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CHAPTER I.

The Old House by the Mill.

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 merry and frolicsome as now; for years before our story opens, pent up and impeded in their course they dashed angrily against their prison walls, and turning the creaking wheel of an old saw mill, with a sullen, rebellious roar. The mill has gone to decay, and the sturdy men who fed it with the giant oaks of the forest, are sleeping quietly in the village graveyard. The waters of the mill-pond, too, relieved from their confinement, leap gaily 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 were, through the deep gorge overhung with the hemlock and the pine, where the shadows of twilight ever lie, and where the rocks from gloomily down upon the stream below, which, emerging from the darkness, loses itself 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, distant nearly a mile from the public highway, and surrounded so thickly by forest trees that the bright sunlight, dancing merrily amid the rust-

ling leaves above, falls but seldom on the time-stained walls of dark gray stone, where the damp and dews of more than a century have fallen, and where now the green moss clings with a loving grasp, as if 'twere its rightful resting-place. When the thunders of the Revolution shook the hills of the Bay State, and the royal banner floated in the evening breeze, the house was owned by an old Englishman, who, loyal to his king and country, denounced as rebels the followers of Washington. Against these however, he would not raise his hand; for among them were many long-armed friends, who had gathered 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 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 beloved, and his property was unmolested, while the weeds and grass grew tall 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 no one appeared to dispute their rights, 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 granddaughter of the old Englishman, having met 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 future home. To this plan no objection was made, for the aged people of Hillsdale still cherished the memory of the hospitable old man, whose locks were grey while they were yet

but children, and the younger portion of the community hoped for a renewal of the gaieties 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 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 progress 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 flower-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 her 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 rather it should be so." So the trees remained, throwing their long shadows upon the high, narrow windows, and into the large, square rooms, where the morning light and the rosy heat seldom found entrance, and which seemed like so many cold, silent caverns, with their old-fashioned massive furniture, their 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-looking woman, who more than any one else, shared her mistress's confidence, had grown up in the family, receiving a very good education, and had nursed their young mistress, Miss Margaret, which, of course, entitled her to more 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 all the formalities of high life, dressed each day with the utmost precision for her solitary dinner, dining from off a service of solid silver, and presiding with great dignity in

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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 covering, 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 quiet, which was broken at last for Hagar by the announcement that her daughter's young mistress had died four months before, and the husband, a grey-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.

(To be continued.)

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factation Hagar read the letter through, exulting that fortune had favored her at last. Possessed of many sterling qualities, 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 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 herself might some time cease to be a servant, and help to 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 sold, and that he, overwhelmed with mortification both at his failure and the opposition of his friends to his last marriage, had died suddenly, leaving Hester with no home in the wide world unless Madam Conway received her again into her family.

"Just my luck!" was Hagar's mental comment, as she finished reading the letter, and carried it to her mistress, who had always liked Hester, and who readily consented to give her a home, provided she put on no airs from having been for a time 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 goods!" 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, bearing a foreign postmark, and bringing the sad news that her son-in-law had been lost in a storm, while crossing the English 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.

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