

ONE OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S
HEROINES.

NOWHERE, perhaps, in the whole range of literature can there be found a character who so well represents personified purity as does the "Hilda of the Marble Faun." Dwelling, white-robed, on a tower, she breathes a serene and unpolluted atmosphere, unknown to the inhabitants of the city in which she has nominally her abode. Her companions are the doves. A daughter of Puritans, she yet lovingly tends the light before the shrine of the Virgin Mother, attracted through all the barriers of religious prejudice to that symbol of stainless womanhood. "Her womanhood is of the ethereal type, incompatible with any shadow of darkness or evil." Incapable herself of the slightest deviation from her standard—a severely exalted standard—of right, the mere realization of the fact that crime exists in the world, suddenly brought home to her by witnessing that of her friend, tortures her. She endures in her own person the remorse of the guilty combined with the horror of the innocent, for she feels that by the tie of humanity which links her with the criminal, the crime is hers; yet so alien is the spotless purity of her nature from any sympathy with wrong-doing that she is furnished with no means of framing an excuse for it. Human motives and human actions are not to her mind that mixture of good and evil which we others, fallible mortals, by many a sad experience subjective and objective, have learned them to be. "There is," she says, "only one right and one wrong, and I do not understand, and may God keep me from ever understanding how two things so totally unlike can be mistaken one for the other, nor how two mortal foes as right and wrong surely are can work together in the same deed." Therefore when, having witnessed a crime, she must bear the knowledge of it about with her, she bears it as a burden which no slightest affinity with her own nature can familiarize or render less intolerable. She is "innocence dying of a blood-stain . . . A man has been slain in her presence, and the blood spurting accidentally upon her white robe, has made a stain which eats into her life."

The woman whose character is believed to have furnished Hawthorne with the idea of his Hilda had herself a history which in its weird, pathetic, beautiful unlikeness to ordinary experience might itself have engaged the pen of that master romancer. She was the Ada Shepherd whose name occurs several times in the "Note-books" of that European sojourn during which he conceived and wrote "The Marble Faun,"—for she was a member of his family during those years in the capacity of governess to his children.

She was born about 1832, at Dorchester, a suburb of Boston—one of a numerous family, for there were ten sisters and several brothers. "Their father," says one who was their early friend and schoolmate, "was one of Nature's noblemen, but they owed to their mother their high intellectual natures." All of the children were early distinguished for high mental gifts, and for the energy with which they sought to employ them. They were said always to carry books about with them so that no leisure moment might be unimproved—an indication that their time for uninterrupted reading was limited. As children they attracted the notice of Horace Mann and his wife who sought in many ways to befriend them; and whose pupil Ada afterwards was. She passed from the public school of her native town to the State Normal at West Newton, and had just been graduated from the latter institution when Antioch College was opened at Yellow Springs, Ohio. It was established by the Christian Church the plan being co-education of the sexes on a perfect equality, and Horace Mann was first President. Miss Shepherd at once decided upon a full collegiate course and was graduated at its first commencement in 1857, in the same class with Henry Clay Badger, whom she afterwards married. Soon afterwards she accompanied Mr. Hawthorne and family abroad and during two years, spent for the most part in Italy and France, she made herself thoroughly proficient in the languages of these countries as well as in German. Unfortunately during a summer spent in Rome "Italy's malarial fever laid its terrible hand upon her" and to the blighting effects of its touch her friends trace the terrible calamity that afterwards befel her. She married soon after her return to America in 1859, and for a time both she and her husband were teachers in Antioch College. Afterwards Mr. Badger entered the ministry of the Unitarian Church and held the pastorate of a congregation at Cambridgeport, till ill-health compelled him to resign it. Mrs. Badger, who had long felt a deep interest in the education of girls, decided soon after upon opening a private school for girls in Boston, being joined in the undertaking by her friend Miss Tilden, a teacher of large experience. Their venture was eminently successful, and Mrs. Badger's scholarship and educational ability were recognized by her election to a seat on the Boston School Board.

A little word-picture of her home at this period was lovingly painted for me two years ago by Mrs. Amelia W. Durfee, of Villa Park, California, a cousin of Mr. Badger, and to whom I am indebted for the materials from which I have attempted to frame this little history. When a young girl Mrs. Durfee was for a short time a guest at her cousin's home, and she describes the simplicity and beauty of the surroundings which seemed to her to reflect down to their minutest details the purity, the sweetness and the perfectness of adjustment which distinguished the character of her who presided over them. Indeed, to her mind, the very food set before her, simple, temptingly prepared and

nutritious, had a tongue to speak of her who had provided it.

The impression of being a living standard of right Mrs. Badger seems to have been able to make upon all who knew her,—a characteristic which is markedly displayed in Hilda; "she dwelt," like her "above our vanities and passions, our moral dust and mud." Those of her friends who have put upon record their impressions of her character speak no less warmly of her tender and wide-embracing sympathies, her tendency to implicit trust in others, her extraordinary sweetness of manner. If she displayed also that severity in her dealings with sinners, which Hawthorne calls the necessary outcome of Hilda's immaculate purity, I have nowhere found it recorded. But we may be sure no real woman of Hilda's character ever lacked some memory of personal sin to soften her towards wrong doing in others. It is only the Pharisees of humanity who are righteous in their own eyes.

At every anniversary of her first attack of malarial fever much of its misery returned, and by degrees the cheerful brightness of her spirits came to have periods of eclipse. Year by year, too, showed less of elasticity in the rebound from depression. A fearful dread was growing upon her, though she concealed it from those nearest to her, and spoke of it only to one or two friends—the dread that her reason was being undermined. Insanity was not a stranger to their blood, for one of her sisters, the second wife of Professor Thomas Hill, of Harvard, afterwards died a lunatic. Perhaps she knew of this taint and that it increased her dread. However that may be, when in the Christmas holidays of 1873 a malarial sickness again overcame her, her fear seems to have become a conviction; and with the conviction came the resolution to spare her family the sad trial of seeing her thus changed—the heavy burden of caring for a lunatic. Of suicide she had often spoken with unqualified condemnation as a step which nothing could excuse, and yet, strangely enough, in the confusion of mind which, we cannot doubt, was even then upon her, it was this step which presented itself before her as the only means by which she could save her beloved ones the suffering she foresaw for them—a delusion which in its nature is never foreign to the minds of those capable of the utmost self-sacrifice, who often, in imagining they are taking upon themselves all the suffering, are really, as if ingeniously, contriving to inflict the greatest possible anguish upon those who love them. That this feeling was the sole one that determined her is the view taken by all her friends, and her own words show it had great force. But in attentively studying her history another has been presented to me as not improbably mingling in her motives. May not a temptation to the deed, which in the abstract she regarded with a peculiar horror and upon which she had often dwelt, have been one of the effects of the perversion of her mental faculties? May she not have been impelled by something like "that perilous fascination which haunts the brow of precipices, tempting the unwary one to fling himself over for the very horror of the thing?"

She made her plans methodically. She wrote a letter to a dear friend of her husband in a neighbouring town asking him to come at once when he should receive it as Henry needed him; to her eldest brother, commending husband and sons to his care and sympathy; to her husband himself, assuring him of her "eternal love and gratitude." These she left behind her. On her way to the railway station she stopped to pay a few trifling debts not known to any other member of the family, and at the station she wrote a farewell note to the elder of her boys, enclosing her wedding ring, and commending father and brother to his lasting love. She went to New York and took passage upon an ocean steamer just leaving. She was noticed by many of the passengers who remembered afterwards her silence and apparent pre-occupation. After the steamer had passed Point Judith none saw her more; and after a careful investigation it seemed certainly established that, unobserved in the darkness, she had leaped overboard determined that not even a lifeless body should remain a burden upon those she loved and wished to spare. "And thus," says one who knew her well, writing soon after her death, "after reason had left her, walking still in the clear, white light of her own pure spirit, she passed out of sight."

The following description of her appearance from the same pen may be compared with that of Hilda:—

"Through the almost transparent veil of her delicate organization her spirit shone like a lamp through an alabaster vase, the frequently changing expression of her face showing every mood of feeling and every shade of thought."

Mrs. Durfee has a portrait of her taken after her marriage, when, perhaps, already the melancholy of her tragic death had cast from afar its shadow upon her, for her eyes show that her soul is no stranger to sad thoughts. She still wears Hilda's brown ringlets; and displays Hilda's delicate beauty of feature. Her brow is thoughtful and intellectual looking, but, as the cheeks are somewhat sunken, looks a little out of proportion. It seemed to me—but her history may have been before my eyes as I gazed—that the beautiful face spoke of a destiny, realized or foreseen, higher and sadder than that of most mortals.

KATHERINE B. COUTTS.

Chatham, May 24.

CONSCIENCE flourishes best on continuous hard service, and should not be allowed to take a holiday for a single afternoon.

A DREAM AND ITS SEQUEL.

THEY were all seated round the fire-place where blazed and crackled huge logs which sent long tongues of flame up the wide chimney and showered sparks and hisses as if in approval or disapproval of the many weird stories which one or other of the speakers told. Outside the wind tore madly through the trees and wailed down the chimney while the rain dashed even more wildly against the panes. Stories of apparitions, ghosts, curious dreams, or presentiments of evil—all these had been related, each one vying with the other in horror. A sort of scared silence had followed the last speaker's narration which was broken by a girl with large expressive eyes and broad white brow.

"That certainly was very curious and unaccountable; but I have had an experience which I deem as curious as that. I have never spoken of it simply because I feared ridicule; however, since you all are so communicative and have such an appetite for the occult and horrible, I will relate to you my little adventure."

"It is now four years since I made a six months' visit to Washington. You all remember how enchanted I was with that beautiful city—the American Paris—how I revelled in its noble buildings, its lovely squares and beautiful monuments. Well, one night shortly before my return to Canada I had a curious dream. I thought I was walking along College Street in Toronto; it was a clear cold evening in January; the sun had sunk below the horizon, leaving the sky in the west all luminous and golden from his passing, and just above where the gold merged into the already darkening blue, the evening star hung faint and tremulous. So clear was the air that the house-tops, chimneys, and the naked trees to their tiniest twig stood out in sharp relief against the golden background. At every other corner the intense blue of the electric lights which depended from long poles above the trees etched upon the sidewalks and roadways the dark delicate tracing of the branches and twigs. Down the street in indistinct picturesque groups came workmen carrying dinner-cans or bundles of tools; so distinct is everything in my memory that I even recall a great brick waggon drawn by huge grey horses whose driver wore long red stockings drawn up nearly to his knees, while a flat woollen cap of the same colour covered his shaggy head."

"Well, I had walked along some distance westward enjoying the beauty of the street; it was one long beautiful perspective vanishing into the sunset. As I approached one of the electric lights I noticed a slowly moving figure before me; it was that of a slight, old man with long silvery hair which glistened in the light and fell down over a sort of blue scarf which was twisted lightly about his neck; his right hand grasped a walking-stick with a great hook at the end of it, while with his left he strove to hold together the two sides of a great rent in the right shoulder of his coat. Just as he came into the brightest of the light I noticed with horror that his thin bare shoulder was exposed to the keen night wind which was just rising. He stopped and struggled to fasten it, while I, without a thought as to whether or not I should thus accost a stranger, quickly stepped up to him and said, 'O, do let me help you, I will fasten it with a pin.' He turned suddenly and placing one long bony hand upon the other which rested upon the walking-stick, calmly surveyed me. Never shall I forget the awful sensations which poured over me as I met his eyes. The silvery hair which I had noticed before framed a face seamed and wrinkled and of the tint of old ivory. All about him suggested extreme old age, except the eyes; they alone had retained all the beauty and lustre of youth. They were so dark as to seem black, and as they glowed upon me with an expression of accusing hatred, I felt like a criminal taken in some horrid deed where denial or escape is impossible. I stood rooted to the spot, fascinated, incapable of speech. Then I began to be conscious of an awful fear while my heart beat in dull sickening thuds. Suddenly the old man lifted one hand as if to take hold of me—the spell was broken. Without another glance I turned and fled homeward, never stopping till I was safely locked in my own room. I sank upon the bed half dead with fright and horror. I had probably lain there a minute or so when I thought I heard a sort of tick-tack upon the window pane. Quickly turning my head, and with my heart in my mouth, I once more beheld that awful apparition peering in below the blinds. With one shriek I flew out of bed and found myself standing in the middle of my room in Washington!"

"That was certainly an uncomfortable dream, but it is not strange that an excited imagination should conjure up such an odd figure," remarked one.

"I quite agree with you," replied the young girl quietly, "The dream is not at all strange! The curious part is yet to come—do you not think it strange that a dream should have a sequel in actual life?"

"O horror!" exclaimed another of the girls, whose eyes had a tendency to widen to infinity as her excitement grew, "I shan't sleep a wink to-night, but never mind that, I am full of curiosity to hear the sequel."

"See here, Evelyn," remarked the narrator's brother with an incredulous laugh, "you don't mean to tell us that this old man had the indecency to turn up in the flesh, do you?"

"Indeed I do," responded Evelyn, quietly, "and cousin Elinor will vouch for what I say, won't you, dear?"

"You surely don't mean my dear old man who scared you at the hospital, do you?"