

Choice Literature.

SALEM: A TALE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

BY D. R. CASTLETON.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

A fair division of labour is one of the useful discoveries of modern times; but if our friends had never heard of it as a principle, they certainly availed themselves of it as a fact. First, Alice, as the owner, founder and projector, pondered and considered and decided what she wished to have done. She represented the theoretic element. Next, the more experienced matron, Mrs. Campbell, took her grandchild's crude imaginings into wise consideration, and decided how it was to be done. She was clearly the practical member. Next came Winny, who held the highest executive power; she took her directions from her mistress, measured and marked and adjusted the boards in their places, and showed her father how to do it. And last of all came in old Drosky, the mechanical power, who did the hammering and sawing—or, as Winny pithily phrased it, "she druv old dad, an' dad druv the nails."

At all events, they worked well together, and made a very harmonious quartette, and the work went gayly on. It is just possible that there may have been more noise and clatter when the Tower of Babel was run up. But then that was a more imposing structure, there were more people engaged in it, and it was in the Old World; but this was pretty well for a new country—three women, an old man, and a hen-coop—and made some noise in the world.

When the work was about half finished, Alice, who, owning not a penny of her own in the wide world, was, of course, of a very liberal and generous disposition—as penniless people usually are—proposed that old Drosky should stop and rest, and have something to eat, observing to Winny that she was sure he must be tired and hungry too.

"No, he aint—not a bit ch'it," said Winny, with a reproving and admonitory wink of her eye, and a shake of her sagacious old head at Alice. "He aint a mite hungry yet, yer know," and as she spoke she looked full in old Drosky's face, whose hungry eyes spoke a very different language. "You aint not a mite hungry now, nigger; but I 'spects yer will be when yer work is done, and den I 'clare I guess yer'll get sum'pen to eat—I do."

"Shoo!" she said, *sotto-voce*, turning to Alice, "yer don' know dat ar ole man as well as I do—he's a mighty powerful han' to eat. Yer sot 'im at it now, an' I guess yer cocks an' hens will hev to stan' round all night for want ob a roost to sot down on. Keep 'im at it till de work's done, I tell yer, an' den stan' clear—an' you'll see!" and Drosky resumed his work submissively but regretfully. But at length the work was completed—the partition was all up; the broken hinge of the door was replaced; slats were put over the window, to allow air, but not egress; the waste ashes were spread over the floor, "to keep off wermin," as Winny explained to Alice; a clothes-pole was put up for a roost; and two old boxes, filled with hay, were introduced to offer suggestive ideas to any well-disposed hen who might be thrifly inclined to pay for her board in eggs and chickens; and all was declared in readiness for the tenants.

Alice was delighted—but still more charmed was old Drosky. He went in, and silently contemplated the little apartment with intense satisfaction; possibly he was admiring the work of his own hands—more probably he was thinking how superior the accommodations were to his own; but he stayed so long in rapt contemplation that Winny had to interfere at last.

"I 'clare for't," she said, "I b'liebe dat ole nigger ob mine wud jest stay an' sot in dar all night, if we'd let 'im; pity he could'nt sot for yer hens, Alice—'twould save dere time, an' it's jest 'bout what he's fit for." But Winny knew of a potent charm sufficient to draw him out.

"Kim a he'ar, nigger, an' get sum'pen to eat;" and the old man was at her heels in a moment.

Laughingly Alice followed them to a table, which Winny had improvised out of two barrels and a board for his express use. Here the indulgent daughter had laid out two or three dozen of cold boiled potatoes; half a peck of cold baked beans, with a corresponding lump of pork; half of a pie; a loaf of bread; a huge bit of cheese; a ham bone; a saucerful of pickles; a bowl of tea; and a can of cider.

With laughing eyes, full of mingled mirth and amazement, Alice stood quietly by and watched the old dorkie make his way through this heterogeneous mass of food, with the celerity and the apparent ease with which an able mower cuts his swath through a field of ripened grain; keeping up all the time an incessant shuffle of his feet, as if there were some part of the machinery by which he was able to accomplish so much in so short a time; but when, after making a clean sweep over the board, he turned his wistful eyes upon Winny with an Oliver Twistical expression, Alice could not help laughing. "He doesn't mean that he wants more, does he, Winny?"

"Oh, no; laws bress us, no; he tinks he does; but he dun'no. No, no, nigger! yer won't get nuffin more here—yer kin go home now an' hav' yer supper."

But when Alice, furnished with the money by her grandmother, was about to offer it to old Drosky, the dusky hand of Winny was interposed. "Hi! hi! Alice; don't yer go to giv' it to im—yer giv' it to me; he don't know nuffin 'bout money—I'll take it. Here, nigger! here's some coppers for yer to buy 'bacca wid; an' now make yer manners an' take yerself off—do yer hear?"

Again, in obedience to his daughter, the ram-like butting and scraping performance was gone through with, and Drosky moved off; but at the gate he paused, looked back with admiring eyes at the work of his hands, and half turned, as if to enter the coop again; but his daughter's eye was upon him; a sudden clapping of hands, a loud shout—"Hist! hist! Drosky! tidy-man! tidy-man!"—and poor old Drosky was off like a shot, just as the cart drove up with Goody Nurse's present.

With great cackling and squalling, laughing and talking, the new comers were released from their confinement and introduced to their new quarters, where they went to roost at once, as if the events of the day and their unexpected journey had been almost too much for them, and they knew that "what was new at night would still be new in the morning."

Alice looked in upon them with much pleasure as they crowded close together, side by side, on the low roost, and shut and buttoned the door upon them with a proud feeling of ownership, as novel to her as it was delightful.

CHAPTER IX.—GOODY REBECCA NURSE.

"Daring to shake, with rude, irreverent hands,
From Life's frail glass the last slow-ebbing sands."

Among the best known, most influential and widely respected of all the families of Salem village was the large family of Francis Nurse.

"Goodman," or "Grandfather," or "Landlord Nurse," which were the several titles of respect usually accorded to him, as the honoured head and patriarch of his numerous family of children and grandchildren, was then about seventy-six years of age.

He appears to have been a man of great and acknowledged respectability; a person of much energy and stability of character, and his judgment was much relied upon by his neighbours; he being frequently appointed to act the part of umpire in disputes, arbitrator on conflicting claims, and also as committeeman and juror. Goodman Nurse had been a mechanic in Salem, but having, by patient industry, accumulated a little money, he removed to Salem village, where, in the year 1650, he purchased the great "Townsend Bishop Farm," as it was termed, a tract of about 300 acres of land, much of it already improved, at the cost of £400. He was at this time a fine, hearty, hale, and vigorous old man; his wife, Rebecca Nurse, was about one year younger than himself.

She was an eminently Christian woman, full of good works; a regular member of long standing in the mother church at Salem; but after their removal to Salem village, by reason of her advanced age and consequent frequent infirmities, often a worshipper at the nearer church in the village, although never formally united with them. Goody Nurse seems to have been one of those rarely gifted women who unite the solid worth and excellence of a deeply religious character with the lighter graces of a cheerful and attractive manner; kind hearted, single minded and free spoken.

This worthy couple had brought up a large and exemplary family of children. They had four sons—Samuel, John, Francis and Benjamin; and four daughters—Rebecca, married to Thomas Preston; Mary, the wife of John Tarbell; Elizabeth, the wife of William Russell; and Sarah, then unmarried, but afterward the wife of Michael Bowdon, of Marblehead.

Francis Nurse, senior, having by the united industry of himself and his children cleared off all the encumbrances upon his large estate, had apportioned it among his several children, reserving a homestead for himself; and his son Samuel, and his two sons-in-law, Thomas Preston and John Tarbell, had already established themselves there near their parents, having separate households and gardens upon the land thus conveyed to them by their father; and a happier, more united, or more respectable family can hardly be imagined than were the Nurses at the time the great delusion of witchcraft first broke out.

Thomas Preston, one of the sons-in-law, was at first a believer in the sufferings of the "afflicted children"; but many others of the family circle, and among them the beloved and venerable mother, refused credence to their pretensions, and had absented themselves from attendance at the village church in consequence of the great and scandalous disturbances which they created there.

It is also noticeable that the Nurse family had been opposed to the party or faction who had been so zealous in favour of Mr. Bayley, the former minister, and they had thus drawn upon themselves the ill-will of Mrs. Ann Putnam, who had been one of his most zealous partisans, and was now one of the most fanatical of the accusers.

Mrs. Nurse, who was a free spoken, active body, had taken a decided part in these church discussions; it is singular to note how in all parish difficulties the female portion are the most zealous, the most belligerent, and the most vituperative. No doubt Mrs. Nurse had been free in the expression of her sentiments upon both these subjects—it was the nature of the woman to be so; and unfriendly remarks about the children, any doubt of the truth of their statements or the reality of their sufferings, were sure to be carried to them at once, and of course suggested to them new victims to accuse as the authors of all their sufferings and torments.

There had been for some time a half-concealed intimation that some one more noted than any of the previous victims was to be brought to justice, and expectation and fear were at their highest, when at length it was stealthily whispered about that Goodwife Nurse was suspected and was to be cried out upon.

At first, of course, the rumour was indignantly discredited, the quiet, unobtrusive virtues of the aged Christian village matron, her well known charities and kindness of heart setting defiance to the monstrous charge against her.

But day by day the rumour grew that she was to be called out, and at last two of her personal friends, Israel Porter and his wife Elizabeth, were requested to go to the Farm, see Mrs. Nurse, and tell her that several of the afflicted ones had accused her.

As the persons thus selected and sent were her friends, it would seem to intimate that the painful visit they were to make was undertaken in a friendly spirit, and was intended to warn the unsuspecting woman of the peril in which she stood, and very possibly they may have hoped that she would take the alarm and save herself by flight.

Entering the grounds, now all bright and smiling in the new promise of their spring beauty, the anxious friends reached the house, which was then regarded as a spacious

and elegant one: it had once been the abode of some of the choicest and best spirits in New England—here Bishop had spent his wealth to beautify the spot, and here he and Chickering and Ingersoll had exercised the rites of liberal and elegant hospitality; and now it was the happy home of an honest and prosperous family.

Entering, they found the venerable and unsuspecting hostess in her usual place. She welcomed them gladly, with all wonted hospitality; although, as she told them in answer to their inquiry, in a rather weak and low condition, having been sick and confined to the house for nearly a week.

Then they asked how it was with her otherwise. To which the patient, cheerful-hearted old Christian replied, "that she blessed God for it, that she had had more of His presence in this sickness than at some other times, but not so much as she desired; but she would, with the apostle, 'press forward to the mark,' with other passages from Scripture to the like purpose. This was not the cant of a hypocritical piety—it was the common mode of expression among Christian believers in those times; and it seemed as if her religious beliefs and the natural buoyancy of her spirits kept her up under the weight of her years and infirmities."

After a little conversation relative to personal and domestic matters, such as is usual among friendly neighbours, she naturally and of her own accord alluded to the great affliction which had broken out among them, and which was of course the most common subject of conversation.

She spoke very kindly of Mr. Parris' family, and said she was much grieved for them, but she had not been to see them because she once had been subject to fits herself, and she did not wish to see them, as people told her their sufferings were awful to witness; that she pitied them with all her heart, and had prayed to God for them; but she heard that there were some persons accused whom she fully believed were as innocent as she was herself.

After a little more conversation of this sort, the visitors told her that they had heard a report that she too had been spoken against.

"Well," she said, "if it be so, the will of the Lord be done."

Then for a while she sat perfectly still, as if utterly amazed at what she had heard—and well she might be. The mind of the aged and saintly woman could not admit the fact; it was all too unnatural—too monstrous—that her good name could be thus vilely traduced.

How could she for a moment believe that her own neighbours, whom she had loved and befriended—that the members of the church where she had worshipped—would listen to such a horrible accusation?

After a little silent reflection, and doubtless an inward prayer, the poor woman said, sadly, "Well, as to this thing, I am as innocent as the child unborn. But surely," she added, "what sin hath God found out in me, unrepented of, that He should lay such a heavy affliction upon me in my old age?"

The pious and loving old woman, the mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother of a large and affectionate family, made no attempt to escape or evade her enemies, as she might possibly even then have done; but fully conscious of her own integrity, and with a heart full of love and good will to others, she felt sure her friends, her townspeople and her fellow worshippers would justify and defend her.

But her inexorable fate was hurrying along; on the 23rd of March a warrant was duly issued against her on the complaint of Edward and Jonathan Putnam; and on the next morning, at eight o'clock, she was arrested—torn, sick and feeble as she was, from the clinging arms of her weeping daughters and indignant husband and sons, and brought up for examination by the marshal, George Herrick.

At this time, it would seem that, though many accusations had been made, and several, after undergoing a preliminary examination, had been committed, there had been no actual trials, and of course no convictions or condemnations; consequently it may be that the prisoner and her friends, although fully alive to the disgrace and obloquy of such a charge, did not realize the awful peril of death in which she was now standing.

It was bitterness enough that, sick and feeble as she was in health, infirm and aged, she was taken all unprepared from her quiet and comfortable home, and the tender care of her devoted husband and children, upon a charge so utterly unfounded, and subject to an examination so harrowing and so disgraceful.

(To be continued.)

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

The story of the Magi, as it is given by the evangelist Matthew, is astonishingly brief and unadorned. He tells us without preface that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem certain foreigners arrived in Jerusalem. He does not tell us how many they were, nor of what race, nor of what station in life; although it is fair to infer from the consideration with which they were received at the court of Herod, and from the fact that they carried treasure boxes with them, that they were persons of wealth and distinction. The most important statement in regard to them is that they were Magians, that is to say, disciples of Zoroaster, and members of the sacred or priestly order of Persia, which was then scattered among the Oriental nations, and included men of exalted rank. They came from the East, a word which to the dwellers in Palestine could hardly have any other meaning than the ancient region of Chaldea, lying beyond the Jordan and the desert. Their explanation of their journey to Herod was that they had seen an appearance in the heavens (whether one star, or many, or a comet they did not say) which led them to believe that the King of the Jews had been born, and they had come to do reverence to Him. Herod was greatly troubled at hearing this, and sent for the chief priests and scribes to inquire where the prophets had foretold that the Messiah should be born. They answered at once that Bethlehem was the