

The Freight of the "Dolphin."

By Mrs. Jane C. Austin.

Meeting had just gone in. Parson Holbrook was in his seat in the high, ugly pulpit, with the sounding board overhead; the singers, in the singing seats in the gallery, had taken their pitch from Uncle Jethuron's tuning-fork and were fuguing "And on the wings of mighty winds came flying all abroad;" the first families of Pilgrim Vale were seated in their square pews, each furnished according to the taste or the means of their owners; and the little boys, perched upon the high wooden seats, with no foot-stools near enough for their dangling feet to reach, had begun their two hours' fidget—when the door, just closed by black Pompey, the sexton, opened slowly, and Major Cathcart walked up the broad aisle in his usual dignified and deliberate manner. Every head was turned to gaze upon him, every face wore an expression of astonishment and disapproval; the singers, finishing their hymn with hasty quavers of discomfort, leaned over the front of the gallery and gazed down upon him, and even Parson Holbrook bent his powdered head sidewise to look sternly at the great square pew where his wealthy parishioner was uncomfortably seating himself with an attempt at unconscious dignity.

A moment of silence fell upon the place—that awful, pregnant silence which speaks as no words can—and then Martin Merivale, the man whom Pilgrim Vale always sent to General Court when he would go, and who led public opinion as he willed in the town where his honorable, steadfast life had thus far passed, rose in his place, deliberately did on his heavy cloak, took his hat in his hand, cast one meaning glance across the aisle into the questioning eyes of Major Cathcart, his old associate and neighbour, and then walked slowly down the aisle. He had not reached the door before Dr. Holcom rose to follow his example, and then Squire Vale, and then the Oldfields, father and son, and finally every man in the congregation who counted himself a person of the least consequence, or able to set an example, until, when black Pompey at last closed the door, and with a joyous grin sat down beside it, the church so lately filled with the pith and sinew of the staunch old colony town, was empty, save of women, children, and Major Reginald Cathcart, whose ashen-grey face had never moved after the first from its stern, straight forward gaze, or his dark eyes blanched, or his heavy eyebrows unbent from the frown of defiant endurance which with some men is the only sign of agony.

And agony it could not fail to be: for this man, to-day so openly and deliberately thrust from their midst by his fellow-townsmen, counted him self only three days earlier their autocrat, claiming by birth, wealth and haughty self-assertion the place yielded to him in virtue of these qualities, as that of Martin Merivale was thrust upon him in recognition of his own personal character.

And why this terrible insult? why this stern intimation that the men of Pilgrim Vale considered the presence of one so lately their magnate so great a pollution that they preferred even to lose the privilege of public worship suffering him to join them in it?

Why? Oh, men of to-day, yours is not the temper of your fathers; but yet you must thrill with admiration of their earnestness of purpose, their mighty trust, their contempt of their own advantage or safety, or comfort, when a Right full of danger and suffering called to them oppose a tyrannous and encroaching Wrong!

It was 1774, and the Governor of Massachusetts, in right of his commission from King George of England, had sent to demand payment of a tax levied upon the colony for the support of the foreign soldiers, sent over with the avowed purpose of holding the mutinous province in subjection. Pilgrim Vale considered this demand of "the man George," argued upon it,

find safety and freedom in the land their Lord had promised them, and he closed with a petition for protection against all enemies, both without and within—the foreign foe and those of their own household who had turned against them, and whose evil counsels might, he prayed, be turned to foolishness and dishonor.

Then came the sermon; and, laying aside his carefully written discourse upon the Urim and Thummim, Parson Holbrook preached extemporaneously and mightily from the text, "Put not your faith in princes," diverging finally into the story of Judas, and the high crime of domestic or social treachery.

When all was over, and the choir had sung, "See where the hoary sinner stands," black Pompey threw open the doors, and stood aside, as usual, to meet and return the kindly greetings of the congregation; but as Major Cathcart strode down the aisle, his head erect, but his face white and withered, as if he had just risen from a bed of torture, even Pompey turned his back and stood staring intently out of the open door as the stricken man passed by. But Major Cathcart looked neither to the right nor the left; and if others besides Pompey had intended to show their disapproval of his presence, they found no opportunity, for the king's collector passed quickly through the little throng outside the door, and down the main street until he reached the grave,

handsome, middle-aged house so strongly resembling its master, and quietly opening the front door passed directly up-stairs, and was hastening to the shelter of a room at the back, known as "the major's study," when from the open door of one of the principal bedrooms came a gentle yet eager call, "Reginald, do come in here."

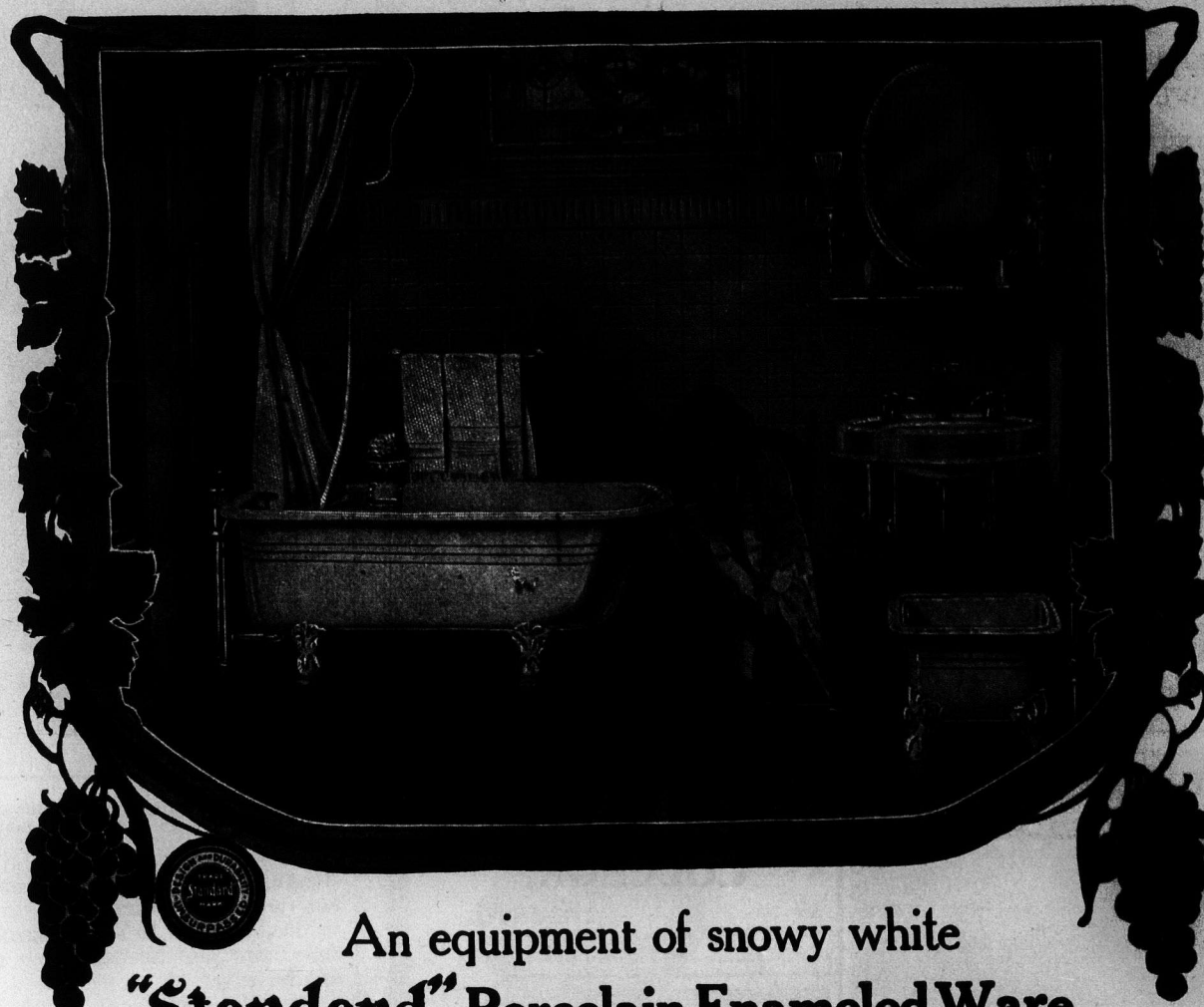
The husband paused reluctantly, and, turning his head toward the door, but without showing his face at it, replied, "What is it, Hepzibah? I am going to my study."

"Not first, dear. Please come and see me for a moment. I am all alone."

Without replying, the major obeyed, and, passing into the handsome shadowy room, stood beside the bed, where lay a woman whose fair and delicate face bore the patient almost angelic look of one who has suffered very long and very cruelly, but whose pains, meekly borne, are consciously drawing to their final close. She was Major Cathcart's wife, and the only being the cold, proud man had ever loved, and she was dying.

He stooped and kissed her tenderly, asking, "How have you been this morning, dear?"

"As well as usual. But you, Reginald, how has it been with you? I knew by your step upon the stair that you were suffering, and your face tells the story. Oh, my darling husband, they have insulted you, as we feared. Is not it so?"



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