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### THE SHAKER LOVERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE GREEN MOUNTAIN BOYS,' 'MAY MARTIN,' &c.

[CONTINUED.]

"Go away! Surely! Hast thee well considered, Seth?"  
"Yes, long and deeply. I can no longer endure the vile misusage I have lately received; I can no longer endure to be a slave—a slave to those who would fetter and degrade both the body and the mind; and I have determined that this night I will leave them."  
"But whither would thee go?—into the wide, wicked world?"

"If I thought, Martha, I should find the people of the world more wicked than some of those I shall leave behind, I would remain. But it is not that which now perplexes and troubles me."

"If we have been taught aright, Seth, what should trouble thee more?"  
"Ay, if aright; but thee knows my opinions of the absurdity of our creed, and the falsity of that kind, but my doubts and fears about the reception I may meet with in the world of whose ways I know so little, and in which I must appear so foolish and awkward. I am ignorant Martha, ignorant as a child, of all that I should know."

"But does not that spring from pride of heart, Seth, which, under any good creed, should strive to banish? It appears to me thee should have better reasons."

"Well, I have other reasons, and much stronger ones, I confess, with me; but I know not that thee would consider them better. It is— and the youth paused and hesitated, while the wondering maiden threw an innocent and inquiring look upon his sorrowful and agitated countenance—"it is," he resumed, at length mastering his emotions, "it is the thought of leaving thee, Martha, which wrings my heart—leaving thee among this people to be subjected to the wiles and persecutions of that wicked and designing—"

"Oh! name him not, Seth, name him not!" quickly interrupted the girl with a shudder, which but too plainly told both her fears and abhorrence of the man about to be mentioned.

"I should not, Martha, but I have noticed that which has filled me with alarming conjectures—with fears for thy safety; and I would that thee tell me what he proposes to thee."

"I cannot—I cannot; but, oh! if thee knew my troubles, Seth—" and the poor girl, at the thought thus called up, dropped her head upon the other's shoulder, and wept as if her heart would break.

"The wretch! the accursed wretch!" exclaimed the young man bitterly.

"Nay, nay, do not curse, Seth," sobbed the girl, making an effort to check her emotion; that is a gift belonging, I think, only to the Great One above, who meets out justice to the sinful, not as man meets under the influence of blinding passions, but according to the proper measure; and He, we must remember, can protect the innocent as well as punish the guilty; and, though my trials are indeed sore, yet I trust that Good Being will still, as He has done, preserve me guiltless and unharmed."

Each being absorbed in the thoughts and feelings which the conversation had excited, there was here a short pause in the discourse, during which the maiden gently disengaged herself from the partial embrace of the other, and, wiping her eyes, seemed to resume her usual tranquillity.

"Martha," at length said the young man, with an air of embarrassment and a slightly tremulous accent.

"What would thee say, Seth?" asked the maiden composedly, perceiving that the other hesitated to go on.

"Martha, does thee love me?" resumed the youth with an effort.

"Why—why," replied she, now hesitating in turn, "why, we are commanded to love one another, are we not?"

"Ay, Martha; but does thee regard me with that feeling which the world calls love?"

"I hardly know what to tell thee, Seth. I have often greatly feared that my heart was an erring one. I have tried to bestow my love on all; but I may have sometimes thought perhaps, that thee was getting more than thy share."

"Thy words are precious to my heart, Martha. Let us, then, cherish that feeling towards each other, and permit it to lead us to its natural consummation. Thee knows, Martha, that the love of which I speak, when crowned by marriage, is allowed and approved by the good and wise of every sect but our own. Thee knows, too, that it is sanctioned and blessed by the good book, which I lent thee on purpose that thee might read the whole, instead of only such parts as our elders would have us take for our guide, cunningly denying us the free use of the book because they fear to have us read and reason upon the rest—not because, as they pretend, we should pervert it."

"Thee bewildered me, Seth. I will confess that I have at times thought that thee

reason in what thee now says, but I have as often feared that it was only the promptings of vain fancies or sinful inclinations; and it is so different from what I have always been taught to believe right, that it sometimes makes me tremble lest I should at last be left to harbour a belief which may be wrong in itself, and prove ruinous to my soul's interests."

"It is not wrong," warmly urged the young man; "it is not wrong, Martha. It is right; thy reason tells thee that it is right. All nature confirms it. The Bible, when properly consulted, also answers yea. Come, then, Martha, come with me. Let us go into the world, where there will be no mean spies to dog and torment us—no tyrants to prevent our innocent actions, and make them an excuse for prosecuting the foulest designs, and none to molest or make us afraid; where, united as one never more to part, we will live, be free to love, and in that love and freedom find our solace, our comfort, and our lasting felicity. Come, come; fear not. With my own hands I will support thee—in my own heart I will cherish thee."

"Oh! tempt me not—tempt me not, Seth!"  
"Call it not temptation, dearest one. Sooner would I suffer all that wicked men could inflict than lead thee astray. I think it—I mean it for thy good as much as for my own happiness. It is not temptation; it is but the pleadings of wisdom and of love. Fly with me, then, this night and this hour—fly with me from the dangers and miseries that here beset thee to safety and happiness."

"Nay, nay, Seth," replied the maiden calmly and firmly, after appearing to struggle a moment with her conflicting feelings. "Thy proposal is a bold and startling one; it is also new and unexpected. I have not considered and may not now accept it, and, moreover, I may not longer remain with thee. I must return to the buildings."

"And am I never to see thee more?" asked the other sadly.

"Why, if thee will indeed leave us," she replied, lingering and hesitating, "unless, perhaps—unless thee could return at some appointed time and place—"

"Will thee, then," eagerly inquired the youth, "will thee meet me here four weeks from this night?"

"If permitted, I will, Seth."  
"And be prepared to go with me?"  
"Again I may not promise; but I will weigh thy proposal with kindly intent. Fare thee well, Seth."

"Fare thee well, beloved Martha—if thee can stay no longer, fare thee well, with many blessings; but remember, oh remember!"

"Fondly and anxiously gazed the youth after the maiden, till her retreating form was lost in view among the intervening shrubbery, when he appeared to rouse himself from his tender reverie to the purpose now remaining to be accomplished; and, with a firm step and resolute air, he bent his course towards the pond, where he knew a skiff belonging to the Shakers was moored.

Although the Shaker leaders mainly depend for retaining their subjects upon the impression of aversion and hatred of the world which they so sedulously implant in the bosoms of their youth, aided by the extreme ignorance in which they are kept for the same purpose, and by which they are generally rendered as helpless and passive as could be wished, yet force, whatever may be said to the contrary, is, or at least was formerly, not unfrequently resorted to for the purpose of restraining those detected in attempting to escape. Seth, therefore, with the view of avoiding collisions growing out of any attempt that might be made, in case he had been suspected and watched, to prevent his going away, deemed it best to depart in a discreet and manner which the Shakers would be the least likely to suspect him of taking. In pursuance of this plan he had determined to take the boat and cross over to some point which was to place him beyond the family possessions, within the boundaries of which the pursuit of their fugitives was usually confined. Congratulating himself on the result of his interview with Martha, which, besides filling his bosom with the blissful consciousness that his love was reciprocated, and inspiring his mind with the joyful hope that the prize of his affections would soon be his, and passed over, as he supposed, undetected, he pursued his way with a light and rapid step along the path leading to the water. He had not gone many rods, however, before, to his utter surprise, his old persecutor, the sleepless Higgins, stepped out from behind a covert, and, with a look of malicious indignation, confronted him in his path. Deeply vexed, but neither daunted nor turned from his purpose, the young man paused and threw back a look of indignation and scorn at his detested opponent; for, perceiving the Elder to be alone and conscious of his own bodily power, he disdained either to cover or flee, but, with an air of cool defiance, stood waiting his movements.

"Ah! thou vile young heretic!" at length exclaimed the Elder, tauntingly; "I have caught thee at last, then, in thine own iniquities, eh? What was thee saying to the maiden

"What thee will not be likely to be much the wiser for," indignantly replied Seth, who felt confident that, whatever the Elder's luck had been as a spy, he could not, from the distance of his position, have gained much in the character of an eaves-dropper.

"Ha! dost thou defy thy appointed rulers, young man? Confess thy sins unto me, lest I make an example of both thee and her in punishment for thy heinous offences."

"Hypocrite, I know thee, and for myself defy thee! But I bid thee beware how thee shalt further persecute that innocent girl; for as sure as thee injures a hair of her head, I will hunt thee while I live, and haunt thee when I am dead."

Accustomed to witness only tokens of the most abject submission in the deluded people over whom he had so long tyrannized, and totally unprepared for such bold language from the young man whose spirit he had greatly underrated, the astonished Elder stood a moment fairly choking with rage, unable, from the violence of his passions, to utter a single word.

"Get—get—get thee back to the buildings!" at length he sputtered in exploding rage—"Get thee back, thou audacious—thou—thou God-forsaken reprobate! Get thee back, I say instantly!"

"Man I shall not obey thee!" said Seth in a cool determined tone. "I no longer acknowledge thy authority; and, from this hour I am no longer one of thy blinded and deluded people. I go hence," he added, turning off of the path with the view of passing by the other.

"I will detain thee—I will seize thee—I will curse thee, and, verily I will smite thee!" again exclaimed the fuming Elder, springing at the other, and making a desperate grasp at his collar.

The young man, however, was not taken unprepared for the onset, and the next instant the wrathful Quaker was sprawling upon the earth.

Bounding forward for the pond, with the object of getting out upon the water before his discomfited antagonist could recover himself and reach the shore in pursuit, Seth quickly gained the landing, hastily unfastened the skiff and leaped aboard; but before he succeeded in clearing the boat fairly from the shore, and as he was stepping backwards, with his hands out, to take his seat in the stern, the Elder came puffing in hot haste down the bank and dashed into the water up to his knees after the receding boat, which even at that moment had just put out of his reach.

Espying however, the end of the tie-rope, which, in the hurry of unfastening, had not been taken up, and was now dragging thro' the water within reach, he instantly seized it and gave it a sudden and furious jerk. Unconscious of the oversight he had committed, and therefore, wholly unprepared for this movement, the young man lost his balance in the violence of the shock, was precipitated over the end of the skiff into the water, and instantly disappeared beneath the surface. With a desperate effort the Elder first drew the skiff up high and dry on the shore, then hurriedly catching up an oar, and springing back to the water's edge, he held the formidable implement upflung over his head, as if in readiness for a fatal blow the instant his victim's head should re-appear on the surface. In a few seconds the young man came up just out of reach of the weapon; when, perceiving the threatening attitude of his antagonist, apparently determined on his destruction should he attempt to come ashore, he seemingly became panic struck and confused; and after glancing wildly around him an instant, sunk again, with a gurgling sound, beneath the surface to rise no more to the view.

With a look of still unmitigated malice & ferocity, and with the same menacing attitude the ruthless Elder stood waiting for a second appearance of his victim, a full moment, when he began to exhibit tokens of surprise and lowered his weapon a little, still keeping his eye keenly fixed on the spot. After waiting in vain nearly another moment, for the drowning man to rise, the Elder became thoroughly alarmed, and throwing down his oar, hurriedly retreated a rod or two on the bank.

Here he turned and threw another anxious and troubled look upon and around the fatal spot. A few faint bubbles rising successively to the surface, alone answered his inquiring gaze; and reading in them the conclusive evidence of the horrid truth, he gave a convulsive start, and fled in terror toward the buildings as fast as his quaking limbs would carry him, mumbling and chattering to himself as he went—

"Now, who would have thought if the youth could have swam; and am I to blame for that he never learned to swim! Of a surety I am not. And then did he not lift his hand against a gifted Elder of God's church? And moreover, have I not saved the family's boat, which he was about to purloin? Verily, I have done a good thing, though I think I will not name the matter to the people, lest it lead the temptation of evil speaking against rulers, and peradventure, get to the world's magistrates. And then again, there is the youth's property, which he was so froward and perverse about relinquishing to the church. Nay,

I will not let the affair be known, but go to work right cunningly and secure it all for God's heritage. Yea, verily, I have done a good thing."

Thus strangely reasoning, and desperately grasping at salvars for his troubled feelings, the terror-stricken Elder reached home, and, without uttering a syllable of what had taken place to any one, immediately betook himself to his solitary lodgings, not there to find peace and repose, but to write an unturn under the scorpion stings of conscience—that unescapable hell of the guilty which retributive Heaven has planted in the bosom of Man for the certain punishment of his crime.

Meanwhile the lovely and conscientious Martha, wholly unapprised of what had befallen her lover, returned to her peaceful pillow, and endeavored to reflect calmly on the new and interesting subject which her recent interview had opened to her mind; but, finding herself unable to do this from the thousand crowding thoughts and sensations which contributed to swell the gentle tumult of her bosom, she discreetly deferred the task for a cooler moment, and, having piously commended herself to the protection of her Maker, yielded herself to those quiet and peaceful slumbers that constitute not the least among the rewards of virtue and innocence. On awakening next morning, her thoughts immediately recurred to the subject that occupied her last waking moments; and, as she now figured in her mind her lover far on his way from the place, rejoicing in his freedom from the oppression he had at length escaped, she again and again recalled the tender professions he had made, and ran over the arguments he had advanced in urging her to leave her present situation, and go forth with him into the world as his companion for weal or for woe. The more she thought of the proposed step, at first so startling, the less fearful did it appear. The more she weighed his reasons with those she found herself able to bring up in refutation, lighter and lighter grew the objections which had caused her to hesitate even in giving him a definite promise of acceding to his request when they should again meet; and as her scruples yielded and gave away, the unchecked pleadings of her own heart came in and soon decisively turned the already inclining balance, leaving her now free to wander unhesitatingly over the new and bright field of destiny which had been presented to her view.

After indulging in her pleasing reveries as long as inclination prompted, the maiden arose dressed, and was on the point of descending from her chamber to join and perform the domestic duties of the morning, when her attention was arrested by an unusual commotion among the family below, which she soon ascertained, from some words that reached through the partially opened door, to be caused by the discovered absence of Seth, for whom search had already been made, but in vain. The consciousness that within her own bosom she harbored the secret of the missing one's absence, which she might not reveal, made her, for the first time in her life, feel like a guilty one; and, dreading not to go down lest her appearance should betray the agitation she felt, she paused at the head of the stairs, and stood some time endeavoring to compose her feelings and gain a command of her countenance, which should save her from showing any excitement that might not be natural to the occasion; but while doing this, the poor girl was little dreaming of the thousand times more difficult task in reserve for her—that of controlling her feeling under the heart-crushing blow which she was destined the next moment to receive. The appalling announcement now passed from mouth to mouth among the family that Seth was drowned in the pond, the evidence of which in addition to his unaccountable absence, was found in the circumstance that his hat had been found floating near the shore, while at a little distance one of his shoes had been espied sunk on the bottom, fished up and identified.

It can be better imagined than described what were the feelings of Martha on hearing these mournful tidings. No word or sound, however, escaped her lips on the occasion. She turned deadly pale, indeed, and for a moment leaned her head for support against the door-lashing; and this was succeeded by a quick heaving of her bosom, while with clasped hands and closed eyes her trembling lips moved rapidly, as if earnestly engaged in silent devotion. But the next moment, as she opened her eyes, and with a firm step descended from her room, a spectator could have detected nothing more in her placid though mournful countenance than he might have seen in the faces of the rest of the sisterhood; among whom she now immediately mingled.

Most of that day was spent by the Shaker men in dragging the pond in search of the body, from which operation Elder Higgins kept studiously aloof; though the nervous restlessness he constantly exhibited through the day, and the many anxious and inquiring glances he frequently cast toward those thus engaged, plainly told that he felt a painful interest in what was going on. The search proved a vain one. This, however, did not

lead any one to doubt that the young man's fate was any different from the one first supposed, as the body, it was conjectured, had floated off and sunk in some of the deepest parts of the pond. But, although all were unanimous in the opinion that Seth had met his death by drowning, yet, with regard to the manner in which the casualty could have happened, there were many and various minds—some supposing that he must have waded in to secure something which he saw floating near the shore; others that he had risen in his sleep and gone in, while others considered either of these suppositions to be highly improbable, since some of the young men now made known the fact that the deceased was an expert swimmer. These and many other conjectures equally erroneous were formed respecting the mysterious event, till, wearied with the fruitless discussion, it was given up as a case entirely hopeless of any further elucidation, and therefore permitted to rest.

Seth had been a peculiar favorite with the family generally, and his loss for many days cast a deep gloom over the minds of the little community who were thus unexpectedly called to mourn his premature decease. The impression, however, like all others of the kind, wore gradually away from the minds of all except the bereaved Martha and the conscience-smitten Elder, from whose bosoms the memory of the lost one, for reasons peculiar to each, was not, as may well be supposed, so easily to be erased.

Although the circumstances in which Martha was placed forbade any manifestation of her peculiar grief, and wholly precluded her from communicating them to others and receiving in return those alleviating sympathies which it is the privilege of ordinary sorrow to receive, yet none the less hereafter that fell this blow of affliction, and none the less keenly was felt the anguish that now in secret wrung her guiltless and faithful bosom.—Young Love was beginning to shed his sweet and happy influence over her pure and gentle heart, and his twin angel, Hope, had just showed his snowy pinion to her unaccustomed vision, pointing her to a land of earthly felicity which never before, even in her brightest dreams, had been pictured to her mind; but all these grateful feelings had been suddenly chilled and frozen in the current that was so blissfully wafting her away to the promised heaven of happiness—all these bright visions had vanished, leaving her future not only blank and cheerless, but dark with portents of persecution and woe, from which there was no hope of escaping. These circumstances combined to render the poor girl's life so ordinary bereavement; and most persons of her natural sensibilities would probably have sunk under the weight of the affliction. But Martha was a Christian; and she meekly bowed beneath the chastening rod, and turned for consolation to that life-spring on high which is never long a sealed fountain to the meek and devoted followers of Him who once himself knew earthly sorrows.

But, while Martha was thus comforted and sustained, no such consolation remained for the despicable wretch who had been the cause of her troubles; and the more he tried to still his startled conscience, the more did its accusing spirit rise up to disquiet him, not only for the hand he had in the young man's death, but for the part he had previously acted toward him in his general misusage, and more particularly in an affair in which only a slight allusion has as yet been made. About a month previous to the time of which we are speaking, a stranger from the neighbourhood of Seth's early residence called at the establishment, bearing for him a letter, which he expressed a desire to deliver in person; but the young man being at work in the woods some distance from home, and the stranger being anxious to resume his journey, the letter was at length entrusted to Higgins, on his promise of delivering it to Seth as soon as he returned. Having repeated his injunctions, the messenger departed, not, however, till the inquisitive Elder had fished from him, as cautiously as he evidently intended to be, some clue to the contents of the letter. No sooner was the stranger's back fairly turned than Higgins retired to a private apartment and broke open the letter, which proved to be from a neighbour of Seth's uncle, whom we have before mentioned, and which announced the successive deaths, within a few days of each other, of that uncle and the nephew living with him, by which event, it was stated, as no will or wills had been made, Seth had become the legal heir to all the estate thus left, consisting of a good farm and considerable personal property. The writer closed by advising the young man to leave his present situation, come home and take possession of his property. After reading the letter carefully over several times, the perfidious Elder committed it to the flames, and spent the remainder of the day in devising and settling his plans, and in drawing up for Seth's signature an acquittance to the family of all the property he had or of which he might become the inheritor. And the next day, after having smoothed the way for the attempt, as he supposed, by an unusual display of affability and parent-like kindness, he cautiously broached

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