

# THE SCRUBWOMAN

BY DOROTHY CANFIELD

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HENRY RANDOLPH shook his white head in an impatient gesture of dissent, and continued the discussions with a tenderly exasperated disregard of his cousin's scruples. "No, no, Alice, dear, this is no time to split hairs on what it's proper to speak about. It's infamous, I know, that I should be talking to you about it—nobody but a woman should; but, my dear child, how *can* I go and leave you so? And there's nobody else *to* speak. You might as well have no brother at all as one in the navy."

Mrs. Smithers's resigned, though unpeaceful, drooping attitude changed at this to a sudden nervous tension. She clasped and unclasped her thin hands, and spoke with a little rush of eagerness. "Ah! that's it, Cousin Henry. If I could only see my brother oftener, he might be able to do something." She relapsed again into listless despondency and continued dully: "But I don't suppose he would ever see anything at all the matter. My husband would be so different with him—you know how Will is to outsiders."

Randolph struck one hand into the other fiercely. "I do! I do! But what's the use of knowing him now, when you've been married ten years? Oh, if I'd only been here instead of on the other side of the globe when he first went to Washington and met you! Why, in Heaven's name, your parents——" He checked himself abruptly. "No, I can't blame them—poo; simple souls! They never had any worldly discernment. You're just like them."

Mrs. Smithers spoke in a naively solemn and hesitant way. "I hope it's not wicked, Cousin Henry, but I'm sometimes glad they died so soon after my marriage—and that Tom is always away

on his vessel. They couldn't help any, and I'm glad they don't have to suffer with me. I'm sorry it makes you so sad, cousin, on your first visit home in so many years. I'm afraid I've not been able to make you very happy."

At this Randolph roared out in indignant tenderness: "Good Heavens, Alice, don't be such a perfectly angelic idiot! If you endure it day after day, and have for ten years, and will as long as he or you live, don't you suppose a great hulking brute of a man like me can bear just to hear about it?"

The woman stirred uneasily in her chair. "Oh, please, dear cousin, don't speak so. I know I've done very wrong to let you know at all, but, seeing somebody who belongs to me after all this long, lonely life in New York—I'm afraid I haven't been very brave. I may not have so much more to bear than other women. Will, you know, is never brutally unkind, as so many husbands are—he has never struck me—we live in this expensive apartment; the children go to the best schools; I always have plenty of money to spend——"

She ended, quivering off into silence before the gathering wrath in the old man's eyes. He caught her up grimly: "Yes, you have plenty of money to spend, but I notice you do your own work most of the time. Your husband makes the apartment such a hell on earth with his devilish ingenuity that you couldn't keep a maid for a week—not for any price."

Alice interrupted him eagerly: "But, no—I have old Belle, the scrubwoman, you know. She's been with me almost ever since I was married—ever since we came to this house to live. She cleans the halls and stairways of this building, and so she's always on hand to come in

and help me out. She does all the rough work, and she won't let me do anything she can manage to prevent. She's so faithful and strong, and so kind to me, I forget all about her dreadful looks and profanity; and you couldn't *drive* her away. She never seems even to hear the things Will says to her."

The man's voice was bitter as he answered gloomily: "Actually the best friend—the *only* friend you are allowed to have is that frightful old harridan I see around here. I wonder you allow her to be with the children. I've never heard her speak without an oath, and little Jack is so——"

The mention of the child was like an electric shock to the mother. She sprang to her feet, and running to the tall old man, she caught one of his hands in hers with a gesture of distraction. "Oh, Cousin Henry, every time I hear Jack's name it makes me remember Will's threat to send him away. It's only because of that I spoke to you at all. I could *not* bear to have him go from me to a strange school. It would kill him."

The man suddenly gave a deep sob of pity, and gathered the frail, weeping woman into his arms. The silence which followed was broken by the entrance from the dining-room of a small woman of uncertain age, in dingy attire, carrying a pail of water in one bony hand and a large cleaning-cloth in the other. Without noticing the silent couple by the window, she dropped heavily to her knees and began to wipe up the edge of bare floor showing about the carpet. Randolph spoke, and she turned, startled, showing a face blurred and battered by hardship, but instantly alive in the keenest interest in the conversation.

"Alice, dear, unless you'll simply drop everything and come away with me to my home, I don't see any way out."

Mrs. Smithers recoiled at this and spoke with a passionate denial: "Why, how *can* you think of my doing that! How could I leave the children? They're all I live for—all that keeps me from going crazy!"

"You could bring the children along. They'd do well in Buenos Ayres."

"He'd come and take them from me. I've been all over that so many

times with myself. And I've read that the children are never allowed to stay with the mother if she has run away. If I could only just snatch them up and hide from him—all of us; but he's so clever and I'm so stupid he'd find us out right away, and then I—he'd never let me see them again."

The old man drew a long breath, in an evident attempt to control himself, but vainly, for he broke out so fiercely that the scrubwoman sat up on her heels electrified. "Damnation! I beg your pardon, Allie, dear, but it just tears me in pieces to see you so. Confound the fellow! Why doesn't he just once go a step too far and give some ground for divorce? The hellish cunning of him!—to care so well for your outward wants and to murder inch by inch your self-respect, your love for your children, your pride—your very soul!"

He stopped her feeble gesture of protest with a furious torrent of words. "No, don't talk to me. I've seen it, and I know. Tom may be fooled by his smooth ways, but I've seen Mexican half-breeds before now. Sometimes I think it a mistake, his having had an American father—he's all greaser, every inch of him! I heard stories about him as a boy when I was in Bocas del Toro. When he was ten years old he was caught burning a cat over a slow fire—half-breed Injun and Spaniard, just like his mother. No, he gets his business sense from old Smithers, all right. And, good Lord! he gets those cold, pale eyes from him!"

He shuddered at the picture and went on in a mounting fury: "Allie, unless you give up the children or divide them, there's nothing anybody can do to help. It's incredible there should be such a situation in a civilized country, but it's so. The mere fact that you are tortured day by day in a thousand subtle ways no decent man could even think of is as nothing, because he doesn't strike you. A jury or judge would take no more cognizance of your mental agony than—your old scrubwoman!"

At this mention of her the woman started, guiltily from her position of strained and intent eavesdropping and let her cloth fall into the pail with a

splash. The two turned, and, seeing her, lowered their voices, Mrs. Smithers trying in vain to repress her sobbing.

Randolph went over to her and laid one hand tenderly on her shoulder. Oh, I know you won't think of leaving the children. You couldn't, of course. But, Allie, do this for me, at least: promise me that the next time you see Tom—and may it be soon, or you won't keep your reason—*tell* him! Tell him what your married life is. He's your big brother, and I feel that he'll be able to help you somehow. Promise me that! Don't send me away quite hopeless over your future."

In a confused murmur of sobs and broken sentences the promise came: "Yes, yes, I promise. I somehow feel, too, that if he really knows—he can help—but there's so much even he can't know. Oh, I wish I had a mother! If my mother had only lived!"

## II

INTO this atmosphere of quivering agitation dropped suddenly the quiet, silvery tinkle of the door-bell. It shocked them all into attitudes of expectation. Mrs. Smithers stopped her sobbing with a convulsive effort and sat up straight, shivering uncontrollably and motioning the scrubwoman to hurry. "Oh, that must be Will! He mustn't see me so upset. Belle, hurry! *Do* hurry and open for him; he can't bear to be kept waiting. I'd go myself, but he doesn't like to see me do it. Oh, Belle, please, *please* hurry!"

The significance of her terror-stricken disquiet pierced the old man with a savage thrust of pity and sympathy, but the scrubwoman did not lift a heavy finger the quicker for it. She finished wiping up a spot on the floor, wrung her cloth out deliberately, and hung it over the pail before she rose to her feet and went down the long, narrow hall with the ungainly walk of women who have long worked beyond their strength. Randolph and his cousin waited and together caught a sudden breath when from the recesses of the hall came a smooth, penetrating voice saying with an indescribably insulting accent: "Out of my way, you hag!"

Rapid steps came down the hall, and

a tall man with a very black beard and pale-blue eyes entered the room, bringing with him the lowering atmosphere of a thunder-storm. As he caught sight of Randolph his face smoothed itself into a cordial smile, and advancing, he insisted on taking the older man's hand in a hearty grasp. When he spoke, his voice had a warm intonation of pleased surprise. "Why, Cousin Henry, this is a welcome sight. I understood that you were to be off to-day, and that we were once more a desolate family, without a relative to our names."

He took off his coat and hat as he spoke and gave them to the scrubwoman, who stood with the apprehensive, repellent gaze of an ill-treated ash-cat. She turned to go out with them, and as she disappeared down the hall Randolph noticed, with a qualm of disgust, as another detail in the nightmare which surrounded him, that she spat fiercely on the hat. He roused himself and said to the newcomer stiffly: "There was some accident to the engines, and the boat won't sail until to-night, so I came back to——"

Smithers interrupted him with a cheery laugh as he began opening some letters on the table and glancing over them. "It's an ill wind, *et cetera*. I dare say little Allie was no end glad to see you again. She's not much company for herself at any time, and when the children are still in the country and she's been spoiled by so much of your delightful companionship, I fancy my little child-wife got pretty dull."

He looked them both full in the face as he delivered this speech, and smiled at their wincing under his accent. The scrubwoman, moving the furniture about, suddenly set a chair down with so furious an energy that they all started.

"Oblige me, Belle, by being a little quieter," said Smithers mildly, and laughed aloud as he caught Randolph's eye. Still smiling, he went rattling on, as he read a letter:

"Do you know, my dear Cousin Henry, you're the only relative who's been to see us since the very first years of our married life? Alice doesn't know her other forty-second cousins very well, and, to tell the truth, they

don't seem to enjoy our simple life. Too bad, eh, Allie?"

His voice dropped into an absent murmur, and he lost himself in the letter. Randolph crossed the room to the window where his cousin stood and drew her to him. "I'm going now, dear child," he said in a low tone, "but it's like tearing a piece of my heart out to leave you so. It seems to me, sometimes, I must go distracted thinking of you. But it's one ray of light in my darkness that you've promised to speak to Tom and appeal to him to help you. And remember, let me know if I can ever help and——"

Smithers laid down his letter and turned toward them with so openly black a look of suspicion that the old man answered as though he had been questioned.

"I'm telling Alice, William," he said defiantly, "that if she ever needs me I'll come from the ends of the earth."

The younger man smiled again, so that his wife caught her breath and clung convulsively to her cousin. He waved his hand genially. "Ah, very good of you—very kind, I'm sure. Alice will, of course, let you know at any time if there is something you can do for her." He added dryly: "I'll see that she does myself." Randolph turned his back on him and kissed Alice on the forehead. "Good-by, little girl. Heaven bless you!" he said, in an unsteady voice.

The scrubwoman stood up to show him the door, drying her distorted hands on her torn apron. She made a furtive wipe at her eyes, and sniffed loudly with a grotesque contortion of her face. Smithers turned on her suddenly, so that she dodged and lifted an arm in guard. He spoke with the most careful gentleness:

"Don't bother to show Mr. Randolph the door, Belle. I'll go myself. No, don't protest, my dear cousin. It's the last time. I'm not going to let a servant's face be the last one you see in my house—and such a face!" The two disappeared down the hall, Smithers ahead, talking animatedly.

### III

BELLE dropped her cloth and hastened heavily to where Alice sat. Her hard

face was set in lines of grim resolution. She spoke in a hoarse whisper, looking continually over her shoulder toward the hall. "Ma'am—Mrs. Smithers—don't give up to him so! Paste him one when he comes back. Git ahead of him and he'd let you alone. Give him fits before he has a chance to git started."

Alice looked up in amazement, and spoke with a childish attempt at dignity. "Belle, you forget yourself!"

Her husband came back into the room with his rapid, noiseless tread, cast a black look at the two women, and went again to his mail. There was a silence which was ominous. The scrubwoman went on stolidly with her work, and Alice waited in trembling suspense for the first words. Smithers finished a letter and held it up, saying in a low, measured tone: "If you've quite finished your furtive conversation with your especial friend, you may care to know that this letter is from Jack. I believe you preserve the pose of being devoted to your children."

He pocketed the letter in answer to an imploring gesture for it from his wife, and went on: "No, there's no need for you to read it. I can tell you all that's necessary for you to know. He's hurt his foot again."

His wife screamed out at this, striking her hands together in anguish. "Oh, Will! His lame foot? How badly?"

The man gathered the letters together and threw some loose envelopes in the waste-paper basket before he answered. Then he said sardonically: "It makes me smile to see the way you carry out your attitude about that. If you care so much about it, it's a wonder you carefully arranged matters so he would be lame."

The mother quivered as though under a physical blow. "Oh, Will, how can you?"

Her tormentor went on: "How could you? It was just pure carelessness on your part letting him fall—you, a mother of children! I wonder that you can look at the ugly little cripple without hating yourself."

He listened impatiently to her feeble attempt at self-justification. "Why, Will, you know I was thrown myself, and fell all those steps. The doctor

has always said that if I hadn't held him up he would have been killed, and——"

"Confound the doctor! You got around him with your soft ways the same way you did me before I knew what a fool you were. Besides, it would be better for Jack if he *were* dead. It makes me sick to see him hobbling about. Anyhow, the fact remains that you were supposed to be taking care of him and let him fall. I notice other mothers seem to be able to avoid those little accidents."

He walked into the study, kicking viciously at Belle's pail and partly overturning it, so that the water ran out on the carpet. As the door slammed the scrubwoman looked apprehensively at Mrs. Smithers, who returned the look sadly.

"Belle, you know I've always been good to you."

The workwoman brightened at the words and answered fervently, in a hoarse, cracked voice: "Yes, ma'am. Lord knows I know."

Her mistress continued seriously, as though speaking to a naughty child: "There's one thing, though, I can't allow. You must not speak to me as you did just now, or I can never have you here again."

The shapeless body of the other drooped humbly under the reproof. "Just as you say, ma'am. I couldn't help myself that time, but I won't never again. I couldn't live if I had to quit workin' for you. I'm scrubbin' here in the house for less than I could git some-where else just so's I can git to see you. Why, ma'am—Mrs. Smithers—I'd go through hell every day to see you!"

She flinched again at the deprecating hand of her mistress, and hung her head, shamefaced, at the exhortation: "Oh, Belle, you *shouldn't* use such language."

The pathos of the unlovely figure went to Alice's heart. "Never mind this time, Belle. You do a great deal for *me*, too. I couldn't have got along without you, a great many times, and it makes me very happy to think that I'm not so weak that I can't help somebody a little."

The hard-featured face of the other suddenly broke into grotesque lines of

emotion. She spoke incoherently, sitting ungracefully on her heels and wiping her eyes with the cleaning-cloth between her sentences. "Oh, ma'am, it just busts me wide open to have you say I help you. When a body's had all done for them you've done for me—keeping me at all!—I know how I look and how rough I talk. There isn't another lady in the world that would have me around, and with the kids and all! And then to give me kind words and looks, and helpin' me through with the typhoid, and goin' to that darned hospital to see me! Not if I live to be a million, which Lord forbid! I couldn't never forget how you looked when you came in the ward with all them flowers, as though I was anybody, and standin' by me all that month when they thought I'd swiped the silver. You're the only livin' soul as ever give me a kind word since I can't remember. I never did anything but fight anywheres else but here. It's just been hell every minute. I cud ha' died like a dog and never knowed what it was to have anybody so much as say—oh, ma'am, Mrs. Smithers——"

She paused, breathless, choked by emotion, unable to express herself, but staring at her mistress, a look of doglike devotion in her somber eyes.

As Alice smiled sweetly at her with a wistful look of gratitude, she came to herself, and began her work again, sniffing unpleasantly and drawing the back of her hand across her nose from time to time.

She moved a picture which stood on the floor to another part of the room, looking at it curiously and at Alice timidly, finally summing up courage to say: "Would it be too darn much trouble, ma'am, to tell me what this picture's about?"

"That? Oh, that's a glacier—ice, you know, on top of a mountain—and two men are tied together with a rope. One of them has just slipped into a great, deep hole, and he's getting out his knife to cut the rope, so he won't drag the other man after him."

Belle seemed unconvinced. "But then he'll fall, won't he?"

Alice replied absently, looking at the picture of a child on the mantel. "Yes, but the other man, his friend, will be

saved." She fell into a reverie, from which she was recalled by the other's insistent questioning: "What do the words underneath mean, please, ma'am?"

"I forget what they do call it. What are the words?"

Belle followed the letters with a gnarled forefinger and read laboriously: "Greater love hath no man," and listened with a painful face of endeavor to the explanation: "Oh, that's from the Bible, where it says, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.' It means, you know, that——"

## IV

THE door from the study opened, and she started eagerly toward her husband. "Oh, Will, won't you tell me about Jack's foot now? Did he hurt it badly?"

Smithers looked at her with a side-wise twist of his mouth and said evenly: "I see your usual careful house-keeping in that large spot of dirty water on the carpet."

Belle and Alice both faced him, amazed, and Alice cried impulsively: "Why, Will, you upset the——"

He cut her off with one of his blighting looks. "It's curious how I am to blame for everything that happens. I don't suppose your peerless beauty, there, is capable of getting me a bottle of beer, is she? As usual, we are without any other servants. I dare say that I am also to blame for your incapacity to keep any help in the house. It seems as though, with all the money you have for service, you might be able to keep somebody besides that harridan. I suppose the fact is you're jealous of any one who doesn't resemble your old eyesore. Oh, don't explain. You needn't be afraid I'd ever think you capable of such a live flesh-and-blood sentiment. Milk and water can't burn." He addressed himself threateningly to Belle: "Will you get some beer, or won't you?"

She answered him sullenly: "The liquor man ain't sent the beer yet."

The man's smoothness broke into an ugly cold fury. He advanced upon his wife, so that she shrank into herself in terror. "Alice, your incompetence is

simply maddening! You know the doctor has ordered me to drink beer. You seem actually to plan to thwart any measures for my good. I'm not surprised that you show no interest in my health. Indeed, I dare say you would be very glad if——"

"Oh, *no*, Will!" shrieked his wife, in an agony of protest. "Don't! I can't bear to hear you say such a dreadful thing!"

The sight of her agitation seemed to restore him to his usual cold control of himself. He eyed her with a smile. "The extraordinary ease with which your guilty imagination fills out my sentences is something surprising, even to me—used as I am to your affection for your husband. I'm going out to the kitchen myself to see if I can't find a bottle which your vigilant handmaid has sequestered for her own use."

In the moment of his absence the scrubwoman raised her gaunt frame again in exhortation: "Oh, blame it all, ma'am—if you would—just once—just try it on!"

Alice lushed her, with a frantic fear of being overheard, and turned to her husband, who entered the room with a bottle of beer, which he opened with a deft strength and half emptied into a glass. The two women followed his most trivial actions with a fascinated gaze. The first draft seemed to relax him, for he leaned back in his chair, wiping his beard and looking neutrally at his wife. "Have you heard anything lately from Tom, Alice?" he asked.

Alice flushed up into a timid desire to please him in this brief interlude of peace. "No, Will, not for a long time. How kind of you to think of him! I long to hear from him so. I can't tell you! I think I should almost *die* of happiness to see him again."

She drew away in a drooping submission under her husband's curt "Oh, don't be sickening! Every time I try to have a little reasonable conversation with you you turn my stomach. It's enough to drive any man with a nerve in his body mad with irritation—your fawning ways. I'm sorry for myself! It's not my fault. Any woman with a spark of grit in her—you make me hate myself as well as you——" He

interrupted himself sharply, pointing tensely into a corner of the room. "A mouse! Alice, have you or have you not used that poison I got for you?"

"Oh, Will," she fluttered protestingly, "I'm so afraid to have it around! I haven't seen any mice for a long time, and I thought traps—the children——"

Smithers struck his hand heavily on the table, with a loud oath: "Can't a man be safe from vermin in his own home because he has a fool for a wife?"

He rushed out, and Belle again approached with her ignorant, vacant look of curiosity. "Why are you so afraid of that stuff, ma'am?"

Mrs. Smithers shuddered. "Oh, Belle, it's poison—deadly poison—and the least little drop of it in anything we eat would kill us. And when the children are here——"

Their whispered colloquy was interrupted by Smithers's entrance, bearing a small bottle, which he placed on the mantelpiece in a complete and significant silence. As he seated himself he said coldly: "I hope I shall not have to wait until we are attacked in our beds by the rats before you decide to be reasonable." He fixed his pale eyes on her. "Alice, this is as good a time as ever to tell you that I have decided to send Jack to school—a military school in Wisconsin."

Belle uttered a loud exclamation at this, which was lost in the high hysterical wail of Mrs. Smithers's voice. "Will, I don't want to seem to doubt your judgment, but I really know more about Jack's health than you can, and I know he can't *live* without the most anxious care. A *military* school—why, he's lame! And so far away! And Jack is only nine—a baby—a baby!"

She flung herself upon him, kneeling with imploring hands and awaiting his answer in a breathless suspense. He waited a long time before speaking, and then finished his glass of beer and set it down carefully. "Quite what I expected—just the silly exhibition of yourself that I am used to. And you expect me to leave my children to be brought up by an hysterical idiot like that! I had not finally decided, but I do so now, that the other two would be better in a sane and reasonable atmosphere, which

unfortunately, owing to my choice of a wife, I cannot give them in my own house. Elsie and Harry, as soon as they come home from the country, shall go abroad under the charge of a French governess."

His wife's face did not change at all. She slipped slowly to the floor in an unconscious heap, and her face did not alter from its expression of stupefied horror.

## V

THE scrubwoman darted to her mistress and knelt by her in a passion of anxiety. When Smithers put her roughly on one side and gathered his wife's body into his arms she scratched and struck at him like a cat, with an incoherent burst of objurgation. The man paid no attention to her, carrying his wife down the long hall with an easy strength and disappearing for a moment into a side room.

Belle was still on her knees, a squat figure of hatred, when he emerged again, closed the door after him, and came back down the hall whistling "The Campbells Are Coming." At the entrance to the parlor he looked at her in complete silence till she cringed abjectly: At this he smiled, and said in a tone of finality: "That will be enough from you, Belle. One more such incident and I'll have you dismissed from the apartment and the building. Do you understand?"

She nodded faintly, and started up in a servile haste to answer the door-bell, bringing back a letter which she placed on Mrs. Smithers's desk, saying significantly: "It's for your *wife*, Mr. Smithers."

He cast her a sidelong look of contemptuous warning and opened the letter with a swift deftness, reading it aloud in an inarticulate mumble, which at times rose into a clear note of scornful emphasis.

"Dear little sister—unexpectedly find we're ordered for—stopping a day in New York—hope you can get down to the vessel—you'll need to start as soon as you get this, for we are to—hope you can manage it, for it will be the last chance in two years!"

The last sentence he read quite dis-

tinctly, in a tone of triumph, and gave a short laugh as he tore the letter in two.

At the sound, the scrubwoman sprang toward him, her face convulsed. "Don't you dare tear up that letter from her brother! I'll—I'll——" She struggled to wrest it away in an animal-like frenzy. He struck her from him with a blow so powerful that she reeled to the other side of the room, but, although the action was violent, he did not lose his uncanny smoothness, and held her distant from him and impotently speechless by his cold eye.

"I said, Belle, that another time I would lose my patience with you. That has happened. When you finish your work in this room you will leave the apartment, and you will not come back—either here or to the building." He cut short her paroxysm of horror with a gesture so fierce that she cowered like a whipped dog. "Not a word from you," he said; "I've heard enough. I'm going into the study now, and when I come out I expect you to be gone. And don't dare go near your mistress."

He crossed the room with his graceful, vigorous step, paused at the door, said in his ordinary tone, "Bring me in the rest of that beer, will you," opened the door, and closed it with a resolute jerk back of him.

The movement jarred a picture standing on the floor near the door, and it fell down with a splintering crash of broken glass, which turned the scrubwoman's eye in that direction. There was a moment's silence, and then, without rising from her crouching position, she crept across the floor to where it lay and looked at it dully, making no movement to set it up.

And then suddenly she rose stagger-

ing to her feet, rushed heavily to the mantel, and seized the bottle which stood there. With a sort of insane and extravagant haste she emptied its contents and the beer into a glass at the same moment, and reeled across the room to the study, knocking on the door with a hand hysterically shaking. Smithers's hand appeared, took the glass, and the door was again shut. The scrubwoman leaned against the wall with her eyes closed until the sound of a heavy fall was heard from the other room. She recoiled from the wall at this and walked blindly and aimlessly about the room.

A sound of deep groans came through the closed door. The scrubwoman hastened to the entrance into the hall and drew over it a heavy portière.

"Help! Help!" called Smithers's voice faintly. "Help!—I'm poisoned!"

The scrubwoman began taking the scraps of the torn letter out of the wastepaper basket and laying them carefully on Mrs. Smithers's desk.

There was a confused sound of struggle and the crash of an overturned chair. The scrubwoman lifted up the broken picture and put it on the table, standing by it and absently smoothing out a place in the paper torn by the splintered glass.

"Oh, help!" came in a choking gasp from beyond the closed door, and then in a supreme effort, "*Alice!*"

At the sound of the name the scrubwoman smiled for the first time and stood listening intently.

There was a profound silence. She waited, and then walked softly across the floor to where Mrs. Smithers's shawl was lying across a chair. Still smiling, she held this to her face in a passion of tenderness. "Oh, the poor, dear, *good-for-nothing* lady!" she said.

#### PREFACE TO PRAYER

Why bruise thy lovely wings, poor bird,  
Against the bars that hold thee here?  
Without are snares, thy song unheard  
Among the many singing there.  
I pray thee sing to me, sweet bird!

Why waste thy strength, O soul of mine,  
Beating against thy frail abode  
Of clay? Thou part of me divine,  
Make worthy, then, my little stay,  
And sing for me, O soul of mine!

A. Maria Crawford

# THE AMERICAN WOMAN IN LITERATURE

BY HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE

SINCE THE TIME OF MRS. ANNE BRADSTREET, THE FIRST OF HER SEX TO TAKE PEN IN HAND FOR PUBLIC WRITING IN THE UNITED STATES, WOMEN HAVE HELD STRONG POSITION IN AUTHORSHIP—YET LITERATURE IS NOT A QUESTION OF SEX

AMONG the most obvious facts in the recent history of literature in this country are the extension of literary interest and activity to all parts of the continent and the increasing volume and importance of the work of women in this field. The influence of women on the spirit and character of writing here has been very great and is not likely to diminish. Foreign writers, in some instances, have prophesied evil things of our future literature as the result of this influence; as they have prophesied evil things of our education because such an army of women have invaded our schools as teachers. Without taking time or space to discuss what some of our judges beyond the sea have been pleased to call the "feminization" of our literature, it is clear that this criticism is an evidence of the importance of the contribution which American women are making to American writing of the higher order; and it may be interesting to call the roll, so to speak, by way not only of recalling some of the most charming examples of the art of expression we have given the world, but of gaining a comprehensive view of what women have done and are doing in the field.

A good deal of dreariness hangs over the verse of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet, the first woman who took pen in hand for public writing in this country. The daughter of one governor and the wife of another, this able and well-trained woman had no small poetic gift, and if she had happened upon a more poetic

age might have gained some sweep of wing. Her contemporaries hailed her as the "Tenth Muse," and one gallant reader did not hesitate to confess that when he read her verses he was "sunk in a sea of bliss," and "weltering in delight." The titles of her poems are portentously solemn, and the modern reader in search of easy reading turns with a sigh of relief from "The Four Monarchies," "The Four Elements," and "The Four Seasons"; but if he will pluck up courage and open the short poem on "Contemplations" he will find some very pleasant descriptions of nature. Very little that Mrs. Bradstreet wrote is worth keeping, but she is worthy of remembrance as the first American woman who wrote because she loved poetry for its sake in a country where few people cared for it, and because her work was stamped by the refinement of thought and feeling which has characterized the prose and verse of her successors.

## MRS. BRADSTREET'S LOYAL VERSES

The first poet among American women was not only the forerunner of the large company of women of culture who have had a great influence on American society and education; she was also a vigorous champion of her own sex. She found great comfort in the career of Queen Elizabeth, of whom she wrote:

She hath wiped off the aspersion of her  
sex,  
That women wisdom lack to play the  
Rex.