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Mary Telfair: Single Blessedness and Financial Independence

Savannah, Georgia was home to a very prominent colonial family whose name, Telfair, still resonates today. The generous benefactions made by the final surviving family member, Mary Telfair, have endured a long-lasting presence in this city. Coming from an incredibly wealthy family of plantation owners and finally becoming a plantation owner herself, Mary Telfair embodied an ideology that set her apart from the traditional plantation mistresses in her time.

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Wealthy enough to be highly educated in prestigious northern institutions, Telfair described southern antebellum women as “clinging ivy” or “insipids.” She detested the frills of marriage and chose to live her life of leisure in “single blessedness” because she had the economic means to do so.¹ Because of her immense wealth, Telfair lived with a certain amount of independence that was common amongst other women of her stature.

¹ Betty Wood, *Mary Telfair to Mary Few: Selected Letters 1802-1844* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 38.