

Carlisle Herald and Expositor.

A FAMILY NEWSPAPER—DEVOTED TO GENERAL INTELLIGENCE, ADVERTISING, POLITICS, LITERATURE, MORALITY, AGRICULTURE, ARTS AND SCIENCES, AMUSEMENT, &c. &c.

EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY J. LEADER, TUESDAY, MAY 15, 1816.

VOLUME XVI.

NUMBER 21.

SUBJECT TABLE.

From Godey's Magazine for May.

GERTRUDE; OR, THE FATAL PROPHETY.

BY JOSEPH M. CHANDLER.

Clouds of dark blood shall blot the sun's broad light,
And through the universe, like shroud the world to
night.
The pale and dreary ray, the dead moon gleams,
As lone long stars diffuse an angelic beam,
Woms rock the sky, and earth, and ocean tremble,
A clang of thunder, like the shuddering roar,
Is heard the length thunders from the Almighty throne.
A voice irreverent.—*It is done!*

It was a delightful morning, Sunday, the 1st of May, 1812. Two young persons were seen walking across the fields in the northern part of Philadelphia, in that free exchange of thought, which even a stant observer denoted something more than acquaintance existing between the parties; especially if, as in the present case, they were a young man and young woman.

When the young people were walking, thousand flowers were springing up to redden to the morning, and to add riot to the site dy rich herbage of the old fence after fence was crossed, but they purged their way northwesterly towards Broad street, indifferent to the obstacles which the enclosures presented to their progress, and seeming much more occupied with the subject of conversation than the loveliness of the scene around them, lying in all the luxuriance of early vegetation, bathed in the newly shed light of Sabbath sun. The scene had changed since that pair formed a part of it. The city has increased, and its overbearing population had laid out streets, erected houses, and forbidden a blade of grass where there only a farm house dotted the luxuriance of the outspread meadows; and Broad street, which the party soon reached, was a dusty road, in its whole length across the city. The few dwellings erected near its line seemed to have been built without regard to street regulation, with reference to those conveniences which are looked for in farm houses, or emporium country residences.

The pair emerged from the fields near the lane that once passed through Green Hill farm, and standing beneath one of those beautiful elms that looked abroad upon the distant city, undisturbed by the hum of business, or the senseless clatter of dissipated amusements. The morning sun was shedding its beams, and light columns of smoke were here and there struggling up through the atmosphere. Between the couple and the city lay a broad expanse of fields, whose greenness added to the loveliness of the scene, and invited the heart to a contemplation of that power, whose hand had garnished the heavens with its curtains of blue, and mantled the verdure of the field with the beauties of a host of lowly and lovely flowers.

'If we have to return at your proposal,' said the young woman 'by the way of Centre Square, we would better move on or we shall be too late for church.'

'But before we go let us conclude upon a day,' said the young man.

'There is no necessity; when you return we will appoint the day.'

'Let us fix on now. While I am absent—let me feel that there is an appointed time—that only so many days can intervene; that these passed and you will be mine.'

'But consider,' said the young woman thoughtfully, 'you may not arrive in season, and a postponement is ominous of evil; you know that it is.'

'I do not know much about such signs; but we'll fix the day; so that if I arrive at all I must arrive before the time, the journey never exceeds three weeks. This is the 3d of May, and we will say the 4th of June.'

'But that was no response.' If any one had been listening he might have heard something like a kiss. 'It is agreed then,' said William.

'Why,' said the young woman, 'the whole morning you have been making propositions to me; and before I could get time to say no you have fallen to kissing me, and said that meant yes.'

'Well,' said the youth, 'we'll make it the 4th of June; since I do not find that you say no, when I have done kissing.'

Gertrude, for the first time took the proffered arm of the young man, and they set forward towards Centre Square. The heart of the youth beat stronger, and his footfall was firmer; there was an important movement made, and he felt easier in his mind—happier, he was safe, he was secure, and Gertrude had given him a lead, and she felt that the engagement for a life of happiness was made.

Blessings upon the pair!—they had a parent's consent to their marriage, and that of their friends; and they have listened, and their parents approved their choice, and of its result, without any opposition.

The same afternoon, the young man and woman—had a quiet interview, and it has nothing to do

such a consideration—but the heart is lighted at the moment when it conquers the obstacles to entire freedom of action, and triumph. In an engagement, there is neither timidity nor rashness. Every thought is pure and every desire is holy—the rapid gush of blood through the veins, is the result of mental pleasure; and, for once at least, the heart owns that it is satisfied.

The name of Centre Square, in those days, was one of those misnomers with which the highways and pleasure grounds of our city abound. The place was vast circular piece of ground enclosed with neat railings, and supplied with a considerable abundance of Corinthian and Lombardy poplars. In the middle of this circle stood the Centre House, a beautiful edifice, used for the elevation of water brought from the Schuylkill in a subterranean aqueduct, to a height sufficient to supply the city.

Half way between the eastern front of the centre house, and the entrance to the Square, was a small circular enclosure, in the centre of which stood one of Rush's finely carved female figures, holding over her shoulder, a bird from whose mouth issued a stream of water, while around the image were little jets—whose gushing streams purified the air, and by their gentle murmurs gave a dreamy influence to their progress. It was one of much resort, and thousands flocked there as they now do to the Washington and Franklin Squares. There were held in those days the sports of children, and there the orgies of the Fourth of July were celebrated.

Gertrude and William had nearly reached Centre Square, when they discovered that there was an unusual crowd assembled. 'Let us turn aside,' said she, 'there seems to be something like a riot in the Square.'

They paused, and the sounds of sacred music reached their ear. 'There is preaching,' said William, 'or worship at least; let us see who and what are they.'

The couple entered the square by the 'turn-stile' at the North side, and found a vast collection of persons, between the centre house and the little fountain already mentioned, and as they reached the outer edge of the crowd, the last words of the hymn had been sung, and all eyes turned at once towards the building, as if expectant of the appearance of some distinguished person.

In a few minutes, a man of gigantic proportions, rose slowly from the crowd, and took his stand upon the upper step of the Centre house, his position was sufficiently elevated to show the whole of his form. He was more than six feet in height, and his frame of proportionate size—though the flesh, seemed attenuated by mental efforts. His long black hair slightly motley by age, was parted from the centre of his head top, and thrown over his shoulder. His beard hung far down his breast, while his dark eyes seemed to wander with the restlessness of insanity.

The dress of the strange individual was outre in the extreme, and a loose black wrapper or gown was thrown over the whole, with an air that seemed to mock all ideas of that clerical propriety, which it was evidently intended to imitate.

When the crowd had settled into an easy standing position, for seats were not thought of—the strange man drew himself up to his utmost height, and cast his eye around upon his audience.

He then elevated his right hand, in which he held a small copy of the Bible, into which his fore finger was thrust, while the other fingers and the thumb were used to press together the parted portions of that sacred book.

The crowd was breathlessly noiseless. And the man began.

'The world,' said the preacher, 'which I have selected for your consideration this morning, and which will appropriately introduce my remarks, you will find recorded in the Second Chapter of the Prophecy of Joel, and in the 1st verse:

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'You do not believe the fellow, do you?' asked William.

'I did not before, for I have heard much of him and his prophecy. But, somehow, it seemed today as if the truth of every word he uttered was responded to by my own heart—and did you mark the day he designated?'

'No, I did not pay particular attention, but it was something about the Sixth month; which is that?

'It is June, William, and he said on the evening of the fourth of June.'

'Why, this is the very time we have just agreed on for our wedding day.'

'It is indeed—and as the preacher named it, that it seemed as if I felt doubly the truth of all he uttered.'

William saw that Gertrude was deeply affected by the discourse of the prophecy, and especially by the coincidence of the day; he therefore prudently forbore further remark.

It was not long before the family of Gertrude discerned that something was preying upon her mind; and, loving her as they did, it was not strange that they should have inquired, and found out the cause.

Meantime William entered upon his journey, taking leave of Gertrude in the affectionate assurance that he would return at least one week before the time appointed for their nuptials, and claim the fulfilment of her promise.

The preaching of Nimrod Hughes, and his emphatic prophecy, were not without effect, even beyond the household of Gertrude's parents, especially in the interior counties of the State, not then, now, accessible by rail-roads and canals. This prophet of destruction had been for more than a year lifting up his voice in the rich valleys of our Commonwealth, and making the mountains echo with his terrible denunciation; and such had been the effects of his labors, his preaching, and his explanation of scriptural prophecies, and types and his own foretelling, that thousands took up the idea and became convinced that al. signs now indicated the consummation of earthly affairs, and the utter sweeping away of the human race. To such an extent had the doctrine gained credence, that we are told in many towns the framers in the Asylum refused to hear some better informed person attempt to prove that the prophecy could not be fulfilled. In some parts of the town industry ceased, and people paused to await the result of the day—unwilling to be found in the midst of active employment—and yet ashamed if the event should not take place to be detected in any act of special devotion.

In a few churches there was continued worship, and in many houses the voice of prayer was heard continually rising.

The family of Gertrude were willing to pay a respectful deference to the fears of one part of their neighbors, and the confidence of the other part. They would, at any rate, have postponed the wedding, but for the "bad sign" which such an presents. They therefore proceeded, timidly, but constantly, in the preparations which are never entirely completed, until the event takes place. The hour of noon had passed. The white satin dress of the bride, (rather an extravagant article in the family,) was laid out. The little wreath entwined with orange flowers, was above it. Around were the appliances of the bridal hour, and near were the attendants of the bridal pair. And William had come up, to take possession of his new home, and prepare himself for the trying ceremony.

Men were now seen at the corners of the streets, talking gravely of the prophet and his prophecy; and while some ridiculed the whole, it was remarked that they cast furtive glances to different parts of the horizon, to see whether any signal of danger presented itself, even if "no bigger than a man's hand." But none was seen. The heat of the day, meantime, grew more and more oppressive. The slight breeze of the morning had died away; and there came up from the street pavements a reflected heat, parching and dry, like that of a furnace. It was almost impossible to continue abroad, so fiercely did the sun pour down his rays.

'It is now four o'clock, my daughter,' said Mrs. Schaefer with a smile to Gertrude, 'and there does not seem to be any signs of the fulfilment of Nimrod's prophecy.'

Gertrude, who was sitting near a bed upon which was spread out her nuptial robe, looked up inquiringly. Mrs. Schaefer repeated her remark.

'On the sixth month,' said Gertrude, solemnly repeating the language of the prophet; 'on the fourth day of that month, and on the evening of that day—'

'Mother, is it evening yet?'

'It is evening after mid-day,' said Mrs. Schaefer.

'But, mother, is it not evening also until midnight?'

Mrs. Schaefer turned to make some arrangements, and directed the attendants to prepare Gertrude, with the exception of the gown, which had been prepared for her, to be dressed, and her nuptial hour, and cast in shadow on what should have been lighted with clear sunshine of youth's bright hope. I have heard those who were with her at these times, say a cloud appeared upon her highly polished forehead, and every smile was checked as if treasonable to some hidden woe.

Meantime the day of Gertrude's marriage was approaching—time flies apace, and will continue to fly though, its end be full in sight—and the people of Philadelphia, though occupied with trade and professional calling, though marrying and giving in marriage, still remembered the prophet, a few of them, indeed, suffered it to interfere with their plans, but all seemed to look for the 4th of June as some appointed day as to the approach of an eclipse, no one permitting his occupation, while every one from time to time casts his eyes upward, to see whether the phenomenon is yet visible. Merchants talked of the prophecy at the Coffee-house—it was discussed by the laborer in the midst of his toil, out the woman made it a theme of continued discourse, wondering some of them whether the day would begin to be evidently with secret forebodings. Suddenly a cry was heard, and all eyes were turned towards the south-west, where was seen sweeping up the horizon a thick dark cloud. It is not entirely black, but is marked with yellowish streaks, the edges of which are jagged and wild, and the ascent was rapid. If it were the "sign" of the prophet, it was indeed a fearful omen.

William and Gertrude left the square arm in arm, and in perfect silence. When they had reached the side-walk in Market street, towards Thirteenth, William said:

'The old fellow seemed to be in earnest; his prophecies change, I would rather have heard his calculations, so as to know whether they were according to Hamilton Moore.' (Hamilton Moore was a man who had written a book on the prophecies, and had published it in New York, and was well known for his accuracy.)

After a short pause, Gertrude replied,

'William, I have heard many calculations.'

William had never been compelled to talk of the prophecies, and he did not like to do so.

'The same calculations as the old fellow's—

—there was not an absence of affection, still less any apparent inclination to be released from the engagement into which she had entered, but she manifested a solemnity of feeling when conversing of the approaching wedding that seemed more appropriate, to some agonizing scene; still she was the same kind, thoughtful, affectionate girl, that William had wooed, and won, and his heart was as much knotted with her as when in the loveliness of a May morning she had consented to be his bride.

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