

The Glittering Years, 1865-1887

Adelicia survived the war with houses and land intact and a large sum from her sale of the cotton, but many women in her place would have sought domestic tranquility. She had been through much trial. The emancipation of the slaves had possibly swept away a third of her capital wealth, and it was many years before Southern agriculture regained its pre-war level. She was not only a widow a second time but no longer could look for support from her father who had died three years before the war. She had four children to rear, ranging from fifteen years to not quite six. But Adelicia faced the future undaunted and even moved into other spheres of endeavor.

Before the war had ended, Adelicia began to plan for a European trip. As a child she wished to visit Europe, and now with ample funds the way seemed open. Besides visiting interesting sites, the journey would launch her into international society, provide a French education for her children, and give opportunity to acquire some notable pieces of art.

As none of her family had traveled abroad before, her relatives were fearful of the trip. After traveling on the paddle-wheel *Scotia* in primitive conditions, with poultry and a cow for milk, Adelicia and her children

landed in England in July, 1865. Lord Rothschild in London offered his opera box to her, but she was not able to see Queen Victoria who was in Scotland at the time. She heard with pleasure, however, the great Baptist pulpiteer, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

With her love of things French, Paris became the magnet. After her arrival in the city, she reached the pinnacle of social success on her presentation at the imperial court of Emperor Napoleon III and Empress Eugenie at the Tuileries. According to Mrs. Jeannette Noel, the latter presented to Adelicia, upon noticing her skillful riding on a stag hunt, a beautiful pin of a hunting horn and hound's head, a keepsake which remains in the family. In his memoirs, Adelicia's son, William, remembered in this period how beautiful his mother looked on her way to balls dressed in a lovely Parisian gown with a diamond tiara on her head.

In 1866 she left France and traveled to Italy. She bought some pieces of statuary from American sculptors residing in Rome—Randolph Rogers, William Rinehart, Chauncey B. Ives, and Joseph Mozier. She then journeyed to Switzerland and again to France, boarding the *Scotia* for her return to America. After an absence of

one year, she arrived in New York City and spent some time in Newport before returning to Nashville.

About one year later, on June 18, 1867, at Belmont Mansion, Adelicia married William A. Cheatham, her third husband, a widower of three years who was three years younger. Cheatham signed a marriage contract which assured Adelicia control over her own property. He was aristocratic in bearing and, as a respected member of the medical profession, brought Adelicia additional standing. After receiving his education at the University of Nashville and the University of Pennsylvania, he began to practice medicine, specializing in mental disorders. From 1851 until 1862, when removed by Andrew Johnson, military governor of Tennessee, he served as superintendent of the Tennessee Hospital for the Insane, supervising during his tenure the building of the state asylum. The Cheatham marriage brought two stepchildren into the home, Martha (or Mattie), fourteen years of age, and Richard, almost twelve. On May 21, 1872, Martha married Thomas Weaver in Belmont Mansion. On the basis of correspondence and Martha's testimony as a grandmother, the relationship between stepdaughter and stepmother was excellent.

Upon her return to the United States, Adelicia began her reign as one of "the queens of American society." A book of that title, published in 1867 by Elizabeth F. Ellet, recognized her attainment to this rank. Before the Civil War, she had lived, of course, in great style. Emily Donelson Walton, as a girl, remembered the Widow Franklin arriving at her home in a carriage pulled by four claybank horses with two escorts, with another carriage following for her children and two nurses. At a wedding in 1858, Randal McGavock wrote in his journal that Mrs. Acklen's diamonds were "the largest single stones that I have ever seen in the country." But now her style became grander. She, of course, owned the finest carriage in town with coachman and footman in uniform and the pair of horses in "shining silver mounted harness." Her dress at social functions, including her Parisian gowns, was spectacular. Annie L. Pope claimed that Adelicia's court dress at the reception for Octavia Le Vert cost \$60 a yard. After attending Sallie Acklen's wedding in New York City, Emma Y. Player, a close friend, wrote that she had "never even dreamed of as elegant a wardrobe as Mrs. Acklen had." At her wedding to Cheatham, one observer claimed that he could not determine whether Adelicia was as beautiful as ever because "neck, brow, arms, hands and waist were blinding with the glitter of diamonds."

Adelicia's parties at Belmont became almost legendary. She gave a large ball each year, carefully planning by the almanac for a full moon, lighting the shrubs with Japanese lanterns, and filling the mansion with flowers. On December 18, 1866, with over 500 guests present, she held a glittering reception for

Madame Octavia Le Vert of Mobile, a friend noted for her charm and social renown in both America and Europe. The party did not start until after eleven in the evening, a supposedly fashionable hour, and end until after six in the morning. One elderly guest, Lucius Julius Polk of Hamilton Place, was so worn out that he was unable to take the morning train. One account years later claimed that her marriage to Cheatham cost \$10,000. Other notable social events included in 1871 the reception of Adelicia's son, Joseph, and his bride, Hattie Bethell, and in 1877 a reception for members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science which was then meeting in Nashville.

Besides friends and relatives who at times practically overran Belmont, the famous stopped to visit. According to Adelicia's son, William, such diverse guests as Thomas Huxley, the scientist, Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, and Augustin Iturbide, grandson of the first emperor of Mexico, plus actors and poets, all paid their respects. It appears, however, that President Rutherford B. Hayes on his short visit to Nashville in 1877 did not visit Adelicia, his third cousin. He later offered in 1880 to her son, Joseph, shortly before the latter completed his second term as congressman from Louisiana, a position as federal district judge in Louisiana. Joseph, however, declined because of the possible appearance of nepotism.

The furnishings in Belmont Mansion reflected lavish expenditure. Adelicia filled the house with French revival furniture, statuary, and paintings which covered the walls. One sympathetic observer, correspondent from the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, in 1881 gained the impression, as he was conducted through the rooms by Adelicia herself, that he was "in some grand art gallery." On the other hand, a very critical English visitor, Thérèse Yelverton, felt the mansion was "insecurely built of pictures" and was "only an imitation of a lavishly-bedecked Cockney villa."

Although Victorian society was more tolerant of wealth and its exhibition than other ages, there were some individuals in her own day, whether from imagined fears, envy, or other reasons, who resented her lifestyle. Members of the family of Lucius Julius Polk, fearful of Adelicia's designs to marry Lucius, were quick to criticize. One daughter, Sarah Rachel, wrote to a sister: "... she may be a fine woman for ought I know the contrary but she is not the sort of woman that would make Father happy. . . . She is a complete woman of the world & very fond of making a display of her wealth which is very parvenuish I think."

With all her wealth and social prominence, Adelicia always moved within the bounds of Victorian propriety. She no doubt felt her conduct was always within acceptable moral standards. She was a shrewd business woman but evidently did not seek to gain everything she could.

STATUARY

One of the lasting benefits of Adelicia's European trip was her acquisition in Rome in 1866 of five pieces of marble statuary. The four sculptors who produced the statues were all American expatriates. Two of the men, Randolph Rogers (1825-1892), born in New York, and William Rinehart (1825-1874), a native of Maryland, are today considered in the first rank of American sculptors of the nineteenth century. The other two, Chauncey B. Ives (1810-1894) and Joseph Mozier (1812-1870), are regarded with much less favor. Her taste in statuary was typical of the Victorian age.

One of Adelicia's finest purchases was *Ruth Gleaning* by Rogers, a statue she placed in the entrance hall of Belmont Mansion. Rogers first modeled *Ruth* in 1853, producing two years later the first marble copy. This statue was one of his most popular works with many editions. He sculpted one version of 45 3/4 inches and a reduced version which was 10 3/4 inches shorter, but Adelicia bought the larger one. This statue, representing the Biblical figure of Ruth, dignified as she pauses from gathering the grain to gaze at Boaz, is neoclassical in form but incorporates naturalistic features as seen in the hair, garments, and feet and in the leaves and sheaves of grain at the base. Adelicia willed *Ruth* to her son, William, but, upon its failure to gain a respectable bid at the Belmont sale in 1888, he left it in the mansion, as did the trustees of his estate. *Ruth* is the one statue which has always remained at Belmont.

Probably the finest piece in Adelicia's collection, in spite of its nineteenth-century sentimentalism, is the *Sleeping Children*, a neoclassical statue by Rinehart. As a memorial for the Acklen twins who died in 1855, Adelicia ordered the words "Laura and Corinne" and "Twin Sisters," be carved on the statue. She placed it, at least for a time, in the front hall of the mansion. The sculpture, portraying the sleep of the children, also a euphemism for death, is most realistic in the soft skin of the children, the folds of the blanket, the satin texture

of the pillow, and the suppleness of the mattress. Rinehart made twenty editions of the statue, the most notable of which is at Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore.

Adelicia purchased two statues from Ives, *Rebecca at the Well*, again a Biblical subject, and *Sans Souci*. He was a very popular sculptor of his day, catering to the popular taste, and noted for his portrait sculptures and ideal statuary. Both of these statues found a wide market with twenty-five replicas for the former and over twenty for the latter. On the base of *Rebecca* at Belmont is inscribed, "C. B. Ives, Fecit Romae 1866." The proportions of the statue were most unfortunate: the figure was more like an overgrown girl than a young lady. His *Sans Souci* portrays a sweet girl with book in hand in a pose of complete abandon. Adelicia placed *Rebecca* in the library and *Sans Souci* in the central parlor. Pauline Acklen Lockett inherited the two pieces by Ives as well as the *Sleeping Children* by Rinehart, taking all three to Washington, D.C. After Pauline Lockett's death, her daughter, Pauline Lockett Kaiser, returned the three pieces to Nashville with *Rebecca* and the *Sleeping Children* going to Belmont and *Sans Souci* to the home of Dr. Oscar F. Noel, Jr.

The fifth marble statue, *The Peri*, is an original piece produced by Mozier for Adelicia herself. It represents a poetic/mystical theme, taken from the poem by Thomas Moore, "Paradise and the Peri," from *Lalla Rookh*. The statue is a nude figure of an angel with massive wings who, standing at the gates of Paradise, holds in her right hand the tears of the penitent sinner and in the left hand one of the bowls found on the shore of the lake from which the redeemed penitent drinks. On the statue is inscribed the words:

Joy, Joy for ever!—my task is done—
The Gates are pass'd, and Heaven is won!

Adelicia placed *The Peri* in a prominent position in the grand salon of the mansion. After her death the statue was moved to the family mausoleum at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.