there only one year. Still another year, then I entered a hearing college, which was a branch of Missouri State University. Here I had the most wonderful, the most progressive and elevating, the most profitable school year of my whole life.

Mute's Only Word Saves Many Lives

LONDON (By Mail).—An extraordinary story of how a dumb man, a peer of the realm, was given the power to utter one word thereby saving many lives, was told by Dr. Kennion, Bishop of Bath and Wells, at the dedication of a new Home for Deaf-Mutes in Bath.

The peer was a former Lord Carbery and a friend of Dr. Kennion.

"Lord Carbery," said the Bishop, "was aboard a steamer sailing from Cork to Bristol. A dense fog came on and the passengers could see nothing. Even the look-out man was unaware of danger, when Lord Carbery, who was sitting in the bow, shouted loudly 'Land!' It often happens that when God has deprived a man of one sense he increases the power of another. Lord Carbery was able to see what others could not, and realizing the ship was making straight for the black mass, his excitement forced that one word from his lips.

"The captain put the helm round and the vessel just skimmed past the southernmost rock of Lundy Island. We all had a most narrow escape, and many lives were saved by Lord Carbery's warning."

That word "land" was the only one Lord Carbery ever uttered.—*Ex.*

Some ha'e meat that canna eat,
And s'me wou'd eat that wau't it;
But we ha'e meat and we can eat
Sae let the Lord be thankit.—Burns