

and gives the alarm when he awakes." She took out of the cradle a beautiful boy.

"How I do love that child!" said she. "It is the life of my life. If I were dead and an one should abuse it I would defend it. Such things do happen in the inward world."

The two young women rode away from the place.

"There is nothing new in the woman's thoughts," said Miss Needham, "but it does seem strange that she should have reasoned thus."

"Miss Needham," said the other, "there is something very strange, very strange indeed, about the wife of Ben Bow."

In the Indian summer days our two Brook Farm friends, whom we will call Mary Needham and Hester Fifield, rode again to the Dedham woods, among the falling leaves, wild grapes and gathering flocks of birds, and called on the wife of Ben Bow.

She received them gratefully, and said that her babe had been ill, and that she had hardly left the place since their former call.

"I have thought much over the matters of which you talked," she said, "and I have wished to come over and call on you for my hand and arm have become swollen. See." She held up her hand from which the middle forefinger was gone. The visitors marked the appearance of the hand very distinctly.

"I have had," she added, "some strange experiences of late. My soul at times has seemed to soar away and be in other places. I sometimes think that I am not constituted like other people. You know that I believe that the body

is merely a mass of organs adapted to the needs of the soul—the means of communication between the outward and inward world. It is the inward world that is the source of all mysteries, as the bloom of the rose is but the rose principle in the outward world, bodied forth. I shall go in some day, and it will not be long, and they will shut the door. But I can come out again." She pressed her child closely to her heart. "I can come out again, at least, in appearance. What the soul sees, it sees; I do not mean that these bones or that this or that dress or shoes can come out again. But the inward world will be a reality then, and all its mysteries now will then be a part of life."

The two ladies invited her again to visit Brook Farm.

She came one still November day, while the summer splendor lingered, bringing her babe with her. One of the men of the Community, Dr. Fifield, who had had a medical education, examined her hand and arm and gave her advice and a prescription. They never again saw her alive, and here begins the inexplicable mystery of "The Wife of Ben Bow."

The ladies did not belong to the original Community of rustic philosophers at Brook Farm. The charm, possibly the romance, of the little Community, drew many visitors there, and Miss Fifield having a brother, and Miss Needham a sister there, they liked to be much with the people who were making the novel social experiment. But they found their thought more stimulated by the poor wife of Ben Bow than by the learned and glowing conversations of Margaret Fuller, or of Alcott, whom they also knew. They had heard this woman say that the Ought which was written in the soul of every man was the true law of life. This they could understand, and they began to build up a bit of philosophy upon it which made them interesting, though they had learned it in the bush, and had hardly had an idea before, except such as had been endorsed by wholesome Mt. Holyoke or Catherine Beecher's prudent school. So they began to study the Ought between them, which they decided came out of the "inward world," and evolved into infinite consciousness, and they became numbered among the speckled birds of the stream-cleaved meadows of Brook Farm.

But a darker problem haunted their minds. This, also, came from the poor woman in the bush. Does the soul have power after death which it can exercise over the living? They talked of this by themselves, for the amiable disciples of Kant and Fourier did not regard any such old-fashioned speculations as this as a part of their transcendental investigations. The Communists, or Transcendentalists, as they came to be called, had gathered to study those things that transcended human experience, but the topic of a ghost was ruled out as a matter of vulgar superstition, although ghosts were still believed in by the people at large at this time to make lively many old New England houses and cemeteries. So our ladies talked of the Ought in the symposiums of the parlor, and of avenging spirits by themselves, and a year passed amid the lights of agreeable speculations and the shadows of apprehensions, and the leaves came out of the inner world, expanded, breathed the air, turned red and crisp, and fell, in the bowery groves of peaceful Brook Farm.

It was a dark, still night of one of the short days of December. Snow had fallen. There had been made a fire on the hearth in the keeping-room, whose noble proportions may still be seen. Without, the crystals in the thin snow were glistening in the moonlight. There was heard the gallop of a horse's feet up the high bank before the door, which are now seats on the terrace under the trees. There followed a sharp rap on the door. Miss Needham, who was at the time in the room alone, hurried to answer the call.

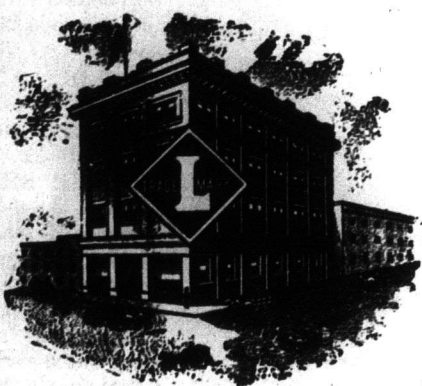
"I am Ben Bow," said the man at the door. "Call Dr. Fifield. My wife is dying."

Miss Needham called the doctor, who left with Ben Bow for a keen-aired ride through the Dedham woods.

Dr. Fifield returned late. In answer to Miss Needham's inquiries, for the

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