OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

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The Guardian Angel

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TO MY READERS.

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“A new Preface” is, I find, promised with my story. If there are any among my readers who loved Aesop's Fables chiefly on account of the Moral appended, they will perhaps be pleased to turn backward and learn what I have to say here.

This tale forms a natural sequence to a former one, which some may remember, entitled “Elsie Venner.” Like that—it is intended for two classes of readers, of which the smaller one includes the readers of the “Morals” in Aesop and of this Preface.

The first of the two stories based itself upon an experiment which some thought cruel, even on paper. It imagined an alien element introduced into the blood of a human being before that being saw the light. It showed a human nature developing itself in conflict with the ophidian characteristics and instincts impressed upon it during the pre-natal period. Whether anything like this ever happened, or was possible, mattered little: it enabled me, at any rate, to suggest the limitations of human responsibility in a simple and effective way.

The story which follows comes more nearly within the range of common experience. The successive development of inherited bodily aspects and habitudes is well known to all who have lived long enough to see families grow up under their own eyes. The same thing happens, but less obviously to common observation, in the mental and moral nature. There is something frightful in the way in which not only characteristic qualities, but particular manifestations of them, are repeated from generation to generation. Jonathan Edwards the younger tells the story of a brutal wretch in

New Haven who was abusing his father, when the old man cried out, “Don't drag me any further, for I did n't drag my father beyond this tree.” [The original version of this often-repeated story may be found in Aristotle's Ethics, Book 7th, Chapter 7th.] I have attempted to show the successive evolution of some inherited qualities in the character of Myrtle Hazard, not so obtrusively as to disturb the narrative, but plainly enough to be kept in sight by the small class of preface-readers.

If I called these two stories Studies of the Reflex Function in its higher sphere, I should frighten away all but the professors and the learned ladies. If I should proclaim that they were protests against the scholastic tendency to shift the total responsibility of all human action from the Infinite to the finite, I might alarm the jealousy of the cabinet-keepers of our doctrinal museums. By saying nothing about it, the large majority of those whom my book reaches, not being preface-readers, will never suspect anything to harm them beyond the simple facts of the narrative.

Should any professional alarmist choose to confound the doctrine of limited responsibility with that which denies the existence of any self-determining power, he may be presumed to belong to the class of intellectual half-breeds, of which we have many representatives in our new country, wearing the garb of civilization, and even the gown of scholarship. If we cannot follow the automatic machinery of nature into the mental and moral world, where it plays its part as much as in the bodily functions, without being accused of laying “all that we are evil in to a divine thrusting on,” we had better return at once to our old demonology, and reinstate the Leader of the Lower House in his time-honored prerogatives.

As fiction sometimes seems stranger than truth, a few words may be needed here to make some of my characters and statements appear probable. The long-pending question

involving a property which had become in the mean time of immense value finds its parallel in the great De Haro land-case, decided in the Supreme Court while this story was in progress (May 14th, 1867). The experiment of breaking the child's will by imprisonment and fasting is borrowed from a famous incident, happening long before the case lately before one of the courts of a neighboring Commonwealth, where a little girl was beaten to death because she would not say her prayers. The mental state involving utter confusion of different generations in a person yet capable of forming a correct judgment on other matters, is almost a direct transcript from nature. I should not have ventured to repeat the questions of the daughters of the millionaires to Myrtle Hazard about her family conditions, and their comments, had not a lady of fortune and position mentioned to me a similar circumstance in the school history of one of her own children. Perhaps I should have hesitated in reproducing Myrtle Hazard's “Vision,” but for a singular experience of his own related to me by the late Mr. Forceythe Willson.

Gifted Hopkins (under various alliasis) has been a frequent correspondent of mine. I have also received a good many communications, signed with various names, which must have been from near female relatives of that young gentleman. I once sent a kind of encyclical letter to the whole family connection; but as the delusion under which they labor is still common, and often leads to the wasting of time, the contempt of honest study or humble labor, and the misapplication of intelligence not so far below mediocrity as to be incapable of affording a respectable return when employed in the proper direction, I thought this picture from life might also be of service. When I say that no genuine young poet will apply it to himself, I think I have so far removed the sting that few or none will complain of being wounded.

It is lamentable to be forced to add that the Reverend Joseph Bellamy Stoker is only a softened copy of too many originals to whom, as a regular attendant upon divine worship from my childhood to the present time, I have respectfully listened, while they dealt with me and mine and the bulk of their fellow-creatures after the manner of their sect. If, in the interval between his first showing himself in my story and its publication in a separate volume, anything had occurred to make me question the justice or expediency of drawing and exhibiting such a portrait, I should have reconsidered it, with the view of retouching its sharper features. But its essential truthfulness has been illustrated every month or two, since my story has been in the course of publication, by a fresh example from real life, stamped in darker colors than any with which I should have thought of staining my pages.

There are a great many good clergymen to one bad one, but a writer finds it hard to keep to the true proportion of good and bad persons in telling a story. The three or four good ministers I have introduced in this narrative must stand for many whom I have known and loved, and some of whom I count to-day among my most valued friends. I hope the best and wisest of them will like this story and approve it. If they cannot all do this, I know they will recognize it as having been written with a right and honest purpose.

BOSTON, 1867.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

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It is a quarter of a century since the foregoing Preface was written, and that is long enough to allow a story to be forgotten by the public, and very possibly by the writer of it also. I will not pretend that I have forgotten all about “The Guardian Angel,” but it is long since I have read it, and many of its characters and incidents are far from being distinct in my memory. There are, however, a few points which hold their place among my recollections. The revolt of Myrtle Hazard from the tyranny of that dogmatic dynasty now breaking up in all directions has found new illustrations since this tale was written. I need only refer to two instances of many. The first is from real life. Mr. Robert C. Adams's work, “Travels in Faith from Tradition to Reason,” is the outcome of the teachings of one of the most intransigeant of our New England Calvinists, the late Reverend Nehemiah Adams. For an example in fiction—fiction which bears all the marks of being copied from real life—I will refer to “The Story of an African Farm.” The boy's honest, but terrible outburst, “I hate God,” was, I doubt not, more acceptable in the view of his Maker than the lying praise of many a hypocrite who, having enthroned a demon as Lord of the Universe, thinks to conciliate his favor by using the phrases which the slaves of Eastern despots are in the habit of addressing to their masters. I have had many private letters showing the same revolt of reasoning natures against doctrines which shock the more highly civilized part of mankind in this nineteenth century and are leading to those dissensions which have long shown as cracks, and are fast becoming lines of cleavage in some of the largest communions of Protestantism.

The principle of heredity has been largely studied since this story was written. This tale, like “Elsie Venner,” depends for its deeper significance on the ante-natal history of its subject. But the story was meant to be readable for those who did not care for its underlying philosophy. If it fails to interest the reader who ventures upon it, it may find a place on an unfrequented bookshelf in common with other “medicated novels.”

Perhaps I have been too hard with Gifted Hopkins and the tribe of rhymesters to which he belongs. I ought not to forget that I too introduced myself to the reading world in a thin volume of verses; many of which had better not have been written, and would not be reprinted now, but for the fact that they have established a right to a place among my poems in virtue of long occupancy. Besides, although the writing of verses is often a mark of mental weakness, I cannot forget that Joseph Story and George Bancroft each published his little book, of rhymes, and that John Quincy Adams has left many poems on record, the writing of which did not interfere with the vast and important labors of his illustrious career.

BEVERLY FARMS, MASS., August 7, 1891. O. W. H.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

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CHAPTER I. AN ADVERTISEMENT.

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On Saturday, the 18th day of June, 1859, the “State Banner and Delphian Oracle,” published weekly at Oxbow Village, one of the principal centres in a thriving river-town of New England, contained an advertisement which involved the story of a young life, and stained the emotions of a small community. Such faces of dismay, such shaking of heads, such gatherings at corners, such halts of complaining, rheumatic wagons, and dried-up, chirruping chaises, for colloquy of their still-faced tenants, had not been known since the rainy November Friday, when old Malachi Withers was found hanging in his garret up there at the lonely house behind the poplars.

The number of the “Banner and Oracle” which contained this advertisement was a fair specimen enough of the kind of newspaper to which it belonged. Some extracts from a stray copy of the issue of the date referred to will show the reader what kind of entertainment the paper was accustomed to furnish its patrons, and also serve some incidental purposes of the writer in bringing into notice a few personages who are to figure in this narrative.

The copy in question was addressed to one of its regular subscribers—“B. Gridley, Esq.” The sarcastic annotations at various points, enclosed in brackets and italicised that they may be distinguished from any other comments, were taken from the pencilled remarks of that gentleman, intended for the improvement of a member of the family in which he resided, and are by no means to be attributed to the harmless pen which reproduces them.

Byles Gridley, A. M., as he would have been styled by persons acquainted with scholarly dignities, was a bachelor, who had been a schoolmaster, a college tutor, and afterwards for many years professor—a man of learning, of habits, of whims and crotchets, such as are hardly to be found, except in old, unmarried students—the double flowers of college culture, their stamina all turned to petals, their stock in the life of the race all funded in the individual. Being a man of letters, Byles Gridley naturally rather undervalued the literary acquirements of the good people of the rural district where he resided, and, having known much of college and something of city life, was apt to smile at the importance they attached to their little local concerns. He was, of course, quite as much an object of rough satire to the natural observers and humorists, who are never wanting in a New England village—perhaps not in any village where a score or two of families are brought together—enough of them, at any rate, to furnish the ordinary characters of a real-life stock company.

The old Master of Arts was a permanent boarder in the house of a very worthy woman, relict of the late Ammi Hopkins, by courtesy Esquire, whose handsome monument —in a finished and carefully colored lithograph, representing a finely shaped urn under a very nicely groomed willow— hung in her small, well-darkened, and, as it were, monumental parlor. Her household consisted of herself, her son, nineteen years of age, of whom more hereafter, and of two small children, twins, left upon her doorstep when little more than mere marsupial possibilities, taken in for the night, kept for a week, and always thereafter cherished by the good soul as her own; also of Miss Susan Posey, aged eighteen, at school at the “Academy” in another part of the same town, a distant relative, boarding with her.

What the old scholar took the village paper for it would be hard to guess, unless for a reason like that which carried

him very regularly to hear the preaching of the Rev. Joseph Bellamy Stoker, colleague of the old minister of the village parish; namely, because he did not believe a word of his favorite doctrines, and liked to go there so as to growl to himself through the sermon, and go home scolding all the way about it.

The leading article of the “Banner and Oracle” for June 18th must have been of superior excellence, for, as Mr. Gridley remarked, several of the “metropolitan” journals of the date of June 15th and thereabout had evidently conversed with the writer and borrowed some of his ideas before he gave them to the public. The Foreign News by the Europa at Halifax, 15th, was spread out in the amplest dimensions the type of the office could supply. More battles! The Allies victorious! The King and General Cialdini beat the Austrians at Palestro! 400 Austrians drowned in a canal! Anti-French feeling in Germany! Allgermine Zeiturg talks of conquest of Allsatia and Loraine and the occupation of Paris! [Vicious digs with a pencil through the above proper names.] Race for the Derby won by Sir Joseph Hawley's Musjid! [That's what England cares for! Hooray for the Darby! Italy be deedeed!] Visit of Prince Alfred to the Holy Land. Letter from our own Correspondent. [Oh! Oh! A West Minkville?] Cotton advanced. Breadstuffs declining.—Deacon Rumrill's barn burned down on Saturday night. A pig missing; supposed to have “fallen a prey to the devouring element.” [Got roasted.] A yellow mineral had been discovered on the Doolittle farm, which, by the report of those who had seen it, bore a strong resemblance to California gold ore. Much excitement in the neighborhood in consequence [Idiots! Iron pyrites!] A hen at Four Corners had just laid an egg measuring 7 by 8 inches. Fetch on your biddies! [Editorial wit!] A man had shot an eagle measuring six feet and a half from tip to tip of his wings.—Crops suffering for want of rain [Always just so. “Dry times, Father

Noah!”] The editors had received a liberal portion of cake from the happy couple whose matrimonial union was recorded in the column dedicated to Hymen. Also a superior article of [article of! bah!] steel pen from the enterprising merchant [shopkeeper] whose advertisement was to be found on the third page of this paper.—An interesting Surprise Party [cheap theatricals] had transpired [bah!] on Thursday evening last at the house of the Rev. Mr. Stoker. The parishioners had donated [donated! GIVE is a good word enough for the Lord's Prayer. DONATE our daily bread!] a bag of meal, a bushel of beans, a keg of pickles, and a quintal of salt-fish. The worthy pastor was much affected, etc., etc. [Of course. Call'em. SENSATION parties and done with it!] The Rev. Dr. Pemberton and the venerable Dr. Hurlbut honored the occasion with their presence.—We learn that the Rev. Ambrose Eveleth, rector of St. Bartholomew's Chapel, has returned from his journey, and will officiate to-morrow.

Then came strings of advertisements, with a luxuriant vegetation of capitals and notes of admiration. More of those PRIME GOODS! Full Assortments of every Article in our line! [Except the one thing you want!] Auction Sale. Old furniture, feather-beds, bed-spreads [spreads! ugh!], setts [setts!] crockery-ware, odd vols., ullage bbls. of this and that, with other household goods, etc., etc., etc.—the etceteras meaning all sorts of insane movables, such as come out of their bedlam-holes when an antiquated domestic establishment disintegrates itself at a country “vandoo.”—Several announcements of “Feed,” whatever that may be—not restaurant dinners, anyhow—also of “Shorts,”—terms mysterious to city ears as jute and cudbear and gunnybags to such as drive oxen in the remote interior districts.—Then the marriage column above alluded to, by the fortunate recipients of the cake. Right opposite, as if for matrimonial ground-bait, a Notice that Whereas my

wife, Lucretia Babb, has left my bed and board, I will not be responsible, etc., etc., from this date.—Jacob Penhallow (of the late firm Wibird and Penhallow) had taken Mr. William Murray Bradshaw into partnership, and the business of the office would be carried on as usual under the title Penhallow and Bradshaw, Attorneys at Law. Then came the standing professional card of Dr. Lemuel Hurlbut and Dr. Fordyce Hurlbut, the medical patriarch of the town and his son. Following this, hideous quack advertisements, some of them with the certificates of Honorables, Esquires, and Clergymen.—Then a cow, strayed or stolen from the subscriber.—Then the advertisement referred to in our first paragraph:

MYRTLE HAZARD has been missing from her home in this place since Thursday morning, June 16th. She is fifteen years old, tall and womanly for her age, has dark hair and eyes, fresh complexion, regular features, pleasant smile and voice, but shy with strangers. Her common dress was a black and white gingham check, straw hat, trimmed with green ribbon. It is feared she may have come to harm in some way, or be wandering at large in a state of temporary mental alienation. Any information relating to the missing child will be gratefully received and properly rewarded by her afflicted aunt,

MISS SILENCE WITHERS, Residing at the Withers Homestead, otherwise known as “The Poplars,” in this village.

CHAPTER II. GREAT EXCITEMENT

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The publication of the advertisement in the paper brought the village fever of the last two days to its height. Myrtle Hazard's disappearance had been pretty well talked round through the immediate neighborhood, but now that forty-eight hours of search and inquiry had not found her, and the alarm was so great that the young girl's friends were willing to advertise her in a public journal, it was clear that the gravest apprehensions were felt and justified. The paper carried the tidings to many who had not heard it. Some of the farmers who had been busy all the week with their fields came into the village in their wagons on Saturday, and there first learned the news, and saw the paper, and the placards which were posted up, and listened, open-mouthed, to the whole story.

Saturday was therefore a day of much agitation in Oxbow Village, and some stir in the neighboring settlements. Of course there was a great variety of comment, its character depending very much on the sense, knowledge, and disposition of the citizens, gossips, and young people who talked over the painful and mysterious occurrence.

The Withers Homestead was naturally the chief centre of interest. Nurse Byloe, an ancient and voluminous woman, who had known the girl when she was a little bright-eyed child, handed over “the baby” she was holding to another attendant, and got on her things to go straight up to The Poplars. She had been holding “the baby” these forty years and more, but somehow it never got to be more than a month or six weeks old. She reached The Poplars after much toil and travail. Mistress Fagan, Irish, house-servant, opened

the door, at which Nurse Byloe knocked softly, as she was in the habit of doing at the doors of those who sent for her.

“Have you heerd anything yet, Kitty Fagan?” asked Nurse Byloe.

“Niver a blissed word,” said she. “Miss Withers is upstairs with Miss Bathsheby, a cryin' and a lamentin'. Miss Badlam's in the parlor. The men has been draggin' the pond. They have n't found not one thing, but only jest two, and that was the old coffeepot and the gray cat—it's them nigger boys hanged her with a string they tied round her neck and then drownded her.” [P. Fagan, Jr., Aet. 14, had a snarl of similar string in his pocket.]

Mistress Fagan opened the door of the best parlor. A woman was sitting there alone, rocking back and forward, and fanning herself with the blackest of black fans.

“Nuss Byloe, is that you? Well, to be sure, I'm glad to see you, though we 're all in trouble. Set right down, Nuss, do. Oh, it's dreadful times!”

A handkerchief which was in readiness for any emotional overflow was here called on for its function.

Nurse Byloe let herself drop into a flaccid squab chair with one of those soft cushions, filled with slippery feathers, which feel so fearfully like a very young infant, or a nest of little kittens, as they flatten under the subsiding person.

The woman in the rocking-chair was Miss Cynthia Badlam, second-cousin of Miss Silence Withers, with whom she had been living as a companion at intervals for some years. She appeared to be thirty-five years old, more or less, and looked not badly for that stage of youth, though of course she might have been handsomer at twenty, as is often the case with women. She wore a not unbecoming cap; frequent headaches had thinned her locks somewhat of late years. Features a little too sharp, a keen, gray eye, a quick and restless glance, which rather avoided being met, gave the

impression that she was a wide-awake, cautious, suspicious, and, very possibly, crafty person.

“I could n't help comin',” said Nurse Byloe, “we do so love our babies—how can we help it, Miss Badlam?”

The spinster colored up at the nurse's odd way of using the possessive pronoun, and dropped her eyes, as was natural on hearing such a speech.

“I never tended children as you have, Nuss,” she said. “But I 've known Myrtle Hazard ever since she was three years old, and to think she should have come to such an end—'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,'”—and she wept.

“Why, Cynthy Badlam, what do y' mean?” said Nurse Byloe. “Y' don't think anything dreadful has come o' that child's wild nater, do ye?”

“Child!” said Cynthia Badlam—“child enough to wear this very gown I have got on and not find it too big for her neither.” [It would have pinched Myrtle here and there pretty shrewdly.]

The two women looked each other in the eyes with subtle interchange of intelligence, such as belongs to their sex in virtue of its specialty. Talk without words is half their conversation, just as it is all the conversation of the lower animals. Only the dull senses of men are dead to it as to the music of the spheres.

Their minds travelled along, as if they had been yoked together, through whole fields of suggestive speculation, until the dumb growths of thought ripened in both their souls into articulate speech, consentingly, as the movement comes after the long stillness of a Quaker meeting.

Their lips opened at the same moment. “You don't mean”—began Nurse Byloe, but stopped as she heard Miss Badlam also speaking.

“They need n't drag the pond,” she said. “They need n't go beating the woods as if they were hunting a patridge—though for that matter Myrtle Hazard was always more like a patridge than she was like a pullet. Nothing ever took hold of that girl—not catechising, nor advising, nor punishing. It's that dreadful will of hers never was broke. I've always been afraid that she would turn out a child of wrath. Did y' ever watch her at meetin' playing with posies and looking round all the time of the long prayer? That's what I've seen her do many and many a time. I'm afraid—Oh dear! Miss Byloe, I'm afraid to say—what I'm afraid of. Men are so wicked, and young girls are full of deceit and so ready to listen to all sorts of artful creturs that take advantage of their ignorance and tender years.” She wept once more, this time with sobs that seemed irrepressible.

“Dear suz!” said the nurse, “I won't believe no sech thing as wickedness about Myrtle Hazard. You mean she's gone an' run off with some good-for-nothin' man or other? If that ain't what y' mean, what do y' mean? It can't be so, Miss Badlam: she's one o' my babies. At any rate, I handled her when she fust come to this village—and none o' my babies never did sech a thing. Fifteen year old, and be bringin' a whole family into disgrace! If she was thirty year old, or five-an'-thirty or more, and never'd had a chance to be married, and if one o' them artful creturs you was talkin' of got hold of her, then, to be sure—why, dear me!—law! I never thought, Miss Badlam!—but then of course you could have had your pickin' and choosin' in the time of it; and I don't mean to say it's too late now if you felt called that way, for you're better lookin' now than some that's younger, and there's no accountin' for tastes.”

A sort of hysteric twitching that went through the frame of Cynthia Badlam dimly suggested to the old nurse that she was not making her slightly indiscreet personality much better by her explanations. She stopped short, and surveyed

the not uncomely person of the maiden lady sitting before her with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, and one hand clenching the arm of the reeking-chair, as if some spasm had clamped it there. The nurse looked at her with a certain growing interest she had never felt before. It was the first time for some years that she had had such a chance, partly because Miss Cynthia had often been away for long periods—partly because she herself had been busy professionally. There was no occasion for her services, of course, in the family at The Poplars; and she was always following round from place to place after that everlasting migratory six-weeks or less old baby.

There was not a more knowing pair of eyes, in their way, in a circle of fifty miles, than those kindly tranquil orbs that Nurse Byloe fixed on Cynthia Badlam. The silver threads in the side fold of hair, the delicate lines at the corner of the eye, the slight drawing down at the angle of the mouth—almost imperceptible, but the nurse dwelt upon it—a certain moulding of the features as of an artist's clay model worked by delicate touches with the fingers, showing that time or pain or grief had had a hand in shaping them, the contours, the adjustment of every fold of the dress, the attitude, the very way of breathing, were all passed through the searching inspection of the ancient expert, trained to know all the changes wrought by time and circumstance. It took not so long as it takes to describe it, but it was an analysis of imponderables, equal to any of Bunsen's with the spectroscope.

Miss Badlam removed her handkerchief and looked in a furtive, questioning way, in her turn, upon the nurse.

“It's dreadful close here—I'm 'most smothered,” Nurse Byloe said; and, putting her hand to her throat, unclasped the catch of the necklace of gold beads she had worn since she was a baby—a bead having been added from time to time as she thickened. It lay in a deep groove of her large

neck, and had not troubled her in breathing before, since the day when her husband was run over by an ox-team.

At this moment Miss Silence Withers entered, followed by Bathsheba Stoker, daughter of Rev. Joseph Bellamy Stoker.

She was the friend of Myrtle, and had come to comfort Miss Silence, and consult with her as to what further search they should institute. The two, Myrtle's aunt and her friend, were as unlike as they could well be. Silence Withers was something more than forty years old, a shadowy, pinched, sallow, dispirited, bloodless woman, with the habitual look of the people in the funeral carriage which follows next to the hearse, and the tone in speaking that may be noticed in a household where one of its members is lying white and still in a cool, darkened chamber overhead. Bathsheba Stoker was not called handsome; but she had her mother's youthful smile, which was so fresh and full of sweetness that she seemed like a beauty while she was speaking or listening; and she could never be plain so long as any expression gave life to her features. In perfect repose, her face, a little prematurely touched by sad experiences—for she was but seventeen years old—had the character and decision stamped in its outlines which any young man who wanted a companion to warn, to comfort, and command him, might have depended on as warranting the courage, the sympathy, and the sense demanded for such a responsibility. She had been trying her powers of consolation on Miss Silence. It was a sudden freak of Myrtle's. She had gone off on some foolish but innocent excursion. Besides, she was a girl that would take care of herself; for she was afraid of nothing, and nimbler than any boy of her age, and almost as strong as any. As for thinking any bad thoughts about her, that was a shame; she cared for none of the young fellows that were round her. Cyprian Eveleth was the one she thought most of; but Cyprian was as true as his sister Olive, and who else was there?

To all this Miss Silence answered only by sighing and moaning, For two whole days she had been kept in constant fear and worry, afraid every minute of some tragical message, perplexed by the conflicting advice of all manner of officious friends, sleepless of course through the two nights, and now utterly broken down and collapsed.

Bathsheba had said all she could in the way of consolation, and hastened back to her mother's bedside, which she hardly left, except for the briefest of visits.

“It's a great trial, Miss Withers, that's laid on you,” said Nurse Byloe.

“If I only knew that she was dead, and had died in the Lord,” Miss Silence answered—“if I only knew that but if she is living in sin, or dead in wrong—doing, what is to become of me?—Oh, what is to become of me when 'He maketh inquisition far blood'?”

“Cousin Silence,” said Miss Cynthia, “it is n't your fault, if that young girl has taken to evil ways. If going to meeting three times every Sabbath day, and knowing the catechism by heart, and reading of good books, and the best of daily advice, and all needful discipline, could have corrected her sinful nature, she would never have run away from a home where she enjoyed all these privileges. It's that Indian blood, Cousin Silence. It's a great mercy you and I have n't got any of it in our veins! What can you expect of children that come from heathens and savages? You can't lay it to yourself, Cousin Silence, if Myrtle Hazard goes wrong”—

“The Lord will lay it to me—the Lord will lay it to me,” she moaned. “Did n't he say to Cain, 'Where is Abel, thy brother?'”

Nurse Byloe was getting very red in the face. She had had about enough of this talk between the two women. “I hope the Lard 'll take care of Myrtle Hazard fust, if she's in trouble, 'n' wants help,” she said; “'n' then look out for them

that comes next. Y' 're too suspicious, Miss Badlam; y' 're too easy to believe stories. Myrtle Hazard was as pretty a child and as good a child as ever I see, if you did n't rile her; 'n' d' d y' ever see one o' them hearty lively children, that had n't a sperrit of its own? For my part, I'd rather handle one of 'em than a dozen o' them little waxy, weak-eyed, slim-necked creturs that always do what they tell 'em to, and die afore they're a dozen year old; and never was the time when I've seen Myrtle Hazard, sence she was my baby, but what it's always been, 'Good mornin', Miss Byloe,' and 'How do you do, Miss Byloe? I'm so glad to see you.' The handsomest young woman, too, as all the old folks will agree in tellin' you, s'ence the time o' Judith Pride that was —the Pride of the County they used to call her, for her beauty. Her great-grandma, y' know, Miss Cynthy, married old King David Withers. What I want to know is, whether anything has been heerd, and jest what's been done about findin' the poor thing. How d' ye know she has n't fell into the river? Have they fired cannon? They say that busts the gall of drownded folks, and makes the corpse rise. Have they looked in the woods everywhere? Don't believe no wrong of nobody, not till y' must—least of all of them that come o' the same folks, partly, and has lived with yo all their days. I tell y', Myrtle Hazard's jest as innocent of all what y' 've been thinkin' about—bless the poor child; she's got a soul that's as clean and sweet-well, as a pond-lily when it fust opens of a mornin', without a speck on it no more than on the fust pond-lily God Almighty ever made!”

That gave a turn to the two women's thoughts, and their handkerchiefs went up to their faces. Nurse Byloe turned her eyes quickly on Cynthia Badlam, and repeated her close inspection of every outline and every light and shadow in her figure. She did not announce any opinion as to the age or good looks or general aspect or special points of Miss Cynthia; but she made a sound which the books write

humph! but which real folks make with closed lips, thus: m'! —a sort of half-suppressed labio-palato-nasal utterance, implying that there is a good deal which might be said, and all the vocal organs want to have a chance at it, if there is to be any talking.

Friends and neighbors were coming in and out; and the next person that came was the old minister, of whom, and of his colleague, the Rev. Joseph Bellamy Stoker, some account may here be introduced.

The Rev. Eliphalet Pemberton Father Pemberton as brother ministers called him, Priest Pemberton as he was commonly styled by the country people—would have seemed very old, if the medical patriarch of the village had not been so much older. A man over ninety is a great comfort to all his elderly neighbors: he is a picket-guard at the extreme outpost; and the young folks of sixty and seventy feel that the enemy must get by him before he can come near their camp. Dr. Hurlbut, at ninety-two, made Priest Pemberton seem comparatively little advanced; but the college catalogue showed that he must be seventy-five years old, if, as we may suppose, he was twenty at the time of his graduation.

He was a man of noble presence always, and now, in the grandeur of his flowing silver hair and with the gray shaggy brows overhanging his serene and solemn eyes, with the slow gravity of motion and the measured dignity of speech which gave him the air of an old pontiff, he was an imposing personage to look upon, and could be awful, if the occasion demanded it. His creed was of the sternest: he was looked up to as a bulwark against all the laxities which threatened New England theology. But it was a creed rather of the study and of the pulpit than of every-day application among his neighbors. He dealt too much in the lofty abstractions which had always such fascinations for the higher class of New England divines, to busy himself as much as he might have done with the spiritual condition of individuals. He had also

a good deal in him of what he used to call the Old Man, which, as he confessed, he had never succeeded in putting off—meaning thereby certain qualities belonging to humanity, as much as the natural gifts of the dumb creatures belong to them, and tending to make a man beloved by his weak and erring fellow-mortals.

In the olden time he would have lived and died king of his parish, monarch, by Divine right, as the noblest, grandest, wisest of all that made up the little nation within hearing of his meeting-house bell. But Young Calvinism has less reverence and more love of novelty than its forefathers. It wants change, and it loves young blood. Polyandry is getting to be the normal condition of the Church; and about the time a man is becoming a little overripe for the livelier human sentiments, he may be pretty sure the women are looking round to find him a colleague. In this way it was that the Rev. Joseph Bellamy Stoker became the colleague of the Rev. Eliphalet Pemberton.

If one could have dived deep below all the Christian graces—the charity, the sweetness of disposition, the humility—of Father Pemberton, he would have found a small remnant of the “Old Man,” as the good clergyman would have called it, which was never in harmony with the Rev. Mr. Stoker. The younger divine felt his importance, and made his venerable colleague feel that he felt it. Father Pemberton had a fair chance at rainy Sundays and hot summer-afternoon services; but the junior pushed him aside without ceremony whenever he thought there was like to be a good show in the pews. As for those courtesies which the old need, to soften the sense of declining faculties and failing attractions, the younger pastor bestowed them in public, but was negligent of them, to say the least, when not on exhibition.

Good old Father Pemberton could not love this man, but he would not hate him, and he never complained to him or

of him. It would have been of no use if he had: the women of the parish had taken up the Rev. Mr. Stoker; and when the women run after a minister or a doctor, what do the men signify?

Why the women ran after him, some thought it was not hard to guess. He was not ill-looking, according to the village standard, parted his hair smoothly, tied his white cravat carefully, was fluent, plausible, had a gift in prayer, was considered eloquent, was fond of listening to their spiritual experiences, and had a sickly wife. This is what Byles Gridley said; but he was apt to be caustic at times.

Father Pemberton visited his people but rarely. Like Jonathan Edwards, like David Osgood, he felt his call to be to study-work, and was impatient of the egotisms and spiritual megrims, in listening to which, especially from the younger females of his flock, his colleague had won the hearts of so many of his parishioners. His presence had a wonderful effect in restoring the despondent Miss Silence to her equanimity; for not all the hard divinity he had preached for half a century had spoiled his kindly nature; and not the gentle Melanchthon himself, ready to welcome death as a refuge from the rage and bitterness of theologians, was more in contrast with the disputants with whom he mingled, than the old minister, in the hour of trial, with the stern dogmatist in his study, forging thunderbolts to smite down sinners.

It was well that there were no tithing-men about on that next day, Sunday; for it shone no Sabbath day for the young men within half a dozen miles of the village. They were out on Bear Hill the whole day, beating up the bushes as if for game, scaring old crows out of their ragged nests, and in one dark glen startling a fierce-eyed, growling, bobtailed catamount, who sat spitting and looking all ready to spring at them, on the tall tree where he clung with his claws unsheathed, until a young fellow came up with a gun and

shot him dead. They went through and through the swamp at Musquash Hollow; but found nothing better than a wicked old snapping-turtle, evil to behold, with his snaky head and alligator tail, but worse to meddle with, if his horny jaws were near enough to spring their man-trap on the curious experimenter. At Wood-End there were some Indians, ill-conditioned savages in a dirty tent, making baskets, the miracle of which was that they were so clean. They had seen a young lady answering the description, about a week ago. She had bought a basket. Asked them if they had a canoe they wanted to sell.—Eyes like hers (pointing to a squaw with a man's hat on).

At Pocasset the young men explored all the thick woods—some who ought to have known better taking their guns, which made a talk, as one might well suppose it would. Hunting on a Sabbath day! They did n't mean to shoot Myrtle Hazard, did they? it was keenly asked. A good many said it was all nonsense, and a mere excuse to get away from meeting and have a sort of frolic on pretence that it was a work of necessity and mercy, one or both.

While they were scattering themselves about in this way, some in earnest, some rejoicing in the unwonted license, lifting off for a little while that enormous Sabbath-day pressure which weighs like forty atmospheres on every true-born Puritan, two young men had been since Friday in search of the lost girl, each following a clue of his own, and determined to find her if she was among the living.

Cyprian Eveleth made for the village of Mapleton, where his sister Olive was staying, trusting that, with her aid, he might get a clue to the mystery of Myrtle's disappearance.

William Murray Bradshaw struck for a railroad train going to the great seaport, at a station where it stops for wood and water.

In the mean time, a third young man, Gifted Hopkins by name, son of the good woman already mentioned, sat down, with tears in his eyes, and wrote those touching stanzas, “The Lost Myrtle,” which were printed in the next “Banner and Oracle,” and much admired by many who read them.