

Lydia Maria Child, "The Black Saxons" Fact and Fiction:
a collection of stories, 1847.

THE BLACK SAXONS.

Tyrants are but the spawn of ignorance,
Begotten by the slaves they trample on;
Who, could they win a glimmer of the light,
And see that tyranny is *always* weakness,
Or fear with its own bosom ill at ease,
Would laugh away in scorn the sand-wove chain,
Which their own blindness feigned for adamant.
Wrong ever builds on quicksands; but the Right
To the firm centre lays its moveless base.—J. R. LOWELL.

MR. DUNCAN was sitting alone in his elegantly furnished parlour, in the vicinity of Charleston, South Carolina. Before him lay an open volume, Thierry's History of the Norman Conquest. From the natural kindness of his character, and democratic theories deeply imbibed in childhood, his thoughts dwelt more with a nation prostrated and kept in base subjection by the strong arm of violence, than with the renowned robbers, who seized their rich possessions, and haughtily trampled on their dearest rights.

"And so that bold and beautiful race became slaves!" thought he. "The brave and free-souled Harolds, strong of heart and strong of arm; the fair-haired Ediths, in their queenly beauty, noble in soul as well as ancestry; these all sank to the condition of slaves. They tamely submitted to their lot, till their free, bright beauty passed under the heavy cloud of animal dullness, and the contemptuous Norman epithet of

'base Saxon churls' was but too significantly true. Yet not without efforts did they thus sink. How often renewed, or how bravely sustained, we know not; for Troubadours rarely sing of the defeated, and conquerors write their own History. That they did not relinquish freedom without a struggle, is proved by Robin Hood and his bold followers, floating in dim and shadowy glory on the outskirts of history; brave outlaws of the free forest, and the wild mountain-passes, taking back, in the very teeth of danger, a precarious subsistence from the rich possessions that were once their own; and therefore styled thieves and traitors by the robbers who had beggared them. Doubtless they had minstrels of their own; unknown in princely halls, untrumpeted by fame, yet singing of their exploits in spirit-stirring tones, to hearts burning with a sense of wrong. Troubled must be the sleep of those who rule a conquered nation!"

These thoughts were passing through his mind, when a dark mulatto opened the door, and making a servile reverence, said, in wheedling tones, "Would massa be so good as gib a pass to go to Methodist meeting?"

Mr. Duncan was a proverbially indulgent master; and he at once replied, "Yes, Jack, you may have a pass; but you must mind and not stay out all night."

"Oh, no, massa. Tom neber preach more than two hours."

Scarcely was the pass written, before another servant appeared with a similar request; and presently another; and yet another. When these interruptions

ceased, Mr. Duncan resumed his book, and quietly read of the oppressed Saxons, until the wish for a glass of water induced him to ring the bell. No servant obeyed the summons. With an impatient jerk of the rope, he rang a second time, muttering to himself, "What a curse it is to be waited upon by slaves! If I were dying, the lazy loons would take their own time, and come dragging their heavy heels along, an hour after I was in the world of spirits. My neighbours tell me it is because I never flog them. I believe they are in the right. It is a hard case, too, to force a man to be a tyrant, whether he will or no."

A third time he rang the bell more loudly; but waited in vain for the sound of coming footsteps. Then it occurred to him that he had given every one of his slaves a pass to go to the Methodist meeting. This was instantly followed by the remembrance, that the same thing had happened a few days before.

We were then at war with Great Britain; and though Mr. Duncan often boasted the attachment of his slaves, and declared them to be the most contented and happy labourers in the world, who would not take their freedom if they could, yet, by some coincidence of thought, the frequency of Methodist meetings immediately suggested the common report that British troops were near the coast, and about to land in Charleston. Simultaneously came the remembrance of Big-boned Dick, who many months before had absconded from a neighbouring planter, and was suspected of holding a rendezvous for runaways, in the swampy depths of some dark forest. The existence

of such a gang was indicated by the rapid disappearance of young corn, sweet potatoes, fat hogs, &c., from the plantations for many miles round.

“The black rascal!” exclaimed he: “If my boys are in league with him”—

The coming threat was arrested by a voice within, which, like a chorus from some invisible choir, all at once struck up the lively ballad of Robin Hood; and thus brought Big-boned Dick, like Banquo’s Ghost, unbidden and unwelcome, into incongruous association with his spontaneous sympathy for Saxon serfs, his contempt of “base Saxon churls,” who tamely submitted to their fate, and his admiration of the bold outlaws, who lived by plunder in the wild freedom of Saxon forests.

His republican sympathies, and the “system entailed upon him by his ancestors,” were obviously out of joint with each other; and the skilfullest soldering of casuistry could by no means make them adhere together. Clear as the tones of a cathedral bell above the hacks and drays of a city, the voice of Reason rose above all the pretexts of selfishness, and the apologies of sophistry, and loudly proclaimed that his sympathies were right, and his practice wrong. Had there been at his elbow some honest John Woolman, or fearless Elias Hicks, that hour might perhaps have seen *him* a freeman, in giving freedom to his serfs. But he was alone; and the prejudices of education, and the habits of his whole life, conjured up a fearful array of lions in his path; and he wist not that they were phantoms. The admonitions of awakened conscience gradually gave place to considerations of per-

sonal safety, and plans for ascertaining the real extent of his danger.

The next morning he asked his slaves, with assumed nonchalance, whether they had a good meeting.

“ Oh, yes, massa ; bery good meeting.”

“ Where did you meet ?”

“ In the woods behind Birch Grove, massa.”

The newspaper was brought, and found to contain a renewal of the report that British troops were prowling about the coast. Mr. Duncan slowly paced the room for some time, apparently studying the figures of the carpet, yet utterly unconscious whether he trod on canvass or the greensward. At length, he ordered his horse and drove to the next plantation. Seeing a gang at work in the fields, he stopped ; and after some questions concerning the crop, he said to one of the most intelligent, “ So you had a fine meeting last night ?”

“ Oh, yes, massa, bery nice meeting.”

“ Where was it ?”

The slave pointed far *east* of Birch Grove. The white man's eye followed the direction of the bondman's finger, and a deeper cloud gathered on his brow. Without comment he rode on in another direction, and with apparent indifference made similar inquiries of another gang of labourers. They pointed *north* of Birch Grove, and replied, “ In the Hugonot woods, massa.”

With increasing disquietude, he slowly turned his horse toward the city. He endeavoured to conceal anxiety under a cheerful brow ; for he was afraid to ask counsel, even of his most familiar friends, in a

community so prone to be blinded by insane fury under the excitement of such suspicions. Having purchased a complete suit of negro clothes, and a black mask well fitted to his face, he returned home, and awaited the next request for passes to a Methodist meeting.

In a few days, the sable faces again appeared before him, one after another, asking permission to hear Tom preach. The passes were promptly given, accompanied by the cool observation, "It seems to me, boys, that you are all growing wonderfully religious of late."

To which they eagerly replied, "Ah, if massa could hear Tom preach, it make his hair stand up. Tom make ebery body tink weder he hab a soul."

When the last one had departed, the master hastily assumed his disguise, and hurried after them. Keeping them within sight, he followed over field and meadow, through woods and swamps. As he went on, the number of dark figures, all tending toward the same point, continually increased. Now and then, some one spoke to him; but he answered briefly, and with an effort to disguise his voice. At last, they arrived at one of those swamp islands, so common at the South, insulated by a broad, deep belt of water, and effectually screened from the main-land by a luxuriant growth of forest trees, matted together by a rich entanglement of vines and underwood. A large tree had been felled for a bridge; and over this dusky forms were swarming, like ants into their new-made nest.

Mr. Duncan had a large share of that animal in-

stinct called physical courage ; but his heart throbbed almost audibly, as he followed that dark multitude.

At the end of a rough and intricate passage, there opened before him a scene of picturesque and imposing grandeur. A level space, like a vast saloon, was enclosed by majestic trees, uniting their boughs over it, in fantastic resemblance to some Gothic cathedral. Spanish moss formed a thick matted roof, and floated in funereal streamers. From the points of arches hung wild vines in luxuriant profusion, some in heavy festoons, others lightly and gracefully leaping upward. The blaze of pine torches threw some into bold relief, and cast others into a shadowy background. And here, in this lone sanctuary of Nature, were assembled many hundreds of swart figures, some seated in thoughtful attitudes, others scattered in moving groups, eagerly talking together. As they glanced about, now sinking into dense shadow, and now emerging into lurid light, they seemed to the slaveholder's excited imagination like demons from the pit, come to claim guilty souls. He had, however, sufficient presence of mind to observe that each one, as he entered, prostrated himself, till his forehead touched the ground, and rising, placed his finger on his mouth. Imitating this signal, he passed in with the throng, and seated himself behind the glare of the torches. For some time, he could make out no connected meaning amid the confused buzz of voices, and half-suppressed snatches of songs. But, at last, a tall man mounted the stump of a decayed tree, nearly in the centre of the area, and requested silence.

“When we had our last meeting,” said he, “I sup-

pose most all of you know, that we all concluded it was best for to join the British, if so be we could get a good chance. But we didn't all agree about our masters. Some thought we should never be able to keep our freedom, without we killed our masters, in the first place; others didn't like the thoughts of that; so we agreed to have another meeting to talk about it. And now, boys, if the British land here in Carolina, what shall we do with our masters?"

He sat down, and a tall, sinewy mulatto stepped into his place, exclaiming, with fierce gestures, "Ravish wives and daughters before their eyes, as they have done to *us*! Hunt them with hounds, as they have hunted *us*! Shoot them down with rifles, as they have shot *us*! Throw their carcasses to the crows, they have fattened on *our* bones; and then let the Devil take them where they never rake up fire o' nights. Who talks of *mercy* to our masters?"

"I do," said an aged black man, who rose up before the fiery youth, tottering as he leaned both hands on an oaken staff. "I do;—because the blessed Jesus always talked of mercy. I know we have been fed like hogs, and shot at like wild beasts. Myself found the body of my likeliest boy under the tree where buckra* rifles reached him. But thanks to the blessed Jesus, I feel it in my poor old heart to forgive them. I have been member of a Methodist church these thirty years; and I've heard many preachers, white and black; and they all tell me Jesus said, Do good to them that do evil to you, and pray for them that spite you. Now I say, let us love our enemies;

* Buckra is the negro term for white man.

let us pray for them ; and when our masters flog us,
and sell our piccaninnies, let us break out singing :

“You may beat upon my body,
But you cannot harm my soul;
I shall join the forty thousand by and by.

“You may sell my children to Georgy,
But you cannot harm their soul;
They will join the forty thousand by and bye.

“Come, slave-trader, come in too ;
The Lord 's got a pardon here for you ;
You shall join the forty thousand by and bye.

“Come, poor nigger, come in too ;
The Lord 's got a pardon here for you ;
You shall join the forty thousand by and bye.

“My skin is black, but my soul is white ;
And when we get to Heaven we 'll all be alike ;
We shall join the forty thousand by and bye.

That's the way to glorify the Lord.”

Scarcely had the cracked voice ceased the tremulous chant in which these words were uttered, when a loud altercation commenced ; some crying out vehemently for the blood of the white men, others maintaining that the old man's doctrine was right. The aged black remained leaning on his staff, and mildly replied to every outburst of fury, “But Jesus said, do good for evil.” Loud rose the din of excited voices ; and the disguised slaveholder shrank deeper into the shadow.

In the midst of the confusion, an athletic, gracefully-proportioned young man sprang upon the stump, and throwing off his coarse cotton garments, slowly turned round and round, before the assembled multitude.

Immediately all was hushed ; for the light of a dozen torches, eagerly held up by fierce revengeful comrades, showed his back and shoulders deeply gashed by the whip, and still oozing with blood. In the midst of that deep silence, he stopped abruptly, and with stern brevity exclaimed, "Boys ! *shall* we not murder our masters ?"

"Would you murder *all* ?" inquired a timid voice at his right hand. "They don't all cruellize their slaves."

"There's Mr. Campbell," pleaded another ; "he never had one of his boys flogged in his life. You wouldn't murder *him*, would you ?"

"Oh, no, no, no," shouted many voices ; "we wouldn't murder Mr. Campbell. He's always good to coloured folks."

"And I wouldn't murder *my* master," said one of Mr. Duncan's slaves ; "and I'd fight anybody that set out to murder him. I an't a going to work for him for nothing any longer, if I can help it ; but he shan't be murdered ; for he's a good master."

"Call him a good master, if ye like !" said the bleeding youth, with a bitter sneer in his look and tone. "I curse the word. The white men tell us God made them our masters ; I say it was the Devil. When they don't cut up the backs that bear their burdens ; when they throw us enough of the grain we have raised, to keep us strong for another harvest ; when they forbear to shoot the limbs, that toil to make *them* rich ; there *are* fools who call them good masters. Why should *they* sleep on soft beds, under silken curtains, while *we*, whose labour bought it all,

lie on the floor at the threshold, or miserably coiled up in the dirt of our own cabins? Why should I clothe my master in broadcloth and fine linen, when he knows, and I know, that he is my own brother? and I, meanwhile, have only this coarse rag to cover my aching shoulders?" He kicked the garment scornfully, and added, "Down on your knees, if ye like, and thank them that ye are not flogged and shot. Of *me* they'll learn another lesson!"

Mr. Duncan recognised in the speaker, the reputed son of one of his friends, lately deceased; one of that numerous class, which southern vice is thoughtlessly raising up, to be its future scourge and terror.

The high, bold forehead, and flashing eye, indicated an intellect too active and daring for servitude; while his fluent speech and appropriate language betrayed the fact that his highly educated parent, from some remains of instinctive feeling, had kept him near his own person, during his lifetime, and thus formed his conversation on another model than the rude jargon of slaves.

His poor, ignorant listeners stood spell-bound by the magic of superior mind; and at first it seemed as if he might carry the whole meeting in favour of his views. But the aged man, leaning on his oaken staff, still mildly spoke of the meek and blessed Jesus; and the docility of African temperament responded to his gentle words.

Then rose a man of middle age, short of stature, with a quick roguish eye, and a spirit of knowing drollery lurking about his mouth. Rubbing his head in uncouth fashion, he began: "I don't know how to

speak like Bob ; for I never had no chance. He says the Devil made white men our masters. Now dat's a ting I've thought on a heap. Many a time I've axed myself how pon arth it was, that jist as sure as white man and black man come togeder, de white man sure to git he foot on de black man. Sometimes I tink one ting, den I tink anoder ting ; and dey all be jumbled up in my head, jest like seed in de cotton afore he put in de gin. At last, I find it all out. White man *always* git he foot on de black man ; no mistake in *dat*. But how he do it? I'll show you how !”

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he took out a crumpled piece of printed paper, and smoothing it carefully on the palm of his hand, he struck it significantly with his finger, and exclaimed triumphantly, “ Dat's de way dey do it ! Dey got de *knowledge* ! Now, it'll do no more good to rise agin our masters, dan put de head in de fire and pull him out agin ; and may be you can't pull him out agin. When I was a boy, I hear an old conjuring woman say she could conjure de Divil out of anybody. I ask her why she don't conjure her massa, den ; and she tell me, ‘ Oh, nigger neber conjure buckra—can't do't.’ But I say nigger *can* conjure buckra. How he do it? Get de knowledge ! Dat de way. We make de sleeve wide, and fill full of de tea and de sugar, ebery time we get in missis' closet. If we take half so much pains to get de knowledge, de white man take he foot off de black man. Maybe de British land, and maybe de British no land ; but tell you sons to marry de free woman, dat know how to read and write ; and tell

you gals to marry de free man, dat know how to read and write; and den, by'm bye, you be de British *yourselves*! You want to know how I manage to get de knowledge? I tell you. I want right bad to larn to read. My old boss is the most begrudgfullest massa, and I know he won't let me larn. So, when I see leetle massa wid he book, (he about six year old,) I say to him, What you call dat? He tell me dat is A. Oh, dat is A! So I take old newspaper, and I ax missis, may I hab dis to rub my brasses? She say yes. I put it in my pocket, and by'm by, I look to see I find A; and I look at him till I know him bery well. Den I ask my young massa, What you call dat? He say, dat is B. So I find him on my paper, and look at him, till I know him bery well. Den I ask my young massa what C A T spell? He tell me cat. Den, after great long time, I can read de newspaper. And what you tink I *find* dere? I read British going to land! Den I tell all de boys British going to land; and I say what you *do*, s'pose British land? When I stand behind massa's chair, I hear him talk, and I tell all de boys what he say. Den Bob say must hab Methodist meeting, and tell massa, Tom going to preach in de woods. But what you tink I did toder day? You know Jim, massa Gubernor's boy? Well, I want mighty bad to let Jim know British going to land. But he lib ten mile off, and old boss no let me go. Well, massa Gubernor he come dine my massa's house; and I bring he horse to de gate; and I make my bow, and say, massa Gubernor, how Jim do? He tell me Jim bery well. Den I ax him, be Jim good boy? He say

yes. Den I tell him Jim and I leetle boy togeder ; and I want mighty bad send Jim someting. He tell me Jim hab enough of ebery ting. Oh, yes, massa Gubernor, I know you bery good massa, and Jim hab ebery ting he want ; but when leetle boy togeder, dere is always someting *here* (laying his hand on his heart). I want to send a leetle backy to Jim. I know he hab much backy he want ; but Jim and I leetle boy togeder, and I want to send Jim someting. Massa Gubernor say, bery well, Jack. So I gib him de backy, done up in de bery bit o' newspaper dat tell British going to land ! And massa Gubernor *himself* carry it ! And massa Gubernor *himself* carry it ! !”

He clapped his hands, kicked up his heels, and turned somersets like a harlequin. These demonstrations were received with loud shouts of merriment ; and it was sometime before sufficient order was restored to proceed with the question under discussion.

After various scenes of fiery indignation, gentle expostulation, and boisterous mirth, it was finally decided, by a considerable majority, that in case the British landed, they would take their freedom *without* murdering their masters ; not a few, however, went away in wrathful mood, muttering curses deep.

With thankfulness to Heaven, Mr. Duncan again found himself in the open field, alone with the stars. Their glorious beauty seemed to him, that night, clothed in new and awful power. Groups of shrubbery took to themselves startling forms ; and the sound of the wind among the trees was like the unsheathing of swords. Again he recurred to Saxon history, and remembered how he had thought that troubled must

be the sleep of those who rule a conquered people. A new significance seemed given to Wat Tyler's address to the insurgent labourers of *his* day ; an emphatic, and most unwelcome application of *his* indignant question why serfs should toil unpaid, in wind and sun, that lords might sleep on down, and embroider their garments with pearl.

“And these Robin Hoods, and Wat Tylers, were my Saxon ancestors,” thought he. “Who shall so balance effects and causes, as to decide what portion of my present freedom sprung from their seemingly defeated efforts? Was the place I saw to-night, in such wild and fearful beauty, like the haunts of the *Saxon* Robin Hoods? Was not the spirit that gleamed forth as brave as *theirs*? And who shall calculate what even such hopeless endeavours may do for the future freedom of this down-trodden race?”

These cogitations did not, so far as I ever heard, lead to the emancipation of his bondmen ; but they did prevent his revealing a secret, which would have brought hundreds to an immediate and violent death. After a painful conflict between contending feelings and duties, he contented himself with advising the magistrates to forbid all meetings whatsoever among the coloured people until the war was ended.

He visited Boston several years after, and told the story to a gentleman, who often repeated it in the circle of his friends. In brief outline it reached my ears. I have told it truly, with some filling up by imagination, some additional garniture of language, and the adoption of fictitious names, because I have forgotten the real ones.

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. "Slavery in New England." By Miss Sedgewick. *Bentley's Miscellany*, vol. 34, 1853, pp. 417-24.

SLAVERY IN NEW ENGLAND.

BY MISS SEDGEWICK.

[p. 417]

Before the American Revolution, slavery extended throughout the United States. In New England it was on a very limited scale. There were household slaves in Boston, who drove the coaches, cooked the dinners, and shared the luxuries of rich houses; and a few were distributed among the most wealthy of the rural population. They were not numerous enough to make the condition a great evil or embarrassment, but quite enough to show its incompatibility with the demonstration of the truth, on which our declaration of Independence is based, that "all men are born equal," and have "an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The slaves in Massachusetts were treated with almost parental kindness. They were incorporated into the family, and each puritan household being a sort of religious structure, the relative duties of master and servant were clearly defined. No doubt the severest and longest task fell to the slave, but in the household of the farmer or artisan, the master and the mistress shared it, and when it was finished, the white and the black, like the feudal chief and his household servant, sat down to the same table, and shared the same viands. No doubt there were hard masters and cruel mistresses, and so there are cruel fathers and exacting mothers: unrestrained power is not a fit human trust. We know an old man, who, fifty years ago, when strict domestic discipline was a cardinal virtue, and "spare the rod and spoil the child" was written on the lintel, was in the unvarying habit, "after prayers" on a Monday morning, of setting his children, boys and girls, nine in number, in a row, and beginning with the eldest, a lad of eighteen, he inflicted an hebdomadal prospective chastisement down the whole line, to the little urchin of three years. And the tradition goes, that the possible transgressions of the week were never underrated—that these were supererogatory stripes for possible sins, or chance misdemeanors!

But this was a picturesque exception from the prevailing mildness of the parental government, and so were the cruelties exercised upon her slaves by a certain Madame A---, who lived in Sheffield, a border-town in the western part of Massachusetts, exceptional from the general course of patriarchal government. This Madame A---- belonged to the provincial gentry, and did not live long enough for the democratic wave to rise to her high-water mark. Her husband, as was, and is, not uncommon in New England, combined the duties of the soldier and the magistrate, and honourably discharged both. He won laurels in "the French war," (the war waged in the Northern British provinces), and wore them meekly. The plan of Providence to prevent monstrous discrepancies, by mating the tall with the short, the fat with the lean, the sour with the

sweet, &c., was illustrated by General A---- and his help-meet. He was the gentlest, most benign of men;

[p. 418]

she, a shrew untameable. He was an 'Allworthy,' or 'my Uncle Toby.' He had pity, tolerance, and forgiveness for every human error. There was no such word as error in Madame A----'s vocabulary. Every departure from her rule of rectitude was criminal. She was the type of punishment. Her justice was without scales as well as blind, so that she never weighed ignorance against error, nor temptation against sin. He was the kindest of masters to his slaves; she, the most despotic of mistresses. Happily for the servile household, those were the days of the fixed supremacy of man. No question of the equality of the sexes had impaired woman's contentment, or provoked man's fear or ridicule. The current of his authority had run undisturbed since first the river Pison flowed out of Eden. No "woman's rights' conventions" had dared to doubt the primitive law and curse, "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee:" so that, as we intimated, the servants of Madame A----, suffering under her despotism, had always a right of appeal to a higher tribunal. Whatever petty tyrannies the magnanimous General might quietly submit to in his own person, he never acquiesced in oppression of his people. Among them was a remarkable woman of unmixed African race. Her name was Elizabeth Freeman, transmuted to "Betty," and afterwards contracted by lisping lips from Mammy Bet, to Mum-Bett, by which name she was best known.

It has since been luminously translated in a French notice, into *Chut Babet*.

This woman,* who was said by a competent judge to have "no superiors and few equals," was the property, "the chattel" of General A----. She had a sister in servitude with her, a sickly timid creature, over whom she watched as the lioness does over her cubs. On one occasion, when Madame A was making the patrol of her kitchen, she discovered a wheaten cake, made by Lizzy the sister, for herself, from the scrapings of the great oaken bowl in which the family batch had been kneaded. Enraged at the "thief," as she branded her, she seized a large iron shovel red hot from clearing the oven, and raised it over the terrified girl. Bet interposed her brawny arm, and took the blow. It cut quite across the arm to the bone, "but," she would say afterwards in concluding the story of the frightful scar she earned to her grave, "Madam never again laid her hand on Lizzy. I had a bad arm all winter, but Madam had the worst of it. I never covered the wound, and when people said to me, before Madam,—' Why, Betty! what ails your arm?' I only answered—' ask missis!" Which was the slave and which was the real mistress?

[p. 419]

She had another characteristic story of the days of her servitude; and she retained so vivid an impression of its circumstances, that when she related them in her old age, the blood of her hearers would curdle in their veins.

"It was in May," she would say, "just at the time of the apple blossoms; I was wetting the bleaching linen, when a smallish girl came in to the gate, and up the lane, and straight to me, and said, without raising her eyes, 'where is your master? I must speak with him.' I told her that my master was absent, that he would come home before night. 'Then I must stay,' she said, 'for I must speak with him.' I set down my watering pot, and told her to come with me into the house. I saw it was no common case. *Gals* in trouble were often coming to master." ('Girls in trouble,' is a definite rustic phrase, indicating but one species of trouble). "But," she continued, "I never saw one look like this. The blood seemed to have stopped in her veins; her face and neck were all in blotches of red and white. She had bitten her lip through; her voice was hoarse and husky, and her eyelids seemed to settle down as if she could never raise them again. I showed her into a bedroom next the kitchen, and shut the door, hoping Madam would not mistrust it, for she never overlooked anybody's wrongdoing but her own, and she had a partic'lar hatred of gals that had met with a misfortin; she could not abide them. She saw me bring the gal in—it was just her luck—she always saw everything. I heard her coming and I threw open the bedroom door; for seeing I could no way hide the poor child—she was not over fifteen—I determined to stand by her. When Madam had got half across the kitchen, in full sight of the child, she turned to me, and her eyes flashing like a cat's in the dark, she asked me, 'what that baggage wanted?' 'To speak to master.' 'What does she want to say to your master?' 'I don't know, ma'am.' 'I know,' she said—and there was no foul thing she didn't call the child; and when she had got to the end of her bad words, she ordered her to walk out of the house. Then the gal raised her eyes for the first time; she had not seemed to hear a word before. She did not speak—she did not sigh—nor sob—nor groan—but a sharp sound seemed to come right out of her heart; it was heart-breaking to hear it.

"'Sit still, child,' I said. At that Madam's temper rose like a thunder-storm. She said the house was hers, and again ordered the gal out of it. 'Sit still, child,' says I again. 'She shall go,' says madam. 'No, missis, she shan't,' says I. 'If the gal has a complaint to make, she has a right to see the judge; that's lawful, and stands to reason beside.' Madam knew when I set my foot down, I kept it down; so after blazing out, she walked away."

One should have known this remarkable woman, the native majesty of her deportment, the intelligence of her indomitable, irresistible will, to understand the calmness of the stranger-girl under her protection, and her sure victory over her hurricane of a mistress.

"When dinner-time came," she continued, "I offered the child

[p. 420]

a part of mine; I had no right to take madam's food and give it to her, and I didn't; but, poor little creature, she could no more eat than if she were a dead corpse; she tried when I begged her, but she could not. Master came home at evening." (It might have been noticed of Mum-Bett, that, to the end of her life, when referring to the days of her servitude, she spoke of General A---- as "my master," and tenderly, "my old master!" but

always of her mistress as "Madam.") "I got speech of master as he was getting off his horse. I told him that there was a poor afflicted gal—a child, one might call her—had been waiting all day to speak to him. He bid me bring her in, after supper. I knew Madam would berate her to master, but that did not signify with him. When he sent word he was ready, I took a lighted candle in each hand, and told the child to follow me. She did not seem frightened; she was just as she was in the morning, 'cept that the red blotches had gone, and she was all one dreadful waxy white.

"We went to the study. Master was sitting in his high-backed chair, before his desk. Master could not scare her, he looked so pitiful. I sets down the candles, walked back to the wall, and stood there; I knew master had no objections,—master and I understood one another. 'Come hither,' says master. The gal walked up to the desk. 'What is your name?'—'Tamor Graham.'—'Take off your bonnet, Tamor.' She took it off. Her hair was brown—a pretty brown, and curly, but all a tangle. Master looked at her." When Mum-Bett got to the point of her story, (every word, as she often repeated it, is "cut in" my memory), the tears started from her eyes, and she quietly wiped them away with the back of her hand. She was not given to tears. They were not her demonstration. "If ever there was a pitiful look," she continued, "it was that look of master's. I can see it yet. 'Now hold up your hand, Tamor,' he said, 'and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God!' She did. 'Sit down now, child,' he said, and drew a chair himself. She kind of fell into the chair, and clasped her hands tight together."

We cannot, and it is not needful for our purpose that we should, go into the particulars of the wretched girl's story. It was steeped in horrors; in homely rustic life, a repetition of the crime of the Cenci tragedy. The girl had knit her soul to her task, and she went unflinching through it.

"Once," said Mum-Bett, "my master stopped her, and said, 'Do you know, child, that if your father is committed, and convicted, on your oath, he must die for the crime?' 'Yes, sir, I know it!' 'You say he has pursued you again and again; why did you not complain before?' 'I escaped, sir,—and for my mother's sake—and my little brother's—poor boy!' and then she burst out like a child, and cried, and cried, and wrung her hands."

After the examination, General A---- gave the girl into Mum-Bett's hands, with orders that every thing should be done for her security and comfort. The father was apprehended—his child was confronted with him. "He was an awful-looking man,"

[p. 421]

Mum-Bett said, "He had short grey hair, but not close cropped, and when I led Tamor in, it rose, and every hair stood stiff and upright on his head. I've seen awful sights in my day, but nothing near to that."

Much corroborative testimony was obtained. There was then no court for capital trials in Berkshire, the county of General A----'s residence. The culprit was transferred to Hampshire to be tried. While Tamor remained at the General's she received a message,

requesting her to come to a sequestered lane at twilight, to meet her mother. Nothing suspecting, she went, and was seized and carried off, by two men, agents of her father, who hoped to escape by abducting the witness. A posse of militia was called out, and she was found in durance, in a hut in the depth of a wood. The mother and child did meet once, and but once. They locked their arms around each other. The mother shrieked—the girl was silent—livid, and when they were parted, more dead than alive.

The father was condemned. The daughter, at her earnest instance, was sent off to a distant province where it was understood she died not long after.

Mum-Bett's character was composed of few but strong elements. Action was the law of her nature, and conscious of superiority to all around her, she felt servitude intolerable. It was not the work—work was play to her. Her power of execution was marvellous. Nor was it awe of her kind master, or fear of her despotic mistress, but it was the galling of the harness, the irresistible longing for liberty. I have heard her say, with an emphatic shake of the head peculiar to her: "Any time, any time while I was a slave, if one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it—just to stand one minute on God's *airth* a free woman—I would."

It was soon after the close of the revolutionary war, that she chanced at the village "meeting house," in Sheffield, to hear the Declaration of Independence read. She went the next day to the office of Mr. Theodore Sedgewick, then in the beginning of his honourable political and legal career. "Sir," said she, "I heard that paper read yesterday, that says, "all men are born equal, and that every man has a right to freedom. I am not a dumb *critter*; won't the law give me my freedom?" I can imagine her upright form, as she stood dilating with her fresh hope based on the declaration of an intrinsic, inalienable right. Such a resolve as hers is like God's messengers—wind, snow, and hail—irresistible.

Her application was made to one who had generosity as well as intelligence to meet it. Mr. Sedgewick immediately instituted a suit in behalf of the extraordinary plaintiff; a decree was obtained in her favour. It was the first practical construction in Massachusetts of the declaration which had been to the black race a constitutional abstraction, and on this decision was based the freedom of the few slaves remaining in Massachusetts.

Mum-Bett immediately transferred herself to the service of her

[p. 422]

champion, if service that could be called, which was quite as much rule as service. She was in truth a sort of nurse—*gouvernante* in his house—an anomalous office in our land.

The children under her government regarded it, as the Jews did theirs, as a theocracy; and if a divine right were founded upon such ability and fidelity as hers, there would be no revolutions. Wider abuses make rebels. Soon after the close of the war, there was some resistance to the administration of the newly organised State Government in Massachusetts. Instead of the exemption from taxation which the ignorant had expected, a heavy imposition was necessarily laid upon them, and instead of the licence they had hoped from liberty, they found themselves fenced in by legal restraints. The Jack Cades banded together; dishonest men misled honest ones; the government was embarrassed; the courts were interrupted; and disorder prevailed throughout the western counties. A man named Shay was the leader; the rising has been dignified as Shay's war. There were some skirmishing, and one or two encounters called battles; but with the exception of a few wounds and three or four deaths, it was a bloodless contest—chiefly mischievous for the fright it gave the women, and the licensed forays of the dishonest and idle, who joined the insurgents. Those who had fancied that equality of rights and privileges would make equality of condition; that the mountains and mole-hills of gentle descent, education, and fortune would all sink before the proclamation of a republic, to one level, were grievously disappointed; and the old war was waged that began with the revolt in Heaven, and has been continued down to our day of socialism. The gentlemen were called the "ruffled shirts;" they were made prisoners wherever the insurgents could lay hands upon them; their houses were invaded, and their moveable property unceremoniously seized by those whose might made their right.

Mr. Sedgewick was a member of the state legislature, and absent from his home on duty, at Boston. His family were transferred to a place free from danger or annoyance; all his family, with the exception of the servants, and one young invalid child, Mum-Bett's pet. Leave her castle she would not, and her particular treasure she felt able to defend. She adopted a rather feminine mode of defence. She drew her bars and bolts, hung over the kitchen fire a large kettle of beer, and sounded her trump of defiance, the declaration that she would scald to death the first invader.

The insurgents knew she would keep her word, and on that occasion they preserved their distance.

The fear of personal molestation having subsided, the family returned to their home. They were not, however, secure from levies by the honest insurgents, and thefts by the dishonest. For them all, Mum-Bett had an aristocratic contempt. She did not recognise their "new-made honour," but accoutered and decked as they were in epaulets and ivy boughs, they were, to her, " Nick Bottom the weaver, Robin Starveling the tailor, Tom Snout the tinker," &c.

[p. 423]

The captain of a company, with two or three subalterns, came to Mr. Sedgwick's with the intent to capture Jenny Gray, a beautiful young mare, esteemed too spirited for any hand but the master of the family, and "gentle as a dog in his hand," Mum-Bett would say. So a cowardly serving man obeyed the order to bring Jenny Gray from the

stable, and saddle and bridle her. Mum-Bett stood at the open house-door, keenly observing the procedure. The captain, with much difficulty, for the animal was snorting and restive, mounted; but whether from an instinct of repulsion, or from some magnetic sign from Mum-Bett (I suspect the latter), she reared and plunged, and threw her unskilled rider on the turf behind her. Again the Captain mounted, and again was thrown; the third time he essayed with like default, then having got some hard bruises, he stood off, and hesitated. While he did so, Mum-Bett started out, unbuckled the saddle, threw it one side, and leading Jenny Gray to a gate that opened into a wide field skirting a wooded, unfenced, upland, she slipped off the bridle, clapped Jenny on the side, and whistled her off, and off she went, careering beyond the hope of Captain Smith, the joiner.

Alas! Jenny Gray was not always so fortunate! One dark night she disappeared from the stable, and the last that was seen of her, she was galloping away into the State of New York, bearing one of the Shay leaders from the pursuit of justice.

On another occasion, when a party of marauders were making their domiciliary visits to the houses of the few gentry in the village, they entered Mr. Sedgwick's, and demanded the key of the cellar. In those days, the distance now traversed in a few hours was a week's journey. The supplies of to-morrow, now sent from New York on the order of to-day, were then laid in semi-annually, and Mr. S.'s cellar was furnished for six months' unstinted hospitality. Mum-Bett led the party, embodying the dignity of the family in her own commanding manner. She adroitly directed their attention first to a store of bottled brown stout. One of the men knocking off the neck of a bottle, took a draught, and pithily expressed his abhorrence of the 'bitter stuff.' 'How should you like what gentlemen like?' she asked in a tone of derision bitterer than the brown stout. 'Is there nothing better here?' they asked. '*Gentlemen* want nothing better,' she answered with contempt, and they, partly disappointed, but more crestfallen, turned back and left untasted, liquor which they would have been as ready as Caliban to swear was 'not earthly,' was 'celestial liquor.' She managed her defensive warfare to the end with equal adroitness. She had secreted the watches and few trinkets of the ladies, and small articles of plate, in a large oaken chest containing her own wardrobe; no contemptible store either. Bett had a regal love of the solid and the splendid wear, and to the last of her long life went on accumulating chintzes and silks.

When, after tramping through the house, they came to Bett's locked chest and demanded the key, she lifted up her hands, and laughed in scorn. "Ah! Sam Cooper," she said, "you and your fellows are no

[p. 424]

better than I thought you. You call me 'wench' and 'nigger,' and you are not above rummaging my chest. You will have to break it open to do it!" Sam Cooper, a quondam broom-pedlar (to whom Bett had pointed out, in their progress, his worthless brooms rotting in the cellar) was the leader of the party. "He turned," she said, "and slunk away like a whipped cur as he was!"

We have marked a few striking points along the course of her life, but its whole course was like a noble river, that makes rich and glad the dwellers on its borders.

She was a guardian to the childhood, a friend to the maturity, a staff to the old age of those she served. More than once, by a courageous assumption of responsibility, by resisting the absurd medical usages of the time, in denying cold water and fresh air to burning fevers, she saved precious lives.

The time came for leaving even the shadow of service, and she retired to a freehold of her own, which she had purchased with her savings. These had been rather freely used by her only child, and her grandchildren, who, like most of their race, were addicted to festive joys.

In the last act of the drama of life, when conscience upheaves the barren or the bloated past, and poor humanity quails, she met death, not as the dreaded tyrant, but as the angel-messenger of God. Some of the "orthodox" pious felt a technical yet sincere concern for her. Even her worth required the passport of "Church Membership." The clergyman of the village visited her with the rigors of the old creed, and presenting the terrors of the law, said, "Are you not afraid to meet your God?" "No, Sir," she replied, calmly and emphatically — "No, Sir. I have tried to do my duty, and I am *not* afraid!" She had passed from the slavery of spiritual conventionalism into the liberty of the children of God.

She lies now in the village burial ground, in the midst of those she loved and blessed; of those who loved and honoured her. The first ray of the sun, that as it rose over the beautiful hills of Berkshire, was welcomed by her vigilant eye, now greets her grave; its last beam falls on the marble inscribed with the following true words:—

"ELIZABETH FREEMAN,
(known by the name of Mum-Bett),
died Dec. 28th, 1829.
Her supposed age was 85 years.

She was born a slave and remained a slave for nearly thirty years. She could neither read nor write; yet in her own sphere she had no superior nor equal. She neither wasted time nor property. She never violated a truth, nor failed to perform a duty. In every situation of domestic trial she was the most efficient helper and the tenderest friend. Good mother, farewell!"

* Our readers may have seen some account of this woman by Miss Martineau, I believe, in her "Society in America;" but as that account was but partial, and by a stranger, I have thought that one more extended, without exaggeration or colouring, in every particular true, might be acceptable at a time when "Uncle Tom's Cabin" has excited curiosity as to the individual character of the African race. It was said, perhaps truly, by that

distinguished man, Charles Follen, that if you could establish the equality of the slave with the master in a single instance, you had answered the argument for slavery furnished by the inferiority of the African race.