

THE WITCH-MARK.

CHAPTER I.

"O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! a brave vessel
Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her;
Dashed all to pieces."

—TEMPEST, Act 1, Scene 2.

"I WISH you wouldn't put our George on board that foreign-bound ship," said a feeble voice to a stout man who puffed a cigar in a chair opposite.

"Well, wife, it is all for the boy's good. He's nothing but a spooney as it is, and 'twill be the making of him. What's the use of making pictures, anyway? He'll just be nothing as he goes on."

At this moment a handsome boy of perhaps eighteen years, with a breezy stir and vivacity, entered, just in time to hear the latter part of what his father said, and he replied to it in a bright, off-hand way, that did not seem in the least spooney-like.

"I guess you are about right, father, in thinking me a good-for-nothing. I'll go, mother; it's only for a year, and, perhaps, it *will* make a man of me." And so it was decided that the youth should visit "foreign ports" in one of his father's ships bound for China.

The staunch ship *Asia* went her voyage, George acting as a sort of supercargo, which would seem to contradict the assertion of his father that he was good for nothing. He was no mean artist, and on the voyage delighted all on board with his ready caricatures of men and events.

All was promising and prosperous till the *Asia* approached the end of her voyage. It was near the period known as the line gale, or equinoctial storm, when off the rock-bound coast of Maine, that the hurricane came upon them in all its terrible might. They were off a long reef of rocks known as the Cuckolds, a heavy wind and tide drifting them thereon. Utter destruction was before them, when a sudden whirl of the furious elements drifted them aside, and dashed them upon the shore within a narrow bay of

comparative safety. The stout ship, riven and tortured by the storm, was driven upon the rocks, and left there her staunch ribs, scattered and helpless. Few of the crew escaped, and among these George Radford, bruised and bleeding, survived the terrible ruin.

He was roused to consciousness by a kindly voice saying, "Take heart, manny; you're all right."

The gale had subsided with the approach of day, and as the glorious luminary blazed upon the still raging billows, and drove afar the black clouds, a sorrowful sight was opened to view: dead and dying men, masses of cargo, and the battered hull of man's most perfect workmanship, looking in its ruin like some beautiful, sentient being overcome by a relentless destiny.

The few inhabitants of the inhospitable region were not unused to these disasters, and afforded all the relief possible in saving the cargo and supplying the wants of the few survivors of the catastrophe. George followed his guide to a hut under the lee of the promontory, where a woman placed him on a rude bed, and ministered as best she could to his suffering condition, dressing his wounds with the cooling leaves of burdock and plantain, infallible panaceas for all human aches and pains. For several days he was too ill to move, but at length he crawled out upon the rocks, where he sat gazing listlessly upon the long reach of ocean, dotted here and there by those rocky islands found along that coast; ragged peaks of granite, many of which were surmounted by their beautiful garniture of trees.

With the eye of an artist he took in the wild, solitary grandeur of the scene, and with the inspiration of the poet, half chanted aloud a rude rhythm to the deep monotone of the unresting ocean. A touch upon his knee arrested his attention, and looking down a small brown hand rested upon it, while its mate softly

tapped his shoulder, and a pair of dark eyes peered into his face, while a childish voice asked :

"Do you feel bad to be cast away?"

"Yes, indeed, I do."

"I am glad of it," she rejoined, with a laugh that was nearer to a sob.

"Who are you, little one? Do you live in this region?"

"I comed here in a big storm, just as you did. Granny says 'tis an evil sign to you and me."

Radford now looked more attentively at the little shape leaning over him—brown-faced, with masses of yellow hair curling and burnt in the sun. A scanty gown, rudely blown away from round limbs, exhibited their symmetry to the knees, while the feet were half hidden by the kelp and sea-weed that covered the rocks. Something strange, weird, and unaccordant with the rudeness of her surroundings sent the blood back to his heart with a feeling of pain, and he tenderly pressed the little figure nearer to his side. At this she drew in a long breath, and, moving slightly back, said :

"Oh, mister, you don't know! I must never let anybody like me. Granny looked hard at you when you didn't know nothing, and she said you was like an angel, but I was—like——"

"Like what?" asked the youth, smiling with a gratified, boyish vanity, and blushing at the same time.

"I mustn't tell; but the wicked man has put his mark on me."

She drew back, and stood erect on her bare feet, planted with peculiar firmness, and, bending her head, fixed her dark eyes upon his face under brows so contracted that they made a straight line above them and across her forehead. It was certainly very peculiar, but by no means unhandsome.

George was lost in studying the face artistically, and made no comment, at which she said :

"You see what it is! All the witches are born with that black mark."

"Well, the witches are born to be very handsome, then."

This innocent flattery was interrupted by the call of Mrs. Hooker, who appeared on the sand below, and beckoned the child to follow her. Radford followed also down the rocks to the little hut nestled below amid junipers and sage and tufts of wormwood and tansy. He now remembered that while he had been ill and helpless, he had heard a child croning rude rhymes, and several times a fresh, warm cheek had been pressed to his own. He had supposed this a mixture of his dreams and not reality, though some of the words she had sung haunted his mind.

He was able now to associate this with the strange child of the rocks, and only wondered that he had seen so little of her. That she was an exotic in this wild region was very evident; and how she should be left here, growing up in utter ignorance, seemed incomprehensible.

CHAPTER II.

"She dwelt amid the untrodden ways,
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."

—WORDSWORTH.

JOSH HOOKER, a low, square-built fisherman, had lived with his wife Sally more than forty years under the hill, which sheltered them from the rough northern winds of that region. A simple-hearted, kindly pair were they, content with the daily round of human necessities and neighborly offices, and devoid of any spark of what is called ambition. Once or twice a year Parson Sawyer, an apostle of the olden time, sculled his little wherry into the cove, and gave them, as best he might, scraps of reading, and what was more, his prayers and benedictions, otherwise their lives might be said to be uneventful.

The great event of their lives was, however, when a heavy storm, ten years before our story, drove the English brigantine *Lingard* ashore, very nearly on the spot where the *Asia* was wrecked. Mr. Hooker said :

"It was just the kind of storm that you

had, and the captain and all on board perished, but—" and he glanced at the little girl, who stood with her arm over his shoulder.

"All but me," she interjected; and contracted her dark, delicate line over the eyes.

"Yes, that's so, Cosset; and the wreck brought us this here bird, this pretty, Mother-Carey chicken."

"Hush, Josh; don't you know Father Sawyer told us not to pamper or berate Pauline?"

"Then her name is Pauline?" said George, admiring the girl's elegant pose and low, white forehead, kept white by overhanging curls.

"Besides, Josh, all the people are afraid of Pauline because of the mark."

Josh answered by a low, incredulous laugh, and drew her nearer to himself, saying, after a pause:

"If it is a witch-mark, I'll take all the mischief upon me that birdie can do," at which the child patted his rough, beard-covered cheek with her small hand.

The superstitions current in the past ages still keep their hold in obscure, solitary hamlets, where this feature of the eyebrows, the presence of a ruby mole, or crook of the little finger, are in our day regarded with superstitious horror by the ignorant. It was plain to be seen that Pauline had been made nervously sensitive by the disfavor of the people around her to the shape of her eyebrows, and she rather increased the intensity of their contour by the habit of involuntary contraction of them.

"Bless my soul!" cried Sally, starting from the settle upon which she was seated netting a fish-net, and hurrying to the door, "if here aint the Parson!"

Father Sawyer was a man of nearly ninety summers—tall, erect, of full but not corpulent size, who for seventy years had given religious instruction to the inhabitants along the coast and islands of north-east Maine. His voice was of that grave, sympathetic kind that wins the heart and inspires respect, while a pair of large, deep-set eyes, under black eyebrows, were of great beauty even now.

"Well, Josh, I heard the shipwreck had brought you another Paul, and so I am here, you see." Saying this, he disengaged a red bandanna from his head, showing a profusion of white, silky hair waving in curls to his shoulders. He now took the hand of George as he had done that of Josh and Sally, held him at arm's length, and scrutinized his face.

"You will do, young man; but as Paul found a viper to fasten on his hand at the shipwreck of Malita, we must see to it that only lambs, perhaps angels, meet you here."

"Amen!" responded George; and, to his surprise, the child uttered an amen also.

"And how is our Mother-Carey chicken? Has she learned her lessons? and can she say her verses, aye?"

"She's a good girl, and l'arns her lessons, Father; but somehow she's so different from us, that I pity the poor lamb."

"Run down to the wherry and bring me a bundle there. I have books and a paper or two, and a plum or so, you shall see," said the Parson.

The child obeyed with alacrity, and when she was gone he took the arm of George, and leading him to a shelf on the rocks, thus addressed him:

"I have lived so long that coming events seem now present, young man, and I foresee that God has designs in your coming here. That poor, bright child, perhaps through it may find help in some way. To take her from Josh would well-nigh break his heart; but Sally, a good creature, loving the child, has still a superstitious fear of her, and this is wrong done her."

"Is there no clue to her history?" interrupted Radford.

"Scarcely any. The mother, like others on board the *Lingard*, was washed on shore so exhausted that it was impossible to restore her, and she died, shielding to the last the poor infant of perhaps two years. I performed the sad rites over the dead, and never a more pitiful one. She must have been a comely woman. She gave the witch-mark to her child, which is not an ill one, to my eyes."

"Nor to mine," answered George. "I am an artist, and can admire Nature in all her manifestations."

The Parson's fine eyes studied the face of his companion, and he at length replied:

"An artist should be nearer to God than other men. I see no evil in your face."

Radford winced a little under this negative praise; perhaps all of us would feel the same. He arose as Father Sawyer did, and followed him up the bank to where a few old pines and hemlocks sighed in the breeze.

"Here," said the elder, "are the graves of the wrecked mariners brought hither by the relentless waves, and here lies the mother of Pauline."

Saying this, he laid his hand upon the head of the child, who had followed silently as they walked to the burial-place.

It was a picturesque scene—one never to be obliterated from the mind of the artist—that long ocean reach, dotted with islands; the hut beneath the junipers, and its semicircle of sand, marking a quiet haven; the old pines over the peaceful graves; the white-haired, saintly minister, and the weird, barefooted child over its mother's grave.

"I named the child Pauline Lingard, remembering the shipwrecked apostle, and in memory of the lost vessel, and I sprinkled baptismal water upon her brow, thus making her a lamb of Christ Jesus our Lord. I must be away now, young man, for I came only to look after my little lamb, not knowing what might be."

"I must go, too," replied the youth; "but I feel a strange interest in this child."

"That is natural. You are in your first youth, nearer boyhood than manhood, and she is near maidenhood. She is good, and fair to the eye. Luckily, our fisher-boys are afraid of her. I look to you, young man, to interest yourself in her behalf."

Radford colored deeply, foreseeing a

difficulty because of the ignorance of the girl, to say nothing of the many obstacles that all at once sprang to view. Perceiving his hesitation, Father Sawyer resumed:

"I would by no means have her go hence at present; but her guardians are old and scarcely the kind to well foster so elegant a plant. She has intimations of blood unknown to theirs, and has vague longings and desires that can have no fruition in her present environments. But I must away before turn of tide. Think of what I have said."

Radford lingered several weeks after this interview: he hardly knew why, for his parents had urged his return home, and the weather was cold and inclement. Pauline was much of the time clambering the rocks with him, and pointing out objects of interest that would otherwise have escaped him. When the air was soft, the two rowed out among the rocks and islands of the bay, fished in the waters, and gathered shells and seaweed along the shore. It was a life of enchantment to the young artist, who was growing daily more and more wrapt in the companionship of the barefooted child, whose blush glowed warmly through the sun-burned cheek as her companion touched her hand in the man-agement of the boat, or lifted her over the sharp edges of the cliff. At length he awoke to consciousness.

"I must go away, Pauline; and when I am gone you will forget me."

"Why should I forget you?" she returned, contracting her dark brows, and fixing her large eyes upon his face.

"Why should you remember me, Pauline? You will be wife some day to one of these fishermen, and die like the rest of them, and be buried under the pines."

The oar dropped from the hands of the little maid, and the boat gave a great lurch. Starting to her feet, she cried rather than spoke:

"Never, never! When you are gone, I will go to the top of Baldhead and throw myself into the sea."

CHAPTER III.

"The fairest face hath never brought
Its fairest look—the deepest thought
Is never into language wrought."

—E. OLIVES SMITH.

"THAT is a strange face you are so fond of sketching, George," said his mother, holding a drawing up to the light.

"How do you like it, mother?"

"I am no judge in such things; but it seems to me I should be afraid of it. I suppose it is one of your ideals that lives only in the fancy of an artist."

"Not in the least. It is a true portrait, and not half so beautiful as the girl herself."

"Why, George, can it be the bare-footed girl of the wreck! Poor thing! she must be dreadfully out of place where she is."

"That is true, mother; and I reproach myself that I have not tried to provide for her elsewhere."

"George, George, do not think of her. She must be totally demoralized by the life among those ignorant fishermen."

George pondered over his mother's words, knowing her pride of caste, and her repugnance to everything aside from her daily routine; but none the less was he determined to see Pauline once more.

It was now the Indian summer, that beautiful escapade of Nature by which she strives to renew again the beauties of the year. Two years had elapsed—two busy years of study by which he had endeavored to efface from his mind the barefooted maid of the rocks. He was often from home long intervals, in which amid the wildest scenery he sought materials for his art. Many faces grew under his pencil, and many a dull, common one took a line of beauty borrowed from that of Pauline.

It was a day of peculiar loveliness as the young artist idly propelled his boat in the direction of Baldhead, around the shoulder of which nestled the hut of Joshua Hooker. His heart beat quickly as he approached, and looking up he beheld a tall, slender figure standing on the beetling rock and gazing seaward. It

was Pauline. Rounding the cape, his keel grated upon the sand, and he mounted the rock. He met her on her descent, and extended his hands with a warm greeting, which she returned with a faint—

"Come at last!" and burst into tears.

"You have missed me, then, Pauline?" he answered, taking her hand, which was icy cold. She was rudely clad, but nothing could disguise the wondrous beauty which the two years had developed. Sally met them on the sands, having, it seemed, come in search of her *protégé*.

"Ah, Mr. George," she said, "I am glad you have come. Father Sawyer said you would come back," and she glanced furtively at Pauline, who hastened onward in silence.

"I fear she is not well," said the other.

"She must go from this place. She has no companions here, and Joshua says she will die."

"I will not die; why should I?" said the girl.

"Surely, no; surely, no."

This was said by Josh Hooker, who took the arm of Pauline, and led her homeward.

Weeks passed away, and still the artist lingered. The cold November rains came down, and still he sat at twilight in the lurid light of the fisherman's hut—a fire made of the drift-wood from many a gallant ship wrecked along the coast.

Pauline had recovered something of her gayety, but was more reserved than in former times, while her beauty of form and face were greatly augmented. George saw this with the eye of an artist, not that of a lover, hence he joined in all her innocent pursuits, with no quickening of the pulse and no anxieties for the future.

A looker-on might have observed his long interviews with the foster parents of Pauline quite into the night, long after the lights in the few cottages along the coast were extinguished; and now Josh and Sally began to talk of going abroad—even visiting Bath and Portland before the winter set in, and Pauline was to go with them. Some little finery and more

comfort was apparent in the dress of the latter also, before George took his leave, as it was needful for him to do.

Not long after the return home of the artist, he was one day startled by the sudden entrance of Mrs. Radford into his studio, who exclaimed :

"Good gracious! Some queer people down-stairs are asking for *you*—an old man and woman who might have come out of Noah's Ark, and a tall girl in short petticoats, and hair all over her face."

George smiled consciously, and hastened below, followed by his mother. The three visitants rose at his entrance, and each shook him by the hand, the girl barely extending her fingers.

"Mother," he said, "these are the kind people who befriended me after the shipwreck"; and, leading Pauline forward, he added, "and this is Pauline, of whom you have heard me speak."

A bright smile illumined the face of the girl at these words, and even Mrs. Radford felt its sweetness, for she put back the curls from the brow, and kissed her cheek, at which Josh exclaimed :

"Oh, ma'am, you can not but love her, and it will nigh break our old hearts to part with her!"

The mother glanced at George, and then at the group before her, only in part comprehending the meaning of it; but the entrance of Capt. Radford set all right. He warmly greeted the family; thanked them for the care they had extended to his property, more than all to his son. He surveyed Pauline from head to foot, muttering: "So-ho! a handsome maid, George, ah! Makes a good picture, ah!"

"These people mean to leave her here, I think," his wife whispered in his ear.

"Why not? why not? Room enough. Will be company for you, wife."

Mrs. Radford looked aghast. A sea of troubles arose in her mind's eye. But it was at length decided that Pauline should remain, and Josh and Sally, weeping like two children, took their departure, laden with gifts, and books and other donations for the good Parson Sawyer.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE RADFORD, wedded to his art, was heart-safe, so far as Pauline was interested, and thus several years elapsed, during which she had matured to higher loveliness. To the many graces of maidenhood were added the sweetest of tempers, and so many winning ways that Mrs. Radford declared she was losing the witch-mark.

"I really hope that will not be," replied her son, thoughtfully.

In the meanwhile, he had painted a picture, entitled "The Witch of the Wreck." It was gorgeous in coloring, and rich in suggestion. A wild, savage coast, beaten by the sea, and overhung with black clouds; a headland of bald rock, upon which was drifting a splendid ship, her masts and spars and ropes made visible by the light streaming from above and emanating from a figure in the center of the vessel. This figure was a woman, dark-eyed and radiant in the glow of supreme youth and beauty. One hand held back her masses of golden hair, and the other was arched over her brow, as if to aid the eyes that peered into the blackness of the night. The strong wind swept aside her scanty garments, revealing the rich contour of limb and the half uncovered bust. It was in the eyes, the hair, the brow upon which the artist had expended the depths of his art. The latter was contracted in the intensity of the gaze, making a straight, black line over eyes so deep, so brilliant, that the observer grew spell-bound before them.

George Radford, whose reputation had become confirmed as an artist of power, was desirous to exhibit this picture abroad. Accordingly, when his wish became known, letters of introduction were supplied him, and he made his way to the great city of London. Nor was he disappointed there in the impression made by his master-piece. Thousands flocked to admire "The Witch of the Wreck," hardly knowing which most to commend, the wonderful landscape, if so it might be called, or the gorgeous beauty

of the figure posed in the midst of the impending ruin. "Beautiful, exceedingly!" went from lip to lip, and orders poured in upon the American artist.

At length the fame of the picture reached the ears of Sir Ralph Dinsmore, a once popular member of Parliament, but long since living in seclusion, owing, it was believed, to the sudden death of a beloved wife, and loss of a no less beloved daughter. A moody, taciturn man, he rarely left the boundary of his estate, busying himself as best he might in agriculture, and in promoting the welfare of his tenants. Forced by some contingency to go to London, he took occasion to visit the Gallery of Fine-Arts, where was exhibited the work of the artist. He gave a careless glance at first, absorbed in the rich, warm light of the picture.

Suddenly he started. A deathly pallor spread over his face, and he staggered to one side; recovering himself, he grasped the arm of Radford, and essayed to speak, but words would not come. At length, as if aroused from the stupor of an incubus, he faltered out:

"Who is the original? Where is she?"

The artist endeavored to quiet him, and evaded a direct reply.

"Is she alive? Is she in England?"

"Why do you ask? What is it to you who is the original, if such ever existed?"

The question invaded the monopoly he held in the original.

"Tell me the name of the girl, if nothing more," persisted the other.

"She was found in a fisherman's hut, and is called Pauline."

"A fisherman's daughter! Never, with that look and face!" and he turned away with a weary movement as of one whose last hope is blighted. Radford took his arm, and led him to a private room.

We must now return to Portland, where events demand our attention. Capt. Radford, as may be inferred, was a man of wealth, largely interested in commerce, and of a liberal, generous make, willing to enjoy life as it passed in a sensible and indulgent way. The reputation of George abroad gratified him

more than he was willing to confess, despite his general contempt for picture-making. But, as he said, "Pauline was an uncommon fine girl, and worth making a picture of."

In the way of business, a ship of which he was mostly owner was bound for England, and he determined to take a voyage in her, accompanied by Mrs. Radford and Pauline. They would see the world, and see George, and see how "The Witch of the Wreck" looked in the fogs of London. Accordingly, they arrived, and, not finding the artist in his studio, went at once to the exhibition gallery. They were shown to the private room to which George had led the Baronet, and with whom he was in conversation.

Pauline's rich, radiant beauty lighted up the little somber apartment as she entered, casting aside her bonnet at the same time, with a pretty, girlish art, willing to make her advent charming. Greetings—warm, unconventional, American greetings—were exchanged, Pauline presenting her cheek for the family kiss. For the first time in his life, the pulse of the artist thrilled at the touch of the velvet cheek. For the first time she was not merely an object of artistic beauty, but a warm embodiment of that maiden grace and loveliness which no manful eye can look upon with indifference.

Sir Ralph slowly arose to his feet upon the entrance of the family, scarcely obtruding a glance, and, with well-bred courtesy, was about to retire, when something in the voice of Pauline arrested him. He turned sharply about, and then seizing her arm gazed upon her face. This apparent rudeness caused her to recoil from him with the witch-mark upon her brow as defined as in her earlier days.

"Mary Greame! Can it be? Speak! From whence are you?"

"Pauline Lingard," replied the girl, in a low voice, won to a feeling of pity for the distressed Baronet.

"Thou art my child—my child!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "That is the Dinsmore mark upon your brow—the witch-mark of vulgar minds."

Pauline shrank from his embrace. She glanced at George, at Capt. Radford, and then, with a graceful movement, laid her head upon the shoulder of the latter, bursting into tears.

"Pauline Lingard! 'Lingard!' That was the name of the ship in which my daughter embarked, and was never heard from after leaving port. The brigantine *Lingard*."

The whole now flashed over the mind of Pauline, and she exclaimed:

"Oh, George! George! Why did I ever leave the hut under the rocks? Take me back, father! Take me back! Let me die with you!" and she clung to the neck of Capt. Radford, who, disengaging her arms, laid her almost fainting in those of his wife.

"A fatal, fatal work is mine," whispered the artist, turning away.

"Let us hope not," said the Baronet. "Let me relate what transpired nearly twenty years ago. The captain of my yacht was a fine, manly fellow, who for several years was my companion in excursions to the South of Europe, along the northern shores of Scotland, and the Hebrides. Quick of thought, handsome in person, and in every way endearing himself to me, I forgot that these same qualities might make their way to the heart of a young girl."

Pauline bent her witch-look earnestly upon the speaker, who, gazing at her, said:

"There, with such a face, such a look, Mary often sat at the feet of her mother, and lured away the heart of Donald Greame. I saw it all when it was too late."

"Why talk in this wise, sir?" broke in Capt. Radford. "A true-hearted sailor is fit for a queen, letting alone an idle hussy lolling on shipboard."

The Baronet, unused to American views in this relation, showed the witch-mark across his brow, eyeing the speaker with puzzled scrutiny.

"Go on, sir; let us hear how it ended," continued the Captain. Turning, at the same time, to his son, he muttered:

"George is no interloper, at home or abroad."

"There is little more to tell. The lovers were married with my consent, and he took charge of a fine, fast-sailing vessel, in which Mary went with him several years. This brigantine was named *Lingard*, a beautiful craft, fitted out with all the appliances that wealth could furnish to make a home for wife and child, and the latter must be the beautiful Pauline Lingard, the witch of the wreck. They embarked for Quebec, and from that day to this no tidings ever came of her."

It was now Capt. Radford's turn to give the supplement of the story, which he did briefly as he had learned it from his son. As he closed, he laid his hand tenderly on the head of Pauline, saying:

"I don't know your laws in things of this kind: they are bad enough, I have no doubt; but I will say this much: you shall never take this girl away from us against her will," and he brought down a heavy boot with emphasis.

"The Dinsmore mark must have its way," returned Sir Ralph. "Pauline, will you not give your relative one kiss before he resigns you to others?"

At these words the artist sprang to his feet, and, trembling with emotion, he raised Pauline, and, leading her to her relative, the two knelt down with bowed heads. He spread his hands over them in blessing, saying:

"What God hath joined together, by so many and inscrutable ways, let not man put asunder."

And thus the witch of the rock became the wife of the artist, and many times the now happy Sir Ralph visited the old scene of disaster. He built a granite memorial under the pines on the hill-side, where slept the mother of Pauline, and in memory of the gallant dead. Josh and his wife were not forgotten, nor the apostolic Parson Sawyer; and thus our brief story ends, with the golden threads rewrought in the destinies of those that survived the shipwrecks.

E. IZABETH OAKES SMITH.