

## Choice Literature.

## THE MINISTER'S BLACK VEIL.

WITH FULL PARTICULARS.

BY EDWARD EVERETT HALE.

## CHAPTER I.

Mr. Hooper woke one morning after a broken sleep. He was more silent at breakfast than was his habit. Mrs. Hooper saw this and she knew the reason. She had seen it while he dressed himself, and she knew the reason then. But all her comment was to hurry into her kitchen a little earlier than usual, and take in her own hand a certain preparation of egg on toast which he was fond of. "If he is worried, he shall have his egg," said the good woman to her elf. And Mr. Hooper had it, and ate it all, and thanked her for it. But he talked little at breakfast, and Mrs. Hooper knew why.

A messenger had come from her brother the night before to say that Phinlimmon would sail on Thursday, if the wind served, for England. Now Phinlimmon was to take in his ship the return which Parson Hooper was to make for last year's purchases in London; for the silk dress, the silk stockings, the muslin neckties, the books, the gamboge, and senna and other medicines. Mrs. Hooper's cousin Avery had made and sent out the selection, and had bidden Mr. Hooper send the returns in mink, or beaver, clapboards, sassafras and gold thread. But, of course, he had left it to Mr. Hooper's judgment, how much or how little of each of these various staples should be entrusted Phinlimmon. And here was the great decision to be made to-day. Poor Mr. Hooper must find out how much gold thread there was on sale, and how much sassafras and the rest. He must take final advice with her brother and the other merchants, and so do the best possible thing for her cousin Avery. Mrs. Hooper knew too well that she must not oppose him. She had suggested that he should leave the whole affair to her brother, and Mr. Hooper had said "No." She could not understand, he had said, but it was one of those personal things which he must determine.

So he left her, with his brow clouded. He had called her attention to what he supposed to be the rise in the price of gold thread. He had asked her whether she had heard from "the Indian" anything about the number of minks killed last winter. So far he had confided in her. But only so far. And she knew that he went in perplexity to a disagreeable morning.

But, if Mr. Hooper were depressed when he left home, he was more depressed when he returned. Yet his brother-in-law had been most kind. He had ready for him, in the little counting-room, notes of the prices of all the various articles which the Averys had suggested for shipment. He had given his own advice. He had consulted with neighbours; and as Mr. Glover, the brother-in-law, was one of the largest merchants, and as Mr. Hooper's and Avery's little venture was one of the smallest, even Mr. Hooper felt that all possible care had been given, as to the grounds for his decision. And he had gone so far as to determine that twelve hundred cedar clapboards, of a fashion that had found favour in London, should be that day packed away in the recesses of the hold of Phinlimmon's vessel. For the rest he told Mr. Glover he would decide.

And so he had started to walk home and to make his decision on the way. Then it was that misfortune began. For, just as he was crossing from the counting room to the more quiet side of the street, that he might meditate undisturbed, excellent Madam Cockrell had seen him and had borne down on him.

"Dear Mr. Hooper, I am so glad to see you. I am so taken up to-day, and so busy with Ruth and Eunice and all the girls. You do not know, indeed, that Ruth is to go to Biddeford with Chauncy, and not a thing ready!" I said to my husband that I did not see how I could go and see your wife, and he did not seem to think that he could go; but now I have caught you; it is so lucky, and you will do just as well. Will you tell Mrs. Hooper that I have seen Dinah, and that Dinah says that if she will give her up Monday afternoon so that she can go up to the Tettlows' then and kind of finish off their washing—she can stop for me half an hour earlier on Tuesday and then be at your house by eleven. Or, if you must have her Monday and will let her know by Silas when he passes by, then she will see Miriam at Judge Lee's," etc., etc., etc. Mr. Hooper could not repeat more of the message, far less Mrs. Hooper, and least of all this chronicler.

"She said she had caught me," said the poor minister. "How often they say that. As if I were escaping from my keepers. She 'caught me,' indeed, and after she had walked half-way home with me without her hood on, and I tried to think out about the gold thread and the sassafras—my dear, I believe I am going crazy. I was all confused whether your brother said ten or ten dozen. I do not know, and I know he wants to know in the morning."

Poor Mrs. Hooper did what she had done hundreds of times before in similar catastrophes. She sympathized, soothed and wondered. She led back to the success about the clapboards. Privately she dispatched Jotham, who was chopping wood, with a note to her brother. And, before Mr. Hooper had finished the egg and wine she had hastily beaten up for him, lest he should be chilled by his walk, a note from the wharf supplied, in black and white, the necessary information. And, in the secret silence of the study, Parson Hooper recomposed himself as he could to the unusual and disagreeable calculation. What his brother Glover would have done in five minutes this excellent man wasted a day upon, and even then was sure that he did not do it well, because Mrs. Cockrell had "caught him." Not even when Avery's letters arrived, eight months after, and expressed even enthusiasm about the success of the venture, was Parson Hooper wholly soothed.

## CHAPTER II.

To persons unused to ministerial life in New England, at the beginning of the last century, it will seem that no such misfortune could happen again to Parson Hooper within a year. But that is because they are unused to it. His wife could tell them better. The very next day—it was Wednesday—the good man told his wife that he should give the morning to the Goldthwaites at the mills. The troubles of the

Goldthwaites were: 1, bodily, in that they were poor; 2, mental, in that they knew not what to do; 3, spiritual, in that each one had quarrelled with each other of the whole clan of Goldthwaites. On Parson Hooper, as the clear-headed, sound adviser and peacemaker of the whole town, devolved the solution of all problems and the reunion of the broken family. And to this work he gave up Wednesday, and went forth as cheerfully as Amadis ever went to battle.

Lo! he returned all wounded and forlorn,  
His dream of glory lost in shades of night.

To Mrs. Hooper and to her alone he told the story of his discomfiture.

He had seen Seth Goldthwaite alone. That was necessary. And no one knew he had come in. He had seen old grandsire Tellow, who had married the widow Goldthwaite. This visit also was secret, as if he had been Nicodemus. He had seen Lucas and Philemon, as they were hewing the timbers for their new barn. Then he had left them to "cross lots," by pardonable guile. For both these "contrary" men believed that he was on his way to the school at the Falls, and he did not undeceive them. His visit to Fairfax Shipman, who had married Rachel Goldthwaite, must be as secret as the dew from heaven, and none this side the Recording Angel must know he took to her ten pieces of eight and a joe from Mother Tellow.

"And I went by the quarry, and just as I had to cross the country road, of all the men in the world the doctor appeared in his gig. Of course he knew me. Of course he guessed I was going to the school. I must ride. He would stop and bring me home. My dear Mary, if I had lisped a word about Rachel Shipman it would have gone over the town. So I had to go with him. I have been at the Falls since noon. The doctor has brought me home, and here I am, with poor Rachel's money in my pocket. My dear Mary, I wished for the invisible hat of Jack the Giant Killer!"

And in this grievous wail of the good man, the first suggestion of the veil came in.

Before it was light the next morning he had saddled the bay mare. And before the sun rose Rachel Shipman had her money.

## CHAPTER III.

But the week was not ended. No, indeed! "The end is not yet," as good Parson Hooper would have said. In the long ride to Mr. Shipman's in the gray of the morning he had studied over his sermons as best he might, and in the ride back again he had gone over the order of the argument again. But the whole was hazy, and he knew it was. All intermingled with the logical flow of predestination and free will, sanctification and duty, came in the refrain of poor Mrs. Shipman's entreating words as she stood on the doorstep and whispered them in his ear. It was a long distance, and of course he was late to his breakfast after he returned. Then he told his wife the whole story. And now he could go into the study and begin his notes for a brief of the sermons. But his mind would not work well. The Goldthwaites and the Shipmans and the Tettlows and all their gossip would interfere with the argument. The good man put on his hat and boots, stopped at the dairy door to tell his wife that he was going to walk in the cedar pasture, so as to think out the sermons in the open air, and jumped lightly over the fence into the orchard on his way thither.

Better for him had he taken the longer way, for as he passed through the orchard Nick Tainter saw him and joined him instantly.

"So glad to find you, Parson! Didn't dare go in. Mrs. Hooper said you was busy writin'." "N' I thought I must wait till ye come out. All night I've been thinkin' about it, 'n' I knew I must come 'n' ask ye."

"Now, tell me, Parson, ef Solomon's Temple had a nethermost chamber five cubits high, en the middle chamber was six cubits broad, en the third chamber was seven cubits broad, how would them priests and Levites turn round? etc., etc., etc., in that strangest and saddest of half-coherency and half-folly, in which the mathematical mind of New England is so apt to give way."

Poor Parson Hooper! he knew the morning was gone for him now. How often the poor man had said that here was the one point where his dear Saviour's example failed him. "He could cure these poor, crazy people," the good Parson said, "and I can't." Still he was willing to do his part. He could always soothe and he would always soothe. How much time or how little he ought to give to them and their vagaries he could never decide. And yet he could never bring himself to accept the more trenchant views of Mrs. Hooper—into which discussion this story need not go. Enough to say that the brief of the sermons was more hazy than ever, and was intermingled now with the dimensions of the nethermost chamber. And to-morrow would be Friday. In a working minister's life, most days are.

When dinner came, Nick Tainter was provided with a bit of pie and cheese to walk home with, and told to read carefully the books of Chronicles, and good Mr. Hooper, still perplexed but ready to see the droll side of the adventure, joined the failym at their meal. Here was a new element. His wife's pretty sister, Martha Glover, had come down from Boston. She had been expected, but was not expected so soon. She was a pet with the Parson, as she was, indeed, with all the household. And the blackest clouds of Goldthwaites or of Tainters vanished before her sunshine.

By the time they came to the dumplings, Mr. Hooper was in his best mood, and with all his latent fun, and with infinite kindness as well, he told the story of poor Nick's troubles about the nethermost chamber, and of his own crafty and ingenious solutions. But then his face clouded a little, and he said, sadly enough, "It is all well enough to laugh at, but what will become of my sermons; I am sure I do not know." And so he told in a humorous vein, and not as seriously as I have told it, the history of Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday. How Mrs. Cockrell had "caught him," how the doctor had insisted on his riding, and now how poor Nick had recognized him the moment he leaped the fence. Indeed, if he had not told the story, you would not be reading it now.

"My dear brother Oliver," said the laughing girl, "you must do as I do. You must wear a veil. You are too attractive by half to all these people. Now, what do I do when I want a bit of ribbon or some buttons or some muslin early in the morning before I am dressed in a walking dress, you know when I just want to run into Cornhill and out again. Why I put on a veil. If I meet anybody he thinks it is the govern-

or's cool; or one of Judge Sewall's maids. I get my buttons and nobody is the wiser. I might be a squaw and nobody would know." And they all laughed at the conceit which supposed that the light, merry girl should not be recognized anywhere. But she was pleased with her fancy and she followed it out into its details. And she made the Parson and Mrs. Hooper and even little Deborah Hooper discuss the colour of the veil, whether it should be white, or light blue, or dark blue, or green or purple. But Parson Hooper said that he wouldn't have it green, because his eyes were strong and good, and as for white he thought it was unbecoming. "As to that," the merry girl said, "no one could tell until they had tried."

She was sure, she said, that she could find muslin or some sleazy stuff in her sister's boxes or drawers and in that afternoon she should put a veil in every hat in the house, and so she did. While the Parson, in the quiet of his own den that afternoon, took a long nap and then addressed himself to the mysteries of predestination again Miss Martha captured every hat in the house. In one she sewed a white veil, in one a green, in one a light blue, and in one a very dark blue. She could find no purple muslin and so had to give up that fancy. But she revenged herself by putting in one a veil of cherry colour.

She was wild to try the experiment, and a little before sun set she tapped at his door and said he must come to walk with her. The good man: ad as he was bid; and to her infinite joy, as he took the first hat which offered, carrying it absently in his hand till they had crossed the door yard, he did not notice the pink veil till, when the hat was fairly on his head, it fell before his eyes.

The girl screamed with delight at her success. And, when he fell in with her humour, and walked on with the veil; when even the two old cows, waiting to be milked, turned with horror and fled when they saw him, she clapped her hands with delight and did not pretend to suppress her shouts of laughter. A jolly walk, indeed, they both had of it, and when they came back to supper it would be hard to say which of them made the more absurd and amusing story from the adventure.

"Indeed, my dear sister, you must let him do it. Indeed, my dear Oliver, you must wear one or the other of them always, whenever you go abroad, if it were only for the love of me. When Mrs. Cockrell sees you she will say, 'That man looks just like our dear Mr. Hooper,' but it isn't he because Mr. Hooper never wears a veil.' And when the doctor sees you he will say, 'Umph! there's one of Pyecroft's patients; the old fool has made him wear a veil;' and you, my dear Oliver, you will be the happiest of men. Your sermons will be perfectly magnificent, and every day you will bless your wise little sister, Martha."

## CHAPTER IV.

And so it proved, indeed, that the minister's Saturday was tranquil and happy. Not that anybody saw him with a veil on, always excepting Jotham, who saw everything that went and came. And Jotham asked no questions. Why should he ask questions? There were many things in that house, from Hebrew down and from Marlboro pies up, which he did not understand. Possibly the presence in the house of a cheery, wide-awake sister Martha, determined to make the best of everything, had its part in the improvement of the minister's spirits. He had his quiet morning in his study. He had his lonely walk in the afternoon among the cedars; and, to amuse Martha, when he went out he let the rose-coloured veil fall over his face. And, for half an hour, he forgot it, as he wore back and forward that web of foreknowledge into which was wrought the patterns drawn from the Goldthwaites' quarrels. And as he came home in the evening, with the sermon well thought out, he dropped the veil again, as he crossed the orchard, so that he might please the laughing girl who awaited his return.

Martha hardly knew one hat from another, certainly did not care as she stitched the veils into the linings. But Mr. Hooper knew very well which was the Sunday hat; and when she and Martha started for meeting together in the chaise or the Sabbath morning she left the Sunday hat, carefully brushed, in full sight of her husband, and secreted all the others. Now, this hat, as the powers ordered, was the hat with the dark blue veil. Mr. Hooper always preferred to walk to meeting alone. Indeed, if he could start an hour before the rest, and carry a crumb of comfort to some wretched home, he said that was his best preparation. But this time he followed hard after the party in the chaise. Of course, he had folded the veil back so that it rested above his head, nor did any one suspect that it was there. But, as he walked alone and shook out again that webwork of foreknowledge on what he was to preach, again the phantom of the Goldthwaites live ran across his thought; and as, in his puzzle, he tried to wipe the furrows from his forehead, unconsciously for a moment he lifted the hat from his head. It was but a moment, and when he put it back the blue veil fell and floated before his eyes. It did screen out the sun. It screened off the dust of the road. His puzzled thoughts did flow more smoothly for a moment. He would not break that flow for the world, and he let the veil hang. It was at that moment that Jotham let passed him, as he paced along so slowly and thoughtfully. It was he who announced, as Mr. Hawthorne has told, to the wondering loafers on the steps of the meeting-house that "the minister was wearing a veil."

Meanwhile the bell slowly tolled. It would have tolled all day if the minister had not come. Mr. Hooper did walk slowly. The veil soothed him more than he knew. And even when he approached the group of those waiting for him he did not know how late he was. Indeed, he was roused from his thought only by a coarse oath of that brute, Cephas Goldthwaite, who said, as if half-daring the minister to hear:

"Ef he would wear that rag into meetin', I'd go in as hear him, 'n' I have not been into meetin' twelve months to day."

Parson Hooper turned on the brute, took off his hat, and looked at him, with a look of love which might have softened a stone.

"Go in, Cephas, with your wife, and I will wear the rag as you say."

He tore the lining out upon the instant, adjusted the veil over his eyes, and, as the hushed assembly stood on both sides bowing as he passed, he bowed to the right and left, and with the mysterious veil upon his face, mounted the pulpit stairs.