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From Godey's Lady's Book, for May.

GERTRUDE;
OR
The Fatal Prophecy.
A STORY OF THE END OF THE WORLD.

BY JOSEPH R. CHANDLER.

Clouds of dark blood shall blot the sun's broad light,
Spread round the immense, and shroud the wild in night;
With pale and dreadful ray, the cold moon gleam,
The dim lone stars diffuse an anguish beam,
Storms rock the sky, afflicted oceans roar,
And sanguine billows dye the shuddering shore,
While round the earth thunders from the Almighty throne.
The voice irrevocable,—it is done."

It was a delightful morning, Sunday the 3d of May, 1812. Two young persons were seen walking across the fields in the northern part of Philadelphia, in that free interchange of thought, which to even a distant observer denoted something more than mere acquaintance existing between the parties; especially if, as in the present case, they were a young man and a young woman.

Where the young people were walking a thousand flowers were springing up to give redolence to the morning, and to add variety to the already rich herbage of the field; fence after fence was crossed but they pursued their way northwestwardly 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 with the loveliness of the scene around them, lying in all the luxuriance of early vegetation bathed in newly shed light of a Sabbath sun. The scene has changed since that pair formed a part of it. The city has increased, and its overteeming population has laid out streets, erected houses, and forbidden a blade of grass where then 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 to and across the city. The few dwellings erected near its line seemed to have been built without regard to street regulation, but with reference to those conveniences which are looked for in farm houses, or temporary 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, they looked abroad upon the distant city, undisturbed by the hum of business, or the senseless clatter of dissipated amusements. The morning sun was shedding askant his 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 loviness of the scene, and invited the heart to a contemplation of that power, whose hand had garnished the heavens with its curtain of blue, and mottled the verdure of the field with the beauties of a host of lowly and lovely flowers

"If we have to return as you propose," 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 concluae upon a day,' said the young man.

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

'Let us fix on it 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 what a bad sign 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 there 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 by force, 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 arrangement made, and he felt easier in his mind—happier. be it said.

And Gertrude trod more lightly, and a swell of pleasure rose towards her throat—as she felt that the *engagement* for a life of happiness was made.

Blessings upon the pair that unite with a parent's consent, to their own arrangements. But it is a cold, worldly bargain that parents drive and inform their child of its result; prudence may make the union comfortable—but it will chill the flower of happiness.

The hour of marriage is thought by some to be one of pleasure,—and the triumphs of affection—and it has its claims to such a consideration—but the heart is lightest at the moment when it conquers the obstacles to entire freedom of affection, and triumphs 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 a vast circular piece of ground enclosed with neat railings, and supplied with a considerable abundance of Corinthean and Lumbardy 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 aquaduct, 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 shoulders 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 the scene. It was one of much resort and thousands flocked there as they now do to the Washington and Franklin Squares. There was held in those days the sports of children, and there the high 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 there.'

The couple entered the Square by the 'turnstyle' 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 his flesh seemed attenuated by mental efforts. His long black hair slightly mottled by age, was parted from the centre of his head top, and thrown over his shoulders. 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 in to 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 the sacred book.

The crowd was breathlessly noiseless. And the man began.

'The words,' 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 first verse

'Blow ye a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.'

'This is the language of denunciary prophecy, whether applicable to the present times or not it will not be my duty this morning to inquire. Yet we should all do well to remember that what was written afore time, was written for our instruction.'

'I came not to calculate prophecies, but to foretell. I came not to explain, but to exhort. Why should I number the days of prophecy among the wicked—among those who number not their own days to apply their hearts unto wisdom? I have been sent to you, oh! people, to declare, not to prove—to make known the things that are at hand—even now at your door. Why should I then stand at the shadow of the thunder cloud, and talk to you of the terrors of a gathering tempest? Nay, if my voice be not itself the foretoken of the storm that shall sweep you away, then no sign shall be given.

'For, mark, I have called to the people of the valleys, & they have listened, & from the utmost peaks of the mountain I have cried, and my warning has been heard—it is not given to all men to know the signs of the times—but when they are disclosed, woe to him that refuseth to acknowledge them. It is not a little thing that I utter—it is not that which nations have seen and lived—it is not that which has swept away one people & left others to mark its destruction, but it is that which shall destroy a world, and leave no being upon its surface to describe its desolation."

In this strain, with exceeding emphasis and wonderful volubility, the remarkable man continued to attract attention and never had I seen an audience more deeply wrapt up in the subject to which their attention was called by the preacher. The gestures of the speaker were rather abundant than disciplined, & yet seemed appropriate, because natural; his voice was sometimes wild and offensive to the ear, and then again it would sink into delicate tones that charmed the listener, who readily forgot the wild appearance of the preacher in the startling events he announced, & the thrilling language in which he conveyed his mission.

'You start,' said he, 'at the annunciation which I make; thank God you do not deride—no, you are spared that—the day & the hour are too near for skepticism itself to sport with the awful event.

You may disbelieve the prophecy, but you will not ridicule it—you may set down without preparation for the event, but you will not forget the foretelling of its approach. Nay, at this moment, you startle, and stand closer to each other as you anticipate what I have to declare—and scarcely now is it necessary for me to deliver my mission to this audience, the truth is on you, and you feel my errand. You know while I delay its utterance, that I am commanded to declare to you, that the kindling wrath of Heaven is a blaze, and the lines of prophecy of earth's destruction centre in the present year. Nay, the angel now standeth upon the sea and the land, with hand lifted to Heaven, and awaits the signal to swear by him that liveth for ever, who created Heaven & the things that therein are, the Earth & the things that therein are, and the Sea and the things that therein are, that time shall be no longer.

You doubt—but you do not doubt that this event must come—why then not *now*?—why may not this be the season—prophecy concurs to lead to the belief—the calculation of the learned demonstrate the truth of this prophecy—and I declare to you by revelation that this is the year. 'How can it be?' you ask.—'How shall night come down upon the people and no sun rise? Shall the earth cease her diurnal motion, or shall an angel's arm annihilate the globe?'

He who created can destroy: the last is the smallest effort—and yonder sun, now climbing into mid Heaven, may go down to us, and the shadows that fade away in evening darkness never be renewed by a morning's light But it is not thus. The quiet of creation and the morning song of the sons of God shall not be repeated in that dreadful day. But tempests shall be the messengers and agents of destruction—the thunder shall shake the thick foundations of man's highest effort, the lightning shall blast and burn—and the water of the firmament above shall mingle with those of the rivers and the seas, and earthquakes heap in one mass of destruction the unconsumed materials of all earth's strength, her majesty and her beauty.'

In this manner, though in far more energetic phrase, the preacher announced the consummation of all things, and held his immense audience in breathless attention. After some time he paused—and whether it was from himself, or from some one of the company, it was difficult to say—but the inquiry was heard:—'when shall these things be?'

'Ah, that is well—when shall they be—because, if a few years may come and go, then you will eat and drink as you have done, and laugh at the calamity.—But I say unto you, it is not a few years, not even a single year that you may wait—for thus saith the Lord "*On the sixth month of this year, and on the fourth day of that month, & on the evening of that day, at the going down of the sun, shall these things be*—and you shall see it and tremble, the agonies of death, and the cry of terror, and the wail of woe, the bitter scream of despair shall mingle with the crash of a ruined world, for the great day of *his* wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand.'

A few remarks by way of application followed, and the preacher disappeared; the crowd freed itself from its compact position and seemed to cover nearly one half of the area of the lot, talking in groups of the things that had been uttered, and shewing the effect which the wild enthusiasm of the speaker had wrought upon their minds.

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 in his prophecy, though I would rather have heard his calculations, so as to know whether they were according to Hamilton Moore.' (Hamilton Moore was in those days the grand authority for a sailor's calculations.)

After a short pause, Gertrude hesitatingly replied, 'that it was probable that some higher authority would have been cited; nay, the elements of a calculation WERE offered from the Bible.'

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

'I did not before, for I have heard much of him and of his prophecy. But, somehow, it seemed to-day 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, that is the very time that we have just agreed on for our wedding-day.'

'It is indeed—and as the preacher named that day, 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 remarks.

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 for 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, & 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, and especially in the interior counties of the State, not then, as 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, & making the mountains echo with his terrifying denunciation; and such had been the effect 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 all 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 townships the farmers in the autumn refused to sow their fields with wheat, and they and their families seemed to be looking 'for that great and terrible day.' In some places the conviction of the people led them to a reformation of life; in others it appeared only to produce a studied indifference to the things of this world, without any preparation for that which is to come.

Before the time to which we have alluded, when Nimrod stood in Centre Square the people of Philadelphia had heard of his prophecy, and also of the effects which had been wrought in some of the interior counties, so that when he came to utter his monitions, people were prepared to hear him. The address, therefore, to which we have alluded, created much talk throughout the city, and produced serious effects in many families, where fear of evil seemed to be easily excited.

Gertrude continued to manifest her apprehension of some impending evil, although she refused to confess that her fears had reference to the prophecy of Nimrod Hughes She prepared, however, for her nuptials, by purchasing and making up her dresses—for when did woman ever neglect such preparation—but she evidently had little pleasure in the occupation—some evil seemed to stand between that moment and her nuptial hour, and to cast its shadow on what should have been lighted with the clear sunshine of youth's brightest hope. I have heard those who were with her at these times, say that a cloud appeared always to rest upon her high 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 given in marriage, still remembered the prophecy; few of them, indeed, suffered it to interfere with there plans, but all seemed to look for the 4th of June as some appointed day; as at the approach of an eclipse, no one pretermits his occupation, while every one from time to time casts his eyes upwards as if 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 toils—but the women made it a theme of continued discourse, wondering some of them whether the day would begin in darkness, or whether the calamity would be sudden, in the twinkling of an eye. But those who believed most firmly in the prophecy, seemed less concerned about the details than they were about there own situation when the change should come upon them.

In the mean time the journey on which William had entered was completed, and he hastened to the house of Gertrude to salute his affianced bride. He was shocked at the change which had come over her—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 knit with her's as when in the loveliness of a May morning she had consented to be his bride, by the brightness of a countenance that seemed to shame the sunshine of the hour.

All the preparations for the wedding were completed, and Gertrude had talked and talked over the affair fifty times with her bridesmaids—but never once without a shudder of fearful apprehension, that was easily imputed to the prevalent terrors of the times, but which all supposed would pass away with the non fulfilment of the prophecy on the fourth of the next month.

On Friday, the 4th day of June, 1812, the sun rose bright upon the people of Philadelphia. It was a lovely morning, warm indeed but without a cloud. Men and woman were abroad that day looking earnestly as if half suspicious that the prophecy might be fulfilled—many indeed joking about the crazy prophet and foolish believers, but feeling occasionally gratified 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 & 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 act 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 par 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 horizon, to see whether any signal of danger presented itself, even it 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. Scheaffer, 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. Scheaffer repeated her remark.

'On the sixth month,' said Gertrude solemnly repeating the language of the prophet 'on the sixth month, 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. Scheaffer.

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

Mrs. Scheaffer turned to make some arrangements, and directed the attendants to prepare Gertrude, with the exception of the gown—This was completed at once, and Mrs Scheaffer went to fulfil other duties in her household affairs, growing out of the approaching wedding

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and the heat was unabated. Men, however, had gone forth, not to business, but to converse. There was in the street, in the northern part of the city, (and we speak of North Fourth street in particular,) a quite so remarkable, that a foot-fall might have been heard at the distance of a square. Men looked around with some increasing confidence, but evidently with secret forebodings. Suddenly a cry was heard, and all eyes were turned towards the southwest, where was seen sweeping up the horizon a thick dark cloud. It was not entirely black, but was marked with yellow streaks. Its edges were jagged and wild, and its ascent was as rapid as if it were the chariot of the winds. It came booming onwards, and every face was turned upwards to its approach. It soon hid the sun, and so dark and dense was it, that its shadow upon the earth was like the coming in of a starless night.

Meantime the thunder began to mutter, increasing in sound as the cloud approached.

In ten minutes the whole horizon was covered by this dark pall; a sudden burst of lightning, attended, without a minute's pause, by an awful crash of thunder, gave voice to the growing fears of the people, and screams of horror and despair, and the tones of the thunder, that seemed to know no cessation, were mingled with the blasts of wind that stripped the trees of their branches. There was in all this uproar a new source of wonder and fear.—So dense was the cloud that hung over the city, that there was upon its surface a reflection as if in a troubled water, of all the prominent objects below, and men thought they saw hill and tree and house and people in the thick ceiling of the heavens above them.

In the midst of this wild uproar of the elements, the rain commenced as if 'the windows of heaven had indeed been opened'—there was no prelusive drop, no thickening of the shower, but a down-pouring of the elements, as if the incontinent clouds had been rent by the lightning, and their treasuries of water poured forth without stint. In two minutes the streets were inundated, and appeared like mountain torrents, and the already unmanageable fears of the people were increased by the up-pouring of water from the cellars, as if the fountains of the great deep had been broken up, 'and the elements of the air and of the nether world, the things of the heavens above and the earth beneath, and the] waters under the earth' were uniting to break down the middle wall of partition, and to confound all of order that had resulted from their distinct separation.

In all this, man felt his insignificance—there was nothing to which he could turn his hand with even an appearance of usefulness; the thoughtful and the pious stood waiting; the voice of prayer was heard amid the deep thunder tones without; and here and there the wild shriek of despair rose sharp amid the turmoil and told the progress of the day's disaster.

One loud thunder clap, and a flash of lightning that blazed over the whole firmament, were accompanied with additional out pouring of water; trees came prostrate to the earth, or crushed the windows of the houses against which they fell, and the wild uproar was doubled.

After this there was a sudden pause of the rain—not a drop fell; here and there a stream of lightning played fantastically in the edge of the horizon, and the distant thunder kept a low but constant muttering, and those who did not look forth, began to hope that the worst was past.

In a few moments people were seen at the windows and doors, some in the street, looking upwards, but the glossy reflecting black of the clouds above them and the wild movements of the masses on the horizon told them that the elemental strife had only paused as if for fresh efforts—and the wind appeared to be gathering new force beneath the western horizon, where a stripe of grey clouds was moving fantastically as if to spring upward to bear the munitions of additional horrors.

Not a breath agitated the remaining leaves of the trees Scarcely a word from the gathered groups interfered with the sound of prayer or the shriek of continued terror that broke from the neighboring houses. There was a pause in nature, and man hushed the emotion of his fears as if silence was the true attribute of the hour. A wide spreading blaze of lightning almost seered the upturned eye of the people, and a peal of thunder seemed to break in the very midst—many sunk down in sheer weakness and some screamed aloud in the agony of fear. There was another pause, when one universal cry of horror fixed every eye upon the south west portion of the horizon. There had sprung upward as is from the earth, for its base could not be seen, a mighty column of fire, it reared itself toward the cloud—a wild, lurid flame flashed from its sides quite across the whole heavens, leaving a sickly light upon the northern & western sides of all the buildings. When the column had attained what seemed to be nearly the height of the clouds an inverted cone of vast dimensions appeared to reach downward to the summit of the earth borne pillar of fire. Then commenced the scene of wildest horror. Groans and screams rose wildly upon the air, while here and there was seen some silent waiter sitting in utter abstraction, folding himself about, and looking to be included in the general dissolution. While this last fearful sign gleamed in the eyes of the affrighted people, the tempest was renewed—the thunder and the lightning came with redoubled force, and the wind which had been gathered in the west swept onward and bore upon its wings and scattered downward jagged masses of ice that cut like winged swords.

The inundation began again, and many who had scoffed at the first outbreak of the tempest, trembled at the awful demonstration of this, when the magazines of heaven seemed to be exhausting themselves for the destruction of earth.

In the midst of this awful uproar, William, who had more than once sought to gain access to Gertrude's chamber, renewed his attempt, and found her stretched out upon the bed, nearly dressed for the evening ceremony. It was a fearful sight on such a moment, but it was doubly painful to find her insensible to his presence, and to the appalling uproar abroad.

He kneeled beside her bed and called to her in every tone of affection to recognize him—but she gave no heed. At length the thunder was silenced—the rain and hail ceased, and William called to the people of the house to aid him with Gertrude.

In a short time he took her in his arms and carried her to the door of her chamber, with a view of showing to her that the occasion of her fears had been removed, and that the storm which had so much alarmed her had passed away. He directed her attention to the west, where beneath the lifted masses of the clouds the sun was sinking in a glorious set—and all around seemed to be a trembling sea of light and heat of which the sun was only a centre.

'Do you see how lovely the evening comes in?' said William.

'I see it,' said she—'it is beautiful, far far more beautiful than EARTHLY scenes.'

'And such an evening too for our marriage, better than we had ventured to hope,' added William.

'Is there marriage in *Heaven*?' said Gertrude—with hesitancy.

William turned towards the east, and looking out saw that the sun was throwing a most brilliant rainbow on the water clouds that had passed. It was a magnificent sight—the whole horizon was spanned by the gorgeous arch which was made doubly beautiful by the dark cloud upon which it rested.

'Look,' said William, 'what a heavenly sight—how full of hope and promise is that token."

Gertrude lifted her eyes towards the east—then dropped gently on her knees, and with her hands crossed upon breast and eyes upturned, she rather sighed than uttered 'There was a rainbow round about the throne."

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