

HILARY'S HUSBAND.

aning against a rugged  
side the farm-house gate,  
as he drove away from  
never. It was a lonely road; there were  
neither neighbors nor passers-by to peer curi-  
ously into her face, and Aaron never once  
looked round as he went; she need not have  
pressed back the tears so resolutely. But she  
stood perfectly calm and still, looking fixedly  
down the road after the retreating wheels,  
though feeling as if she were watching a  
hearse that bore away her heart to burial in some  
far-away graveyard beyond reach of tears.

When the last flutter of dust had laid itself  
in the road behind the gig, like a sorrow mo-  
mentarily lulled to sleep, but ready to start  
into life at memory's first breath, the girl  
raised her clasped hands above her head, and  
closed her eyes tightly as if to shut out the  
vision of the long dull years to come, stretch-  
ing themselves aimlessly into the distance,  
empty, loveless, and hard like the blank road  
before her. Then she turned and walked  
steadily into the house, and up the narrow  
stairs into her aunt's room, and sat down by the  
bed, folding her slender hands in her lap, and  
looking down at the invalid with tired gray eyes  
that seemed suddenly to have discovered the  
end of all things, and to know that henceforth  
they must always look back instead of forward.

The paralytic neither saw nor heard when  
Hilary came in. She lay as she had lain  
these many months,—past seeing, past hear-  
ing, past suffering, yet living still, though as  
utterly dead to her old life as had the *Re-  
quiescat in pace* already been written in let-  
ters of marble above her. For a long time  
Hilary sat by the bedside, absolutely motion-  
less, save when she mechanically leaned for-  
ward to brush a fly from her aunt's brow, or  
smooth away a crease in the counterpane, or  
straighten some small crookedness that un-  
consciously arrested her eye. One's outward  
senses are never so peculiarly alive to trifles  
as when a great crisis of fate holds all the  
spirit spell-bound.

So now the various consecutive sounds of  
every-day farm-life struck sharply through  
to Hilary's brain, and she rose obediently  
from her seat at the first stroke of the bell  
ringing in the men from the fields to their  
evening meal. She lingered a moment before  
going down, to look curiously at herself in the  
glass. No; this change that had come was  
all in her life—not in herself. There were  
no wrinkles amid the faint horizontal lines

that crossed her forehead, no hollows in the  
smooth, pale cheeks, no faded threads in the  
blonde braids that covered her head in such  
profusion. She looked the same now as when  
she had run down so blithely to bid her lover  
welcome only an hour before. She pressed  
her thin, sweet lips together, and shook her  
head as if to fence off memory, and then  
slowly descended to the dining-room, where  
Farmer Perkins and his wife, with whom she  
and her aunt had boarded ever since she  
could remember, were already seated at the  
table, which was set for four, and had that  
air of elaboration about it which tables, like  
people, put on for an expected guest.

"Why, where's Aaron?" asked Mrs. Per-  
kins, in evident disappointment. "I made  
sure he would stay, and opened a jar of my  
best strawberries, though young men are that  
ignorant, I believe he'd all as soon have had  
crab-apples."

"He couldn't wait," Hilary answered qui-  
etly, as she took her place and busied herself  
with her napkin. "He had a great deal to do."

Farmer Perkins raised his bushy brows  
without lifting his eyes from his plate. "Had  
he, then?" he said, with good-humored doubt.  
"I'd be glad of the day when Aaron Johns  
had a deal to do."

"Yes," answered Hilary, lifting her head  
with a desperate feeling that it was best to  
get through the worst at once. "He had so  
little time. He leaves to-night for the West  
—for Omaha."

"What!"

The exclamation came from Mrs. Perkins.  
Her husband merely suspended his opera-  
tions with the waffles, and stared at Hilary  
sideways.

"Yes," she continued, in a perfectly quiet,  
unemotional voice. "He said he had failed  
long enough here, and he was sure to get a  
start there. It's a poor opening a young lawyer  
has in a little country town like this, he says."

"Right enough there," assented the farmer,  
resuming his knife and fork and appetite.  
"We ain't so dishonest about here yet, that  
many folks can earn a living swearing black  
is white for us. He'll do a sight better in that  
lying country where he's going. He's a smart  
enough fellow too, is Aaron. Give him a start,  
and he'll not come in with the hindmost."

"Well, I am took back," said Mrs. Perkins  
slowly, quite forgetting to spread her bread  
in her surprise, absently eating the butter in  
little lumps off the end of her knife, as if test-

ing it. "I can't seem to settle down to it. Who'd have thought he'd go off so sudden, for all the world like a rocket before the match is set to it! And when is he coming back to fetch you, Hilary?"

"He is not coming back."

"Not ever?"

"No."

The girl answered steadily enough, but her eyes fell.

"Hilary," said Mrs. Perkins solemnly, leaning forward to look at her, with both elbows on the table, "you don't mean you've been keeping company with Aaron Johns this twelvemonth back, for him to give you the go-by like that in the end?"

"There isn't any go-by about it," replied Hilary quickly, a hot crimson spot coming to each cheek. "We've broken with each other—that's all. He wanted me to go with him, and I wouldn't. How could I leave aunt, when she's only me in all the world to stay by her and close her eyes decently when she dies?"

"Come, come," said Mrs. Perkins sympathetically. "I don't know as your church is stricter than ours, though it's true Episcopalians have queer notions; but I do think there oughtn't *any* religion to expect a young girl to let go so likely a fellow as Aaron, and tie herself down to a half-dead body like yon poor, unknowing creature upstairs, that can't tell porridge from cider."

"I don't tie myself to her," Hilary answered. "God tied me to her when he left us two all alone in the world, and I can't undo a duty of God's making."

There was silence for a time, during which Mrs. Perkins gazed fixedly at the girl, occasionally giving some tempting dish an abrupt push in her direction, and once going to the pantry to cut off a slice of particularly successful election cake, which she silently put on Hilary's plate, as if wishing to offer such alleviations of destiny as were in her power.

"Don't you feel bad, Hilary?" she brusquely asked, at last.

It was a cruel question, and the poor girl winced. She looked up appealingly, all her features quivering, but controlled herself with a great effort. "There is no good making moan over what has to be," she replied simply.

"Very true, my dear," said Mrs. Perkins approvingly, considerably cheered by the answer. "That's the only proper way to take afflictions. That's just what I said myself when the black hen wouldn't set, and all the eggs went addled. And I dare say there'll be some other young man along all as good as Aaron, and a stay-at-home besides. There's Nathan Taylor, now. He's none so bad when you get used to his squint. Oh, you needn't

think you've had your last chance yet, Hilary. There's many a hook slips a fish that lands its second easy."

Hilary shivered ever so slightly. "There'll never be any one else for me, Mrs. Perkins. Don't let's talk about it. Are you going to look over those currants to-night? Shall I help you?"

"Well, yes, if you like," answered the good woman briskly. "Four hands is always better than two at a job, and there's nothing like picking over currants for diverting the mind. It's the most distracting thing I know of. I set myself right to it the night after my little Jim was buried, and it consoled me wonderful. It was really providential that he died in currant-time. I'll fetch 'em right in."

They all left the table together, and the farmer took up his straw hat from the chair where he had thrown it upon entering, then turned back awkwardly to lay a heavy hand on Hilary's shoulder.

"Hilary, my girl," he said kindly, "you're made of pretty decent stuff. You'll do."

By ten o'clock that night all apparent life had ceased in the little farm-house. Save in Hilary's room every light was out, and all but she were sunk in the dreamless sleep of the hard-working. But Hilary still sat by her aunt's bed, lost in thought and taking no note of time. At last she rose, with the look of one who has come to some solemn decision, and, going to a tall chest of drawers that stood square and ungainly in a corner of the room under the sloping roof, she took out a white muslin dress that had lain there undisturbed since her first and only ball, and which was still very fresh and unrumpled. She shook it carefully out of its creases and laid it by while she sought for various other dainty articles of apparel,—her one pair of silk stockings and kid slippers, a white ribbon sash, a bit of rare old lace,—and then, taking off her plain stuff dress, she proceeded to make a fresh toilette from head to foot, even rebraiding her heavy masses of hair and arranging them in a way that suited her better. She stood at last fully dressed in the soft white muslin,—very fair, very bride-like. But something was still wanting. Brides wear veils. Ah, she must borrow hers. That little Shetland shawl, soft as spun silk and cobwebby as lace, which had been her aunt's pride in bygone days,—what could better fit her need? With trembling hands she unfolded it from its many wrappers and threw it over her head, fastening it deftly here and there to her shining braids. It fell fleecy and light over her shoulders and floated far down over her dress. It was the finishing touch. Surely all was complete now. But no; did ever bride go to the altar without a flower

upon her? Hilary hesitated an instant, then gathering her white skirts closely around her, with her long veil flung over one bare white arm, down she went, noiselessly as the ghost she seemed, to the tiny hall below. She listened anxiously. Had the creaking wooden stairs betrayed her? There was not a sound indoors save the old clock ticking wearily in the corner, where it stood like a sentinel at his post waiting to be relieved. Another step and she reached the front door, slid back the bolt, lifted the latch, and passed out into the dark and dewy garden.

Her heart beat high as she stole softly down between the shrubberies. There was but moonlight enough to make the darkness visible, and to show her herself a misty white spot upon it, strange in the midst of strangeness, as if a cloud had fallen to earth and gathered a semblance of human shape in falling; the rustling of the leaves was as so many faint spirit-voices asking in frightened whispers who and what she was that had thus come among them; the tan felt cold and unaccustomed beneath her feet; the air was damp and heavy with too sweet odors; bats flew low across her pathway with ugly, flapping wings, and her ears tingled with a thousand little sounds that she seemed never to have heard before. It was a gruesome hour for a girl to be out alone, but she kept steadily on her way, down between the straight, stiff flower-beds. The lilacs were long since done blooming, and the lilies and the syringas too. She thought of these last with a sigh; they would have been quite like orange-blossoms. There were plenty of white balsams and white phlox and candy-tuft too, on either side; but she passed them swiftly by, never pausing till she came to the very end of the garden, where a white rose-bush, laden with half-open buds, seemed to have bloomed purposely for this hour. Hilary broke off the flowers with hasty hands,— a few for her breast and a few for her hair were all she needed,—and then, with an exultant thrill at her heart, she turned and retraced her steps through the fitful moonlight and the mysterious shadows, that seemed to turn when she did, and to chase her with gliding, dusky footsteps, as though loath to let so fair a vision go.

But the house was reached in safety, the door reclosed upon that strangely unfamiliar world of night outside, and Hilary stood once more in her room before the glass, smiling a sad little smile of triumph at herself. Yes, it was all complete now. There lacked nothing save only some one to say that she was fair. She glanced shyly at her own image, ashamed of her involuntary pleasure in its sweetness, and turning away went to the bed to bend down over the poor invalid, who was no far-

ther from her now sleeping than waking, and softly kissed her forehead.

"Aunt," she murmured beneath her breath, "I take you for my witness."

The clock in the hall below struck eleven; the lamp began to flicker and turn dim; Hilary saw she must not delay.

From some hidden nook that held her choicest treasures she took out a daguerreotype and placed it open upon the table. It was the likeness of a good-humored, sturdy young fellow of about three and twenty, with a beardless face and honest blue eyes, and big, awkward hands, brought into bold relief against the uncomfortably fitting Sunday coat. It was not altogether admirable as a work of art, but Hilary looked at it with loving eyes as she knelt by the table in her bridal draperies, and opening her prayer-book laid her right hand upon the picture and repeated aloud in a grave, hushed voice, firm with resolve and sweet with unutterable love: "I, Hilary, take thee, Aaron, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth."

The strange rite was not ended yet. Should she too not wear a marriage symbol upon her hand, like all women who have sworn this vow? Still on her knees, Hilary reached out for a spool of yellow silk in her basket, and, knotting a slender thread firmly about her wedding-finger, slipped over it a little ring which she had heretofore always worn on the other hand. Now she felt wedded indeed, and bending forward she pressed her lips against the unresponsive pictured face, blushing all over hotly in sweet shame.

And so the weird midnight ceremony came to an end, and Hilary rose, folded up her wedding garments one by one and laid them tenderly away forever with the white roses that had scarcely yet lost their dew, returned the picture to its hiding-place, blew out the light, crept silently to her couch, and lay there motionless as the sleeping figure in the bed beyond, but with wide, bright eyes that refused to close, though all was so dark and still.

From that night a new life began for Hilary—a life unshared by any, unknown to any, and of which the only outward sign was that tiny silken thread upon her finger, which she replaced as often as it loosened or showed dim, and which, safely hidden as it was beneath the little trumpery garnet ring, provoked no manner of comment. Or if occasionally it caught a curious eye, her simple answer—"It is only to remember something

by"— was a quite sufficient explanation. But everything was changed to her from that night. She wore only the ribbons that he best liked her in; every new gown was chosen and fashioned wholly according to his taste. Every Christmas, every birthday, she worked him presents that none saw save the poor to whom she gave them in his stead. "Aaron's handkerchiefs must be nearly worn out by now," she would say soberly to herself. "I must hem him some more." Or—"Aaron's shirts can surely hold no longer; I must make him another set. His wife must not neglect him." And the needy creatures who received her gifts little knew what pure and perfect love had aided in their making. Once a year upon her wedding anniversary, as she called it in her thoughts, she always made a little feast to mark out the day from its uneventful fellows. Was it not natural enough sometimes to call a few friends together? And no one thought of noticing that on those occasions she invariably wore a bunch of white roses at her breast.

And so the years went by. The poor old aunt quietly slipped away altogether out of the life upon which she had long had so slight a hold; the farmer and his wife became old and infirm, and upon Hilary, who had grown to be more daughter than guest in the house, now devolved much of the real management of the homestead. But who, seeing the quiet, middle-aged woman moving methodically and prosaically about her work, slurring no homely part of it, neglecting no wearisome detail, would have guessed that she hid such a bright fresh romance in her heart, and was glad of it and comforted by it through all the lonely days, and through all the tedious common-places of the monotonous routine?

Aaron Johns had been heard of but once since he drove angrily away through the sunshine and the dust, never turning to look back at the girl who could so lightly let him go; and that once was when Farmer Perkins brought home word from town that Aaron had gone on from Omaha to Denver, and settled there, and had married a wife and was doing well. Hilary listened with no deepening of color, no quickening of her even pulses, but with a curious sense that Aaron had committed a crime, and that she was responsible for his sin. But even that feeling wore off soon, and Aaron remained her dream-husband still, her secret counsel in emergencies, her daily director and helper and comforter, while she tried to think of him as keeping pace with time, and to imagine him every year with hair a little more gray, and eyes a little less blue, and cheeks a little more sunken and furrowed. "I should know him anywhere if I saw him," she

often said to herself. "Of course he would not recognize me now; but my love has kept step with his changes, and he could not have grown away from it."

And so the years slipped softly by, until one day Farmer Perkins returned from town bringing a wonderful bit of news with him.

"Hilary," he said, as he sat down, resting the palms of both hands on his knees, and looking solemnly at her over his spectacles, "Aaron Johns is back. He's picked up a tidy bit of money and buried his wife out there, and now he's come on a visit to see how the old place looks. I told him he'd find you here the same as ever, only that the old aunt was dead. He wanted to know special if she was alive still. I always said he was a smart fellow, was Aaron. I knew he'd get on."

"You don't mean Aaron's back!" Mrs. Perkins exclaimed, all in a flutter of excitement at once. "Now I shouldn't wonder if he'd really come for Hilary at last, and here she's been a-waiting ready to his hand all these years!"

Hilary said nothing, but got up and took one of the old man's withered hands and stroked it gently for an instant, and then quietly left the room. Could it be true? Was it possible the dream was to become a reality?

She went about all day as if stunned, and when at last word was brought her that Aaron was there and asking for her, she went to meet him like one walking in a dream. "He will never know me," she repeated to herself. "I have changed, and so of course has he; yet I feel that I should know him anywhere."

And then she heard a voice saying heartily, "Why, she's positively not altered through all these twenty years! Hilary, I should have known you the world over!" And raising her eyes she saw a stranger standing looking at her, a large, stout man, with a bald head, and bushy, red-brown whiskers, and not a wrinkle anywhere on all his round, good-humored face. Was this Aaron? Was it possible that this was he? Not a look, not a tone, not a gesture seemed familiar; even the blue eyes recalled no memory; even his smile seemed strange.

It came upon her like a shock and took away her breath. She could only give him her hand in silence.

"Yes, the very, very same!" he cried delightedly. "Nothing is changed. No one is changed. The same place, the same house, the same people. It is as if the whole town had been sleeping an enchanted sleep. There are no improvements, no innovations, no alterations anywhere,—not so much as a sign-board torn down. Everybody seems just to have become his own grandfather. I could swear I saw some of the very hats in the street to-day that I saw twenty years ago. It's de-

lightful. You can't think how it rests a man, after he has lived so long in the midst of perpetual newness and stir and change, to step back to some spot where time is at a standstill, and where there is really nothing new under the sun. Should you have known me, Hilary? Forgive me; I could not call you by anything but the old name."

"She hasn't any other hereabouts," said the farmer, patting her shoulder affectionately. "Our Hilary is Hilary to all the town-folk still, just as she was in her young days."

"She has never outgrown her young days," said Aaron, looking with pleased eyes at the slim figure and gentle, lovable face. "Time has stood more still with her than with anything else. But I'm afraid you have forgotten me, Hilary."

She flushed deeply all over her delicate pale face, and her eyes dropped.

"No," she answered, "I have not. But—but you do not seem the same."

And try as she would, through all the days that followed, she could not think him back into his own place. He was a new Aaron altogether, not the old Aaron whom she had so loved, and to whom she had been so faithful through the years. She could not get used to him. His presence was a continuous shock to her, as if his real and his imaginary self were always at war with each other. This Aaron was too stout, too noisy, too careless, and in too exuberant good spirits. His clothes fitted him too well, and she missed the blue necktie, and the limp collar, and the big flapping silver chain. And he carried silk handkerchiefs now, and wore shirts beyond anything her simple skill could fashion. He was very nice, very pleasant; she found no fault with him as he was: it was only that he was not the Aaron of her dreams.

And when one evening, as he was bidding her good-bye, he came nearer and said, gently, "Hilary, will you go West with me this time when I go back?" she trembled violently, and caught away her hand, looking up at him with eyes full of perplexity.

"Oh, Aaron, give me time, give me time," she faltered. "I do not know,—I cannot say,—let me think."

She sat up late in her own room that night, as she had sat there once so many years before, thinking it all over with a disquiet heart. There was no helpless form stretched on the bed beside her now. There was absolutely no one to keep her back—nothing to keep her from him. She had been true to him all these years; she had shut out all other love from her heart because of that lost love of his;

and now he had brought it back to her to be hers, and hers always, if she would. How could she do else than reach out to him the hand that she had given him so many years ago? She looked down at it, fingering the little gold thread nervously. Must she part with that? Could any shining wedding-ring ever be dearer to her than that had been? It would be like unsaying an old vow, like casting off an old allegiance, to take this thread away. She went to her desk and took the little daguerreotype from its hiding-place. A faint odor of rose-leaves clung to it, like a tangible emanation from all the gentle and sweet associations with which it had enriched her life. A tranquillizing sense of peace stole over her as she looked down at the dear familiar face that had smiled changelessly back at her for so long. Oh, *this* was the real Aaron,—*this* was the Aaron to whom she had given her heart,—*this* was the Aaron who had been with her till he had grown into every fiber of her being. How could she be faithless to him now, giving herself away to that other and different Aaron who had so boldly come in to claim her?

"Oh, no, no!" she cried aloud, clasping the picture to her heart with a sudden paroxysm of foolish tears; "I cannot—I cannot! Aaron, my dear picture-love, you have been my all when I had no one else, and I will not give you up. This new Aaron is not the same, and if I took him in your place, it would be like divorcing myself from you to marry him; and I should miss you, oh, I should miss you till I died!"

And so, merely for sake of a dream which she could not banish, Hilary sent her lover away once more, and stood at the end of her story as at the beginning, watching him as he drove disconsolately down the road, knowing that she should never see him again. But he turned this time to wave his hand to her in friendly farewell, feeling vaguely, perhaps, that she was right after all, and that the Hilary he loved would cease to be the same transplanted to foreign soil. And when he had disappeared and the dust had settled quietly down behind him, Hilary turned with a smile on her lips to reënter the house. Farmer Perkins stood upon the threshold, watching her somewhat anxiously. She went up to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Aaron is going back to Denver to-morrow," she said, still smiling. "And—I shall stay behind again."

"Hilary, my girl," said the old man earnestly, "I've always said it, you're made of pretty decent stuff, and"—he took off his spectacles and wiped them carefully—"and I think you'll do, Hilary,—you'll do."

*Grace Denio Litchfield.*

## HOW SHALL WE HELP THE NEGRO?

BY THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL BISHOP OF KENTUCKY.

IN discussing this question I do not propose to enter the arena of statistics. I am not quite ready to admit the statement of one writer, that "comparison based on the census of 1870 is utterly worthless as regards the negroes," while yet I do agree that in certain portions of the South it was materially at fault. And although, therefore, the figures of Professor Gilliam, showing that eighty years hence the Southern blacks will nearly double the Southern whites, may not be perfectly accurate, yet, as he further says, "it is morally certain that by that date, and perhaps sooner, the negroes throughout the South will have a great numerical superiority."

Nor do I propose to enter the lists either as champion or as assailant of the negro's progress, physical, intellectual, or moral. There can be no question that Mr. Greener, the first colored graduate of Harvard University, says truly that the negro is self-supporting, that he adds to the wealth of the country, and that he is accumulating property. As certainly, too, we must admit that the intellectual progress claimed for his race by Mr. Greener is indicated by the existence of "upward of a hundred journals owned and edited by negroes," and by the "number and influence of educated negroes who are now scattered broadcast throughout the South." But on the other hand we note his own declaration that "intemperance, a low standard of morality, an emotional rather than a reflective system of religious ethics, a partial divorce of creed and conduct, and a tendency (by no means confined to negroes) of superficial learning, and of the less desirable elements of character, fitness, or brain, to force their way to the front, are evils which every honest negro must deplore, while sadly admitting their existence."

I recall, as I write, a conversation in New Orleans, in 1880, when I chanced to be placed next to a distinguished Federal official at a dinner-table, whereat the wealth and the intelligence of the Crescent City were gathered to do honor to the Chief Justice of the United States. A rather malapropos remark of mine elicited from my companion the confession that he had come to Louisiana as a philanthropist in the days of reconstruction; that he had been nourished in the faith of human freedom; that his aged father in New Hampshire had prayed with his family morning and evening, since his earliest recollection, that the negro

might be freed. And then he added that the greatest disappointment of his life was to be compelled by experience to acknowledge that the negro is incapable of development, and that he is utterly incapable of the proper performance of the citizen's duty, either at the polls or in the jury-box. Beyond controversy and by the testimony of the educated negro leaders, and of their partisan friends of the white race, there are still remaining, in spite of all their boasted progress, an ignorance which is simply abysmal, and a moral incapacity before which the lover of humanity, and still more the patriot American, stands appalled. So that I am constrained to fear, and to believe, that Professor Gilliam speaks truth when he adds, as conclusion of the sentence of which I have already quoted a part, that, with numerical superiority, eighty years hence the negroes throughout the South will have made a "disproportionate gain in wealth and education, and a gain lower still in the domain of morals."

And thirdly, I would say that in seeking for an answer to the dreadful question which keeps repeating itself, "What are you going to do about it?" I shall not for a moment consider the possibility of any emigration of these people which would so much as diminish the cotton crop by a single bale. To my mind it is perfectly absurd to talk of deporting the negroes of the South to Africa, or to any other country; and it is just as much so to think of setting apart for them a reservation of territory in our own country to which they shall be confined. The fact that by a sacred provision of our Constitution these people are citizens of the United States, and so citizens of each and every State, is sufficient barrier to protect them from forcible migration or emigration; and the further facts that for twenty years they have enjoyed the sweet privileges of American citizenship, that under its protection they have made material progress, that members of their race have sat in the high places as rulers of the nation, and that the school and the ballot-box open a like glorious prospect before the eyes of all,—all these things declare that voluntary migration can never take place. No. "The negro has come to America to stay," says Mr. Armstrong, in the "North American Review" for July, 1884, and his opinion is corroborated by the opinions of all the educated negroes given in the symposium whereof he was one.