

[Unpublished Manuscript]: Sketches from a Young Girl's Life [with:] Twenty Five Years Later, a Sequel [with:] The Story of Tom

Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts: 1893-1894

\$4000



Manuscript. Octavo. Three volumes in one: (8), 64pp. [approximately 8500 words]; (2), 44pp [approximately 5000 words]; (2), 28pp [approximately 3000 words]. Fair copy manuscript of three works of biographically influenced fiction, or autobiography, written in a small lined notebook. Original cloth-backed color illustrated silk (old stain at base of spine), home-made plain dust jacket (chipped and worn along spine and corners, some staining), title in ink on front panel. Shaken, offset to endpapers from dust jacket, else very good. The manuscript is accompanied by two volumes containing earlier manuscript versions of the narratives: (1) Fessenden, Margaret. *Sketches from a Young Girl's Life*. Jamaica Plain, (MA: April 25, 1893. 8vo. (8), 31, (35) pp. Approximately 8500 words. Earlier draft of the first work above. (2) Fessenden, Margaret. *Twenty Five Years Later, a Sequel to Sketches from a Young Girl's Life [with:] The Story of Tom*. NP: October, 1893 and April, 1894. 8vo. (2), 40 (approximately 5000 words); (2), 27 [approximately 3000 words] pp. Earlier drafts of the last two titles above. Both volumes in contemporary half-sheep (all boards nearly detached) and marbled boards (rubbed).

A beautifully written story of love, tragedy, and family devotion, based on events in the lives of Rev. James De Normandie and his wife Emily Jones Normandie, narrated by her (either as the author under the pseudonym Margaret Fessenden or as the lead character in a work of fictionalized autobiography). The first volume begins in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in the mid 1840s and tells the story of young Emily, left with her father and brothers when her mother died, proceeding through her teen years, an infatuation with a handsome young man, and an extended courtship with what would become her true love, the young minister of her Unitarian church, ending the evening before their marriage. The second volume starts with an extended passage concerning Emily's devastation at the loss of her first born, continues through the family's move to Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1883, and ends with two of the children at Harvard in the late 1880s.

Throughout the text, the author employs a stylish but simple Victorian manner to describe her surroundings, her houses, gardens, home towns, etc., but, above all, her relationships with her family members, especially her husband and four sons, but including the housekeeper who joined her father's household at her mother's death and various other friends and relatives. The "Story of Tom" is an autobiographical sketch of the family's dog, an Irish terrier, the runt of a litter, bought for the youngest child as he approached his teen years.

Mrs. Normandie (or Ms. Fessenden summed up her efforts near the end of the second volume: "If I were a real authoress, if I were truly eloquent, I might paint this simple story in glowing colors; but if I have revealed a little of my happiness, if I have portrayed with some success the sterling character of my husband, if I have told a little of the blessedness of the married life, and that it is the more beautiful as the years go on, and one is drawn closer and closer to her husband, by all its diverse experiences – I shall be content!" (Sequel, pp. 39-40). In the preface she explains that "this little story is probably not true. It is an imaginary sweet sketch of the life of a real girl, now grown to be a woman. She really did live in Portsmouth however. She really did marry the Rev. James De Normandie; and after some years they did leave their old home when he thought it best to go 'afield.'" The names of all the family members and the events of their family life described in the narrative are true to what we have been able to find, with the exception of the circumstances surrounding the death of the first-born son. There are, of course, other people and events described that we have no way of verifying. The hand writing on the title pages, including "by Margaret Fessenden" is the same as that of the body of the text.

Emily Farnum Jones De Normandie (1841-1916), the author or subject of this manuscript, was born and raised in Portsmouth, N.H., married James De Normandie (1836-1924; Unitarian minister in Portsmouth, N.H., 1862-1883, and Roxbury, Mass., 1883-1924) in Portsmouth in 1864, moved with him to his new church in Roxbury, Mass., in 1883, and lived there the remainder of her life, raising four sons to adulthood, three of whom graduated from Harvard.

Information about the family is scant, with sketches of Rev. De Normandie in various Who's Who-like volumes, giving names and birth and death dates for family members, dates of his tenures at the two churches, and other simple facts, but not much of substance about family activities. Two sources record the date of death of the couple's first son as the year of his birth (1865), differing substantially from the description given in Sequel, where Fessenden (Mrs. DeNormandie?) goes into great detail concerning her feelings of devastation at the loss of a 4-year old (the second son, born 1868, was a baby at the time).

We have been unable to locate a Margaret Fessenden, either in Jamaica Plain or Roxbury, or in Portsmouth and surroundings in New Hampshire, for the period; Margaret Fessenden Morse (1877 - ?), lived in Jamaica Plain and published three novels, 1906-1910, but would have been but 16 when Sketches was written, and it's doubtful Mrs. De Normandie would have divulged the kind of information that would have allowed her to reconstruct the story as given here, and further doubtful that a teenager might have been able to convey Mrs. De Normandie's rich descriptions of her feelings in the wake of familial events. [BTC#424721]

