THE SEXTON'S HERO.

BY COTTON MATHER MILLS, ESQ.

the grassy churchyard, making the shadow cast by the he'd denied me: and the folks stood at the doors and waves that knew no mercy in their steady advance.old yew tree under which we sat seem deeper and looked at him going up the hill to his home, as if he That one quarter of an hour, sir, seemed as long as all deeper by contrast. The everlasting hum of myriads had been a monkey, or a foreigner—but no one wished my life since. Thoughts, and fancies, and dreams, of summer insects made luxurious lullaby.

Of the view that lay beneath our gaze, I cannot speak adequately. The foreground was the grey ever, they had found voice, The men muttered the in for death, seemed to bring with it the scents of the stone wall of the vicarage garden; rich in the colouring made by innumerable lichens, ferns, ivy of most men tittered as he passed, and the little impudent lads be, for it was falling on them like blessed dew, though tender green, and most delicate tracery, and the vivid scarlet of the crane's-bill, which found a home in every ed Quaker?' 'Good-bye, Jonathan Broad-brim,' and heard her baby crying for her, above the gurgle of the nook and crevice—and at the summit of that old wall such like jests. flaunted some unpruned tendrils of the vine, and long flower laden branches of the climbing rose-tree, trained and mountain grey, and the blue dazzle of Merecombe

speaking, a quarter of an hour before.

be bad, but the fruit is ripe.

"How then would you define a hero?"

There was a long pause, and I had almost forgotten my question in watching a cloud shadow floating over ed his ear in his wild death-struggle. the far-away hills, when Jeremy made answer:

"My idea of a hero, is one who acts up to the duty consisted in personal prowess."

Then you would even admit the military heroes?" asked I.

ny them the title of hero."

"A poor, unchristian heroism, whose manifestation consists in injury to others!" I said. We were both startled by a third voice:

"If I might make so bold, sir," - and then the speaker stopped. It was the sexton, whom, when we first arrived, we we had forgotten as much as though he were as inani-

mate as one of the moss-covered headstones.

rightly understood your meaning, gentlemen, but as in to thinking poor Gilbert Dawson a hero, At any talking on. rate," said he, heaving a long quivering sigh, "I have reason to think him so.'

I confess I felt impatient at the interruption.

never look on it again, either far off or near, but you after she had her baby to care for. may see it both ways, and a terrible bonny spot it is: "All my kin lived on this side the bay, up above wept the live-long night. I rode back to the shore clapped eyes on; all for fighting, poaching, quarrel serve her but that Letty and I must come to the wed- shouting out in the silence a vain cry for Gilbert. The ling, and such like work. I was startled myself when ding; for all my sisters loved Letty, she had such waters went back, and left no trace. Two days after-

and said :

very wroth by his colour coming and going—and as I the hollow, the sand was so quick; and when we came was gone."
said before he was a fine active young fellow. But all up again, there, again the blackness, was the white I hear it yet; I could na' help but feel sorry for him, bay, it comes swifter than a galloping horse. 'Lord to be so scorned, and I thought he'd not rightly taken help us!' said I; and then I were sorry I'd spoken. my meaning, and I'd give him another chance; so I to frighten Letty, but the words were crushed out of had no quarrel against me; that he might have said screeched himself hoarse some time ago) had found something to put me up; he did not know that he had out the danger we were all in, he took to squealing but that if he had he asked my pardon; but that he again, enough to bewilder any man. I cursed him would not fight no-how.

"I was so full of scorn at his cowardliness, that I answer to my prayer, blind sinner as I was. Aye! you was vex'd I'd given him the second chance, and I join- may smile, sir, but God can work through many a ed in the yell that was set up, twice as bad as before. scornful thing, if need be, He stood it out, his teeth set, and looking very white, and when we were silent for want of breath, he said trembling and panting as if in a mortal fright; for out loud, but in a hoarse voice, quite different from his though we were on the last bank afore the second

rel, and use violence.

self with scorn and hate, that I called out:

dunnot go and tell a lie about it. Mother's moppet is bent down my head. afraid of a black eye, pretty dear. It shannot be hurt "I think, John-I think-I shall never see baby but it munnot tell lies,'

coward, and afraid!

The afternoon sun shed down his glorious rays on Lindal, how I had challenged Gilbert to fight, and how sullenly up to the very axie-tree, let alone the white

coming up from the shore. She was almost crying as -I never caught it; it was miles away at any rate. against the inner side. Beyond, lay meadow green I came upon them at the turn of the lane; and look- "Just as I'd gotten my knife out, another sound ing up in his face as if begging him something. And was close upon us, blending with the gurgle of the Bay, as it sparkled between us and the more distant so she was; she told me it after. For she did really near waters, and the roar of the distant; (not so dislike him; and could not abide to hear him scorued by tant though;) we could hardly see, but we thought For a while we were silent, living in sight, and mur- every one for being a coward; and she coy as she was we saw something black against the deep lead colour muring sound. Then Jeremy took up our conversa- all but told him that very night that she loved him, of wave, and mist, and sky. It neared, and meared; tion where, suddenly feeling weariness, as we saw that and begged him not to disgrace himself, but fight me, with slow, steady motion it came across the channel deep green shadowy resting place, we had ceased as I'd dated him to. When he still stuck to it that he right to where we were. O God! it was Gilbert West of England Broad Cloths, Cassimeres, Doeskins, neaking, a quarter of an hour before.

It is one of the luxuries of holiday time that thoughts like at the way she'd spoken, and the feelings she'd let "Few words did we speak, and little time had we are not rudely shaken from us by outward violence of out to coax him that she said more stinging things to say them in. I had no knowledge at that time of hurry, and busy impatience, but fall maturely from our about his being a coward than all the rest put to- past or future-only of present thought-how to save Which he is prepared to put up to order in the most fashionable lips in the sunny leisure of our days. The stock may gether, (according to what she told me, sir, after- Letty, and, if I could, myself. I only remembered wards,) and ended by saying she'd never speak to him afterwards that Gilbert said he had been guided by an again, as long as she lived;—she did once again though animal's shriek of terror. I only heard, when all was Barristers' Robes, University work. &c., made on the shortest notice in superior style; also, Fine Linen Surplices. -her blessing was the last human speech that reach-

day I met them walking, Letty turned towards me; down to Cart lane to watch for us. If all had gone highest idea of duty he has been able to form, no mat- I could see a part of it was to spite Gilbert, for she'd well, we should ne'er have heard of it. As it was, old ter at what sacrifice. I think that by this definition, be twice as kind when he was near, or likely to hear of Jonas told it, the tears downdropping from his withered we may include all phases of the character, even to it; but by-and-by she gat to like me for my own sake, cheeks. the heroes of old, whose sole (and to us, low) idea of and it was all settled for our marriage. Gilbert kept aloof from every one, and fell into a sad careless way. Letty to the pillion. The waters rose every instant His very gait was changed, his step used to be brisk with a sullen sound. They were all but in the shanand sounding, and now his foot lingered heavily on dry. Letty clung to the pillion handles, but drooped "I would: with a certain kind of pity for the cir- the ground. I used to try to daunt him with my eye, her head as if she had yet no hope of life. cumstances which had given them no higher ideas of but he would always meet my look in a steady, quiet "Swifter than thought, (and yet he might have had duty. Still if they sacrificed self to do what they sin- way, for all so much about him was altered; the lads time for thought and for temptation, sir; -if he had cerely believed to be right, I do not think I could de- would not play with him; and as soon as he found he ridden off with Letty he would have been saved-not was to be slighted by them whenever he came to me,) Gilbert was in the shandry by my side. quoiting, or cricket he just left off coming.

with; or perhaps, rightly to speak, the only one who By God's mercy I will follow. I can cut the traces, would keep company with him. They got so thick at last, that old Jonas would say Gilbert had Gospel on carry me safely through. At any rate, you are a hushis side, and did no more than gospel told him to do; band and a father. No one cares for me. had noticed, as an accessory to the scene, but whom but we none of us gave much credit to what he said, "Do not hate me gentlemen. I often wish that more by token our vicar had a brother, a colonel in night was a dream. It has haunted my sleep ever the army; and as we threeped it many a time to since like a dream; and yet it was no dream. I took his "If I might be so bold," said he again, awaiting Jonas, would he set himself up to know the gospel betleave to speak. Jeremy bowed in deference to his ter than the vicar? that would be putting cart afore and felt her head rest on my shoulder. I trust in God white, uncovered head. And so encouraged, he went the horse, like the French radicals. And if the vicar I spoke some words of thanks; but I can't remember. had thought quarrelling and fighting wicked, and again I only recollect Letty raising her head, and calling "What that gentleman" (alluding to my last speech) the Bible, would be have made so much work about all out-"has just now said, brings to my mind one who is dead the victories, that were as plenty as blackberries at and gone this many a year ago. I may-be have not that time of day, and kept the little bell of Lindal baby from being an orphan this night.' And then she Church forever ringing; or would he have thought so fell against me, as if unconscious. far as I could gather it, I think you'd both have given much of 'my brother the colonel,' as he was always

bert. I even kind of pitied him-he was so scorned but we could have but one thought-where was Gil-"Will you take a seat, sir, and tell us about him?" and slighted; and for all he'd a bold look about him, bert? Thick mists and heaving waters compassed us said Jeremy, standing up until the old man was seated. as if he were not ashamed: he seemed pining and round. Where was he? We shouted. Letty faint shrunk. It's a wearing thing to be kept at arm's as she was, raised her voice and shouted, clear and "It will be forty-five years come Martinmas," said length by one's kind; and so Gilbert found it, poor shrill. No answer came. The sea boomed on with the sexton, sitting down on a grassy mound at our feet tellow. The little children took to him, though; ceaseless, sullen beat. I rode to the guide's house .-"since I had finished my 'prenticeship, and settled they'd be round about him like a swarm of bees- He was a-bed, and would not get up, though I offered down at Lindal. You can see Lindal, sir, at evenings them as was too young to know what a coward was, him more than I was worth. Perhaps he knew itand mornings, across the bay; a little to the right of and only felt that he was ever ready to love and help the cursed old villain. At any rate, I'd have paid it Grange; at least, I used to see it many a time and oft, them, and was never loud or cross: however naughty if I'd toiled my life long. He said I might take his afore my sight grew so dark; and I have spent many they might be. After a while we had our little one a quarter of an hour a-gazing at it far away, and thinking of the days I lived there, till the tears came so we love her; Letty in especial, who seemed to get all upon the heavy air; but no human voice or sound was to my eyes, I could gaze no longer. I shall the thought I used to think sometimes she wanted, heard; that wild blast could not awaken the dead.

-in my young days, when I went to settle there, it Kellet. Jane (that's her that lies buried near you about Cart-lane; and to and fro with weary march did was full of as wild a set of young fellows as ever were white rose tree) was to be married, and nought would I pace along the brink of the waters, now and then I first found what a set I were among, but soon I began winning ways with her. Letty did not like to leave wards he was washed ashore near Fulkeborough. The to fall into their ways, and I ended by being as rough her baby, nor yet did I want her to take it; so after shandry and poor old mare were found half buried in a a chap as any on 'em. I'd been there a matter of a talk, we fixed to leave it with Letty's mother for heap of sand by Arnside Knot. As far as we could two year, and were reckoned by most the cock of the the afternoon. I could see her heart ached a bit, for guess, he had dropped his knife while trying to cut the village, when Gilbert Dawson, as I was speaking of, she'd never left it till then, and she seemed to fear all traces, and so had lost all chance of life. At any rate came to Lindal. He was about as strapping a chap manner of evil, even to the French coming and taking the knife was found in a cleft of the shaft. as I was, (I used to be six feet high, though now I'm it away. Well! we borrowed a shandry, and harnessed "His friends came over from Garstang to his funerso shrunk and doubled up.) and, as we were like in my old grey mare, as I used in th' cart, and set off as al. I wanted to go chief mourner, but it was not my the same trade, (both used to prepare osiers and wood grand as King George across the Sands about three right, and I might not; though I've never done mournfor the Liverpool coopers, who get a great deal of stuff o'clock, for you see it were high water about twelve, ing him to this day. When his sister packed up his from the copses round the bay, sir,) we were thrown and we'd to go and come back same tide, as Letty things, I begged hard for something that had been his. together, and took mightily to each other. I put my could not leave her baby for long. It were a merry She would give me none of his clothes, (she was a right best leg foremost to be equal with Gilbert, for I'd had afternoon, were that :- last time I ever saw Letty down shaving woman,) as she had boys of her own, who some schooling, though since I'd been at Lindal I'd laugh heartily: and for that matter the last time I might grow up into them. But she threw me his Bible lost a good part of what I learnt; and I kept my ever laughed downright hearty myself. The latest as she said they'd gotten one already, and his were but rough ways out of sight for a time, I felt so ashamed crossing time fell about nine o'clock, and we were late a poor used-up thing. It was his and so I cared for it. of his getting to know them. But that did not last at starting. Clocks were wrong; and we'd a piece of It were a black leather one, with pockets at the sides, long; I began to think he fancied a girl I dearly loved work chasing a pig father had given Letty to take old fashionedwise; and in one were a bunch of wild but who had always held off from me. Eh! but she home; we bagged him at last, and he screeched and flowers, Letty said she could almost be sure were some was a pretty one in those days! There's none like screeched in the back part o' shandry, and we laughed she had once given him. her now. I think I see her going along the road with and they laughed; and in the midst of all the merriher dancing tread, and shaking back her long yellow ment the sun set, and that sobered us a bit, for then broad with his carpenter's pencil, which more than King Street curls, to give me or any other young fellow a sancy we knew what time it was. I whipped the old mare, bore him out in his refusal to fight. Of a surety, sir, word; no wonder Gilbert was taken with her, for all but she was a deal keener than she was in the morn- there's call enough for bravery in the service of God, he was so grave, and she so merry and light. But I ing, and would neither go quick up nor down the brows, and to shew love to man without quarrelling and fightbegan to think she liked him again; and then my and they're not a few 'twixt Kellet and the shore .- ing. blood was all afire. I got to hate him for everything On the sands it were worse. They were very heavy, he did. Aforetime I had stood by, admiring to see for the fresh had come down after the rains we'd had. words called up the thoughts of him, and my heart was him, how he leapt, and what a quoiter and cricketer he Lord! how I did whip the poor mare, to make the full to speaking. But I must make up; I've to dig a was. And now I ground my teeth with hatred when- most of the red light as yet lasted. You, maybe, don't grave for a little child, who is to be buried to-morrow e'er he did a thing which caught Letty's eye. I could know the Sands, gentlemen. From Bolton-side, morning, just when his playmates are trooping of to read it in her eye that she liked him, for all she held where we started from, it's better than six miles to school." herself just as high with him as with all the rest .- Cart-lane, and two channels to cross, let alone holes Lord God forgive me! how I hated that man." and quick-sands. At the second channel from us the Jeremy. He spoke as if the hatred were a thing of yesterday guide waits all during crossing time from sunrise to The old man shook his head, and struggled against so clear within his memory were shown the actions and sunset; but for the three hours on each side high a choking sigh. After a minute's pause, he said, feelings of his youth. And then he dropped his voice, water, he's not there, in course. He stays after sun-

set if he's fore-spoken, not else. So now you know She was uever like the same again. She would sit "Well! I began to look out to pick a quarrel with where we were that awful night. For we'd crossed thinking, on Gilbert I guessed; but I could not blame him! for my blood was up to fight him. If I beat the first channel about two mile, and it were growing her. We had a boy, and we named it Gilbert Dawson him, (and I were a rare boxer in those days,) I thought darker and darker above and around us, all but one Knipe; he that's stoker on the London railway. Our Letty would cool towards him. So one evening at red line of light above the hills, when we came to a girl was carried off in teething, and Letty just quietly quoits, (I'm sure I dont know how or why, but large hollow (for all the Sands look so flat, there's many a drooped, and died in less than a six week. They were doings grow out of small words,) I fell out with him, hollow in them where you lose all sight of the shore.) buried here; so I came to be near them, and away and challenged him to fight. I could see that he were We were longer than we should ha' been in crossing from Lindal, a place I could never abide after Letty at once he drew in, and said he would not fight. Such line of the rushing tide coming up the bay. It looked ciently, rose up, and came away. a yell as the Lindal lads, who were watching us, set up! not a mile from us; and when the wind blows up the said it again, and dared him, as plain as words could my heart by the terror. I felt her shiver up by my speak, to fight out the quarrel. He told me then, he side, and clutch my coat. And as if the pig (as had between my teeth for his noise; and yet it was God's

"By this time the mare was all in a lather, and channel, the water was gathering up her legs; and she "I cannot fight, because I think its wrong to quar- so tired out! When we came close to the channel she stood still, and not all my flogging could get her to stir; "Then he turned to go away; I were so beside my- she fairly groaned aloud, and shook in a terrible quaking way. Till now Letty had not spoken; only "'Tell truth, lad, at least, if you dare not fight, held my coat tightly. I heard her say something, and

again!"

"Well, they laughed, but I could not laugh. It "And then she sent up such a cry-so loud, and seemed such a thing for a stout young chap to be a shrill and pitiful! It fairly maddened me. I pulled WOOLLEN DRAPER AND TAILOR, out my knife to spur on the old mare, that it might "Before the sun had set, it was talked of all over end one way or the other, for the water was stealing him good e'en. Such a thing as refusing to fight had and memory, ran into each other. The mist, the never been heard of afore at Lindal. Next day, how- heavy mist, that was like a ghastly curtain, shutting us word 'coward' in his hearing, all kept aloof; the wo- flowers that grew around our own threshold; -it might and lasses shouted out, 'How long is it sin' thou turn- to us it was a shroud. Letty told me, after, she rising waters, as plain as ever she heard any thing; "That evening I met him, with Letty by his side, but the sea birds were skirling, and the pig shrieking

over, that he had been uneasy about our return, because of the depth of fresh; and had borrowed a pillion, and "But much happened afore that time. From the saddled his horse early in the evening, and ridden

"We fastened his horse to the shandry. We lifted

"'Quick!' said he, clear and firm. 'You must "The old clerk was the only one he kept company ride before her, and keep her. The horse can swim.

"God bless you, Gilbert Dawson, from saving my

"I bore her through; or, rather, the strong horse swam bravely through the gathering waves. We were "After I was married to Letty I left off hating Gil- dripping wet when we reached the banks in shore;

"I took Letty home to her baby, over whom she be had in this market

"Thank you gentlemen, for listening to me. Your

"But tell us of Letty; is she still alive?" asked

"She died in less than two years after that night.

He turned to his work, and we, having rested suffi-

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