# VARIOUS

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# Содержание

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# The Atlantic Monthly, Volume 04, No. 22, August, 1859 / A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics

## THE DRAMATIC ELEMENT IN THE BIBLE

We say dramatic element *in* the Bible, not dramatic element *of* the Bible, since that of which we speak is not essential, but incidental; it is an aspect of the form of the book, not an attribute of its inspiration.

By the use of the term *dramatic* in this connection, let us, in the outset, be understood to have no reference whatever to the theatre and stage-effect, or to the sundry devices whereby the playhouse is made at once popular and intolerable. Nor shall we anticipate any charge of irreverence; since we claim the opportunity and indulge only the license of the painter, who, in the treatment of Scriptural themes, seeks both to embellish the sacred page and to honor his art,—and of the sculptor, and the poet, likewise, each of whom, ranging divine ground, remarks upon the objects there presented according to the law of his profession. As the picturesque, the statuesque, the poetical in the Bible are legitimate studies, so also the dramatic.

But in the premises, is not the term *dramatic* interdicted,—since it is that which is not the Bible, but which is foreign to the Bible, and even directly contradistinguished therefrom? The drama is representation,—the Bible is fact; the drama is imitation,—the Bible narrative; the one is an embodiment,—the other a substance; the one transcribes the actual by the personal,—the other is a return to the simplest originality; the one exalts its subjects by poetic freedom,—the other adheres to prosaic plainness.

Yet are there not points in which they meet, or in which, for the purposes of this essay, they may be considered as coming together,—that is, admitting of an artistical juxtaposition?

In the first place, to take Shakspeare for a type of the drama, what, we ask, is the distinguishing merit of this great writer? It is his fidelity to Nature. Is not the Bible also equally true to Nature? "It is the praise of Shakspeare," says Dr. Johnson, "that his plays are the mirror of life." Was there ever a more consummate mirror of life than the Bible affords? "Shakspeare copied the manners of the world then passing before him, and has more allusions than other poets to the traditions and superstitions of the vulgar." The Bible, perhaps, excels all other books in this sort of description. "Shakspeare was an exact surveyor of the inanimate world." The Bible is full of similar sketches. An excellence of Shakspeare is the individuality of his characters. "They are real beings of flesh and blood," the critics tell us; "they speak like men, not like authors." How truly this applies to the persons mentioned in sacred writ! Goethe has compared the characters of Shakspeare to "watches with crystalline cases and plates, which, while they point out with perfect accuracy the course of the hours and minutes, at the same time disclose the whole combination of springs and wheels whereby they are moved." A similar transparency of motive and purpose, of individual traits and spontaneous action, belongs to the Bible. From the hand of Shakspeare, "the lord and the tinker, the hero and the valet, come forth equally distinct and clear." In the Bible the various sorts of men are never confounded, but have the advantage of being exhibited by Nature herself, and are not a contrivance of the imagination. "Shylock," observes a recent critic, "seems so much a man of Nature's making, that we can scarce accord to Shakspeare the merit of creating him." What will you say of Balak, Nabal, Jeroboam? "Macbeth is rather guilty of tempting the Weird Sisters than of being tempted by

them, and is surprised and horrified at his own hell-begotten conception." Saul is guilty of tampering with the Witch of Endor, and is alarmed at the Ghost of Samuel, whose words distinctly embody and vibrate the fears of his own heart, and he "falls straightway all along on the earth." "The exquisite refinement of Viola triumphs over her masculine attire." The exquisite refinement of Ruth triumphs in the midst of men.

We see there are points in which dramatic representation and Scriptural delineation mutually touch.

A distinguished divine of Connecticut said he wanted but two books in his library, the Bible and Shakspeare,—the one for religion, the other to be his instructor in human nature. In the same spirit, St. Chrysostom kept a copy of Aristophanes under his pillow, that he might read it at night before he slept and in the morning when he waked. The strong and sprightly eloquence of this father, if we may trust tradition, drew its support from the vigorous and masculine Atticism of the old comedian.

But human nature, in every stage of its development and every variety of its operation, is as distinctly pronounced on the pages of Scripture as in the scenes of the dramatist. Of Shakespeare it is said, "He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives." He has been called the "thousand-minded," the "oceanic soul." The Bible creates the world and peoples it, and gives us a profound and universal insight into all its concerns.

Another peculiarity of Shakspeare is his self-forgetfulness. In reading what is written, you do not think of him, but of his productions. "The perfect absence of himself from his own pages makes it difficult for us to conceive of a human being having written them." This remark applies with obvious force to the Bible. The authors of the several books do not thrust themselves upon your notice, or interfere with your meditations on what they have written; indeed, to such an extent is this self-abeyance maintained, that it is impossible, at this period of time, to determine who are the authors of some of the books. The narrative of events proceeds, for the most part, as if the author had never existed. How *naïvely* and perspicuously everything is told, without the colouring of prejudice, or an infusion of egotism on the part of the writer!

Coleridge says, Shakspeare gives us no moral highwaymen, no sentimental thieves and rat-catchers, no interesting villains, no amiable adulteresses. The Bible even goes farther than this, and is faithful to the foibles and imperfections of its favorite characters, and describes a rebellious Moses, a perjured David, a treacherous Peter.

"In nothing does Shakspeare so deeply and divinely touch the heart of humanity as in the representation of woman." We have the grandeur of Portia, the sprightliness of Rosalind, the passion of Juliet, the delicacy of Ophelia, the mournful dignity of Hermione, the filial affection of Cordelia. How shall we describe the Pythian greatness of Miriam, the cheerful hospitality of Sarah, the heroism of Rahab, the industry of Dorcas, the devotion of Mary? And we might set off Lady Macbeth with Jezebel, and Cleopatra with Delilah.

But the Bible, it may be said, so far as the subject before us is concerned, is chiefly historical, while Shakspeare is purely dramatic. The one is description,—the other action; the one relates to events,—the other to feelings; the department of the one is the general course of human affairs,—that of the other, the narrower circle of individual experience; the field of the one is that which the eye of philosophy may embrace,—while that of the other is what the human frame may portray.

However this may apply to the average of history, it will be found that the Bible, in its historical parts, is not so strictly historical as to preclude associations of another sort. The Bible is remarkable for a visual and embodied relief, a bold and vivid detail. We know of no book, if we may except the compositions of professed dramatists, that contains so much of personal feeling and incident. In simplicity and directness, in freedom from exaggeration, and in the general unreserve of its expression, it even exceeds the most of these. In it we may discover a succession of little dramas of Nature that will affect us quite as profoundly as those larger ones of Art.

If the structure of the drama be dialogistic, we find the Bible formed on the same model. If the writers of the former disappear under the personages of their fancy, the writers of the latter disappear under the personages of fact. As in the one, so in the other, strangers are introduced to tell their own story, each in his own way.

In the commencement of the Bible, after a brief prologue, the curtain rises, and we, as spectators, look in upon a process of interlocution. The scene is the green, sunny garden of Eden, that to which the memory of humanity reverts as to its dim golden age, and which ever expresses the bright dream of our youth, ere the rigor of misfortune or the dulness of experience has spoilt it. The *dramatis personae* are three individuals, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. There are the mysterious tree, with its wonderful fruit,—the beautiful, but inquisitive woman,—the thoughtful, but too compliant man,—and the insinuating reptile. One speaks, the other rejoins, and the third fills up the chasm of interest. The plot thickens, the passions are displayed, and the tragedy hastens to its end. Then is heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the cool (the wind) of the garden, the impersonal presence of Jehovah is, as it were, felt in the passing breeze, and a shadow falls upon the earth,—but such a shadow as their own patient toil may dissipate, and beyond the confines of which their hope, which has now taken the place of enjoyment, is permitted ever to look.

Without delaying on the moral of this passage, what we would remark upon is the clearness and freedom of the dialogue,—a feature which we find pervading the whole of the sacred writings.

In the account of Cain, which immediately succeeds, the narrative is inelaborate, casual, secondary; the dialogue is simple and touching. The agony of the fratricide and his remorse are better expressed by his own lips than could be done by any skill of the historian.

In the deception which Abraham put upon the Egyptians, touching his wife,—which it is no part of our present object to justify or to condemn,—what a stroke of pathos, what a depth of conjugal sentiment, is exhibited! "Thou art a fair woman to look upon, and the Egyptians, when they see thee, will kill me and save thee alive. *Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee*."

Viola appears very interesting and very innocent, when, in boy's clothes, she wanders about in pursuit of a lover. Is not Sarah equally interesting and equally innocent, when, under cover of an assumed name, and that a sister's, she would preserve the love of one who has worthily won it?

Will it be said that the dialogue of the Bible lacks the charm of poetry?—that its action and sentiment, its love and its sorrow, are not heightened by those efforts of the fancy which delight us in dramatic authors?—that its simplicity is bald, and its naturalness rough?—that its excessive familiarity repels taste and disturbs culture? If we may trust Wordsworth, simplicity is not inconsistent with the pleasures of the imagination. The style of the Bible is not redundant,—there is little extravagance in it, and it has no trickery of words. Yet this does not prevent its being deep in sentiment, brilliant with intrinsic thought or powerful effect.

In the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Valentine thus utters himself touching his betrothed:—

"What light is light, if Sylvia be not seen?
What joy is joy, if Sylvia be not by?
Except I see my Sylvia in the night,
There is no music in the nightingale.
Unless I look on Sylvia in the day,
There is no day for me to look upon.
She is my essence; and I cease to be,
If I be not by her fair influence
Fostered, illumined, cherished, kept alive."

Compare with this the language of Abraham. "Thou art fair, my wife. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee." The first is an instance of poetic amplification and *abandon*; we should contend, for the last, that it expresses poetic tenderness and delicacy. In the one case, passion is diffuse,—in the other, concentrated. Which is the more natural, others must judge.

"Euthanasy," "Theron and Aspasio," the "Phaedon" of Plato are dialogues, but they are not dramatic. It may be, that, for a composition to claim this distinction, it must embody great character or deep feeling,—that it must express not only the individuality, but the strength of the passions.

Observing this criticism, we think we may find any quantity of dramatic dialogue in Scripture. The story of Joseph, the march in the wilderness, the history of David, are full of it.

There are not only dramatic dialogue and movement, but dramatic monologue and episode. For illustration, we might refer to Hagar in the wilderness. Her tragic loneliness and shuddering despair alight upon the page of Scripture with the interest that attends the introduction of the veiled Niobe with her children into the Grecian theatre.

There are those who say, that the truth of particular events, so far as we are conscious of it, is a drawback on the pleasure as well as the dignity of the drama,—in other words, that the Bible is too true to afford what is called dramatic delight, while the semblance of truth in Shakspeare is exactly graduated to this particular affection. Between the advocates of this theory, and those who say that Shakspeare is true as truth itself, we can safely leave the point.

The subject has another aspect, which appears in the inquiry, What is the true object of the drama? If, as has been asserted, the object of the drama be the exhibition of the human character, —if, agreeably to Aristotle, tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity,—or if, according to a recent writer, it interests us through the moral and religious principles of our nature,—or even if, according to Dr. Johnson, it be the province of comedy to bring into view the customs, manners, vices, and the whole character of a people,—it is obvious that the Bible and the drama have some correspondence. If, in the somewhat heated language of Mrs. Jameson, "whatever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable and grave, whatever hath passion or admiration in the changes of fortune or the refluxes of feeling, whatever is pitiful in the weakness, grand in the strength, or terrible in the perversion of the human intellect," be the domain of tragedy, this correspondence increases upon us.

If, however, it be the object of the drama to divert, then it occupies a wholly different ground from the Bible. If it merely gratifies curiosity or enlivens pastime, if it awakens emotion without directing it to useful ends, if it rallies the infirmities of human nature with no other design than to provoke our derision or increase our conceit, it shoots very, very wide of the object which the sacred writers propose.

It is worthy to be remarked, that the Jews had no drama, or nothing that answers to our idea of that term at the present time; they had no theatres, no writers of tragedy or comedy. Neither are there any traces of the dramatic art among the Egyptians, among whom the Jews sojourned four hundred years, nor among the Arabs or the Persians, who are of kindred stock with this people. On the other hand, by the Hindoos and Chinese, the Greeks and Romans, histrionic representation was cultivated with assiduity.

How shall we explain this national peculiarity? Was it because the religion of the Jews forbade creative imitation? Is it to be found in the letter or the spirit of the second commandment, which interdicts the making of graven images of any pattern in earth or heaven? We should hardly think so, since the object of this prohibition is rather to prevent idolatry than to discourage the gratification of taste. "Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them." The Jews did have emblematic observances, costume, and works of art. Yet, on the other hand, the Jews possessed something resembling the drama, and that out of which the dramatic institutions of all nations have sprung. The question, then,

why the Jews had no drama proper, and still preserved the semblance and germ thereof, will be partially elucidated by a reference to the early history of dramatic art.

In its inception, the drama, among all nations, was a religious observance. It came in with the chorus and the ode. The chorus, or, as we now say, choir, was a company of persons who on stated occasions sang sacred songs, accompanying their music with significant gesture, and an harmonious pulsation of the feet, or the more deliberate march. The ode or song they sang was of an elevated structure and impassioned tone, and was commonly addressed to the Divinity. Instances of the ode are the lyrics of Pindar and David. The chorus was also divided into parts, to each of which was assigned a separate portion of the song, and which answered one another in alternate measures. A good instance of the chorus and its movement appears after the deliverance of the Jews from the dangers of the Red Sea. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord: 'I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously,'" etc. "And Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances; and Miriam answered them, 'Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.'" At a later period, in Jewish as in Greek history, choral exercises became a profession, and the choir constituted a detached portion of men and women.

"Those who have studied the history of Grecian antiquities," says Archbishop Potter, "and collected the fragments which remain of the most ancient authors, have all concurred in the opinion, that poetry was first employed in celebrating the praises of the gods. The fragments of the Orphic hymns, and those of Linus and Musaeus, show these poets entertained sounder notions of the Supreme Being than many philosophers of a later date. There are lyric fragments yet remaining that bear striking resemblance to Scripture."

So, says Bishop Horne, "The poetry of the Jews is clearly traceable to the service of religion. To celebrate the praises of God, to decorate his worship, and give force to devout sentiments, was the employment of the Hebrew Muse."

The choral song, that is, a sacred ode united with appropriate action, distinguished the Jews and Greeks alike. At a later period of Jewish history, the chorus became perfected, yet without receiving any organic change. Among the Greeks, however, the chorus passed by degrees into the drama. To simple singing and dancing they added a variety of imitative action; from celebrating the praises of the Divinity, they proceeded to represent the deeds of men, and their orchestras were enlarged to theatres. They retained the chorus, but subordinated it to the action. The Jews, on the other hand, did no more than dramatize the chorus. So, Bishop Horsley says, the greater part of the Psalms are a sort of dramatic ode, consisting of dialogues between certain persons sustaining certain characters. In these psalms, the persons are the writer himself and a band of Levites,—or sometimes the Supreme Being, or a personation of the Messiah.

We find, then, the Jews and the Greeks running parallel in respect of the drama, or that out of which the drama sprung, the chorus, for a long series of years. The practice of the two nations in this respect exhibits a striking coincidence, indeed, Lowth conceives that the Song of Solomon bears a strong resemblance to the Greek drama. "The chorus of virgins," he says, "seems in every respect congenial to the tragic chorus of the Greeks. They are constantly present, and prepared to fulfil all the duties of advice and consolation; they converse frequently with the different characters; they take part in the whole business of the poem." They fulfilled, in a word, all the purpose of the Greek chorus on the Greek stage.

On certain occasions, the Greek chorus celebrated divine worship in the vicinity of the great altar of their god. Clad in magnificent vestments, they move to solemn measures about it; they ascend and descend the steps that lead to it; they offer sacrifices upon it; they carry in their hands lighted torches; they pour out lustral water; they burn incense; they divide into antiphonal bands, and sing alternate stanzas of their sacred songs.

So, in their religious festivals, the Jewish chorus surrounded the high altar of their worship, gorgeously dressed, and with an harmonious tread; they mounted and remounted the steps; they

offered sacrifices; they bore branches of trees in their hands; they scattered the lustral water; they burnt incense; they pealed the responsive anthem.

But while we follow down the stream of resemblance to a certain point, it divides at last: on the Greek side, it is diverted into the lighter practice of the theatre; on the Jewish side, it seems to deepen itself in the religious feeling of the nation.

Aeschylus, the father of tragedy, seizing upon the chorus, elaborated it into the drama. The religious idea, indeed, seems never to have deserted the gentile drama; for, at a later period, we find the Romans appointing theatrical performances with the special design of averting the anger of the gods. A religious spirit, also, pervades all the writings of the ancient dramatists; they bring the gods to view, and the terrors of the next world, on their stage, are seen crowding upon the sins of this.

On the other hand, David, who may be denominated the Alfred of the Jews, seems to have contented himself with the chorus; he allotted its members, disciplined its ranks, heightened its effect, and supplied new lyrics for its use.

Another exemplification of singular coincidence and diversity between the two nations appears in this, that the goat was common in the religious observances of both; a similar ritual required the sacrifice of this animal: but with the Jews the creature was an emblem of solemnity, while with the Greeks he was significant of joy; the Jews sacrificed him on their fasts,—the Greeks in their feasts. And here we may observe, that tragedy, the most dignified and the primitive form of the drama, deduces its origin from the goat,—being, literally, the song of the goat, that is, the song accompanying the sacrifice of the goat.

Let us now endeavor to answer the question, Why, since the drama was generally introduced among surrounding nations, and Jewish customs and life comprised so many initial dramatic materials, this art was not known among that people?

It was owing to the earnestness and solemnity of their religious faith. We find the cause in the simple, exalted, and comparatively spiritual ideas they had of the Supreme Being; in a word, we shall state the whole ground to be this,—that the Greeks were polytheists, and the Jews monotheists.

Let us bear in mind that the chorus, and the drama that was built upon it, had a religious association, and were employed in religious devotion. We may add, moreover, that the Greeks introduced their gods upon the stage; this the Jews could not do. The Greeks, of course, had a great deal of religious feeling, but they could not cherish that profound reverence for the object of their worship which the Jews entertained towards theirs. The Jews accompanied the Greeks in the use of the chorus, but they could not go with them any farther. They both united in employing music and the dance, and all the pomp of procession and charm of ceremony, in divine worship; but when it came to displaying the object of their adoration in personal form to the popular eye, and making him an actor on the stage, however dignified that stage might be, the Jews could not consent.

This, we think, will explain, in part, why others of the ancient nations, the Arabs and Persians, rich as they were in every species of literature, had no theatre; they were monotheists.

But there is the department of comedy, of a lighter sort, which does not converse with serious subjects, or necessarily include reference to Deity; why do we find no trace of this among the Jews? We may remember, that all festivals, in very ancient time, of every description, the grave and the gay, the penitential and the jubilant, had a religious design, and were suggested by a religious feeling. We think the peculiar cast of the Judaic faith would hardly embody itself in such a mode of expression. Moreover, tragedy was the parent of comedy,—and since the Jews had not the first, we should hardly expect them to produce the last. It is not difficult to perceive how the Greeks could convert their goat to dramatic, or even to comic purposes; but the Jews could not deal so with theirs.

We approach another observation, that there is no comedy in the Bible. There is tragedy there, —not in the sense in which we have just denied that the Jews had tragedy, but in the obvious sense of tragic elements, tragic scenes, tragic feelings. In the same sense, we say, there are no comic elements, or scenes, or feelings. There is that in the Bible to make you weep, but nothing to move you to

laughter. Why is this? Are there not smiles as well as tears in life? Have we not a deep, joyous nature, as well as aspiration, reverence, awe? Is there not a free-and-easy side of existence, as well as vexation and sorrow? We assent that these things are so.

But comedy implies ridicule, sharp, corroding ridicule. The comedy of the Greeks ridiculed everything,—persons, characters, opinions, customs, and sometimes philosophy and religion. Comedy became, therefore, a sort of consecrated slander, lyric spite, aesthetical buffoonery. Comedy makes you laugh at somebody's expense; it brings multitudes together to see it inflict death on some reputation; it assails private feeling with all the publicity and powers of the stage.

Now we doubt if the Jewish faith or taste would tolerate this. The Jews were commanded to love their neighbor. We grant, their idea of neighbor was excessively narrow and partial; but still it was their neighbor. They were commanded not to bear false witness against their neighbor, and he was pronounced accursed who should smite his neighbor secretly. It might appear that comedy would violate each of these statutes. But the Jews had their delights, their indulgences, their transports, notwithstanding the imperfection of their benevolence, the meagreness of their truth, and the cumbersomeness of their ceremonials. The Feast of Tabernacles, for instance, was liberal and happy, bright and smiling; it was the enthusiasm of pastime, the psalm of delectableness. They did not laugh at the exposure of another's foibles, but out of their own merry hearts.

Will it be said, the Bible is not true to Nature, if it does not represent the comical side of life, as well as Shakspeare does? We think the comical parts of Shakspeare, his extreme comical parts, are rather an exaggeration of individual qualities than a fair portraiture of the whole species. There is no Falstaff in the Bible, yet the qualities of Falstaff exist in the Bible and in Nature, but in combination, and this combination modifies their aspect and effect.

There is laughter in the Bible, but it is not uttered to make you laugh. There are also events recorded, which, at the time, may have produced effects analogous to comedy. The approach of the Gibeonites to the camp of Israel in their mock-beggarly costume might be mentioned. Shimei's cursing David has always seemed to us to border on the ludicrous.

But to leave these matters and return to the general thread of thought. Dramas have been formed on the Bible. We hardly need name "Paradise Lost," or "Samson Agonistes," or the "Cain" of Byron, the "Hadad" of Hillhouse, or Mrs. More's "David and Goliah." "Pilgrim's Progress" has a Scriptural basis.

Moreover, if we may trust the best critics, certain portions of the sacred volume are conceived in a dramatic spirit, and are propounded to a dramatic interpretation. These are the Book of Job, the Song of Solomon, and, possibly, the Apocalypse of St. John. If we were disposed to contend for this view, we need but mention such authorities as Calmet, Carpzov, Bishops Warburton, Percy, Lowth, Bossuet.

The Book of Job has a prose prologue and epilogue, the intermediate portions being poetic dialogue. The characters are discriminated and well supported. It does not preserve the unities of Aristotle, which, indeed, are found neither in the Bible nor in Nature,—which Shakspeare neglects, and which are to be met with only in the crystalline artificialness of the French stage. "It has no plot, not even of the simplest kind," says Dr. Lowth. It has a plot,—not an external and visible one, but an internal and spiritual one; its incidents are its feelings, its progress is the successive conditions of mind, and it terminates with the triumph of virtue. If it be not a record of actual conversation, it is an embodiment of a most wonderful ideality. The eternity of God, the grandeur of Nature, the profundity of the soul, move in silent panorama before you. The great and agitating problems of human existence are depicted with astonishing energy and precision, and marvellous is the conduct of the piece to us who behold it as a painting away back on the dark canvas of antiquity.

We said the Jews had no drama, no theatre, because they would not introduce the Divinity upon the stage. Yet God appears speaking in the Book of Job, not bodily, but ideally, and herein is all difference. This drama addresses the imagination, not the eye. The Greeks brought their divinities

into sight, stood them on the stage,—or clothed a man with an enormous mask, and raised him on a pedestal, giving him also corresponding apparel, to represent their god. The Hebrew stage, if we may share the ordinary indulgence of language in using that term, with an awe and delicacy suitable to the dignity of the subject, permits the Divinity to speak, but does not presume to employ his person; the majesty of Infinitude utters itself, but no robe-maker undertakes to dress it for the occasion. In the present instance, how exalted, how inspiring, is the appearance of God! how free from offensive diminution and costumal familiarity! "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said." Dim indeed is the representation, but very distinct is the impression. The phenomenon conforms to the purity of feeling, not to the grossness of sense. Devotion is kindled by the sublime impalpableness; no applause is enforced by appropriate acting. The Greeks, would have played the Book of Job,—the Jews were contented to read it.

And here we might remark a distinction between dramatic reading and dramatic seeing; and in support of our theory we can call to aid so good an authority as Charles Lamb. "I cannot help being of opinion," says this essayist, "that the plays of Shakspeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever."

How are the love dialogues of Romeo and Juliet, by the inherent fault of stage representation, sullied and turned from their very nature by being exposed to a large assembly! How can the profound sorrows of Hamlet be depicted by a gesticulating actor? So, to see Lear acted, to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm in which he goes out is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear. In the acted Othello, the black visage of the Moor is obtruded upon you; in the written Othello, his color disappears in his mind. When Hamlet compares the two pictures of Gertrude's first and second husband, who wants to see the pictures? But in the acting, a miniature must be lugged out. "The truth is," he adds, "the characters of Shakspeare are more the objects of meditation than of interest or curiosity as to their actions."

All this applies with force to what we have been saying. The Jews, in respect of their dramatic culture, seem more like one who enjoys Shakspeare in the closet; the Greeks, like those who are tolled off to the theatre to see him acted. The Greeks would have contrived a pair of bellows to represent the whirlwind; mystic, vast, inaudible, it passes before the imagination of the Jew, and its office is done. The Jew would be shocked to see his God in a human form; such a thing pleased the Greek. The source of the difference is to be sought in the theology of the two nations. The theological development of the Jews was very complete,—that of the Greeks unfinished.

Yet the Jews were very deficient in art, and the Greeks perfect; both failed in humanity. The Greeks had more ideality than the Jews; but their ideality was very intense; it was continually, so to speak, running aground; it must see its conceptions embodied; and more,—when they were embodied, Pygmalion-like, it must seek to imbue them with motion and sensibility. The conception of the Jews was more vague, perhaps, but equally affecting; they were satisfied with carrying in their minds the faint outline of the sublime, without seeking to chisel it into dimension and tangibility. They cherished in their bosoms their sacred ideal, and worshipped from far the greatness of the majesty that shaded their imaginations. Hence we look to Athens for art, to Palestine for ethics; the one produces rhetoricians,—the other, prophets.

So, we see, the theologico-dramatic forms of the two nations—and there were no other—are different. The one pleases the prurient eye,—the other gratifies the longing soul; the one amuses,—the other inspires; the one is a hollow pageant of divine things,—the other is a glad, solemn intimation from the unutterable heart of the universe.

The Song of Solomon, that stumbling-block of criticism and pill of faith, a recent writer regards as a parable in the form of a drama, in which the bride is considered as representing true religion, the royal lover as the Jewish people, and the younger sister as the Gospel dispensation. But it is evidently

conceived in a very different spirit from the Book of Job or the Psalms of David, and its theological character is so obscured by other associations as to lead many to inquire whether an enlightened religious sensibility dictated it.

We cannot dismiss this part of our subject without allusion to a species of drama that prevailed in the Middle Ages, called Mysteries, or Moralities. These were a sort of scenical illustration of the Sacred Scripture, and the subjects were events taken sometimes from the New Testament and sometimes from the Old. It is said they were designed to supply the place of the Greek and Roman theatre, which had been banished from the Church. The plays were written and performed by the clergy. They seem to have first been employed to wile away the dulness of the cloister, but were very soon introduced to the public. Adam and Eve in Paradise, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection were theatrized. The effect could hardly be salutary. The different persons of the Trinity appeared on the stage; on one side of the scene stretched the yawning throat of an immense wooden dragon; masked devils ran howling in and out.

"In the year 1437,"—we follow the literal history, as we find it quoted in D'Israeli,—"when the Bishop of Metz caused the Mystery of the Passion to be represented near that city, God was an old gentleman, a curate of the place, and who was very near expiring on the cross, had he not been timely assisted. He was so enfeebled that another priest finished his part. At the same time this curate undertook to perform the Resurrection, which being a less difficult task, he did it admirably well. Another priest, personating Judas, had like to have been stifled while he hung on the tree, for his neck slipped. This being at length luckily perceived, he was cut down, and recovered." In another instance, a man who assumed the Supreme Being becoming nearly suffocated by the paint applied to his face, it was wisely announced that for the future the Deity should be covered by a cloud. These plays, carried about the country, taken up by the baser sort of people, descended through all degrees of farce to obscenity, and, in England, becoming entangled in politics, at length disappeared. It is said they linger in Italy, and are annually reproduced in Spain.

The Bible is incapable of representation. For a man to act the Supreme Being would be as revolting in idea as profane in practice. One may in words portray the divine character, give utterance to the divine will. This every preacher does. But to what is the effect owing? Not to proprieties of attitude or arrangement of muscle, but to the spirit of the man magnified and flooding with the great theme, and to the thought of God that surrounds and subdues all; in other words, the imagination is addressed, not the sight,—the sentiments and affections are engaged, not the senses. As Lamb says of the Lear of Shakspeare, it cannot be acted; so, with greater force, we may say of the Bible, it cannot be acted. When we read or hear of the Passion of the Saviour, it is the thought, the emotion, burning and seething within it, at which by invisible contact our own thought and emotion catch fire; and the capabilities of impersonation and manufacture are mocked by such a subject.

But the Bible abounds in dramatic situation, action, and feeling. This has already been intimated; it only remains that we indicate some examples. The history of David fulfils all the demands of dramatic composition. It has the severe grandeur of Aeschylus, the moving tenderness of Euripides, and the individual fidelity of Shakspeare. Could this last-named writer, who, while he counterfeited Nature with such success, was equally commended for his historical integrity,—could Shakspeare have performed that service on this history, which Milton, More, and others have undertaken on other portions of the sacred volume,—could he have digested it into a regular dramatic form,—he would have accomplished a work of rare interest. It would include the characters of Samuel and Saul; it would describe the magnanimous Jonathan and the rebellious Absalom; Nathan, Nabal, Goliah, Shimei, would impart their respective features; it would be enriched with all that is beautiful in woman's love or enduring in parental affection. It is full of incident, and full of pathos. It verges towards the terrible, it is shaken with the passionate, it rises into the heroic. Pursued in the true spirit of Jewish theology, the awful presence of God would overhang and pervade it, while the agency of his providence should attend on the evolutions of events.

There is one effect which, in the present arrangement of the canon, is entirely lost to view, and which could be revived only by the synchronizing of the Psalms with their proper epochs. For instance, the eighth Psalm is referable to the youth of David, when he was yet leading a shepherd life. The dramatic form of his history would detach this from its present place, and insert it amid the occasions and in the years to which it belongs. What a scene we should then have! The youthful David, ruddy he was, and, withal, of a beautiful countenance, (marginal reading, fair of eyes,) and goodly to look to; and he was a cunning player on the harp. There is the glow of poetic enthusiasm in his eyes, and the fervor of religious feeling in all his moods; as he tends his flock amid the quietness and beauty of his native hills, he joins to the aspirations of his soul the melodies of music. So the night overtakes him, the labors of the day are past, his meditations withdraw him from the society of men, he is alone with Nature and with God;—at such a moment the spirit of composition and utterance is upon him, and he hymns himself in those lofty and touching stanzas,—

"O Jehovah, our Lord,
How excellent is thy name in all the earth!
When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars which thou hast ordained,
What is man that thou art mindful of him,
And the son of man that thou carest for him?
Yet thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,
Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor;
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hand,
Thou hast put all things under his feet,—
All sheep and oxen,
Yea, and the beasts of the forest,
The birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea,
And whatsoever passes through the deep.
O Jehovah, our Lord,
How excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

Again, the fifty-seventh Psalm is assigned, in respect of place, to the cave of En-gedi, into which David fled from the vengeance of Saul. Here, surrounded by lofty rocks, whose promontories screen a wide extent of vale, he breaks forth,—

"Have pity upon me, O God, have pity upon me,
For in thee doth my soul seek refuge!
Yea, in the shadow of thy wings do I take shelter,
Until these calamities be overpast!"

Dramatically touched, and disposed according to the natural unities of the subject, these sublime and affecting songs would appear on their motive occasions, and be surrounded by their actual accompaniments.

The present effect may be compared to that which would be felt, if we should detach the songs of the artificial drama from their original impulse and feeling, (for instance, the willow dirge of Desdemona, and the fantastic moans of Ophelia,) and produce them in a parlor. Not but that these lyrics have a universal fitness, and a value which no time can change or circumstance diminish; but as we are looking at them simply in a dramatic view, we claim the right to suggest their dramatic force and pertinency. This effect, we might remark, is particularly and most truthfully regarded in the Lament of David over Saul and Jonathan. That monody would be shorn of its interest, if it were

inserted anywhere else. The Psalms are more impersonal and more strictly religious than that, and hence their universal application; only we say, we can easily conceive that the revival of them in the order of their history, and in all the purity of their native pathos, would render them more attractive.

In connection with what we would further observe of the Psalms of David, let us again call attention to the ancient chorus,—how it was a species of melodrama, how it sang its parts, and comprised distinct vocalists and musicians, who pursued the piece in alternate rejoinder. What we would observe is, that many of the Psalms were written for the chorus, and, so to speak, were performed by it. There are some of them which it is impossible to understand without attention to this dramatic method of rehearsal. Psalm cxviii., for instance, includes several speakers. Psalm xxiv. was composed on the occasion of the transfer of the ark to the tabernacle on Mount Zion. And David, we read, and all the house of Israel, brought up the ark with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. In the midst of the congregated nation, supported by a varied instrumental accompaniment, with the smoke of the well-fed altar surging into the skies, the chorus took up the song which had been prepared to their hand,—one group calling out, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?"—the other pealing their answer, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." Meanwhile, they dance before the Lord,—that is, we suppose, preserving with their feet the unities of the music.

It was during a melodrama like this, in the midst of its exciting grandeur and all-pervading transport, executed at the Feast of Tabernacles, in the open area of the Temple, when the Jews were wont to pour upon the altar water taken from the pool of Siloam, chanting at the same time the twelfth chapter of Isaiah, and one division of the chorus had just sung the words,—

"With joy we draw water from the wells of salvation,"

and before the other had replied,—it was at this moment, that Christ, as Dr. Furness very reasonably conjectures, took up the response in his own person, and overwhelmed attention by that memorable declaration, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink; and from within him shall flow rivers of living water."

It is what we may term the dramatic proprieties that give to many of the Psalms, in the language of a recent commentator, "a greater degree of fitness, spirit, and grandeur"; and they impart to the history of David a certain decorousness of illustration and perspicuity of feature which it would not otherwise possess. They would produce upon it the same result as is achieved by the sister arts on this and other portions of the sacred volume, without marring the text or doing violence to truth. Not, let us repeat, that the Bible can be theatrized. Neither church nor playhouse can revive the forms of Judaism, without recalling its lost spirit. And that must be a bold hand, indeed, that shall undertake to mend again the shivered vail of the Temple, or collect from its ruins a ritual which He that was greater than Solomon typically denounced in foretelling the overthrow of that gorgeous pile. The Bible, as to its important verities and solemn doctrine, is transparent to the imagination and affections, and does not require the mediation of dumb show or scenic travesty.

It is not difficult to trace many familiar dramatic resemblances in the Old Testament. Shakspeare, who was certainly well read in the Bible and frequently quotes it, in the composition of Lear may have had David and Absalom in mind; the feigned madness of Hamlet has its prototype in that of David; Macbeth and the Weird Sisters have many traits in common with Saul and the Witch of Endor. Jezebel is certainly a suggestive study for Lady Macbeth. The whole story has its key in that verse where we read, "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, *whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up*." As in the play, so in this Scripture, we have the unrestrained and ferocious ambition of the wife conspiring with the equally cruel, but less hardy ambition of the husband. When Macbeth had murdered sleep, when he could not screw his courage to the sticking-point, when his purpose looked green and pale, his wife stings him with taunts, scathes him with sarcasm, and by her own energy of intellect and storm of will arouses him to action. So Ahab came in heavy and displeased, and laid him down on his bed, and turned away his face, and so his wife inflames him with the sharpness of her rebuke. "Why art thou sad?" she asks. "Dost thou

now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, eat bread, and be merry!" The lust of regal and conjugal pride, intermixed, works in both. Jezebel, whose husband was a king, would crown him with kingly deeds. Lady Macbeth, whose husband was a prince, would see him crowned a king. Jezebel would aggrandize empire, which her unlawful marriage thereto had jeoparded. Lady Macbeth will run the risk of an unlawful marriage with empire, if she may thereby aggrandize it. Jezebel is insensible to patriotic feelings,—Lady Macbeth to civil and hospitable duties. The Zidonian woman braves the vengeance of Jehovah,—the Scotch woman dares the Powers of Darkness; the one is incited by the oracles of Baal,—the other by the predictions of witches. Lady Macbeth has more intellectual force, —Jezebel more moral decision; Lady Macbeth exhibits great imagination,—Jezebel a stronger will. As the character of Lady Macbeth is said to be relieved by the affection she shows for her husband, so is that of Jezebel by her tenderness for Ahab. The grandness of the audacity with which Jezebel sends after the prophet Elisha, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time," has its counterpart in the lofty terror of the invocation which Lady Macbeth makes to the "spirits that wait on mortal thoughts,"—

> "Fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
> Stop up the access and the passage of remorse!
> . . . . Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, ye murdering ministers!"

But the last moments of these excessive characters are singularly contrasted. Jezebel scoffs at approaching retribution, and, shining with paint and dripping with jewels, is pitched to the dogs; Lady Macbeth goes like a coward to her grave, and, curdled with remorse, receives the stroke of doom.

If Shakspeare and the Old Testament are a just manifestation of human nature, the New is so different, its representation would seem to be almost fanciful or fallacious; or if the latter be accepted, the former would seem to be discarded. But both are faithful to the different ages and phases of man. The one is a dispensation of force,—the other of love; the one could make nothing perfect,—but the bringing in of a better covenant makes all things perfect. Through the tempest and storm, the brutality and lust of the Greek tragedians, and even of the barbarous times on which Shakspeare builds many of his plays, through the night of Judaical back-slidings, idolatry, and carnal commandments, we patiently wait, and gladly hail the morning of the Sun of Righteousness. The New Testament is a green, calm, island, in this heaving, fearful ocean of dramatic interest. How delightful is everything there, and how elevated! how glad, and how solemn! how energetic, and how tranquil! What characters, what incident, what feeling! Yet how different! So different, indeed, from what elsewhere appears, that we are compelled to ask, Can this be that same old humanity whose passions, they tell us, are alike in all ages, and the emphatic turbulence of which constitutes so large a portion of history?

But how shall we describe what is before us? The events open, if we may draw a term from our subject, with a prologue spoken by angels,—

"Peace on earth, and good-will towards men."

There had been Jezebels and Lady Macbeths enough; the memory of David still smelt of blood; the Roman eagles were gorging their beaks on human flesh; and the Samaritan everywhere felt the gnawing, shuddering sense of hatred and scorn. No chorus appears answering to chorus, praising the god of battles, or exulting in the achievements of arms; but the sympathies of Him who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities answer to the wants and woes of the race, and every thoughtful mind ecstatically encores. The inexorable Fate of the Greeks does not appear, but a good Providence interferes, and Heaven smiles graciously upon the scene. There is passion, indeed, grief and sorrow, sin and suffering,—but the tempest-stiller is here, who breathes tranquillity upon the waters, and pours serenity into the turbid deep. The Niobe of humanity, stiff and speechless, with her enmarbled

children, that used sometimes to be introduced on the Athenian stage for purposes of terror or pity, is here restored to life, and she renders thanks for her deliverance and participates in the general joy to which the piece gives birth. No murderers of the prophets are hewn in pieces before the Lord; but from the agonies of the cross and the depths of a preternatural darkness, the tender cry is heard, on behalf of the murderers of the Son of God, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" No Alcestis is exhibited, doomed to destruction to save the life of her husband,—but One appears, moving cheerfully, voluntarily, forwards, to what may be termed the funeral pile of the world, from which, phoenix-like, he rises, and gloriously ascends, drawing after him the hearts, the love, the worship of millions of spectators. The key of the whole piece is Redemption, the spirit that actuates is Love. The chief actors, indeed, are Christ and Man; but innumerable subsidiary personages are the Charities. The elements of a spiritualized existence act their part. Humanity is not changed in its substance, but in its tendencies; the sensibilities exist, but under a divine culture. Stephen is as heroic as Agamemnon, Mary as energetic as Medea. Little children are no longer dashed in pieces, —they are embraced and blessed.

But let us select for attention, and for a conclusion to these remarks, a particular scene. It shall be from Luke. This evangelist has been fabled a painter, and in the apotheosis of the old Church he was made the tutelar patron of that class of artists. If the individuality of his conceptions, the skill of his groupings, and the graphicness gave rise to such an idea, it would seem to have its foundation as well in Nature as in superstition. Matthew has more detail, more thought; Luke is more picturesque, more descriptive. John has more deep feeling; Luke more action, more life. The Annunciation, the Widow of Nain, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the incident to which we shall presently advert, are found in Luke alone.

The incident in question is the dining of Christ at the house of Simon the Pharisee, and, while they were reclining at meat, the entrance of a woman which was a sinner, who bathes the feet of Jesus with tears, and wipes them with the hair of her head. The place is the city of Nain; the hour noon. The *dramatis personae* are three,—Jesus, Simon, and the Woman,—and, if we choose to add them, the other guests, who are silent spectators of what transpires.

Let, us consider, first, the Woman. She "was a sinner." This is all, in fact, that we know of her; but this is enough. The term "sinner," in this instance, as in many others, does not refer to the general apostasy in Adam; it is distinctive of race and habit. She was probably of heathen extraction, as she was certainly of a dissolute life. The poetry of sin and shame calls her the Magdalen, and there may be a convenience in permitting this name to stand. The depth of her depravity Christ clearly intimates in his allusion to the debtor who owed five hundred pence, and the language of Simon teaches that the infamy of her life was well understood among the inhabitants of the city. If a foreigner, she had probably been brought into the country by the Roman soldiers and deserted. If a native, she had fallen beneath the ban of respectability, and was an outcast alike from hope and from good society. She was condemned to wear a dress different from that of other people; she was liable at any moment to be stoned for her conduct; she was one whom it was a ritual impurity to touch. She was wretched beyond measure; but while so corrupt, she was not utterly hardened. Incapable of virtue, she was not incapable of gratitude. Weltering in grossness, she could still be touched by the sight of purity. Plunged into extremest vice, she retained the damning horror of her situation. If she had ever striven to recover her lost position, there were none to assist her; the bigotry of patriotism rejected her for her birth,—the scrupulousness of modesty, for her history. The night, that consecrated so many homes and gathered together so many families in innocence and repose, was to her blacker than its own blackness in misery and turpitude; the morning, that radiated gladness over the face of the world, revealed the extent and exaggerated the sense of her own degradation. But the vision of Jesus had alighted upon her; she had seen him speeding on his errands of mercy; she hung about the crowd that followed his steps; his tender look of pity may have sometimes gleamed into her soul. Stricken, smitten, confounded, her yearnings for peace gush forth afresh. It was as if Hell, moved by contrition,

had given up its prey,—as if Remorse, tired of its gnawing, felt within itself the stimulus of hope. But how shall she see Jesus? Wherewithal shall she approach him? She has "nothing to pay." She has tears enough, and sorrows enough,—but these are derided by the vain, and suspected by the wise. She has an alabaster box of ointment, which, shut out as she is from honorable gain, must be the product and the concomitant of her guilt. But with these she must go. We see her threading her lonely way through the streets, learning by hints, since she would not dare to learn by questions, where Jesus is, and stops before the vestibule of the elegant mansion of Simon the Pharisee.

Who is Simon the Pharisee? Not necessarily a bad man. We associate whatever is odious in hypocrisy or base in craft with the name Pharisee, while really it was the most distinguished title among the Jews. Many of the Pharisees were hypocrites; not all of them. The name is significant of profession, not of character. He could not have been an unprincipled, villanous man, or he would never have tendered to Jesus the hospitalities of his house. Indeed, Christ allows him, in the sense of moral indebtedness, to owe but fifty pence. He was probably a rich man, which might appear from the generous entertainment he made. He was a respectable man. The sect to which he belonged was the most celebrated and influential among the Jews; and when not debased by positive crime, a Pharisee was always esteemed for his learning and his piety. He had some interest in Christ, either in his mission or his character,—an interest beyond mere curiosity, or he would not have invited him to dine with him. He betrays a sincere friendliness, also, in his apprehension lest Christ should suffer any religious contamination.

The third person in the scene is Christ, who, to speak of him not as theology has interpreted him to us, but as he appeared to the eyes of his contemporaries, was the reputed son of Joseph and Mary, the Bethlehemites; who by his words and deeds had attracted much attention and made some converts; now accused of breaking the Jewish Sabbath, now of plotting against the Roman sovereignty; one who in his own person had felt the full power of temptation, and who had been raised to the grandeur of a transfiguration; so tender he would not bruise the broken reed, so gentle his yoke was rest; raying out with compassion and love wherever he went; healing alike the pangs of grief and the languor of disease; whom some believed to be the Messiah, and others thought a prophet; whom the masses followed, and the priests feared;—this is the third member of the company.

The two last, with the other guests, are engaged at their meal, and in conversation. The door is darkened by a strange figure; all eyes are riveted on the apparition; the Magdalen enters, faded, distressed, with long dishevelled hair. She has no introduction; she says nothing; indeed, in all this remarkable scene she never speaks; her silence is as significant as it is profound. She goes behind the couch where Jesus, according to Oriental custom, is reclined. She drops at his feet; there her tears stream; there the speechless agony of her soul bursts. Observe the workings of the moment. See how those people are affected. Surprise on the part of Simon and his friends turns to scorn, and this shades into indignation. Jesus is calm, collected, and intently thoughtful. The woman is overwhelmed by her situation. The lip of Simon curls, his eye flashes with fire of outraged virtue. Jesus meets his gaze with equal fire, but it is all of pure heavenly feeling. Simon moves to have the vagabond expelled; Christ interrupts the attempt. But the honor of the house is insulted. Yes, but the undying interests of the soul are at stake. But the breath of the woman is ritual poison, and her touch will bring down the curses of the law. But the look of Christ indicates that depth of spirituality before which the institutions of Moses flee away as chaff before the wind. Simon has some esteem for Jesus, and in this juncture his sensations take a turn of pity, spiced, perhaps, with a little contempt, and he says with himself,—"Surely, this man cannot be a prophet, as is pretended, or he would know who and what sort of woman it is that touches him; for she is a sinner; she is unclean and reprobate."

"Simon!" says Jesus, with a tone that pierced to the worthy host's heart, and arrested the force of his pious alarm,—"Simon!"

"Sir, say on," is the reply of the Pharisee, who is awed by this appeal into an humble listener.

Whereupon Jesus relates the story of the two debtors, and, with irresistible strength of illustration and delicacy of application, breaks the prejudice and wins the composure of the Jew. "If, then," he continues, "he loves much to whom much is forgiven, what shall we say of one who loves so much?"

"See," he goes on, pointing to the woman, "See this woman,—this wretch. I entered thy house; thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She kisses my feet; she anoints them with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much."

This scene, however inadequately it may be set forth, contains all that is sublime in tragedy, terrible in guilt, or intense in pathos. The woman represents humanity, or the soul of human nature; Simon, the world, or worldly wisdom; Christ, divinity, or the divine purposes of good to us ward. Simon is an incarnation of what St. Paul calls the beggarly elements; Christ, of spirituality; the woman, of sin. It is not the woman alone,—but in her there cluster upon the stage all want and woe, all calamity and disappointment, all shame and guilt. In Christ there come forward to meet her, love, hope, truth, light, salvation. In Simon are acted out doting conservatism, mean expediency, purblind calculation, carnal insensibility. Generosity in this scene is confronted with meanness, in the attempt to shelter misfortune. The woman is a tragedy herself, such as Aeschylus never dreamed of. The scourging Furies, dread Fate, and burning Hell unite in her, and, borne on by the new impulse of the new dispensation, they come towards the light, they ask for peace, they throng to the heaven that opens in Jesus. Simon embodies that vast array of influences that stand between humanity and its redemption. He is a very excellent, a very estimable man,—but he is not shocked at intemperance, he would not have slavery disturbed, he sees a necessity for war. Does Christ know who and what sort of a woman it is that touches him? Will he defile himself by such a contact? Can he expect to accomplish anything by familiarity with such matters? Why is he not satisfied with a good dinner? "Simon!" "Simon!"

The silence of the woman is wonderful, it is awful. What is most profound, most agitating, most intense cannot speak; words are too little for the greatness of feeling. So Job sat himself upon the ground seven days and seven nights, speechless. Not in this case, as is said of Schiller's Robbers, did the pent volcano find vent in power-words; not in strong and terrible accents was uttered the hoarded wrath of long centuries of misrule and oppression. The volcano, raging, aching, threw itself in silence into the arms of one who could soothe and allay it. The thunder is noisy and harmless. The lightning is silent,—and the lightning splits, kills, consumes. Humanity had muttered its thunder for ages. Its lightning, the condensed, fiery, fatal force of things, leaped from the blackness of sin, threaded with terrific glare the vision of man, and, in the person of the woman, fell hot and blasting at the feet of Jesus, who quenched its fire, and of that destructive bolt made a trophy of grace and a fair image of hope. She could not speak, and so she wept,—like the raw, chilling, hard atmosphere, which is relieved only by a shower of snow. How could she speak, guilty, remorseful wretch, without excuse, without extenuation? In the presence of divine virtue, at the tribunal of judgment, she could only weep, she could only love. But, blessed be Jesus, he could forgive her, he can forgive all. The woman departs in peace; Simon is satisfied; Jesus triumphs; we almost hear the applauses with which the ages and generations of earth greet the closing scene. From the serene celestial immensity that opens above the spot we can distinguish a voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him!"

We speak of these things dramatically, but, after all, they are the only great realities. Everything else is mimetic, phantasmal, tinkling. Deeply do the masters of the drama move us; but the Gospel cleaves, inworks, regenerates. In the theatre, the leading characters go off in death and despair, or with empty conceits and a forced frivolity; in the Gospel, tranquilly, grandly, they are dismissed to a serener life and a nobler probation. Who has not pitied the ravings of Lear and the agonies of Othello? The Gospel pities, but, by a magnificence of plot altogether its own, by preserving, if we may so say, the unities of heaven and earth, it also saves.

Of all common tragedy, we may exclaim, in the words of the old play,—

"How like a silent stream shaded with night,
And gliding softly, with our windy sighs,
Moves the whole frame of this solemnity!"

The Gospel moves by, as a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, from the throne of God and the Lamb; on its surface play the sunbeams of hope; in its valleys rise the trees of life, beneath the shadows of which the weary years of human passion repose, and from the leaves of the branches of which is exhaled to the passing breeze healing for the nations.

# THE RING FETTER

## A NEW ENGLAND TRAGEDY

There are long stretches in the course of the Connecticut River, where its tranquil current assumes the aspect of a lake, its sudden bends cut off the lovely reach of water, and its heavily wooded banks lie silent and green, undisturbed, except by the shriek of the passing steamer, casting golden-green reflections into the stream at twilight, and shadows of deepest blackness, star-pierced, at remoter depths of night. Here, now and then, a stray gull from the sea sends a flying throb of white light across the mirror below, or the sweeping wings of a hawk paint their moth-like image on the blue surface, or a little flaw of wind shudders across the water in a black ripple; but except for these casual stirs of Nature, all is still, oppressive, and beautiful, as earth seems to the trance-sleeper on the brink of his grave.

In one of these reaches, though on either side the heavy woods sweep down to the shore and hang over it as if deliberating whether to plunge in, on the eastern bank there is a tiny meadow just behind the tree-fringe of the river, completely hedged in by the deep woods, and altogether hidden from any inland road; nor would the traveller on the river discover it, except for the chimney of a house that peers above the yellow willows and seems in that desolate seclusion as startling as a daylight ghost. But this dwelling was built and deserted and weather-beaten long before the date of our story. It had been erected and inhabited during the Revolution, by an old Tory, who, foreseeing the result of the war better than some of his contemporaries, and being unwilling to expose his person to the chances of battle or his effects to confiscation, maintained a strict neutrality, and a secret trade with both parties; thereby welcoming peace and independence, fully stocked with the dislike and suspicion of his neighbors, and a large quantity of Continental "fairy-money." So, when Abner Dimock died, all he had to leave to his only son was the red house on "Dimock's Meadow," and a ten-acre lot of woodland behind and around the green plateau where the house stood. These possessions he strictly entailed on his heirs forever, and nobody being sufficiently interested in its alienation to inquire into the State laws concerning the validity of such an entail, the house remained in the possession of the direct line, and in the year 18— belonged to another Abner Dimock, who kept tavern in Greenfield, a town of Western Massachusetts, and, like his father and grandfather before him, had one only son. In the mean time, the old house in Haddam township had fallen into a ruinous condition, and, as the farm was very small, and unprofitable chestnut-woodland at that, the whole was leased to an old negro and his wife, who lived there in the most utter solitude, scratching the soil for a few beans and potatoes, and in the autumn gathering nuts, or in the spring roots for beer, with which Old Jake paddled up to Middletown, to bring home a return freight of salt pork and rum.

The town of Greenfield, small though it was, and at the very top of a high hill, was yet the county town, subject to annual incursions of lawyers, and such "thrilling incidents" as arise from the location of a jail and a court-room within the limits of any village. The scenery had a certain summer charm of utter quiet that did it good service with some healthy people of well-regulated and insensitive tastes. From Greenfield Hill one looked away over a wide stretch of rolling country; low hills, in long, desolate waves of pasturage and grain, relieved here and there by a mass of black woodland, or a red farm-house and barns clustered against a hill-side, just over a wooden spire in the shallow valley, about which were gathered a few white houses, giving signs of life thrice a day in tiny threads of smoke rising from their prim chimneys; and over all, the pallid skies of New England, where the sun wheeled his shorn beams from east to west as coldly as if no tropic seas mirrored his more fervid glow thousands of miles away, and the chilly moon beamed with irreproachable whiteness across the

round gray hills and the straggling pond, beloved of frogs and mud-turtles, that Greenfield held in honor under the name of Squam Lake.

Perhaps it was the scenery, perhaps the air, possibly the cheapness of the place as far as all the necessaries of life went, that tempted Judge Hyde to pitch his tent there, in the house his fathers had built long ago, instead of wearing his judicial honors publicly, in the city where he attained them; but, whatever the motive might be, certain it is that at the age of forty he married a delicate beauty from Baltimore, and came to live on Greenfield Hill, in the great white house with a gambrel roof and dormer windows, standing behind certain huge maples, where Major Hyde and Parson Hyde and Deacon Hyde had all lived before him.

A brief Northern summer bloomed gayly enough for Adelaide Howard Hyde when she made her bridal tour to her new home; and cold as she found the aspect of that house, with its formal mahogany chairs, high-backed, and carved in grim festoons and ovals of incessant repetition,—its penitential couch of a sofa, where only the iron spine of a Revolutionary heroine could have found rest,—its pinched, starved, and double-starched portraits of defunct Hydes, Puritanic to the very ends of toupet and periwig,—little Mrs. Hyde was deep enough in love with her tall and handsome husband to overlook the upholstery of a home he glorified, and to care little for comfort elsewhere, so long as she could nestle on his knee and rest her curly head against his shoulder. Besides, flowers grew, even in Greenfield; there were damask roses and old-fashioned lilies enough in the square garden to have furnished a whole century of poets with similes; and in the posy-bed under the front windows were tulips of Chinese awkwardness and splendor, beds of pinks spicy as all Arabia, blue hyacinths heavy with sweetness as well as bells, "pi'nies" rubicund and rank, hearts-ease clustered against the house, and sticky rose-acacias, pretty and impracticable, not to mention the grenadier files of hollyhocks that contended with fennel-bushes and scarlet-flowered beans for the precedence, and the hosts of wild flowers that bloomed by wood-edges and pond-shores wherever corn or potatoes spared a foot of soil for the lovely weeds. So in Judge Hyde's frequent absences, at court or conclave, hither and yon, (for the Judge was a political man,) it was his pretty wife's chief amusement, when her delicate fingers ached with embroidery, or her head spun with efforts to learn housekeeping from old Keery, the time-out-of-mind authority in the Hyde family, a bad-humored, good-tempered old maid,—it was, indeed, the little Southerner's only amusement,—to make the polish and mustiness of those dreary front-parlors gay and fragrant with flowers; and though Judge Hyde's sense of the ridiculous was not remarkably keen, it was too much to expect of him that he should do otherwise than laugh long and loud, when, suddenly returning from Taunton one summer day, he tracked his wife by snatches of song into the "company rooms," and found her on the floor, her hair about her ears, tying a thick garland of red peonies, intended to decorate the picture of the original Hyde, a dreary old fellow, in bands, and grasping a Bible in one wooden hand, while a distant view of Plymouth Bay and the Mayflower tried to convince the spectator that he was transported, among other antediluvians, by that Noah's ark, to the New World. On either hand hung the little Flora's great-grandmother-in-law, and her great-grandfather accordingly, Mrs. Mehitable and Parson Job Hyde, peering out, one from a bushy ornament of pink laurel-blossoms, and the other from an airy and delicate garland of the wanton sweet-pea, each stony pair of eyes seeming to glare with Medusan intent at this profaning of their state and dignity. "Isn't it charming, dear?" said the innocent little beauty, with a satisfaction half doubtful, as her husband's laugh went on.

But for every butterfly there comes an end to summer. The flowers dropped from the frames and died in the garden; a pitiless winter set in; and day after day the mittened and mufflered schoolboy, dragging his sled through drifts of heavy snow to school, eyed curiously the wan, wistful face of Judge Hyde's wife pressed up to the pane of the south window, its great restless eyes and shadowy hair bringing to mind some captive bird that pines and beats against the cage. Her husband absent from home long and often, full of affairs of "court and state,"—her delicate organization, that lost its flickering vitality by every exposure to cold,—her lonely days and nights,—the interminable sewing,

that now, for her own reasons, she would trust to no hands but her own,—conscious incapacity to be what all the women about her were, stirring, active, hardy housekeepers,—a vague sense of shame, and a great dread of the future,—her comfortless and motherless condition,—slowly, but surely, like frost, and wind, and rain, and snow, beat on this frail blossom, and it went with the rest. June roses were laid against her dark hair and in her fair hands, when she was carried to the lonely graveyard of Greenfield, where mulleins and asters, golden-rod, blackberry-vines, and stunted yellow-pines adorned the last sleep of the weary wife and mother; for she left behind her a week-old baby,—a girl,—wailing prophetically in the square bedroom where its mother died.

Judge Hyde did not marry again, and he named his baby Mehitable. She grew up as a half-orphaned child with an elderly and undemonstrative father would naturally grow,—shy, sensitive, timid, and extremely grave. Her dress, thanks to Aunt Keery and the minister's wife, (who looked after her for her mother's sake,) was always well provided and neat, but no way calculated to cultivate her taste or to gratify the beholder. A district school provided her with such education as it could give; and the library, that was her resort at all hours of the day, furthered her knowledge in a singular and varied way, since its lightest contents were histories of all kinds and sorts, unless one may call the English Classics lighter reading than Hume or Gibbon.

But at length the district-schoolma'am could teach Mehitable Hyde no more, and the Judge suddenly discovered that he had a pretty daughter of fourteen, ignorant enough to shock his sense of propriety, and delicate enough to make it useless to think of sending her away from home to be buffeted in a boarding-school. Nothing was left for him but to undertake her education himself; and having a theory that a thorough course of classics, both Greek and Latin, was the foundation of all knowledge, half a score of dusty grammars were brought from the garret, and for two hours every morning and afternoon little Miss Hitty worried her innocent soul over conjugations and declensions and particles, as perseveringly as any professor could have desired. But the dreadful part of the lessons to Hitty was the recitation after tea; no matter how well she knew every inflection of a verb, every termination of a noun, her father's cold, gray eye, fixed on her for an answer, dispelled all kinds of knowledge, and, for at least a week, every lesson ended in tears. However, there are alleviations to everything in life; and when the child was sent to the garret after her school-books, she discovered another set, more effectual teachers to her than Sallust or the "Graeca Minora," even the twelve volumes of "Sir Charles Grandison," and the fewer but no less absorbing tomes of "Clarissa Harlowe"; and every hour she could contrive not to be missed by Keery or her father was spent in that old garret, fragrant as it was with sheaves of all the herbs that grow in field or forest, poring over those old novels, that were her society, her friends, her world.

So two years passed by. Mehitable grew tall and learned, but knew little more of the outside world than ever; her father had learned to love her, and taught her to adore him; still shy and timid, the village offered no temptation to her, so far as society went; and Judge Hyde was beginning to feel that for his child's mental health some freer atmosphere was fast becoming necessary, when a relentless writ was served upon the Judge himself, and one that no man could evade; paralysis smote him, and the strong man lay prostrate,—became bedridden.

Now the question of life seemed settled for Hitty; her father admitted no nursing but hers. Month after month rolled away, and the numb grasp gradually loosed its hold on flesh and sense, but still Judge Hyde was bedridden. Year after year passed by, and no change for better or worse ensued. Hitty's life was spent between the two parlors and the kitchen; for the room her dead mother had so decorated was now furnished as a bedroom for her father's use; and her own possessions had been removed into the sitting-room next it, that, sleeping or waking, she might be within call. All the family portraits held a conclave in the other front-parlor, and its north and east windows were shut all the year, save on some sultry summer day when Keery flung them open to dispel damp and must, and the school-children stared in reverentially, and wondered why old Madam Hyde's eyes followed them as far as they could see. Visitors came now and then to the kitchen-door, and usurped Keery's flag-

bottomed chair, while they gossiped with her about village affairs; now and then a friendly spinster with a budget of good advice called Hitty away from her post, and, after an hour's vain effort to get any news worth retailing about the Judge from those pale lips, retired full of disappointed curiosity to tell how stiff that Mehitable Hyde was, and how hard it was to make her speak a word to one! Friends were what Hitty read of in the "Spectator," and longed to have; but she knew none of the Greenfield girls since she left school, and the only companion she had was Keery, rough as the east wind, but genuine and kind-hearted,—better at counsel than consolation, and no way adapted to fill the vacant place in Hitty's heart.

So the years wore away, and Miss Hyde's early beauty went with them. She had been a blooming, delicate girl,—the slight grace of a daisy in her figure, wild-rose tints on her fair cheek, and golden reflections in her light brown hair, that shone in its waves and curls like lost sunshine; but ten years of such service told their story plainly. When Hitty Hyde was twenty-six, her blue eyes were full of sorrow and patience, when the shy lids let their legend be read; the little mouth had become pale, and the corners drooped; her cheek, too, was tintless, though yet round; nothing but the beautiful hair lasted; even grace was gone, so long had she stooped over her father. Sometimes the unwakened heart within her dreamed, as a girl's heart will. Stately visions of Sir Charles Grandison bowing before her,—shuddering fascinations over the image of that dreadful Lovelace,—nothing more real haunted Hitty's imagination. She knew what she had to do in life,—that it was not to be a happy wife or mother, but to waste by a bedridden old man, the only creature on earth she loved as she could love. Light and air were denied the plant, but it grew in darkness,—blanched and unblooming, it is true, but still a growth upward, toward light.

Ten years more of monotonous patience, and Miss Hyde was thirty-six. Her hair had thinned, and was full of silver threads; a wrinkle invaded either cheek, and she was angular and bony; but something painfully sweet lingered in her face, and a certain childlike innocence of expression gave her the air of a nun; the world had never touched nor taught her.

But now Judge Hyde was dead; nineteen years of petulant, helpless, hopeless wretchedness were at last over, and all that his daughter cared to live for was gone; she was an orphan, without near relatives, without friends, old, and tired out. Do not despise me that I say "old," you plump and rosy ladies whose life is in its prime of joy and use at thirty-six. Age is not counted by years, nor calculated from one's birth; it is a fact of wear and work, altogether unconnected with the calendar. I have seen a girl of sixteen older than you are at forty. I have known others disgrace themselves at sixty-five by liking to play with children and eat sugar-plums!

One kind of youth still remained to Hitty Hyde,—the freshness of inexperience. Her soul was as guileless and as ignorant as a child's; and she was stranded on life, with a large fortune, like a helmless ship, heavily loaded, that breaks from its anchor, and drives headlong upon a reef.

Now it happened, that, within a year after Judge Hyde's death, Abner Dimock, the tavern-keeper's son, returned to Greenfield, after years of absence, a bold-faced, handsome man, well-dressed and "free-handed," as the Greenfield vernacular hath it. Nobody knew where Abner Dimock had spent the last fifteen years; neither did anybody know anything against him; yet he had no good reputation in Greenfield. Everybody looked wise and grave when his name was spoken, and no Greenfield girl cared to own him for an acquaintance. His father welcomed him home with more surprise than pleasure; and the whole household of the Greenfield Hotel, as Dimock's Inn was new-named, learned to get out of Abner Dimock's way, and obey his eye, as if he were more their master than his father.

Left quite alone, without occupation or amusement, Miss Hyde naturally grasped at anything that came in her way to do or to see to; the lawyer who had been executor of her father's will had settled the estate and gone back to his home, and Miss Hyde went with him, the first journey of her life, that she might select a monument for her father's grave. It was now near a year since Judge Hyde's death, and the monument was on its way from Boston; the elder Dimock monopolized the cartage of

freight as well as passengers to the next town, and to him Miss Hyde intrusted the care of the great granite pillar she had purchased; and it was for his father that Abner Dimock called on the young lady for directions as to the disposal of the tombstone just arrived. Hitty was in the garden; her white morning-dress shone among the roses, and the morning air had flushed her pale cheek; she looked fair and delicate and gracious; but her helpless ignorance of the world's ways and usages attracted the world-hardened man more than her face. He had not spent a *roué* life in a great city for nothing; he had lived enough with gentlemen, broken-down and lost, it is true, but well-bred, to be able to ape their manners; and the devil's instinct that such people possess warned him of Hitty Hyde's weakest points. So, too, he contrived to make that first errand lead to another, and still another,—to make the solitary woman depend on his help, and expect his coming; fifty thousand dollars, with no more incumbrance than such a woman, was worth scheming for, and the prey was easily snared.

It is not to be expected that any country village of two streets, much less Greenfield, could long remain ignorant of such a new and amazing phase as the devotion of any man to any woman therein; but, as nobody liked to interfere too soon in what might only be, after all, a mere business arrangement, Greenfield contented itself with using its eyes, its ears, and its tongues, with one exception to the latter organ's clatter, in favor of Hitty Hyde; *to* her no one dared as yet approach with gossip or advice.

In the mean time Hitty went on her way, all regardless of the seraphs at the gate. Abner Dimock was handsome, agreeable, gentlemanly to a certain lackered extent;—who had cared for Hitty, in all her life, enough to aid and counsel her as he had already done? At first she was half afraid of him; then she liked him; then he was "so good to me!" and then—she pitied him! for he told her, sitting on that hard old sofa, in the June twilight, how he had no mother, how he had been cast upon the charities of a cruel and evil world from his infancy; reminded her of the old red school-house where they had been to school together, and the tyranny of the big boys over him,—a little curly, motherless boy. So he enlarged upon his life; talked a mildly bitter misanthropy; informed Miss Hyde by gradual insinuations that she was an angel sent on earth to console and reform a poor sinner like him; and before the last September rose had droped, so far had Abner Dimock succeeded in his engineering, that his angel was astounded one night by the undeniably terrestrial visitation of an embrace and a respectfully fervid kiss.

Perhaps it would have been funny, perhaps pathetic, to analyze the mixed consternation and delight of Mehitable Hyde at such *bonâ-fide* evidence of a lover. Poor woman's heart!—altogether solitary and desolate,—starved of its youth and its joy,—given over to the chilly reign of patience and resignation,—afraid of life,—without strength, or hope, or pleasure,—and all at once Paradise dawns!—her cold, innocent life bursts into fiery and odorous bloom; she has found her fate, and its face is keen with splendor, like a young angel's. Poor, deluded, blessed, rapture-smitten woman!

Blame her as you will, indignant maidens of Greenfield, Miss Flint, and Miss Sharp, and Miss Skinner! You may have had ten lovers and twenty flirtations apiece, and refused half-a-dozen good matches for the best of reasons; you, no doubt, would have known better than to marry a man who was a villain from his very physiognomy; but my heart must needs grow tender toward Miss Hyde; a great joy is as pathetic as a sorrow. Did you never cry over a doting old man?

But when Mrs. Smith's son John, a youth of ten, saw, by the light of an incautious lamp that illuminated a part of the south parlor, a good-night kiss bestowed upon the departing Abner by Miss Hitty Hyde and absolutely returned by said Abner, and when John told his mother, and his mother revealed it to Miss Flint, Miss Flint to Miss Skinner, and so forth, and so on, till it reached the minister's wife, great was the uproar in Greenfield; and the Reverend Mrs. Perkins put on her gray bonnet and went over to remonstrate with Hitty on the spot.

Whether people will ever learn the uselessness of such efforts is yet a matter for prophecy. Miss Hyde heard all that was said, and replied very quietly, "I don't believe it." And as Mrs. Perkins had no tangible proofs of Abner Dimock's unfitness to marry Judge Hyde's daughter, the lady in question

got the better of her adviser, so far as any argument was concerned, and effectually put an end to remonstrance by declaring with extreme quiet and unblushing front,—

"I am going to marry him next week. Will you be so good as to notify Mr. Perkins?"

Mrs. Perkins held up both hands and cried. Words might have hardened Hitty; but what woman that was not half tigress ever withstood another woman's tears?

Hitty's heart melted directly; she sat down by Mrs. Perkins, and cried, too.

"Please, don't be vexed with me," sobbed she. "I love him, Mrs. Perkins, and I haven't got anybody else to love,—and—and—I never shall have. He's very good to love me,—I am so old and homely."

"Very good!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, in great wrath, "*good*! to marry Judge Hyde's daughter, and—fifty thousand dollars," Mrs. Perkins bit off. She would not put such thoughts into Hitty's head, since her marriage was inevitable.

"At any rate," sighed Hitty, on the breath of a long-drawn sob, "nobody else ever loved me, if I am Judge Hyde's daughter."

So Mrs. Perkins went away, and declared that things had gone too far to be prevented; and Abner Dimock came on her retreating steps, and Hitty forgot everything but that he loved her; and the next week they were married.

Here, by every law of custom, ought my weary pen to fall flat and refuse its office; for it is here that the fate of every heroine culminates. For what are women born but to be married? Old maids are excrescences in the social system,—disagreeable utilities,—persons who have failed to fulfil their destiny,—and of whom it should have been said, rather than of ghosts, that they are always in the wrong. But life, with pertinacious facts, is too apt to transcend custom and the usage of novel-writers; and though the one brings a woman's legal existence to an end when she merges her independence in that of a man, and the other curtails her historic existence at the same point, because the novelist's catechism hath for its preface this creed,—"The chief end of woman is to get married"; still, neither law nor novelists altogether displace this same persistent fact, and a woman lives, in all capacities of suffering and happiness, not only her wonted, but a double life, when legally and religiously she binds herself with bond and vow to another soul.

Happy would it have been for Hitty Hyde, if with the legal fiction had chimed the actual existent fact!—happy indeed for Abner Dimock's wife to have laid her new joy down at the altar, and been carried to sleep by her mother under the mulleins and golden-rods on Greenfield Hill! Scarce was the allotted period of rapture past half its term, scarce had she learned to phrase the tender words aloud that her heart beat and choked with, before Abner Dimock began to tire of his incumbrance, and to invent plans and excuses for absence; for he dared not openly declare as yet that he left his patient, innocent wife for such scenes of vice and reckless dissipation as she had not even dreamed could exist.

Yet for week after week he lingered away from Greenfield; even months rolled by, and, except for rare and brief visits home, Hitty saw no more of her husband than if he were not hers. She lapsed into her old solitude, varied only by the mutterings and grumblings of old Keery, who had lifted up her voice against Hitty's marriage with more noise and less effect than Mrs. Perkins, and, though she still staid by her old home and haunts, revenged herself on fate in general and her mistress in particular by a continual course of sulking, all the time hiding under this general quarrel with life a heart that ached with the purest tenderness and pity. So some people are made, like chestnuts; one gets so scratched and wounded in the mere attempt to get at the kernel within, that it becomes matter of question whether one does not suffer less from wanting their affection than from trying to obtain it. Yet Hitty Dimock had too little love given her to throw away even Keery's habit of kindness to her, and bore with her snaps and snarls as meekly as a saint,—sustained, it is true, by a hope that now began to solace and to occupy her, and to raise in her oppressed soul some glimmer of a bright possibility, a faint expectation that she might yet regain her husband's love, a passion which she began in her secret heart to fear had found its limit and died out. Still, Hitty, out of her meek,

self-distrusting spirit, never blamed Abner Dimock for his absence or his coldness; rather, with the divine unselfishness that such women manifest, did she blame herself for having linked his handsome and athletic prime with her faded age, and struggle daily with the morbid conscience that accused her of having forgotten his best good in the indulgence of her own selfish ends of happiness. She still thought, "He is so good to me!" still idealized the villain to a hero, and, like her kind, predestined to be the prey and the accusing angel of such men, prayed for and adored her husband as if he had been the best and tenderest of gentlemen. Providence has its mysteries; but if there be one that taxes faith and staggers patience more than another, it is the long misery that makes a good woman cringe and writhe and agonize in silence under the utter rule and life-long sovereignty of a bad man. Perhaps such women do not suffer as we fancy; for after much trial every woman learns that it is possible to love where neither respect nor admiration can find foothold,—that it even becomes necessary to love some men, as the angels love us all, from an untroubled height of pity and tenderness, that, while it sees and condemns the sin and folly and uncleanness of its object, yet broods over it with an all-shielding devotion, laboring and beseeching and waiting for its regeneration, upheld above the depths of suffering and regret by the immortal power of a love so fervent, so pure, so self-forgetting, that it will be a millstone about the necks that disregard its tender clasping now, to sink them into a bottomless abyss in the day of the Lord.

Now had one long and not unhappy autumn, a lingering winter, a desolate spring, a weary summer, passed away, and from an all-unconscious and protracted wrestling with death Hitty Dimock awoke to find her hope fulfilled,—a fair baby nestled on her arm, and her husband, not all-insensible, smiling beside her.

It is true, that, had she died then, Abner Dimock would have regretted her death; for, by certain provisions of her father's will, in case of her death, the real estate, otherwise at her own disposal, became a trust for her child or children, and such a contingency ill suited Mr. Dimock's plans. So long as Hitty held a rood of land or a coin of silver at her own disposal, it was also at his; but trustees are not women, happily for the world at large, and the contemplation of that fact brought Hitty Hyde's husband into a state of mind well fitted to give him real joy at her recovery.

So, for a little while, the sun shone on this bare New England hill-side, into this grim old house. Care and kindness were lavished on the delicate woman, who would scarce have needed either in her present delight; every luxury that could add to her slowly increasing strength, every attention that could quiet her fluttering and unstrung nerves, was showered on her, and for a time her brightest hopes seemed all to have found fruition.

As she recovered and was restored to strength, of course these cares ceased. But now the new instincts of motherhood absorbed her, and, brooding over the rosy child that was her own, caressing its waking, or hanging above its sleep, she scarce noted that her husband's absences from home grew more and more frequent, that strange visitors asked for him, that he came home at midnight oftener than at dusk. Nor was it till her child was near a year old that Hitty discovered her husband's old and rewakened propensity,—that Abner Dimock came home drunk,—not drunk as many men are, foolish and helpless, mere beasts of the field, who know nothing and care for nothing but the filling of their insatiable appetite;—this man's nature was too hard, too iron in its moulding, to give way to temporary imbecility; liquor made him savage, fierce, brutal, excited his fiendish temper to its height, nerved his muscular system, inflamed his brain, and gave him the aspect of a devil; and in such guise he entered his wife's peaceful Eden, where she brooded and cooed over her child's slumbers, with one gripe of his hard hand lifted her from her chair, kicked the cradle before him, and, with an awful though muttered oath, thrust mother and child into the entry, locked the door upon them, and fell upon the bed to sleep away his carouse.

Here was an undeniable fact before Hitty Dimock, one she could no way evade or gloss over; no gradual lesson, no shadow of foreboding, preluded the revelation; her husband was unmistakably, savagely drunk. She did not sit down and cry;—drearily she gathered her baby in her arms, hushed

it to sleep with kisses, passed down into the kitchen, woke up the brands of the ash-hidden fire to a flame, laid on more wood, and, dragging old Keery's rush-bottomed chair in front of the blaze, held her baby in her arms till morning broke, careless of anything without or within but her child's sleep and her husband's drunkenness. Long and sadly in that desolate night did she revolve this new misery in her mind; the fact was face to face, and must be provided for,—but how to do it? What could she do, poor weak woman, even to conceal this disgrace, much more to check it? Long since she had discovered that between her and her husband there was no community of tastes or interests; he never talked to her, he never read to her, she did not know that he read at all; the garden he disliked as a useless trouble; he would not drive, except such a gay horse that Hitty dared not risk her neck behind it, and felt a shudder of fear assail her whenever his gig left the door; neither did he care for his child. Nothing at home could keep him from his pursuits; that she well knew; and, hopeful as she tried to be, the future spread out far away in misty horror and dread. What might not, become of her boy, with such a father's influence? was her first thought;—nay, who could tell but in some fury of drink he might kill or maim him? A chill of horror crept over Hitty at the thought,—and then, what had not she to dread? Oh, for some loophole of escape, some way to fly, some refuge for her baby's innocent life! No,—no,—no! She was his wife; she had married him; she had vowed to love and honor and obey,—vow of fearful import now, though uttered in all pureness and truth, as to a man who owned her whole heart! Love him!—that was not the dread; love was as much her life as her breath was; she knew no interval of loving for the brute fiend who mocked her with the name of husband; no change or chance could alienate her divine tenderness,—even as the pitiful blue sky above hangs stainless over reeking battle-fields and pest-smitten cities, piercing with its sad and holy star-eyes down into the hellish orgies of men, untouched and unchanged by just or unjust, forever shining and forever pure. But honor him! could that be done? What respect or trust was it possible to keep for a self-degraded man like that? And where honor goes down, obedience is sucked into the vortex, and the wreck flies far over the lonely sea, historic and prophetic to ship and shore.

No! there was nothing to do! her vow was taken, past the power of man to break; nothing now remained but endurance. Perhaps another woman, with a strong will and vivid intellect, might have set herself to work, backed by that very vow that defied poor Hitty, and, by sheer resolution, have dragged her husband up from the gulf and saved him, though as by fire; or a more buoyant and younger wife might have passed it by as a first offence, hopeful of its being also the only one. But an instinctive knowledge of the man bereft Hitty of any such hope; she knew it was not the first time; from his own revelations and penitent confessions while she was yet free, she knew he had sinned as well as suffered, and the past augured the future. Nothing was left her, she could not escape, she must shut her eyes and her mouth, and only keep out of his way as far as she could. So she clasped her child more tightly, and, closing her heavy eyes, rocked back and forth till the half-waked boy slept again; and there old Keery found her mistress, in the morning, white as the cold drifts without, and a depth of settled agony in her quiet eyes that dimmed the old woman's only to look at.

Neither spoke; nor when her husband strode into the breakfast-room and took his usual place, sober enough, but scarcely regretful of the over-night development, did any word of reproach or allusion pass the wife's white lips. A stranger would have thought her careless and cold. Abner Dimock knew that she was heartbroken; but what was that to him? Women live for years without that organ; and while she lived, so long as a cent remained of the Hyde estate, what was it to him if she pined away? She could not leave him; she was utterly in his power; she was his,—like his boots, his gun, his dog; and till he should tire of her and fling her into some lonely chamber to waste and die, she was bound to serve him; he was safe.

And she offered no sort of barrier to his full indulgence of his will to drink. Had she lifted one of her slender fingers in warning, or given him a look of reproachful meaning, or uttered one cry of entreaty, at least the conscience within him might have visited him with a temporary shame, and restrained the raging propensity for a longer interval; but seeing her apparent apathy, knowing

how timid and unresisting was her nature,—that nothing on earth will lie still and be trodden on but a woman,—Abner Dimock rioted and revelled to his full pleasure, while all his pale and speechless wife could do was to watch with fearful eyes and straining ears for his coming, and slink out of the way with her child, lest both should be beaten as well as cursed; for faithful old Keery, once daring to face him with a volley of reproaches from her shrill tongue, was levelled to the floor by a blow from his rapid hand, and bore bruises for weeks that warned her from interference. Not long, however, was there danger of her meddling. When the baby was a year and a half old. Keery, in her out-door labors,—now grown burdensome enough, since Mr. Dimock neither worked himself nor allowed a man on the premises,—Keery took a heavy cold, and, worn out with a life of hard work, sank into rest quickly, her last act of life being to draw Hitty's face down to her own, wrinkled and wan as it was, scarce so old in expression as her mistress's, and with one long kiss and sob speak the foreboding and anxious farewell she could not utter.

"Only you now!" whispered Hitty to her child, as Keery's peaceful, shrouded face was hidden under the coffin-lid and carried away to Greenfield Hill. Pitiful whisper! happily all-unmeaning to the child, but full of desolation to the mother, floating with but one tiny plank amid the wild wrecks of a midnight ocean, and clinging as only the desperate can cling to this vague chance of life.

A rough, half-crazed girl, brought from the alms-house, now did the drudgery of the family. Abner Dimock had grown penurious, and not one cent of money was given for comfort in that house, scarce for need. The girl was stupid and rude, but she worked for her board,—recommendation enough in Mr. Dimock's eyes; and so hard work was added to the other burdens loaded upon his silent wife. And soon came another, all-mysterious, but from its very mystery a deeper fear. Abner Dimock began to stay at home, to be visited at late hours by one or two men whose faces were full of evil and daring; and when, in the dead of the long nights, Hitty woke from her broken and feverish sleep, it was to hear muffled sounds from the cellar below, never heard there before; and once, wrapping a shawl about her, she stole down the stairways with bare feet, and saw streams of red light through the chinks of the cellar-door, and heard the ring of metal, and muttered oaths, all carefully dulled by such devices as kept the sounds from chance passers in the street, though vain as far as the inhabitants of the house itself were concerned. Trembling and cold, she stole back to her bed, full of doubts and fears, neither of which she dared whisper to any one, or would have dared, had she possessed a single friend to whom she could speak. Troubles thickened fast over Hitty; her husband was always at home now, and rarely sober; the relief his absences had been was denied her entirely; and in some sunny corner of the uninhabited rooms up-stairs she spent her days, toiling at such sewing as was needful, and silent as the dead, save as her life appealed to God from the ground, and called down the curse of Cain upon a head she would have shielded from evil with her own life.

Keen human legislation! sightless justice of men!—one drunken wretch smites another in a midnight brawl, and sends a soul to its account with one sharp shudder of passion and despair, and the maddened creature that remains on earth suffers the penalty of the law. Every sense sobered from its reeling fury, weeks of terribly expectation heaped upon the cringing soul, and, in full consciousness, that murderer is strangled before men and angels, because he was drunk!—necessary enough, one perceives, to the good of society, which thereby loses two worse than useless members; but what, in the name of God's justice, should His vicegerent, law, visit upon the man who wrings another life away by slow tortures, and torments heart and soul and flesh for lingering years, where the victim is passive and tenacious, and dies only after long-drawn anguish that might fill the cup of a hundred sudden deaths? Yet what escapes the vicegerent shall the King himself visit and judge. "For He cometh! He cometh to judge the earth; with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity."

Six months passed after Keery's death, and now from the heights of Greenfield and her sunny window Hitty Dimock's white face looked out upon a landscape of sudden glory; for October, the gold-bringer, had come, pouring splendor over the earth, and far and wide the forests blazed; scarlet and green maples, with erect heads, sentinelled the street, gay lifeguards of autumn; through dark

green cedars the crimson creeper threaded its sprays of blood-red; birches, gilded to their tops, swayed to every wind, and drooped their graceful boughs earthward to shower the mossy sward with glittering leaves; heavy oaks turned purple-crimson through their wide-spread boughs; and the stately chestnuts, with foliage of tawny yellow, opened wide their stinging husks to let the nuts fall for squirrel and blue-jay. Splendid sadness clothed all the world, opal-hued mists wandered up and down the valleys or lingered about the undefined horizon, and the leaf-scented south wind sighed in the still noon with foreboding gentleness.

One day, Abner Dimock was gone, and Hitty stole down to the garden-door with her little child, now just trying to walk, that he might have a little play on the green turf, and she cool her hot eyes and lips in the air. As she sat there watching the pretty clumsiness of her boy, and springing forward to intercept his falls, the influence of sun and air, the playful joy of the child, the soothing stillness of all Nature, stole into her heart till it dreamed a dream of hope. Perhaps the budding blossom of promise might become floral and fruitful; perhaps her child might yet atone for the agony of the past; —a time might come when she should sit in that door, white-haired and trembling with age, but as peaceful as the autumn day, watching the sports of his children, while his strong arm sustained her into the valley of shadow, and his tender eyes lit the way.

As she sat dreaming, suddenly a figure intercepted the sunshine, and, looking up, she saw Abner Dimock's father, the elder Abner, entering the little wicket-gate of the garden. A strange, tottering old figure, his nose and chin grimacing at each other, his bleared eyes telling unmistakable truths of cider-brandy and New England rum, his scant locks of white lying in confusion over his wrinkled forehead and cheeks, his whole air squalid, hopeless, and degraded,—not so much by the poverty of vice as by its demoralizing stamp penetrating from the inner to the outer man, and levelling it even below the plane of brutes that perish.

"Good-day! good-day!" said he to his son's wife, in a squeaking, tremulous tone, that drove the child to his mother's arms,—"Abner to home?"

"No, Sir," said Hitty, with an involuntary shudder, that did not escape the bleared blue eye that fixed its watery gaze upon her.

"Cold, a'n't ye? Better go in, better go in! Come, come along! How d'e do, little feller? don't know yer grandper, hey?"

The child met his advances with an ominous scream, and Hitty hurried into the house to give him to the servant's charge, while she returned to the sitting-room, where the old man had seated himself in the rocking-chair, and was taking a mental inventory of the goods and chattels with a momentary keenness in his look that no way reassured Hitty's apprehensive heart.

"So, Abner a'n't to home?"

"No, Sir."

"Don't know where he's gone, do ye?"

"No, Sir."

"Don't never know where he goes, I expect?"

"No, Sir."

"Well, when he comes home,—know when he's a-comin' home?"

"No, Sir."

"Well, when he doos, you tell him 't some folks come to the tavern last night, 'n' talked pretty loud, 'n' I heerd—Guess 'ta'n't best, though, to tell what I heerd. Only you tell Abner 't I come here, and I said he'd better be a-joggin'. He'll know, he'll know,—h'm, yes," said the old man, passing his hand across his thin blue lips, as if to drive away other words better left unsaid,—and then rising from his seat, by the aid of either arm, gained his balance, and went on, while he fumbled for his stick:—

"I'd ha' writ, but black and white's a hangin' matter sometimes, 'n' words a'n't; 'n' I hadn't nobody to send, so I crawled along. Don't ye forget now! don't ye! It's a pretty consider'ble piece o' business; 'n' you'll be dreffully on't, ef you do forget. Now *don't* ye forget!"

"No, I won't," said Hitty, trembling as she spoke; for the old man's words had showed her a depth of dreadful possibility, and an old acquaintance with crime and its manoeuvres, that chilled the blood in her veins. She watched him out of the gate with a sickening sense of terror at her heart, and turned slowly into the house, revolving all kinds of plans in her head for her husband's escape, should her fears prove true. Of herself she did not think; no law could harm her child; but, even after years of brutality and neglect, her faithful affection turned with all its provident thoughtfulness and care at once to her husband; all her wrongs were forgotten, all her sorrows obliterated by this one fear. Well did St. Augustine say, "God is patient because He is eternal": but better and truer would the saying have been, had it run, "God is patient because He is love": a gospel that He publishes in the lives of saints on earth, in their daily and hourly "anguish of patience," preaching to the fearful souls that dare not trust His long-suffering by the tenacious love of those who bear His image, saying, in resistless human tones, "Shall one creature endure and love and continually forgive another, and shall I, who am not loving, but Love, be weary of thy transgressions, O sinner?" And so does the silent and despairing life of many a woman weave unconsciously its golden garland of reward in the heavens above, and do the Lord's work in a strange land where it cannot sing His songs.

The day crept toward sunset, and Hitty sat with her wan face pressed to the window-pane, hushing her child in his cradle with one of those low, monotoned murmurs that mothers know; but still her husband did not come. The level sun-rays pierced the woods into more vivid splendor, burnished gold fringed the heavy purple clouds in the west, and warm crimson lights turned the purple into more triumphant glory; the sun set, unstained with mist or tempest, behind those blue and lonely hills that guard old Berkshire with their rolling summits, and night came fast, steel-blue and thick with stars; but yet he did not come, the untouched meal on the table was untouched still. Hour after hour of starry darkness crept by, and she sat watching at the window-pane; overhead, constellations marched across the heavens in relentless splendor, careless of man or sorrow; Orion glittered in the east, and climbed toward the zenith; the Pleiades clustered and sparkled as if they missed their lost sister no more; the Hyades marked the celestial pastures of Taurus, and Lyra strung her chords with fire. Hitty rested her weary head against the window-frame and sent her wearier thoughts upward to the stars; there were the points of light that the Chaldeans watched upon their plains by night, and named with mystic syllables of their weird Oriental tongue,—names that in her girlhood she had delighted to learn, charmed by that nameless spell that language holds, wherewith it plants itself ineradicably in the human mind, and binds it with fetters of vague association that time and chance are all-powerless to break,—Zubeneschamali and Zubenelgunebi, Bellatrix and Betelguese, sonorous of Rome and Asia both, full of old echoes and the dry resonant air of Eastern plains,—names wherein sounded the clash of Bellona's armor, and the harsh stir of palm-boughs rustled by a hot wind of the desert, and vibrant with the dying clangor of gongs, and shouts of worshipping crowds reverberating through horrid temples of grinning and ghastly idols, wet with children's blood.

Far, far away, the heavenly procession and their well-remembered names had led poor Hitty's thoughts; worn out with anxiety, and faint for want of the food she had forgotten to take, sleep crept upon her, and her first consciousness of its presence was the awakening grasp of a rough hand and the hoarse whisper of her husband.

"Get up!" said he. "Pick up your brat, get your shawl, and come!"

Hitty rose quickly to her feet. One faculty wretchedness gives, the power of sudden self-possession,—and Hitty was broad awake in the very instant she was called. Her husband stood beside her, holding a lantern; her boy slept in the cradle at her feet.

"Have you seen your father?" said she, with quick instinct.

"Yes, d—n you, be quick! do you want to hang me?"

Quick as a spirit Hitty snatched her child, and wrapped him in the blanket where he lay; her shawl was on the chair she had slept in, her hood upon a nail by the door, and flinging both on, with the child in her arms, she followed her husband down-stairs, across the back-yard, hitting her

feet against stones and logs in the darkness, stumbling often, but never falling, till the shadow of the trees was past, and the starlight showed her that they were traversing the open fields, now crisp with frost, but even to the tread,—over two or three of these, through a pine-wood that was a landmark to Hitty, for she well knew that it lay between the turnpike-road and another, less frequented, that by various windings went toward the Connecticut Hue,—then over a tiny brook on its unsteady bridge of logs, and out into a lane, where a rough-spoken man was waiting for them, at the head of a strong horse harnessed to one of those wagons without springs that New-Englanders like to make themselves uncomfortable in. Her husband turned to her abruptly.

"Get in," said he; "get in behind; there's hay enough; and don't breathe loud, or I'll murder you!"

She clambered into the wagon and seated herself on the hay, hushing her child, who nestled and moaned in her arms, though she had carried him with all possible care. A sharp cut of the whip sent the powerful horse off at full speed, and soon this ill-matched party were fast traversing the narrow road that wound about the country for the use of every farm within a mile of its necessary course, a course tending toward the Connecticut.

Hour after hour crept by. Worn out with fatigue, poor Hitty dozed and fell back on the soft hay; her child slept, too, and all her troubles faded away in heavy unconsciousness, till she was again awakened by her husband's grasp, to find that dawn was gathering its light roseate fleeces in the east, and that their flight was for the present stayed at the door of a tavern, lonely and rude enough, but welcome to Hitty as a place of rest, if only for a moment. The sullen mistress of the house asked no questions and offered no courtesy, but, after her guests had eaten their breakfast, rapidly prepared, she led the way to a bedroom in the loft, where Abner Dimock flung himself down upon the straw bed and fell sound asleep, leaving Hitty to the undisturbed care of her child. And occupation enough that proved; for the little fellow was fretful and excited, so that no hour for thought was left to his anxious and timid mother till the dinner-bell awoke her husband and took him downstairs. She could not eat, but, begging some milk for her boy, tended, and fed, and sung to him, till he slept; and then all the horrors of the present and future thronged upon her, till her heart seemed to die in her breast, and her limbs failed to support her when she would have dragged herself out of doors for one breath of fresh air, one refreshing look at a world untroubled and serene.

So the afternoon crept away, and as soon as night drew on the journey was resumed. But this night was chill with the breath of a sobbing east wind, and the dim stars foreboded rain. Hitty shivered with bitter cold, and the boy began to cry. With a fierce curse Abner bade her stop his disturbance, and again the poor mother had hands and heart full to silence the still recurring sobs of the child. At last, after the midnight cocks had ceased to send their challenges from farm to farm, after some remote church-clocks had clanged one stroke on the damp wind, they began to pass through a large village; no lights burned in the windows, but white fences gleamed through the darkness, and sharp gable ends loomed up against the dull sky, one after another, and the horse's hoofs flashed sparks from the paved street before the church, that showed its white spire, spectre-like, directly in their path. Here, by some evil chance, the child awoke, and, between cold and hunger and fear, began one of those long and loud shrieks that no power can stop this side of strangulation. In vain Hitty kissed, and coaxed, and half-choked her boy, in hope to stop the uproar; still he screamed more and more loudly. Abner turned round on his seat with an oath, snatched the child from its mother's arms, and rolled it closely in the blanket.

"Hold on a minute, Ben!" said he to his companion; "this yelp must be stopped"; and stepping over to the back of the wagon, he grasped his wife tightly with one arm, and with the other dropped his child into the street. "Now drive, Ben," said he, in the same hoarse whisper,—"drive like the Devil!"—for, as her child fell, Hitty shrieked with such a cry as only the heart of a mother could send out over a newly-murdered infant. Shriek on shriek, fast and loud and long, broke the slumbers of the village; nothing Abner could do, neither threat nor force, short of absolute murder, would avail, —and there was too much real estate remaining of the Hyde property for Abner Dimock to spare

his wife yet. Ben drove fiend-fashion; but before they passed the last house in the village, lights were glancing and windows grating as they were opened. Years after, I heard the story of such a midnight cry borne past sleeping houses with the quick rattle of wheels; but no one who heard it could give the right clue to its explanation, and it dried into a legend.

Now Hitty Dimock became careless of good or evil, except one absorbing desire to get away from her husband,—to search for her child, to know if it had lived or died. For four nights more that journey was pursued at the height of their horse's speed; every day they stopped to rest, and every day Hitty's half-delirious brain laid plans of escape, only to be balked by Abner Dimock's vigilance; for if he slept, it was with both arms round her, and the slightest stir awoke him,—and while he woke, not one propitious moment freed her from his watch. Her brain began to reel with disappointment and anguish; she began to hate her husband; a band of iron seemed strained about her forehead, and a ringing sound filled her ears; her lips grew parched, and her eye glittered; the last night of their journey Abner Dimock lifted her into the wagon, and she fainted on the hay.

"What in hell did you bring her for, Dimock?" growled his companion; "women are d–d plagues always."

"She'll get up in a minute," coolly returned the husband; "can't afford to leave a goose that lays golden eggs behind; hold on till I lift her up. Here, Hitty! drink, I tell you! drink!"

A swallow of raw spirit certainly drove away the faintness, but it brought fresh fire to the fever that burned in her veins, and she was muttering in delirium before the end of that night's journey brought them to a small village just above the old house on the river that figured in the beginning of this history, and which we trust the patient reader has not forgotten. Abner Dimock left his wife in charge of the old woman who kept the hovel of a tavern where they stopped, and, giving Ben the horse to dispose of to some safe purchaser, after he had driven him down to the old house, returned at night in the boat that belonged to his negro tenant, and, taking his unconscious wife from her bed, rowed down the river and landed her safely, to be carried from the skiff into an upper chamber of the old house, where Jake's wife, Aunt Judy, as Mr. Dimock styled her, nursed the wretched woman through three weeks of fever, and "doctored" her with herbs and roots.

The tenacious Hyde constitution, that was a proverb in Greenfield, conquered at last, and Hitty became conscious, to find herself in a chamber whose plastered walls were crumbling away with dampness and festooned with cobwebs, while the uncarpeted floor was checkered with green stains of mildew, and the very old four-post bedstead on which she lay was fringed around the rickety tester with rags of green moreen, mould-rotted.

Hitty sank back on her pillow with a sigh; she did not even question the old negress who sat crooning over the fire, as to where she was, or what had befallen her; but accepted this new place as only another misty delirium, and in her secret heart prayed, for the hundredth time, to die.

Slowly she recovered; for prayers to die are the last prayers ever answered; we live against our will, and tempt living deaths year after year, when soul and body cry out for the grave's repose, and beat themselves against the inscrutable will of God only to fall down before it in bruised and bleeding acquiescence. So she lived to find herself immured in this damp and crumbling house, with no society but a drinking and crime-haunted husband, and the ignorant negroes who served him,—society varied now and then by one or two men revolting enough in speech and aspect to drive Hitty to her own room, where, in a creaking chair, she rocked monotonously back and forth, watching the snapping fire, and dreaming dreams of a past that seemed now but a visionary paradise.

For now it was winter, and the heavy drifts of snow that lay on Dimock's meadow forbade any explorations which the one idea of finding her child might have driven her to make; and the frozen surface of the river no white-sailed ship could traverse now, nor the hissing paddle-wheels of a steamer break the silence with intimations of life, active and salient, far beyond the lonely precinct of Abner Dimock's home.

So the winter passed by. The noises and lights that had awoke Hitty at midnight in the house at Greenfield had become so far an institution in this lonely dwelling that now they disturbed her sleep no more; for it was a received custom, that, whenever Abner Dimock's two visitors should appear, the cellar should resound all night with heavy blows and clinking of metal, and red light as from a forge streamed up through the doorway; but it disturbed Hitty no more; apathy settled down in black mist on her soul, and she seemed to think, to care, for nothing.

But spring awoke the dead earth, and sleeping roots aroused with fresh forces from their torpor, and sent up green signals to the birds above. A spark of light awoke in Hitty's eye; she planned to get away, to steal the boat from its hidden cove in the bushes and push off down the friendly current of the river,—anywhere away from him! anywhere! though it should be to wreck on the great ocean, but still away from him! Night after night she rose from her bed to hazard the attempt, but her heart failed, and her trembling limbs refused their aid. At length moonlight came to her aid, and when all the house slept she stole downstairs with bare, noiseless feet, and sped like a ghost across the meadow to the river-bank. Poor weak hands! vainly they fumbled with the knotted rope that bound the skiff to a crooked elm over-hanging the water,—all in vain for many lingering minutes; but presently the obdurate knot gave way, and, turning to gather up her shawl, there, close behind her, so close that his hot breath seemed to sear her cheek, stood her husband, clear in the moonlight, with a sneer on his face, and the lurid glow of drunkenness, that made a savage brute of a bad man, gleaming in his deep-set eyes. Hitty neither shrieked nor ran; despair nerved her,—despair turned her rigid before his face.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.