Old Hagar's Secret

BY MRS. M. J. HOLMES

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"Woman Against Woman," Etc.

'Mid the New England hills, and beneath the shadow of their dim old woods, is a running brook, whose deep waters were not always as mersry and frolicsome as now; for years ary and frolicsome as now; for years abefore our story opens, pent up and impeded in their course, they dashed angrily against their prison walls, and turned the creeking wheel of an old saw mill, with a sullen, rehellious froar. The full has gone to decay, and the sturdy men who fed it with the giant oaks of the forest, are sleeping quietly in the village grave-yard. The waters of the mill-pond, too, relieved from their confinement, deap gayly over the ruined dam, tossing for a moment in wanton glee their locks of snow-white foam, and then, flowing on, half fearfully as it their locks of snow-white foam, and then, flowing on, half fearfelly as it were, through the deep gorge overhung with the hemlock and the pine, where the shadows of twilight ever its, and where the rocks frown glosmily down upon the stream below, which, emerging from the darkness, loses itself at last in the waters of the gracefully winding Chicopee, and, leaves far behind the moss-covered walls of what is familiarly known as the "Old House by the Mill."

Tis a huge, old-fashioned building, Tis a nuge, our amile from the pub-distant nearly a mile from the pub-Ite highway; and surrounded se thickly by ferest trees that the bright sunlight, dancing merrily midst the rustling leaves above, falls midst the rustling leaves above, falls but seldom on the time-stated walls of dark gray shalls where the damp and daws of more that a certury have fallen, and where new the green moss sings with a loving grasp, as if twere its rightful rest-ducylace. When the thunders of the flevolution sheef the hills of the Bay State, and the royal banner doubted in the evening breaze, the house was owned by an old Englishman, who, loyal to his kind and country, denounced as rebels the folcountry, denounced as rebels the fol-lowers of Washington. Against these, however, he would not raise his hand, for among them were many long-tried friends, who had gathered with him round the restal board; so with him round the festal board; so he chose the only remaining alternative, and went back to his native country, cherishing the hope that he should one day return to the home he loved so well, and listen again to the musical flow of the water-brook, which could be distinctly heard from the door of the mansion. But his wish was wain, for when at last America was free and the British wish was vain, for when at last America was free, and the British troops recalled, he slept beneath the sod of England, and the old house was for many years deserted. The Englishman had been greatly belowed, and his property was unmolested, while the weeds and grass grew rall and rank in the garden beds, and the birds of heaven built their nests beneath the projecting roof, or held a holiday in the gloomy, silent rooms.

As time passed on, however, and As time passed on, however, and me one appeared to dispute their right; different families occupied the house at intervals, until at last, when nearly fifty years had elapsed, news was one day received that Madam Conway, a grand-daughter of the old Englishman, having met with reverses athome, had determined to emigrate to the New World, and, remembering the "House by the Mill," of which she had heard so much, she wished to know if peaceable possession of it would be allowed her, in case she decided upon removing thither, and making it her with reverses at home, had determined to emigrate to the New World, and, remembering the "House by the Mill," of which she had heard so much, she wished to know if peaceable possession of it would be allowed her, in case she decided upon removing thither, and making it her tuture home. To this plan no objection was made, for the aged people of Hillsdaie still cherished the memory of the hospitable old man, whose locks were gray while they were yet but children, and the younger portion of the community hoped for a remewal of the gayeties which they had heard were once so common at the old stone house.

But in this they were disappointed, for Madam Conway was a proud, unsocial woman, desiring no sould be deed to the story of her wrongs—how here

the old stone house.

But in this they were disappointed, for Madam Conway was a proud, unsocial woman, desiring no acquaintance whatever with her neighbors, who, after many ineffectual attempts at something like friendly intercourse, concluded to leave her entirely alone, and contented themselves with watching the pregress of matters at "Mill Farm," as she designated the place which soon began to show visible marks of improvement. The Englishman is a man of taste, and Madam Conway's first work was an attempt to restore the grounds to something of their former beauty. The yard and garden were cleared of weeds, the walks and hower-beds laid out with care, and then the neighbors looked to see her cut away a few of the multitude of trees which had sprung up around ther home. But this she had no intention of doing. "They shut her out," she said, "from the prying eyes of the vulgar, and she would ratcher it should be so." So the trees senained, throwing their long smardows upon the high, narrow windows, and into the large, square rooms, where the morning light and the noonday heat seldom found entrance, and which seemed like so many cold, silent caverns, with their old-inshioned massive furniture, their dark, heavy curtains, and the noiseless footfall of the stately lady, who moved ever with the same measured tread, speaking always softly and low to the household servants, who, having been trained in her service, had followed her across the sea.

From these the neighbors learned that Madam Conway had in London a married daughter, Mrs. Miller, that old Hagar Warren, the strange-look.

one else, shared her mistress's confidence, had grown up in the family, receiving a very good education, and had nursed their foung mistress, Miss Margaret, which, of course, entitled her to more respect than was usually bestowed upon menials like her; that Madam Conway was very aristocratic, very proud of her high English blood; that, though she lived alone, she attended strictly to al-English blood; that, though she lived alone, she attended strictly to all the formalities of high life, dressing each day with the utmost precision for her solitary dinner, dining from off a service of solid silver, and presiding with great dignity in her straight, high-backed chair. She was fond, too, of the ruby wine, and her cellar was stored with the choicest liquors, some of which she had brought with her from home, while others, it was said, had belonged to her grandfather, and for half a century had remained unseen and unmolested, while the cobwebs of time had woven around them a misty sovering, making them still more valuable to the lady, who knew full well how age improved such things.

had woven, around them a misty eovering, making them still more valuable to the lady, who knew full well how age improved such things. Regularly each day she rode in her ponderous carriage, sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by Hester, the daughter of old Hagar, a handsome, intelligent-looking girl, who, after two or three years of comparative idleness at Mill Farm, went to Meriden, Connecticut, as seamstress-in a family which had advertised for such a person. With her departed the only life of the house, and during the following year there ensued a monotonous quilt, which was broken at last for Hagar by the sartling announcement that her daughter's young mistress had died four months before, and the husband, a gray-haired, elderly man, had proved conclusively that he was in his dotage by talking of marriage to Hester, who, ere the letter reached her mother, would probably be the third bride of one whose reputed wealth was the only possible inducement to a girl like Hester Warren.

With an immense degree of satisfaction Hagar read the letter through, exulting that fortune had favored her at last. Possessed of many sterling qualties. Hagar Warren had one glaring fault which had embittered her whole life. Why others were rich while she' was poor she could not understand, and her heart rebelled at the fate which had made her what she was. But Hester would be wealthy—nay, would, perhaps, one day rival the haughty Mrs. Miller across the water, who had been her playmate; there was comfort in that, and she wrote to her daughter expressing her entire approbation, and hinting vaguely of the possibility that she herseli might some time cease to be a servant, and help do the honors of Mr. Hamilton's house! To this there came no reply, and Hagar was thinking seriously of making a visit to Meriden, when one rainy autumnal night, nearly a year after Hester's marriage, there came another letter sealed with black. With a sad foreboding Hagar opened it, and read that Mr. Hamilton had failed; that his house and farm were his house and farm were sold, that he, overwhelmed with mortification both at his failure and the op-position of his friends to his last marriage, had died suddenly, leaving

The wife of a reputed wealthy man. "Mustn't put on airs!" muttered Hagar, as she left the room. "Just as if airs wasn't for anybody but high bloods!" And with the canker worm of envy at her heart, she wrote to Hester, who came immediately; and Hagar, when she heard her tell the story of her wrongs—how her husband's sister, indignant at his marriage with a sewing-girl, had removed from him the children, one a step-child and one his own; and how of all his vast fortune there was not left for her a penny—experienced again the old bitterness of feeling, and murmured that fate should thus deal with her and hers.

With the next day's mail there came to Madam Conway a letter, hearing a foreign postmark, and bringing the Sad news that her son-inlaw had been loss was storm, while crossing the Engirsh Channel, and that her daughter Margaret, utterly crushed and heart-broken, would sail immediately for America, where she wished only to lay her weary head upon her mother's bosom and die.

"So, there is one person, that has no respect for blood, and that is Death," said old Hagar to her mistress, when she heard the news. "He has served us both alike—he has served us both and the her here.

"Frowning

her daughter. 'It'll be Hagar here and Hagar there, and Hagar every where; but I shan't hurry mysels I'm getting too old to wait on a chit like her."

chit like her."

"Don't talk soy mother," said Hester. "Margaret was always kind to me. She is not to blame for being rich, while I am poor."

"But somebody's to blame," interrupted old Hagar. "You was always accounted the handsomest and cleverest of the two, and yet for all you'll be nothing but a drudge to wait on her and the little girl."

Hester only sighed in reply, while

you'll be nothing but a drudge to wait on her and the little girl."
Hester only sighed in reply, while her thoughts went forward to the future, and what it would probably bring her. Hester Warren and Margaret Conway had been children together, and in spite of the difference of their stations they had loved each other dearly; and when at last the weary traveler came, with her pale sad face and mourning garb, none gave her so heartfelt a welcome as liester; and during the week when, from exhaustion and excitement, she was confined to her bed, it was Hester who nursed her with the utmost care, soothing her to sleep, and then amusing the little Theo, a child of two years. Hagar, too, softened by her young mistross's sorrow, repented of her harsh words, and watched each night with the invalid, who, once when her mind seemed wandering far back in the past, whispered softly: "Tell me the Lord's Prayer, dear Hagar, just as you told it to me years ago when I was a little child."

It was a long time since Hagar had breathed that prayer, but at Mrs. Miller's request she commenced it, repeating correctly until she came to the words. "Give us this repeating correctly until she came to the words, "Give us this day our daily bread," then she hesitated, and, bending forward, said. "What comes next, Miss Margaret? Is it,

Lead us not into temptation?"
"Yes, yes," whispered the half-unconscious lady. "Lead us not into
temptation," that's it," Then, as if there were around her a dim forebod-ing of the great wrong Hagar was to do, she took her old nurse's hand between her own, and continued: "Say it often, Hagar—'Lead us not into temptation'—you have much need for that prayer."

A moment more and Margaret Mil-ler slept, while beside her sat Hagar ler slept, while beside her sat Hagar Warren, half shuddering, she knew not why, at the thought of her mistress's words, which seemed to her so much like the spirit of prophecy. "Why do I need that prayer more than any one else?" she said, at last, "I have never been tempted more than I could bear—never shall be tempted—and if I am, old Hagar Warren, bad as she is, can resist temptation without that prayer."

Still, reason as she would, Hagar could not shake off the strange feel-

Still, reason as she would, Hagar could not shake off the strange feeling, and as she sat, half dozing, in her chair, with the dim lamplight flickering over her dark face, she fancied that the October wind, sighing so mournfully through the locust trees beneath the window and then dying away in the distance, bore upon its wing, "Lead us not into temptation. Hagar, you have much need to say that prayer."

Aye, Hagar Warren, much need, much need!

CHAPTER II.

The wintry winds were blowing cold and chill around the old stone house, and the deep, untrodden snow lay high piled upon the ground. For many days the gray, leaden clouds had frowned gloomily down upon the earth below, covering it with a thick veil of white. But the storm was over now, with the setting sun it had gone to rest, and the pale moonlight stole softly into the silent chamber, where Madam Conway bent anxiously down to see if but the faintest breath came from the partbent anxiously down to see if but the faintest breath came from the parted lips of her only daughter. There had been bein to her that night another grandchild—a. little, helpless girl, which now in an adjoining room was Hagar's special care; and Hagar, sitting there with the wee creature upon her lap, and the dread fear at her heart that her young mistress might die forgot for once mistress might die, forgot for once to repine at her lot, and did cheer-fully whatever was required of her

to replie at her lot, and fully whatever was required of her to do.

There was silence in the rooms below—silence in the chambers above—silence everywhere—for the sick wonand fast nearing the deep, man seemed fast nearing the deep, dark river whose waters move on-

selence everywhere—for the sick woman seemed fast nearing the deep, dark river whose waters move onward but never return.

Almost a week went by, and then, in a room far more humble than that where Margaret Miller lay, another immortal being was given to the world; and, with a softened light in her keen black eyes, old Hagar told to her stately mistress, when she met ber on the stairs, that she, too was a grandmother.

"You must not on that account neglect Margaret's child," was Madam Conway's answer, as, with a wave of her hand, she passed on; and this was all she said—not a word of sympathy or congratulation for the peculiar old woman whose heart, so long benumbed, had been roused to a better state of feeling, and who, in the first joy of her new-born happiness, had hurried to her mistress, fancying for the moment that she was almost her equal.

"Don't neglect Margaret's child for that!" How the words rang in her eers as she fied up the narrow stairs and through the dark hall, till the low room was reached where lay the babe for whom Margaret's child was not to be neglected. All the old bitterness had returned, and as hour after hour went by, and Madam Conway came not near, while the physician and the servants looked in for a moment only and then hurried away to the other sick room. where all their services were kept in requisition, she muttered: "Little would they care—if Hester died upon my hands. And she will die, too," she continued, as by the fading daylight she saw the pallor deepen on her daughter's face.

And Hagar was right, for Hester's sands were nearer run than those of

stairs struck the hour of midnight, she murmured: "It is gettiag dark here, mother—so dark—and 1 am growing cold. Can it be death?"
"Yes, Hester, 'tis death," answered Hagar, and her voice was unnaturally calm as she laid her hand on the clammy brow of her daughter.

An hour later, and Madam Conway, who sat dozing in the parlor below, ready for any summons which might come from Margaret's room, was roused by the touch of a cold, hard hand, and Hagar Warren stood before her.

"Come," she said, "come with me;" and thinking only of Margaret, Madam Conway arose to follow her. "Not there—but this way," said

Madam Conway arose to follow her "Not there—but this way," said Hagar, as her mistress turned towards Mrs. Miller's door, and grasping firmly the lady's arm, she led to the room where Hester lay dead, with her young baby clasped lovingly to her bosom. "Look at her—and rity me now, if you never did before. She was all I had in the world to love," said Hagar, passionately. Madam Conway was not naturally a hard-hearted woman, and she answered gently, "I do pity you, Hagar, and I did not think Rester was so id. Why haven't you let me know?" To this Hagar made no direct reply, and after a few more inquiries Madam Conway left the soom, saying she would send up the servants to do whatever was necessary. When it was known throughout the house that Hester was dead, much surprise was expressed and a good deal of sympathy manifested for old Hagar, who, with a gloomy brow, hugged to her heart the demon of jealousy, which kept whispering to her of the difference there would be were Margaret to die. It was deemed advisable to keep Hester's death a secret from Mrs. Miller; so, with as were Margaret to die. It was deemed advisable to keep Hester's death
a secret from Mrs. Miller; so, with as
little ceremony as possible, the body
was buried at the close of the day,
in an inclosure which had been set
apart as a family burying ground;
and when again the night shadows
fell Hagar Warren sat in her silent
room, brooding o'er her grief, and
looking off at the plain pine cradle. looking oft at the plain pine cradle, where day the little motherless child, her grand-daughter. Occasionally, too, her eye wandered towards the nahogany crib, where another infant slept. Perfect quiet seemed necessary for Mrs. Miller, and Madam Conway had ordered her baby to be removed from, the ante-chamber where first it had been kept, so that Hagar had the two children in her own room.

own room.

In the pine cradle there was a In the pine cradle there was a rustling sound; the baby was awaking, and taking it on her lap, Hagar soothed it again to sleep, gazing earnestly upon it to see if it were like its mother. It was a bright, healthy-looking infant, and though five days yourger than that of Mrs. Miller, was quite as large and looked as old. "And you will be a drudge while

"And you will be a drudge, while she will be a lady," muttered Hagar, as her tears fell on the face of the sleeping child. "Why need this differ-ence be?" Old Hagar had forgotten

old. Hagar had lorgotten the words "Lead us not into temptation;" and when the tempter answered "It need not be," she only started suddenly as if smitten by a heavy blow; but she did not drive him from her, and she sat there reasoning with herself that, "it need not be." Neither the physician nor Madam Conway had naid any attention dam Conway had paid any attention to Margaret's child; it had been her special care, while no one had notic-ed hers, and newly-born babics were so much alike that deception was an easy matter. But could she do it? casy matter. But could she do it?
Could she bear that secret on her soul? Madam Conway; though proud, had been kind to her, and could she thus deceive her! Would could she thus deceive her! Would her daughter, sleeping in her early grave, approve the deed. "No, no," she answered aloud, "she would not." and the great drops of perspiration stood thickly upon fer dark, haggard face, as she arose and laid back in her cradie the child whom she had thought to make an heiross.

asleep, dreaming that the deed was done by other agency than hers-, that the little face resting on the downy pillow; and shaded by the costly lace, was lowly born; while the child, wrapped in the coarser blanket, came of nobler blood, even that of the Conways, who boasted more than one lordly title. With a nervous start she awoke at last and creeping to the cradle of mahogany, looked to see if her dream were true; but it was not. She knew it by the pinched, blue look about the nose, and the thin covering of hair. This was all the difference which even her eye could see, and probably no other person had noticed that, for the child had never been seen in a darkened room. The sin was growing gradually less heinous, and she could now calmly calculate the chances for detection. Still, the conflict was long and severe, and it was not until morning that the tempter gained a point by compromising the matter, and suggesting that while dressing the infants she should change their clothes for once, just to see how fine cambries and soft flannel yould look upon a grandchild of Hagar Warren! "She could easily change them again—'twas only an experiment," she said, as with trembling hands she proceeded to divest the children of their wrappings. But her fingers seemed all thumbs, and more than one sharp pin pierced the tinder flesh of her little grandchild, as she fastened together the embroidered slip, teaching her thus early, had she been able to learn the lesson, that the pathway of the rich is not free from thorns.

Their toilet was completed at last—their cradle beds exchanged, and

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than the other one whose nose looked still more pinched and blue in the plain white dress and cradle of pine. Still, there was a gnawing pain at Hagar's heart, and she would, perhaps, have undone the wrong, had not Madam Conway appeared with inquiries for the baby's health. Hagar could not face her mistress, so she turned away and pretenaed to busy herself with the arrangement of the room, while the lady, bending over room, while the lady, bending over the cradle, said, 'I think she is improving, Hagar; I never saw her look so well,' and she pushed back the window curtain to obtain a bet-

she answered aloud, "she would not;" and the great drops of perspiration stood thickly upon ifer dark, haggard face, as she arose and laid back in her cradle the child whom she had thought to make an heiress.

For a time the tempter left her, but returned ere long, and creeping into her heart sung to her beautiful songs of the future which might be, were Hester's baby a lady. And Hagar, listening to that song, fell asleep, dreaming that the deed was done by other agency than herst that the little face resting on the downey nillow? and shaded by the and stooped to kiss the child. Inand stooped to kiss the child. Involuntarily old Hagar sprang forward to stay the act, and grasped the lady's arm, but she was too late; the aristocratic lips had touched the cheek of Hagar Warren's grandchild, and the secret, if now confessed, would never be forgiven. "It can't be "helped," muttered Hagar, and then, when Mrs. Conway asked an explanation of her conduct, she answered: "I was afraid you's wake her up, and mercy knows I've had worry enough with both the brats,"

you's wake her up, and mercy knows I've had worry enough with both the brats."

Not till then had Madam Conway observed how haggard and worn was Hagar's face, and instead of reproving her for her boldness, she said gently, "you have, indeed, been sorely tried. Shall I send up Bertha to relieve you?"

"No, no," answered Hagar, hurriedly. "I am better alone."

The next morning Madam Conway was moving silently down the narrow hall, while Hagar, on her knees, was weeping passionately. One word of kindness had effected more than a thousand reproaches would have done; and wringing her hands. she cried, "I will not do it; I cannot."

Approaching the cradle, she was about to lift the child, when again Madam Conway was at the door. She had come, she said, to take the babe to Margaret, who seemed better this morning, and had asked to see it.

"Not now, not now. Wait till I put on her handsomer dress, and I'll bring her myself." pleaded Hagar.

But Madam Conway say no fault in the fine cambric wrapper, and taking the infant in her arms, she walked away, while Hagar followed steadily. Very lovingly the mother folded to her hosom the babe, calling it her fatheriess one, and wetting its face with her tears, while through

the half-closed door peered Hagar's

the half-closed door peered Hagar's wild, dark eyes—one moment lighting up with exultation as she mutrered, "it's my flesh, my blood, roud lady!" and the next growing dim with tears, as she thought of the evil she had done.

"I did not know she had so much hair," said Mrs. Miller, parting the silken looks. "I think it will be like mine." and she gave the child to her mother, while Hagar glided swiftly back to her room.

That afternoon the clergyman, whose church Mrs. Conway usually attended, called to see Mrs. Miller, who suggested that both the children should receive the rite of baptism. Hagar was accordingly bidden to prepare them for the ceremony, and resolving to make one more effort to undo what she had done, she dressed the child whom she had thought to wrong in its own clothes, and then anxiously awaited her mistress' coming.

"Hagar Warren! What does this

"Hagar Warren! What does this "Hagar Warren! What does this mean? Aro you crazy!" sternly demanded Madam Conway, when the old nurse held up before her the child with the blue nose.
"No, not crazy yet; but I shall be, if you don't take this one first," answered Hagar.
More than once that day Madam Conway had heard the servants hint that Hagar's grief had driven her insane: and now, when she observed

that Hagar's grief had driven her insane; and now, when she observed
the unnatural brightness in her eyes,
and saw what she had done, she,
too, thought it possible that her
mind was partially unsettled; so she
said gently, but firmly, "this is no
time for foolishness, Hagar. They are
weiting for us in the sick-room; so
make haste and change the baby's
dress."

make haste and change the baby's dress."

There was something authoritative in her manner, and Hagar obeyed, whispering incoherently to herself, and thus further confirming her mistress' suspicions that she was partially insane. During the ceremony, she stood, tall and erect, like some

dark, grim statue, her hands firmly locked together, and her eyes fixed upon the face of the little one, who was baptized "Margaret Miller." As the dergyman promounced that name, she uttered a low, gasping moan, but her face betrayed no emotion, and very calmly she stepped forward with the other child upon her arm.

"What name?" asked the minister, and she answered, "her mother's; call her for her mother!"

"Hester," said Madam Conway, turning to the clergyman, who understood nothing from Hagar's reply.

ply. So "Hester" was the name given to the child, in whose veins the flood of English noblemen was flowing; and when the ceremony was ended, Hagar bore back to her rocin "Hester Hamilton," the child defrauded of her birthright, and "Maggie Miller," the heroine of our story.

(To Be Continued.)

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Mr. Thos. Neil, well known in town, and a former employee at Pardo's mill, met with a bad accident on Saturday. He is now a fireman on the Pers Marquette Railway, and while working on his engine a flue of the boiler burst, blowing the stram and hot water through the fire-box into the cab. He was bending over at the time, and was badly scalded on one arm and the face, saving his eyes only by having his arm in front of them.—Blenheim Tribune.



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