Charles and Eliza Leslie

In early nineteenth-century Philadelphia, the family of Robert Leslie was considered one of genius. Robert himself was a remarkable man—a self-taught scientist, musician and draughtsman, and a ready writer on scientific subjects. He was in the clock-and-watch business in the then seat of federal government, numbering among his patrons some of the most distinguished men of his time. It was through one of these patrons, Thomas Jefferson, that he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society. In time, Leslie's business became so large that he took a partner, Isaac Price, in order that he himself might live in London and export clocks and watches to his concern in Philadelphia. Robert's two sons, Charles Robert and Thomas Jefferson, were born in London.

When Isaac Price died, the Leslies returned to Philadelphia. The business had been woefully mismanaged, and the long and complicated court settlement left them much reduced in circumstances. In 1803, Robert Leslie died. In order to support the family, Mrs. Leslie and her daughter Eliza kept a boardinghouse. They asked no favors, incurred no debts, and kept their difficulties to themselves.

Robert Leslie had long encouraged his children in drawing. His own drawings of ships and machinery always excited admiration, and four of his children, to a varying degree, developed real talent. Eliza Leslie became well known in Philadelphia as a copyist of works of the masters. As early as 1812, when she was twenty-five years old, she attracted much attention by the exhibition of her copy of Salvator Rosa's "Banditti in Ruins." It was her brother Charles,

1 In 1788, Robert Leslie was in business at Second and Market Streets. He advertised that he made and repaired "all kinds of Time-pieces, musical, chimney, quarter, and chamber CLOCKS, on an improved plan, entirely new, which prevents the different Changes of weather from affecting the Swing of the Pendulum." The long advertisement ended with an announcement that he would make "moveable Dial-work" for any purpose or fancy, and that he would make small machines or models "either for trying philosophical or mechanical Experiments." In 1789, he proposed to establish a museum in Philadelphia, for a collection of models of various kinds of machinery. Freeman's Journal, Aug. 27, 1788, June 24, 1789.

however, who was to achieve considerable distinction in the world of art.

Some time after Robert Leslie's death, young Charles was bound as an apprentice to Bradford and Inskeep, booksellers. At that time, Thomas Bradford was encouraging Alexander Wilson to bring out his fine work on ornithology, and Charles Leslie helped Wilson color some of his first plates, working from birds that Wilson had shot and stuffed himself. Charles never forgot the beautiful accuracy of Wilson's drawings, how carefully he counted the number of scales on the tiny legs and feet of his subject. In the evenings, young Leslie frequented the theater, going backstage to make sketches of the actors. His likeness of George Frederick Cooke was so striking that Bradford raised a fund to send him to London to study. Thomas Sully befriended him, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts voted him a hundred dollars. In 1811, at the age of seventeen, Charles went to London, carrying letters to artists of note from some of the most influential men in Philadelphia.

The Portfolio carried a poetical tribute to the young genius, entitled "Lines Addressed to Master Charles R. Leslie, now on his voyage to England to perfect himself in the art of painting." There were two long stanzas, the first of which read, in part:

Go, child of genius! Go while youth remains,
And Glory's pulses beat in all thy veins.
Embrace the hour the Fates auspicious give;
Make every sense, and nobly learn to live.
No vulgar art thy rev'rence now commands,
And beckons thee away to distant lands.

In gratitude to his American patrons, Charles sent some of his early paintings to Philadelphia, where they were exhibited. When his canvas, "The Trial of Constance," arrived in 1813, the Academy of Fine Arts passed resolutions of appreciation of "the rapid improvement made by Mr. Charles Leslie, now in London, in the prosecution of his studies." It was also arranged to have an engraving of the picture executed "in the best style which the talents of our country

4 Scharf, II, 1050-1051.
[could] afford,” the net proceeds to go to Leslie. In 1816, Leslie’s “Murder of Rutland” was exhibited in Philadelphia, and eventually became the property of the Academy.6

Within three years, Charles Leslie, still in his boyhood, was recognized by London artists as a genius. Benjamin West said that he excelled any young man “of his age and opportunities,” he had ever heard of, or had ever known. Already, Leslie had sold his “Witch of Endor” to a baronet for a hundred guineas, and was exhibiting at Somerset House a full-length portrait of John Howard Payne in the character of Douglas.7 In 1815, Charles painted “A Portrait of a Lady,” and qualified for two silver medals. In London, as in Philadelphia, he haunted the theater, frequently sending drawings of his favorite actors to his sister Eliza.

By 1820, Leslie had a distinguished circle of friends in London—Samuel Coleridge, Charles and Mary Lamb, Peter and Washington Irving, and Gilbert Stuart Newton. With Washington Irving and Newton he had daily intercourse. They dined together at the York Chop House; they made excursions into the country, riding on top of a coach together.

In April, 1820, at a breakfast given in Scott’s honor in London, Washington Irving introduced Charles Leslie to Sir Walter Scott. Charles had anticipated that event with great pleasure, and had promised his family in Philadelphia a full account of that important occasion. When the letter finally arrived, Eliza Leslie wrote all the details to her friend, Abbe Bailey, in Cincinnati.8 Charles had found Sir Walter amiable, unaffected, polished in manner, as amusing and interesting as his novels. Sir Walter was neither fat nor thin. His Scottish face was not handsome, but it was agreeable and marked by “strong sense.” With a painter’s observing eyes, Charles noted the heaviness of the lower face, the high forehead, the short nose, the long upper lip. He observed, also, the shrewd, penetrating blue eyes, the fresh, clear complexion, the silvery hair, the pale eyebrows and lashes. Scott was dressed in “a brown frock coat, blue trowsers, and had on a black cravat.” It was Leslie’s opinion that all the portraits

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6 Westcott, XXX, 2367, Stauffer Collection, HSP.
7 Recollections, I, 40, II, 319; Scharf, II, 1050–1051.
8 Abbe Bailey was the youngest child of Francis Bailey, editor of the Freeman’s Journal and first publisher of Emanuel Swedenborg’s works in America. The Baileys and the Leslies had been neighbors on Market Street.
of Scott were like him, but not strongly so; he had tried to make a sketch of him for Eliza, but could not do it from memory.

Scott's novels were creating considerable comment and criticism, generally, and Eliza's natural interest was sharpened by her brother's acquaintance with the author. Eliza and Charles agreed that *The Monastery* was inferior to all of Scott's previous novels, but Charles tempered his criticism by saying that there was much in the book that no one else could have written. Eliza, however, was grieved and vexed by the book. "Another falling off like this," she wrote to Abbe Bailey, "and he sinks to rise no more." 9

In the year that he met Scott, Leslie made designs for *Kenilworth*; a gentleman wrote to the publisher Henry Carey, Charles' brother-in-law, that these drawings were the most beautiful things he had ever seen. 10 Also, in that year, Charles painted a portrait of Washington Irving 11 and made designs for new editions of Irving's *Knickerbocker History* and *Sketch Book*.

In the spring of 1821, Leslie was finishing his "May Day in the Reign of Elizabeth." Sir Walter Scott, then in London, called to see it. Not only did he praise it warmly and promise to return, but he asked where Leslie's "Sir Roger de Coverley Going to Church" (1819) was, that he might see it, too. Charles wrote to Eliza that he had been delighted with Scott's hearty manner and so overcome with pleasure at his visit that he was unable to paint for the remainder of the day. Scott did call again to see the "May Day." He advised the introduction of a few archers into the picture, a suggestion that Leslie followed. When exhibited, the picture brought an offer of three hundred guineas and attracted more attention than any other picture at the exhibition. 12 Eliza assured her friend Abbe that Charles considered Scott's visit a greater honor than if George the Fourth and his whole court had waited on him.

9 Charles Leslie to Eliza, London, June 28, 1820, in *Recollections*, II, 83-85; Eliza Leslie to Abbe Bailey, Oct. 8, 1820, in John H. James Manuscripts at Urbana, Ohio. All the Bailey correspondence is to be found among these manuscripts.

10 Eliza Leslie to Abbe Bailey, Mar. 6, 1821.


By the summer of 1823, a few of Charles' designs for the Waverley novels had reached America. The *Kenilworth* set of seven small plates was selling in Philadelphia at five dollars a set, although they were inferior to the proof impressions.\(^{13}\) Charles sent more engravings of the Waverley designs to Eliza that fall, among them a very good one of King Charles saluting Lady Margaret. Eliza cherished every engraving her brother sent, and eagerly watched for the *Souvenirs* in which his prints appeared.

As the Waverley novels were printed at Edinburgh without a running title at the top of the page, Henry Carey seldom knew the title of the book he was publishing until the concluding sheets arrived. American publishers fought grimly among themselves to be the first on the market with the new novel. The Careys solved the problem by bribing someone in the Ballantyne printing shop to send them advance sheets. Scott meticulously revised his manuscripts up to the last moment, and since the Careys received the uncorrected galleys, their customers read Scott unrevised.\(^{14}\)

It was in 1824 that Charles Leslie went to Abbotsford to paint Sir Walter Scott's portrait for George Ticknor of Boston. Sir Walter, finding Leslie already familiar with Scottish legend and song from a Scottish grandfather, delighted to read and recite the old ballads for him, and to show him the romantic and celebrated spots in the vicinity of Abbotsford. In a letter to Harriet Stone, his fiancée, Charles described the dogs in the Scott household. Around the fire in the evenings, there were "little ugly varlets of black terriers" named Ginger, Mustard, Spice, and Whiskey; there was a huge greyhound named Hamlet, a gigantic deerhound called Maida, Lady Scott's dog Risk, and sundry pointers belonging to Charles Scott. Sir Walter never left the house without at least two dogs at his side.\(^{15}\)

Leslie painted in the library at Abbotsford. He always placed a chair facing Sir Walter, ready for a willing guest to drop into and engage his host in conversation. At the other end of the room there was generally a group around the piano or harp. Scott told many a delightful anecdote during those sittings. Sometimes he became rest-

\(^{13}\) Eliza Leslie to Abbe Bailey, June 10, 1823.


\(^{15}\) Sept. 12, 1824, in *Recollections*, II, 150 f.
When the portrait was finished, it was a fine one. The editor of *Blackwood's*, a competent art critic, informed posterity that Leslie's was the best likeness of Sir Walter Scott ever achieved—face, figure, air, manner—all characteristically complete. In his opinion, Leslie was "a genuine genius." The portrait was eventually engraved by Mosely Isaac Danforth, an American artist, and printed in *Watt's Literary Souvenir.*

When Charles returned to his London home, he was met at the door by his sister Ann in deep mourning. Their mother had died at West Point at the home of their brother. Ann had kept the sad news from Charles while he was executing that important commission.

At this time, Ann was studying drawing and painting with her brother. Not only did she observe his technique firsthand, but she acquired considerable skill by copying her brother's pictures, as well as some by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Among those of her brother's paintings which she copied and sent to Eliza was "Sancho and the Duchess," which *Blackwood's Magazine* had pronounced "very beautiful," but "a little lame" from undue caution. (Charles Leslie never overdrew anything, because of a delicate sense of the classical and because of his fear of extravagance and caricature.) Ann copied some of her brother's illustrations also, including those for Sir Walter Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor* and *Kenilworth.* It was her privilege to be with him when he designed the plates for a splendid edition of Burns's poems. A number of Ann's drawings were engraved in a popular American annual, the *Atlantic Souvenir,* and two of her best-known original works were the portraits of Mathew Carey and Benjamin Franklin.

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17 *Recollections*, I, 98.
18 In time, Ann came to like English life. Her brother was acquainted with the eminent public men of the country and knew many of the first families of England. Through Charles, Ann had an unusual opportunity to see how the nobility lived, and occasionally met members of "that exalted class." Westcott, XXX, 2376, Stauffer Collection, HSP; Eliza Leslie to Abbe Bailey, Apr. 9, Sept. 1, 1823.
19 Ann's sister Patty married Mathew Carey's son Henry. Patty, also, had a pronounced talent for drawing. Her floral drawings were exquisite. Emma Leslie to Henry Carey, May 3, 1855, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection, HSP. Ellen Bailey, in telling of a visit she made to Eliza Leslie in 1824, wrote: "She [Eliza] has hanging in the parlor in the U. S. Hotel where she
In 1824, Charles was busy finishing "Sancho and the Duchess," a scene from *Don Quixote*, which he mentioned in an affectionate letter to Thomas Sully. In that letter he urged his friend and benefactor to try to persuade some group to buy Benjamin West's pictures for the city of Philadelphia. Charles feared that the merchants of Philadelphia would think the price too high, but he thought the pictures well worth the money. After all, he reasoned, they would cost no more than an equal number of full-length portraits.

After Leslie had finished "Sancho and the Duchess" he began a scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for Philip Hone of New York City. He wrote to Hone that there would be three principal figures—Slender, Ann Page, and Shallow—with others in the background. The size of the picture would be about two feet by two and a half; the price to be two hundred guineas. However, he wrote, if Hone thought the price too high, he would paint him a smaller picture at any price he would name. Nevertheless, he would go ahead with the larger picture, for he could easily sell it.

On April 11, 1825, Charles Leslie married Harriet Stone. After his marriage, he continued to paint portraits and pictures for the nobility and for Americans in England. Lord Egremont became his patron, inviting him and his family every year to spend a month at Petworth. It was for Lord Egremont that Charles painted "Sancho and the Duchess," "A Scene from the 'Taming of the Shrew,'" "Gulliver's Introduction to the Queen of Brobdignag," and "Charles II at Tillietudem Castle," besides portraits of members of Egremont's family.

Within the scant ten years since he had been in England, Leslie had made for himself an enviable reputation. He had been supremely happy when he was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in November, 1821, for, as Eliza once said, only "first-rate artists" received such recognition. In 1824, he was listed with Allston, Copley, West, Trumbull, Morse, Sully, Stuart, Newton, and Chester boards a portrait of B. Franklin taken by her sister also a very splendid engraving of Victoria's coronation she pointed out all the nobility to me, and informed me it was a copy from Charles painting taken on that occasion." Ellen Bailey to Abbe Bailey James, Philadelphia, March 14, 1848.

22 Eliza Leslie to Margaret Bailey, Aug. 18, 1829. Margaret Bailey was Abbe Bailey's sister.
Harding in an article on American artists that appeared in Blackwood's Magazine. His portraits were said to be "beautiful and rich," his historical compositions "graceful, chaste and full of subdued pleasantriness." The capstone of recognition came when he was elected to full membership in the Royal Academy in 1826.

While Charles was making a place for himself in England, Eliza Leslie had embarked upon a literary career in America. So many people had asked for her "receipts," that she published them in 1827, under the title of Receipts for Pastry, Cakes, and Sweetmeats. This was her first book, "a most un-pannassian" work, she recalled in her old age. Of the Receipts, she wrote to Margaret Bailey in Cincinnati:

I send you a new book of receipts which may probably be useful in your family. It is in very general use in Philadelphia, in which city the art of making cakes and pastry has greatly improved within a few years. The book is in such demand that Henry Carey has to send every few weeks to Boston (where it is printed) for a fresh supply. If these receipts are exactly followed, I can assure you, by experience, that all the things made from them will turn out well; very superior to any that can be bought in the shops, while the expense will not exceed one half.

Such a book would have been dear to the heart of William Cobbett who ranted against "Sir Walter Scott's amusements for the dirty-necked daughters of Jews and Jobbers, and the lazy wives who almost rot at the fireside." No young girl with a head stuffed "with the amours of knights and damsels," said Cobbett, could think about directing a family and how to make good bread, pies, and puddings.

The success of the receipt book caused Eliza's publisher to urge her to write children's stories, and at his instance she wrote The Mirror: Juvenile Stories. Eliza was a pioneer in juvenile literature. Her characters were genuine, speaking with the naïveté of real children; they were neither paragons of virtue nor demons of evil. The American Girl's Book: or Occupation for Play Hours (1831) had fourteen editions in eighteen years; her Stories for Adelaide and Stories for Emma were the first ever written by an American author in words of "one or divided" syllables. This idea had been derived from some juvenile stories which Charles had sent her from London.

23 Cincinnati Literary Gazette, Dec. 4, 1824.
24 Aug. 18, 1829.
26 Note written on the back of a sketch of Thomas Jefferson Leslie, E. C. Gardiner Collection, HSP. Adelaide and Emma were the small daughters of Thomas Leslie.
In her early years as a writer, Miss Leslie won four prizes from periodicals. Her first prize winner and best story, "Mrs. Washington Potts," was published in *Godey's Lady's Book* and reprinted in nearly every newspaper in the land. The immediate success of that story caused her to turn to writing in earnest.

Charles Leslie made unremitting efforts to find a market in London for Eliza's stories. Receiving little encouragement from publishers, in 1829 he went to Mrs. Hofland, a very amiable woman who was always ready to serve other authors. Mrs. Hofland said that Eliza could get little more for her work in England than she could in America; too many English ladies of fortune, liking to see their names in print, gave their stories to the publishers, thus making it difficult for an author who had to be paid for her writing. Mrs. Hofland suggested that Eliza might have more success with the annuals.

In 1830, Charles took Eliza's "Alphonsine" to John Murray, and, as a special inducement, offered to design a plate for it without charge. But Murray politely declined it because it was a translation. Charles then took it to the London annuals, the *Gem* and the *Amulet*, with the same offer; they, too, declined. He had little better success with Harris and with Hurst and Chance, to whom he offered "Alphonsine" together with all the other tales then in his hands. Harris was not interested, but Hurst and Chance offered to print them at Miss Leslie's expense and divide the profits quarterly. Finally, Ann Leslie made some arrangement with Mrs. Hall for their publication.

In July, 1830, Charles wrote to Eliza that he was correcting the proof sheets of the "Traveling Tin-man," for which he had made a design that was already in the engraver's hands.

Charles was as frank in his criticism of Eliza's stories as she was outspoken about his paintings. Both were respectful and sincere. Eliza did not hesitate to point out weakness in color and chiaroscuro, and Charles was quick to correct those faults. Charles liked his sister's stories, but he thought they would be better if they "had not so much of the didactic cast" which was then fashionable.

27 Probably Barbara Hofland (1775-1844), English novelist and writer.
28 Probably Anna Maria Hall (née Fielding), English miscellaneous writer (1800-1881).
29 Charles to Eliza, Nov. 12, 1829, May 20, 1830, July 2, 1830, *Recollections*, II, 197-199, 207-211.
But this is too hard a task [he wrote to Eliza] for the writers of children’s books, who find it much easier to sit down and make a nature of their own, in which little monsters of virtue, sense, and fine sentiments are contrasted with caricatures of folly.31

While Charles considered Eliza’s characters more natural than in most stories, he still thought her aim to instruct was too obvious. He felt that children’s books should be written “with as much discrimination of real character as the novels of Le Sage, Fielding, Smollett, and the best of Sir Walter Scott.” He anticipated Eliza’s answer that such books would not sell. Then try a novel, he urged, taking nature and the best models for guides. Draw men and women as they really are, not consistently bad or consistently good.

Do not let all the events of a man’s or a woman’s life [he wrote] turn on one point of character, as Miss Edgeworth does, for the sake of supporting a theory, but divest yourself of every other intention than that of giving true pictures of nature. I would read none of the trash that is now published in the rage for universal improvement, but study, over and over again, the sterling authors of fiction, whose works will last as long as their language, because they are built on the rock—nature.32

If the novel were “a good one,” Charles was sure that he could get a good price for it in London. In one of his letters to Eliza, he repeated what he had said before33:

I am glad you agree with me in distaste for the didactic class of works. . . . it seems to me to be a great mistake of their well-meaning authors to attempt to deceive mankind into virtue, which I have no doubt, if it has any effect, is only calculated to deceive them into hypocrisy. Truth never did, and never can do harm; and I feel sure that the really moral writers are those who describe characters as they are, and not as the authors think they ought to be. . . .

Charles Leslie himself had a fine talent for writing, but he never found time to complete more than two books—Memoirs of John Constable and A Handbook for Young Painters. His life of Sir Joshua Reynolds was never finished.

By 1832, Charles was so much in demand as a painter that he had pictures engaged for years ahead—the subject, the size, and the price left entirely to his discretion. In that year, he painted “a conversation picture,” in which he introduced the whole family of the Marquis of Westminster.

31 Recollections, II, 209.
33 Ibid., 199.
In the following year, at the height of his career in England and after an absence of more than twenty years from America, Leslie was persuaded by his family and friends to accept a professorship at West Point. Even Washington Irving advised him to come to America. He was made to believe that he could save more money, have more security for himself and his sons, and still have plenty of time to paint. Eliza had pointed out that the clear bright days of American winters would give him twice as much time to paint as he had in gloomy London.

The Leslies sailed on the ship Philadelphia on September 21, 1833, arriving at New York five weeks later. They went on to Philadelphia to visit Eliza and Ann. There Charles was literally besieged by his friends who wished to do him honor, receiving more invitations than he could accept. In declining one of these invitations, he wrote:

I trust I shall have many opportunities of renewing that intercourse with my early friends among you which I have never ceased to remember with unmingled pleasure; and of becoming known to the many who have distinguished themselves and done honor to our country by the successful cultivation of the Fine Arts during my absence.

On November 20, 1833, Eliza wrote to Abbe Bailey James that Charles and his wife and five children were pleasantly situated near her brother Tom at West Point. With deep satisfaction she continued:

Charles is literally enraptured with America—He says had he known exactly what America now is, he could not have stayed away from it half so long. . . . He is not the least English, either in looks or ways. I never saw a man who had less coldness, reserve, and fastidiousness. He is full of amusing anecdotes of things and people that he has seen, and tells them so well that to hear and see him is almost equal to a performance of Mathews. And having had more or less personal acquaintance with most of the distinguished public characters of England, he has much to relate that is well worth knowing. In feeling and opinions he is a most determined American. In leaving England, he of course made many sacrifices, but he was willing to give up all the advantages . . . as soon as he could see his way clear in returning home. He says that from the time he became a father, he felt it impossible to become reconciled to the idea of bringing up his children as English children, and making Englishmen and Englishwomen of them.

This enthusiasm for America was not shared by Charles Leslie's wife. Fearing that she would make Charles dissatisfied, his friends

34 Ibid., I, 125.
35 Leslie to Thomas Sully, William Strickland, C. J. Childs, James B. Longacre and William E. Tucker, Phila., Nov. 2, 1833, Dreer Collection, HSP.
made strenuous efforts to secure for him an adequate painting room and an increase in salary. Without Leslie's knowledge, his old friend and employer, Thomas Bradford, went to Washington to try to influence Congress to make provision for these things at West Point. At this time, however, there was a faction in Congress seeking to destroy the Academy. Colonel de Russey, the Superintendent, was anxious to build the painting room and submitted a plan for it to the Secretary of War. But because of the opposition to the school, the application for funds to build the room was never sent to Congress.  

Charles wanted no special favors. He felt that he could make no complaint, for a raise in salary from a thousand to fifteen hundred dollars had not been definitely promised. But the painting room had been pledged, and he felt a keen disappointment when that pledge was not fulfilled. As for the school itself, Charles thought it a good one, admirably managed. But he had a poor opinion of Congress, whose members sent their sons and favorites to West Point and blamed the school when those sons and favorites were sent home because of deficiency in brains or character.  

Before the year was out, Charles decided to return to England. His wife had been ill, his studio was inadequate, there was too little time for painting, living expenses were high, and he could not see that his sons would do any better in America than in England. He missed his European artist friends, and he could make his wife happy by returning. The Leslies and the Careys, of course, were greatly distressed by this decision. Ellen Bailey, visiting in Philadelphia, heard all about it, and in a letter to her sisters in Ohio, she wrote (April 26, 1834):

Betsy [Eliza] . . . can think and talk of nothing else. She says it is too bad that Charles should be blamed when it is his most ardent wish to remain here but for the sake of domestic peace he was compelled to return his wife gave him no rest until he consented to resign and leave this horrid country. Betsy says she believes she was disappointed that she did not find the Americans in a savage state. When she discovered her error she railed out against their extravagance and ungentility. To think they eat with their knives and break their eggs in a glass. Oh shocking! Betsy says she cannot imagine what possessed Charles to marry such a woman. She is not pretty accomplished or sensible nor does she possess one qualification to render

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36 Recollections, I, 127.
37 Charles Leslie to Henry Carey, West Point, Feb. 3, 1834, E. C. Gardiner Collection, HSP.
38 Recollections, I, 125-127.
any man happy but she says Charles ought to have taken warning from those who
married her sisters they all make bad wives, and he was advised by all his friends
not to marry into the family but all to no effect.

A New York paper commented that the professorship of drawing
at West Point did not answer Mr. Leslie’s expectations, and duty to
his family compelled him to return to Europe. The same paper
reported a party given in Leslie’s honor, on the evening of April 18,
1834, at the Academy of Design. There he met brother artists who
testified to him their admiration of his genius and their regret that
he was leaving America. All the painters, engravers, and sculptors of
the city and vicinity were there to do him honor, with the exception
of Trumbull, who was ill, and William Dunlap, who was too old and
frail to be there. In addition to the artists, a number of literary
gentlemen were present, among them Washington Irving, G. C.
Verplanck, James Hillhouse and Fitz-Greene Halleck. “It was a
parting tribute—well deserved on the one hand and rendered with
taste and feeling on the other.”

Back in England, Charles received many new honors, even from
royalty. In 1838, he began to paint “The Queen Receiving the
Sacrament at her Coronation,” which he finished in 1843; in 1840, he
began “The Christening of the Princess Royal,” completing it in
1842; and in 1841, he painted “The Queen in her Coronation Robes.”
Leslie’s correspondence sparkles with references to royalty, nobility,
and eminent artists. In 1847, by a unanimous vote, he was elected
Professor of Painting to the Royal Academy, at a salary of sixty
pounds for six lectures a year. This enabled him to provide for his
sister Ann, who had lost her position as mistress of drawing at
Rutgers’ Institute in New York. It was a source of pride to Leslie
that two of his children, a son and a daughter, became fine artists.

In America, Eliza Leslie was forging ahead in the literary field.
She had become a regular contributor to Godey’s Lady’s Book and an
occasional contributor to Graham’s Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine.
Her earlier successes encouraged her to edit the Gift, one of the
best of American annuals, and the Violet, a juvenile “souvenir.” The
New York Mirror (October 3, 1835) called the Gift “an attractive
and exquisite little bijou,” and from that exquisite little bijou they

40 Recollections, II, 263, 281.
printed copious extracts, including Washington Irving's "An Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron."

In 1843, Eliza began to edit her own magazine—Miss Leslie's Magazine—with T. S. Arthur, who a decade later wrote the widely read Ten Nights in a Bar-Room. It was launched as a "Home Book of Fashion, Literature and Domestic Economy," and included as a special feature, "Miss Leslie's valuable information on household and domestic interests." At the end of the year, however, the magazine was taken over by Arthur, and renamed Arthur's Ladies' Magazine of Elegant Literature and the Fine Arts.41

In 1833, 1835, and 1837, respectively, three series of Pencil Sketches by Miss Leslie had been published. Of the first series, Eliza wrote to Abbe Bailey James:42

I hope you have derived some amusement from my Pencil Sketches. I believe "Uncle Philip" is generally considered the best—The French characters are from people I have met with. . . . I frequently see and hear things that I would not dare put into a book. . . . they would by nine-tenths of my readers be considered impossible.

The letter continued:

My next work, a little volume of about three hundred pages, is designed for children, and will be published in a fortnight. The title is "Atlantic Tales." The concluding Story, "Russel and Sidney, or the Young Revolutionists," I am myself better satisfied with than with anything I have ever written. . . . This winter, I shall probably write another volume of the Sketches, or perhaps I may be able to "screw my courage to the sticking-place" and attempt a novel. . . .

In 1837, Miss Leslie brought out the Domestic Cookery Book, and in 1840 the House-Book, both meeting with immediate success. By 1840 forty thousand copies of the Cookery-Book had been sold, and by 1851 it was in its forty-first edition, no edition being less than a thousand copies. As early as 1842, Eliza began to collect materials for a life of John Fitch, and although she devoted much of the last years of her life to it, it was never completed. In 1846 she published a new cookbook under the title of the Ladies' Receipt-Book, and about this same time, the Indian Meal Book, which had a great sale during the Irish famine, came out. In 1853 she published her Behaviour-Book.


42 Nov. 20, 1833.
which also sold in great numbers. A British biographical encyclopedia (1856) remarked that the Behaviour-Book was “a work apparently much required in some parts of America.” It was during this period, many years after her brother had urged her to, that Eliza Leslie “screw[ed her] courage to the sticking-place” and wrote a novel, Amelia: or a Young Lady’s Vicissitudes. It appeared in Godey’s Lady’s Book in 1846, and was published in book form in 1848. Although this was her only novel, she continued to write shorter pieces, enjoying the largest sale of any woman writer of her time.

By 1847, Eliza Leslie had become such a celebrity that a visitor from New Orleans paid fifty dollars to Mrs. Steele, a fashionable artist staying at the United States Hotel, to paint her miniature. In a letter to one of her nieces, Eliza gave an animated account of Mrs. Steele and the miniature:

... Mrs. Steele, originally Miss Adeline Redfield of Onandaga County, Western New York. She is the widow of a painter well-known in the southern part of the Union. He taught her to do miniatures and since his death, she had been travelling round, and supporting herself in that way. ... During the short time she has been here, she has painted Mr. Mitchell, Miss Nicholson, and myself; and is now doing Mrs. King the wife of an ex-member of congress. She finished my miniature yesterday, and it is considered very good. It is painted for Mr. Pierce of New Orleans, ... and by desire of [his daughters, he] requested me to sit to Mrs. Steele for him. ... It was their desire that I should be painted in mourning-dress—as they had seen me in no other. I would rather, myself, have been represented in my gray merino coat with the black velvet pelerine; and the white bonnet I wore last winter and which looks as white nearly as when new, having always kept a cake of white wax in the bandbox. ... The miniature ... is an oval, and the corners of the frame are filled up with crimson velvet according to the present fashion; ... These frames cost twelve dollars, but Mr. Pierce desired Mrs. Steele to get one of the handsomest and newest style. It goes to New Orleans next week by Mr. and Miss Nicholson. ... It is by no means as handsome as Sully’s portrait of me, and therefore a more correct likeness. ... 

Some people feared Eliza Leslie, because of her penetrating sarcasm, but her admirers loved her for her candor and almost quixotic benevolence. That she had eccentricities that were hard to live with is evident in the family correspondence. She was loved by her family, but they could not cope with her peculiarities in her last years. She

43 S. Austin Allibone, A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors From the Earliest Accounts to the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century (Philadelphia. 1899), I, 1086.
44 Eliza Leslie to Gertrude Leslie, Oct. 10, 1847, Conarroe Papers, VI, 45, HSP.
held very strong prejudices, but she always stood for right principles and aimed to be useful to society. Her long and busy life, a span of seventy-one years, ended in Gloucester, New Jersey, on New Year's Day, 1858. She was buried in St. Peter's Churchyard in Philadelphia.

One year and four months later, on May 5, 1859, Charles Leslie died in London, at the age of sixty-five. Like Eliza, Charles had scorned affection and notoriety, and had held strong convictions. He was milder in speech and temperament than Eliza, and more brilliant. While Eliza ruthlessly laid bare the follies of fashionable society, Charles painted pictures that made people happier and gentler, pictures that helped them to love good books more and to regard their fellow creatures "with kindlier eyes." He painted scenes from the books his father had loved—Shakespeare, Cervantes, Le Sage, Molière, Addison, Sterne, Fielding and Smollett. A great deal of Leslie's best work embodied the thought of others; as an interpreter of "other men's conceptions," he ranked among the foremost English painters. Tom Taylor, his friend and biographer, said of him: "What painter has entered so completely as Leslie into the mind of Shakespeare and Cervantes, of Molière and Addison?"

Oxford, Ohio

CHARLES AND ELIZA LESLIE

Ophira D. Smith

45 Charles Leslie's pictures were sold at auction in London, according to his request, for a larger sum than was expected. Harriet J. Leslie (Charles' daughter) to Henry Carey, St. John's Wood, Sept. 3, 1859; Emma Leslie (Tom Leslie's daughter) to Henry Carey, New York, June 18, 1860, E. C. Gardiner Collection, HSP.

46 The English claimed Charles Leslie as their own, in view of the fact that he had done most of his work in their country and had become so completely identified with English life. Leslie, however, always thought of himself as an American painter, and certainly he was so considered by his own country.

47 Thomas Proclus Taylor (1817-1880), English playwright and journalist, editor of Punch. He was much interested in art, and wrote biographies of Robert Haydon and Sir Joshua Reynolds. He edited Charles Robert Leslie's Autobiographical Recollections in 1860, the year after Leslie's death.