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The clear spirit:
twenty Canadian women and their times.
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The Strickland Sisters

SUSANNA MOODIE 1803-1885

CATHARINE PARR TRAILL 1802-1899

CLARA THOMAS

M. Quaye, ed.

ONLY A FEW CANADIANS now living can personally recall either of the two Strickland sisters whose lives and achievements form so important a part of the story of Upper Canada's settlement. Dr. Lily Mathieson of Belleville, whose long medical career was itself notable among the achievements of Canadian women and who died as recently as 1966, remembered being introduced to Mrs. Moodie, a venerable old lady who greeted her kindly, but whose age and dignity filled her with tongue-tied awe. Recollections of Mrs. Traill, whose long and active life extended well into the nineties, are more commonly available and are always tributes to a gentle, joyful, and strong personality. Distanced by time as we are, we can perhaps appreciate more fully than could those who knew the two ladies personally both the great adventures and the marked successes that form the story of their lives.

Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie were the youngest daughters of Thomas Strickland of Reydon Hall in Suffolk. Of his family of nine children, six were ultimately famous in varying degrees for their writings; Catharine and Susanna claim double recognition

and remembrance, as settlers in Upper Canada and as recorders of its life.

The Stricklands were proud of a distinguished lineage. Thomas, born in 1758, was descended from wealthy and influential Stuart supporters and more remotely, as he and all his family believed, from Catharine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry VIII. His daughters, Agnes and Elizabeth, whose *Lives of the Queens of England* commanded both public acclaim and scholarly respect, were impelled to their subject by family pride as much as by their bent toward historical research. "I derive my descent from John, Duke of Lancaster, fourth son of Edward III, and eight of the early queens of whom I have written," wrote Agnes.

Thomas Strickland spent his working life as master and manager of the Greenland docks, in London. He retired in his late forties, partly because of ill health—he was, his daughters say, a "martyr to the gout"—and partly because he could now afford to live at ease as a country gentleman and to devote himself to his absorbing interest, the education of his family. First he rented Stowe House, a pleasant rural property near the town of Bungay in Norfolk, the home of Catharine's and Susanna's early years. Then in 1808 he bought Reydon Hall, near Southwold, in Suffolk, henceforth considered the Strickland family seat, remembered with pride and nostalgia by his emigrant children and maintained, until the 1850s, by their mother and sisters.

Mr. Strickland had married twice: his first wife, a grand-niece of Sir Isaac Newton, died with the birth of their first child, a little girl who died in infancy. In 1793 he married Elizabeth Homer, the mother of six daughters, two sons, and a ninth child who died very young. Catharine, born in 1802, and Susanna, in 1803, were the youngest of the daughters. Mrs. Strickland was a willing and an able partner in her husband's educational system, undertaking the instruction of the younger children as her husband supervised the lessons of the older ones. The scope and the rigour of the undertaking are impressive to contemplate, but it was by no means an unusual phenomenon among cultivated English families. As the childhood of the Mills, Burneys, Austens, Martineaus and scores of others less notable indicates, many parents considered the education of their children their personal task as well as their parental responsibility.

Mr. Strickland had a fine library, some of it a legacy from his first wife, and at least one book, Pope's *Iliad*, Sir Isaac Newton's own