

THE BLACK MAN:

HIS ANTECEDENTS, HIS GENIUS, AND
HIS ACHIEVEMENTS.

BY

K.

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give only the last two verses of "Hope and Confidence."

"There's nothing so lovely and bright below,
As the shapes of the purified mind ;
Nought surer to which the weak heart can grow,
On which it can rest as it onward doth go,
Than that Truth which its own tendrils bind.

"Yes, Truth opes within a pure sun-tide of bliss,
And shows in its ever calm flood
A transcript of regions where no darkness is,
Where Hope its conceptions may realize,
And Confidence sleep in the good."

CHARLOTTE L. FORTEN.

IN the autumn of 1854, a young colored lady of seventeen summers, unable to obtain admission into the schools of her native city (Philadelphia) on account of her complexion, removed to Salem, Massachusetts, where she at once entered the Higginson Grammar School. Here she soon secured the respect and esteem of the teachers and her fellow-pupils. Near the end of the last term, the principal of the establishment invited the scholars to write a poem each, to be sung at the last day's examination, and at the same time expressing the desire that the authors should conceal their names. As might have been expected, this drew out all the poetical genius of the young aspirants. Fifty or more manuscripts were sent

in, and one selected, printed on a neat sheet, and circulated through the vast audience who were present. The following is the piece:—

A PARTING HYMN.

When Winter's royal robes of white
From hill and vale are gone,
And the glad voices of the spring
Upon the air are borne,
Friends, who have met with us before,
Within these walls shall meet no more.

Forth to a noble work they go:
O, may their hearts keep pure,
And hopeful zeal and strength be theirs
To labor and endure,
That they an earnest faith may prove
By words of truth and deeds of love.

May those, whose holy task it is
To guide impulsive youth,
Fail not to cherish in their souls
A reverence for truth;
For teachings which the lips impart
Must have their source within the heart.

May all who suffer share their love—
The poor and the oppressed;
So shall the blessing of our God
Upon their labors rest.
And may we meet again where all
Are blest and freed from every thrall.

The announcement that the successful competitor would be called out at the close of the singing, created no little sensation amongst the visitors, to say nothing of the pupils.

The principal of the school, after all parties had taken their seats, mounted the platform, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the beautiful hymn just sung is the composition of one of the students of this school, but who the talented person is I am unaware. Will the author step forward?" A moment's silence, and every eye was turned in the direction of the principal, who, seeing no one stir, looked around with a degree of amazement. Again he repeated, "Will the author of the hymn step forward?" A movement now among the female pupils showed that the last call had been successful. The buzzing and whispering throughout the large hall indicated the intense interest felt by all. "Sit down; keep your seats," exclaimed the principal, as the crowd rose to their feet, or bent forward to catch a glimpse of the young lady, who had now reached the front of the platform. Thunders of applause greeted the announcement that the distinguished authoress then before them was Miss Charlotte L. Forten. Her finely-chiselled features, well-developed forehead, countenance beaming with intelligence, and her dark complexion, showing her identity with an oppressed and injured race, all conspired to make the scene an exciting one. The audience was made up in part of some of the most aristocratic people in one of the most aristocratic towns in America. The impression left upon their minds was great in behalf of the race thus so nobly represented by the granddaughter of the noble-hearted, brave, generous, and venerable James Forten,

whose whole life was a vindication of the character of his race.

“’Tis the mind that makes the body rich ;
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So honor peereth in the meanest habit.”

For several days after the close of the school, the name of Charlotte L. Forten was mentioned in all the private circles of Salem ; and to imitate her was the highest aspiration of the fairest daughters of that wealthy and influential city. Miss Forten afterwards entered the State Normal School, where, in the language of the *Salem Register*, “she graduated with decided eclat.” She was then appointed by the school committee to be a teacher in the Epes Grammar School, where she “was graciously received,” says the same journal, “by parents of the district, and soon endeared herself to the pupils under her charge.” These pupils were all white. Aside from having a finished education, Miss Forten possesses genius of a high order. An excellent student and a lover of books, she has a finely-cultivated mind, well stored with incidents drawn from the classics. She evinces talent, as a writer, for both prose and poetry. The following extracts from her “Glimpses of New England,” published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, are characteristic of her prose. “The Old Witch House,” at Salem, is thus described : —

“This street has also some interesting associations. It contains a very great attraction for all lovers of the olden time. This is an ancient, dingy, yellow frame house, known as “The Old Witch House.” Our readers must know that Salem was, two hundred years ago, the headquarters of the witches. And this is the veri-

table old Court House where the so-called witches were tried and condemned. It is wonderful with what force this singular delusion possessed the minds, not only of the poor and ignorant, but of the wisest and gravest of the magistrates appointed by his majesty's government.

“Those were dark days for Salem. Woe to the housewife or the household over whose door latch the protecting horseshoe was not carefully placed; and far greater woe to the unlucky dame who chanced to be suspected of such fanciful freaks as riding through the air on a broomstick, or muttering mystic incantations wherewith to undo her innocent neighbors. Hers was a summary and terrible punishment. Well, it is very pleasant to think how times have changed, and to say with Whittier, —

‘Our witches are no longer old
And wrinkled beldams, Satan-sold,
But young, and gay, and laughing creatures,
With the heart's sunshine on their features.’

Troops of *such* witches now pass the old house every day. I grieve to say that the ‘Old Witch House’ has recently been defaced and desecrated by the erection of an apothecary's shop in front of one of its wings. People say that the new shop is very handsome; but to a few of us, lovers of antiquity, it seems a profanation, and we can see no beauty in it.”

The hills in the vicinity of Salem are beautifully pictured. “The pure, bracing air, the open sky,” and the sheet of water in the distance, are all brought in with their lights and shades. Along with the brilliancy of style and warmth of imagination which characterize her writings, we find here and there gravity

of thought and earnestness of purpose, befitting her literary taste. Of Marblehead Beach she writes, —

“The beach, which is at some distance from the town, is delightful. It was here that I first saw the sea, and stood ‘entranced in silent awe,’ gazing upon the waves as they marched, in one mass of the richest green, to the shore, then suddenly broke into foam, white and beautiful as the winter snow. I remember one pleasant afternoon which I spent with a friend, gathering shells and seaweed on the beach, or sitting on the rocks, listening to the wild music of the waves, and watching the clouds of spray as they sprang high up in the air, then fell again in snowy wreaths at our feet. We lingered there until the sun had sunk into his ocean bed. On our homeward walk we passed Forest River, a winding, picturesque little stream, dotted with rocky islands. Over the river, and along our quiet way, the moon shed her soft and silvery light. And as we approached Salem, the lights, gleaming from every window of the large factory, gave us a cheerful welcome.”

She “looks on nature with a poet’s eye.” The visit to Lynn is thus given: —

“Its chief attraction to me was ‘High Rock,’ on whose summit the pretty little dwelling of the Hutchinsons is perched like an eagle’s eyrie. In the distance this rock looks so high and steep that one marvels how a house could ever have been built upon it. At its foot there once lived a famous fortune-teller of the olden time — ‘Moll Pitcher.’ She at first resided in Salem, but afterwards removed to Lynn, where her fame spread over the adjoining country far and near. Whit-tier has made her the subject of a poem, which every

one should read, not only for its account of the fortune-teller, but for its beautiful descriptions of the scenery around Lynn, especially of the bold promontory of Nahant, whose fine beach, invigorating sea air, and, more than all, its grand, rugged old rocks, — the grandest I have ever seen, — washed by the waves of old Ocean, make it the most delightful of summer resorts.”

The gifts of nature are of no rank or color; they come unbidden and unsought: as the wind awakes the chords of the Æolian harp, so the spirit breathes upon the soul, and brings to life all the melody of its being. The following poem recalls to recollection some of the beautiful yet solemn strains of Miss Landon, the gifted “L. E. L.,” whose untimely death at Cape Coast Castle, some years since, carried sorrow to so many English hearts: —

THE ANGEL'S VISIT.

’Twas on a glorious summer eve, —
 A lovely eve in June, —
 Serenely from her home above
 Looked down the gentle moon;
 And lovingly she smiled on me,
 And softly soothed the pain —
 The aching, heavy pain that lay
 Upon my heart and brain.

And gently ’mid the murmuring leaves,
 Scarce by its light wings stirred,
 Like spirit voices soft and clear,
 The night wind’s song was heard;
 In strains of music sweet and low
 It sang to me of peace;

It bade my weary, troubled soul
Her sad complainings cease.

For bitter thoughts had filled my breast,
And sad, and sick at heart,
I longed to lay me down and rest,
From all the world apart.

“Outcast, oppressed on earth,” I cried,
“O Father, take me home ;
O, take me to that peaceful land
Beyond the moon-lit dome.

“On such a night as this,” methought,
“Angelic forms are near ;
In beauty unrevealed to us
They hover in the air.

O mother, loved and lost,” I cried,
“Methinks thou’rt near me now ;
Methinks I feel thy cooling touch
Upon my burning brow.

“O, guide and soothe thy sorrowing child ;
And if ’tis not His will
That thou shouldst take me home with thee,
Protect and bless me still ;
For dark and drear had been my life
Without thy tender smile,
Without a mother’s loving care,
Each sorrow to beguile.”

I ceased : then o’er my senses stole
A soothing, dreamy spell,
And gently to my ear were borne
The tones I loved so well ;

A sudden flood of rosy light
 Filled all the dusky wood,
 And, clad in shining robes of white,
 My angel mother stood.

She gently drew me to her side,
 She pressed her lips to mine,
 And softly said, "Grieve not, my child ;
 A mother's love is thine.
 I know the cruel wrongs that crush
 The young and ardent heart ;
 But falter not ; keep bravely on,
 And nobly bear thy part.

"For thee a brighter day's in store ;
 And every earnest soul
 That presses on, with purpose high,
 Shall gain the wished-for goal.
 And thou, beloved, faint not beneath
 The weary weight of care ;
 Daily before our Father's throne
 I breathe for thee a prayer.

"I pray that pure and holy thoughts
 May bless and guard thy way ;
 A noble and unselfish life
 For thee, my child, I pray."
 She paused, and fondly bent on me.
 One lingering look of love,
 Then softly said, — and passed away, —
 "Farewell ! we'll meet above."

I woke, and still the silver moon
 In quiet beauty shone ;

And still I heard amid the leaves
The night wind's murmuring tone ;
But from my heart the weary pain
Forevermore had flown ;
I knew a mother's prayer for me
Was breathed before the throne.

Nothing can be more touching than Miss Forten's allusion to her sainted mother. In some of her other poems she is more light and airy, and her muse delights occasionally to catch the sunshine on its aspiring wings. Miss Forten is still young, yet on the sunny side of twenty-five, and has a splendid future before her. Those who know her best consider her on the road to fame. Were she white, America would recognize her as one of its brightest gems.

WILLIAM H. SIMPSON.

It is a compliment to a picture to say that it produces the impression of the actual scene. Taste has, frequently, for its object works of art. Nature, many suppose, may be studied with propriety, but art they reject as entirely superficial. But what is the fact? In the highest sense, art is the child of nature, and is most admired when it preserves the likeness of its parent. In Venice, the paintings of Titian, and of the Venetian artists generally, exact from the traveller a yet higher tribute, for the hues and forms around him constantly remind him of their works. Many of the citizens of Boston are often called to mention the