



**Ray Strachey**

*Shaken  
by the Wind*

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# **Shaken by the Wind**

**A Story of Fanaticism**



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## EPILOGUE

# CHAPTER I

## THE SHAKERS

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“Oh way won wiste wah  
Le Soka pom a pah!”

THE SHAKERS WERE standing in orderly rows in their empty barnlike meeting-house, the men on the East and the women on the West side, and the Elder and Eldress faced them from the top of the room. It was the Eldress who had uttered the strange remark, her worn and aged face glowing with sudden animation, and in the attentive silence which followed, Thomas and Sarah, his wife, looked at each other across the width of the room. What could that strange saying mean?

The young couple had decided to drive through the Shaker village more from curiosity than from any other motive, but the grave courtesy with which they had been greeted had shamed them into pretending to be earnest seekers after truth. And now they were admitted to the worship, and the brothers and sisters were all assembled before them, in their neat, prim-looking clothes, the women in their caps and shawls, the men in smocks, all grave, quiet and collected.

“Oh way won wiste wah!” repeated the Eldress again, and then in a thin, nasal voice she began to sing:

“My carnal life I will lay down  
Because it is depraved,

I'm sure on any other ground  
I never can be saved.  
My haughty spirit I'll subdue,  
I'll seek humiliation,  
And if I'm true my work to do  
I know I'll find salvation."

The tune was melancholy, but it had a strong rhythm, and she had not intoned three lines before a movement began in the ordered ranks before her. At first there was a stamping and shuffling of Shaker feet in the flat-heeled Shaker shoes, and then a slow marching forward and back along the room. All the worshippers held their hands before them, the fingers pointing downwards, and shaking as they moved. The slow movements gradually quickened as the song went on; after a time both tune and step changed, and a much livelier motion began, still, however, up and down and not round the room. The new words were less lugubrious:

"Give us room to dance and play,  
'Tis beautiful behaviour,  
We have put our sins away,  
And we will praise our Saviour."

Another change of tune and step followed, and then another still and occasionally a harsh, discordant cry broke from one of the worshippers, but that was all. The real shaking, the rolling upon the ground, of which so much was said in the world outside did not then take place. It was a strange form of worship, but not exciting, and Thomas

Sonning, who remained motionless, as he had promised, on the men's side of the building, found the time pass very slowly indeed.

If this was all they were to see, he thought, it was a pity to have stopped over. These elderly men and women were all right in their way, doubtless, but, after all, they didn't amount to much, and the atmosphere of the place was depressing for a honeymoon. His mind wandered away from the proceedings before him to the thought of his own concerns. He and Sarah had been married barely a week, and there was much that was pleasant to dwell upon.

His bride, on the other side of the room, was not feeling quite the same. To her the Shaker worship conveyed no sense of disappointment. Something in the air of the place, some catch in the rhythm, or the shaking of those down-turned hands moved her strangely. For the time she forgot her absorbing personal concerns, and lost herself in the queer, intense emotion which the Shakers were enjoying. It was worship—with all her innocent eagerness she joined it, and her own private happiness welling up in her heart seemed like a prayer to God. An hour wore by, and another still, before the end came. At a signal, which neither of the visitors saw, the dancing stopped, and the Eldress who had opened the proceedings closed them, with another unintelligible sentence. Then the Shakers, brothers and sisters, trooped out in orderly fashion and proceeded to their evening meal.

One of the Elders remained behind to escort the guests, and although somewhat out of breath from his exercise he

was ready enough to answer the first questions the two young people put to him.

Yes, he said, this was their ordinary form of worship. The Spirit did not often move them to the shaking and rolling which had given them their common name. That was only a special mercy meant for special times of trial; but the gift of song or the gift of speech in an unknown tongue came often to one or other of them; the words they had heard that night had first been vouchsafed to Eldress Deborah King at Mount Lebanon in the State of New York some dozen years before.

The ending of the worship had ended the trance in which both young people had been watching, and Sarah and Thomas plied the gentle old man with eager questions as they walked along the well-kept avenue which led from the meeting-house to the high square dwelling in which most of the Shakers lived. They wanted to know everything at once, and their guide smiled kindly at their excitement.

“We are quiet people, you know,” he assured them. “There is always time enough for what we want to do or say.”

His guests took the hint and followed a little subdued, to the common dining-hall, where Sarah took her seat among the women and Thomas among the men, to partake of the simple meal of cooked fruit, milk and bread. Very little talking took place; a word or two here and there, a quiet laugh, and then a blessing uttered by the Eldress, and with gentle movements the board was cleared. Thomas and Sarah looked at each other again. They both very much wanted to talk and compare notes, but in accepting the Shakers’ hospitality for the night they had agreed to abide

by the regulations of the household, and these separated the sexes very effectually. Sarah was carried off by the Eldress for a tour of the establishment, and Thomas was led off to the workshops. They did not see each other again till the next morning.

The houses, barns and outhouses of the community were all in spotless order, kept with a cleanliness which was positively bare. The long sheds where the fruit-preserving was carried on were as exquisitely neat as were the laundry and bakehouse, and the gardens and orchards were almost unnaturally trim. Every inch of the ground, every separate board of the flooring seemed to have received loving, personal care, and the Shakers themselves, moving almost silently about their tasks, wore faces of quiet and austere content.

The evening was spent in holy conversation, and both in the men's and in the women's parlours the same tale was told. Indeed, so steeped were the Shakers in the atmosphere of their community that the Elder and Eldress who instructed the visitors used almost identical terms in telling of the foundress of the Order, Mother Ann Lee, and of its early struggles and persecutions.

Sarah listened with deep interest to the revelation of their beliefs, and found something exceedingly attractive in the theory of the dual sex of the Almighty. There was, indeed, a feminine colour to the whole doctrine which Sarah found agreeable, and the complete acceptance of eldresses and the preaching and authority allowed to them gratified her own unconscious longing to be up and doing for the Lord. The doctrine of celibacy, too, was not unattractive.

The Eldress who spoke with her felt it her duty to point out to the bride that carnal love is ever sinful and displeasing to God; and Sarah, far from being angry, half agreed with her. Her own experience of married life was very short, and she had not as yet mastered an instinctive shrinking from the manifestations of sexual love. It seemed to her quite possible that the Shakers were choosing the better path. She did not indeed follow with her teacher when she went on to say that universal celibacy was soon to prevail, and that thus the end of the world would be brought about; but she did feel an uneasiness, and a sort of envy of their perfect tranquillity. To be done with all this human emotion, to have only God to think of, must be so restful, so pure! If she and Thomas, now, had been Shakers, what a holy, comfortable friendship they might have enjoyed. And yet, of course, it would never have suited Thomas.

Indeed, even the little glimpse, the brief explanations of the Elder who was entertaining him in the other parlour did not suit him. The whole thing seemed rather meaningless and distasteful, with nothing but its oddity to recommend it. His thoughts that night, as he lay on his narrow bed in the male visitors' room, were not much occupied with the Shakers or their beliefs. His own bright human life was too engrossing.

The Shakers and their guests rose early, and the frugal breakfast was eaten in silence. Then, after a few words of thanks, the guests departed, driving off again together in the little two-wheeled carriage in which they were touring the country. Before they were out of sight Thomas had taken his wife's hand:

“Oh, Sally!”

“Oh, Thomas!”

“How I want to talk it over!”

“What a lot I have to tell!”

The delight of being together again was extreme, and their impressions of all they had seen and heard among the Shakers had to wait awhile until the pleasure of being reunited had been thoroughly enjoyed.

After a time, however, they fell upon the subject of their visit, and compared notes as to all they had heard.

“Queer old people,” Thomas said, “as dry as dust.”

“There’s something lovely about them, all the same,” Sarah protested. “And I don’t know, Thomas, but what they may be right in some ways.”

“Rubbish, Sally; you don’t mean that?”

“How can we be sure that what the Lord revealed to Mother Ann wasn’t meant for us all?” asked Sarah, looking anxiously into the young man’s face.

“Do you mean the doctrine that no one should marry, Sal?” he answered, smiling at her, “because I don’t think it would suit you and me.”

Sarah smiled back at him in a serious sort of fashion.

“I didn’t mean that part, Thomas,” she said untruthfully. “But you know they say that God is Mother as well as Father.”

Thomas shook his head.

“There’s nothing about that in the Bible,” he said.

“Well, anyway, they are very good people,” Sarah replied, dismissing the point of doctrine for later

consideration, “and I’ve never in my life set foot in so clean a place.”

Thomas agreed to this, but it did not seem to interest him. He attached little importance to the episode, now that it was over, and so, as they drove on through the hilly, wooded country, their talk fell back again to themselves and their present happiness. This much, however, Thomas did admit, that it had been an unusual glimpse. All their friends would like to hear of it when they got back home; no one they knew had seen Shakers at first hand before, and it would be an interesting thing to tell.

Sarah, for her part, dismissed it all less easily from her mind. She was conscious not only of the impression which the new notions had made upon her, but also of the fact that they had made none on Thomas at all. It was the first separate judgment, the first emancipation of her thought from his, and it went right down to the fundamental relationship between them, of which, already, she had found it impossible to speak to him. Faintly, amid her happiness and her pleasure, this knowledge troubled her. But she hid it carefully away out of sight, and soon forgot that it was there.

Like other young couples, Sarah and Thomas were full of plans and hopes, and delighted with their prospects in life. They finished their driving tour, therefore, and went back to the growing and prosperous city of Delaville which was their home, eager to prove that life was a perfect affair. If no one else knew it, they knew that it was possible to combine happiness on earth with that full submission to the will of

God which would ensure happiness hereafter. They had no doubt of success.

The young people had lived all their lives among definitely religious people. Christianity affected the outward setting of their lives; it was not only the commonest subject of their conversation, but also the chief occupation of their thoughts. The business of discovering religious truth was of the first importance, and their energies were devoted to the effort to save their own souls and those of their immediate acquaintances. Religion was the language of their social intercourse, and about it clustered almost all the happenings of their lives. Love, friendship, enmity, sympathy, gossip, and all other human experiences readily found expression in its phraseology, and it was as natural for them to pray, as it was for them to eat, together.

There were some whose inner life withered away under the constant repetitions which this excessive preoccupation involved, and some whose grasp of the great beliefs grew weak, and whose hold upon Christianity became a matter of routine and habit. But Sarah Sonning was not of these; her life deepened her longing for religious sincerity, and as she grew, and especially after her marriage, she turned the whole force of her will to the task of subduing herself to God.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the state of earnest ignorance of the Sonnings and their friends. The early years of the nineteenth century were a time of scientific progress and intellectual development in Europe, but, except in Boston and New York, nothing of the kind could be detected in the United States. The prosperous little communities of

Pennsylvania and New Jersey were small and narrow in their interests, conventional and hide-bound in their manners, and incredibly isolated from the rest of the world. Educated, in a sense, the people were, and yet learning, philosophy, mathematics, science, and all forms of abstract reasoning were ignored among them. The intelligence, the vigour and the brains of the people went into practical affairs, and were turned to the great adventures which arose in subduing their gigantic new land. Thousands of miles of unpeopled wilderness awaited them, and the adventures of scholarship paled before this mighty call. The best men were pioneering, the best thinkers planning out the physical and political features of the new world.

In religious matters it was just the same. While in England the Evangelicals were triumphant, and later when the Tractarian movement and the ingenious sophistries of early Victorian Anglicanism were coming to birth, the people in the eastern states of America were growing corn and apples, ignoring it all. The march of thought and of knowledge touched them not; a Puritan tradition, a social equality and a new country were by themselves enough.

Civilization, as it was known in England at that date, was curiously unlike its crude parallel across the ocean. The forms and ceremonies of antiquity had been shaken off so fully that beauty was lacking too. Music was elementary in the extreme, literature at an incredibly low ebb, and pictorial art had no existence at all. Religion was deprived of these aids, and cut off from tradition, from scholarship and from contemporary thought; and yet, in spite of its bareness, it held the very centre of the stage, and was the

deepest, and often indeed the only abstraction within reach of thoughtful people. But what a queer religion it was! Anything might be true, if the Bible could be found to suggest it; and what could the Bible not be twisted to say? Moreover, anyone's rendering of a disputed passage might be valid, for all men were free and equal. There was nothing which might not come to pass on the favoured soil of America.

Revivals flourished in this hopeful field, rising and dying away in a kind of periodic cycle. New prophets and new teachers arose; it was a thrilling time.

In the township of Delaville, in which Sarah and her sister Anna grew up, none of the more startling religious manifestations were directly known. Religious adventures, which were unceasing, centred round points of quite orthodox difficulty, such as the problem of Baptism, the nice question of whether a sermon might be read, instead of spoken, and the anxious query whether or not Salvation depended on public profession of faith. In these and similar struggles the devout passed their days. Not only were these questions in themselves so hard, but on their issue such great stakes hung! Eternal torment was no abstraction to these simple people; it was the ever present menace of their lives, and they knew for a fact that they would earn or escape Hell solely by the rightness of their personal belief.

Upon the minds of conscientious young people these problems weighed heavily. Sarah and her sister, growing up through the early years of the century, were more than a little troubled by predestination, sanctification and the atonement. They spoke hopefully in terms of grace; they

agonized over their shortcomings; they compressed into their thin religious mould all the longings and fervours of their youth.

Of the two sisters Sarah was always the more practical and energetic, and if a new thing came their way it was she who rushed out to meet it. Even tempered and unselfconscious, she was perfectly happy and contented in her monstrously decorous life, and believed with her whole heart anything which she had once accepted. Anna was different; she had her black days, her unsatisfied longings, her vague discontents. As she grew older, too, she developed a slightly caustic turn of mind, and even, to the horror of her sister, she indulged for a brief moment in a mild form of religious doubt. The two sisters were intimately devoted to one another. Not a thought, not an aspiration, not a weakness did they try to conceal, and so this period of Anna's unsettlement was very grievous to her sister. It soon passed off, however, and in the long talks in which they nightly indulged Sarah brought Anna back to the paths of righteousness. How could she not do so, with God and all the world upon her side?

Within the social circle of their family there was a good deal of solid entertaining, and as the girls grew up the young sons and daughters of their parents' friends made one or two daring innovations. There were all-day picnics in the woods, there were candy-pulls and oyster-bakes, and even a debating society. The young life refused to be quieted to the old standard, and the boys and girls required, and secured, opportunities of meeting and laughing together. Their parents shook their heads; things had not

been so frivolous and worldly in their day; but the young people persisted, and the sober dissipation went its way.

In due time both Sarah and Anna were sought in marriage, one by Thomas Sonning, the charming, persuasive, open-handed son of their father's partner, the other by a silent young doctor ten years older than herself. With hesitation and reluctance, and yet with the utmost delight, both girls received their suitors, and for a brief season the house was filled with worldliness. In vain the parents spoke of God and of Divine Guidance. In vain the minister waited upon the young people with prayer and good advice. Submissively as all four bowed their heads, the whirlwind of their love affairs swept through their souls, and life seemed all hope and joy. They could thank God, but they could not be afraid.

Sarah's suitor, Thomas, was very, very attentive. He brought many presents, and paid compliments which delighted and embarrassed her. He was ardent, too, and demonstrative, and Sarah was swept quite off her feet.

Anna's young man, James Whitebread, was not nearly so expressive, but there was an intensity about him which suited her better than the easy sympathy of Thomas Sonning. His very moderation of phrase enhanced all he said, and he had a way of listening to Anna's sallies, and suddenly laughing irresistibly at them, which she found wonderfully agreeable. There was something obviously reliable about James. He was the sort of man who was certain as he grew older to find himself the executor of wills and the guardian of orphan children. Men in trouble confided in him, and many secrets were trusted to his care.

Already he was successful as a doctor, as much for his reassuring personality as for his skill.

In his early manhood James had studied in Germany. He had learnt other things in Germany besides his medicine, things he was always unwilling to speak of, but which had left some very definite mark on his mind. To the close little city of Delaville he passed for a wonderfully learned man, for he could speak foreign tongues, and he read books and followed movements of which others had never heard.

On religious matters no one knew quite what he felt. He went regularly, indeed, to the Church which Anna attended, but no one could say that he was a real member, and his reticence upon the subject of his faith was the only objection Anna's parents found to the match. They suspected him of believing too much—or too little—of getting ideas out of books, and of being somehow obscurely unsound in his opinions. But no one could deny that he was a good and honest man, and devotedly attached to Anna.

And so the two matches had been made, and the two sisters, eighteen and nineteen years old, had been married on the same day.

# CHAPTER II

## THE PERFECTIONIST PREACHER

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ALL MEMORY OF the visit to the Shaker village had long since faded away. Sarah and Thomas had been married six years, and a multitude of other impressions had crowded upon them. Edmund, their son, had been born and was already five years old. Thomas was in the family business and Sarah was active in good works. They had not realized all their dreams, they had indeed fallen rather rapidly out of love, but they were nevertheless a contented and successful couple, neither of whom wished to change their lot.

There was one matter, however, in which they were not satisfied, and that was their religion. Both of them, from their different standpoints, had grown uneasy in the quiet humdrum of their Congregational Church, and both together they had wandered out into the bewildering mazes of religious experiment. To Thomas the chief attraction had been the excitement of a new emotion, the rapture of Conversion and Reconversion, the pleasant sense of being the centre of the stage. He was always an excellent penitent. To Sarah's more genuine soul the driving force had been her longing to understand more of the ways of God. She was forever seeking for something which she had not yet found, and hoping for a real and reliable guidance. She had followed Thomas gladly in all his new theories, never feeling so secure as to be unwilling to move on, and yet, with each experience storing up more devotion and more

true piety in her heart. There was something to be learnt from every group of earnest believers, she felt. "Where ever two or three are gathered together in My name——" And though as yet she had not been able to find absolute satisfaction, she believed it to lie somewhere on earth. It was the great business of life to seek it. Once she thought she had found it; that was in the period when she had joined the Methodists, and the belief had only been strengthened by the indignation of their more conservative friends. The actual faith had faded away, but the experience had given Sarah a freedom from religious convention which was very precious to her. This stage had really been broken off because both Sarah and Thomas had found the shouting and the groaning somewhat distasteful, but it had left behind it a great fervour for Sunday Schools and Bible Classes which had lasted longer. This, in its turn, had moderated, and then had come the anxiety as to Baptism, which had culminated in the immersion of both of them in the cold little tank under the floor of the Baptist Chapel.

Anna and James, on the other hand, had made no religious experiments at all. As time went on, indeed, they seemed to settle down into coldness, and although Anna, at any rate, remained as true a believer as ever, she seemed somehow to have lost her sense of the excitement of doctrinal affairs. "It will be all right whatever we do," she once said to her sister. "God doesn't mind much what we say. He knows we're only children." It was a soothing thought, and satisfied her conscience, but it did nothing to quiet Sarah.

“I can’t believe in that kind of a distant God,” she said; “one who doesn’t know or think enough about us to signify. You know, Anna, the Bible says He counts the hairs on our heads. And what are we in the world for, if not to find Him out?” And when Anna only smiled and shook her head, her sister grieved, and prayed for her, and suspected that it was James who was leading her astray.

While Sarah and Thomas were in the Baptist stage the great Revival of 1831 came their way. It had begun in New York with the rise of the Millerites, foretelling the date of the Second Coming; and, spreading in different forms, it swept over the Northern States. Connecticut was known as a “burnt district,” in which hardly a village escaped the conflagration, and the power of the Lord was plainly manifest. The full blast of the Revival had spent its force before it came towards Pennsylvania, but curious side winds of the movement were still blowing at that time, and one of these, the Perfect or Pauline teaching, found its way into Delaville township.

The missionary who brought the gospel was a young man of the name of John Andrew Norris, an eager, lean, young man, with a look of hard thinking and obvious ability about him. He came into the city with a letter of introduction to Thomas Sonning, and as a matter of course he was invited to stay at his house. And the natural consequence of this was that before many days had passed he had entirely converted his hosts.

In a very short time the religious circles of the city were in a whirl. Preaching was held daily, and then almost hourly. John Andrew Norris was in great demand, and earnest souls

from the surrounding villages poured into the town. The Sonnings' house, which sheltered the chief missionary, became crowded with guests, and the ordering and buying of food for such a concourse of people put a great strain on Sarah's household resources. Everything mundane, however, faded out before the great light of the new Revelation, and Sarah, drinking in the Perfectionist doctrine, thought nothing of being over-worked. If sinless perfection was, as Norris maintained, a gift from God, and easily attainable in this life, then she, Sarah Sonning, was going to have it. Housekeeping should not stand in the way of so infinitely important an offer.

One of the remarkable things which the young preacher said was that he himself had become perfect, and that he could do no wrong. Curiously enough this claim, which would have seemed fantastic at any other time, passed unquestioned amid the revival fervour. It was not only Norris, but any one of them who could attain that blessed state. They had but to stretch out their hands! What wonder that converts were made?

After a short time, however, it became clear that these Perfectionist doctrines, remarkable as they were, were not the whole of the new faith. There was, it seemed, a still newer and more sacred revelation, which was the very kernel of it all. This secret doctrine could only be unfolded to the initiated, it was said, and many were the speculations which went about. There were reported to be but six of the initiated in Delaville, but many were full of hope. Two young girls, Dorcas and Flavilla, who lodged at the Sonnings' house, were said to be among the six, and both Sarah and

Thomas believed that their own call was at hand. They longed impatiently for its coming, and little knew in what a strange fashion it was to be made plain.

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It was dark in the upper corridor of the Sonnings' house, and only a very faint gleam of light came up the stairs from the hall below. The two girls who stood barefooted outside their bedroom door were frightened of the darkness; the inner light which was guiding them was not sufficient to dispel it. Not that either of them doubted for an instant the necessity for pushing on. Had they not received word from the Lord that they must do this thing? Did not they know that it was their duty to run the risk of misunderstanding, of scandal even, in the service of their Master? But all the same it was awesome, out there in the silent house—what was that creaking?

With whispers of fear and of encouragement, and with intense excitement they shut their door behind them, and stepped softly along the corridor. Their host and hostess slept in there—past the quiet room they went, and on, round the corner, towards the room where H<sub>E</sub> lodged; H<sub>E</sub>, the teacher, the man who had been chosen, marked out for their experiment.

It was a week now that they had been in this hospitable house. How long it seemed! The two girls had had time to forget their homes, and all the traditions in which they had been brought up; or, if not to forget, at least to discard them. In the wonder of these new doctrines how should they not? For they were in the inmost circle of disciples, and to-night they would be able to put their faith to the test.

As they slipped along in the dark they did not really think of anything. It was the cold touch of the floor, the fright, the pang of excitement, and the horrid feeling that it was too late to turn back which engrossed them. Flavilla's heart was pumping so hard that she could feel its motion. Dorcas was uncomfortably dry at the throat, and yet she did not dare to swallow; they were both dreadfully alarmed. The door was just before them; an out-stretched hand feeling along the wall had touched its handle. All was dark and silent within.

They crept into the young man's room, and then Flavilla made a light. The sudden flare showed the square room, the large bed, the young man sleeping upon it, and—oh, how terrible—his clothes, actually his trousers, crumpled and lying anyhow across a chair.

In the next instant the light went down, burning dim, as candles do when first lighted, and all the shadows bounded out again from the corners of the room, and the dark corridor outside was filled with terrors. The girls clutched each other again, and the candle slanted perilously in Flavilla's shaking hand. But the flame burned up, and the candle was righted. It would not do to turn back now, especially as with the increased light things looked better. How innocently handsome John Andrew looked in his sleep!

With solemn faces the two girls advanced to the bed and sat down upon it. They were there to prove their freedom from carnal sin and carnal thoughts, and to establish once and for all the spiritual nature of the bond which united the brothers and sisters of the Lord. It was midnight, and this was the way it was done.

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Half an hour later Thomas woke, wondering what noise it could be which disturbed him. Between the room he occupied and that of his principal guest there was a communicating door, shut and locked indeed, and with a heavy wardrobe before it, but still a door, with a crack at the top. Through this crack came a faint yellow light, and also, as Thomas soon realized, a faint unmistakable sound. People were moving and talking in the preacher's room.

Thomas did not care to do things alone; he roused Sarah, and the two of them went out together into the same quiet corridor along which the girls had passed. There was no darkness for them, for Thomas carried a candle, but there was a sense of strangeness and uneasiness, even of alarm. They thought their guest must have been taken ill, and Sarah's practical mind flew to hot water, mustard plasters and the like. She had thought him looking worn and pale; poor fellow, he worked too hard.

It was not illness, however, which seemed to be the matter. The opening door displayed a wholly unexpected scene, and indeed revealed the young man in the act of kissing Flavilla upon the cheek, his arm meanwhile encircling Dorcas as she sat upon his pillow. The two girls were fully wrapped up in dressing gowns, though their feet were bare. The young man was sitting up in his bed, his nightshirt imperfectly covered over with his jacket. The faces of all three were shining with a holy joy.

Thomas and Sarah were amazed at the sight. For an appreciable time they stared, not knowing what to do. Then Thomas, the fluent, began to speak. And Thomas was very angry. It was a scandal, he said, a monstrosity. "I can't have

such goings on in my house." He would make it all known to the brethren, declare it on the housetops, publish it abroad. "A scandal, a shame and a disgrace."

The culprits were perfectly unashamed. "We are doing no wrong, and you should think none," they affirmed. "It is a trial of our chastity; we have been led thereto by the Lord." But the girls got off the bed as they spoke.

The young preacher, sitting in his bed where he was, confirmed their strange words. They had meant no harm, and had done none. If Thomas knew all he would understand. He begged them to sit down and listen to the truth.

They sat down. Sarah noticed that Flavilla hesitated before lifting the trousers off the chair nearest to her, but she did it in the end, and they all gathered round the bed. John Andrew still sat among his sheets and blankets. He had nothing on his legs, and must perforce keep them in bed. But Sarah was the only one who thought of this. There was so much to be said!

Strange as the scene was, it quickly ceased to be awkward. The three Perfectionists were so sure of their doctrine, so earnest-minded! To Sarah also there seemed to be much good reason in what they were urging. An old memory of the visit to the Shakers flashed into her mind. Sarah was half converted already.

The doctrine which John Andrew unfolded was this: that when the Lord granted sinlessness to any soul He granted at the same time the Great Reward. And this reward was the power of forming holy and purified spiritual affinities which should take the place of all wicked earthly sensuality.

Everything which was according to the flesh was sinful, as the Chosen knew. Even the bonds of matrimony were accursed, but there was a holy, spiritual mating which the Lord loved. Just as of old the Apostles had worked and travelled with “sisters” who were not their wives, so now, in this newly apostolic age, the perfect men and women would find a sacred union. How blissful and satisfying to the soul it was, none but the Chosen could know; but indeed it was as a pearl above price.

When Sarah asked what was the sign of this companionship, and how it was to be known, the young man turned eagerly towards her. Familiarities, he explained, which in others would be carnal wickedness would feel innocent to the Brethren of the Lord. Indeed, the possibility of caresses without danger, of love without passion, was the mark and sign of these spiritual bridals. And it had been the search for this treasure which had led, and very properly led, the two girls to the preacher’s room. They had not known which, if either of them, was his spiritual bride. But now they knew, without a doubt, that it was Flavilla. Henceforward he and she would be companions in innocence and in labour for the Lord.

This, then, was the great secret, the special revelation of the new Pauline Church. Those to whom it was vouchsafed were henceforth workers in the Lord’s vineyard. A few, as yet only a very few, had been enlightened, but the Lord was working fast. Chance, or rather the hand of the Lord, had opened it up before the eyes of Thomas and Sarah. They must now take or reject their opportunity.

These explanations unfolded slowly, and the dawn came to fade out the glimmer of their candles before all was properly said. They parted, agreed at any rate in the desire to conceal what had been going on from the servants. It was evidently a matter which needed much prayerful thought before it could be fully understood.

# CHAPTER III

## SARAH'S REVOLT

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THE FIVE PEOPLE who knew about the midnight escapade dispersed at dawn, and four of them went back along the now dim corridor, while the fifth rose at last from his bed, and falling upon his bare knees upon the floor prayed ardently.

Flavilla and her friend went back to their own room and lay down side by side upon the bed they shared. They lay there as the light strengthened, and had no thought of sleeping, but whispered excitedly together.

Thomas and Sarah, too, returned to their bedroom, and lay down side by side. They talked too, at first, or at least Thomas did. But soon he turned sideways to sleep. His anger had been rather exhausting.

Sarah, however, was not sleepy. As she lay there waiting for the sounds of the stirring of the household she turned the new ideas over in her mind, and each moment they seemed more attractive. Some things she felt obscurely, others clearly enough, and what she wanted was to sort them out a little before they talked any more. The idea of celibate living, and of loving without sex attracted her immensely. She had never been able to get over a distaste, even a sort of disgust with everything connected with sex. It always seemed to her wrong, and rather shameful to think of men and women in terms of their bodies, and the new doctrine she had just heard made an instant appeal to the

pruderies and inhibitions of her nature. Her married life with Thomas had by no means cured her of her dislikes; even at the first when she had loved him most she had shrunk from physical expression; kisses and innocent caresses would have satisfied her then, she believed; and now, when six years had passed, although she was well enough accustomed to her position, she was wearied beyond telling. How fine it would be if he and she could lead this new pure life henceforward! How she would work and pray!

Of the other side of the doctrine, with its promise of a substitute for bodily love, she thought less. It might be true that new spiritual affinities were open, that new spiritual matings were lawful. She was not interested in that. Thomas was her husband and little as she actually loved him she had not the faintest wish to seek for other affinities elsewhere; the weight of her respectable Puritan tradition held her still; and indeed she was as little interested in spiritual as in physical love-making. What she did care for, with all the passion and emotion of her being, was the approach to God. And perhaps this new way was a real short cut. It was an interesting, exciting thought.

At her side Thomas slept—and outside now the maids were beginning to sweep and clean, and she could hear the raking out of the kitchen fire below.

“Lord, show me Thy truths,” she murmured, and got out of bed to go and see to the proper waking and dressing of her son Edmund.

When Sarah returned to her own room Thomas was awake, and Thomas had a great deal to say to his wife. All this talk of carnal love being sinful in itself was nonsense, he