HAWTHORNE NATHANIEL

TWICE TOLD TALES

Nathaniel Hawthorne
Twice Told Tales

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25560292
Twice Told Tales:

Содержание

Nathaniel Hawthorne
Twice Told Tales

THE GRAY CHAMPION

There was once a time when New England groaned under the actual pressure of heavier wrongs than those threatened ones which brought on the Revolution. James II., the bigoted successor of Charles the Voluptuous, had annulled the charters of all the colonies and sent a harsh and unprincipled soldier to take away our liberties and endanger our religion. The administration of Sir Edmund Andros lacked scarcely a single characteristic of tyranny – a governor and council holding office from the king and wholly independent of the country; laws made and taxes levied without concurrence of the people, immediate or by their representatives; the rights of private citizens violated and the titles of all landed property declared void; the voice of complaint stifled by restrictions on the press; and finally, disaffection overawed by the first band of mercenary troops that ever marched on our free soil. For two years our ancestors were kept in sullen submission by that filial love which had invariably secured their allegiance to the mother-country, whether its head chanced to be a Parliament, Protector or popish monarch. Till these evil times, however, such allegiance had been merely

nominal, and the colonists had ruled themselves, enjoying far more freedom than is even yet the privilege of the native subjects of Great Britain.

At length a rumor reached our shores that the prince of Orange had ventured on an enterprise the success of which would be the triumph of civil and religious rights and the salvation of New England. It was but a doubtful whisper; it might be false or the attempt might fail, and in either case the man that stirred against King James would lose his head. Still, the intelligence produced a marked effect. The people smiled mysteriously in the streets and threw bold glances at their oppressors, while far and wide there was a subdued and silent agitation, as if the slightest signal would rouse the whole land from its sluggish despondency. Aware of their danger, the rulers resolved to avert it by an imposing display of strength, and perhaps to confirm their despotism by yet harsher measures.

One afternoon in April, 1689, Sir Edmund Andros and his favorite councillors, being warm with wine, assembled the red-coats of the governor's guard and made their appearance in the streets of Boston. The sun was near setting when the march commenced. The roll of the drum at that unquiet crisis seemed to go through the streets less as the martial music of the soldiers than as a muster-call to the inhabitants themselves. A multitude by various avenues assembled in King street, which was destined to be the scene, nearly a century afterward, of another encounter between the troops of Britain and a people struggling against her

tyranny.

Though more than sixty years had elapsed since the Pilgrims came, this crowd of their descendants still showed the strong and sombre features of their character perhaps more strikingly in such a stern emergency than on happier occasions. There was the sober garb, the general severity of mien, the gloomy but undismayed expression, the scriptural forms of speech and the confidence in Heaven's blessing on a righteous cause which would have marked a band of the original Puritans when threatened by some peril of the wilderness. Indeed, it was not yet time for the old spirit to be extinct, since there were men in the street that day who had worshipped there beneath the trees before a house was reared to the God for whom they had become exiles. Old soldiers of the Parliament were here, too, smiling grimly at the thought that their aged arms might strike another blow against the house of Stuart. Here, also, were the veterans of King Philip's war, who had burned villages and slaughtered young and old with pious fierceness while the godly souls throughout the land were helping them with prayer. Several ministers were scattered among the crowd, which, unlike all other mobs, regarded them with such reverence as if there were sanctity in their very garments. These holy men exerted their influence to quiet the people, but not to disperse them.

Meantime, the purpose of the governor in disturbing the peace of the town at a period when the slightest commotion might throw the country into a ferment was almost the Universal subject

of inquiry, and variously explained.

"Satan will strike his master-stroke presently," cried some, "because he knoweth that his time is short. All our godly pastors are to be dragged to prison. We shall see them at a Smithfield fire in King street."

Hereupon the people of each parish gathered closer round their minister, who looked calmly upward and assumed a more apostolic dignity, as well befitted a candidate for the highest honor of his profession – a crown of martyrdom. It was actually fancied at that period that New England might have a John Rogers of her own to take the place of that worthy in the *Primer*.

"The pope of Rome has given orders for a new St. Bartholomew," cried others. "We are to be massacred, man and male-child."

Neither was this rumor wholly discredited; although the wiser class believed the governor's object somewhat less atrocious. His predecessor under the old charter, Bradstreet, a venerable companion of the first settlers, was known to be in town. There were grounds for conjecturing that Sir Edmund Andros intended at once to strike terror by a parade of military force and to confound the opposite faction by possessing himself of their chief.

"Stand firm for the old charter-governor!" shouted the crowd, seizing upon the idea – "the good old Governor Bradstreet!"

While this cry was at the loudest the people were surprised by the well-known figure of Governor Bradstreet himself, a

patriarch of nearly ninety, who appeared on the elevated steps of a door and with characteristic mildness besought them to submit to the constituted authorities.

"My children," concluded this venerable person, "do nothing rashly. Cry not aloud, but pray for the welfare of New England and expect patiently what the Lord will do in this matter."

The event was soon to be decided. All this time the roll of the drum had been approaching through Cornhill, louder and deeper, till with reverberations from house to house and the regular tramp of martial footsteps it burst into the street. A double rank of soldiers made their appearance, occupying the whole breadth of the passage, with shouldered matchlocks and matches burning, so as to present a row of fires in the dusk. Their steady march was like the progress of a machine that would roll irresistibly over everything in its way. Next, moving slowly, with a confused clatter of hoofs on the pavement, rode a party of mounted gentlemen, the central figure being Sir Edmund Andros, elderly, but erect and soldier-like. Those around him were his favorite councillors and the bitterest foes of New England. At his right hand rode Edward Randolph, our arch-enemy, that "blasted wretch," as Cotton Mather calls him, who achieved the downfall of our ancient government and was followed with a sensible curse-through life and to his grave. On the other side was Bullivant, scattering jests and mockery as he rode along. Dudley came behind with a downcast look, dreading, as well he might, to meet the indignant gaze of the

people, who beheld him, their only countryman by birth, among the oppressors of his native land. The captain of a frigate in the harbor and two or three civil officers under the Crown were also there. But the figure which most attracted the public eye and stirred up the deepest feeling was the Episcopal clergyman of King's Chapel riding haughtily among the magistrates in his priestly vestments, the fitting representative of prelacy and persecution, the union of Church and State, and all those abominations which had driven the Puritans to the wilderness. Another guard of soldiers, in double rank, brought up the rear.

The whole scene was a picture of the condition of New England, and its moral, the deformity of any government that does not grow out of the nature of things and the character of the people – on one side the religious multitude with their sad visages and dark attire, and on the other the group of despotic rulers with the high churchman in the midst and here and there a crucifix at their bosoms, all magnificently clad, flushed with wine, proud of unjust authority and scoffing at the universal groan. And the mercenary soldiers, waiting but the word to deluge the street with blood, showed the only means by which obedience could be secured.

"O Lord of hosts," cried a voice among the crowd, "provide a champion for thy people!"

This ejaculation was loudly uttered, and served as a herald's cry to introduce a remarkable personage. The crowd had rolled back, and were now huddled together nearly at the extremity of

the street, while the soldiers had advanced no more than a third of its length. The intervening space was empty – a paved solitude between lofty edifices which threw almost a twilight shadow over it. Suddenly there was seen the figure of an ancient man who seemed to have emerged from among the people and was walking by himself along the centre of the street to confront the armed band. He wore the old Puritan dress – a dark cloak and a steeple-crowned hat in the fashion of at least fifty years before, with a heavy sword upon his thigh, but a staff in his hand to assist the tremulous gait of age.

When at some distance from the multitude, the old man turned slowly round, displaying a face of antique majesty rendered doubly venerable by the hoary beard that descended on his breast. He made a gesture at once of encouragement and warning, then turned again and resumed his way.

"Who is this gray patriarch?" asked the young men of their sires.

"Who is this venerable brother?" asked the old men among themselves.

But none could make reply. The fathers of the people, those of fourscore years and upward, were disturbed, deeming it strange that they should forget one of such evident authority whom they must have known in their early days, the associate of Winthrop and all the old councillors, giving laws and making prayers and leading them against the savage. The elderly men ought to have remembered him, too, with locks as gray in their youth as their

own were now. And the young! How could he have passed so utterly from their memories – that hoary sire, the relic of long-departed times, whose awful benediction had surely been bestowed on their uncovered heads in childhood?

"Whence did he come? What is his purpose? Who can this old man be?" whispered the wondering crowd.

Meanwhile, the venerable stranger, staff in hand, was pursuing his solitary walk along the centre of the street. As he drew near the advancing soldiers, and as the roll of their drum came full upon his ear, the old man raised himself to a loftier mien, while the decrepitude of age seemed to fall from his shoulders, leaving him in gray but unbroken dignity. Now he marched onward with a warrior's step, keeping time to the military music. Thus the aged form advanced on one side and the whole parade of soldiers and magistrates on the other, till, when scarcely twenty yards remained between, the old man grasped his staff by the middle and held it before him like a leader's truncheon.

"Stand!" cried he.

The eye, the face and attitude of command, the solemn yet warlike peal of that voice – fit either to rule a host in the battle-field or be raised to God in prayer – were irresistible. At the old man's word and outstretched arm the roll of the drum was hushed at once and the advancing line stood still. A tremulous enthusiasm seized upon the multitude. That stately form, combining the leader and the saint, so gray, so dimly seen, in such an ancient garb, could only belong to some old

champion of the righteous cause whom the oppressor's drum had summoned from his grave. They raised a shout of awe and exultation, and looked for the deliverance of New England.

The governor and the gentlemen of his party, perceiving themselves brought to an unexpected stand, rode hastily forward, as if they would have pressed their snorting and affrighted horses right against the hoary apparition. He, however, blenched not a step, but, glancing his severe eye round the group, which half encompassed him, at last bent it sternly on Sir Edmund Andros. One would have thought that the dark old man was chief ruler there, and that the governor and council with soldiers at their back, representing the whole power and authority of the Crown, had no alternative but obedience.

"What does this old fellow here?" cried Edward Randolph, fiercely. – "On, Sir Edmund! Bid the soldiers forward, and give the dotard the same choice that you give all his countrymen – to stand aside or be trampled on."

"Nay, nay! Let us show respect to the good grandsire," said Bullivant, laughing. "See you not he is some old round-headed dignitary who hath lain asleep these thirty years and knows nothing of the change of times? Doubtless he thinks to put us down with a proclamation in Old Noll's name."

"Are you mad, old man?" demanded Sir Edmund Andros, in loud and harsh tones. "How dare you stay the march of King James's governor?"

"I have stayed the march of a king himself ere now," replied

the gray figure, with stern composure. "I am here, Sir Governor, because the cry of an oppressed people hath disturbed me in my secret place, and, beseeching this favor earnestly of the Lord, it was vouchsafed me to appear once again on earth in the good old cause of his saints. And what speak ye of James? There is no longer a popish tyrant on the throne of England, and by to-morrow noon his name shall be a by-word in this very street, where ye would make it a word of terror. Back, thou that wast a governor, back! With this night thy power is ended. To-morrow, the prison! Back, lest I foretell the scaffold!"

The people had been drawing nearer and nearer and drinking in the words of their champion, who spoke in accents long disused, like one unaccustomed to converse except with the dead of many years ago. But his voice stirred their souls. They confronted the soldiers, not wholly without arms and ready to convert the very stones of the street into deadly weapons. Sir Edmund Andros looked at the old man; then he cast his hard and cruel eye over the multitude and beheld them burning with that lurid wrath so difficult to kindle or to quench, and again he fixed his gaze on the aged form which stood obscurely in an open space where neither friend nor foe had thrust himself. What were his thoughts he uttered no word which might discover, but, whether the oppressor were overawed by the Gray Champion's look or perceived his peril in the threatening attitude of the people, it is certain that he gave back and ordered his soldiers to commence a slow and guarded retreat. Before another sunset the governor

and all that rode so proudly with him were prisoners, and long ere it was known that James had abdicated King William was proclaimed throughout New England.

But where was the Gray Champion? Some reported that when the troops had gone from King street and the people were thronging tumultuously in their rear, Bradstreet, the aged governor, was seen to embrace a form more aged than his own. Others soberly affirmed that while they marvelled at the venerable grandeur of his aspect the old man had faded from their eyes, melting slowly into the hues of twilight, till where he stood there was an empty space. But all agreed that the hoary shape was gone. The men of that generation watched for his reappearance in sunshine and in twilight, but never saw him more, nor knew when his funeral passed nor where his gravestone was.

And who was the Gray Champion? Perhaps his name might be found in the records of that stern court of justice which passed a sentence too mighty for the age, but glorious in all after-times for its humbling lesson to the monarch and its high example to the subject. I have heard that whenever the descendants of the Puritans are to show the spirit of their sires the old man appears again. When eighty years had passed, he walked once more in King street. Five years later, in the twilight of an April morning, he stood on the green beside the meeting-house at Lexington where now the obelisk of granite with a slab of slate inlaid commemorates the first-fallen of the Revolution. And when our fathers were toiling at the breastwork on Bunker's Hill,

all through that night the old warrior walked his rounds. Long, long may it be ere he comes again! His hour is one of darkness and adversity and peril. But should domestic tyranny oppress us or the invader's step pollute our soil, still may the Gray Champion come! for he is the type of New England's hereditary spirit, and his shadowy march on the eve of danger must ever be the pledge that New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry.

SUNDAY AT HOME

Every Sabbath morning in the summer-time I thrust back the curtain to watch the sunrise stealing down a steeple which stands opposite my chamber window. First the weathercock begins to flash; then a fainter lustre gives the spire an airy aspect; next it encroaches on the tower and causes the index of the dial to glisten like gold as it points to the gilded figure of the hour. Now the loftiest window gleams, and now the lower. The carved framework of the portal is marked strongly out. At length the morning glory in its descent from heaven comes down the stone steps one by one, and there stands the steeple glowing with fresh radiance, while the shades of twilight still hide themselves among the nooks of the adjacent buildings. Methinks though the same sun brightens it every fair morning, yet the steeple has a peculiar robe of brightness for the Sabbath.

By dwelling near a church a person soon contracts an attachment for the edifice. We naturally personify it, and conceive its massy walls and its dim emptiness to be instinct with a calm and meditative and somewhat melancholy spirit. But the steeple stands foremost in our thoughts, as well as locally. It impresses us as a giant with a mind comprehensive and discriminating enough to care for the great and small concerns of all the town. Hourly, while it speaks a moral to the few that think, it reminds thousands of busy individuals of their separate

and most secret affairs. It is the steeple, too, that flings abroad the hurried and irregular accents of general alarm; neither have gladness and festivity found a better utterance than by its tongue; and when the dead are slowly passing to their home, the steeple has a melancholy voice to bid them welcome. Yet, in spite of this connection with human interests, what a moral loneliness on week-days broods round about its stately height! It has no kindred with the houses above which it towers; it looks down into the narrow thoroughfare – the lonelier because the crowd are elbowing their passage at its base. A glance at the body of the church deepens this impression. Within, by the light of distant windows, amid refracted shadows we discern the vacant pews and empty galleries, the silent organ, the voiceless pulpit and the clock which tells to solitude how time is passing. Time – where man lives not – what is it but eternity? And in the church, we might suppose, are garnered up throughout the week all thoughts and feelings that have reference to eternity, until the holy day comes round again to let them forth. Might not, then, its more appropriate site be in the outskirts of the town, with space for old trees to wave around it and throw their solemn shadows over a quiet green? We will say more of this hereafter.

But on the Sabbath I watch the earliest sunshine and fancy that a holier brightness marks the day when there shall be no buzz of voices on the Exchange nor traffic in the shops, nor crowd nor business anywhere but at church. Many have fancied so. For my own part, whether I see it scattered down among

tangled woods, or beaming broad across the fields, or hemmed in between brick buildings, or tracing out the figure of the casement on my chamber floor, still I recognize the Sabbath sunshine. And ever let me recognize it! Some illusions – and this among them – are the shadows of great truths. Doubts may flit around me or seem to close their evil wings and settle down, but so long as I imagine that the earth is hallowed and the light of heaven retains its sanctity on the Sabbath – while that blessed sunshine lives within me – never can my soul have lost the instinct of its faith. If it have gone astray, it will return again.

I love to spend such pleasant Sabbaths from morning till night behind the curtain of my open window. Are they spent amiss? Every spot so near the church as to be visited by the circling shadow of the steeple should be deemed consecrated ground to-day. With stronger truth be it said that a devout heart may consecrate a den of thieves, as an evil one may convert a temple to the same. My heart, perhaps, has no such holy, nor, I would fain trust, such impious, potency. It must suffice that, though my form be absent, my inner man goes constantly to church, while many whose bodily presence fills the accustomed seats have left their souls at home. But I am there even before my friend the sexton. At length he comes – a man of kindly but sombre aspect, in dark gray clothes, and hair of the same mixture. He comes and applies his key to the wide portal. Now my thoughts may go in among the dusty pews or ascend the pulpit without sacrilege, but soon come forth again to enjoy the music of the bell. How glad,

yet solemn too! All the steeples in town are talking together aloft in the sunny air and rejoicing among themselves while their spires point heavenward. Meantime, here are the children assembling to the Sabbath-school, which is kept somewhere within the church. Often, while looking at the arched portal, I have been gladdened by the sight of a score of these little girls and boys in pink, blue, yellow and crimson frocks bursting suddenly forth into the sunshine like a swarm of gay butterflies that had been shut up in the solemn gloom. Or I might compare them to cherubs haunting that holy place.

About a quarter of an hour before the second ringing of the bell individuals of the congregation begin to appear. The earliest is invariably an old woman in black whose bent frame and rounded shoulders are evidently laden with some heavy affliction which she is eager to rest upon the altar. Would that the Sabbath came twice as often, for the sake of that sorrowful old soul! There is an elderly man, also, who arrives in good season and leans against the corner of the tower, just within the line of its shadow, looking downward with a darksome brow. I sometimes fancy that the old woman is the happier of the two. After these, others drop in singly and by twos and threes, either disappearing through the doorway or taking their stand in its vicinity. At last, and always with an unexpected sensation, the bell turns in the steeple overhead and throws out an irregular clangor, jarring the tower to its foundation. As if there were magic in the sound, the sidewalks of the street, both up and

down along, are immediately thronged with two long lines of people, all converging hitherward and streaming into the church. Perhaps the far-off roar of a coach draws nearer – a deeper thunder by its contrast with the surrounding stillness – until it sets down the wealthy worshippers at the portal among their humblest brethren. Beyond that entrance – in theory, at least – there are no distinctions of earthly rank; nor, indeed, by the goodly apparel which is flaunting in the sun would there seem to be such on the hither side. Those pretty girls! Why will they disturb my pious meditations? Of all days in the week, they should strive to look least fascinating on the Sabbath, instead of heightening their mortal loveliness, as if to rival the blessed angels and keep our thoughts from heaven. Were I the minister himself, I must needs look. One girl is white muslin from the waist upward and black silk downward to her slippers; a second blushes from top-knot to shoe-tie, one universal scarlet; another shines of a pervading yellow, as if she had made a garment of the sunshine. The greater part, however, have adopted a milder cheerfulness of hue. Their veils, especially when the wind raises them, give a lightness to the general effect and make them appear like airy phantoms as they flit up the steps and vanish into the sombre doorway. Nearly all – though it is very strange that I should know it – wear white stockings, white as snow, and neat slippers laced crosswise with black ribbon pretty high above the ankles. A white stocking is infinitely more effective than a black one.

Here comes the clergyman, slow and solemn, in severe

simplicity, needing no black silk gown to denote his office. His aspect claims my reverence, but cannot win my love. Were I to picture Saint Peter keeping fast the gate of Heaven and frowning, more stern than pitiful, on the wretched applicants, that face should be my study. By middle age, or sooner, the creed has generally wrought upon the heart or been attempered by it. As the minister passes into the church the bell holds its iron tongue and all the low murmur of the congregation dies away. The gray sexton looks up and down the street and then at my window-curtain, where through the small peephole I half fancy that he has caught my eye. Now every loiterer has gone in and the street lies asleep in the quiet sun, while a feeling of loneliness comes over me, and brings also an uneasy sense of neglected privileges and duties. Oh, I ought to have gone to church! The bustle of the rising congregation reaches my ears. They are standing up to pray. Could I bring my heart into unison with those who are praying in yonder church and lift it heavenward with a fervor of supplication, but no distinct request, would not that be the safest kind of prayer? – "Lord, look down upon me in mercy!" With that sentiment gushing from my soul, might I not leave all the rest to him?

Hark! the hymn! This, at least, is a portion of the service which I can enjoy better than if I sat within the walls, where the full choir and the massive melody of the organ would fall with a weight upon me. At this distance it thrills through my frame and plays upon my heart-strings with a pleasure both of the sense and

spirit. Heaven be praised! I know nothing of music as a science, and the most elaborate harmonies, if they please me, please as simply as a nurse's lullaby. The strain has ceased, but prolongs itself in my mind with fanciful echoes till I start from my reverie and find that the sermon has commenced. It is my misfortune seldom to fructify in a regular way by any but printed sermons. The first strong idea which the preacher utters gives birth to a train of thought and leads me onward step by step quite out of hearing of the good man's voice unless he be indeed a son of thunder. At my open window, catching now and then a sentence of the "parson's saw," I am as well situated as at the foot of the pulpit stairs. The broken and scattered fragments of this one discourse will be the texts of many sermons preached by those colleague pastors – colleagues, but often disputants – my Mind and Heart. The former pretends to be a scholar and perplexes me with doctrinal points; the latter takes me on the score of feeling; and both, like several other preachers, spend their strength to very little purpose. I, their sole auditor, cannot always understand them.

Suppose that a few hours have passed, and behold me still behind my curtain just before the close of the afternoon service. The hour-hand on the dial has passed beyond four o'clock. The declining sun is hidden behind the steeple and throws its shadow straight across the street; so that my chamber is darkened as with a cloud. Around the church door all is solitude, and an impenetrable obscurity beyond the threshold. A commotion

is heard. The seats are slammed down and the pew doors thrown back; a multitude of feet are trampling along the unseen aisles, and the congregation bursts suddenly through the portal. Foremost scampers a rabble of boys, behind whom moves a dense and dark phalanx of grown men, and lastly a crowd of females with young children and a few scattered husbands. This instantaneous outbreak of life into loneliness is one of the pleasantest scenes of the day. Some of the good people are rubbing their eyes, thereby intimating that they have been wrapped, as it were, in a sort of holy trance by the fervor of their devotion. There is a young man, a third-rate coxcomb, whose first care is always to flourish a white handkerchief and brush the seat of a tight pair of black silk pantaloons which shine as if varnished. They must have been made of the stuff called "everlasting," or perhaps of the same piece as Christian's garments in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, for he put them on two summers ago and has not yet worn the gloss off. I have taken a great liking to those black silk pantaloons. But now, with nods and greetings among friends, each matron takes her husband's arm and paces gravely homeward, while the girls also flutter away after arranging sunset walks with their favored bachelors. The Sabbath eve is the eve of love. At length the whole congregation is dispersed. No; here, with faces as glossy as black satin, come two sable ladies and a sable gentleman, and close in their rear the minister, who softens his severe visage and bestows a kind word on each. Poor souls! To them the most captivating picture

of bliss in heaven is "There we shall be white!"

All is solitude again. But hark! A broken warbling of voices, and now, attuning its grandeur to their sweetness, a stately peal of the organ. Who are the choristers? Let me dream that the angels who came down from heaven this blessed morn to blend themselves with the worship of the truly good are playing and singing their farewell to the earth. On the wings of that rich melody they were borne upward.

This, gentle reader, is merely a flight of poetry. A few of the singing-men and singing-women had lingered behind their fellows and raised their voices fitfully and blew a careless note upon the organ. Yet it lifted my soul higher than all their former strains. They are gone – the sons and daughters of Music – and the gray sexton is just closing the portal. For six days more there will be no face of man in the pews and aisles and galleries, nor a voice in the pulpit, nor music in the choir. Was it worth while to rear this massive edifice to be a desert in the heart of the town and populous only for a few hours of each seventh day? Oh, but the church is a symbol of religion. May its site, which was consecrated on the day when the first tree was felled, be kept holy for ever, a spot of solitude and peace amid the trouble and vanity of our week-day world! There is a moral, and a religion too, even in the silent walls. And may the steeple still point heavenward and be decked with the hallowed sunshine of the Sabbath morn!

THE WEDDING-KNELL

There is a certain church, in the city of New York which I have always regarded with peculiar interest on account of a marriage there solemnized under very singular circumstances in my grandmother's girlhood. That venerable lady chanced to be a spectator of the scene, and ever after made it her favorite narrative. Whether the edifice now standing on the same site be the identical one to which she referred I am not antiquarian enough to know, nor would it be worth while to correct myself, perhaps, of an agreeable error by reading the date of its erection on the tablet over the door. It is a stately church surrounded by an enclosure of the loveliest green, within which appear urns, pillars, obelisks, and other forms of monumental marble, the tributes of private affection or more splendid memorials of historic dust. With such a place, though the tumult of the city rolls beneath its tower, one would be willing to connect some legendary interest.

The marriage might be considered as the result of an early engagement, though there had been two intermediate weddings on the lady's part and forty years of celibacy on that of the gentleman. At sixty-five Mr. Ellenwood was a shy but not quite a secluded man; selfish, like all men who brood over their own hearts, yet manifesting on rare occasions a vein of generous sentiment; a scholar throughout life, though always an indolent one, because his studies had no definite object either of public

advantage or personal ambition; a gentleman, high-bred and fastidiously delicate, yet sometimes requiring a considerable relaxation in his behalf of the common rules of society. In truth, there were so many anomalies in his character, and, though shrinking with diseased sensibility from public notice, it had been his fatality so often to become the topic of the day by some wild eccentricity of conduct, that people searched his lineage for a hereditary taint of insanity. But there was no need of this. His caprices had their origin in a mind that lacked the support of an engrossing purpose, and in feelings that preyed upon themselves for want of other food. If he were mad, it was the consequence, and not the cause, of an aimless and abortive life.

The widow was as complete a contrast to her third bridegroom in everything but age as can well be conceived. Compelled to relinquish her first engagement, she had been united to a man of twice her own years, to whom she became an exemplary wife, and by whose death she was left in possession of a splendid fortune. A Southern gentleman considerably younger than herself succeeded to her hand and carried her to Charleston, where after many uncomfortable years she found herself again a widow. It would have been singular if any uncommon delicacy of feeling had survived through such a life as Mrs. Dabney's; it could not but be crushed and killed by her early disappointment, the cold duty of her first marriage, the dislocation of the heart's principles consequent on a second union, and the unkindness of her Southern husband, which had inevitably driven her to connect

the idea of his death with that of her comfort. To be brief, she was that wisest but unloveliest variety of woman, a philosopher, bearing troubles of the heart with equanimity, dispensing with all that should have been her happiness and making the best of what remained. Sage in most matters, the widow was perhaps the more amiable for the one frailty that made her ridiculous. Being childless, she could not remain beautiful by proxy in the person of a daughter; she therefore refused to grow old and ugly on any consideration; she struggled with Time, and held fast her roses in spite of him, till the venerable thief appeared to have relinquished the spoil as not worth the trouble of acquiring it.

The approaching marriage of this woman of the world with such an unworldly man as Mr. Ellenwood was announced soon after Mrs. Dabney's return to her native city. Superficial observers, and deeper ones, seemed to concur in supposing that the lady must have borne no inactive part in arranging the affair; there were considerations of expediency which she would be far more likely to appreciate than Mr. Ellenwood, and there was just the specious phantom of sentiment and romance in this late union of two early lovers which sometimes makes a fool of a woman who has lost her true feelings among the accidents of life. All the wonder was how the gentleman, with his lack of worldly wisdom and agonizing consciousness of ridicule, could have been induced to take a measure at once so prudent and so laughable. But while people talked the wedding-day arrived. The ceremony was to be solemnized according to the Episcopalian

forms and in open church, with a degree of publicity that attracted many spectators, who occupied the front seats of the galleries and the pews near the altar and along the broad aisle. It had been arranged, or possibly it was the custom of the day, that the parties should proceed separately to church. By some accident the bridegroom was a little less punctual than the widow and her bridal attendants, with whose arrival, after this tedious but necessary preface, the action of our tale may be said to commence.

The clumsy wheels of several old-fashioned coaches were heard, and the gentlemen and ladies composing the bridal-party came through the church door with the sudden and gladsome effect of a burst of sunshine. The whole group, except the principal figure, was made up of youth and gayety. As they streamed up the broad aisle, while the pews and pillars seemed to brighten on either side, their steps were as buoyant as if they mistook the church for a ball-room and were ready to dance hand in hand to the altar. So brilliant was the spectacle that few took notice of a singular phenomenon that had marked its entrance. At the moment when the bride's foot touched the threshold the bell swung heavily in the tower above her and sent forth its deepest knell. The vibrations died away, and returned with prolonged solemnity as she entered the body of the church.

"Good heavens! What an omen!" whispered a young lady to her lover.

"On my honor," replied the gentleman, "I believe the bell has

the good taste to toll of its own accord. What has she to do with weddings? If you, dearest Julia, were approaching the altar, the bell would ring out its merriest peal. It has only a funeral-knell for her."

The bride and most of her company had been too much occupied with the bustle of entrance to hear the first boding stroke of the bell – or, at least, to reflect on the singularity of such a welcome to the altar. They therefore continued to advance with undiminished gayety. The gorgeous dresses of the time – the crimson velvet coats, the gold-laced hats, the hoop-petticoats, the silk, satin, brocade and embroidery, the buckles, canes and swords, all displayed to the best advantage on persons suited to such finery – made the group appear more like a bright-colored picture than anything real. But by what perversity of taste had the artist represented his principal figure as so wrinkled and decayed, while yet he had decked her out in the brightest splendor of attire, as if the loveliest maiden had suddenly withered into age and become a moral to the beautiful around her? On they went, however, and had glittered along about a third of the aisle, when another stroke of the bell seemed to fill the church with a visible gloom, dimming and obscuring the bright-pageant till it shone forth again as from a mist.

This time the party wavered, stopped and huddled closer together, while a slight scream was heard from some of the ladies and a confused whispering among the gentlemen. Thus tossing to and fro, they might have been fancifully compared to a splendid

bunch of flowers suddenly shaken by a puff of wind which threatened to scatter the leaves of an old brown, withered rose on the same stalk with two dewy buds, such being the emblem of the widow between her fair young bridemaids. But her heroism was admirable. She had started with an irrepressible shudder, as if the stroke of the bell had fallen directly on her heart; then, recovering herself, while her attendants were yet in dismay, she took the lead and paced calmly up the aisle. The bell continued to swing, strike and vibrate with the same doleful regularity as when a corpse is on its way to the tomb.

"My young friends here have their nerves a little shaken," said the widow, with a smile, to the clergyman at the altar. "But so many weddings have been ushered in with the merriest peal of the bells, and yet turned out unhappily, that I shall hope for better fortune under such different auspices."

"Madam," answered the rector, in great perplexity, "this strange occurrence brings to my mind a marriage-sermon of the famous Bishop Taylor wherein he mingles so many thoughts of mortality and future woe that, to speak somewhat after his own rich style, he seems to hang the bridal-chamber in black and cut the wedding-garment out of a coffin-pall. And it has been the custom of divers nations to infuse something of sadness into their marriage ceremonies, so to keep death in mind while contracting that engagement which is life's chiefest business. Thus we may draw a sad but profitable moral from this funeral-knell."

But, though the clergyman might have given his moral even a

keener point, he did not fail to despatch an attendant to inquire into the mystery and stop those sounds so dismally appropriate to such a marriage. A brief space elapsed, during which the silence was broken only by whispers and a few suppressed titterings among the wedding-party and the spectators, who after the first shock were disposed to draw an ill-natured merriment from the affair. The young have less charity for aged follies than the old for those of youth. The widow's glance was observed to wander for an instant toward a window of the church, as if searching for the time-worn marble that she had dedicated to her first husband; then her eyelids dropped over their faded orbs and her thoughts were drawn irresistibly to another grave. Two buried men with a voice at her ear and a cry afar off were calling her to lie down beside them. Perhaps, with momentary truth of feeling, she thought how much happier had been her fate if, after years of bliss, the bell were now tolling for her funeral and she were followed to the grave by the old affection of her earliest lover, long her husband. But why had she returned to him when their cold hearts shrank from each other's embrace?

Still the death-bell tolled so mournfully that the sunshine seemed to fade in the air. A whisper, communicated from those who stood nearest the windows, now spread through the church: a hearse with a train of several coaches was creeping along the street, conveying some dead man to the churchyard, while the bride awaited a living one at the altar. Immediately after, the footsteps of the bridegroom and his friends were heard at the

door. The widow looked down the aisle and clenched the arm of one of her bridemaids in her bony hand with such unconscious violence that the fair girl trembled.

"You frighten me, my dear madam," cried she. "For heaven's sake, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, my dear – nothing," said the widow; then, whispering close to her ear, "There is a foolish fancy that I cannot get rid of. I am expecting my bridegroom to come into the church with my two first husbands for groomsmen."

"Look! look!" screamed the bridemaid. "What is here? The funeral!"

As she spoke a dark procession paced into the church. First came an old man and woman, like chief mourners at a funeral, attired from head to foot in the deepest black, all but their pale features and hoary hair, he leaning on a staff and supporting her decrepit form with his nerveless arm. Behind appeared another and another pair, as aged, as black and mournful as the first. As they drew near the widow recognized in every face some trait of former friends long forgotten, but now returning as if from their old graves to warn her to prepare a shroud, or, with purpose almost as unwelcome, to exhibit their wrinkles and infirmity and claim her as their companion by the tokens of her own decay. Many a merry night had she danced with them in youth, and now in joyless age she felt that some withered partner should request her hand and all unite in a dance of death to the music of the funeral-bell.

While these aged mourners were passing up the aisle it was observed that from pew to pew the spectators shuddered with irrepressible awe as some object hitherto concealed by the intervening figures came full in sight. Many turned away their faces; others kept a fixed and rigid stare, and a young girl giggled hysterically and fainted with the laughter on her lips. When the spectral procession approached the altar, each couple separated and slowly diverged, till in the centre appeared a form that had been worthily ushered in with all this gloomy pomp, the death-knell and the funeral. It was the bridegroom in his shroud.

No garb but that of the grave could have befitted such a death-like aspect. The eyes, indeed, had the wild gleam of a sepulchral lamp; all else was fixed in the stern calmness which old men wear in the coffin. The corpse stood motionless, but addressed the widow in accents that seemed to melt into the clang of the bell, which fell heavily on the air while he spoke.

"Come, my bride!" said those pale lips. "The hearse is ready; the sexton stands waiting for us at the door of the tomb. Let us be married, and then to our coffins!"

How shall the widow's horror be represented? It gave her the ghastliness of a dead man's bride. Her youthful friends stood apart, shuddering at the mourners, the shrouded bridegroom and herself; the whole scene expressed by the strongest imagery the vain struggle of the gilded vanities of this world when opposed to age, infirmity, sorrow and death.

The awestruck silence was first broken by the clergyman.

"Mr. Ellenwood," said he, soothingly, yet with somewhat of authority, "you are not well. Your mind has been agitated by the unusual circumstances in which you are placed. The ceremony must be deferred. As an old friend, let me entreat you to return home."

"Home – yes; but not without my bride," answered he, in the same hollow accents. "You deem this mockery – perhaps madness. Had I bedizened my aged and broken frame with scarlet and embroidery, had I forced my withered lips to smile at my dead heart, that might have been mockery or madness; but now let young and old declare which of us has come hither without a wedding-garment – the bridegroom or the bride."

He stepped forward at a ghostly pace and stood beside the widow, contrasting the awful simplicity of his shroud with the glare and glitter in which she had arrayed herself for this unhappy scene. None that beheld them could deny the terrible strength of the moral which his disordered intellect had contrived to draw.

"Cruel! cruel!" groaned the heartstricken bride.

"Cruel?" repeated he; then, losing his deathlike composure in a wild bitterness, "Heaven judge which of us has been cruel to the other! In youth you deprived me of my happiness, my hopes, my aims; you took away all the substance of my life and made it a dream without reality enough even to grieve at – with only a pervading gloom, through which I walked wearily and cared not whither. But after forty years, when I have built my tomb and would not give up the thought of resting there – no, not for

such a life as we once pictured – you call me to the altar. At your summons I am here. But other husbands have enjoyed your youth, your beauty, your warmth of heart and all that could be termed your life. What is there for me but your decay and death? And therefore I have bidden these funeral-friends, and bespoken the sexton's deepest knell, and am come in my shroud to wed you as with a burial-service, that we may join our hands at the door of the sepulchre and enter it together."

It was not frenzy, it was not merely the drunkenness of strong emotion in a heart unused to it, that now wrought upon the bride. The stern lesson of the day had done its work; her worldliness was gone. She seized the bridegroom's hand.

"Yes!" cried she; "let us wed even at the door of the sepulchre. My life is gone in vanity and emptiness, but at its close there is one true feeling. It has made me what I was in youth: it makes me worthy of you. Time is no more for both of us. Let us wed for eternity."

With a long and deep regard the bridegroom looked into her eyes, while a tear was gathering in his own. How strange that gush of human feeling from the frozen bosom of a corpse! He wiped away the tear, even with his shroud.

"Beloved of my youth," said he, "I have been wild. The despair of my whole lifetime had returned at once and maddened me. Forgive and be forgiven. Yes; it is evening with us now, and we have realized none of our morning dreams of happiness. But let us join our hands before the altar as lovers whom adverse

circumstances have separated through life, yet who meet again as they are leaving it and find their earthly affection changed into something holy as religion. And what is time to the married of eternity?"

Amid the tears of many and a swell of exalted sentiment in those who felt aright was solemnized the union of two immortal souls. The train of withered mourners, the hoary bridegroom in his shroud, the pale features of the aged bride and the death-bell tolling through the whole till its deep voice overpowered the marriage-words, – all marked the funeral of earthly hopes. But as the ceremony proceeded, the organ, as if stirred by the sympathies of this impressive scene, poured forth an anthem, first mingling with the dismal knell, then rising to a loftier strain, till the soul looked down upon its woe. And when the awful rite was finished and with cold hand in cold hand the married of eternity withdrew, the organ's peal of solemn triumph drowned the wedding-knell.

THE MINISTER'S BLACK VEIL

A PARABLE.[1]

The sexton stood in the porch of Milford meeting-house pulling lustily at the bell-rope. The old people of the village came stooping along the street. Children with bright faces tripped merrily beside their parents or mimicked a graver gait in the conscious dignity of their Sunday clothes. Spruce bachelors looked sidelong at the pretty maidens, and fancied that the Sabbath sunshine made them prettier than on week-days. When the throng had mostly streamed into the porch, the sexton began to toll the bell, keeping his eye on the Reverend Mr. Hooper's door. The first glimpse of the clergyman's figure was the signal for the bell to cease its summons.

"But what has good Parson Hooper got upon his face?" cried the sexton, in astonishment.

All within hearing immediately turned about and beheld the semblance of Mr. Hooper pacing slowly his meditative

[1] Another clergyman in New England, Mr. Joseph Moody, of York, Maine, who died about eighty years since, made himself remarkable by the same eccentricity that is here related of the Reverend Mr. Hooper. In his case, however, the symbol had a different import. In early life he had accidentally killed a beloved friend, and from that day till the hour of his own death he hid his face from men.

way toward the meeting-house. With one accord they started, expressing more wonder than if some strange minister were coming to dust the cushions of Mr. Hooper's pulpit.

"Are you sure it is our parson?" inquired Goodman Gray of the sexton.

"Of a certainty it is good Mr. Hooper," replied the sexton. "He was to have exchanged pulpits with Parson Shute of Westbury, but Parson Shute sent to excuse himself yesterday, being to preach a funeral sermon."

The cause of so much amazement may appear sufficiently slight. Mr. Hooper, a gentlemanly person of about thirty, though still a bachelor, was dressed with due clerical neatness, as if a careful wife had starched his band and brushed the weekly dust from his Sunday's garb. There was but one thing remarkable in his appearance. Swathed about his forehead and hanging down over his face, so low as to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil. On a nearer view it seemed to consist of two folds of crape, which entirely concealed his features except the mouth and chin, but probably did not intercept his sight further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things. With this gloomy shade before him good Mr. Hooper walked onward at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat and looking on the ground, as is customary with abstracted men, yet nodding kindly to those of his parishioners who still waited on the meeting-house steps. But so wonder-struck were they that his greeting hardly met with a return.

"I can't really feel as if good Mr. Hooper's face was behind that piece of crape," said the sexton.

"I don't like it," muttered an old woman as she hobbled into the meeting-house. "He has changed himself into something awful only by hiding his face."

"Our parson has gone mad!" cried Goodman Gray, following him across the threshold.

A rumor of some unaccountable phenomenon had preceded Mr. Hooper into the meeting-house and set all the congregation astir. Few could refrain from twisting their heads toward the door; many stood upright and turned directly about; while several little boys clambered upon the seats, and came down again with a terrible racket. There was a general bustle, a rustling of the women's gowns and shuffling of the men's feet, greatly at variance with that hushed repose which should attend the entrance of the minister. But Mr. Hooper appeared not to notice the perturbation of his people. He entered with an almost noiseless step, bent his head mildly to the pews on each side and bowed as he passed his oldest parishioner, a white-haired great-grandsire, who occupied an arm-chair in the centre of the aisle. It was strange to observe how slowly this venerable man became conscious of something singular in the appearance of his pastor. He seemed not fully to partake of the prevailing wonder till Mr. Hooper had ascended the stairs and showed himself in the pulpit, face to face with his congregation except for the black veil. That mysterious emblem was never once withdrawn.

It shook with his measured breath as he gave out the psalm, it threw its obscurity between him and the holy page as he read the Scriptures, and while he prayed the veil lay heavily on his uplifted countenance. Did he seek to hide it from the dread Being whom he was addressing?

Such was the effect of this simple piece of crape that more than one woman of delicate nerves was forced to leave the meeting-house. Yet perhaps the pale-faced congregation was almost as fearful a sight to the minister as his black veil to them.

Mr. Hooper had the reputation of a good preacher, but not an energetic one: he strove to win his people heavenward by mild, persuasive influences rather than to drive them thither by the thunders of the word. The sermon which he now delivered was marked by the same characteristics of style and manner as the general series of his pulpit oratory, but there was something either in the sentiment of the discourse itself or in the imagination of the auditors which made it greatly the most powerful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor's lips. It was tinged rather more darkly than usual with the gentle gloom of Mr. Hooper's temperament. The subject had reference to secret sin and those sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest, and would fain conceal from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them. A subtle power was breathed into his words. Each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl and the man of hardened breast, felt as if the preacher had crept upon

them behind his awful veil and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought. Many spread their clasped hands on their bosoms. There was nothing terrible in what Mr. Hooper said – at least, no violence; and yet with every tremor of his melancholy voice the hearers quaked. An unsought pathos came hand in hand with awe. So sensible were the audience of some unwonted attribute in their minister that they longed for a breath of wind to blow aside the veil, almost believing that a stranger's visage would be discovered, though the form, gesture and voice were those of Mr. Hooper.

At the close of the services the people hurried out with indecorous confusion, eager to communicate their pent-up amazement, and conscious of lighter spirits the moment they lost sight of the black veil. Some gathered in little circles, huddled closely together, with their mouths all whispering in the centre; some went homeward alone, wrapped in silent meditation; some talked loudly and profaned the Sabbath-day with ostentatious laughter. A few shook their sagacious heads, intimating that they could penetrate the mystery, while one or two affirmed that there was no mystery at all, but only that Mr. Hooper's eyes were so weakened by the midnight lamp as to require a shade.

After a brief interval forth came good Mr. Hooper also, in the rear of his flock. Turning his veiled face from one group to another, he paid due reverence to the hoary heads, saluted the middle-aged with kind dignity as their friend and spiritual guide, greeted the young with mingled authority and love, and laid

his hands on the little children's heads to bless them. Such was always his custom on the Sabbath-day. Strange and bewildered looks repaid him for his courtesy. None, as on former occasions, aspired to the honor of walking by their pastor's side. Old Squire Saunders – doubtless by an accidental lapse of memory – neglected to invite Mr. Hooper to his table, where the good clergyman had been wont to bless the food almost every Sunday since his settlement. He returned, therefore, to the parsonage, and at the moment of closing the door was observed to look back upon the people, all of whom had their eyes fixed upon the minister. A sad smile gleamed faintly from beneath the black veil and flickered about his mouth, glimmering as he disappeared.

"How strange," said a lady, "that a simple black veil, such as any woman might wear on her bonnet, should become such a terrible thing on Mr. Hooper's face!"

"Something must surely be amiss with Mr. Hooper's intellects," observed her husband, the physician of the village. "But the strangest part of the affair is the effect of this vagary even on a sober-minded man like myself. The black veil, though it covers only our pastor's face, throws its influence over his whole person and makes him ghost-like from head to foot. Do you not feel it so?"

"Truly do I," replied the lady; "and I would not be alone with him for the world. I wonder he is not afraid to be alone with himself."

"Men sometimes are so," said her husband.

The afternoon service was attended with similar circumstances. At its conclusion the bell tolled for the funeral of a young lady. The relatives and friends were assembled in the house and the more distant acquaintances stood about the door, speaking of the good qualities of the deceased, when their talk was interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Hooper, still covered with his black veil. It was now an appropriate emblem. The clergyman stepped into the room where the corpse was laid, and bent over the coffin to take a last farewell of his deceased parishioner. As he stooped the veil hung straight down from his forehead, so that, if her eye-lids had not been closed for ever, the dead maiden might have seen his face. Could Mr. Hooper be fearful of her glance, that he so hastily caught back the black veil? A person who watched the interview between the dead and living scrupled not to affirm that at the instant when the clergyman's features were disclosed the corpse had slightly shuddered, rustling the shroud and muslin cap, though the countenance retained the composure of death. A superstitious old woman was the only witness of this prodigy.

From the coffin Mr. Hooper passed into the chamber of the mourners, and thence to the head of the staircase, to make the funeral prayer. It was a tender and heart-dissolving prayer, full of sorrow, yet so imbued with celestial hopes that the music of a heavenly harp swept by the fingers of the dead seemed faintly to be heard among the saddest accents of the minister. The people trembled, though they but darkly understood him,

when he prayed that they and himself, and all of mortal race, might be ready, as he trusted this young maiden had been, for the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil from their faces. The bearers went heavily forth and the mourners followed, saddening all the street, with the dead before them and Mr. Hooper in his black veil behind.

"Why do you look back?" said one in the procession to his partner.

"I had a fancy," replied she, "that the minister and the maiden's spirit were walking hand in hand."

"And so had I at the same moment," said the other.

That night the handsomest couple in Milford village were to be joined in wedlock. Though reckoned a melancholy man, Mr. Hooper had a placid cheerfulness for such occasions which often excited a sympathetic smile where livelier merriment would have been thrown away. There was no quality of his disposition which made him more beloved than this. The company at the wedding awaited his arrival with impatience, trusting that the strange awe which had gathered over him throughout the day would now be dispelled. But such was not the result. When Mr. Hooper came, the first thing that their eyes rested on was the same horrible black veil which had added deeper gloom to the funeral and could portend nothing but evil to the wedding. Such was its immediate effect on the guests that a cloud seemed to have rolled duskily from beneath the black crape and dimmed the light of the candles. The bridal pair stood up before the minister, but

the bride's cold fingers quivered in the tremulous hand of the bridegroom, and her death-like paleness caused a whisper that the maiden who had been buried a few hours before was come from her grave to be married. If ever another wedding were so dismal, it was that famous one where they tolled the wedding-knell.

After performing the ceremony Mr. Hooper raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing happiness to the new-married couple in a strain of mild pleasantry that ought to have brightened the features of the guests like a cheerful gleam from the hearth. At that instant, catching a glimpse of his figure in the looking-glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet and rushed forth into the darkness, for the Earth too had on her black veil.

The next day the whole village of Milford talked of little else than Parson Hooper's black veil. That, and the mystery concealed behind it, supplied a topic for discussion between acquaintances meeting in the street and good women gossipping at their open windows. It was the first item of news that the tavernkeeper told to his guests. The children babbled of it on their way to school. One imitative little imp covered his face with an old black handkerchief, thereby so affrighting his playmates that the panic seized himself and he wellnigh lost his wits by his own waggery.

It was remarkable that, of all the busybodies and impertinent people in the parish, not one ventured to put the plain question

to Mr. Hooper wherefore he did this thing. Hitherto, whenever there appeared the slightest call for such interference, he had never lacked advisers nor shown himself averse to be guided by their judgment. If he erred at all, it was by so painful a degree of self-distrust that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent action as a crime. Yet, though so well acquainted with this amiable weakness, no individual among his parishioners chose to make the black veil a subject of friendly remonstrance. There was a feeling of dread, neither plainly confessed nor carefully concealed, which caused each to shift the responsibility upon another, till at length it was found expedient to send a deputation of the church, in order to deal with Mr. Hooper about the mystery before it should grow into a scandal. Never did an embassy so ill discharge its duties. The minister received them with friendly courtesy, but became silent after they were seated, leaving to his visitors the whole burden of introducing their important business. The topic, it might be supposed, was obvious enough. There was the black veil swathed round Mr. Hooper's forehead and concealing every feature above his placid mouth, on which, at times, they could perceive the glimmering of a melancholy smile. But that piece of crape, to their imagination, seemed to hang down before his heart, the symbol of a fearful secret between him and them. Were the veil but cast aside, they might speak freely of it, but not till then. Thus they sat a considerable time, speechless, confused and shrinking uneasily from Mr. Hooper's eye, which they felt to be fixed

upon them with an invisible glance. Finally, the deputies returned abashed to their constituents, pronouncing the matter too weighty to be handled except by a council of the churches, if, indeed, it might not require a General Synod.

But there was one person in the village unappalled by the awe with which the black veil had impressed all besides herself. When the deputies returned without an explanation, or even venturing to demand one, she with the calm energy of her character determined to chase away the strange cloud that appeared to be settling round Mr. Hooper every moment more darkly than before. As his plighted wife it should be her privilege to know what the black veil concealed. At the minister's first visit, therefore, she entered upon the subject with a direct simplicity which made the task easier both for him and her. After he had seated himself she fixed her eyes steadfastly upon the veil, but could discern nothing of the dreadful gloom that had so overawed the multitude; it was but a double fold of crape hanging down from his forehead to his mouth and slightly stirring with his breath.

"No," said she, aloud, and smiling, "there is nothing terrible in this piece of crape, except that it hides a face which I am always glad to look upon. Come, good sir; let the sun shine from behind the cloud. First lay aside your black veil, then tell me why you put it on."

Mr. Hooper's smile glimmered faintly.

"There is an hour to come," said he, "when all of us shall cast

aside our veils. Take it not amiss, beloved friend, if I wear this piece of crape till then."

"Your words are a mystery too," returned the young lady. "Take away the veil from them, at least."

"Elizabeth, I will," said he, "so far as my vow may suffer me. Know, then, this veil is a type and a symbol, and I am bound to wear it ever, both in light and darkness, in solitude and before the gaze of multitudes, and as with strangers, so with my familiar friends. No mortal eye will see it withdrawn. This dismal shade must separate me from the world; even you, Elizabeth, can never come behind it."

"What grievous affliction hath befallen you," she earnestly inquired, "that you should thus darken your eyes for ever?"

"If it be a sign of mourning," replied Mr. Hooper, "I, perhaps, like most other mortals, have sorrows dark enough to be typified by a black veil."

"But what if the world will not believe that it is the type of an innocent sorrow?" urged Elizabeth. "Beloved and respected as you are, there may be whispers that you hide your face under the consciousness of secret sin. For the sake of your holy office do away this scandal."

The color rose into her cheeks as she intimated the nature of the rumors that were already abroad in the village. But Mr. Hooper's mildness did not forsake him. He even smiled again – that same sad smile which always appeared like a faint glimmering of light proceeding from the obscurity beneath the

veil.

"If I hide my face for sorrow, there is cause enough," he merely replied; "and if I cover it for secret sin, what mortal might not do the same?" And with this gentle but unconquerable obstinacy did he resist all her entreaties.

At length Elizabeth sat silent. For a few moments she appeared lost in thought, considering, probably, what new methods might be tried to withdraw her lover from so dark a fantasy, which, if it had no other meaning, was perhaps a symptom of mental disease. Though of a firmer character than his own, the tears rolled down her cheeks. But in an instant, as it were, a new feeling took the place of sorrow: her eyes were fixed insensibly on the black veil, when like a sudden twilight in the air its terrors fell around her. She arose and stood trembling before him.

"And do you feel it, then, at last?" said he, mournfully.

She made no reply, but covered her eyes with her hand and turned to leave the room. He rushed forward and caught her arm.

"Have patience with me, Elizabeth!" cried he, passionately. "Do not desert me though this veil must be between us here on earth. Be mine, and hereafter there shall be no veil over my face, no darkness between our souls. It is but a mortal veil; it is not for eternity. Oh, you know not how lonely I am, and how frightened to be alone behind my black veil! Do not leave me in this miserable obscurity for ever."

"Lift the veil but once and look me in the face," said she.

"Never! It cannot be!" replied Mr. Hooper.

"Then farewell!" said Elizabeth.

She withdrew her arm from his grasp and slowly departed, pausing at the door to give one long, shuddering gaze that seemed almost to penetrate the mystery of the black veil. But even amid his grief Mr. Hooper smiled to think that only a material emblem had separated him from happiness, though the horrors which it shadowed forth must be drawn darkly between the fondest of lovers.

From that time no attempts were made to remove Mr. Hooper's black veil or by a direct appeal to discover the secret which it was supposed to hide. By persons who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice it was reckoned merely an eccentric whim, such as often mingles with the sober actions of men otherwise rational and tinges them all with its own semblance of insanity. But with the multitude good Mr. Hooper was irreparably a bugbear. He could not walk the street with any peace of mind, so conscious was he that the gentle and timid would turn aside to avoid him, and that others would make it a point of hardihood to throw themselves in his way. The impertinence of the latter class compelled him to give up his customary walk at sunset to the burial-ground; for when he leaned pensively over the gate, there would always be faces behind the gravestones peeping at his black veil. A fable went the rounds that the stare of the dead people drove him thence. It grieved him to the very depth of his kind heart to observe how the children fled from his approach, breaking up their

merriest sports while his melancholy figure was yet afar off. Their instinctive dread caused him to feel more strongly than aught else that a preternatural horror was interwoven with the threads of the black crape. In truth, his own antipathy to the veil was known to be so great that he never willingly passed before a mirror nor stooped to drink at a still fountain lest in its peaceful bosom he should be affrighted by himself. This was what gave plausibility to the whispers that Mr. Hooper's conscience tortured him for some great crime too horrible to be entirely concealed or otherwise than so obscurely intimated. Thus from beneath the black veil there rolled a cloud into the sunshine, an ambiguity of sin or sorrow, which enveloped the poor minister, so that love or sympathy could never reach him. It was said that ghost and fiend consorted with him there. With self-shudderings and outward terrors he walked continually in its shadow, groping darkly within his own soul or gazing through a medium that saddened the whole world. Even the lawless wind, it was believed, respected his dreadful secret and never blew aside the veil. But still good Mr. Hooper sadly smiled at the pale visages of the worldly throng as he passed by.

Among all its bad influences, the black veil had the one desirable effect of making its wearer a very efficient clergyman. By the aid of his mysterious emblem – for there was no other apparent cause – he became a man of awful power over souls that were in agony for sin. His converts always regarded him with a dread peculiar to themselves, affirming, though but figuratively,

that before he brought them to celestial light they had been with him behind the black veil. Its gloom, indeed, enabled him to sympathize with all dark affections. Dying sinners cried aloud for Mr. Hooper and would not yield their breath till he appeared, though ever, as he stooped to whisper consolation, they shuddered at the veiled face so near their own. Such were the terrors of the black veil even when Death had bared his visage. Strangers came long distances to attend service at his church with the mere idle purpose of gazing at his figure because it was forbidden them to behold his face. But many were made to quake ere they departed. Once, during Governor Belcher's administration, Mr. Hooper was appointed to preach the election sermon. Covered with his black veil, he stood before the chief magistrate, the council and the representatives, and wrought so deep an impression that the legislative measures of that year were characterized by all the gloom and piety of our earliest ancestral sway.

In this manner Mr. Hooper spent a long life, irreproachable in outward act, yet shrouded in dismal suspicions; kind and loving, though unloved and dimly feared; a man apart from men, shunned in their health and joy, but ever summoned to their aid in mortal anguish. As years wore on, shedding their snows above his sable veil, he acquired a name throughout the New England churches, and they called him Father Hooper. Nearly all his parishioners who were of mature age when he was settled had been borne away by many a funeral: he had one congregation

in the church and a more crowded one in the churchyard; and, having wrought so late into the evening and done his work so well, it was now good Father Hooper's turn to rest.

Several persons were visible by the shaded candlelight in the death-chamber of the old clergyman. Natural connections he had none. But there was the decorously grave though unmoved physician, seeking only to mitigate the last pangs of the patient whom he could not save. There were the deacons and other eminently pious members of his church. There, also, was the Reverend Mr. Clark of Westbury, a young and zealous divine who had ridden in haste to pray by the bedside of the expiring minister. There was the nurse – no hired handmaiden of Death, but one whose calm affection had endured thus long in secrecy, in solitude, amid the chill of age, and would not perish even at the dying-hour. Who but Elizabeth! And there lay the hoary head of good Father Hooper upon the death-pillow with the black veil still swathed about his brow and reaching down over his face, so that each more difficult gasp of his faint breath caused it to stir. All through life that piece of crape had hung between him and the world; it had separated him from cheerful brotherhood and woman's love and kept him in that saddest of all prisons his own heart; and still it lay upon his face, as if to deepen the gloom of his darksome chamber and shade him from the sunshine of eternity.

For some time previous his mind had been confused, wavering doubtfully between the past and the present, and hovering forward, as it were, at intervals, into the indistinctness of the

world to come. There had been feverish turns which tossed him from side to side and wore away what little strength he had. But in his most convulsive struggles and in the wildest vagaries of his intellect, when no other thought retained its sober influence, he still showed an awful solicitude lest the black veil should slip aside. Even if his bewildered soul could have forgotten, there was a faithful woman at his pillow who with averted eyes would have covered that aged face which she had last beheld in the comeliness of manhood.

At length the death-stricken old man lay quietly in the torpor of mental and bodily exhaustion, with an imperceptible pulse and breath that grew fainter and fainter except when a long, deep and irregular inspiration seemed to prelude the flight of his spirit.

The minister of Westbury approached the bedside.

"Venerable Father Hooper," said he, "the moment of your release is at hand. Are you ready for the lifting of the veil that shuts in time from eternity?"

Father Hooper at first replied merely by a feeble motion of his head; then – apprehensive, perhaps, that his meaning might be doubtful – he exerted himself to speak.

"Yea," said he, in faint accents; "my soul hath a patient weariness until that veil be lifted."

"And is it fitting," resumed the Reverend Mr. Clark, "that a man so given to prayer, of such a blameless example, holy in deed and thought, so far as mortal judgment may pronounce, – is it fitting that a father in the Church should leave a shadow on his

memory that may seem to blacken a life so pure? I pray you, my venerable brother, let not this thing be! Suffer us to be gladdened by your triumphant aspect as you go to your reward. Before the veil of eternity be lifted let me cast aside this black veil from your face;" and, thus speaking, the Reverend Mr. Clark bent forward to reveal the mystery of so many years.

But, exerting a sudden energy that made all the beholders stand aghast, Father Hooper snatched both his hands from beneath the bedclothes and pressed them strongly on the black veil, resolute to struggle if the minister of Westbury would contend with a dying man.

"Never!" cried the veiled clergyman. "On earth, never!"

"Dark old man," exclaimed the affrighted minister, "with what horrible crime upon your soul are you now passing to the judgment?"

Father Hooper's breath heaved: it rattled in his throat; but, with a mighty effort grasping forward with his hands, he caught hold of life and held it back till he should speak. He even raised himself in bed, and there he sat shivering with the arms of Death around him, while the black veil hung down, awful at that last moment in the gathered terrors of a lifetime. And yet the faint, sad smile so often there now seemed to glimmer from its obscurity and linger on Father Hooper's lips.

"Why do you tremble at me alone?" cried he, turning his veiled face round the circle of pale spectators. "Tremble also at each other. Have men avoided me and women shown no pity and

children screamed and fled only for my black veil? What but the mystery which it obscurely typifies has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend, the lover to his best-beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin, – then deem me a monster for the symbol beneath which I have lived and die. I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a black veil!"

While his auditors shrank from one another in mutual affright, Father Hooper fell back upon his pillow, a veiled corpse with a faint smile lingering on the lips. Still veiled, they laid him in his coffin, and a veiled corpse they bore him to the grave. The grass of many years has sprung up and withered on that grave, the burial-stone is moss-grown, and good Mr. Hooper's face is dust; but awful is still the thought that it mouldered beneath the black veil.

THE MAYPOLE OF MERRY MOUNT

There is an admirable foundation for a philosophic romance in the curious history of the early settlement of Mount Wollaston, or Merry Mount. In the slight sketch here attempted the facts recorded on the grave pages of our New England annalists have wrought themselves almost spontaneously into a sort of allegory. The masques, mummeries and festive customs described in the text are in accordance with the manners of the age. Authority on these points may be found in Strutt's *Book of English Sports and Pastimes*.

Bright were the days at Merry Mount when the Maypole was the banner-staff of that gay colony. They who reared it, should their banner be triumphant, were to pour sunshine over New England's rugged hills and scatter flower-seeds throughout the soil. Jollity and gloom were contending for an empire. Midsummer eve had come, bringing deep verdure to the forest, and roses in her lap of a more vivid hue than the tender buds of spring. But May, or her mirthful spirit, dwelt all the year round at Merry Mount, sporting with the summer months and revelling with autumn and basking in the glow of winter's fireside. Through a world of toil and care she flitted with a dream-like smile, and came hither to find a home among the

lightsome hearts of Merry Mount.

Never had the Maypole been so gayly decked as at sunset on Midsummer eve. This venerated emblem was a pine tree which had preserved the slender grace of youth, while it equalled the loftiest height of the old wood-monarchs. From its top streamed a silken banner colored like the rainbow. Down nearly to the ground the pole was dressed with birchen boughs, and others of the liveliest green, and some with silvery leaves fastened by ribbons that fluttered in fantastic knots of twenty different colors, but no sad ones. Garden-flowers and blossoms of the wilderness laughed gladly forth amid the verdure, so fresh and dewy that they must have grown by magic on that happy pine tree. Where this green and flowery splendor terminated the shaft of the Maypole was stained with the seven brilliant hues of the banner at its top. On the lowest green bough hung an abundant wreath of roses – some that had been gathered in the sunniest spots of the forest, and others, of still richer blush, which the colonists had reared from English seed. O people of the Golden Age, the chief of your husbandry was to raise flowers!

But what was the wild throng that stood hand in hand about the Maypole? It could not be that the fauns and nymphs, when driven from their classic groves and homes of ancient fable, had sought refuge, as all the persecuted did, in the fresh woods of the West. These were Gothic monsters, though perhaps of Grecian ancestry. On the shoulders of a comely youth uprose the head and branching antlers of a stag; a second, human in all other

points, had the grim visage of a wolf; a third, still with the trunk and limbs of a mortal man, showed the beard and horns of a venerable he-goat. There was the likeness of a bear erect, brute in all but his hind legs, which were adorned with pink silk stockings. And here, again, almost as wondrous, stood a real bear of the dark forest, lending each of his forepaws to the grasp of a human hand and as ready for the dance as any in that circle. His inferior nature rose halfway to meet his companions as they stooped. Other faces wore the similitude of man or woman, but distorted or extravagant, with red noses pendulous before their mouths, which seemed of awful depth and stretched from ear to ear in an eternal fit of laughter. Here might be seen the salvage man – well known in heraldry – hairy as a baboon and girdled with green leaves. By his side – a nobler figure, but still a counterfeit – appeared an Indian hunter with feathery crest and wampum-belt. Many of this strange company wore foolscaps and had little bells appended to their garments, tinkling with a silvery sound responsive to the inaudible music of their gleesome spirits. Some youths and maidens were of soberer garb, yet well maintained their places in the irregular throng by the expression of wild revelry upon their features.

Such were the colonists of Merry Mount as they stood in the broad smile of sunset round their venerated Maypole. Had a wanderer bewildered in the melancholy forest heard their mirth and stolen a half-affrighted glance, he might have fancied them the crew of Comus, some already transformed to brutes, some

midway between man and beast, and the others rioting in the flow of tipsy jollity that foreran the change; but a band of Puritans who watched the scene, invisible themselves, compared the masques to those devils and ruined souls with whom their superstition peopled the black wilderness.

Within the ring of monsters appeared the two airiest forms that had ever trodden on any more solid footing than a purple-and-golden cloud. One was a youth in glistening apparel with a scarf of the rainbow pattern crosswise on his breast. His right hand held a gilded staff – the ensign of high dignity among the revellers – and his left grasped the slender fingers of a fair maiden not less gayly decorated than himself. Bright roses glowed in contrast with the dark and glossy curls of each, and were scattered round their feet or had sprung up spontaneously there. Behind this lightsome couple, so close to the Maypole that its boughs shaded his jovial face, stood the figure of an English priest, canonically dressed, yet decked with flowers, in heathen fashion, and wearing a chaplet of the native vine leaves. By the riot of his rolling eye and the pagan decorations of his holy garb, he seemed the wildest monster there, and the very Comus of the crew.

"Votaries of the Maypole," cried the flower-decked priest, "merrily all day long have the woods echoed to your mirth. But be this your merriest hour, my hearts! Lo! here stand the Lord and Lady of the May, whom I, a clerk of Oxford and high priest of Merry Mount, am presently to join in holy matrimony. – Up

with your nimble spirits, ye morrice-dancers, green men and glee-maidens, bears and wolves and horned gentlemen! Come! a chorus now rich with the old mirth of Merry England and the wilder glee of this fresh forest, and then a dance, to show the youthful pair what life is made of and how airily they should go through it! – All ye that love the Maypole, lend your voices to the nuptial song of the Lord and Lady of the May!"

This wedlock was more serious than most affairs of Merry Mount, where jest and delusion, trick and fantasy, kept up a continual carnival. The Lord and Lady of the May, though their titles must be laid down at sunset, were really and truly to be partners for the dance of life, beginning the measure that same bright eve. The wreath of roses that hung from the lowest green bough of the Maypole had been twined for them, and would be thrown over both their heads in symbol of their flowery union. When the priest had spoken, therefore, a riotous uproar burst from the rout of monstrous figures.

"Begin you the stave, reverend sir," cried they all, "and never did the woods ring to such a merry peal as we of the Maypole shall send up."

Immediately a prelude of pipe, cittern and viol, touched with practised minstrelsy, began to play from a neighboring thicket in such a mirthful cadence that the boughs of the Maypole quivered to the sound. But the May-lord – he of the gilded staff – chancing to look into his lady's eyes, was wonder-struck at the almost pensive glance that met his own.

"Edith, sweet Lady of the May," whispered he, reproachfully, "is yon wreath of roses a garland to hang above our graves that you look so sad? Oh, Edith, this is our golden time. Tarnish it not by any pensive shadow of the mind, for it may be that nothing of futurity will be brighter than the mere remembrance of what is now passing."

"That was the very thought that saddened me. How came it in your mind too?" said Edith, in a still lower tone than he; for it was high treason to be sad at Merry Mount. "Therefore do I sigh amid this festive music. And besides, dear Edgar, I struggle as with a dream, and fancy that these shapes of our jovial friends are visionary and their mirth unreal, and that we are no true lord and lady of the May. What is the mystery in my heart?"

Just then, as if a spell had loosened them, down came a little shower of withering rose-leaves from the Maypole. Alas for the young lovers! No sooner had their hearts glowed with real passion than they were sensible of something vague and unsubstantial in their former pleasures, and felt a dreary presentiment of inevitable change. From the moment that they truly loved they had subjected themselves to earth's doom of care and sorrow and troubled joy, and had no more a home at Merry Mount. That was Edith's mystery. Now leave we the priest to marry them, and the masquers to sport round the Maypole till the last sunbeam be withdrawn from its summit and the shadows of the forest mingle gloomily in the dance. Meanwhile, we may discover who these gay people were.

Two hundred years ago, and more, the Old World and its inhabitants became mutually weary of each other. Men voyaged by thousands to the West – some to barter glass and such like jewels for the furs of the Indian hunter, some to conquer virgin empires, and one stern band to pray. But none of these motives had much weight with thecolonists of Merry Mount. Their leaders were men who had sported so long with life, that when Thought and Wisdom came, even these unwelcome guests were led astray by the crowd of vanities which they should have put to flight. Erring Thought and perverted Wisdom were made to put on masques, and play the fool. The men of whom we speak, after losing the heart's fresh gayety, imagined a wild philosophy of pleasure, and came hither to act out their latest day-dream. They gathered followers from all that giddy tribe whose whole life is like the festal days of soberer men. In their train were minstrels, not unknown in London streets; wandering players, whose theatres had been the halls of noblemen; mummers, rope-dancers, and mountebanks, who would long be missed at wakes, church ales, and fairs; in a word, mirth makers of every sort, such as abounded in that age, but now began to be discountenanced by the rapid growth of Puritanism. Light had their footsteps been on land, and as lightly they came across the sea. Many had been maddened by their previous troubles into a gay despair; others were as madly gay in the flush of youth, like the May Lord and his Lady; but whatever might be the quality of their mirth, old and young were gay at Merry Mount. The young deemed themselves

happy. The elder spirits, if they knew that mirth was but the counterfeit of happiness, yet followed the false shadow wilfully, because at least her garments glittered brightest. Sworn triflers of a lifetime, they would not venture among the sober truths of life not even to be truly blest.

All the hereditary pastimes of Old England were transplanted hither. The King of Christmas was duly crowned, and the Lord of Misrule bore potent sway. On the Eve of St. John, they felled whole acres of the forest to make bonfires, and danced by the blaze all night, crowned with garlands, and throwing flowers into the flame. At harvest time, though their crop was of the smallest, they made an image with the sheaves of Indian corn, and wreathed it with autumnal garlands, and bore it home triumphantly. But what chiefly characterized the colonists of Merry Mount was their veneration for the Maypole. It has made their true history a poet's tale. Spring decked the hallowed emblem with young blossoms and fresh green boughs; Summer brought roses of the deepest blush, and the perfected foliage of the forest; Autumn enriched it with that red and yellow gorgeousness which converts each wildwood leaf into a painted flower; and Winter silvered it with sleet, and hung it round with icicles, till it flashed in the cold sunshine, itself a frozen sunbeam. Thus each alternate season did homage to the Maypole, and paid it a tribute of its own richest splendor. Its votaries danced round it, once, at least, in every month; sometimes they called it their religion, or their altar; but always, it was the banner staff of Merry

Mount.

Unfortunately, there were men in the new world of a sterner faith than those Maypole worshippers. Not far from Merry Mount was a settlement of Puritans, most dismal wretches, who said their prayers before daylight, and then wrought in the forest or the cornfield till evening made it prayer time again. Their weapons were always at hand to shoot down the straggling savage. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians. Their festivals were fast days, and their chief pastime the singing of psalms. Woe to the youth or maiden who did but dream of a dance! The selectman nodded to the constable; and there sat the light-heeled reprobate in the stocks; or if he danced, it was round the whipping-post, which might be termed the Puritan Maypole.

A party of these grim Puritans, toiling through the difficult woods, each with a horseload of iron armor to burden his footsteps, would sometimes draw near the sunny precincts of Merry Mount. There were the silken colonists, sporting round their Maypole; perhaps teaching a bear to dance, or striving to communicate their mirth to the grave Indian, or masquerading in the skins of deer and wolves which they had hunted for that especial purpose. Often the whole colony were playing at Blindman's Buff, magistrates and all with their eyes bandaged, except a single scapegoat, whom the blinded sinners pursued by

the tinkling of the bells at his garments. Once, it is said, they were seen following a flower-decked corpse with merriment and festive music to his grave. But did the dead man laugh? In their quietest times they sang ballads and told tales for the edification of their pious visitors, or perplexed them with juggling tricks, or grinned at them through horse-collars; and when sport itself grew wearisome, they made game of their own stupidity and began a yawning-match. At the very least of these enormities the men of iron shook their heads and frowned so darkly that the revellers looked up, imagining that a momentary cloud had overcast the sunshine which was to be perpetual there. On the other hand, the Puritans affirmed that when a psalm was pealing from their place of worship the echo which the forest sent them back seemed often like the chorus of a jolly catch, closing with a roar of laughter. Who but the fiend and his bond-slaves the crew of Merry Mount had thus disturbed them? In due time a feud arose, stern and bitter on one side, and as serious on the other as anything could be among such light spirits as had sworn allegiance to the Maypole. The future complexion of New England was involved in this important quarrel. Should the grisly saints establish their jurisdiction over the gay sinners, then would their spirits darken all the clime and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm for ever; but should the banner-staff of Merry Mount be fortunate, sunshine would break upon the hills, and flowers would beautify the forest and late posterity do homage to the Maypole.

After these authentic passages from history we return to the nuptials of the Lord and Lady of the May. Alas! we have delayed too long, and must darken our tale too suddenly. As we glance again at the Maypole a solitary sunbeam is fading from the summit, and leaves only a faint golden tinge blended with the hues of the rainbow banner. Even that dim light is now withdrawn, relinquishing the whole domain of Merry Mount to the evening gloom which has rushed so instantaneously from the black surrounding woods. But some of these black shadows have rushed forth in human shape.

Yes, with the setting sun the last day of mirth had passed from Merry Mount. The ring of gay masquers was disordered and broken; the stag lowered his antlers in dismay; the wolf grew weaker than a lamb; the bells of the morrice-dancers tinkled with tremulous affright. The Puritans had played a characteristic part in the Maypole mummeries. Their darksome figures were intermixed with the wild shapes of their foes, and made the scene a picture of the moment when waking thoughts start up amid the scattered fantasies of a dream. The leader of the hostile party stood in the centre of the circle, while the rout of monsters cowered around him like evil spirits in the presence of a dread magician. No fantastic foolery could look him in the face. So stern was the energy of his aspect that the whole man, visage, frame and soul, seemed wrought of iron gifted with life and thought, yet all of one substance with his headpiece and breastplate. It was the Puritan of Puritans: it was Endicott

himself.

"Stand off, priest of Baal!" said he, with a grim frown and laying no reverent hand upon the surplice. "I know thee, Blackstone![2] Thou art the man who couldst not abide the rule even of thine own corrupted Church, and hast come hither to preach iniquity and to give example of it in thy life. But now shall it be seen that the Lord hath sanctified this wilderness for his peculiar people. Woe unto them that would defile it! And first for this flower-decked abomination, the altar of thy worship!"

And with his keen sword Endicott assaulted the hallowed Maypole. Nor long did it resist his arm. It groaned with a dismal sound, it showered leaves and rosebuds upon the remorseless enthusiast, and finally, with all its green boughs and ribbons and flowers, symbolic of departed pleasures, down fell the banner-staff of Merry Mount. As it sank, tradition says, the evening sky grew darker and the woods threw forth a more sombre shadow.

"There!" cried Endicott, looking triumphantly on his work; "there lies the only Maypole in New England. The thought is strong within me that by its fall is shadowed forth the fate of light and idle mirthmakers amongst us and our posterity. Amen, saith John Endicott!"

"Amen!" echoed his followers.

But the votaries of the Maypole gave one groan for their idol.

---

[2] Did Governor Endicott speak less positively, we should suspect a mistake here. The Rev. Mr. Blackstone, though an eccentric, is not known to have been an immoral man. We rather doubt his identity with the priest of Merry Mount.

At the sound the Puritan leader glanced at the crew of Comus, each a figure of broad mirth, yet at this moment strangely expressive of sorrow and dismay.

"Valiant captain," quoth Peter Palfrey, the ancient of the band, "what order shall be taken with the prisoners?"

"I thought not to repent me of cutting down a Maypole," replied Endicott, "yet now I could find in my heart to plant it again and give each of these bestial pagans one other dance round their idol. It would have served rarely for a whipping-post."

"But there are pine trees enow," suggested the lieutenant.

"True, good ancient," said the leader. "Wherefore bind the heathen crew and bestow on them a small matter of stripes apiece as earnest of our future justice. Set some of the rogues in the stocks to rest themselves so soon as Providence shall bring us to one of our own well-ordered settlements where such accommodations may be found. Further penalties, such as branding and cropping of ears, shall be thought of hereafter."

"How many stripes for the priest?" inquired Ancient Palfrey.

"None as yet," answered Endicott, bending his iron frown upon the culprit. "It must be for the Great and General Court to determine whether stripes and long imprisonment, and other grievous penalty, may atone for his transgressions. Let him look to himself. For such as violate our civil order it may be permitted us to show mercy, but woe to the wretch that troubleth our religion!"

"And this dancing bear?" resumed the officer. "Must he share

the stripes of his fellows?"

"Shoot him through the head!" said the energetic Puritan. "I suspect witchcraft in the beast."

"Here be a couple of shining ones," continued Peter Palfrey, pointing his weapon at the Lord and Lady of the May. "They seem to be of high station among these misdoers. Methinks their dignity will not be fitted with less than a double share of stripes."

Endicott rested on his sword and closely surveyed the dress and aspect of the hapless pair. There they stood, pale, downcast and apprehensive, yet there was an air of mutual support and of pure affection seeking aid and giving it that showed them to be man and wife with the sanction of a priest upon their love. The youth in the peril of the moment, had dropped his gilded staff and thrown his arm about the Lady of the May, who leaned against his breast too lightly to burden him, but with weight enough to express that their destinies were linked together for good or evil. They looked first at each other and then into the grim captain's face. There they stood in the first hour of wedlock, while the idle pleasures of which their companions were the emblems had given place to the sternest cares of life, personified by the dark Puritans. But never had their youthful beauty seemed so pure and high as when its glow was chastened by adversity.

"Youth," said Endicott, "ye stand in an evil case – thou and thy maiden-wife. Make ready presently, for I am minded that ye shall both have a token to remember your wedding-day."

"Stern man," cried the May-lord, "how can I move thee? Were

the means at hand, I would resist to the death; being powerless, I entreat. Do with me as thou wilt, but let Edith go untouched."

"Not so," replied the immitigable zealot. "We are not wont to show an idle courtesy to that sex which requireth the stricter discipline. – What sayest thou, maid? Shall thy silken bridegroom suffer thy share of the penalty besides his own?"

"Be it death," said Edith, "and lay it all on me."

Truly, as Endicott had said, the poor lovers stood in a woeful case. Their foes were triumphant, their friends captive and abased, their home desolate, the benighted wilderness around them, and a rigorous destiny in the shape of the Puritan leader their only guide. Yet the deepening twilight could not altogether conceal that the iron man was softened. He smiled at the fair spectacle of early love; he almost sighed for the inevitable blight of early hopes.

"The troubles of life have come hastily on this young couple," observed Endicott. "We will see how they comport themselves under their present trials ere we burden them with greater. If among the spoil there be any garments of a more decent fashion, let them be put upon this May-lord and his Lady instead of their glistening vanities. Look to it, some of you."

"And shall not the youth's hair be cut?" asked Peter Palfrey, looking with abhorrence at the lovelock and long glossy curls of the young man.

"Crop it forthwith, and that in the true pumpkin-shell fashion," answered the captain. "Then bring them along with us, but more

gently than their fellows. There be qualities in the youth which may make him valiant to fight and sober to toil and pious to pray, and in the maiden that may fit her to become a mother in our Israel, bringing up babes in better nurture than her own hath been. – Nor think ye, young ones, that they are the happiest, even in our lifetime of a moment, who misspend it in dancing round a Maypole."

And Endicott, the severest Puritan of all who laid the rock-foundation of New England, lifted the wreath of roses from the ruin of the Maypole and threw it with his own gauntleted hand over the heads of the Lord and Lady of the May. It was a deed of prophecy. As the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gayety, even so was their home of wild mirth made desolate amid the sad forest. They returned to it no more. But as their flowery garland was wreathed of the brightest roses that had grown there, so in the tie that united them were intertwined all the purest and best of their early joys. They went heavenward supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on the vanities of Merry Mount.

THE GENTLE BOY

In the course of the year 1656 several of the people called Quakers – led, as they professed, by the inward movement of the spirit – made their appearance in New England. Their reputation as holders of mystic and pernicious principles having spread before them, the Puritans early endeavored to banish and to prevent the further intrusion of the rising sect. But the measures by which it was intended to purge the land of heresy, though more than sufficiently vigorous, were entirely unsuccessful. The Quakers, esteeming persecution as a divine call to the post of danger, laid claim to a holy courage unknown to the Puritans themselves, who had shunned the cross by providing for the peaceable exercise of their religion in a distant wilderness. Though it was the singular fact that every nation of the earth rejected the wandering enthusiasts who practised peace toward all men, the place of greatest uneasiness and peril, and therefore in their eyes the most eligible, was the province of Massachusetts Bay.

The fines, imprisonments and stripes liberally distributed by our pious forefathers, the popular antipathy, so strong that it endured nearly a hundred years after actual persecution had ceased, were attractions as powerful for the Quakers as peace, honor and reward would have been for the worldly-minded. Every European vessel brought new cargoes of the sect, eager

to testify against the oppression which they hoped to share; and when shipmasters were restrained by heavy fines from affording them passage, they made long and circuitous journeys through the Indian country, and appeared in the province as if conveyed by a supernatural power. Their enthusiasm, heightened almost to madness by the treatment which they received, produced actions contrary to the rules of decency as well as of rational religion, and presented a singular contrast to the calm and staid deportment of their sectarian successors of the present day. The command of the Spirit, inaudible except to the soul and not to be controverted on grounds of human wisdom, was made a plea for most indecorous exhibitions which, abstractedly considered, well deserved the moderate chastisement of the rod. These extravagances, and the persecution which was at once their cause and consequence, continued to increase, till in the year 1659 the government of Massachusetts Bay indulged two members of the Quaker sect with the crown of martyrdom.

An indelible stain of blood is upon the hands of all who consented to this act, but a large share of the awful responsibility must rest upon the person then at the head of the government. He was a man of narrow mind and imperfect education, and his uncompromising bigotry was made hot and mischievous by violent and hasty passions; he exerted his influence indecorously and unjustifiably to compass the death of the enthusiasts, and his whole conduct in respect to them was marked by brutal cruelty. The Quakers, whose revengeful feelings were not less

deep because they were inactive, remembered this man and his associates in after-times. The historian of the sect affirms that by the wrath of Heaven a blight fell upon the land in the vicinity of the "bloody town" of Boston, so that no wheat would grow there; and he takes his stand, as it were, among the graves of the ancient persecutors, and triumphantly recounts the judgments that overtook them in old age or at the parting-hour. He tells us that they died suddenly and violently and in madness, but nothing can exceed the bitter mockery with which he records the loathsome disease and "death by rottenness" of the fierce and cruel governor.

On the evening of the autumn day that had witnessed the martyrdom of two men of the Quaker persuasion, a Puritan settler was returning from the metropolis to the neighboring country-town in which he resided. The air was cool, the sky clear, and the lingering twilight was made brighter by the rays of a young moon which had now nearly reached the verge of the horizon. The traveller, a man of middle age, wrapped in a gray frieze cloak, quickened his pace when he had reached the outskirts of the town, for a gloomy extent of nearly four miles lay between him and his home. The low straw-thatched houses were scattered at considerable intervals along the road, and, the country having been settled but about thirty years, the tracts of original forest still bore no small proportion to the cultivated ground. The autumn wind wandered among the branches, whirling away the leaves from all except the pine trees

and moaning as if it lamented the desolation of which it was the instrument. The road had penetrated the mass of woods that lay nearest to the town, and was just emerging into an open space, when the traveller's ears were saluted by a sound more mournful than even that of the wind. It was like the wailing of some one in distress, and it seemed to proceed from beneath a tall and lonely fir tree in the centre of a cleared but unenclosed and uncultivated field. The Puritan could not but remember that this was the very spot which had been made accursed a few hours before by the execution of the Quakers, whose bodies had been thrown together into one hasty grave beneath the tree on which they suffered. He struggled, however, against the superstitious fears which belonged to the age, and compelled himself to pause and listen.

"The voice is most likely mortal, nor have I cause to tremble if it be otherwise," thought he, straining his eyes through the dim moonlight. "Methinks it is like the wailing of a child – some infant, it may be, which has strayed from its mother and chanced upon this place of death. For the ease of mine own conscience I must search this matter out." He therefore left the path and walked somewhat fearfully across the field. Though now so desolate, its soil was pressed down and trampled by the thousand footsteps of those who had witnessed the spectacle of that day, all of whom had now retired, leaving the dead to their loneliness.

The traveller at length reached the fir tree, which from the

middle upward was covered with living branches, although a scaffold had been erected beneath, and other preparations made for the work of death. Under this unhappy tree – which in after-times was believed to drop poison with its dew – sat the one solitary mourner for innocent blood. It was a slender and light-clad little boy who leaned his face upon a hillock of fresh-turned and half-frozen earth and wailed bitterly, yet in a suppressed tone, as if his grief might receive the punishment of crime. The Puritan, whose approach had been unperceived, laid his hand upon the child's shoulder and addressed him compassionately.

"You have chosen a dreary lodging, my poor boy, and no wonder that you weep," said he. "But dry your eyes and tell me where your mother dwells; I promise you, if the journey be not too far, I will leave you in her arms tonight."

The boy had hushed his wailing at once, and turned his face upward to the stranger. It was a pale, bright-eyed countenance, certainly not more than six years old, but sorrow, fear and want had destroyed much of its infantile expression. The Puritan, seeing the boy's frightened gaze and feeling that he trembled under his hand, endeavored to reassure him:

"Nay, if I intended to do you harm, little lad, the readiest way were to leave you here. What! you do not fear to sit beneath the gallows on a new-made grave, and yet you tremble at a friend's touch? Take heart, child, and tell me what is your name and where is your home."

"Friend," replied the little boy, in a sweet though faltering

voice, "they call me Ilbrahim, and my home is here."

The pale, spiritual face, the eyes that seemed to mingle with the moonlight, the sweet, airy voice and the outlandish name almost made the Puritan believe that the boy was in truth a being which had sprung up out of the grave on which he sat; but perceiving that the apparition stood the test of a short mental prayer, and remembering that the arm which he had touched was lifelike, he adopted a more rational supposition. "The poor child is stricken in his intellect," thought he, "but verily his words are fearful in a place like this." He then spoke soothingly, intending to humor the boy's fantasy:

"Your home will scarce be comfortable, Ilbrahim, this cold autumn night, and I fear you are ill-provided with food. I am hastening to a warm supper and bed; and if you will go with me, you shall share them."

"I thank thee, friend, but, though I be hungry and shivering with cold, thou wilt not give me food nor lodging," replied the boy, in the quiet tone which despair had taught him even so young. "My father was of the people whom all men hate; they have laid him under this heap of earth, and here is my home."

The Puritan, who had laid hold of little Ilbrahim's hand, relinquished it as if he were touching a loathsome reptile. But he possessed a compassionate heart which not even religious prejudice could harden into stone. "God forbid that I should leave this child to perish, though he comes of the accursed sect," said he to himself. "Do we not all spring from an evil root? Are we

not all in darkness till the light doth shine upon us? He shall not perish, neither in body nor, if prayer and instruction may avail for him, in soul." He then spoke aloud and kindly to Ilbrahim, who had again hid his face in the cold earth of the grave:

"Was every door in the land shut against you, my child, that you have wandered to this unhallowed spot?"

"They drove me forth from the prison when they took my father thence," said the boy, "and I stood afar off watching the crowd of people; and when they were gone, I came hither, and found only this grave. I knew that my father was sleeping here, and I said, 'This shall be my home.'"

"No, child, no, not while I have a roof over my head or a morsel to share with you," exclaimed the Puritan, whose sympathies were now fully excited. "Rise up and come with me, and fear not any harm."

The boy wept afresh, and clung to the heap of earth as if the cold heart beneath it were warmer to him than any in a living breast. The traveller, however, continued to entreat him tenderly, and, seeming to acquire some degree of confidence, he at length arose; but his slender limbs tottered with weakness, his little head grew dizzy, and he leaned against the tree of death for support.

"My poor boy, are you so feeble?" said the Puritan. "When did you taste food last?"

"I ate of bread and water with my father in the prison," replied Ilbrahim, "but they brought him none neither yesterday nor to-day, saying that he had eaten enough to bear him to his journey's

end. Trouble not thyself for my hunger, kind friend, for I have lacked food many times ere now."

The traveller took the child in his arms and wrapped his cloak about him, while his heart stirred with shame and anger against the gratuitous cruelty of the instruments in this persecution. In the awakened warmth of his feelings he resolved that at whatever risk he would not forsake the poor little defenceless being whom Heaven had confided to his care. With this determination he left the accursed field and resumed the homeward path from which the wailing of the boy had called him. The light and motionless burden scarcely impeded his progress, and he soon beheld the fire-rays from the windows of the cottage which he, a native of a distant clime, had built in the Western wilderness. It was surrounded by a considerable extent of cultivated ground, and the dwelling was situated in the nook of a wood-covered hill, whither it seemed to have crept for protection.

"Look up, child," said the Puritan to Ilbrahim, whose faint head had sunk upon his shoulder; "there is our home."

At the word "home" a thrill passed through the child's frame, but he continued silent. A few moments brought them to the cottage door, at which the owner knocked; for at that early period, when savages were wandering everywhere among the settlers, bolt and bar were indispensable to the security of a dwelling. The summons was answered by a bond-servant, a coarse-clad and dull-featured piece of humanity, who, after ascertaining that his master was the applicant, undid the door

and held a flaring pine-knot torch to light him in. Farther back in the passageway the red blaze discovered a matronly woman, but no little crowd of children came bounding forth to greet their father's return.

As the Puritan entered he thrust aside his cloak and displayed Ilbrahim's face to the female.

"Dorothy, here is a little outcast whom Providence hath put into our hands," observed he. "Be kind to him, even as if he were of those dear ones who have departed from us."

"What pale and bright-eyed little boy is this, Tobias?" she inquired. "Is he one whom the wilderness-folk have ravished from some Christian mother?"

"No, Dorothy; this poor child is no captive from the wilderness," he replied. "The heathen savage would have given him to eat of his scanty morsel and to drink of his birchen cup, but Christian men, alas! had cast him out to die." Then he told her how he had found him beneath the gallows, upon his father's grave, and how his heart had prompted him like the speaking of an inward voice to take the little outcast home and be kind unto him. He acknowledged his resolution to feed and clothe him as if he were his own child, and to afford him the instruction which should counteract the pernicious errors hitherto instilled into his infant mind.

Dorothy was gifted with even a quicker tenderness than her husband, and she approved of all his doings and intentions.

"Have you a mother, dear child?" she inquired.

The tears burst forth from his full heart as he attempted to reply, but Dorothy at length understood that he had a mother, who like the rest of her sect was a persecuted wanderer. She had been taken from the prison a short time before, carried into the uninhabited wilderness and left to perish there by hunger or wild beasts. This was no uncommon method of disposing of the Quakers, and they were accustomed to boast that the inhabitants of the desert were more hospitable to them than civilized man.

"Fear not, little boy; you shall not need a mother, and a kind one," said Dorothy, when she had gathered this information. "Dry your tears, Ilbrahim, and be my child, as I will be your mother."

The good woman prepared the little bed from which her own children had successively been borne to another resting-place. Before Ilbrahim would consent to occupy it he knelt down, and as Dorothy listed to his simple and affecting prayer she marvelled how the parents that had taught it to him could have been judged worthy of death. When the boy had fallen asleep, she bent over his pale and spiritual countenance, pressed a kiss upon his white brow, drew the bedclothes up about his neck, and went away with a pensive gladness in her heart.

Tobias Pearson was not among the earliest emigrants from the old country. He had remained in England during the first years of the Civil War, in which he had borne some share as a cornet of dragoons under Cromwell. But when the ambitious designs of his leader began to develop themselves, he quitted

the army of the Parliament and sought a refuge from the strife which was no longer holy among the people of his persuasion in the colony of Massachusetts. A more worldly consideration had perhaps an influence in drawing him thither, for New England offered advantages to men of unprosperous fortunes as well as to dissatisfied religionists, and Pearson had hitherto found it difficult to provide for a wife and increasing family. To this supposed impurity of motive the more bigoted Puritans were inclined to impute the removal by death of all the children for whose earthly good the father had been over-thoughtful. They had left their native country blooming like roses, and like roses they had perished in a foreign soil. Those expounders of the ways of Providence, who had thus judged their brother and attributed his domestic sorrows to his sin, were not more charitable when they saw him and Dorothy endeavoring to fill up the void in their hearts by the adoption of an infant of the accursed sect. Nor did they fail to communicate their disapprobation to Tobias, but the latter in reply merely pointed at the little quiet, lovely boy, whose appearance and deportment were indeed as powerful arguments as could possibly have been adduced in his own favor. Even his beauty, however, and his winning manners sometimes produced an effect ultimately unfavorable; for the bigots, when the outer surfaces of their iron hearts had been softened and again grew hard, affirmed that no merely natural cause could have so worked upon them. Their antipathy to the poor infant was also increased by the ill-success of divers theological discussions in which it was

attempted to convince him of the errors of his sect. Ilbrahim, it is true, was not a skilful controversialist, but the feeling of his religion was strong as instinct in him, and he could neither be enticed nor driven from the faith which his father had died for.

The odium of this stubbornness was shared in a great measure by the child's protectors, insomuch that Tobias and Dorothy very shortly began to experience a most bitter species of persecution in the cold regards of many a friend whom they had valued. The common people manifested their opinions more openly. Pearson was a man of some consideration, being a representative to the General Court and an approved lieutenant in the train-bands, yet within a week after his adoption of Ilbrahim he had been both hissed and hooted. Once, also, when walking through a solitary piece of woods, he heard a loud voice from some invisible speaker, and it cried, "What shall be done to the backslider? Lo! the scourge is knotted for him, even the whip of nine cords, and every cord three knots." These insults irritated Pearson's temper for the moment; they entered also into his heart, and became imperceptible but powerful workers toward an end which his most secret thought had not yet whispered.

On the second Sabbath after Ilbrahim became a member of their family, Pearson and his wife deemed it proper that he should appear with them at public worship. They had anticipated some opposition to this measure from the boy, but he prepared himself in silence, and at the appointed hour was clad in the new mourning-suit which Dorothy had wrought for him. As the parish

was then, and during many subsequent years, unprovided with a bell, the signal for the commencement of religious exercises was the beat of a drum. At the first sound of that martial call to the place of holy and quiet thoughts Tobias and Dorothy set forth, each holding a hand of little Ilbrahim, like two parents linked together by the infant of their love. On their path through the leafless woods they were overtaken by many persons of their acquaintance, all of whom avoided them and passed by on the other side; but a severer trial awaited their constancy when they had descended the hill and drew near the pine-built and undecorated house of prayer. Around the door, from which the drummer still sent forth his thundering summons, was drawn up a formidable phalanx, including several of the oldest members of the congregation, many of the middle-aged and nearly all the younger males. Pearson found it difficult to sustain their united and disapproving gaze, but Dorothy, whose mind was differently circumstanced, merely drew the boy closer to her and faltered not in her approach. As they entered the door they overheard the muttered sentiments of the assemblage; and when the reviling voices of the little children smote Ilbrahim's ear, he wept.

The interior aspect of the meeting-house was rude. The low ceiling, the unplastered walls, the naked woodwork and the undraperied pulpit offered nothing to excite the devotion which without such external aids often remains latent in the heart. The floor of the building was occupied by rows of long cushionless benches, supplying the place of pews, and the broad aisle formed

a sexual division impassable except by children beneath a certain age.

Pearson and Dorothy separated at the door of the meeting-house, and Ilbrahim, being within the years of infancy, was retained under the care of the latter. The wrinkled beldams involved themselves in their rusty cloaks as he passed by; even the mild-featured maidens seemed to dread contamination; and many a stern old man arose and turned his repulsive and unheavenly countenance upon the gentle boy, as if the sanctuary were polluted by his presence. He was a sweet infant of the skies that had strayed away from his home, and all the inhabitants of this miserable world closed up their impure hearts against him, drew back their earth-soiled garments from his touch and said, "We are holier than thou."

Ilbrahim, seated by the side of his adopted mother and retaining fast hold of her hand, assumed a grave and decorous demeanor such as might befit a person of matured taste and understanding who should find himself in a temple dedicated to some worship which he did not recognize, but felt himself bound to respect. The exercises had not yet commenced, however, when the boy's attention was arrested by an event apparently of trifling interest. A woman having her face muffled in a hood and a cloak drawn completely about her form advanced slowly up the broad aisle and took place upon the foremost bench. Ilbrahim's faint color varied, his nerves fluttered; he was unable to turn his eyes from the muffled female.

When the preliminary prayer and hymn were over, the minister arose, and, having turned the hour-glass which stood by the great Bible, commenced his discourse. He was now well stricken in years, a man of pale, thin countenance, and his gray hairs were closely covered by a black velvet skull-cap. In his younger days he had practically learned the meaning of persecution from Archbishop Laud, and he was not now disposed to forget the lesson against which he had murmured then. Introducing the often-discussed subject of the Quakers, he gave a history of that sect and a description of their tenets in which error predominated and prejudice distorted the aspect of what was true. He adverted to the recent measures in the province, and cautioned his hearers of weaker parts against calling in question the just severity which God-fearing magistrates had at length been compelled to exercise. He spoke of the danger of pity – in some cases a commendable and Christian virtue, but inapplicable to this pernicious sect. He observed that such was their devilish obstinacy in error that even the little children, the sucking babes, were hardened and desperate heretics. He affirmed that no man without Heaven's especial warrant should attempt their conversion lest while he lent his hand to draw them from the slough he should himself be precipitated into its lowest depths.

The sands of the second hour were principally in the lower half of the glass when the sermon concluded. An approving murmur followed, and the clergyman, having given out a hymn, took his

seat with much self-congratulation, and endeavored to read the effect of his eloquence in the visages of the people. But while voices from all parts of the house were tuning themselves to sing a scene occurred which, though not very unusual at that period in the province, happened to be without precedent in this parish.

The muffled female, who had hitherto sat motionless in the front rank of the audience, now arose and with slow, stately and unwavering step ascended the pulpit stairs. The quaverings of incipient harmony were hushed and the divine sat in speechless and almost terrified astonishment while she undid the door and stood up in the sacred desk from which his maledictions had just been thundered. She then divested herself of the cloak and hood, and appeared in a most singular array. A shapeless robe of sackcloth was girded about her waist with a knotted cord; her raven hair fell down upon her shoulders, and its blackness was defiled by pale streaks of ashes, which she had strewn upon her head. Her eyebrows, dark and strongly defined, added to the deathly whiteness of a countenance which, emaciated with want and wild with enthusiasm and strange sorrows, retained no trace of earlier beauty. This figure stood gazing earnestly on the audience, and there was no sound nor any movement except a faint shuddering which every man observed in his neighbor, but was scarcely conscious of in himself. At length, when her fit of inspiration came, she spoke for the first few moments in a low voice and not invariably distinct utterance. Her discourse gave evidence of an imagination hopelessly entangled with her reason;

it was a vague and incomprehensible rhapsody, which, however, seemed to spread its own atmosphere round the hearer's soul, and to move his feelings by some influence unconnected with the words. As she proceeded beautiful but shadowy images would sometimes be seen like bright things moving in a turbid river, or a strong and singularly shaped idea leapt forth and seized at once on the understanding or the heart. But the course of her unearthly eloquence soon led her to the persecutions of her sect, and from thence the step was short to her own peculiar sorrows. She was naturally a woman of mighty passions, and hatred and revenge now wrapped themselves in the garb of piety. The character of her speech was changed; her images became distinct though wild, and her denunciations had an almost hellish bitterness.

"The governor and his mighty men," she said, "have gathered together, taking counsel among themselves and saying, 'What shall we do unto this people – even unto the people that have come into this land to put our iniquity to the blush?' And, lo! the devil entereth into the council-chamber like a lame man of low stature and gravely apparelled, with a dark and twisted countenance and a bright, downcast eye. And he standeth up among the rulers; yea, he goeth to and fro, whispering to each; and every man lends his ear, for his word is 'Slay! Slay!' But I say unto ye, Woe to them that slay! Woe to them that shed the blood of saints! Woe to them that have slain the husband and cast forth the child, the tender infant, to wander homeless and hungry and cold till he die, and have saved the mother alive in the cruelty of

their tender mercies! Woe to them in their lifetime! Cursed are they in the delight and pleasure of their hearts! Woe to them in their death-hour, whether it come swiftly with blood and violence or after long and lingering pain! Woe in the dark house, in the rottenness of the grave, when the children's children shall revile the ashes of the fathers! Woe, woe, woe, at the judgment, when all the persecuted and all the slain in this bloody land, and the father, the mother and the child, shall await them in a day that they cannot escape! Seed of the faith, seed of the faith, ye whose hearts are moving with a power that ye know not, arise, wash your hands of this innocent blood! Lift your voices, chosen ones, cry aloud, and call down a woe and a judgment with me!"

Having thus given vent to the flood of malignity which she mistook for inspiration, the speaker was silent. Her voice was succeeded by the hysteric shrieks of several women, but the feelings of the audience generally had not been drawn onward in the current with her own. They remained stupefied, stranded, as it were, in the midst of a torrent which deafened them by its roaring, but might not move them by its violence. The clergyman, who could not hitherto have ejected the usurper of his pulpit otherwise than by bodily force, now addressed her in the tone of just indignation and legitimate authority.

"Get you down, woman, from the holy place which you profane," he said, "Is it to the Lord's house that you come to pour forth the foulness of your heart and the inspiration of the devil? Get you down, and remember that the sentence of death is on

you – yea, and shall be executed, were it but for this day's work."

"I go, friend, I go, for the voice hath had its utterance," replied she, in a depressed, and even mild, tone. "I have done my mission unto thee and to thy people; reward me with stripes, imprisonment or death, as ye shall be permitted." The weakness of exhausted passion caused her steps to totter as she descended the pulpit stairs.

The people, in the mean while, were stirring to and fro on the floor of the house, whispering among themselves and glancing toward the intruder. Many of them now recognized her as the woman who had assaulted the governor with frightful language as he passed by the window of her prison; they knew, also, that she was adjudged to suffer death, and had been preserved only by an involuntary banishment into the wilderness. The new outrage by which she had provoked her fate seemed to render further lenity impossible, and a gentleman in military dress, with a stout man of inferior rank, drew toward the door of the meetinghouse and awaited her approach. Scarcely did her feet press the floor, however, when an unexpected scene occurred. In that moment of her peril, when every eye frowned with death, a little timid boy threw his arms round his mother.

"I am here, mother; it is I, and I will go with thee to prison," he exclaimed.

She gazed at him with a doubtful and almost frightened expression, for she knew that the boy had been cast out to perish, and she had not hoped to see his face again. She feared, perhaps,

that it was but one of the happy visions with which her excited fancy had often deceived her in the solitude of the desert or in prison; but when she felt his hand warm within her own and heard his little eloquence of childish love, she began to know that she was yet a mother.

"Blessed art thou, my son!" she sobbed. "My heart was withered – yea, dead with thee and with thy father – and now it leaps as in the first moment when I pressed thee to my bosom."

She knelt down and embraced him again and again, while the joy that could find no words expressed itself in broken accents, like the bubbles gushing up to vanish at the surface of a deep fountain. The sorrows of past years and the darker peril that was nigh cast not a shadow on the brightness of that fleeting moment. Soon, however, the spectators saw a change upon her face as the consciousness of her sad estate returned, and grief supplied the fount of tears which joy had opened. By the words she uttered it would seem that the indulgence of natural love had given her mind a momentary sense of its errors, and made her know how far she had strayed from duty in following the dictates of a wild fanaticism.

"In a doleful hour art thou returned to me, poor boy," she said, "for thy mother's path has gone darkening onward, till now the end is death. Son, son, I have borne thee in my arms when my limbs were tottering, and I have fed thee with the food that I was fainting for; yet I have ill-performed a mother's part by thee in life, and now I leave thee no inheritance but woe and shame.

Thou wilt go seeking through the world, and find all hearts closed against thee and their sweet affections turned to bitterness for my sake. My child, my child, how many a pang awaits thy gentle spirit, and I the cause of all!"

She hid her face on Ilbrahim's head, and her long raven hair, discolored with the ashes of her mourning, fell down about him like a veil. A low and interrupted moan was the voice of her heart's anguish, and it did not fail to move the sympathies of many who mistook their involuntary virtue for a sin. Sobs were audible in the female section of the house, and every man who was a father drew his hand across his eyes.

Tobias Pearson was agitated and uneasy, but a certain feeling like the consciousness of guilt oppressed him; so that he could not go forth and offer himself as the protector of the child. Dorothy, however, had watched her husband's eye. Her mind was free from the influence that had begun to work on his, and she drew near the Quaker woman and addressed her in the hearing of all the congregation.

"Stranger, trust this boy to me, and I will be his mother," she said, taking Ilbrahim's hand. "Providence has signally marked out my husband to protect him, and he has fed at our table and lodged under our roof now many days, till our hearts have grown very strongly unto him. Leave the tender child with us, and be at ease concerning his welfare."

The Quaker rose from the ground, but drew the boy closer to her, while she gazed earnestly in Dorothy's face. Her mild but

saddened features and neat matronly attire harmonized together and were like a verse of fireside poetry. Her very aspect proved that she was blameless, so far as mortal could be so, in respect to God and man, while the enthusiast, in her robe of sackcloth and girdle of knotted cord, had as evidently violated the duties of the present life and the future by fixing her attention wholly on the latter. The two females, as they held each a hand of Ilbrahim, formed a practical allegory: it was rational piety and unbridled fanaticism contending for the empire of a young heart.

"Thou art not of our people," said the Quaker, mournfully.

"No, we are not of your people," replied Dorothy, with mildness, "but we are Christians looking upward to the same heaven with you. Doubt not that your boy shall meet you there, if there be a blessing on our tender and prayerful guidance of him. Thither, I trust, my own children have gone before me, for I also have been a mother. I am no longer so," she added, in a faltering tone, "and your son will have all my care."

"But will ye lead him in the path which his parents have trodden?" demanded the Quaker. "Can ye teach him the enlightened faith which his father has died for, and for which I – even I – am soon to become an unworthy martyr? The boy has been baptized in blood; will ye keep the mark fresh and ruddy upon his forehead?"

"I will not deceive you," answered Dorothy. "If your child become our child, we must breed him up in the instruction which Heaven has imparted to us; we must pray for him the prayers of

our own faith; we must do toward him according to the dictates of our own consciences, and not of yours. Were we to act otherwise, we should abuse your trust, even in complying with your wishes."

The mother looked down upon her boy with a troubled countenance, and then turned her eyes upward to heaven. She seemed to pray internally, and the contention of her soul was evident.

"Friend," she said, at length, to Dorothy, "I doubt not that my son shall receive all earthly tenderness at thy hands. Nay, I will believe that even thy imperfect lights may guide him to a better world, for surely thou art on the path thither. But thou hast spoken of a husband. Doth he stand here among this multitude of people? Let him come forth, for I must know to whom I commit this most precious trust."

She turned her face upon the male auditors, and after a momentary delay Tobias Pearson came forth from among them. The Quaker saw the dress which marked his military rank, and shook her head; but then she noted the hesitating air, the eyes that struggled with her own and were vanquished, the color that went and came and could find no resting-place. As she gazed an unmirthful smile spread over her features, like sunshine that grows melancholy in some desolate spot. Her lips moved inaudibly, but at length she spake:

"I hear it, I hear it! The voice speaketh within me and saith, 'Leave thy child, Catharine, for his place is here, and go hence, for I have other work for thee. Break the bonds of natural

affection, martyr thy love, and know that in all these things eternal wisdom hath its ends.' I go, friends, I go. Take ye my boy, my precious jewel. I go hence trusting that all shall be well, and that even for his infant hands there is a labor in the vineyard."

She knelt down and whispered to Ilbrahim, who at first struggled and clung to his mother with sobs and tears, but remained passive when she had kissed his cheek and arisen from the ground. Having held her hands over his head in mental prayer, she was ready to depart.

"Farewell, friends in mine extremity," she said to Pearson and his wife; "the good deed ye have done me is a treasure laid up in heaven, to be returned a thousandfold hereafter. – And farewell, ye mine enemies, to whom it is not permitted to harm so much as a hair of my head, nor to stay my footsteps even for a moment. The day is coming when ye shall call upon me to witness for ye to this one sin uncommitted, and I will rise up and answer."

She turned her steps toward the door, and the men who had stationed themselves to guard it withdrew and suffered her to pass. A general sentiment of pity overcame the virulence of religious hatred. Sanctified by her love and her affliction, she went forth, and all the people gazed after her till she had journeyed up the hill and was lost behind its brow. She went, the apostle of her own unquiet heart, to renew the wanderings of past years. For her voice had been already heard in many lands of Christendom, and she had pined in the cells of a Catholic Inquisition before she felt the lash and lay in the

dungeons of the Puritans. Her mission had extended also to the followers of the Prophet, and from them she had received the courtesy and kindness which all the contending sects of our purer religion united to deny her. Her husband and herself had resided many months in Turkey, where even the sultan's countenance was gracious to them; in that pagan land, too, was Ilbrahim's birthplace, and his Oriental name was a mark of gratitude for the good deeds of an unbeliever.

When Pearson and his wife had thus acquired all the rights over Ilbrahim that could be delegated, their affection for him became, like the memory of their native land or their mild sorrow for the dead, a piece of the immovable furniture of their hearts. The boy, also, after a week or two of mental disquiet, began to gratify his protectors by many inadvertent proofs that he considered them as parents and their house as home. Before the winter snows were melted the persecuted infant, the little wanderer from a remote and heathen country, seemed native in the New England cottage and inseparable from the warmth and security of its hearth. Under the influence of kind treatment, and in the consciousness that he was loved, Ilbrahim's demeanor lost a premature manliness which had resulted from his earlier situation; he became more childlike and his natural character displayed itself with freedom. It was in many respects a beautiful one, yet the disordered imaginations of both his father and mother had perhaps propagated a certain unhealthiness in the mind of the boy. In his general state Ilbrahim would derive

enjoyment from the most trifling events and from every object about him; he seemed to discover rich treasures of happiness by a faculty analogous to that of the witch-hazel, which points to hidden gold where all is barren to the eye. His airy gayety, coming to him from a thousand sources, communicated itself to the family, and Ilbrahim was like a domesticated sunbeam, brightening moody countenances and chasing away the gloom from the dark corners of the cottage.

On the other hand, as the susceptibility of pleasure is also that of pain, the exuberant cheerfulness of the boy's prevailing temper sometimes yielded to moments of deep depression. His sorrows could not always be followed up to their original source, but most frequently they appeared to flow – though Ilbrahim was young to be sad for such a cause – from wounded love. The flightiness of his mirth rendered him often guilty of offences against the decorum of a Puritan household, and on these occasions he did not invariably escape rebuke. But the slightest word of real bitterness, which he was infallible in distinguishing from pretended anger, seemed to sink into his heart and poison all his enjoyments till he became sensible that he was entirely forgiven. Of the malice which generally accompanies a superfluity of sensitiveness Ilbrahim was altogether destitute. When trodden upon, he would not turn; when wounded, he could but die. His mind was wanting in the stamina of self-support. It was a plant that would twine beautifully round something stronger than itself; but if repulsed or torn away, it had no choice but to wither

on the ground. Dorothy's acuteness taught her that severity would crush the spirit of the child, and she nurtured him with the gentle care of one who handles a butterfly. Her husband manifested an equal affection, although it grew daily less productive of familiar caresses.

The feelings of the neighboring people in regard to the Quaker infant and his protectors had not undergone a favorable change, in spite of the momentary triumph which the desolate mother had obtained over their sympathies. The scorn and bitterness of which he was the object were very grievous to Ilbrahim, especially when any circumstance made him sensible that the children his equals in age partook of the enmity of their parents. His tender and social nature had already overflowed in attachments to everything about him, and still there was a residue of unappropriated love which he yearned to bestow upon the little ones who were taught to hate him. As the warm days of spring came on Ilbrahim was accustomed to remain for hours silent and inactive within hearing of the children's voices at their play, yet with his usual delicacy of feeling he avoided their notice, and would flee and hide himself from the smallest individual among them. Chance, however, at length seemed to open a medium of communication between his heart and theirs; it was by means of a boy about two years older than Ilbrahim, who was injured by a fall from a tree in the vicinity of Pearson's habitation. As the sufferer's own home was at some distance, Dorothy willingly received him under her roof and became his tender and careful

nurse.

Ilbrahim was the unconscious possessor of much skill in physiognomy, and it would have deterred him in other circumstances from attempting to make a friend of this boy. The countenance of the latter immediately impressed a beholder disagreeably, but it required some examination to discover that the cause was a very slight distortion of the mouth and the irregular, broken line and near approach of the eyebrows. Analogous, perhaps, to these trifling deformities was an almost imperceptible twist of every joint and the uneven prominence of the breast, forming a body regular in its general outline, but faulty in almost all its details. The disposition of the boy was sullen and reserved, and the village schoolmaster stigmatized him as obtuse in intellect, although at a later period of life he evinced ambition and very peculiar talents. But, whatever might be his personal or moral irregularities, Ilbrahim's heart seized upon and clung to him from the moment that he was brought wounded into the cottage; the child of persecution seemed to compare his own fate with that of the sufferer, and to feel that even different modes of misfortune had created a sort of relationship between them. Food, rest and the fresh air for which he languished were neglected; he nestled continually by the bedside of the little stranger and with a fond jealousy endeavored to be the medium of all the cares that were bestowed upon him. As the boy became convalescent Ilbrahim contrived games suitable to his situation or amused him by a faculty which he had perhaps

breathed in with the air of his barbaric birthplace. It was that of reciting imaginary adventures on the spur of the moment, and apparently in inexhaustible succession. His tales were, of course, monstrous, disjointed and without aim, but they were curious on account of a vein of human tenderness which ran through them all and was like a sweet familiar face encountered in the midst of wild and unearthly scenery. The auditor paid much attention to these romances and sometimes interrupted them by brief remarks upon the incidents, displaying shrewdness above his years, mingled with a moral obliquity which grated very harshly against Ilbrahim's instinctive rectitude. Nothing, however, could arrest the progress of the latter's affection, and there were many proofs that it met with a response from the dark and stubborn nature on which it was lavished. The boy's parents at length removed him to complete his cure under their own roof.

Ilbrahim did not visit his new friend after his departure, but he made anxious and continual inquiries respecting him and informed himself of the day when he was to reappear among his playmates. On a pleasant summer afternoon the children of the neighborhood had assembled in the little forest-crowned amphitheatre behind the meeting-house, and the recovering invalid was there, leaning on a staff. The glee of a score of untainted bosoms was heard in light and airy voices, which danced among the trees like sunshine become audible; the grown men of this weary world as they journeyed by the spot marvelled why life, beginning in such brightness, should proceed in gloom,

and their hearts or their imaginations answered them and said that the bliss of childhood gushes from its innocence. But it happened that an unexpected addition was made to the heavenly little band. It was Ilbrahim, who came toward the children with a look of sweet confidence on his fair and spiritual face, as if, having manifested his love to one of them, he had no longer to fear a repulse from their society. A hush came over their mirth the moment they beheld him, and they stood whispering to each other while he drew nigh; but all at once the devil of their fathers entered into the unbreeched fanatics, and, sending up a fierce, shrill cry, they rushed upon the poor Quaker child. In an instant he was the centre of a brood of baby-fiends, who lifted sticks against him, pelted him with stones and displayed an instinct of destruction far more loathsome than the bloodthirstiness of manhood.

The invalid, in the mean while, stood apart from the tumult, crying out with a loud voice, "Fear not, Ilbrahim; come hither and take my hand," and his unhappy friend endeavored to obey him. After watching the victim's struggling approach with a calm smile and unabashed eye, the foul-hearted little villain lifted his staff and struck Ilbrahim on the mouth so forcibly that the blood issued in a stream. The poor child's arms had been raised to guard his head from the storm of blows, but now he dropped them at once. His persecutors beat him down, trampled upon him, dragged him by his long fair locks, and Ilbrahim was on the point of becoming as veritable a martyr as ever entered bleeding

into heaven. The uproar, however, attracted the notice of a few neighbors, who put themselves to the trouble of rescuing the little heretic, and of conveying him to Pearson's door.

Ilbrahim's bodily harm was severe, but long and careful nursing accomplished his recovery; the injury done to his sensitive spirit was more serious, though not so visible. Its signs were principally of a negative character, and to be discovered only by those who had previously known him. His gait was thenceforth slow, even and unvaried by the sudden bursts of sprightlier motion which had once corresponded to his overflowing gladness; his countenance was heavier, and its former play of expression – the dance of sunshine reflected from moving water – was destroyed by the cloud over his existence; his notice was attracted in a far less degree by passing events, and he appeared to find greater difficulty in comprehending what was new to him than at a happier period. A stranger founding his judgment upon these circumstances would have said that the dulness of the child's intellect widely contradicted the promise of his features, but the secret was in the direction of Ilbrahim's thoughts, which were brooding within him when they should naturally have been wandering abroad. An attempt of Dorothy to revive his former sportiveness was the single occasion on which his quiet demeanor yielded to a violent display of grief; he burst into passionate weeping and ran and hid himself, for his heart had become so miserably sore that even the hand of kindness tortured it like fire. Sometimes at night, and probably in his dreams, he

was heard to cry, "Mother! Mother!" as if her place, which a stranger had supplied while Ilbrahim was happy, admitted of no substitute in his extreme affliction. Perhaps among the many life-weary wretches then upon the earth there was not one who combined innocence and misery like this poor broken-hearted infant so soon the victim of his own heavenly nature.

While this melancholy change had taken place in Ilbrahim, one of an earlier origin and of different character had come to its perfection in his adopted father. The incident with which this tale commences found Pearson in a state of religious dulness, yet mentally disquieted and longing for a more fervid faith than he possessed. The first effect of his kindness to Ilbrahim was to produce a softened feeling, an incipient love for the child's whole sect, but joined to this, and resulting, perhaps, from self-suspicion, was a proud and ostentatious contempt of their tenets and practical extravagances. In the course of much thought, however – for the subject struggled irresistibly into his mind – the foolishness of the doctrine began to be less evident, and the points which had particularly offended his reason assumed another aspect or vanished entirely away. The work within him appeared to go on even while he slept, and that which had been a doubt when he laid down to rest would often hold the place of a truth confirmed by some forgotten demonstration when he recalled his thoughts in the morning. But, while he was thus becoming assimilated to the enthusiasts, his contempt, in nowise decreasing toward them, grew very fierce against himself; he

imagined, also, that every face of his acquaintance wore a sneer, and that every word addressed to him was a gibe. Such was his state of mind at the period of Ilbrahim's misfortune, and the emotions consequent upon that event completed the change of which the child had been the original instrument.

In the mean time, neither the fierceness of the persecutors nor the infatuation of their victims had decreased. The dungeons were never empty; the streets of almost every village echoed daily with the lash; the life of a woman whose mild and Christian spirit no cruelty could embitter had been sacrificed, and more innocent blood was yet to pollute the hands that were so often raised in prayer. Early after the Restoration the English Quakers represented to Charles II. that a "vein of blood was open in his dominions," but, though the displeasure of the voluptuous king was roused, his interference was not prompt. And now the tale must stride forward over many months, leaving Pearson to encounter ignominy and misfortune; his wife, to a firm endurance of a thousand sorrows; poor Ilbrahim, to pine and droop like a cankered rose-bud; his mother, to wander on a mistaken errand, neglectful of the holiest trust which can be committed to a woman.

A winter evening, a night of storm, had darkened over Pearson's habitation, and there were no cheerful faces to drive the gloom from his broad hearth. The fire, it is true, sent forth a glowing heat and a ruddy light, and large logs dripping with half-melted snow lay ready to cast upon the embers. But the

apartment was saddened in its aspect by the absence of much of the homely wealth which had once adorned it, for the exaction of repeated fines and his own neglect of temporal affairs had greatly impoverished the owner. And with the furniture of peace the implements of war had likewise disappeared; the sword was broken, the helm and cuirass were cast away for ever: the soldier had done with battles, and might not lift so much as his naked hand to guard his head. But the Holy Book remained, and the table on which it rested was drawn before the fire, while two of the persecuted sect sought comfort from its pages.

He who listened while the other read was the master of the house, now emaciated in form and altered as to the expression and healthiness of his countenance, for his mind had dwelt too long among visionary thoughts and his body had been worn by imprisonment and stripes. The hale and weatherbeaten old man who sat beside him had sustained less injury from a far longer course of the same mode of life. In person he was tall and dignified, and, which alone would have made him hateful to the Puritans, his gray locks fell from beneath the broad-brimmed hat and rested on his shoulders. As the old man read the sacred page the snow drifted against the windows or eddied in at the crevices of the door, while a blast kept laughing in the chimney and the blaze leaped fiercely up to seek it. And sometimes, when the wind struck the hill at a certain angle and swept down by the cottage across the wintry plain, its voice was the most doleful that can be conceived; it came as if the past were speaking, as if the

dead had contributed each a whisper, as if the desolation of ages were breathed in that one lamenting sound.

The Quaker at length closed the book, retaining, however, his hand between the pages which he had been reading, while he looked steadfastly at Pearson. The attitude and features of the latter might have indicated the endurance of bodily pain; he leaned his forehead on his hands, his teeth were firmly closed and his frame was tremulous at intervals with a nervous agitation.

"Friend Tobias," inquired the old man, compassionately, "hast thou found no comfort in these many blessed passages of Scripture?"

"Thy voice has fallen on my ear like a sound afar off and indistinct," replied Pearson, without lifting his eyes. "Yea; and when I have hearkened carefully, the words seemed cold and lifeless and intended for another and a lesser grief than mine. Remove the book," he added, in a tone of sullen bitterness; "I have no part in its consolations, and they do but fret my sorrow the more."

"Nay, feeble brother; be not as one who hath never known the light," said the elder Quaker, earnestly, but with mildness. "Art thou he that wouldst be content to give all and endure all for conscience' sake, desiring even peculiar trials that thy faith might be purified and thy heart weaned from worldly desires? And wilt thou sink beneath an affliction which happens alike to them that have their portion here below and to them that lay up treasure in heaven? Faint not, for thy burden is yet light."

"It is heavy! It is heavier than I can bear!" exclaimed Pearson, with the impatience of a variable spirit. "From my youth upward I have been a man marked out for wrath, and year by year – yea, day after day – I have endured sorrows such as others know not in their lifetime. And now I speak not of the love that has been turned to hatred, the honor to ignominy, the ease and plentifulness of all things to danger, want and nakedness. All this I could have borne and counted myself blessed. But when my heart was desolate with many losses, I fixed it upon the child of a stranger, and he became dearer to me than all my buried ones; and now he too must die as if my love were poison. Verily, I am an accursed man, and I will lay me down in the dust and lift up my head no more."

"Thou sinnest, brother, but it is not for me to rebuke thee, for I also have had my hours of darkness wherein I have murmured against the cross," said the old Quaker. He continued, perhaps in the hope of distracting his companion's thoughts from his own sorrows: "Even of late was the light obscured within me, when the men of blood had banished me on pain of death and the constables led me onward from village to village toward the wilderness. A strong and cruel hand was wielding the knotted cords; they sunk deep into the flesh, and thou mightst have tracked every reel and totter of my footsteps by the blood that followed. As we went on – "

"Have I not borne all this, and have I murmured?" interrupted Pearson, impatiently.

"Nay, friend, but hear me," continued the other. "As we journeyed on night darkened on our path, so that no man could see the rage of the persecutors or the constancy of my endurance, though Heaven forbid that I should glory therein. The lights began to glimmer in the cottage windows, and I could discern the inmates as they gathered in comfort and security, every man with his wife and children by their own evening hearth. At length we came to a tract of fertile land. In the dim light the forest was not visible around it, and, behold, there was a straw-thatched dwelling which bore the very aspect of my home far over the wild ocean – far in our own England. Then came bitter thoughts upon me – yea, remembrances that were like death to my soul. The happiness of my early days was painted to me, the disquiet of my manhood, the altered faith of my declining years. I remembered how I had been moved to go forth a wanderer when my daughter, the youngest, the dearest of my flock, lay on her dying-bed, and – "

"Couldst thou obey the command at such a moment?" exclaimed Pearson, shuddering.

"Yea! yea!" replied the old man, hurriedly. "I was kneeling by her bedside when the voice spoke loud within me, but immediately I rose and took my staff and gat me gone. Oh that it were permitted me to forget her woeful look when I thus withdrew my arm and left her journeying through the dark valley alone! for her soul was faint and she had leaned upon my prayers. Now in that night of horror I was assailed by the thought that I

had been an erring Christian and a cruel parent; yea, even my daughter with her pale dying features seemed to stand by me and whisper, 'Father, you are deceived; go home and shelter your gray head.' – O Thou to whom I have looked in my furthest wanderings," continued the Quaker, raising his agitated eyes to heaven, "inflict not upon the bloodiest of our persecutors the unmitigated agony of my soul when I believed that all I had done and suffered for thee was at the instigation of a mocking fiend! – But I yielded not; I knelt down and wrestled with the tempter, while the scourge bit more fiercely into the flesh. My prayer was heard, and I went on in peace and joy toward the wilderness."

The old man, though his fanaticism had generally all the calmness of reason, was deeply moved while reciting this tale, and his unwonted emotion seemed to rebuke and keep down that of his companion. They sat in silence, with their faces to the fire, imagining, perhaps, in its red embers new scenes of persecution yet to be encountered. The snow still drifted hard against the windows, and sometimes, as the blaze of the logs had gradually sunk, came down the spacious chimney and hissed upon the hearth. A cautious footstep might now and then be heard in a neighboring apartment, and the sound invariably drew the eyes of both Quakers to the door which led thither. When a fierce and riotous gust of wind had led his thoughts by a natural association to homeless travellers on such a night, Pearson resumed the conversation.

"I have wellnigh sunk under my own share of this trial,"

observed he, sighing heavily; "yet I would that it might be doubled to me, if so the child's mother could be spared. Her wounds have been deep and many, but this will be the sorest of all."

"Fear not for Catharine," replied the old Quaker, "for I know that valiant woman and have seen how she can bear the cross. A mother's heart, indeed, is strong in her, and may seem to contend mightily with her faith; but soon she will stand up and give thanks that her son has been thus early an accepted sacrifice. The boy hath done his work, and she will feel that he is taken hence in kindness both to him and her. Blessed, blessed are they that with so little suffering can enter into peace!"

The fitful rush of the wind was now disturbed by a portentous sound: it was a quick and heavy knocking at the outer door. Pearson's wan countenance grew paler, for many a visit of persecution had taught him what to dread; the old man, on the other hand, stood up erect, and his glance was firm as that of the tried soldier who awaits his enemy.

"The men of blood have come to seek me," he observed, with calmness. "They have heard how I was moved to return from banishment, and now am I to be led to prison, and thence to death. It is an end I have long looked for. I will open unto them lest they say, 'Lo, he feareth!'"

"Nay; I will present myself before them," said Pearson, with recovered fortitude. "It may be that they seek me alone and know not that thou abidest with me."

"Let us go boldly, both one and the other," rejoined his companion. "It is not fitting that thou or I should shrink."

They therefore proceeded through the entry to the door, which they opened, bidding the applicant "Come in, in God's name!" A furious blast of wind drove the storm into their faces and extinguished the lamp; they had barely time to discern a figure so white from head to foot with the drifted snow that it seemed like Winter's self come in human shape to seek refuge from its own desolation.

"Enter, friend, and do thy errand, be it what it may," said Pearson. "It must needs be pressing, since thou comest on such a bitter night."

"Peace be with this household!" said the stranger, when they stood on the floor of the inner apartment.

Pearson started; the elder Quaker stirred the slumbering embers of the fire till they sent up a clear and lofty blaze. It was a female voice that had spoken; it was a female form that shone out, cold and wintry, in that comfortable light.

"Catharine, blessed woman," exclaimed the old man, "art thou come to this darkened land again? Art thou come to bear a valiant testimony as in former years? The scourge hath not prevailed against thee, and from the dungeon hast thou come forth triumphant, but strengthen, strengthen now thy heart, Catharine, for Heaven will prove thee yet this once ere thou go to thy reward."

"Rejoice, friends!" she replied. "Thou who hast long been

of our people, and thou whom a little child hath led to us, rejoice! Lo, I come, the messenger of glad tidings, for the day of persecution is over-past. The heart of the king, even Charles, hath been moved in gentleness toward us, and he hath sent forth his letters to stay the hands of the men of blood. A ship's company of our friends hath arrived at yonder town, and I also sailed joyfully among them."

As Catharine spoke her eyes were roaming about the room in search of him for whose sake security was dear to her. Pearson made a silent appeal to the old man, nor did the latter shrink from the painful task assigned him.

"Sister," he began, in a softened yet perfectly calm tone, "thou tellest us of his love manifested in temporal good, and now must we speak to thee of that selfsame love displayed in chastenings. Hitherto, Catharine, thou hast been as one journeying in a darksome and difficult path and leading an infant by the hand; fain wouldst thou have looked heavenward continually, but still the cares of that little child have drawn thine eyes and thy affections to the earth. Sister, go on rejoicing, for his tottering footsteps shall impede thine own no more."

But the unhappy mother was not thus to be consoled. She shook like a leaf; she turned white as the very snow that hung drifted into her hair. The firm old man extended his hand and held her up, keeping his eye upon hers as if to repress any outbreak of passion.

"I am a woman – I am but a woman; will He try me above my

strength?" said Catharine, very quickly and almost in a whisper. "I have been wounded sore; I have suffered much – many things in the body, many in the mind; crucified in myself and in them that were dearest to me. Surely," added she, with a long shudder, "he hath spared me in this one thing." She broke forth with sudden and irrepressible violence: "Tell me, man of cold heart, what has God done to me? Hath he cast me down never to rise again? Hath he crushed my very heart in his hand? – And thou to whom I committed my child, how hast thou fulfilled thy trust? Give me back the boy well, sound, alive – alive – or earth and heaven shall avenge me!"

The agonized shriek of Catharine was answered by the faint – the very faint – voice of a child.

On this day it had become evident to Pearson, to his aged guest and to Dorothy that Ilbrahim's brief and troubled pilgrimage drew near its close. The two former would willingly have remained by him to make use of the prayers and pious discourses which they deemed appropriate to the time, and which, if they be impotent as to the departing traveller's reception in the world whither he goes, may at least sustain him in bidding adieu to earth. But, though Ilbrahim uttered no complaint, he was disturbed by the faces that looked upon him; so that Dorothy's entreaties and their own conviction that the child's feet might tread heaven's pavement and not soil it had induced the two Quakers to remove. Ilbrahim then closed his eyes and grew calm, and, except for now and then a kind and low word to his

nurse, might have been thought to slumber. As nightfall came on, however, and the storm began to rise, something seemed to trouble the repose of the boy's mind and to render his sense of hearing active and acute. If a passing wind lingered to shake the casement, he strove to turn his head toward it; if the door jarred to and fro upon its hinges, he looked long and anxiously thitherward; if the heavy voice of the old man as he read the Scriptures rose but a little higher, the child almost held his dying-breath to listen; if a snowdrift swept by the cottage with a sound like the trailing of a garment, Ilbrahim seemed to watch that some visitant should enter. But after a little time he relinquished whatever secret hope had agitated him and with one low complaining whisper turned his cheek upon the pillow. He then addressed Dorothy with his usual sweetness and besought her to draw near him; she did so, and Ilbrahim took her hand in both of his, grasping it with a gentle pressure, as if to assure himself that he retained it. At intervals, and without disturbing the repose of his countenance, a very faint trembling passed over him from head to foot, as if a mild but somewhat cool wind had breathed upon him and made him shiver.

As the boy thus led her by the hand in his quiet progress over the borders of eternity, Dorothy almost imagined that she could discern the near though dim delightfulness of the home he was about to reach; she would not have enticed the little wanderer back, though she bemoaned herself that she must leave him and return. But just when Ilbrahim's feet were pressing on the soil

of Paradise he heard a voice behind him, and it recalled him a few, few paces of the weary path which he had travelled. As Dorothy looked upon his features she perceived that their placid expression was again disturbed. Her own thoughts had been so wrapped in him that all sounds of the storm and of human speech were lost to her; but when Catharine's shriek pierced through the room, the boy strove to raise himself.

"Friend, she is come! Open unto her!" cried he.

In a moment his mother was kneeling by the bedside; she drew Ilbrahim to her bosom, and he nestled there with no violence of joy, but contentedly as if he were hushing himself to sleep. He looked into her face, and, reading its agony, said with feeble earnestness,

"Mourn not, dearest mother. I am happy now;" and with these words the gentle boy was dead.

The king's mandate to stay the New England persecutors was effectual in preventing further martyrdoms, but the colonial authorities, trusting in the remoteness of their situation, and perhaps in the supposed instability of the royal government, shortly renewed their severities in all other respects. Catharine's fanaticism had become wilder by the sundering of all human ties; and wherever a scourge was lifted, there was she to receive the blow; and whenever a dungeon was unbarred, thither she came to cast herself upon the floor. But in process of time a more Christian spirit – a spirit of forbearance, though not of cordiality or approbation – began to pervade the land in regard to

the persecuted sect. And then, when the rigid old Pilgrims eyed her rather in pity than in wrath, when the matrons fed her with the fragments of their children's food and offered her a lodging on a hard and lowly bed, when no little crowd of schoolboys left their sports to cast stones after the roving enthusiast, – then did Catharine return to Pearson's dwelling, and made that her home.

As if Ilbrahim's sweetness yet lingered round his ashes, as if his gentle spirit came down from heaven to teach his parent a true religion, her fierce and vindictive nature was softened by the same griefs which had once irritated it. When the course of years had made the features of the unobtrusive mourner familiar in the settlement, she became a subject of not deep but general interest – a being on whom the otherwise superfluous sympathies of all might be bestowed. Every one spoke of her with that degree of pity which it is pleasant to experience; every one was ready to do her the little kindnesses which are not costly, yet manifest good-will; and when at last she died, a long train of her once bitter persecutors followed her with decent sadness and tears that were not painful to her place by Ilbrahim's green and sunken grave.

MR. HIGGINBOTHAM'S CATASTROPHE

A young fellow, a tobacco-pedler by trade, was on his way from Morristown, where he had dealt largely with the deacon of the Shaker settlement, to the village of Parker's Falls, on Salmon River. He had a neat little cart painted green, with a box of cigars depicted on each side-panel, and an Indian chief holding a pipe and a golden tobacco-stalk on the rear. The pedler drove a smart little mare and was a young man of excellent character, keen at a bargain, but none the worse liked by the Yankees, who, as I have heard them say, would rather be shaved with a sharp razor than a dull one. Especially was he beloved by the pretty girls along the Connecticut, whose favor he used to court by presents of the best smoking-tobacco in his stock, knowing well that the country-lasses of New England are generally great performers on pipes. Moreover, as will be seen in the course of my story, the pedler was inquisitive and something of a tattler, always itching to hear the news and anxious to tell it again.

After an early breakfast at Morristown the tobacco-pedler – whose name was Dominicus Pike – had travelled seven miles through a solitary piece of woods without speaking a word to anybody but himself and his little gray mare. It being nearly seven o'clock, he was as eager to hold a morning gossip as a city

shopkeeper to read the morning paper. An opportunity seemed at hand when, after lighting a cigar with a sun-glass, he looked up and perceived a man coming over the brow of the hill at the foot of which the pedler had stopped his green cart. Dominicus watched him as he descended, and noticed that he carried a bundle over his shoulder on the end of a stick and travelled with a weary yet determined pace. He did not look as if he had started in the freshness of the morning, but had footed it all night, and meant to do the same all day.

"Good-morning, mister," said Dominicus, when within speaking-distance. "You go a pretty good jog. What's the latest news at Parker's Falls?"

The man pulled the broad brim of a gray hat over his eyes, and answered, rather sullenly, that he did not come from Parker's Falls, which, as being the limit of his own day's journey, the pedler had naturally mentioned in his inquiry.

"Well, then," rejoined Dominicus Pike, "let's have the latest news where you did come from. I'm not particular about Parker's Falls. Any place will answer."

Being thus importuned, the traveller – who was as ill-looking a fellow as one would desire to meet in a solitary piece of woods – appeared to hesitate a little, as if he was either searching his memory for news or weighing the expediency of telling it. At last, mounting on the step of the cart, he whispered in the ear of Dominicus, though he might have shouted aloud and no other mortal would have heard him.

"I do remember one little trifle of news," said he. "Old Mr. Higginbotham of Kimballton was murdered in his orchard at eight o'clock last night by an Irishman and a nigger. They strung him up to the branch of a St. Michael's pear tree where nobody would find him till the morning."

As soon as this horrible intelligence was communicated the stranger betook himself to his journey again with more speed than ever, not even turning his head when Dominicus invited him to smoke a Spanish cigar and relate all the particulars. The pedler whistled to his mare and went up the hill, pondering on the doleful fate of Mr. Higginbotham, whom he had known in the way of trade, having sold him many a bunch of long nines and a great deal of pig-tail, lady's twist and fig tobacco. He was rather astonished at the rapidity with which the news had spread. Kimballton was nearly sixty miles distant in a straight line; the murder had been perpetrated only at eight o'clock the preceding night, yet Dominicus had heard of it at seven in the morning, when, in all probability, poor Mr. Higginbotham's own family had but just discovered his corpse hanging on the St. Michael's pear tree. The stranger on foot must have worn seven-league boots, to travel at such a rate.

"Ill-news flies fast, they say," thought Dominicus Pike, "but this beats railroads. The fellow ought to be hired to go express with the President's message."

The difficulty was solved by supposing that the narrator had made a mistake of one day in the date of the occurrence; so that

our friend did not hesitate to introduce the story at every tavern and country-store along the road, expending a whole bunch of Spanish wrappers among at least twenty horrified audiences. He found himself invariably the first bearer of the intelligence, and was so pestered with questions that he could not avoid filling up the outline till it became quite a respectable narrative. He met with one piece of corroborative evidence. Mr. Higginbotham was a trader, and a former clerk of his to whom Dominicus related the facts testified that the old gentleman was accustomed to return home through the orchard about nightfall with the money and valuable papers of the store in his pocket. The clerk manifested but little grief at Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe, hinting – what the pedler had discovered in his own dealings with him – that he was a crusty old fellow as close as a vise. His property would descend to a pretty niece who was now keeping school in Kimballton.

What with telling the news for the public good and driving bargains for his own, Dominicus was so much delayed on the road that he chose to put up at a tavern about five miles short of Parker's Falls. After supper, lighting one of his prime cigars, he seated himself in the bar-room and went through the story of the murder, which had grown so fast that it took him half an hour to tell. There were as many as twenty people in the room, nineteen of whom received it all for gospel. But the twentieth was an elderly farmer who had arrived on horseback a short time before and was now seated in a corner, smoking his pipe. When

the story was concluded, he rose up very deliberately, brought his chair right in front of Dominicus and stared him full in the face, puffing out the vilest tobacco-smoke the pedler had ever smelt.

"Will you make affidavit," demanded he, in the tone of a country-justice taking an examination, "that old Squire Higginbotham of Kimballton was murdered in his orchard the night before last and found hanging on his great pear tree yesterday morning?"

"I tell the story as I heard it, mister," answered Dominicus, dropping his half-burnt cigar. "I don't say that I saw the thing done, so I can't take my oath that he was murdered exactly in that way."

"But I can take mine," said the farmer, "that if Squire Higginbotham was murdered night before last I drank a glass of bitters with his ghost this morning. Being a neighbor of mine, he called me into his store as I was riding by, and treated me, and then asked me to do a little business for him on the road. He didn't seem to know any more about his own murder than I did."

"Why, then it can't be a fact!" exclaimed Dominicus Pike.

"I guess he'd have mentioned, if it was," said the old farmer; and he removed his chair back to the corner, leaving Dominicus quite down in the mouth.

Here was a sad resurrection of old Mr. Higginbotham! The pedler had no heart to mingle in the conversation any more, but comforted himself with a glass of gin and water and went to bed, where all night long he dreamed of hanging on the St. Michael's

pear tree.

To avoid the old farmer (whom he so detested that his suspension would have pleased him better than Mr. Higginbotham's), Dominicus rose in the gray of the morning, put the little mare into the green cart and trotted swiftly away toward Parker's Falls. The fresh breeze, the dewy road and the pleasant summer dawn revived his spirits, and might have encouraged him to repeat the old story had there been anybody awake to bear it, but he met neither ox-team, light wagon, chaise, horseman nor foot-traveller till, just as he crossed Salmon River, a man came trudging down to the bridge with a bundle over his shoulder, on the end of a stick.

"Good-morning, mister," said the pedler, reining in his mare. "If you come from Kimballton or that neighborhood, maybe you can tell me the real fact about this affair of old Mr. Higginbotham. Was the old fellow actually murdered two or three nights ago by an Irishman and a nigger?"

Dominicus had spoken in too great a hurry to observe at first that the stranger himself had a deep tinge of negro blood. On hearing this sudden question the Ethiopian appeared to change his skin, its yellow hue becoming a ghastly white, while, shaking and stammering, he thus replied:

"No, no! There was no colored man. It was an Irishman that hanged him last night at eight o'clock; I came away at seven. His folks can't have looked for him in the orchard yet."

Scarcely had the yellow man spoken, when he interrupted

himself and, though he seemed weary enough before, continued his journey at a pace which would have kept the pedler's mare on a smart trot. Dominicus stared after him in great perplexity. If the murder had not been committed till Tuesday night, who was the prophet that had foretold it in all its circumstances on Tuesday morning? If Mr. Higginbotham's corpse were not yet discovered by his own family, how came the mulatto, at above thirty miles' distance, to know that he was hanging in the orchard, especially as he had left Kimballton before the unfortunate man was hanged at all? These ambiguous circumstances, with the stranger's surprise and terror, made Dominicus think of raising a hue-and-cry after him as an accomplice in the murder, since a murder, it seemed, had really been perpetrated.

"But let the poor devil go," thought the pedler. "I don't want his black blood on my head, and hanging the nigger wouldn't unhang Mr. Higginbotham. Unhang the old gentleman? It's a sin, I know, but I should hate to have him come to life a second time and give me the lie."

With these meditations Dominicus Pike drove into the street of Parker's Falls, which, as everybody knows, is as thriving a village as three cotton-factories and a slitting-mill can make it. The machinery was not in motion and but a few of the shop doors unbarred when he alighted in the stable-yard of the tavern and made it his first business to order the mare four quarts of oats. His second duty, of course, was to impart Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe to the hostler. He deemed it advisable, however, not

to be too positive as to the date of the direful fact, and also to be uncertain whether it were perpetrated by an Irishman and a mulatto or by the son of Erin alone. Neither did he profess to relate it on his own authority or that of any one person, but mentioned it as a report generally diffused.

The story ran through the town like fire among girdled trees, and became so much the universal talk that nobody could tell whence it had originated. Mr. Higginbotham was as well known at Parker's Falls as any citizen of the place, being part-owner of the slitting-mill and a considerable stockholder in the cotton-factories. The inhabitants felt their own prosperity interested in his fate. Such was the excitement that the Parker's Falls *Gazette* anticipated its regular day of publication, and came out with half a form of blank paper and a column of double pica emphasized with capitals and headed "HORRID MURDER OF MR. HIGGINBOTHAM!" Among other dreadful details, the printed account described the mark of the cord round the dead man's neck and stated the number of thousand dollars of which he had been robbed; there was much pathos, also, about the affliction of his niece, who had gone from one fainting-fit to another ever since her uncle was found hanging on the St. Michael's pear tree with his pockets inside out. The village poet likewise commemorated the young lady's grief in seventeen stanzas of a ballad. The selectmen held a meeting, and in consideration of Mr. Higginbotham's claims on the town determined to issue handbills offering a reward of five hundred

dollars for the apprehension of his murderers and the recovery of the stolen property.

Meanwhile, the whole population of Parker's Falls, consisting of shopkeepers, mistresses of boarding-houses, factory-girls, mill-men and schoolboys, rushed into the street and kept up such a terrible loquacity as more than compensated for the silence of the cotton-machines, which refrained from their usual din out of respect to the deceased. Had Mr. Higginbotham cared about posthumous renown, his untimely ghost would have exulted in this tumult.

Our friend Dominicus in his vanity of heart forgot his intended precautions, and, mounting on the town-pump, announced himself as the bearer of the authentic intelligence which had caused so wonderful a sensation. He immediately became the great man of the moment, and had just begun a new edition of the narrative with a voice like a field-preacher when the mail-stage drove into the village street. It had travelled all night, and must have shifted horses at Kimballton at three in the morning.

"Now we shall hear all the particulars!" shouted the crowd.

The coach rumbled up to the piazza of the tavern followed by a thousand people; for if any man had been minding his own business till then, he now left it at sixes and sevens to hear the news. The pedler, foremost in the race, discovered two passengers, both of whom had been startled from a comfortable nap to find themselves in the centre of a mob. Every man assailing them with separate questions, all propounded at once,

the couple were struck speechless, though one was a lawyer and the other a young lady.

"Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham! Tell us the particulars about old Mr. Higginbotham!" bawled the mob. "What is the coroner's verdict? Are the murderers apprehended? Is Mr. Higginbotham's niece come out of her fainting-fits? Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham!"

The coachman said not a word except to swear awfully at the hostler for not bringing him a fresh team of horses. The lawyer inside had generally his wits about him even when asleep; the first thing he did after learning the cause of the excitement was to produce a large red pocketbook. Meantime, Dominicus Pike, being an extremely polite young man, and also suspecting that a female tongue would tell the story as glibly as a lawyer's, had handed the lady out of the coach. She was a fine, smart girl, now wide awake and bright as a button, and had such a sweet, pretty mouth that Dominicus would almost as lief have heard a love-tale from it as a tale of murder.

"Gentlemen and ladies," said the lawyer to the shopkeepers, the mill-men and the factory-girls, "I can assure you that some unaccountable mistake – or, more probably, a wilful falsehood maliciously contrived to injure Mr. Higginbotham's credit – has excited this singular uproar. We passed through Kimballton at three o'clock this morning, and most certainly should have been informed of the murder had any been perpetrated. But I have proof nearly as strong as Mr. Higginbotham's own oral testimony

in the negative. Here is a note relating to a suit of his in the Connecticut courts which was delivered me from that gentleman himself. I find it dated at ten o'clock last evening."

So saying, the lawyer, exhibited the date and signature of the note, which irrefragably proved either that this perverse Mr. Higginbotham was alive when he wrote it, or, as some deemed the more probable case of two doubtful ones, that he was so absorbed in worldly business as to continue to transact it even after his death. But unexpected evidence was forthcoming. The young lady, after listening to the pedler's explanation, merely seized a moment to smooth her gown and put her curls in order, and then appeared at the tavern door, making a modest signal to be heard.

"Good people," said she, "I am Mr. Higginbotham's niece."

A wondering murmur passed through the crowd on beholding her so rosy and bright – that same unhappy niece whom they had supposed, on the authority of the Parker's Falls *Gazette*, to be lying at death's door in a fainting-fit. But some shrewd fellows had doubted all along whether a young lady would be quite so desperate at the hanging of a rich old uncle.

"You see," continued Miss Higginbotham, with a smile, "that this strange story is quite unfounded as to myself, and I believe I may affirm it to be equally so in regard to my dear uncle Higginbotham. He has the kindness to give me a home in his house, though I contribute to my own support by teaching a school. I left Kimballton this morning to spend the vacation

of commencement-week with a friend about five miles from Parker's Falls. My generous uncle, when he heard me on the stairs, called me to his bedside and gave me two dollars and fifty cents to pay my stage-fare, and another dollar for my extra expenses. He then laid his pocketbook under his pillow, shook hands with me, and advised me to take some biscuit in my bag instead of breakfasting on the road. I feel confident, therefore, that I left my beloved relative alive, and trust that I shall find him so on my return."

The young lady courtesied at the close of her speech, which was so sensible and well worded, and delivered with such grace and propriety, that everybody thought her fit to be preceptress of the best academy in the State. But a stranger would have supposed that Mr. Higginbotham was an object of abhorrence at Parker's Falls and that a thanksgiving had been proclaimed for his murder, so excessive was the wrath of the inhabitants on learning their mistake. The mill-men resolved to bestow public honors on Dominicus Pike, only hesitating whether to tar and feather him, ride him on a rail or refresh him with an ablution at the town-pump, on the top of which he had declared himself the bearer of the news. The selectmen, by advice of the lawyer, spoke of prosecuting him for a misdemeanor in circulating unfounded reports, to the great disturbance of the peace of the commonwealth. Nothing saved Dominicus either from mob-law or a court of justice but an eloquent appeal made by the young lady in his behalf. Addressing a few words of heartfelt gratitude

to his benefactress, he mounted the green cart and rode out of town under a discharge of artillery from the schoolboys, who found plenty of ammunition in the neighboring clay-pits and mud-holes. As he turned his head to exchange a farewell glance with Mr. Higginbotham's niece a ball of the consistence of hasty-pudding hit him slap in the mouth, giving him a most grim aspect. His whole person was so bespattered with the like filthy missiles that he had almost a mind to ride back and supplicate for the threatened ablution at the town-pump; for, though not meant in kindness, it would now have been a deed of charity.

However, the sun shone bright on poor Dominicus, and the mud – an emblem of all stains of undeserved opprobrium – was easily brushed off when dry. Being a funny rogue, his heart soon cheered up; nor could he refrain from a hearty laugh at the uproar which his story had excited. The handbills of the selectmen would cause the commitment of all the vagabonds in the State, the paragraph in the Parker's Falls *Gazette* would be reprinted from Maine to Florida, and perhaps form an item in the London newspapers, and many a miser would tremble for his moneybags and life on learning the catastrophe of Mr. Higginbotham. The pedler meditated with much fervor on the charms of the young schoolmistress, and swore that Daniel Webster never spoke nor looked so like an angel as Miss Higginbotham while defending him from the wrathful populace at Parker's Falls.

Dominicus was now on the Kimballton turnpike, having all along determined to visit that place, though business had

drawn, him out of the most direct road from Morristown. As he approached the scene of the supposed murder he continued to revolve the circumstances in his mind, and was astonished at the aspect which the whole case assumed. Had nothing occurred to corroborate the story of the first traveller, it might now have been considered as a hoax; but the yellow man was evidently acquainted either with the report or the fact, and there was a mystery in his dismayed and guilty look on being abruptly questioned. When to this singular combination of incidents it was added that the rumor tallied exactly with Mr. Higginbotham's character and habits of life, and that he had an orchard and a St. Michael's pear tree, near which he always passed at nightfall, the circumstantial evidence appeared so strong that Dominicus doubted whether the autograph produced by the lawyer, or even the niece's direct testimony, ought to be equivalent. Making cautious inquiries along the road, the pedler further learned that Mr. Higginbotham had in his service an Irishman of doubtful character whom he had hired without a recommendation, on the score of economy.

"May I be hanged myself," exclaimed Dominicus Pike, aloud, on reaching the top of a lonely hill, "if I'll believe old Higginbotham is unhanged till I see him with my own eyes and hear it from his own mouth. And, as he's a real shaver, I'll have the minister, or some other responsible man, for an endorser."

It was growing dusk when he reached the toll-house on Kimballton turnpike, about a quarter of a mile from the village of

this name. His little mare was fast bringing him up with a man on horseback who trotted through the gate a few rods in advance of him, nodded to the toll-gatherer and kept on towards the village. Dominicus was acquainted with the toll-man, and while making change the usual remarks on the weather passed between them.

"I suppose," said the pedler, throwing back his whiplash to bring it down like a feather on the mare's flank, "you have not seen anything of old Mr. Higginbotham within a day or two?"

"Yes," answered the toll-gatherer; "he passed the gate just before you drove up, and yonder he rides now, if you can see him through the dusk. He's been to Woodfield this afternoon, attending a sheriff's sale there. The old man generally shakes hands and has a little chat with me, but to-night he nodded, as if to say, 'Charge my toll,' and jogged on; for, wherever he goes, he must always be at home by eight o'clock."

"So they tell me," said Dominicus.

"I never saw a man look so yellow and thin as the squire does," continued the toll-gatherer. "Says I to myself tonight, 'He's more like a ghost or an old mummy than good flesh and blood.'"

The pedler strained his eyes through the twilight, and could just discern the horseman now far ahead on the village road. He seemed to recognize the rear of Mr. Higginbotham, but through the evening shadows and amid the dust from the horse's feet the figure appeared dim and unsubstantial, as if the shape of the mysterious old man were faintly moulded of darkness and gray light.

Dominicus shivered. "Mr. Higginbotham has come back from the other world by way of the Kimballton turnpike," thought he. He shook the reins and rode forward, keeping about the same distance in the rear of the gray old shadow till the latter was concealed by a bend of the road. On reaching this point the pedler no longer saw the man on horseback, but found himself at the head of the village street, not far from a number of stores and two taverns clustered round the meeting-house steeple. On his left was a stone wall and a gate, the boundary of a wood-lot beyond which lay an orchard, farther still a mowing-field, and last of all a house. These were the premises of Mr. Higginbotham, whose dwelling stood beside the old highway, but had been left in the background by the Kimballton turnpike.

Dominicus knew the place, and the little mare stopped short by instinct, for he was not conscious of tightening the reins. "For the soul of me, I cannot get by this gate!" said he, trembling. "I never shall be my own man again till I see whether Mr. Higginbotham is hanging on the St. Michael's pear tree." He leaped from the cart, gave the rein a turn round the gate-post, and ran along the green path of the wood-lot as if Old Nick were chasing behind. Just then the village clock tolled eight, and as each deep stroke fell Dominicus gave a fresh bound and flew faster than before, till, dim in the solitary centre of the orchard, he saw the fated pear tree. One great branch stretched from the old contorted trunk across the path and threw the darkest shadow on that one spot. But something seemed to struggle beneath the

branch.

The pedler had never pretended to more courage than befits a man of peaceable occupation, nor could he account for his valor on this awful emergency. Certain it is, however, that he rushed forward, prostrated a sturdy Irishman with the butt-end of his whip, and found – not, indeed, hanging on the St. Michael's pear tree, but trembling beneath it with a halter round his neck – the old identical Mr. Higginbotham.

"Mr. Higginbotham," said Dominicus, tremulously, "you're an honest man, and I'll take your word for it. Have you been hanged, or not?"

If the riddle be not already guessed, a few words will explain the simple machinery by which this "coming event" was made to cast its "shadow before." Three men had plotted the robbery and murder of Mr. Higginbotham; two of them successively lost courage and fled, each delaying the crime one night by their disappearance; the third was in the act of perpetration, when a champion, blindly obeying the call of fate, like the heroes of old romance, appeared in the person of Dominicus Pike.

It only remains to say that Mr. Higginbotham took the pedler into high favor, sanctioned his addresses to the pretty schoolmistress and settled his whole property on their children, allowing themselves the interest. In due time the old gentleman capped the climax of his favors by dying a Christian death in bed; since which melancholy event, Dominicus Pike has removed from Kimballton and established a large tobacco-manufactory in

my native village.

LITTLE ANNIE'S RAMBLE

Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

The town-crier has rung his bell at a distant corner, and little Annie stands on her father's doorsteps trying to hear what the man with the loud voice is talking about. Let me listen too. Oh, he is telling the people that an elephant and a lion and a royal tiger and a horse with horns, and other strange beasts from foreign countries, have come to town and will receive all visitors who choose to wait upon them. Perhaps little Annie would like to go? Yes, and I can see that the pretty child is weary of this wide and pleasant street with the green trees flinging their shade across the quiet sunshine and the pavements and the sidewalks all as clean as if the housemaid had just swept them with her broom. She feels that impulse to go strolling away – that longing after the mystery of the great world – which many children feel, and which I felt in my childhood. Little Annie shall take a ramble with me. See! I do but hold out my hand, and like some bright bird in the sunny air, with her blue silk frock fluttering upward from her white pantalets, she comes bounding on tiptoe across the street.

Smooth back your brown curls, Annie, and let me tie on your bonnet, and we will set forth. What a strange couple to go on their rambles together! One walks in black attire, with a measured step and a heavy brow and his thoughtful eyes bent down, while the gay little girl trips lightly along as if she were forced to keep hold

of my hand lest her feet should dance away from the earth. Yet there is sympathy between us. If I pride myself on anything, it is because I have a smile that children love; and, on the other hand, there are few grown ladies that could entice me from the side of little Annie, for I delight to let my mind go hand in hand with the mind of a sinless child. So come, Annie; but if I moralize as we go, do not listen to me: only look about you and be merry.

Now we turn the corner. Here are hacks with two horses and stage-coaches with four thundering to meet each other, and trucks and carts moving at a slower pace, being heavily laden with barrels from the wharves; and here are rattling gigs which perhaps will be smashed to pieces before our eyes. Hitherward, also, comes a man trundling a wheelbarrow along the pavement. Is not little Annie afraid of such a tumult? No; she does not even shrink closer to my side, but passes on with fearless confidence, a happy child amidst a great throng of grown people who pay the same reverence to her infancy that they would to extreme old age. Nobody jostles her: all turn aside to make way for little Annie; and, what is most singular, she appears conscious of her claim to such respect. Now her eyes brighten with pleasure. A street-musician has seated himself on the steps of yonder church and pours forth his strains to the busy town – a melody that has gone astray among the tramp of footsteps, the buzz of voices and the war of passing wheels. Who heeds the poor organ-grinder? None but myself and little Annie, whose feet begin to move in unison with the lively tune, as if she were loth that music should be

wasted without a dance. But where would Annie find a partner? Some have the gout in their toes or the rheumatism in their joints; some are stiff with age, some feeble with disease; some are so lean that their bones would rattle, and others of such ponderous size that their agility would crack the flagstones; but many, many have leaden feet because their hearts are far heavier than lead. It is a sad thought that I have chanced upon. What a company of dancers should we be! For I too am a gentleman of sober footsteps, and therefore, little Annie, let us walk sedately on.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.