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1904

THE NEW LIGHTS

A PLAY





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The New Lights

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

By
HUGH MANN



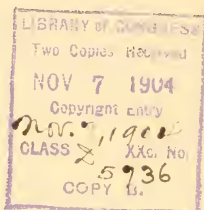
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PREFACE

The New-Lights, so called in derision, are a religious sect, established early in the nineteenth century by schism from the Mennonites of Pennsylvania in the interests of greater religious purism.

They are known locally as "New Mennists" (pronounced "Men-neests," in the vernacular), by way of distinction from the original church, — the "Old Mennists."

They are non-resistant. They take no part in politics, — not even to the extent of voting. They refuse to go to war; they also refuse to "go to law," even to recover stolen property. But they are earnest, hard-working, law-abiding citizens.

They regard themselves as the only true church of Christ, — looking upon all other sects as heretical. Their children are not members by birth-right, and, as they make no effort to proselyte, the sect is slowly dying out.

Many of them are very rich, principally in land; and their children, to whom they are proverbially indulgent, often lead very "gay and worldly" lives.

They wear a peculiar garb, somewhat resembling that of the Quakers. The women dress in woolen or cotton, in sombre colors, — silk velvet,

any material or color suggesting "pride of life," being rigidly tabooed. Their gowns are made with the greatest simplicity, and with these there is always worn an apron, almost as long as the dress, a kerchief, and a cap. The apron and kerchief are ordinarily of the same material as the gown, — though in working garb the apron, with a woollen gown, may be of gingham, and, on extra occasions, the kerchief may be of soft white lawn or cashmere.

The hair is drawn smoothly back under the cap, — which is worn because of the scriptural dictum that "a woman who goeth with head uncovered dishonoreth her head," — and is made of the sheerest Swiss muslin, with exquisite daintiness, but following the severest lines, and finished with rolled hems.

NOTE. — This play is, in a small way, historical. The descriptions of dress, manner, and customs, religious doctrines and practices, are transcriptions from life. The incidents which make the plot are founded upon fact, and occurred in the generation preceding that of the author; — but so little has the life of this exclusive sect changed in the past century that these incidents might have taken place within the past year.

CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM GAST — Wealthy farmer and New Mennist preacher.

JAMES HERRON — Son-in-law to Abraham Gast, — a prosperous young lawyer of the “gay world” living in the neighboring city of L—.

JOHN RUNKEL — Well-to-do young farmer, — neighbor of Abraham Gast.

HENRY EICHBERGER AND LEVI SCHWARTZ — Prominent New Mennists, — neighbors of Abraham Gast.

JAKE METZGER — Hired man to Abraham Gast.

KATHERINE — Daughter of Abraham Gast.

HANNAH BROWN — Hired girl to Abraham Gast.

ELLEN BROWN — Sister to Hannah and hired girl to Henry Eichberger.

MARY EICHBERGER — Wife of Henry Eichberger.

MARTHA RUNKEL — Mother of John Runkel.

SUSAN MARTIN — Chief maid servant in house of James Herron.

The action takes place in the houses of Abraham Gast and of James Herron, alternately.

ACT FIRST

SCENE — *A large, old-fashioned farmhouse living-room, with two broad, deep-seated windows and a wide, open door in rear, giving upon an ample back-porch, and affording vistas of level-stretching green fields smiling in the warm sunlight of an early summer morning.*

The huge fireplace, a scene of yule-log cheer in winter; is closed in for the summer with heavy wooden doors, and serves as a sort of closet. At either end of the room is a door, leading to other parts of the house.

The walls are whitewashed; the woodwork is painted a dove-gray. There are green paper blinds at the windows, rolled up and tied with white tape. There is a tall clock in one corner; a quaint china-closet in another. An old-fashioned settle and three or four chairs to match, with spindle backs, are ranged stiffly against the wall. There is a rag-carpet on the floor. In the center of the room is a large table, piled with freshly washed and dried clothes. By the table stands a huge basket, ready to receive the clothes when they shall be "damped down" for ironing.

(Curtain rises upon Hannah Brown, engaged in sprinkling the clothes. She is fresh, young, buxom, with a fair, brilliant skin, and with an abundant suit of dark red hair.)

HANNAH (*seeing a young woman cross the grass plot in rear and mount the porch*)— Well! Well! — and whatever brings you so early of this fine day?

ELLEN (*entering and removing her sun-bonnet. She is prettier than Hannah, and her hair is yellow.*) — Why, Mr. and Mrs. Eichberger are gone to town for the day, and she said I might come over and visit with you, see'n' as I was a stranger and might feel lonesome.

HANNAH — Anybody might easy know you was a stranger to hear you say Mr. and Mrs. Eichberger. We say Abraham and Katherine and Henry and Mary 'round here.

ELLEN — Yes, I know you do, — but it seems sort o' strange to me as yet, — but I guess I'll get used to it.

HANNAH — You come in just good to take a hand with these clothes.

ELLEN — Yes; that's nice, aint it? (*Beginning to sprinkle and fold.*)

HANNAH — Now look-ee-here! Don't put quite so much water on that, — it makes it too stiff to iron good, — and fold it smooth, like this (*taking garment from Ellen's hands and demonstrating*).

ELLEN (*good-naturedly*)— Aint you partick'lar! — My! —

HANNAH — It's easy to see you was brought up by mother's folks. They was never partick'lar, like father's.

ELLEN (*a little indignantly*)—I suit Mrs. Eichberger.

HANNAH — Yes, I guess, — but she don't have things, anyhow, like we have 'em.

ELLEN — You do things all your own way here, don't you?

HANNAH — Yes; since Mother Gast died.

ELLEN — Why, where's Katherine?

HANNAH — She's keeping house for her brother-in-law, in town, since he lost his wife — taking care of the little baby she left.

ELLEN — Is that so? Well! Well! I wonder how she likes that sort o' thing. You used to write me about how gay she was, and how fine she dressed, and the beaux she had, and how she went hither and yon among the fashionables. My! My! —

HANNAH — Yes; that was when I used to take more interest in such things than I do now. But don't you know that Katherine's a New Menneest?

ELLEN — Katherine a New Menneest? Goodness gracious! Since when?

HANNAH — Well! it's goin' on to pretty near a year now, I guess. You see, when Christian

was took off so sudden-like, and then soon after Barbara died in childbed,— she began to feel concern for her soul. (*Ending with a pious cadence in her tone.*)

ELLEN (*looking at Hannah in surprise at this tone, and then changing her expression at the thought of Christian*)— Yes! that was turrible about Christian, wasn't it? Just how did it happen? I never heard quite.

HANNAH — Why, one day, when we was thronged in the harvest field, he put his buggy-horse, Jenny, a high-steppin' blooded thing, into the reaper, — and she run away and killed him and herself too.

ELLEN (*shuddering*)— My! My! My! How turrible! And Katherine took it hard! No wonder! No wonder!

HANNAH — Yes; him and her was fond of the world together, and she missed him something turrible. She shut herself up in her own room and wouldn't eat enough to keep a fly alive. Then, a week later, came word that Barbara was dead, — sudden, you know, — in child-bed — and before they could get to her. Barbara was very worldly, too, you see! So that just finished things up for Katherine.

ELLEN — What did she do?

HANNAH — Well, just as I tell you, she didn't

come out of her room for days, — and then one evenin', when I was startin' to take somethin' to eat up to her as usual, lo and behold ye! I sees her standin' at the foot o' the stairs dressed in plain clothes. Well! You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather. I thought at first I'd saw a ghost, — but it just come to me that she'd gone and got some of her mother's clothes and put 'em on, — she's just her mother's build. And, — well! she aint never been her old self since.

ELLEN — Is she good-lookin' — as ever?

HANNAH — Oh, yes! She's good-lookin', — too good-lookin', — even her plain clothes don't spoil her good looks.

ELLEN — And how about all her beaux? .

HANNAH — Well, of course they all dropped off sharp, — when she give herself up, — you know you can't marry out o' meetin' —

ELLEN — “Give herself up?” Oh, yes! You mean joined the church. But aint there no likely young men in meetin'?

HANNAH — Well — no-o — not to say *young* men, — not many, leastways. John Runkel used to be crazy over Katherine. I hear he's give himself up, too — a'ready. It's easy to see what he's after. Katherine never would look at him as long as she was in the world. I wonder if she'd take him now?

ELLEN (*laughing heartily*)— It makes me die o'laughing to think of a beau in plain clothes.

HANNAH — Well, you might do somethin' better than laugh at such things.

ELLEN (*with surprise at Hannah's pious tone, but mockingly*)— Why, Hannah! Are you goin' to turn New Menneest?

HANNAH (*whose sharp eye has caught sight of Abraham Gast mounting the porch, — in a loud and distinct tone*)— There's been stranger things as has happened.

ABRAHAM (*stopping beside the door to remove his boots, — and entering in his stocking feet and shirt sleeves, with a field hat on his head*)— Well, Hannah! Busy as a bee as usual. And who's this we have here (*turning benignantly to Ellen*)?

(*Abraham speaks with great deliberation, with hesitation even, and in a tone with a minor cadence, — a habit contracted from the effort necessary to do extemporaneous preaching in a man not naturally ready of speech.*)

HANNAH — Oh, that's my sister as was brought up out West. She's hired out to Henry Eichberger.

ABRAHAM — Yes! Yes! I heard you talk of her coming. (*Shaking hands with Ellen*) I wish well to your soul (*solemnly*), Hannah.

Did I hear aright? Are you being indeed drawn to seek the narrow way?

HANNAH (*blushing, dropping her eyes, and trembling a little*) — I — I aint worthy!

ABRAHAM — We are none of us worthy. We are all only poor worms of the dust. But he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. But we must feel to give ourselves up — to leave the broad way that leadeth to destruction, — and to walk humbly with our God. (*Giving Hannah a yearning and admiring look, he passes into his bedroom adjoining.*)

(*Hannah catches the look and blushes and trembles again. There is silence for a few seconds, at the end of which time Abraham's voice is heard in the inflections of supplication, though no words are distinguished.*)

ELLEN (*in an awed tone*) — What's he doin' in there? Gettin' ready for his next Sunday sermon?

HANNAH (*with mild scorn*) — Gettin' ready for his next Sunday sermon! They don't get ready for no sermons. They just opens the Bible, when the time comes to preach, and "the Lord gives 'em in that hour what they shall say and what they shall speak," as the scriptur's has it.

ELLEN — You seem to know a right good lot about the scriptur's.

HANNAH — Well, you see I have a chance to learn a right good lot about 'em here.

(The tones of Abraham's voice grow louder, but the words are still undistinguishable.)

ELLEN — What is he a-doin', then?

HANNAH — He's a-prayin! *(drawing near to the door of Abraham's room)* — a-prayin' *(her face flushing and then paling)* — for me.

(With a look of subdued triumph in her eye, but with an expression of humility on her face and in her manner, she returns vigorously to the sprinkling. Ellen is speechless. Ellen and Hannah work silently. Abraham's voice dies away. Presently he appears at the door of his room, with a fine, serene expression of countenance. He has put on a coat, a broad-brimmed hat, and a pair of shoes.)

ABRAHAM — I'm going to market now, Hannah, with the fresh vegetables. I'll be back at the usual time. *(To Ellen)* You must come and see Hannah whenever you can get off. *(Goes out.)*

ELLEN — Does he stand in market?

HANNAH — No; but the Eichbergers do. They aint above that kind o' thing, — none of 'em. But Abraham has such good things. So he has his private customers as knows him and his things.

ELLEN (*suddenly*)— Hannah, are you goin' to join the New Menneests?

HANNAH — Well — why not?

ELLEN (*hotly*)— I know *I* wouldn't join any church that thinks my dead mother's soul is lost forever.

HANNAH — Ye can't help your convictions, can ye?

ELLEN — And you, brought up a Methodist!

HANNAH — Well, I aint a-sayin' yet what I'll do, — but (*piously*) I'll follow my call.

(*Steps are heard on the porch, and Jake Metzger appears in the line of the open doorway, the jamb of which conceals Ellen from his view.*)

HANNAH — Now look-ee-here, Jake Metzger! Don't you be comin' in here with your dirty boots on! You see the example Abraham sets you!

JAKE — Don't you holler afore you're kicked! I aint a-comin' in. I kin stop on the porch a minute, can't I?

HANNAH — Well, I don't know about that! I just scrubbed that porch, and your boots aint a-goin' to help keep it scrubbed!

(*Jake, moving to the window and leaning in on the sill, sees Ellen for the first time. He colors and looks sheepish, but recovers himself and gives her an admiring glance.*)

JAKE — Will I dirty them clothes by lookin' in at 'em?

HANNAH — This is my sister Ellen, as was brought up out West. She's come to live with Eichbergers.

JAKE (*pushing his field hat farther back on his head and ducking a little*)— Never been in these parts before?

ELLEN — Yes; I was born here, same as Hannah, — but I was little when I was took out West by my aunt after mother died.

JAKE — Aint never lived with New Menneests afore?

ELLEN — No.

JAKE — Well, you might live with worse folks. They're not so bad when you git used to 'em, — that is, *some* of 'em. Some of 'em is pretty hard nuts to crack.

HANNAH — Aint you ashamed o' yourself, Jake!

JAKE — Now, you'll be goin' and tellin' Abraham that, I'll swan! You'll be a New Menneest yourself before long. You'd be one now, — only you don't like the idee o' them plain clothes. That's what sticks in your craw. How would you git all that red hair into a cap anyway?

HANNAH — See here, now, Jake! You stop a-jokin' about such things.

JAKE — You think you're mistress here, don't ye? That's what you're a-workin' fur. Aint it, now? They do say you're after Abraham, — and that he's only a-waitin' fur ye to give yourself up (*teasingly*).

HANNAH (*with defiant self-complacency*) — Yes, — they do talk that way, — and it wouldn't be so strange!

ELLEN — Oh, don't say such things!

JAKE (*to Ellen*) — I see you aint likely to join the New Menneests, — any more 'an I am.

ELLEN — Oh, no!

JAKE — Their religion's too slobberin' for me. The men kisses one another when they meet.

HANNAH — Yes! "Greets one another with a holy kiss," as the scriptur's has it.

JAKE (*laughing*) — I see myself greetin' another man with a holy kiss! Ha! ha! Now, if they'd allow the men to kiss the women, I might jine.

ELLEN (*mischievously*) — Maybe you wouldn't if you had to kiss *all* the women.

JAKE (*boldly*) — If they was all as good-lookin' as you, — I'd jine tomorrow!

ELLEN (*catching her breath and blushing furiously*) — Oh!

JAKE — But ye see if I'd jine, and wanted to marry one o' the good-lookin' girls, I wouldn't

dare to tell her first. I'd have to go and speak to the preacher, and then he'd talk to the brethren, and then, when they was all agreed, the preacher he'd go and ask the girl.

ELLEN — Oh, my! Is *that* the way they do?

JAKE — Yes! Ketch me doin' my courtin' that way!

ELLEN — They certainly do have queer notions.

HANNAH — They can give you scriptur' fur every thing they do.

JAKE — Oh, they kin, kin they? Seems to me you know lots about 'em for one as aint of 'em! Well, I must be gittin' out to the field agin. Where's my snack, Hannah?

HANNAH — It's on the out-kitchen table. Mind now, — and don't let in the flies.

JAKE (*with parting glance of admiration at Ellen*) — See you agin soon! (*Goes.*)

HANNAH — That Jake! He's got more impudence! He's a likely fellow, though! You'd better set your cap for him. He's savin' money, — and for all that he's got as fine a horse and buggy as anybody around here.

ELLEN — He aint likely to be a New Menneest, neither!

HANNAH — Well, there's no tellin'! That mockin' kind gits humbled by the Spirit some-

times easier 'an others. He's just like a son to Abraham, too. And Abraham sets great store by him. Most as much as he does by me.

ELLEN — Hannah! Would you marry an old man like Abraham?

HANNAH (*indignantly*)— How do you darest to ask me such a question, and I aint give myself up yet?

ELLEN — He might treat you like Mr. Eichberger treats his wife.

HANNAH (*surprised*)— And how's that?

ELLEN — Why, she never dares to set down to the table with him. She makes me eat with him, and she goes off by herself until we're done. Now, aint that awful! What's the reason, do you think?

HANNAH — Oh, that's what you mean! Why, she's been turned out o' meetin'.

ELLEN — Turned out o' meetin'! Well, what's that got to do with it?

HANNAH (*solemnly*)— The scriptur's says, "With such an one, no not to eat."

ELLEN — My! My! Does the scriptur's say that? There's a lot in 'em that *I* don't know anything about.

HANNAH — You'd better learn a little more.

ELLEN — My! My! And his own wife, too! — and can't eat at the same table with him! But she *sleeps* with him.

HANNAH (*sententiously*) — The scriptur's don't say nothin' agin that. (*With a glance at the clock*) My! I must go and gather my vegetables for dinner (*goes out by porch door*).

(*As soon as she is out of sight Jake reappears at the window with a great piece of pie in his hand.*)

JAKE (*to Ellen*)— Don't you want some o' this pie? It's good! Come out into the out-kitchen and I'll give ye some; I'd think you'd be hungry. Hannah makes the best pies! But ketch me tellin' her! Kin you make as good pies as Hannah?

ELLEN (*humbly*)— I guess Hannah wouldn't think so!

JAKE— I bet you kin. I'm comin' over to Eichberger's to taste your pies some day.

ELLEN (*cordially*)— Yes, do!

(*Hannah's voice is heard outside.*)

HANNAH — Aint you gone to field yet, Jake Metzger?

JAKE — O Lord! There she is! I'd ruther you wouldn't make quite such good pies, if you had to be like Hannah to do it (*goes*).

CURTAIN

ACT SECOND

SCENE — *A spacious, richly-furnished room, half sitting-room, half library, in the house of James Herron. The color scheme is dull green lightened with yellow. There is a large alcove with skylight in rear center, lined with bookshelves filled with books. In the center of the alcove stand a gentleman's table, desk, and turnstile chair: There are curtains to the alcove, which can be drawn to screen it entirely from the rest of the room. There is a large, richly-draped window on either side of the alcove. There is a door at either end of the room leading to other parts of the house. There is an open fireplace left end front, in which a fire is cheerfully burning. The carpet is thick and soft. Near each end of room stands a large library table strewn with books and pamphlets. In the center front, opposite the alcove, stands a quaint but elaborate sewing-table, and, by it, a rather luxurious sewing-chair. Scattered about the room are a number of large library chairs, richly upholstered in green leather.*

(Curtain rises upon Katherine Gast seated at sewing-table with a piece of work in her hands. She wears a dove-gray cashmere gown. Her apron is of the same material, a shade paler. Her kerchief is of soft white muslin, simply

hemmed. Her abundant bright brown hair is coiled very closely under her cap, which is not tied under the chin but has little rounded floating ends, falling away from her cheeks on either side of her throat.)

(James Heron enters from right.)

KATHERINE (without rising, looking a little startled, says quietly, however, in a manner suggesting constant restraint upon self)—I—I thought you had gone out.

JAMES (without looking at her, and going directly into the alcove)—No, I have some work to do that I can do better here than at the office. (Seats himself where he can command a side view of Katherine's face.)

KATHERINE (starting up)—Let me get your study-lamp for you.

JAMES — No, no! Sit down, I'll ring for Susan. (Rises, rings, goes to shelves, takes down a book or two, seats himself at desk.)

KATHERINE (without looking at James)—Don't you think you're working a little too much lately, — all day and in the evening too?

JAMES — It's only temporary. I'm trying to get my affairs fixed up with a view to getting out of this sleepy-hollow of a town as soon as possible. (Knock at door, enter Susan.) Susan, bring my study-lamp. (Susan goes out.) Of

course you must not speak of this, even to Father Gast, — but I'm going into business with a live fellow in San Francisco, — promoting, — with a chance to make millions.

KATHERINE (*aghast*) — San Francisco!

JAMES — Yes. Let me see — this is the first of December; I expect to be out of this by the first of March, — maybe sooner.

KATHERINE — And you'll take little James?

JAMES — Why, of course! What did you expect me to do with him?

KATHERINE — Oh, how can I give him up?

JAMES — You needn't, — you can go with him, — us. (*A knock. Enter Susan with lamp, which she places on alcove table.*)

SUSAN (*to Katherine*) — There's a lady to see you, Miss. She says she's a sister in the Lord, — the widow Runkel! She's settin' in the hall. I as't her into the parlor, but she wouldn't go in. Said somethin' about not givin' countenance to the pride o' life.

KATHERINE (*with agitation, but with the same careful restraint of manner*) — Tell her — but no, wait! — what shall I do?

JAMES — Don't you want to see her? Tell her you're not at home, or engaged, or something. She's a meddlesome old thing. Used to come here often bothering Barbara.

KATHERINE — O James! — a member! — and a preacher's widow. No, no! I can't do that.

JAMES — Well! What's the trouble? Don't you want to go down?

KATHERINE — I can't receive her in the hall (*with a feeble smile*) — nor ask her into the drawing-room, after what she said to Susan.

JAMES — Well! bring her up here. I'll get out for a while.

KATHERINE — Oh, no, James! I don't want to drive you out. Don't go, — please stay.

JAMES — And meet her? Not any, thank you!

KATHERINE (*pale and nervous*) — O James! I — I — I don't want to see her — *alone!*

JAMES — Well, then, if you don't mind, I'll draw the curtains and stay in here. She needn't know. I hope to heaven she won't stay long.

KATHERINE (*comforted, and with a little flash of natural lightness*) — There's no telling!

JAMES — Tell her to come up, Susan (*drawing the curtains*).

(*Susan goes out and returns, showing in Martha Runkel, who removes her Shaker-like slat-bonnet as she enters. Katherine rises, and she and Martha kiss each other solemnly. They sit down, Katherine pale and constrained.*)

MARTHA — I trust that you are in the enjoyment of the peace that passeth all understanding. (*Katherine lifts a pair of sad eyes to Martha's face, — drops them again and says nothing.*) I fear you find it hard not to hunger after the flesh pots of Egypt when you live in the midst of so much lust of the eye and pride of life.

KATHERINE — I — I — don't think I notice it — now.

MARTHA — That is well, dear young sister. It is our calling to be in the world but not of it, — to use these things as if we possessed them not.

KATHERINE — Yes! I — I — try to feel so.

MARTHA — My mind has been much exercised over your being here just now, — while you're so new to the narrow way. I spoke to Abraham about it, — and he said he could not feel to take you away from the child, and that he was trusting to our Heavenly Father to keep you meek and lowly in heart.

KATHERINE — Dear father!

MARTHA — Then I said to him, “Why not have her bring the child home for a while?”

KATHERINE (*with spirit*) — You forget that it is James' child.

MARTHA — Yes, that's what Abraham said. But I answered him, “The scripture says:

'Touch not the unclean thing.' 'Come out from among them and be ye separate,' saith the Lord. 'Ye shall not tempt the Lord thy God.'"

KATHERINE (*agitated*)—I try to remember these things.

MARTHA — I am the bearer of a message to you from the meeting.

KATHERINE — From the meeting?

MARTHA — Yes! You are summoned home for a short season, to consider a matter to be laid before the brethren concerning you.

KATHERINE (*pale and trembling*)—To consider a matter to be laid before the brethren?

MARTHA — Not a matter of rebuke or chastening, my dear sister, — a matter concerning your walk in the flesh.

KATHERINE — The church disapproves of my living here?

MARTHA — Oh, no! Not that (*looking very earnestly at Katherine*). Do you not know that John has given himself up?

KATHERINE (*in great surprise*)— John! No — no — I did not know it!

MARTHA — Yes! It has pleased the Lord to call my dear son from the broad way that leadeth to destruction into the narrow way that leadeth into life (*weeping and wiping her eyes*).

KATHERINE — I — I am glad for you, — for

him. But — when am I to appear before the brethren?

MARTHA — On Wednesday, in your father's house, at a special meeting.

KATHERINE — That's day after tomorrow. Then I can't take little James along. It's too sudden; besides, I'd be afraid, this weather. But I needn't stay? I can come right back?

MARTHA (*coldly*) — Yes, yes! Doubtless! (*Then sweetly, after a short silence*) Beware, my dear young sister, lest you make an idol unto yourself of this child. (*Another silence, during which Katherine clasps and unclasps her hands in a frightened way.*)

KATHERINE — Do you know what this matter is concerning me?

MARTHA — It ill becomes me to speak of that which our holy church must first consider, — but it is my earnest desire that you and John may feel to walk together in the Lord.

KATHERINE (*in great agitation*) — Oh, no! Not that — not that, — I do not wish to think of marrying — now. I must stay with father, and take care of him in his age.

MARTHA (*with a cold smile*) — He'll not need you later any more than he does now, from present signs. Hannah Brown has given herself up, and it is more than likely that she and Abraham will feel to walk together in the Lord.

(*Katherine is dumb. Martha continues.*) Poor Barbara! She was taken out of the midst of all this vanity, before she had the least chance to make her calling and election sure. You should feel to thank the Lord, Katherine, that you have been snatched as a brand from the burning.

KATHERINE (*with flushing face*)— Father says we may always cherish the hope that Barbara had made her peace with God.

MARTHA — Yes, that might be. She was not anyhow of those that bow the knee to Baal,— that follow after false prophets. And so she may have found mercy with the Lord. But does not her sudden taking off lead James to seek the narrow way, lest he too be taken as a thief in the night?

KATHERINE — James doesn't — look at these things as we do.

MARTHA — He is very rich in this world's goods (*looking around her*). The wicked spreadeth himself like a green bay tree, — but it is not pleasing to the Lord. "Woe unto ye lawyers," said Christ. You should warn James to flee from the wrath to come. But I must be going now (*rising and taking Katherine by the hand*). My beloved young sister, we should feel to walk close to our meek and lowly Savior, and so endeavor to make our calling and election sure. Let us serve the Lord while it is called

today, for we know not what the morrow may bring forth (*kisses Katherine solemnly and goes out*).

JAMES (*throwing open the curtain*)—Thank heaven! (*Seats himself again and begins to read, making notes. Katherine takes up her sewing and sits down with her back to James. Presently James moves quietly up behind her, and, taking the crown of her dainty cap between his thumb and finger, lifts it off her head and lays it on the sewing-table. Katherine gives a little frightened cry, and involuntarily puts her hands over her hair, then reaches for the cap to put it on again.*)

JAMES (*seizing her hand, says beseechingly*)—Don't put it on, — not yet at least. You are so beautiful without it. Though you are beautiful enough with it, heaven knows.

KATHERINE (*using her hands to cover her face now*)—O James! how can you talk so!

JAMES—But this is not the reason why I take it off, Katherine. It stands between you and me. Oh (*passionately*), leave it off forever!

KATHERINE (*rising and reaching for the cap*)—I dare not—I dare not. I need something between you and me.

JAMES (*encouraged by this acknowledgment*)—Katherine. Let your hair down, — just once

(*coaxingly*). (*Katherine, as if unable to resist him, removes a simple comb from the close coil of her hair and lets its rich masses fall about her.*) Shake it out. Let me! So! (*Coming nearer and taking the silky strands in his hands, — then suddenly pressing them against his face and wildly kissing them. Katherine, pale and startled, snatches them from him and coils them up quickly, thrusts in the comb, and puts on the cap with trembling hands, — then seats herself and takes up her sewing, in terrible agitation.*)

JAMES (*in a hard voice*)— Katherine, are you going to let the church marry you to John Runkel? That's what they are all after, as you well know.

KATHERINE — No, no, James, — you heard me, — I do not wish to marry.

JAMES (*gloomily*)— But they will easily persuade you that you do.

KATHERINE — I do not love John Runkel.

JAMES — What's that got to do with what the church thinks?

KATHERINE — The church will not *compel* me to marry. It only *forbids* me to marry out of meeting.

(*There is silence, James looking gloomily at the floor, Katherine sewing feverishly.*)

JAMES (*suddenly*)— Katherine, why don't you wear that gown I gave you?

KATHERINE (*evasively*)—It's — not made up yet.

JAMES — Why don't you make it up? Even in this fashion you would look lovely in it. It has just the tints of your hair in shadow, — your beautiful hair, that you cover up with that envious cap!

KATHERINE — You know I could never make it up — like this. It's silk, and we're forbidden to wear such things.

JAMES — Go and get it, Katherine; I want to see it against your hair and skin. (*Katherine goes out door at left. James walks moodily up and down. Katherine returns immediately with the goods, and sits down, smoothing it out admiringly in her lap.*)

KATHERINE — It's so pretty, James, — and I thank you so much, — but you know (*looking up at him appealingly*) I dare not wear it.

JAMES — Give it to me! (*He takes it, walks quickly to the fireplace, and thrusts it into the flames.*)

KATHERINE — O James! James! (*Then buries her face in her arms on the table and breaks into violent sobbing.*)

JAMES (*striding to her chair, throwing himself upon his knees, seizing her hands and passionately kissing them*)—O Katherine! Don't! Don't! I'd rather burn off my right hand than

hurt you so! You love me, Katherine, — you know you love me. What right have these damned religionists to come between us? Katherine, throw it all off and come to me. If there is a good God, who made us as we are, He loves love better than religion.

KATHERINE — James, — you frighten me. I dare not give up to my love for you. If I should, all that old terror of the “wrath to come” would seize me again. I can not face that, — I would rather die now, with my peace made with God. Oh! Oh! (*Rising and putting up her hands as if to ward him off.*)

JAMES (*drawing nearer to her*)— Katherine, my love, there is no such thing as “wrath to come.” Don’t you see that if God is love there cannot be any such thing? There is nothing but love, Katherine, (*drawing nearer still, with glowing eyes and fervid tones*)— nothing but love. Prove it, Katherine! Come to me, my beloved (*holding out his arms*)!

(*Katherine, raising her large, passionate eyes, fixes them upon his glowing countenance, and, as if fascinated, yields to his embrace. James clasps her in his arms and fastens his lips upon hers. Her head drops upon his shoulder, and, as it does so, her little cap falls unheeded to the floor.*)

CURTAIN

ACT THIRD

SCENE — *Same as first act, except that the fireplace is open and a huge fire burning thereon, and a landscape covered with snow shows through the windows.*

(Curtain rises upon Abraham Gast seated before the fire, with the open Bible upon a small table at his side. Hannah Brown, in plain dress, enters from left.)

HANNAH *(in bustling fashion)*— I guess I'll have to send for Ellen to help me. There'll be lots to do, with all these folks for dinner and Katherine so droopy.

ABRAHAM — Where *is* Katherine?

HANNAH — She's in her room. She don't look right. She aint got any life in her, seems like.

ABRAHAM — Yes, I noticed when she came yesterday that she didn't look like herself. I hope she aint going to be sick. I guess you would better send for Ellen. Where's Jake?

HANNAH *(a little viciously)*— Out in the out-kitchen sleepin' over the almanac. Men aint much use in winter.

ABRAHAM — I'll call him.

HANNAH — No, no. Let me. You mus'n't go out in the cold that way without bein' wrapped

up, — you'll git rheumatism agin. (*She opens the door part way and calls, Jake!*)

JAKE (*outside*) — What's up?

HANNAH — Abraham wants ye.

(*Jake enters.*)

ABRAHAM — Take the sleigh, Jake, and go over quick for Ellen. Hannah 'll need her help to get dinner.

(*Jake gives Hannah a quizzical look and goes out, with a pleased expression, on his errand.*)

ABRAHAM — Have all the friends come?

HANNAH — Yes. They're in the front room. Shall I call 'em?

ABRAHAM — No, not yet; I must speak with Katherine alone first. You call her, Hannah. (*Hannah goes out at left. Abraham walks rather nervously up and down. Katherine enters. She wears a gown of soft brown, with golden lights, and an apron and kerchief of cream color. She is very pale.*)

KATHERINE — You sent for me, father?

ABRAHAM — Yes, Katherine. I must speak with you now, not as your earthly father, but as the shepherd and bishop of your soul.

KATHERINE — Speak to me as both, father.

ABRAHAM (*too absorbed to heed Katherine's words*) — John Runkel wishes you to walk before the Lord with him as his wife, Katherine, and the church indorses his wish.

KATHERINE — But I do not love John Runkel, father.

ABRAHAM — I fear you speak of love in the carnal sense, Katherine. When we enter upon the narrow way we should put aside carnal things. We should feel only the spiritual love.

KATHERINE — Father, did you feel only the spiritual love for mother?

ABRAHAM (*flushing a little and then growing pale and sad*) — Your mother and I — married before we entered upon the narrow way.

KATHERINE — Did you marry each other for love?

ABRAHAM — I — we — we thought so.

KATHERINE — Did your love for each other change — after you joined the church?

ABRAHAM (*in simple honesty*) — I have never thought of that. I — I — do not think it did, — but of course it became sanctified.

KATHERINE — But, father, suppose there had been no love to begin with, — could your marriage have become sanctified?

ABRAHAM — The spiritual love sanctifies all things. The holy Paul says, —

KATHERINE (*desperately*) — But, father, suppose — suppose I love another.

ABRAHAM — In the church, Katherine (*sternly*)?

KATHERINE (*trembling*)— No, father.

ABRAHAM — Then, Katherine, as the bishop of your soul, I charge you marry John Runkel! — flee from fleshly lust! — crucify your carnal mind! The carnal mind is enmity against God. Save your soul from the wrath to come! Follow the guidance of our holy church and the peace of God that passeth all understanding shall come upon you.

KATHERINE (*desperately*) — The peace of God! The peace of God! (*Then, as if remembering herself.*) Father, I will do as you, — as the church directs.

ABRAHAM — May the blessing of our Heavenly Father be upon you, my child! And now it is time to call the friends together. (*Opening door at left which leads to a corridor, and then opening a second door upon this corridor leading to the parlor, Abraham says*) Come, friends! (*and re-enters, followed by Henry Eichberger, Levi Schwartz, and John Runkel. These he takes each solemnly by the hand and kisses him upon the mouth, saying*) Greeting in the Lord! (*after which they each shake hands awkwardly with Katherine, saying*) I wish well to your soul. (*In the midst of this greeting Hannah enters, followed by Mary Eichberger. The men seat themselves on one side of the room near Abraham,*

who places himself again at the small table. The women range themselves upon the settee against the other wall. There is a short period of silent prayer, in which all join with bowed heads.)

ABRAHAM — We are gathered together, dearly beloved, to take counsel one with another, as becomes brethren who love the Lord, as to our walk with God before the world (*a short silence*). We are commanded to let our light so shine before men that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven (*another short pause*). We will first consider the excommunication of our sister, Mary Eichberger. Our holy church is becoming a thing of reproach to the world because of this. It is noised about, and has even crept into the church itself, to question whether our sister has been given a just opportunity to plead her cause, — to question whether the judgment against her has been a righteous judgment. As deacon, I will ask our brother Levi Schwartz to give his testimony as to this judgment.

LEVI. (*with set lips and stern face*)— The judgment was a righteous judgment. Our sister, in defiance of her husband, who is her head in Christ, in the vain pride of life, insisted upon having venetian blinds upon the outside of her house. She has doubly sinned. She has been

guilty of the lust of the eye and of disobedience to her husband.

ABRAHAM — Mary, what have you to say to this?

MARY (*lifting her bowed head and looking with gathering courage at her husband's face*)— I feel — I have always felt that it is an unrighteous judgment.

ABRAHAM (*gently*)— Do you desire to return to the fold of the Lord?

MARY (*earnestly*)— I do.

ABRAHAM — Do you sincerely repent of your pride of life?

MARY — I have none to repent of, — I have never felt or shown any pride of life.

ABRAHAM (*in great surprise*)— Your husband testified to the church that you were froward through pride of life.

MARY — He knew, — (*correcting herself*) he knows, — that it was not that.

ABRAHAM — Why did you wish the new-fangled shutters on your house?

MARY — To make my work easier by letting in the air and keeping out the flies.

ABRAHAM — And Henry knew this?

MARY — Ask him.

ABRAHAM (*avoiding looking at Henry*)— And why did you not tell this to the church?

MARY — I had no chance.

LEVI — The holy Paul enjoins upon women to keep silence in the church, — to let their husbands speak for them.

ABRAHAM — Did Henry speak falsely for you?

MARY — Ask him.

ABRAHAM (*looking squarely at Henry for the first time*) — Henry, search your own heart and answer.

LEVI (*interrupting*) — Henry, remember what the holy Paul says, “The husband should rule well his own household, — the husband is the head of the wife.”

HENRY (*his features working convulsively*) — It was — it was — the love of money — in me, — the root of all evil, — in me, and not the pride of life in Mary.

ABRAHAM (*his face quivering with emotion, a few large tears falling down his cheeks*) — And what brought you to know this, Henry?

HENRY (*his countenance still working pathetically*) — Mary’s love and patience.

ABRAHAM — And you will acknowledge this publicly, — to the church?

HENRY (*in deep emotion*) — Yes, I will.

(*Mary, with a look of grateful affection at Henry, drops her head again.*)

ABRAHAM — Let us silently praise God (*a short silence*).

ABRAHAM — Our brother, John Runkel, a newly saved brand from the burning, would speak before these friends his wish to walk before the Lord with my daughter Katherine as his wife.

JOHN (*rising, pale and agitated, and in worldly speech*)— I wish to marry Katherine Gast.

ABRAHAM — The question has been considered and approved by the church. Katherine, what is your wish?

KATHERINE (*who has been sitting with bowed head, gazing fixedly upon her hands in her lap, seemingly hearing nothing, rouses herself with a start, and, with wide open, apparently unseeing eyes, says, monotonously*)— I will marry John in the late spring. (*Then shudders as if with cold and resumes her former pose.*)

(*The blood rushes over John's face, and he gives her a glowing look of gratitude and love, — then remembers himself and resumes his solemn attitude and expression.*)

ABRAHAM — There is another matter which has been considered and indorsed by the church. This is my desire to walk before the Lord with Hannah Brown as my wife. Hannah, is this your wish?

HANNAH (*with a mixture of pride and humility*)— This is my wish.

ABRAHAM — Let us again silently praise the Lord.

(*All sit for a few seconds with bowed heads, then Abraham rises, saying*) I guess we men must leave this room to the women, now. They don't like us around while they're at work (*leads the way to the parlor*).

MARY (*looking anxiously at Katherine*)— You don't look well, Katherine. What ails you, child?

(*Katherine, her nerves giving way, bursts into an agony of sobbing. Mary puts her arms about her in motherly fashion.*)

MARY — Come, dear, let me put you to bed. You're not fit to be up (*leads her out*).

(*There is a jingling of sleigh-bells.*)

HANNAH (*going to the window*)— There they are.

ELLEN (*entering*)— Well, here I am. My, but it's cold. This fire feels good.

HANNAH (*busily*)— Come, now, hurry-burry! You set the table while I go into the kitchen. I'll help you get the table out first. You know where everything is. (*They set the large table in the center of the floor and put up the drop leaves. Hannah goes out. Ellen opens a closet and takes out a linen cloth, which she spreads on the table.*) My, Hannah will have a lot of nice

linen when she marries Abraham! (*Then she proceeds to get out dishes and place them on the table.*) And aint this china nice? (*The door opens very quietly and Jake peeps in.*)

JAKE — Kin I come in?

ELLEN (*blushing*)— Why, yes. What's to hinder?

JAKE — You're purtier than ever today.

ELLEN (*blissfully*)— Am I?

JAKE — Yes, you are. I want to hug you (*passionately*).

ELLEN — O Jake!

JAKE (*mocking her playfully*) — What's to hinder (*coming closer*)?

ELLEN (*backing away from him*)— Somebody might come in.

JAKE — Well, what if they do?

ELLEN — O Jake (*lifting a glowing face to his*)!

JAKE — There's a kind o' general marryin' and given' in marriage goin' on today, — what's wrong with you and me hitchin' up for life (*putting his arms around her*)?

ELLEN (*with spirit*)— I won't come here to live with Hannah!

JAKE (*gleefully*)— That's my girl! Did you think I would ask it of ye? No-sir-ee! Abraham 'll be glad to let us have the tenant house

over by the brook. I've got a nice little pile laid by, and we'll fix it up as cosey as a bird's nest. Won't that be to your likin'?

ELLEN — Oh, you dear Jake (*letting him kiss her as he will*). But you must go now. You're hinderin' my settin' the table, and Hannah 'll scold.

JAKE (*laughing*)— She won't have many more chances to scold you if I kin help it (*steals a kiss and goes out*).

CURTAIN

L. of C.

ACT FOURTH

SCENE — *James Herron's study. It is early evening.*

(Enter Katherine in out-door garb, followed by Susan.)

SUSAN — My, but it's good to see you agin, Miss Katherine! Come to say good-bye to the baby? Mr. Herron's goin' day after tomorrow, and Jane, she's goin' too. She loves that baby so she has to go with it, and Mr. Herron — he's mighty glad to take her. And Mr. Herron's partner, Mr. Reigart, is goin' to move right in. They've bought the place, furniture and all. And I'm goin' to live with 'em. But here I am a-talkin' on as if you'd been to the other side of the world. And indeed, Miss Katherine, you might 'a' been dead for the way we missed you ever since you went away, — little James and all. But, my! let me take your things, and set you down close to the fire. It's cold out, aint it?

KATHERINE *(pale and shivering)* — Yes, it's very cold out. I am quite chilled with my ride. Thank you, Susan. How's little James?

SUSAN — Oh, he's fine, Miss. He's asleep, though. Jane puts him to bed early. Will you go up and look at him a little?

KATHERINE — No, Susan, not yet. I am too cold. I might chill him by going near him. I'll — I'll wait till morning.

SUSAN — I'll take your things right up to your room, then, and you just sit down close to the fire. You don't seem well, Miss Katherine. It goes hard with you to part with the baby fur good, don't it? But they say you're goin' to marry Mr. Runkel, and then maybe you'll have a baby of your own some day. Sit down here (*moving a chair to the fire*), and I'll make more light.

KATHERINE (*sitting down*) — No, no, Susan, thank you. I don't want any more light. I don't even want this. Put it out, please. The fire-light is enough. I am thoroughly chilled, — but I'll soon be warm by this cheerful blaze.

SUSAN — Yes, Miss Katherine. Then I'll get you a little supper quick. Will you have it up here?

KATHERINE — No, Susan, I don't want any supper, not the least thing. I ate something before I started. I have everything I want. I'll just rest here until I get thoroughly warmed, and then I'll go to bed. Good-night, Susan.

SUSAN (*turning out the light*) — Good-night, Miss Katherine. (*Goes out.*)

(*Katherine remains seated in the deep chair*)

before the bright fire, which shines full in her face. She is very pale. She shivers still. Presently she throws up her arms with a little cry, and, rising, begins to walk the floor. Steps are heard outside. She quickly resumes her seat, with her back toward the door upon corridor. James enters. The room seems dark to him after the brightly lighted staircase. He strikes a match on his shoe-sole, which goes out. He approaches the fire. He sees Katherine.)

JAMES — Katherine!

KATHERINE (*rises, staggers a little, holding by the chair. She is paler than before. She speaks in little gasps*)—Yes, James, it is I. I have come to say good-bye — to the baby.

JAMES (*gloomily*)—And to *me* — good-bye — forever.

KATHERINE (*imploringly*)—Don't, James, it breaks my heart. (*Then suddenly and wildly*) O James, what shall I do! — what shall I do! (*Falling on her knees, bowing her head upon her hands, and rocking her body to and fro.*)

JAMES (*startled*)—What do you mean, Katherine, what do you mean?

KATHERINE (*in the same attitude*)—How can I tell you! How can I tell you!

JAMES (*eagerly*)—You do not wish to marry John Runkel?

KATHERINE (*lifting up her face, with the look of death upon it*)—I dare not marry John Runkel.

JAMES (*helping her to her feet*)—Katherine, Katherine, explain yourself. (*A light breaking into his face*) Explain yourself, Katherine.

KATHERINE (*looking him full in the face with agonized eyes*)—I—I—am going to have a child,—*your* child, James (*drawing away from him and drooping her head*).

JAMES—You!—you!—a child! *my* child! Thank God! Katherine,—thank God! (*Taking her in his arms and sobbing in passionate joy.*)

KATHERINE (*lifts her face to his with deep surprise in her expression, which changes to a sort of terror*)—O James! How can you say Thank God!

JAMES (*holding her close*)—Because this is the only thing that would save you—from—your church,—and give you—to me—Katherine,—my love! my love!

KATHERINE—But, O James! Think of our sin! Think of the just anger of God against us! Against me in particular,—who have done despite to His Holy Name,—who have crucified Him afresh.

JAMES—We have *not* sinned, Katherine. We

have only loved, — and if God is love, He loves our love. Why, Katherine (*holding her off and looking into her face with passionate tenderness*), do you really believe that a few words of a priest, or a legal sanction, can make a thing right that is in itself wrong? No, Katherine, it is eternally right that the man and woman who love each other should come together in love. And no priest or law can make this any more right, nor can any lack of religious or legal sanction make it wrong.

KATHERINE (*comforted into a degree of calm in spite of herself*) — When you say these things, James, I can not answer. I feel that you are right somehow, — but if you are, how is it about all that I have been taught, — about the way I feel — so wicked — so vile in the sight of God?

JAMES — The things we have been taught have a deep hold upon us, Katherine, — until we begin to think for ourselves. When we do this we stand up and look the universe in the face, and are not afraid.

KATHERINE — Oh, but James, I *am* afraid! — I *am* afraid! I can *never* — *never* feel as you do. And yet — if you did not feel as you do, — what would become of *me*? I should be an outcast and a word of reproach.

JAMES — You are not going to be an outcast

and a word of reproach, Katherine. You are going to be my dear wife, and we are going far away from the influences that have prevented you from thinking for yourself, — going where you will forget these narrow ideas — where you will discard this dress — where you will have a chance to be your own beautiful self in freedom and in love.

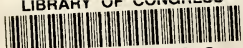
KATHERINE — O James, dear! I can never discard this dress, — don't think that I will, — I must wear it, — wear it always in penance — to keep me humble — to help me remember my sin — my desertion of my Savior.

JAMES — You repeat these stock-in-trade expressions of religion, my dear Katherine, as some lesson that you have learned. But you will learn a new lesson, — a lesson that has in it no wrath or punishment or penance, or any such thing, — nothing but love. There is no such thing as sin, Katherine, — there is only ignorance. And ignorance shall be dissipated as we grow in knowledge through experience. You know Jesus, your Savior, as you call Him, said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” I believe those words, Katherine. They hold all of my religion. We will live *this* religion, — you and I. We will acknowledge our ignorance. We will seek to gain knowledge, — the knowledge

of the truth. And, in doing this, we shall find the universe on our side. And, as the truth sets us free, we shall realize more and more that there is no wrath, no punishment, no penance,—nothing but love—love—love! (*Holding Katherine's face between his hands and kissing her with each word, as she gazes into his eyes in adoring affection, her own pale and stricken countenance seemingly lighted by the glow from his.*)

CURTAIN

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