

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES

From Graham's Philadelphia Magazine.

THE MOTHER'S PROPHECY.

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CHAPTER I.

It was a cold, windy night in the winter of 179—. The tall pines that had climbed to the highest summits of the Green Mountains, bent beneath the rushing of the blast; and as the wind careered among their branches, gave out moans and shrieks that seemed in the darkness like the wailing of weird spirits. Ever and anon the air would be filled with tiny particles of ice and snow, and the cold, fitful gleaming of the moon, as it occasionally emerged from behind a cloud, only served to make the scene more desolate, as the tall, gaunt shadows were rendered distinctly visible.

But in the quiet little valley that lay nestling at the very foot of one of the tallest peaks, there were no traces of storm. The strife of the elements disturbed not its repose, for the encircling mountains bent over it lovingly, and with their giant arms seemed to ward off all dangers and keep back all foes that might harass this—the pet lamb that rested in their embrace.

A single farm-house, rudely constructed of logs, stood beneath the shadow of forest trees; and indeed, but few of those ancient dwellers in the valley had as yet bowed their haughty heads at the stroke of the woodman's axe. Every thing around the little dwelling betokened that it was the abode of one of the hardy pioneers who had left the sunny banks of the Connecticut for a home amid the wilds of Vermont. But there was a ruddy light gleaming from the small window, that spoke invitingly of peace and comfort within; and occasionally the sound of woman's voice singing a low, soft lullaby, fell dreamily upon the ear; or rather, might have done so, had there been an ear to listen.

In the principal apartment of the house—the one that served alike for kitchen and parlour, sat Andrew Gordon and his fair and gentle wife—Amy. A bright-eyed boy, apparently about four years old, played upon the nicely-sanded floor, and in the mother's arms lay a baby, very lovely but very fragile, upon whose face the eyes of Andrew Gordon dwelt with a long, yearning gaze. Few words were spoken by the little group. The husband and father sat gazing thoughtfully upon the glowing embers; the wife looked the child that was cradled upon her breast; and little Frederic silently builded his cob-house, stopping now and then to scan with a pleased eye the progress of his work, or uttering an exclamation of disappointment as the tottering fabric fell to the floor.

There was an air of refinement about the master and mistress of that little domicile, that contrasted somewhat strangely with their rude home and its appurtenances. The dress of the wife, although coarse and plain, was arranged so tastefully, so *gently*, as the young ladies of the present day would say that you would scarcely have noted its texture, or the essence of ornament. Her slight figure, and the taint color upon her cheek, spoke of a delicacy of constitution hardly suited for the hardships and trials of an emigrant's life; but the meek light within her eye, her calm, broad forehead, and the slight smile that lingered upon her lip, told that she possessed that truest of all strength—strength of mind and heart.

There was something in the face of Andrew Gordon that, to a close observer was not exactly pleasing; and yet you could not have denied that it was a very handsome face—quite sufficiently so to warrant the unmistakable look of admiration that his wife occasionally cast upon it. Intellect was there—courage was there—firmness of purpose, and a resolute will; and there was a depth of affection in his eye whenever it dwelt upon the group around him that proved him the possessor of a kindly heart. Perhaps it was some early disappointment—some real or fancied wrong—some never-to-be-forgotten act of harshness or injustice on the part of another, that once in a while, cast such a shadow over his fine face, and gave such a bitter expression to his well formed mouth.

For half an hour they remained as we have pictured them above; and then the mother tenderly placed her little one upon the bed that stood in one corner of the room—cradles were a luxury unknown in those days—and glancing to a clock that pointed to the hour of eight, said,

'Come Frederic, put away your cobs, dear. It is bed-time for little boys.'

'Oh, I wish it wouldn't be eight o'clock so soon when I am making cob-houses,' replied the child; 'just wait one minute, mamma, until I make a chimney—then my house will be done. There, now—isn't it a nice one?' So saying, Freddy gave the finishing touch to his edifice—looked at it admirably for a moment, then giving it a light pressure with his hand, his evening's work was demolished in an instant. Laughing heartily at the havoc he had made, he hastily gathered the cobs in a basket near him, and sprang to his mother's side.

Ah, Freddy, Freddy! how like you are to many a child of larger growth, who toils, month after month, year after year, building a temple, it may be to love, or to wealth, or fame; and then, when it is nearly or quite completed, by a single false step, or a single

ill-regulated action, destroys the shrine he has been rearing with so much care and labor! But here the similitude ceases. You laugh and clap your hands in childish glee at the downfall of your house, he sits down desolate by the ruin he has made, and mourns over hopes and prospects buried beneath it.

Thoughts somewhat like those may have passed through the mind of Andrew Gordon, for there was a cloud upon his brow, as he watched his wife while she undressed the playful child, and smothered his dark curls preparatory to the night's repose. Then kneeling by her side, and folding his little hands together, Frederic repeated after her a simple prayer—a child's prayer of love and faith asking God's blessing upon those dearest to him—his father, mother, and little sister, and His care and protection through the night.

'Now I must kiss papa, good-night,' said the little boy; and then, mamma, wont you please to set by me, and tell me a pretty story? I will shut my eyes up, and go right to sleep so quick if you will.

The good night kisses were exchanged; Frederic soon nestled closely in his soft, warm pillow, and true to his promise, closed his eyes, while his mother, in a low, soothing voice, told him a story of the birds and lambs and flowers. Presently he was fast asleep, and pressing the tenderest of kisses upon his rosy cheek, Amy returned to her seat by the fireside.

'Dear little fellow! how sweetly he sleeps,' said she, moving her chair as she spoke nearer to her husband. 'I wonder what the future hath laid up in store for him,' she continued, musingly, with her eyes fixed upon the bright blaze that went roaring and crackling up the broad chimney. 'And yet if the book of fate were laid open before me, I should fear to turn to the page on which his destiny is inscribed.'

'I hope, at any rate, that the word *wealth* is written there,' said Andrew Gordon, speaking for the first time since he had taken his wonted seat by the fire that evening. 'I am not a very great believer in books of fate or in irrevocable destiny. Man makes his own destiny, with some little help from others—and Frederic shall be a rich man before he dies, if my exertions are of any avail.'

'He may be taken from us, even in childhood,' Andrew said, and the mother's eye turned anxiously toward the little bed, as if the bare thought of death was enough to awaken her solicitude. 'I would rather he would be great than rich—and good than either.'

'He will be great if he is rich—that is, he will have influence, and be looked up to; and as for goodness—pshaw! who ever heard of a rich man's doing wrong?' he continued, with that bitter smile, of which we have before spoken, curling his thin lip. 'If a man possesses wealth, he may oppress the poor, strip the widow and the fatherless of their last penny, cheat his neighbours, and rob his own brother—but it is all right!'

'Then may God grant that our boy may never be a rich man, Andrew,' said his wife, solemnly. 'But you speak too bitterly, dearest. Your own misfortunes have made you unreasonable upon this point.' And Amy lifted, caressingly, the dark locks that fell over her husband's high forehead.

'Unreasonable, Amy! Have I not cause to speak bitterly? Have I not been defrauded of my just rights? Have I not been robbed—ay, literally robbed of the fortune my father left me who when I was young to know its value? Can I forget that one, one of my own kith and kin, too, lives in the dwelling of my forefathers, and calls their broad lands his, when he knows, and I know, and the world knows, that I am the rightful heir? Can I forget all this, and that I am here?' he added glancing contemptuously round upon the rough walls of his cottage. 'And you, too, Amy—you, who were born and reared in a home of luxury—you, whose presence would grace the proudest drawing-room in the land; you, whom I wooed and won before I dreamed that I was to tread a path like this; and yet, angel that you are, you who have never breathed a word of reproach, or a syllable of complaint, your home, too, is here in this rude cabin—and the proud man bowed his head, and something that looked strangely like a tear, glittered a moment in the fire-light.'

'But you are here with me in this rude cabin as you call it, dearest, you and our little ones; and how many times must I tell you that I would rather be here, provided I am by your side, than to sit upon the throne of the Indies without you? I believe you say these things,' she continued, playfully, kissing his flushed brow as she spoke, for she would fain have won him back to more cheerful thoughts. 'I believe you say these things just for the sake of hearing me tell you, over and over again how dearly I love you, and how happy I am with you. Is it not so, darling?'

But Andrew Gordon was not to be cheered even by the tender caresses of his wife. His mind would dwell upon themes, the contemplation of which was destroying his peace of mind, and fast changing his very nature.

'I tell you, Amy,' he said, rising and pacing the apartment with a hurried step. 'I tell you, Amy, I will be rich! and Frederic shall be as rich, ay, richer, than if his father had not been cheated out of his inheritance. They think,' he added, with a flashing eye, 'that they have trampled me in the very dust, but they cannot keep me there. I will be rich and influential; and as soon as Fred is old enough to learn the lesson, I will

teach him how to make money, and how to keep it, too.'

'No, no, Andrew—spare me that last blow, I implore you,' said Amy, and tears were rapidly chasing each other down her pale cheeks. 'If you will give up your whole mind and soul to the pursuit of wealth, as you have done for the last two years—if you will coin your very heart's blood for gold, and allow this feverish thirst for gain to become, as it were, the very essence of your being, spare me this last blow. Teach not this lesson to your child. Teach him to be prudent, industrious, economical as you will, and my examples and teachings shall be added to your own; but impress not upon his young mind the doctrine that the acquisition of wealth is the chief end of his existence, and its possession the chief source of man's enjoyment. Just as surely as you do is misery in store for him. A mother's heart is a prophetic heart, and I repeat it—just as surely as you do, is misery in store for him and you; just as surely will his sun and yours set in darkness and in gloom. Oh, Andrew, Andrew! for your own sake—for my sake—for the sake of these precious ones,' she added, drawing him to the couch where their children lay, 'cease this struggle that is wearing your life away, and changing you so greatly, that at times I can scarcely recognize the Andrew Gordon of my early love.'

The fire upon the hearth had burnt low; but, at that moment, a broad, ruddy glow filled the room, and Andrew Gordon stood with his eyes fixed steadfastly upon his wife's face. Who can tell the emotions that swept over his soul during those few, brief moments? Good and evil spirits were striving for the mastery upon the arena of his heart, and his countenance worked strangely as one or the other prevailed. At last, he turned hastily away, and muttering—as if to himself—'But Frederic must be a rich man,' he sought his pillow.

He had chosen his part!

CHAPTER II.

Years, many years had passed since the conversation narrated in the previous chapter, and Andrew Gordon was no longer the sole tenant of the sweetest valley that slept beneath the shadow of the Green Mountains. A small, but pleasant village had sprung up around the site of his old log house; and upon the very spot where that had once stood, arose an imposing brick mansion, that seemed to look haughtily down upon the humbler dwellings around it. A small church—of simple, yet tasteful architecture—lifted its spire a few paces farther on; two merchants—rivals, of course—display their gilded signs on either side of the street just below, and numerous little heads might have been seen peeping from the windows of the schoolhouse over the river.

Andrew Gordon was a rich man. He had added acre to acre, and farm to farm. The factory—whose machinery moved so steadily from morning till night; and the grist mill—whose wheels whirled round so incessantly, belonged to him; and it was more than hinted, that one of the stores—although managed in the name of another—was, in reality, his property.

Yes, Andrew Gordon was a rich man; but was he satisfied? Was that craving thirst for the 'gold that perisheth' quenched at last? Ah! no; it raged more fiercely than ever. Amy—his pure and gentle Amy, slept in the little church-yard, where the white tombstones contrasted so beautifully with the deep green turf, and where the willow-trees made a cool, refreshing shade even at noon-day.

She had pleaded and reasoned with him in vain. Day by day he became more and more deeply engrossed in the pursuit of wealth. With a mind capable of the highest things—with an intellect that might have soared above the stars—with eloquence at his command, by which he might have swayed the hearts of men, and led them captive at his will, he yet preferred to hover near the earth, and offer up genius, talent, even love itself upon the altar of mammon.

Had any one told him that he had almost ceased to love his wife, he would have spurned the idea, and have laid the 'flattering unction to his soul,' that he was indeed a pattern husband. Were not all his wife's wants most liberally supplied? Was not money ever at her command? In short, did he ever deny her any thing?

Yes, Andrew Gordon! You denied her what was of more worth to her than the gold and silver of Peru. You denied her a little of your precious time. So absorbed were you in your own pursuits, so fearful were you that every hour would not add something to your store, that you had no time to devote to her whose happiness was in your hands. You had no time for that sweet interchange of thought and feeling that she so valued; you had no time for those little attentions that women so dearly prize; you had no time for an occasional caress or word of endearment that would have cheered her in many a long, lonely hour, and the mere memory of which would have sustained her through suffering and through weariness. No, you had no time for trifles like these; and you could not remember—proud man that you were—that her nature was not like your nature, and that those things were as necessary to her existence as dew is to the drooping flower—as the warm sunlight to the ripening grain—as the draught of cool water to the pilgrim, fainting in the wilderness. You could not remember all this, and Amy pined day by day; her cheek grew pale and her step more languid. Do you say she should have more strength of mind than to have been affected by such slight

causes? I tell you she could not help it. Talk of strength of mind to a neglected wife! Woman's true strength lies in her affections; and if wounded there she will droop and wither, just as surely as does the vine, when rudely torn from the tree to which it clung. She may struggle against it long and, for a while, successfully; the eye of man may mark no change upon lip or brow; but—if will come at last!

Amy slept in the church-yard; and the daughter who was cradled on her breast that winter evening when we saw her last, slept beside her. Frederic alone was left to Andrew Gordon, and he loved him with all the love he had to spare from his coffers. Had the son learned the lesson that the father was to teach him? We shall see.

One evening, at the close of a long, bright summer day, about sixteen years from the date when our story commences, a young man—who appeared as if he might be just entering the fifth lustrum of his life—might have been seen loitering along the banks of a stream that came laughing and leaping down the mountain side, at some distance from the dwelling of Andrew Gordon. He had a gun upon his shoulder, but his game bag was empty; and the pretty gray-squirrels hopped from tree to tree, rabbits stared curiously at him with their bright, saucy eyes, and even the wild patridge fluttered around him—unharmful, while he wandered on, wrapped in a somewhat moody reverie.

His thoughts seemed to be very variable—partly sad and partly glad; for, at one moment there would be a cloud upon his brow, a look of doubt and irresolution—and the next, a smile would break over his face, making it remarkably pleasing in its transient expression. His figure was tall and graceful; and his hair—that was black as night—fell over a forehead that would have been almost too white, had not the sun kissed it rather warmly.

It would have been difficult to have recognized in him our old friend Frederic Gordon, the hero of the cob-house—yet when that transient smile, of which we have before spoken, played over his features, the light in his dark eyes was the same as that which beamed there, when—pleading for a story—he sprang joyfully to his mother's side.

He sauntered along for an hour or two, deeply buried in thought. At length—

'She is very lovely,' he murmured to himself, as if unsciously. 'She is, indeed, very lovely! What a pity it is that Dame Fortune has not added a few money bags to her list of charms; for portionless as she is, she sorely tempts one to play the fool. I came near committing myself last night at that boating party. What with the slow, dreamy motion of the boat, the moonlight sparkling on the waters, the heavy shadows on the opposite shore, in short, the exquisite beauty of the whole scene, combined with Lily's almost ethereal loveliness, all the romance of my nature—and I really believe that I possess a tolerable share—was aroused, and I nearly lost my sight of my fixed purpose to marry a rich wife, if any. Yet, after all, does she not possess the truest wealth? he added, 'and I am almost sure she loves me. Pshaw! I wonder what my good father would say to nonsense like this? and again he became lost in thought.'

For nearly an hour he remained sitting upon the stump of a large oak, that had—together with many others—fallen a victim to the progress of civilization, with his head resting upon his hand, and his eyes fixed on a vacancy.

Suddenly, he was startled by the report of a gun—a moment, and a faint scream fell upon his ear; there was the quick tread of bounding feet, the crashing of branches, and a large deer rushed frantically through the thicket, and paused a moment, panting and breathless, almost at his side. He had only time to perceive that it was terribly wounded, when the antlered head was raised for an instant, the quick ear caught the distant baying of the hounds, and the poor creature again dashed onward, with all the energy of despair.

Frederic Gordon immediately sprang toward the thicket from which the deer had emerged; and with much difficulty succeeded in making his way through the tangled underbrush and reaching the cleared space beyond. But what a sight there greeted his vision! A sight that blanched his cheek, and made him cling involuntarily for support to a wild vine, that drooped over him, and nearly impeded his progress. Lily Grey—the subject of his recent reverie, the being who had awakened the first thrill of love that he had ever known, for he did love her, in spite of himself—lay before him, with not the faintest shade of color upon cheek or lip, and the blood slowly oozing from a wound upon her temple.

For a moment, Frederic gazed upon her as if spell bound; then stealing softly forward, as if she were sleeping, and he feared that he might awaken her, he knelt upon the green sward by her side. At first he had no thought but the dread one of death. She lay there so still so pale, so like death, that the idea of attempting to revive her did not even occur to him; and, in truth, it would have been hard to have told whose cheek was the palest—his, or that of sweet Lily Grey.

But, presently he fancied that her lips quivered a little, a very little; and that there was the slightest perceptible tremor of the deeply-fringed eyelids. Perhaps it was nothing but the dancing shadow of the leaves that were frolicking in the sunlight above him; but it gave him hope, and with that