

CHAPTER X

THE MINISTER

Mrs. Kittridge's advantages and immunities resulting from the shipwreck were not yet at an end. Not only had one of the most "solemn providences" known within the memory of the neighborhood fallen out at her door,--not only had the most interesting funeral that had occurred for three or four years taken place in her parlor, but she was still further to be distinguished in having the minister to tea after the performances were all over. To this end she had risen early, and taken down her best china tea-cups, which had been marked with her and her husband's joint initials in Canton, and which only came forth on high and solemn occasions. In view of this probable distinction, on Saturday, immediately after the discovery of the calamity, Mrs. Kittridge had found time to rush to her kitchen, and make up a loaf of pound-cake and some doughnuts, that the great occasion which she foresaw might not find her below her reputation as a forehanded housewife.

It was a fine golden hour when the minister and funeral train turned away from the grave. Unlike other funerals, there was no draught on the sympathies in favor of mourners--no wife, or husband, or parent, left a heart in that grave; and so when the rites were all over, they turned with the more cheerfulness back into life, from the contrast of its freshness with those shadows into which, for the hour, they had been

gazing.

The Rev. Theophilus Sewell was one of the few ministers who preserved the costume of a former generation, with something of that imposing dignity with which, in earlier times, the habits of the clergy were invested. He was tall and majestic in stature, and carried to advantage the powdered wig and three-cornered hat, the broad-skirted coat, knee-breeches, high shoes, and plated buckles of the ancient costume. There was just a sufficient degree of the formality of olden times to give a certain quaintness to all he said and did. He was a man of a considerable degree of talent, force, and originality, and in fact had been held in his day to be one of the most promising graduates of Harvard University. But, being a good man, he had proposed to himself no higher ambition than to succeed to the pulpit of his father in Harpswell.

His parish included not only a somewhat scattered seafaring population on the mainland, but also the care of several islands. Like many other of the New England clergy of those times, he united in himself numerous different offices for the benefit of the people whom he served. As there was neither lawyer nor physician in the town, he had acquired by his reading, and still more by his experience, enough knowledge in both these departments to enable him to administer to the ordinary wants of a very healthy and peaceable people.

It was said that most of the deeds and legal conveyances in his parish

were in his handwriting, and in the medical line his authority was only rivaled by that of Miss Roxy, who claimed a very obvious advantage over him in a certain class of cases, from the fact of her being a woman, which was still further increased by the circumstance that the good man had retained steadfastly his bachelor estate. "So, of course," Miss Roxy used to say, "poor man! what could he know about a woman, you know?"

This state of bachelorhood gave occasion to much surmising; but when spoken to about it, he was accustomed to remark with gallantry, that he should have too much regard for any lady whom he could think of as a wife, to ask her to share his straitened circumstances. His income, indeed, consisted of only about two hundred dollars a year; but upon this he and a very brisk, cheerful maiden sister contrived to keep up a thrifty and comfortable establishment, in which everything appeared to be pervaded by a spirit of quaint cheerfulness.

In fact, the man might be seen to be an original in his way, and all the springs of his life were kept oiled by a quiet humor, which sometimes broke out in playful sparkles, despite the gravity of the pulpit and the awfulness of the cocked hat. He had a placid way of amusing himself with the quaint and picturesque side of life, as it appeared in all his visitings among a very primitive, yet very shrewd-minded people.

There are those people who possess a peculiar faculty of mingling in the affairs of this life as spectators as well as actors. It does not, of course, suppose any coldness of nature or want of human interest or

sympathy--nay, it often exists most completely with people of the tenderest human feeling. It rather seems to be a kind of distinct faculty working harmoniously with all the others; but he who possesses it needs never to be at a loss for interest or amusement; he is always a spectator at a tragedy or comedy, and sees in real life a humor and a pathos beyond anything he can find shadowed in books.

Mr. Sewell sometimes, in his pastoral visitations, took a quiet pleasure in playing upon these simple minds, and amusing himself with the odd harmonies and singular resolutions of chords which started out under his fingers. Surely he had a right to something in addition to his limited salary, and this innocent, unsuspected entertainment helped to make up the balance for his many labors.

His sister was one of the best-hearted and most unsuspecting of the class of female idolaters, and worshiped her brother with the most undoubting faith and devotion--wholly ignorant of the constant amusement she gave him by a thousand little feminine peculiarities, which struck him with a continual sense of oddity. It was infinitely diverting to him to see the solemnity of her interest in his shirts and stockings, and Sunday clothes, and to listen to the subtle distinctions which she would draw between best and second-best, and every-day; to receive her somewhat prolix admonition how he was to demean himself in respect of the wearing of each one; for Miss Emily Sewell was a gentlewoman, and held rigidly to various traditions of gentility which had been handed down in the Sewell family, and which afforded her brother too much quiet

amusement to be disturbed. He would not have overthrown one of her quiddities for the world; it would be taking away a part of his capital in existence.

Miss Emily was a trim, genteel little person, with dancing black eyes, and cheeks which had the roses of youth well dried into them. It was easy to see that she had been quite pretty in her days; and her neat figure, her brisk little vivacious ways, her unceasing good-nature and kindness of heart, still made her an object both of admiration and interest in the parish. She was great in drying herbs and preparing recipes; in knitting and sewing, and cutting and contriving; in saving every possible snip and chip either of food or clothing; and no less liberal was she in bestowing advice and aid in the parish, where she moved about with all the sense of consequence which her brother's position warranted.

The fact of his bachelorhood caused his relations to the female part of his flock to be even more shrouded in sacredness and mystery than is commonly the case with the great man of the parish; but Miss Emily delighted to act as interpreter. She was charmed to serve out to the willing ears of his parish from time to time such scraps of information as regarded his life, habits, and opinions as might gratify their ever new curiosity. Instructed by her, all the good wives knew the difference between his very best long silk stocking and his second best, and how carefully the first had to be kept under lock and key, where he could not get at them; for he was understood, good as he was, to have

concealed in him all the thriftless and pernicious inconsiderateness of the male nature, ready at any moment to break out into unheard-of improprieties. But the good man submitted himself to Miss Emily's rule, and suffered himself to be led about by her with an air of half whimsical consciousness.

Mrs. Kittridge that day had felt the full delicacy of the compliment when she ascertained by a hasty glance, before the first prayer, that the good man had been brought out to her funeral in all his very best things, not excepting the long silk stockings, for she knew the second-best pair by means of a certain skillful darn which Miss Emily had once shown her, which commemorated the spot where a hole had been. The absence of this darn struck to Mrs. Kittridge's heart at once as a delicate attention.

"Mis' Simpkins," said Mrs. Kittridge to her pastor, as they were seated at the tea-table, "told me that she wished when you were going home that you would call in to see Mary Jane; she couldn't come out to the funeral on account of a dreffle sore throat. I was tellin' on her to gargle it with blackberry-root tea--don't you think that is a good gargle, Mr. Sewell?"

"Yes, I think it a very good gargle," replied the minister, gravely.

"Ma'sh rosemary is the gargle that I always use," said Miss Roxy; "it cleans out your throat so."

"Marsh rosemary is a very excellent gargle," said Mr. Sewell.

"Why, brother, don't you think that rose leaves and vitriol is a good gargle?" said little Miss Emily; "I always thought that you liked rose leaves and vitriol for a gargle."

"So I do," said the imperturbable Mr. Sewell, drinking his tea with the air of a sphinx.

"Well, now, you'll have to tell which on 'em will be most likely to cure Mary Jane," said Captain Kittridge, "or there'll be a pullin' of caps, I'm thinkin'; or else the poor girl will have to drink them all, which is generally the way."

"There won't any of them cure Mary Jane's throat," said the minister, quietly.

"Why, brother!" "Why, Mr. Sewell!" "Why, you don't!" burst in different tones from each of the women.

"I thought you said that blackberry-root tea was good," said Mrs. Kittridge.

"I understood that you 'proved of ma'sh rosemary," said Miss Roxy, touched in her professional pride.

"And I am sure, brother, that I have heard you say, often and often, that there wasn't a better gargle than rose leaves and vitriol," said Miss Emily.

"You are quite right, ladies, all of you. I think these are all good gargles--excellent ones."

"But I thought you said that they didn't do any good?" said all the ladies in a breath.

"No, they don't--not the least in the world," said Mr. Sewell; "but they are all excellent gargles, and as long as people must have gargles, I think one is about as good as another."

"Now you have got it," said Captain Kittridge.

"Brother, you do say the strangest things," said Miss Emily.

"Well, I must say," said Miss Roxy, "it is a new idea to me, long as I've been nussin', and I nussed through one season of scarlet fever when sometimes there was five died in one house; and if ma'sh rosemary didn't do good then, I should like to know what did."

"So would a good many others," said the minister.

"Law, now, Miss Roxy, you mus'n't mind him. Do you know that I believe he says these sort of things just to hear us talk? Of course he wouldn't think of puttin' his experience against yours."

"But, Mis' Kittridge," said Miss Emily, with a view of summoning a less controverted subject, "what a beautiful little boy that was, and what a striking providence that brought him into such a good family!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Kittridge; "but I'm sure I don't see what Mary Pennel is goin' to do with that boy, for she ain't got no more government than a twisted tow-string."

"Oh, the Cap'n, he'll lend a hand," said Miss Roxy, "it won't be easy gettin' roun' him; Cap'n bears a pretty steady hand when he sets out to drive."

"Well," said Miss Emily, "I do think that bringin' up children is the most awful responsibility, and I always wonder when I hear that any one dares to undertake it."

"It requires a great deal of resolution, certainly," said Mrs. Kittridge; "I'm sure I used to get a'most discouraged when my boys was young: they was a reg'lar set of wild ass's colts," she added, not perceiving the reflection on their paternity.

But the countenance of Mr. Sewell was all aglow with merriment, which

did not break into a smile.

"Wal', Mis' Kittridge," said the Captain, "strikes me that you're gettin' pussonal."

"No, I ain't neither," said the literal Mrs. Kittridge, ignorant of the cause of the amusement which she saw around her; "but you wa'n't no help to me, you know; you was always off to sea, and the whole wear and tear on't came on me."

"Well, well, Polly, all's well that ends well; don't you think so, Mr. Sewell?"

"I haven't much experience in these matters," said Mr. Sewell, politely.

"No, indeed, that's what he hasn't, for he never will have a child round the house that he don't turn everything topsy-turvy for them," said Miss Emily.

"But I was going to remark," said Mr. Sewell, "that a friend of mine said once, that the woman that had brought up six boys deserved a seat among the martyrs; and that is rather my opinion."

"Wal', Polly, if you git up there, I hope you'll keep a seat for me."

"Cap'n Kittridge, what levity!" said his wife.

"I didn't begin it, anyhow," said the Captain.

Miss Emily interposed, and led the conversation back to the subject.

"What a pity it is," she said, "that this poor child's family can never know anything about him. There may be those who would give all the world to know what has become of him; and when he comes to grow up, how sad he will feel to have no father and mother!"

"Sister," said Mr. Sewell, "you cannot think that a child brought up by Captain Pennel and his wife would ever feel as without father and mother."

"Why, no, brother, to be sure not. There's no doubt he will have everything done for him that a child could. But then it's a loss to lose one's real home."

"It may be a gracious deliverance," said Mr. Sewell--"who knows? We may as well take a cheerful view, and think that some kind wave has drifted the child away from an unfortunate destiny to a family where we are quite sure he will be brought up industriously and soberly, and in the fear of God."

"Well, I never thought of that," said Miss Roxy.

Miss Emily, looking at her brother, saw that he was speaking with a

suppressed vehemence, as if some inner fountain of recollection at the moment were disturbed. But Miss Emily knew no more of the deeper parts of her brother's nature than a little bird that dips its beak into the sunny waters of some spring knows of its depths of coldness and shadow.

"Mis' Pennel was a-sayin' to me," said Mrs. Kittridge, "that I should ask you what was to be done about the bracelet they found. We don't know whether 'tis real gold and precious stones, or only glass and pinchbeck. Cap'n Kittridge he thinks it's real; and if 'tis, why then the question is, whether or no to try to sell it, or keep it for the boy agin he grows up. It may help find out who and what he is."

"And why should he want to find out?" said Mr. Sewell. "Why should he not grow up and think himself the son of Captain and Mrs. Pennel? What better lot could a boy be born to?"

"That may be, brother, but it can't be kept from him. Everybody knows how he was found, and you may be sure every bird of the air will tell him, and he'll grow up restless and wanting to know. Mis' Kittridge, have you got the bracelet handy?"

The fact was, little Miss Emily was just dying with curiosity to set her dancing black eyes upon it.

"Here it is," said Mrs. Kittridge, taking it from a drawer.

It was a bracelet of hair, of some curious foreign workmanship. A green enameled serpent, studded thickly with emeralds and with eyes of ruby, was curled around the clasp. A crystal plate covered a wide flat braid of hair, on which the letters "D.M." were curiously embroidered in a cipher of seed pearls. The whole was in style and workmanship quite different from any jewelry which ordinarily meets one's eye.

But what was remarkable was the expression in Mr. Sewell's face when this bracelet was put into his hand. Miss Emily had risen from table and brought it to him, leaning over him as she did so, and he turned his head a little to hold it in the light from the window, so that only she remarked the sudden expression of blank surprise and startled recognition which fell upon it. He seemed like a man who chokes down an exclamation; and rising hastily, he took the bracelet to the window, and standing with his back to the company, seemed to examine it with the minutest interest. After a few moments he turned and said, in a very composed tone, as if the subject were of no particular interest,--

"It is a singular article, so far as workmanship is concerned. The value of the gems in themselves is not great enough to make it worth while to sell it. It will be worth more as a curiosity than anything else. It will doubtless be an interesting relic to keep for the boy when he grows up."

"Well, Mr. Sewell, you keep it," said Mrs. Kittridge; "the Pennels told me to give it into your care."

"I shall commit it to Emily here; women have a native sympathy with anything in the jewelry line. She'll be sure to lay it up so securely that she won't even know where it is herself."

"Brother!"

"Come, Emily," said Mr. Sewell, "your hens will all go to roost on the wrong perch if you are not at home to see to them; so, if the Captain will set us across to Harpswell, I think we may as well be going."

"Why, what's your hurry?" said Mrs. Kittridge.

"Well," said Mr. Sewell, "firstly, there's the hens; secondly, the pigs; and lastly, the cow. Besides I shouldn't wonder if some of Emily's admirers should call on her this evening,--never any saying when Captain Broad may come in."

"Now, brother, you are too bad," said Miss Emily, as she bustled about her bonnet and shawl. "Now, that's all made up out of whole cloth. Captain Broad called last week a Monday, to talk to you about the pews, and hardly spoke a word to me. You oughtn't to say such things, 'cause it raises reports."

"Ah, well, then, I won't again," said her brother. "I believe, after all, it was Captain Badger that called twice."

"Brother!"

"And left you a basket of apples the second time."

"Brother, you know he only called to get some of my hoarhound for Mehitable's cough."

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"If you don't take care," said Miss Emily, "I'll tell where you call."

"Come, Miss Emily, you must not mind him," said Miss Roxy; "we all know his ways."

And now took place the grand leave-taking, which consisted first of the three women's standing in a knot and all talking at once, as if their very lives depended upon saying everything they could possibly think of before they separated, while Mr. Sewell and Captain Kittridge stood patiently waiting with the resigned air which the male sex commonly assume on such occasions; and when, after two or three "Come, Emily's," the group broke up only to form again on the door-step, where they were at it harder than ever, and a third occasion of the same sort took place at the bottom of the steps, Mr. Sewell was at last obliged by main force to drag his sister away in the middle of a sentence.

Miss Emily watched her brother shrewdly all the way home, but all traces of any uncommon feeling had passed away; and yet, with the restlessness of female curiosity, she felt quite sure that she had laid hold of the end of some skein of mystery, could she only find skill enough to unwind it.

She took up the bracelet, and held it in the fading evening light, and broke into various observations with regard to the singularity of the workmanship. Her brother seemed entirely absorbed in talking with Captain Kittridge about the brig Anna Maria, which was going to be launched from Pennel's wharf next Wednesday. But she, therefore, internally resolved to lie in wait for the secret in that confidential hour which usually preceded going to bed. Therefore, as soon as she had arrived at their quiet dwelling, she put in operation the most seducing little fire that ever crackled and snapped in a chimney, well knowing that nothing was more calculated to throw light into any hidden or concealed chamber of the soul than that enlivening blaze, which danced so merrily on her well-polished andirons, and made the old chintz sofa and the time-worn furniture so rich in remembrances of family comfort.

She then proceeded to divest her brother of his wig and his dress-coat, and to induct him into the flowing ease of a study-gown, crowning his well-shaven head with a black cap, and placing his slippers before the corner of a sofa nearest the fire. She observed him with satisfaction sliding into his seat, and then she trotted to a closet with a glass door in the corner of the room, and took down an old, quaintly-shaped

silver cup, which had been an heirloom in their family, and was the only piece of plate which their modern domestic establishment could boast; and with this, down cellar she tripped, her little heels tapping lightly on each stair, and the hum of a song coming back after her as she sought the cider-barrel. Up again she came, and set the silver cup, with its clear amber contents, down by the fire, and then busied herself in making just the crispest, nicest square of toast to be eaten with it; for Miss Emily had conceived the idea that some little ceremony of this sort was absolutely necessary to do away all possible ill effects from a day's labor, and secure an uninterrupted night's repose. Having done all this, she took her knitting-work, and stationed herself just opposite to her brother.

It was fortunate for Miss Emily that the era of daily journals had not yet arisen upon the earth, because if it had, after all her care and pains, her brother would probably have taken up the evening paper, and holding it between his face and her, have read an hour or so in silence; but Mr. Sewell had not this resort. He knew perfectly well that he had excited his sister's curiosity on a subject where he could not gratify it, and therefore he took refuge in a kind of mild, abstracted air of quietude which bid defiance to all her little suggestions.

After in vain trying every indirect form, Miss Emily approached the subject more pointedly. "I thought that you looked very much interested in that poor woman to-day."

"She had an interesting face," said her brother, dryly.

"Was it like anybody that you ever saw?" said Miss Emily.

Her brother did not seem to hear her, but, taking the tongs, picked up the two ends of a stick that had just fallen apart, and arranged them so as to make a new blaze.

Miss Emily was obliged to repeat her question, whereat he started as one awakened out of a dream, and said,--

"Why, yes, he didn't know but she did; there were a good many women with black eyes and black hair,--Mrs. Kittridge, for instance."

"Why, I don't think that she looked like Mrs. Kittridge in the least," said Miss Emily, warmly.

"Oh, well! I didn't say she did," said her brother, looking drowsily at his watch; "why, Emily, it's getting rather late."

"What made you look so when I showed you that bracelet?" said Miss Emily, determined now to push the war to the heart of the enemy's country.

"Look how?" said her brother, leisurely moistening a bit of toast in his cider.

"Why, I never saw anybody look more wild and astonished than you did for a minute or two."

"I did, did I?" said her brother, in the same indifferent tone. "My dear child, what an active imagination you have. Did you ever look through a prism, Emily?"

"Why, no, Theophilus; what do you mean?"

"Well, if you should, you would see everybody and everything with a nice little bordering of rainbow around them; now the rainbow isn't on the things, but in the prism."

"Well, what's that to the purpose?" said Miss Emily, rather bewildered.

"Why, just this: you women are so nervous and excitable, that you are very apt to see your friends and the world in general with some coloring just as unreal. I am sorry for you, childie, but really I can't help you to get up a romance out of this bracelet. Well, good-night, Emily; take good care of yourself and go to bed;" and Mr. Sewell went to his room, leaving poor Miss Emily almost persuaded out of the sight of her own eyes.