

Poor Amy often offended against the rigid observances of her contemporaries. She would gape, and even smile in the midst of the protracted Sabbath service, and in spite of the bend of her uncle's awful brow, her aunt's admonitory winks, and the plummet and rude example of her cousins—maiden ladies, some fifteen years older than Amy, who were so perpendicular and immovable, that our gay little friend sometimes suspected that the process of petrification had begun about the vital region of their hearts. Amy had a wonderful facility in committing to memory "ungodly ballads and soul enslaving songs," but a sort of intellectual dyspepsia when she attempted to digest sacred literature. She never repeated an answer accurately in the assembly's catechism; and although she did not, as is reported of those "afflicted by the Salem witches," faint at the reading of that precious little treatise entitled 'Cotton's Milk for Babes,' she was sure to fall to sleep over it, the very opposite effect to that intended by the author of this spiritual food. She reached the age of eighteen without acquiring the current virtues of her day; but her beauty, spirit, or sweet temper, or all of them united, attracted more suitors than her exemplary and well-proportioned cousins could boast through their long career. Among the rest came one Uriah Smith, the son of Deacon Smith, a precious light in Boston. Uriah was a fair, sleek, softly looking youth, grave and deliberate, and addicted to none of the "fooleries and braveries" of the coxcombs of the day. So said Madam Cranstoun to Amy, for Uriah had not like young Edwin, 'only bowed,' but had told his love—not to the niece, but most discreetly to the aunt. Madam Cranstoun, amazed at the wonder-working Providence, as she was pleased to term it, that had set before her niece the prospect of such a companion, communicated to Amy, Uriah's proposition, with all the circumlocution and emphasis a prime minister might have employed to announce a royal bounty; but most ungraciously did Amy receive it. She sat the while calmly drawing with her pencil on the blank leaf of a book her face unmoved, except that now and then a slight but ominous smile drew up the corners of her mouth. "Cousin Amy! Cousin Amy," exclaimed her aunt, "give me that book, and let me hear you testify your thankfulness for a favour of which sooth to say, you are abundantly unworthy."

"Well, there is a book, aunt Cranstoun, and let it speak for your 'unworthy niece.'"

One glance at the pencilled page sufficed. Amy had delineated there a striking resemblance of the overgrown angular Rosinante, on which Uriah had rid to his wooing, and for the rider she had portrayed the most exact form of Uriah, and the face of a monkey! "Shame! shame to you, Amy!" exclaimed her aunt, "dare you thus to trifle with so serious a subject?"

"The subject is too serious, I confess aunt, to be trifled with, and therefore being an incorrigible trifier, I must decline it altogether." Madam Cranstoun stared in dumb astonishment.

"I am in earnest, aunt," continued Amy, "Master Uriah must seek a more suitable helpmeet than your foolish niece."

"Foolish!—both foolish and wicked, Amy." Madam Cranstoun lost her self-command. "Yea, wicked, without leave, counsel, and consultation, from and with those who have given you shelter, food and raiment from your cradle, blindly and scoffingly to reject this little to be expected, and most unmerited provision for your protection and maintenance through life."

Amy's frivolity, if it must be called by so harsh a name, vanished, while half indignant and half subdued, her cheeks burning, and tears gushing from her eyes, she said—"For food, raiment, and shelter, and for every kind spoken word, aunt Cranstoun, the only child of your husband's sainted sister thanks you, and will, please God, testify her gratitude for your past bounty by every act of duty and devotion to you and yours. But I implore you, in the name of the God of the fatherless, not to drive me from the house of dependance to the house of bondage—the vilest bondage, service without love, fetters on my affection—joyous would they be in a voluntary service, but rebellious and unprofitable in a compelled one."

Madam Cranstoun's heart was touched. She perceived that there was reason as well as feeling in Amy's appeal.

"Well—well, child," said she, "you know I do not wish to put force upon you. I do not, nor ever did, feel you be a heavy burden on us; I only ask you to take the position of Master Uriah into consideration, and try to love him, as it becometh a virtuous maiden to love a worshiper."

"Oh, aunt, ask me to do any thing else, but indeed is no use in trying to love. I did try, and for one of I confess, I was not in any sort worthy; and whom, and I should have deemed it right easy to love, more I tried the more impossible I found it."

"For whom, I pray you, did you make this marvel?" Amy was silent. "Not, I am sure, for Moses Chilton?—nor Nathaniel Goodeno?" Amy shook her head. "And you would not, Amy," continued she with a more scrutinizing glance, "you will not love that lawless young spark,—I will not mention his name, since your uncle has forbidden it to be spoken in his doors."

"I felt her face and neck flushing and burning, and the right inference from her treacherous blushes, what may be most pithily expressed by a vulgar proverb, 'jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire.'—no, aunt," said she, "he to whom I allude is far—far and has I trust forgotten me."

"Surely, Amy, you do not mean Wickliffe?"

"No, aunt," replied Amy, with an irrepressible smile, "I do not mean Wickliffe."

"Oh, Amy!" exclaimed her aunt, in a voice of sorrow and rebuke, "you amaze and distress me. I knew you were giddy and trifling to a degree, but I never before thought you senseless and hard-hearted." She paused, then added, as if a sudden light had broken upon her, "I see it all now! Little did I think when Wickliffe was spending his precious time, day by day, teaching you

the tongues, that Satan was spreading a snare for him.—How could the learned and pious youth suffer his affections to be wasted upon such a piece of laughing idleness! Wickliffe Wilson, the honored son of an honored sire! the gifted youth! the hope of the plantation! Amy, Amy, was it for that his eye lacked its lustre, his cheek became sunken and pale, and his heart waxed faint!—love of you, Amy, that has sent him forth from his father's house, and from his native land, and without one accusing word or look?"

Amy burst into tears. "He was most generous," she said, "I would have done any thing to manifest my gratitude to him, and as I truly told you, aunt, I did try in earnest to love him."

"O pshaw, child!—I see through it all. You could not choose but have loved him, had not your unbridled affections strayed another way, the sooner you recall them the better, for never—never shall you wed with Lovell Reeve—a fool, a contrast truly to the worthy youth Wickliffe."

Thus pursued, Amy turned and stood at bay. "Aunt Cranstoun," she said, "worthy and noble as Wickliffe may be, and I grant him so, Lovell Reeve, in all gentlemanly points, in all high sentiment and right feeling, is his equal—his equal in every thing but yours and my uncle's esteem; and I have long believed, without the courage to tell you so, that some one has traduced him to you."

"Nay, Amy, his own ill deeds dispraise him. Did he not join the galliards of Boston, in their assemblings for dancing and other forbidden frolics? Did he not aid and abet—nay, was he not the sole instigator and agent in conveying dame Hyslop beyond the Massachusetts, after it was well nigh proven that she was the confederate and vowed servant of Satan, in bewitching Levi Norton's children?—and was not Lovell Reeve foremost, and ring-leader of those ungodly youths, who discredited the right of assistance, and openly opposed the driving forth of the Quakers, and the extirpation of their blasphemous heresy?"

"I believe, aunt, he has done all this."

"And still you dare to even him with one, who is in full communion and fair standing with the church, and whose walk has been, like pious Samuel's, even from his youth, in all godliness."

"Oh, aunt, the Scriptures say there be divers gifts; Wickliffe's are not Lovell's, neither under favor I say sit, are Lovell's Wickliffe's. And now," she continued, throwing herself on her knees before her aunt, and clasping her hands, "Now, my dear aunt, that I have boldly foregone maidenly modesty and spoken, in some measure as I feel, of my true love, let me plead with you, by all your care for my well-being—by all your gentle womanly thoughts and memories—by that pure and interchanged affection which Lovell and I have plighted before God, I beseech ye let me follow the biddings of my heart, and profess before the world what I have revealed to you, instead of hiding it like a guilty passion in the depths of my heart—you do feel for us!—you cannot help it—Oh speak to my uncle."

Amy had skillfully touched a powerful spring. Her aunt was affected by her voluntary confidence; but though the long congealed sources of sympathy were softened, they were not melted, and when Amy mentioned her uncle, the subjected, in Madam Cranstoun, reverted to its old light. "Rise, my child," she said, "It ill becomes you to put yourself in the posture of a silly damsel of romance. Your uncle and I cannot recede from a decision made after due and prayerful deliberation. I now perceive that you are apprised of the youth Lovell having applied to us—not as he should have done before communing with you,—for leave to make suit to you, to which we answered with a full negative, and stated our reasons therefore, which were he of a high temper, would have been satisfactory. We have fully warned him not to urge you to an act of disobedience, and secured his compliance by informing him that any marriage bounty, which your uncle might propose, would be withheld in case of your failure in duty due."

"You mistake his spirit—he spurned the threat, and urged me to forfeit my uncle's gift; and by my troth, aunt, it was not in the wealth of the Indies to hold me back, but I did fear to violate my duty to you, and I hope you would grant my prayer when I dared to make it to you."

"Never, Amy, never. I commend you in as far as you have acted wisely in the past; and for the future I command you to dismiss Lovell Reeve from your mind."

"I cannot. I may control the outward act, but how eradicate the image blended with every thought and affection?" "This is girlish talk, Amy. Be humble and teachable, child. Remember that youth ever errs in judgment. Be guided by those, who are both wise and experienced; and then Amy, if you should still be privileged with the favor of the worthy Master Wickliffe's love, you may be mated to our acceptance and your own profits."

"Heaven forbid," thought Amy. Her aunt proceeded, "I see that thou art self-willed, but take heed—the judgment of Heaven may light upon thee—consider duly—go to thy apartment and commune with thy heart."

Amy obeyed with alacrity; for in these communings she found her only indulgence of an affection which neither her conscience nor her judgment forbade. Amy's conscience, though it did not act in obedience to the laws Madam Cranstoun would have prescribed, was a faithful monitor, and Amy was obedient to its monitions. Clandestine proceedings were abhorrent to the integrity of her character. Every delicate woman instinctively revolts from an elopement and a secret marriage. Amy had maintained a firm negative to Lovell's entreaties. With the confidence of the most happy temper she believed that some favourable circumstances would occur, some influence come, she knew not whence, to shift the wind in her favour. But—when she had put aside her pride and her maidenly reserve, and freely confessed her love to her aunt, and found her unrelenting, and resolved to maintain her power in its utmost rigour,—Amy felt a spirit of insurrection rising in her heart, that probably, but for the strange events that followed, would soon have broken into open rebellion. There were throbbings at her heart at the thought of escape from thralldom; when at this