

For the P. C. Messenger.
The Story of a Poem.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF "CURFEW MUST NOT RING TO-NIGHT."

This poem is a stock piece with elocutionists, and very often read in public. The original can be found in a charming work entitled "Newspaper Poets; or Waifs and their Authors." The poem is founded on an incident in English history. In the days of the Protectorates, a young soldier was condemned to die "at the ringing of the curfew." His friends interceded for him in vain, and a fair young girl, who was attached to him, pleaded with the judges to spare his life, at least until the hour when she could see the stern Cromwell herself, but her efforts were fruitless, she then sought to bribe the sexton to omit the curfew for a single day, but he was also inexorable. The hour drew on, and the executioner stood awaiting the signal which, as the poem will show, did not sound that night.

For the benefit of the younger readers, we may say that the ringing of the curfew bell (derived from a word meaning to cover the fire) was a practice established in England by its Norman conqueror. All the inhabitants were required to cover their fires, extinguish their lights, and retire to rest, at nightfall, and the bell was rung as a signal at the appointed hour.

The poem was written by Miss Rosa Hartwick (afterwards the wife of Edward C. Thorpe) in April, 1867. She was born in Mishawaka, Indiana, July 18, 1850, and was in her 17th year when she read the little story of "Love and Loyalty," and told it so sweetly in rhyme. It was first printed in 1870, in the *Detroit Commercial Advertiser*. Mrs. Thorpe was married in 1871, and now resides in Michigan. She has written other poems, but none more popular than this. I have made out the foregoing account, and copied the poem following, from my "scrap-book," for the readers of the MESSENGER.

GEO. W. BOATMAN.

CURFEW MUST NOT RING TO-NIGHT.

Slowly England's sun was setting o'er the hill tops far away,
Filling all the land with beauty at the close of one sad day,
And the last rays kissed the forehead of a man and maiden fair—
He with foot-steps slow and weary—she with sunny floating hair;
He with bowed head, sad and thoughtful—she with lips all cold and white,
Struggling to keep back the murmurs: "Curfew must not ring to-night."

"Sexton," Bessie's white lips faltered, pointing to the prison old,
With its turrets, tall and gloomy, with its walls, dark, damp and cold,
"I've a lover in that prison, doomed this very night to die,
At the ringing of the Curfew, and no earthly help is nigh;
Cromwell will not come till sunset," and her lips grew strangely white,
As she breathed the husky whisper: "Curfew must not ring to-night."

"Bessie," calmly spoke the sexton—every word pierced her young heart
Like the piercing of an arrow, like a deadly poisoned dart—
"Long, long years I've rung the Curfew from that gloomy, shadowed tower;
Every evening, just at sunset, it has told the twilight hour;
I have done my duty ever, tried to do it just and right—
Now I'm old I still must do it—Curfew, it must ring to-night."

Wild her eyes and pale her features, stern and white her thoughtful brow,
And within her secret bosom Bessie made a solemn vow—
She had listened while the judges read, without a tear or sigh—
"At the ringing of the Curfew, Basil Underwood must die."

And her breath came fast and faster, and her eyes grew large and bright—
In an undertone she murmured: "Curfew must not ring to-night."
She with quick steps bounded forward, sprung within the old church door,
Left the old man treading slowly paths so oft he'd trod before;
Not one moment paused the maiden, but, with eyes and cheeks aglow,
Mounted up the gloomy tower, where the bell swung to and fro;

As she climbed the dusky ladder on which fell no ray of light—
Up and up—her white lips saying: "Curfew shall not ring to-night."

She has reached the top most ladder—o'er her hangs the great dark bell;
Awful is the gloom beneath her, like the pathway down to hell.
So, the ponderous tongue is swinging, 'tis the hour of Curfew now,
And the sight has chilled her bosom, stopped her breath, and paled her brow—

Shall she let it ring? No, never! Flash her eyes with sudden light,
And she springs and grasps it firmly—"Curfew shall not ring to-night."

Out she swung, far out; the city seemed a speck of light below—
'Twixt heaven and earth her form suspended, as the bell swung to and fro;
And the sexton at the bell-rope, old and deaf, heard not the bell,
But he thought it still was ringing fair young Basil's funeral knell—

Still the maiden clung more firmly, and, with trembling lips and white,
Said, to hush her heart's wild beating: "Curfew shall not ring to-night."

It was o'er; the bell ceased awaying, and the maiden stepped once more
Firmly on the dark old ladder, where for hundred years before
Human foot had not been planted. The brave deed that she had done
Should be told long ages after, as the rays of setting sun

Should illumine the sky with beauty; aged sires, with heads of white,
Long should tell the little children Curfew did not ring that night.

O'er the distant hills came Cromwell; Bessie sees him, and her brow,
Full of hope and full of gladness, has no anxious traces now.
At his feet she tells her story, showing her hands all bruised and torn;
And her face, so sweet and pleading, yet, with sorrow pale and worn,
Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes with misty light;
"Go! your lover lives," said Cromwell—"Curfew shall not ring to-night."

David Swan.

ONE OF HAWTHORNE'S MOST EXQUISITE SKETCHES.

Could we indeed know all the vicissitudes of fortunes, life would be too full of hope and fear, exultation or disappointment, to afford us a single hour of true serenity. This idea may be illustrated by a single page from the secret history of David Swan.

We have nothing to do with David until we find him at the age of twenty, on the high road from his native place to the city of Boston, where his uncle, a small dealer in the grocery line, was to take him behind the counter. Be it enough to say that he was a native of New Hampshire, born of respectable parents, and had received an ordinary school education with a classic finish of a year at Gilmantown Academy. After journeying on foot from sunrise till near noon of a summer's day, his weariness and the increasing heat determined him to sit down and await the stage coach. As if planted on purpose for him, there soon appeared a little clump of maples, with a delightful recess in the midst, and such a fresh bubbling spring that it seemed never to have sparkled for any wayfarer but David Swan. Virgin or not, he kissed it with his thirsty lips, and then flung himself along the brink, pillowing his head upon some shirts and a pair of pantaloons tied up in a striped cotton handkerchief. The sunbeams could not reach him; the dust did not rise from the road after the heavy rain of yesterday; and his grassy lair suited the young man better than a bed of down. The spring murmured drowsily beside him; the birds floated across the blue sky overhead, and a deep sleep, perchance hiding dreams within its depths, fell upon David Swan.

While he lay sound asleep in the shade, other people were wide awake, and passed to and fro on horseback, and in all sorts of vehicles, along the sunny road by his bed-chamber. Some looked neither to the right nor to the left, and knew not that he was there; some merely glanced that way, without admitting the slumberer among their busy thoughts; some laughed to see how soundly he slept; several whose hearts were brimming full of

scorn ejected their venomous suzerainty on David Swan. A middle-aged widow, when nobody else was near, thrust her head a little way into the recess, and vowed that the young fellow looked charming in his sleep. A temperance lecturer saw him, and wrought poor David into the texture of his evening's discourse, as an awful instance of dead-drunkness by the roadside. But censure, merriment, praise, scorn, and indifference, were all one, or rather all nothing to David Swan.

He had slept only a few moments when a brown carriage, drawn by a handsome pair of horses, bowled easily along, and was brought nearly to a stand-still nearly in front of David's resting place. A linchpin had fallen out, and permitted one of the wheels to slide off. The damage was slight, and occasioned merely a momentary alarm to an elderly gentleman and wife, who were returning to Boston in the carriage. While the coachman and a servant were replacing the wheel, the lady and gentleman sheltered themselves beneath the maple trees, and there espied the bubbling fountain and David Swan asleep beside it. Impressed with the awe which the humblest sleeper sheds around him, the merchant trod as lightly as the gout would allow; and his spouse took good heed not to rustle his silk gown, lest David should start up all of a sudden.

"How soundly he sleeps!" whispered the old gentleman. "From what a depth he draws that easy breath! such sleep as that, brought on without an opiate, would be worth more to me than half my income; for it would argue health and an untroubled mind."

"And youth besides," said the lady. "Health and quiet age does not sleep thus. Our slumber is no more like his than our wakefulness."

Thus did this elderly couple feel interested in the unknown youth, to whom the wayside and the maple were as a secret chamber, with the rich gloom of damask curtains brooding over him. Perceiving that a stray sunbeam glimmered down upon his face, the lady contrived to twist a branch aside, so as to intercept it. And having done this act of kindness, she began to feel like a mother to him.

"Providence seems to have laid him here," whispered she to her husband, "and to have brought us hither to find him after our disappointment in our cousin's son. Methinks I can see a likeness to departed Henry. Shall we waken him?"

"To what purpose?" said the merchant, hesitating. "We know nothing of the youth's character."

"That open countenance!" replied the wife, in the same hushed voice, earnestly. "This innocent sleep!"

While these whispers were passing the sleeper's heart did not throb, nor his features betray the least token of interest. Yes, fortune was bending over him, just ready to let fall a burden of gold. The old merchant had lost his only son, and had no heir to his wealth except a distant relative, with whose conduct he was dissatisfied. In such cases, people sometimes do stranger things than to act the magician, and awaken a young man in splendor who fell asleep in poverty.

"Shall we not waken him?" repeated the lady, persuasively.

"The coach is ready sir," said the servant, behind.

The old couple started, reddened, and hurried away, mutually wondering that they should ever have dreamed of doing anything so ridiculous. The merchant threw himself back in his carriage and occupied his mind with the plan of a magnificent asylum for unfortunate men of business. Meanwhile David, Swan enjoyed his nap.

The carriage could not have gone above a mile or two, when a pretty young girl came along, with a tripping pace, which showed precisely how her little heart was dancing in her bosom.

Perhaps it was the merry king of motion that caused—is there harm in saying it!—her garter to slip its knot. Conscious that the silken girth—if silk it was—was relaxing its hold, she turned aside into the shade of the maple-trees, and there found a young man asleep by the spring. Blushing as red as any rose, that she should have intruded into a gentleman's bed-chamber, and for such a purpose, too, she was about to make her escape on tip-toe. But there was a peril near the sleeper. A monster of a bee, had been wandering overhead—buzz, buzz, buzz—now among the leaves, now flashing through the stripes of sunshine, and now lost in the dark shade, till finally he appeared to be settling on the eyelid of David Swan. The sting of the bee is sometimes deadly. As free-hearted as she was innocent, the girl attacked the intruder with her handkerchief, brushed him soundly, and drove him from beneath the maple shade. How sweet a picture! The good deed accomplished, with quickened breath and a deeper blush, she stole a glance at the youthful stranger for whom she had been battling with a dragon of the air.

"He is handsome," thought she, and blushed redder yet.

How could it be that no dream of bliss grew so strong within him, that shattered by its very strength, it should part asunder, and allow him to perceive the girl among its phantoms? Why, at least, did no smile of welcome brighten up on his face? She was come, the maid whose soul, according to the old and beautiful idea, had been severed from his own, and whom, in all his vague but passionate desires, he yearned to meet. Her only, could he love with a perfect love—him, only, could she receive into the depths of her heart—and now her image was faintly blushing in the fountain by his side; should it pass away, its luster would never gleam upon his life again.

"How sound he sleeps!" murmured the girl.

She departed, but did not trip along the road so lightly as when she came.

Now, the girl's father was a thriving country merchant in the neighborhood, and happened at that identical time, to be looking for just such a young man as David Swan. Had David formed a wayside acquaintance with the daughter, he would have become the father's clerk, and all else in natural succession. So here again good fortune—the best of fortunes—had stolen so near that her garments brushed against him; and he knew nothing of the matter.

The girl was hardly out of sight when two men turned aside beneath the maple shade. Both had dark faces set off by cloth caps, which were drawn down aslant over their brows. Their dresses were shabby, yet had a certain smartness. These were a couple of rascals who got their living by whatever Satan sent them, and now in the interim of other business, had staked the joint profits of their next piece of villany on a game of cards, which was to have been decided here under the trees.

But, finding David asleep by the spring, one of the rogues whispered to his fellow:

"Hist! Do you see the bundle under his head?"

The other villian nodded, winked, and leered.

"I'll bet you a horn of brandy," said the first, "that the chap has either a pocket-book or else he has a snug little hoard of small change stowed away among his shirts. And if not there we shall find it in his pantaloons pocket."

"But, how if he wakes?" said the other.

His companion thrust aside his waist-coat, pointed to the handle of a dirk and nodded.

"So be it!" muttered the second villian.

They approached the unconscious David, and while one pointed the dag-

ger toward the heart, the other began to search the bundle beneath his head—their two faces, grim, wrinkled and ghastly with guilt and fear, bent over their victim, looking terrible enough to be mistaken for fiends should he suddenly awake. Nay, had the villians glanced aside into the spring, even they might not know themselves as reflected there. But David Swan had never worn a more tranquil aspect, even when asleep on his mother's breast.

"I must take away the bundle," whispered one.

"But if he stirs, I'll strike," muttered the other.

But at this moment a dog scenting along the ground, came in beneath the maple trees and gazed alternately at each of those wicked men and then at the quiet sleeper. He then lapped out of the fountain.

"Pshaw!" said one villian, "we can do nothing now. The dog's master must be close behind."

"Let's take a drink and be off" said the other.

The man with the dagger thrust the weapon into his pocket and drew forth a pocket pistol, but not of that kind which kills by a single discharge.

It was a flask of liquor, with a block-tin tumbler screwed upon the mouth. Each drank a comfortable dram and left the spot with so many jests, and such laughter at their unaccomplished wickedness, that they might be said to have gone on their way rejoicing. In a few hours they had forgotten the whole affair, nor once imagined that the recording angel had written down the crime of murder against their souls in letters as durable as eternity.

As for David Swan he slept quietly neither conscious of the shadow of death when it hung over him, nor of the glow of renewed life when that shadow was withdrawn.

He slept, but no longer quietly as at first. An hour's repose had snatched from his elastic frame the weariness with which many hours of toil had burdened it. Now he stirred; now moved his lips without a sound; now talked in an inward tone, to the noonday spectress of his dream. But a noise of wheels came rattling louder and louder along the road until it dashed through the dispersing mist of David's slumber; and there was the stage coach. He started up with all his ideas about him.

"Halloo, driver! Take a passenger?" shouted he.

"Room on the top," answered the driver.

Up mounted David and bowed away merrily toward Boston, without so much as a parting glance at that fountain of dream-like vicissitudes. He knew not that a phantom of wealth had thrown a golden hue upon its waters, nor that one of love had sighed softly to their murmur, nor that one of death had threatened to crimson him with his blood; all in the brief hour since he lay down to sleep.

Sleeping or waking, we hear not the airy footsteps of the strange things that almost happen.—*Household*.

—The energetic and accomplished Miss Annie Louise Cary has earned with her beautiful voice a beautiful home in Portland, Maine. The house is of brick and brown stone, and is surrounded by a pretty lawn. It is furnished daintily and adorned with many works of art. Miss Cary's married sister keeps house for her, and it is here that the singer, when not busy in her profession, reads, knits stockings, studies and rests.

—Rev. Dr. Jessup, in a recent address in London, stated that "in Turkey a man never spoke of the existence of a woman without an apology for speaking of so degrading a subject, and if there was any hope for the Turkish race, it was in the education of Turkish women. If Christian women desired to see what the Gospel had done for them, they should see what women were in the East under the faith of Mohammed, and then they would desire to spread the light of that Gospel."