

THE DEFEATED LIFE
BY
ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH

The Defeated Life By Elizabeth Oakes Smith

Chapter I

The Defeated Life

“It was a church low-built and square with belfry perched on high; And no unseemly carving there to shock the pious eye.”

Upon the shores of Casco Bay, about ten miles from the city of Portland, is a long hilly range, of perhaps three quarters of a mile in length a barren rocky spot partially covered with stunted pines. In one part where the grey granite “crops” out from the

thin soil, may be seen a weather-beaten vane, which a few inhabitants of the district have elevated upon a rude frame and soldered into the rock, in the pious hope of thus preserving this only relic of the “Meeting House below the ledge.” Rarely might be found a more attractive spot for the worship of a new people, than the site of this old church, standing as it did, at the base of the ledge before named, upon a green esplanade, flanked upon every side by the forest, through the openings of which arose the “Block House,” the place of refuge of the colonists in periods of peril, fast by the altar of God, with here and there the humble dwellings of the worshipers, each in fact a citadel, built for strength, and armed for defense. In front was a Bay, a most lovely expanse of water, with Island and Cove, sloping hill, and rude promontory, all wearing the aspect of newness and beauty, to awaken the freshest impulses of the heart.

Though little can be said in defence of the architectural perfections of the “Old Meeting House,” yet in the proud days thereof it might have been regarded as the model of excellence. Here came the staunch men and the stately dames of the olden time, to listen to the profound and subtle teachings of Parson Gilman as he stood reverently in his large white wig, and discoursed upon “predestination,” “fore-knowledge,” “free agency,” and “eternal necessity,” together with other doctrines abstruse and all-important in the eyes of the unflinching thinkers of that day. Then it

was that a sermon held its all important place as a part of the seventh day teaching; then it was that the theologian found wary hearers; then it was that the Teachers from the pulpit became “Boanarges,” indeed, thundering forth their sublime intellectualities, to overawe the feebler minds, which were unable to penetrate these fearful mysteries, and could only cry trembling and in tears, “I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” Then it was that prayer, by which spirit maketh itself known to spirit, became a weapon of attack, a vehicle for the utterance of dogmas to be received by human ears, and lost its great purposes of supplication, confession and faith. Every man was supposed to have become “Priest unto the Lord,” and the errors of heresy were more dreaded than errors of practice, amongst a people with so few temptations

to evil from without. Hence the introversion of thought in that day; the anxious and pious ingenuity with which men searched for hidden evil; the monkish self-abasement; the severe nicety of moral construction; and those terrible wrestlings and groanings of the spirit to be “delivered from the thorn in the flesh.” This was a part of the Pilgrim care to preserve themselves and their children from abuses, which they had braved peril in every shape to escape.

They would keep themselves a pure people, “jealous of good works,” and in order to do this, they laid the foundation in their own hearts, which they “guarded with diligence.” Far-seeing, earnest and true men, let us reverence the sanctity of their motives, although we may condemn the intolerance of their measures.

Parson Gilman has long since been gathered to his fathers; and his hearers have nearly all departed, except a few venerable men, who still talk of the self-willed, independent old man, who for fifty years swayed the minds and consciences of the people about Casco Bay; whose great learning, severe piety and uncompromising logic found no rival, and have left their impress yet upon the minds of men, after the laps of nearly a century. Parson Gilman and his white wig are still held in affectionate remembrance, and the “elders” in North Yarmouth delight in reviving reminiscences of him and his ministry, when the Old Meeting House was the only place of worship in

the town, and people came from the distance of ten miles to listen to the word of God, as delivered by Parson Gilman “below the ledge.”

After standing more than a hundred years, it was pulled down in 1830, if I mistake not, having been long deserted as a place of prayer. Yet it was in excellent preservation up to the time of its fall, having been built of white oak. I cannot even think of this desecration without a pang. I remember the awe with which I once trod alone its deserted aisles. The quaint pulpit, with its antique, oaken carvings; the communion table, folded in its place, and covered with dust, from which the elements had been distributed to the pious and believing, now no more; the crypt beneath the pulpit, in which had been kept the rude “communion service,”—then the doors ajar, or slipped from their hinges—the seats once pressed by the young and the beautiful—the solemn galleries—the place for singers, the slender balustrade surmounting each pew, which left their tracery where the light fell through the small glass. I remember the sparrow and the swallow which found there a peaceful habitation—the whispered murmur of the pines, as the wind swept adown the ledge, and stole through the lone church,—and the bleat of the sheep sheltered beneath its caves.

Truly, I know not how human hands could have been raised against it. I know not what heart would not have been awed into remorse and grief, as the venerable rafters, so long audible to prayer and praise, were crushed to the earth. We have no ruins, and it may be never shall have, for the spirit of our people is opposed to associations of the kind—they reject the past, whether in experience, in sentiment, or architecture. A cobweb is monstrous to them—a cornice honored by dust, and made sacred by the

swallow, is an offence—the grey beautiful tintings of time are unseemly, and they long for the tidy, painted wall, and the brisk white-wash.

Oh had they but spared the “Old Meeting House below the ledge!” Thither they might have brought their children, and have told them tales of blood and peril—have taught them there the sublime lessons of human freedom, and the more sublime lessons of order and good citizenship. Reverently pacing those old aisles, how impressive

might have become the teachings of wisdom! How the bye-gone age had lived again! What though the bird sang above the sounding board, was it not a sweet harmony? What though the fox might have pat upon the stairs, and look forth from the windows; would it not send solemn and earnest thoughts home to the heart? What though the vestibule became a fold for the sheep—is not Jesus called the lamb of God, and would not their meek innocent natures appeal for the like in our own? What though the green moss lay in tufts upon the roof, the grass nodded from the eaves, and the turf rolled itself like a fold about the tilted steps, yet most pleasantly had come down the Sabbath sun to light each with a smile, and old men, too infirm for church-going, or it may be yearning too much over the past, would have loitered about the door-way, or leaning heavily upon their crutch, have walked along the aisles, with ears too deaf to be startled by the sepulchral echoes. Oh that a plea might be heard fro the old meeting-houses in which our fathers worshiped, in times when each went armed to the house of God, lest the savage should find them unprepared for defence, when worship was a great human need, to be sought through peril and death, and not as now a luxury, an appendage to respectability.

The Defeated Life By Elizabeth Oakes Smith

Chapter II.

The site of the Old Meeting House is now a smooth green turf, and only the grasshopper and the cricket pipe a Sabbath day song to God. The road skirting the hill is overgrown with bushes, and the pines under the shelter of the "Gilman rock," those dear cooling pines, which kept up such a whispering all day and seemed as if they were telling over what the lovers had said beneath them, and trying to sigh in the same style; those old pines, so hard and smooth underneath, where no reptiles ever came, and no bushes crowded themselves, and only the winter-green came up to show off its red berries, and the Indian pipe, so wax-like in its purity, as if it once thought to be a columbine, but found itself out of place, and grew pale and tenderly beautiful, like a pure heart breaking; those social, talkative pines are deserted now. You can still see the road, and a rough one it must have been, adown which every Sunday morning might

be seen the Brewster family on their way to church.

There was Mr. Brewster, a short stout man, with a fresh good-natured face, whose ruffles and velvet gave him the appearance of an overgrown boy, and who bestrode his large sleek chestnut horse with the air of a clumsy master upon the nursery hobby. Behind him, stately, in lace and brocade, perched daintily upon a pillion, her

fair but haughty head rising above him, sat Madam Brewster, her shapely figure almost courtly in its careless yet proud bearing. One hand, which slightly pressed his waist, allowed the many rows of lace to fall backward and expose the handsome arm, scarcely shielded by its glove of net. From the pocket peered out amid the masses of drapery a lawn handkerchief and a bible with clasps, while a fan of gauze, a half a yard in length, graced her fingers. A proud dame was Madam Brewster in every sense of the word, queening it over her household as few women were wont to do in those days of deference for manly prerogative—when the blessing at the board, the petition at the family alter, and the prayer in the pulpit were each and all worded in a way to make

her feel that she was indeed the "weaker vessel." Mr. Brewster, good man, knew better than to indulge in any such pious arrogance, and it was currently hinted that his very smooth, almost Episcopal generalizing form of prayer was carefully prepared by his good dame, and duly committed to memory by himself; for it was generally believed in the neighborhood that Madam Brewster had a leaning to the old church of England

worship, "a handkering for the flesh-pots of Egypt," a spice of the "old leaven" of abomination, as it was called, and even Mr. Gilman, orthodox as his doctrines were believed to be, was not without censure for not curbing the pride of his parishioner, Madam Brewster.

We have said she was a proud woman, and proud she was in every sense. Indeed, it was a rare sight, the flutter caused by the family of a Sabbath morning amongst the primitive congregation, as the cavalcade swept the side of the hill all in order, and the calm eye of the lady often quietly turned itself back to see that due decorum was preserved. Well might her pride be forgiven, for it was a goodly sight— those seven sons, each with his hair in a long braid at the back of the head, handsome boys were they, as they came two by two, into the Old Meeting House, following the steps of good Mr. Brewster and his comely wife, with the pretty Lizzie at their side. Proud was she of the beauty of this fair girl, and the shapeliness of her seven boys. Proud was she as she saw Parson Gilman rise to the services as if it had waited her coming. Proud was she to see how her simple neighbors blushed and looked gratified if she by chance gave them a smile or a slight bow of recognition, for she did not attempt anything like familiarity with them. Proud was she of her wealth, and the blood in her veins, allied to the best in England. Proud was she of the memory of her father, a staunch adherent of the Stewarts, who had exiled himself for them, and died here in this new land, bequeathing to her as her best dowry, his own uncompromising principle.

Mr. Brewster certainly had little sympathy with the lofty notions of his wife, nor did she seem to expect that he should have. Whatever ambitious motives she and her family might once have entertained, had long since been abandoned, but the haughtiness which distinguished her was an ingredient of the blood, combined with a love of sway, which, if it be not altogether amiable, must have done much in the early settlement of the country, to preserve the fine old families of the colonists from degeneracy. She was pertinacious in her adherence to the forms and usages of household matters, such as they existed at her father's house in England. There was no lack of stateliness in her arrangements, which, however becoming in themselves in a wealthy household, savored too much of aristocracy, to please the hardy democrats of

the neighborhood. Parson Gilman, it is true, settled himself in the midst of these courtly trappings with the aspect of a man entirely at home, and it may be the taste of the fine old aristocrat was too well gratified, to admit of anything like pastoral reprehension. Madam Brewster went on her own way, indifferent to the cavilings of her neighbors,

and so long as she appeared regularly at church, she and her household, orderly and devout, so long as all the ordinary offices of good citizenship were well filled by the Brewster family, there really seemed no just cause for complaint.

Mr. Brewster sometimes encountered a sly shrug when the subserviency of wives became the topic of conversation, and the stout radicals of the day, sometimes relieved themselves by a covert allusion to the 'better horse,' and the like, but he, good man, took it all quite naturally, never once seeming to think he had the least to do with the matter; nor no more had he, for Madam relieved him of a world of care, managed the boys, reprimanded the servants, and made Lizzie cry, all in a stately and proper manner, thoroughly lady-like, and edifying. There was nothing left for him to do, but enjoy himself in his own way: go to church of a Sunday, with Mrs. Brewster behind him; say grace at the table; make prayers morning and evening; hold the babies for

Parson Gilman to christen, and in all other ways, demean himself as a good plain honest man should.

It will be seen that in those days the family must have lived nearly apart. There was then no village nearer than Portland, which was twelve miles distant; there was no corner, no tavern then, nothing but the farm houses with long intervals between, the old Meeting House, the Parsonage and the block house. People were too much apart, and too much encompassed with peril to afford much time for neighborly interference. Excepting the Sabbath-day meetings, and the meetings for prayer, weekly, at the houses of the parish, in which the sermon of Parson Gilman the Sabbath before became the subject for discussion, people had few opportunities for social gatherings, and fewer

still for country gossip. They were all orthodox in their religious opinions according even to strict Puritanic construction. They were all virtuous in their relations in life, or there would have been a gathering of the elders to inquire into the matter, and bring the parties to a right sense of the proprieties of things. There was in fact nothing left upon which gossip might expend itself, except the all engrossing and never ending subject of the pride of Madam Brewster, the extravagance of Madam Brewster, and the

domination of Madame Brewster, varied by a change upon the good natured Mr. Brewster, the hen-pecked Mr. Brewster, the affable Mr. Brewster, &c.

Those were the days of decorum and good order, every man knowing that his neighbor's eye was upon him, to read the thoughts of his heart. Those were the days when a marriageable youth and maiden were a sort of public property, scrutinized by the old people with watchful guardianship, and the objects of all the artillery of simple coquetry, covert smiles, and glances from the young, every one of which became the subject of comment or surmise and were duly registered as a part of the important little drama which was hereafter to terminate in a wedding or a heartbreak, either of which would relieve the monotony of the hamlet.

Ah! But these were great days for smiles and ogles; days when each became a matter of profound interest; pretty lips had weighty meanings hid within them, bright eyes sent no random glances abroad, but each were warily used, and only with the premeditated will and consent of the fair owners. Staid and decorous Dames were they of those days, they with calm, steady eyes, compressed lips, and scanty words; they with firm step, and careful observation—they of proud humility, and many internal questionings which found no relief in words; they who bore daily the cross of ungenial ministry, of crushed and distorted sympathy silent and tearless.

The Defeated Life By Elizabeth Oakes Smith

Chapter III.

Hitherto we have said nothing of Lizzie Brewster, fair as she was, and living like a gem in its own brightness. Except her own roistering brothers, from whom she fled half in terror, she had no companions. Madam Brewster, though well aware of her loveliness, often marked her daughter with an anxious scrutiny, fearful that something might be a little wrong in the construction of her mind, a shade of imbecility—a chord slightly ajar, which while it imparted a grace and variety to all her thoughts made them in turn a trifle less reliable. She could not name this to Mr. Brewster, for the subject was altogether beyond his capacity of comprehension, and the thing was in reality too intangible to be well explained to any one.

In this dilemma, she laid the matter before Parson Gilman. The loud, incredulous laugh of the clear-minded good man grated upon the ears of the proud woman.

“Ah no, Madam Brewster,” he said, you shall not be-little and be-twist the pretty lamb in this way. ‘There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the stars, and one star differeth from another star in brightness,’ but you shall not make little Lizzie no star at all, simply because she has not the power and fulgence of her mother. She is not the bright one amid others, but the one star alone in the twilight.”

“Yes, all that is finely said, my dear sir, but my daughter is so strangely gentle, so without any particular bias in any way, that really I do not see how I am ever to look for anything in her.”

Again the Parson laughed, and Madam Brewster, not at all satisfied, was quite glad when Lizzie came in leading Charles Edward by the hand to claim the greetings of the good Parson. He placed her in a chair beside him, and in a few moments they were absorbed in one of those interminable debates as to the nature of free will and fore-knowledge, with which the ladies of that day were in the habit of amusing their leisure moments, and employing any super-abundance of feminine fancy which might be in their possession. It was really surprising to observe the easy grace with which Lizzie would herself in and out of these labyrinthine subjects, seizing points of rare and subtle importance, with a careless vigor, which proved herself fully equal to the matter in hand, although it might not be altogether the one desired by a girl of sixteen. Imperceptibly she glided away from the dryness of polemics, and Parson Gilman listened with delighted wonder to her graceful and discriminating admiration of Spenser and Milton, for Shakespeare was as yet little known and less approved by the Colonists. They looked upon all dramatic representation as little less than wanton exhibition of the cloven hoof of Satan, who, sure of his victims, was at no pains to conceal his designs. But Una, with her snow-white lamb was too far removed from human emotions to create distrust, and she—‘in the lap of womanhood’—was meek, as she was fair, and not all likely to suggest that radical individuality so strongly to be learned from the characters of Shakespeare. Milton, too, with his terrible and majestic Satan, that impersonation of pride against which the pilgrims strove and preached night and day; Milton, the polished courtier yet arrogant republican, the true-hearted man yet earnest puritan; Milton, with his womanly Eve, tender and meek and loving, erring yet always submissive; Milton was the idol of the Puritans, and, had his fame died out at home, had the

license and oppression of courts forced him into perpetual exile, he would have found an evergreen fame here, would have been read and treasured and quoted as he is to this day with reverence, which has half mistaken his opinions for the teachings of Holy Writ.

Allegory, mysticism, and speculation were the daily food of men dwelling in the wilderness, with all the memories of stirring thought within them, who, retaining the intellectual ferment which had wrought out a relief from papal bondage as well as relief from royal prerogative, had exiled themselves so far from the influences of each that they had left little wherewithal to satisfy the cravings of that excitement which would not subside, although the occasion was past.

Young and old partook of this tendency to abstruse and introversive thought, which it is most likely did away with much of the urgency of human affection, and much of that sentimental necessity for sympathy, which while it lends a grace often, not the less weakens the fibre of the mental constitution in a more luxurious state of society.

As yet Lizzie Brewster had naturally read and talked in accordance with the spirit of the times, excepting that a delicacy of perception, and a poetic elevation of view made her often seem to go even beyond them in her pure spirituality; and it was this, which alarmed her clear worldly minded mother into a suspicion that she might not have that practical grasp of life which she considered so essential to the dignity of the family. She never for a moment stopped to ask what might be the individual needs of any one, but what all things considered was for the manifest interest of the individual. For a girl unasked to exhibit any thing like preference for one of the other sex was in her eyes an evidence of monstrous indelicacy, to be treated like some revolting disgrace, which the good sense of a family should hide if possible from the eyes of the world; so that the indifference of Elizabeth to the youth of the period was not matter of surprise to her. She regarded it as the natural result of her careful training, and a proof of her filial submissiveness, while the truth was there was no one with whom she could have any possible sympathy; no one who, had he dared to lift his eyes to Lizzie Brewster, would have found the least return from the proud, intellectual and spiritual-minded girl. The mother was well aware of this, and was not slow to understand how it might be turned to her own purposes. All her ambition, all her love were concentrated in her seven sons, and Lizzie with her high breeding, her tenderness, her feminine gentleness, was so enigmatical to her as to be a source of distrust, if not of annoyance. Her beauty even, severely brilliant, seemed out of place in a new country like this, while it would have been so ennobling in a more refined position. But to the imperious, practical and worldly mother, her deep mysterious eyes, her calm, gentle earnestness of manner, and sweet lips expressive of the finest sensibility, were each and all the source of regret and anxiety. In truth poor Lizzie was scarcely sixteen before she had found the subject of establishing her in life one of such vast solicitude that she had determined to leave nothing undone to have her at once placed where she would be safely cared for.

The Defeated Life By Elizabeth Oakes Smith

Chapter IV.

Thou 'rt like those fine-toned spirits, gentle bird! Which, from some better land, to this rude life [...] borne; they struggle, 'mid the common herd With powers unfitted for the selfish strife! Happy, at length, some zephyr wafts them back To their own home of peace, across the world's dull track.

At the distance of half a mile from Mr. Brewster's lived Mr. Malcolm, a gentleman of fortune and intelligence, a bachelor with an elderly sister, whose office

was nearly a sinecure, involving nothing more than to put brother Malcolm's flannels to the fire, pour out the tea for brother Malcolm, say yes to all that brother Malcolm might utter, yawn in concert with him as dull people, who do not hate each other always will; and ride every Sunday to church where brother Malcolm always sat with his bluish green eyes fixed upon Lizzie Brewster; and go home with him after meeting, when he broke the silence by saying as he did twice every Sunday forenoon and afternoon,

'Lizzie Brewster is a very pretty girl,' at which Miss Sarah always responded, "so she is, brother," and no more was said for the day.

Mr. Malcolm was never known to give utterance to more than half a dozen words at any one time in his life; yet he had a way of smiling in just the right place, of lifting up his eyebrows in a mysterious manner, and distorting his parchment cheeks by various expressions of horror or amazement, or interest, whenever any body did in any way different from what every body else did, that people imbibed the impression that Mr. Malcolm was a wonder of propriety, sense and acuteness. True he had never done one single thing in his whole life either good or bad, and his greenish blue eyes had something exceedingly disagreeable about them, yet he was so respectable, so rich, so regular at church, and so proper every way, that people could give no tangible reason for disliking him, excepting that instinctive one recorded as applicable to Dr. Fell.

Once a week he brought his sister to take tea with the Brewsters, where she sat upon the chintz sofa, and the sound made by her knitting needles as she violently hurried a pair of stockings for brother Malcolm into shape, was the only demonstration she gave of her whereabouts. Mr. Malcolm, on the contrary, listened to the energetic discourse of Madam Brewster, keeping his small full eyes fixed upon Lizzie as she sat with book in hand, or her fair fingers ran over the keys of the spinnet in the corner of the room. Mrs. Brewster, proud as she was, felt not unflattered by the respectful attentions of Mr. Malcolm, who always left her to her own ways of thinking, unlike Parson Gilman, who paid her understanding the compliment of an occasional dissent.

Perhaps no one could well tell how it was, but in the process of time Mr. Malcolm might be seen seated by

Elizabeth Brewster, his bald head showing like a withered pippin beside her viny-looking and spring-abundant beauty. It was melancholy to see his parchment cheeks half cracked into sentimental lines, and his pinky eyes devoid of lashes ready to run over with tenderness; how she bore it all it is impossible to tell; but often did she arise with neck proudly curved, and ill-suppressed disgust, and seek in some great thought, or some wild gush of melody, relief from the destiny which she in her gentleness was powerless to escape; then she, the proud worldly mother was at hand to tell her that all this was but maidenly modesty; that all would yet be well. Unaccustomed to sympathy, alone in her dove-like gentleness, pure and timid and self-distrustful, full of deep and earnest thought, and full of emotions unakin to those around her; beset by snares from the cold and the calculating, it is not surprising that the poor girl found herself in a position unsought and undesired, and without the capacity to say how it was forced upon her. Weapons had been forged

from the wealth of her own fine nature to be used against herself—her own truthfulness and affectionateness had been turned as instruments to make her the victim for the sacrifice—she was the kid seethed in its mother's milk.

Never was bride so unconsciously led to the altar; with no vanity, with nothing of the coquetries and caprice of her sex, with no affections pleading for tolerance, how could she make others feel that her soul revolted from its destiny! how teach the weakness and conceit of Malcolm to understand it, how awaken the forbearance of her haughty and calculating mother.

Rarely had the simple colonists witnessed splendor and expense equal to that which the wedding of Elizabeth Brewster furnished forth. The day was intensely cold and rain poured in torrents, yet warmth and light and luxury within banished the thought of the gloom without. Old people shook their heads and whispered of the sadness and life-long grief which the storm betokened, but the eyes of Madam Brewster were too keen and too alert to allow currency to these prognostics.

Not one in all that household sought to know the real feelings of Elizabeth. All were intent upon the amusement which the period furnished, and not one asked the

meaning of the still pale aspect of the bride. "Are you ill, Lizzie?" said the mother, bending her eyes sternly upon her child.

"No, Madam," she answered, but in a voice so low and faltering it would have reached any other heart.

"Then do look up, and not appear so stupid. People will think you haven't any sense, your eyes are so dull."

Lizzie tried to smile, for she knew her mother's pride, but it wouldn't come, and so she sat down and put her little hands out towards the fire and was silent.

"I do not see what is the matter of you," said the lady impatiently; "this has been none of my seeking; what ails you?"

Lizzie looked up again, and her mother's covert falsehood quailed before that mute appeal.

“Do try to look like something, Lizzie, I’m ashamed that a child of mine should have such a pale mawkish face.”

Lizzie placed herself before the large old mirror, and began to roll the curls about her neck, over her fingers. Madam Brewster seeing her thus engaged, left the room to order the maid to assist in dressing her. No sooner did Lizzie find herself alone than

she leaned her head against the oaken frame and stood in perfect silence. It would be difficult to describe the feelings which passed over her as she thus stood; but whatever they might have been, they were too deep and too bewildering for external expression. She neither wept nor sighed, a torpor, as of some terrible doom weighed her down to silence and apathy. Rarely might be seen a creature of greater loveliness than she thus presented. Scarcely sixteen, with a form tall for her years, and yet possessing the lightness and grace of a child—one hand grasped the frame, against which she leaned, and the falling laces revealed a rounded arm of marble whiteness, her pale forehead, high, it may be too high for gentleness, gleamed through the clustering brown curls, which swept [was swept] her cheek and bosom, and nearly hid the melancholy eyes, (those eyes, which had so often provoked the sarcasms of her imperious mother,) and even brushed the round sweet lips, which were parted now, so apathetic were her feelings. As a fresh gust of wind and rain shook the casement a slight shudder passed over her, but she moved not.

Dolly, the maid, gave the last touches to the dress of the fair girl, and then stood apart in wondering delight at her loveliness. There was a quiet dignity about Lizzie, which made it difficult for any one to address her in the language of praise; but Dolly could not now restrain herself.

“You are the most beautifullest creature I ever beheld,” she cried.

Lizzie did not smile, indeed it seemed doubtful if she heard her, so fixed was the expression of her face. Then came Mr. Malcolm to lead her forth to the ceremony, and she put her hand within his like one who is to act a part in some preconcerted scene. Then followed the solemn words to which she gave no response, neither by look nor motion—those barren words, which wear so much the aspect of a contract, and so little the language of sentiment—cold words involving maintenance and duty, with no seal affixed thereto, for the Puritans rejected even this time honored and beautiful emblem

of unity, the marriage ring. Then followed the sumptuous repast, and the mirth and the jest, in the midst of which Elizabeth moved so hushed and statue-like, that few could have believed all this mockery was to celebrate her nuptials. Then the old carriage of Mr. Malcolm lumbered through the drifts of snow, and wind, and rain, bearing the

silent bride, pale, torpid, and like a doomed creature, to her new home.

The Defeated Life By Elizabeth Oakes Smith

Chapter V.

The garland beneath her had fallen to dust; The wheels above her were eaten to rust. The hands, that over the dial swept, Grew crooked and tarnished, but on they kept, And still there came that silver tone From the shriveled lips of the toothless crone, Let me never forget to my dying day The tone of the burden of her lay, Passing away! passing away!

Pierpont

We must pass over a period of ten years, which brought about the usual changes of life and its concerns. Madam Brewster was nearly the same. Her handsome boys were busy in the affairs of the colony, which was approaching the great struggle resulting in our independence. Mr. Brewster had an easy leaning to the Whig side, but found himself so strenuously opposed by his wife and sons, that with his constitutional dislike to energetic measures he contented himself by simply expressing good will to

his hardy neighbors, and an occasional aid in a pecuniary way, while his family by correspondence abroad and active operations at home did all in their power to sustain the cause of royalty. We said Madam Brewster was unchanged. Time had left her handsome features unimpaired, her complexion was still brilliant, her form as well sustained as ever, nothing told of the passage of years except a statelier and more determined bearing, and the silvery threads marking her abundant and still beautiful hair; these she was at no pains to conceal; for indeed Madam Brewster had little of the infirmities of vanity in her temperament, and knew perfectly well the several stages of beauty adapted to each period of life. She was too proud to appear other than what she really was, hence her contempt for all concealment of what might be the approach of age, while her coldness and haughtiness of manners forbid any allusion to the subject in her presence. She was always called the handsome Madam Brewster, and nobody thought to speculate on her probable age, for no one thought upon the subject unless by accident her manly sons gathered about her suggested the idea of her wondrous youthfulness of aspect as being their mother.

And where was Lizzie all this time, the pale, girlish bride sent from the shelter of home upon that night of storm and darkness? Miss Malcolm had ceased to ply the needles in the chimney corner. She had long since ceased to yawn in concert with brother Malcolm or to respond to his few sentences of interest in what passed before him, for a cold and fever had laid her quietly down to her long sleep. Strange as it might seem, Mr. Malcolm nearly disappeared from church and places of public resort, and seemed more shy and taciturn than ever. Lizzie too—her existence was well nigh forgotten. People were absorbed in the stirring events of the time, and the old low house, so silent, so hushed, so solitary from year to year, was rarely the subject of thought. Speculation was sometimes afloat respecting the inmates, but no one

presumed to interfere with what seem to be matters so entirely belonging to themselves. Besides Madam Brewster was well known to regard her daughter with a strange severity, and few were willing to face the rebuke of her proud eyes and withering tongue.

For a while Lizzie might be seen in the pew of Mr. Malcolm of a Sabbath morning, and then the worshipers, who did not fail to scrutinize her, observed that her figure was more slight than formerly, and a touching waviness approaching a stoop gave a peculiar tenderness to her air; the little fingers which pressed the psalm-book were very fair and slender, and the blue veins of the wrist might all be traced through the transparent skin. As she passed her father's pew she exchanged gentle greetings, rather reserved and timid it was thought with her mother, but Charles Edward she would kiss, and then pass on, nor lift her eyes to the many who longed for a glance from her sweet face.

At length she disappeared altogether, and it was rumored that Lizzie was in effect a prisoner in her own house. A melancholy look had the house indeed. Enormous elms, which should have tossed their long branches forth to the light, had drooped themselves around the roof of the lone dwelling and the common people did not fail to recall the superstition that grief to its inmates is indicated thereby. They remembered that the first blessed day of spring, which should have called gladness about the young bride's home, beheld an owl brooding upon the roof. Then came the swallow to build its nest about the eaves and in the stones of the cold chimney. A sad aspect did the mansion wear with its clustering elms, and singing birds, and all else so hushed. Rarely was the Lady seen about the premises, or if, by chance, a passer by caught a glimpse of her, amid the abundant shrubbery of the old grounds or through the open casement, her look of intense sadness, her sweet unchanged melancholy beauty affected him like something supernatural. [was a question mark] Why did she thus hold herself apart from human sympathy? Surely those round, sweet lips, those

deep, loving eyes, and that low-toned gentle voice betokened all that is best and dearest in the affluence of womanhood!

We must add ten years more to the ten already passed, during which Lizzie had scarcely crossed the threshold. No one knew why it was so, although a general dislike existed with regard to Mr. Malcolm. No one believed that a being so ardent, so full of life and thought as Lizzie Brewster had been in her girlhood, would thus voluntarily immure herself in this way from all the genialities of life.

At length, one morning, the old servant of the family hobbled over to the Brewster house, a distance of some miles, requesting the immediate attendance of Madam Brewster.

Did Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm send? No, Mrs. Malcolm doesn't stir from the sofa, and Mr. Malcolm won't speak to nobody. The proud woman's heart sank within her.

On reaching the house, Mr. Malcolm, wasted to a mere shadow, was found seated in a large chair in the centre of the room, with his small pinky blue eyes intently fixed upon the form of Lizzie, which was curled up enveloped in masses of drapery upon one end of the sofa, her head resting upon her arms and her eyes closed.

"Why do you not speak to her?" cried Madam Brewster, shaking his arm violently, and dreading herself to approach her child.

Mr. Malcolm, without moving his eyes, answered mechanically, "She will not let

me.”

“Go to her, speak to her, man, what are you afraid of?” said the stern woman once more.

“I dare not,” was the reply, and nothing was left but for the mother to solve the terrible mystery, for indeed she seemed as one dead. Lizzie unclosed her eyes, but they were listless, and she seemed unconscious of all that passed before her. When she was borne away to her chamber, Malcolm followed with his eyes, cold and pale, fixed upon her face. Some simple cordials restored her to a partial degree of vigor, and she became aware of his presence. Raising herself up with an energy to which she seemed a moment before totally unequal, she pointed her thin hand towards him.

“Take that man from my presence, and mother, if you hope for peace in your dying hour, let me die, without those hateful eyes upon my face. Oh God, for what I have lived!” she cried, sinking backwards upon the pillow. A few days closed the scene, and Madam Brewster, stung to the heart, stricken with remorse, and her proud intellect humbled that she had so little comprehended a creature whose existence but for her might have been one of love and life-imparting happiness, returned to her dwelling to mourn over that which could never be recalled.

At the direction of Elizabeth, she took from beneath an old chest some sheets of paper, upon which she had inscribed some faint records of her sad life, which the mother read, and never from that time was known to smile.

The Defeated Life By Elizabeth Oakes Smith

CHAPTER VI.

I saw a form about my bed, That always shrunk from him with dread; 'T would come by night, 't would come by day, But clearest in the moonbeam show. Then always as it nearer drew Ere melting from my wistful view, With palm reverend it seemed to say, If yet with me thou wilt not go; Keep him, oh, keep him but away.

Hoffman

SUNDAY. Dolly has just brought me some flowers—the first fresh blooms of spring. My heart leaps at their beauty; I feel as if they were tokens from the angels, telling me that such a thing as happiness does exist somewhere, though not for me. I would kiss them, I would weep over them, but I feel that his eyes are upon me somewhere; somewhere peering in with their dead pale glare. I feel that he is somewhere watching my motions, and I would rather he should feel me to be the icy, impassable abstraction, I have schooled myself to appear, than know what my heart tells me I might be.

I felt that he must be near me. I felt it by the dead weighty atmosphere that hung like a bat over me; and there he stood at the door, waiting to catch the sound of my breath, the fall of my foot; would to God some great thought might awake, no, might find a lodgement in his mind, to crowd out his imbecile tenacity upon a subject which admits of no change; I must write these things, must give form, coherency to my thoughts, or I shall go frantic, and then I must burn all, all, for he will search, search, forever till he finds the record. And yet could I keep these things from year to year, it might, meseems, afford a comfort to read them over, and see how each succeeding one witnessed the triumph of higher thought and purpose, and a nobler surrenderment to God, of what—alas, indeed of what—of what but a poor infirm, outraged heart, which hath never known its idols—never stooped to vain worship, but alone, in silence and secrecy, hath trimmed a barren fane, hath guarded a pure light, against which no wind hath blown; affections which have found nothing akin upon earth, must be wafted heavenward—where, then, is the glory, the triumph? for preachers tell of taking up the cross, that is, of living counter to the impulses of our own natures, distrusting all that affords delight, and in proportion as we recoil from a destiny, so in proportion should we submit thereto, for this is virtue, this is subjecting the inferior to the higher, this is making reason triumph.

Ah! What is life but a succession of sophistries? what is truth to human eyes but the view which each one has of a face over which his own desires have spread dim shadows? and what is truth from God's altar, let me not blaspheme, but the associated views of men, who dole out what they in their littleness deem it safe for me to know.

FRIDAY. My Diary has escaped him, yet I know he has searched everywhere to find it; yes, even pried up the old cold chimney, where I once hung it beside the swallow's nest; he has searched there again, and here is the poor thing's nest upon the stones, blood too, he has killed the young upon the hearthstone; and that was what all the twittering I heard meant. Well, the evil be upon his own head. They say swallows build about the out-houses, but never visit the eaves of a dwelling where peace is; I do believe it. Last night Dolly chased a bat from my window—poor thing might have staid.

But here is my Diary, which he hath not yet seen. The thought is an exultation. I feel as if winged, so pleasant it is to find a record known only to God and my own heart. Meseems it is a profanation to yield up the sanctuary of the soul to human eyes, or it would be to his. I shall go wild, indeed how often do I test the coherency of my mind, lest I may already have lost a portion of its clearness, so bewildered do I become by this silence, solitude, and his pale eyes glaring upon me wherever I am: such eyes, unchanging, wall-like, and moving wherever I move. I will try myself in art, which I remember good Parson Gilman used sometimes to call "thdown dropped from the wings of angels in the hands of good men, but in the hands of bad men was nought but the pin-feathers of Satan." It may be an idle art, but I will bless God for the gift since it has been an antidote to grief, without which my soul had clean died out. Meseemafter reading the divine Milton, it is presumption and unseemliness to touch a single stop of melody; but since no ear but mine will be jarred at the discord, I will e'en go on.

AIMLESS AND HOPELESS Oh weary life! It were an easy task. To lay thee down. Thou hast no boon for me, No beaconing lure save veiled eternity. Still must I struggle to endure, nor ask Nor hope for aught, save that which wears the mask Of joy, to hide the heart's deep agony. I rise each morn with but the single prayer For strength life's heave load of ill to bear And lay me down at night with all the claims Of human hearts, called forth in our weak hour, Each pleading for its own with voice of power. Ah! wherefore struggle thus debarred from aims Which fill the soul with their triumphant dower, And write o'er crushed and weary hearts immortal names.

SUNDAY. The rain pours in torrents, and the terrible wind roars through the old house. The sounds, which others often like to hear, fill me with the saddest emotions. I was cast forth from the home roof in such a night. No wonder all people have regarded a stormy bridal as ominous of evil, the fates, even the merciful fates, shrieking as if it were their disapproval. "A lowery day and lowery bride," I remember hearing some one quote upon that day so fearful to me. I will reproach no one. It must be a blessed thing for a child to feel itself understood, its nature cared for and loved. I wonder if I am unlike others, or if so, the worse for the unlikeness. Well let it pass, I shall never know. I dare say people get tired of loving each other, even my father and my brothers seem to forget my existence. I will write about it, or I shall weep myself blind. SUCCORLESS O thou with grief and pain oppressed, In thy lone chamber masks thy moan, Nor hope for sympathizing breast, 'T will weary soon.

Love for the gay and careless heart, But not for thee his blessed boon; At sight of tears he will depart,
Weary full soon.

Above thy head the ground may rise To shield thee from the fervid noon, But e'er the crimson twilight
dies, 'T will wither soon.

'Tis not for thee, thou stricken vine, To stretch thy tendrils, yearning one, The prop thy weakness would
entwine, Will weary soon.

Take not the cup, though faint of soul, Which human ministry doth own, For all aside the drops will roll,
And mock thee soon.

Seek thou the barren rock for rest, Pillow thy head upon a stone; 'T were better than a human breast,
Weary so soon.

FRIDAY. How I have lived in illusions! how by the creations of my own soul have I lived in a world by
myself. Ah, how the blue sky, the hushed stars have sunk like a great beautiful mystery into my spirit! How
the blossoms have been angel-tokens of love to me, and I have placed all that taste could summon in this
new country to help out these illusions. How like a nun I have lived! and how little do I know of what is
beyond these walls. Dolly says she hears there is war, and great trials and rebellions in the country, yet I
know nothing of these things.

Why have I lived? and yet now that I can escape his presence I am not unhappy. Yet I am feeble and may
die soon, and then, O God! he will come, his eyes will be upon me, his presence will weigh like a cloud on
me. I shall go mad. No, I will pray to God to spare me this most terrible of calamities. I will "re-word" the
past, that I may be sure that all is right with me.

MONDAY. I have been looking in the glass to see what tricks time has played upon me. Sooth to say he
must have been strangely kindly. I am pale but not a line has he traced, and my hair falls like a banner over
a marble capitol, truly it is most abundant, thanks to the good Dolly, who devotes herself to all that
concerns me. This morning, when the faithful being sat down to dress it, I laid my head against her kind old
heart, and wept like a very child. I do not know why I should weep, for I, who have never known
happiness, excepting as God has poured it into my soul through thought and truth, surely why should I
weep that the scene is drawing to a close. Yet so it is. Poor old Dolly! she did not try to comfort me, she
only laid her shriveled hand upon my head, and whispered, "Bless the dear lamb!" I feel as if I should
dissolve in tears: my life has been a blank. Like a child have I lived. Years have passed over me, yet am I
still a child. I feel the stirrings of great and beautiful thought within me, but alas! I now not how others in
the great world are stirred, and these things may be but the humors of the blood lifting thought into
activity, thought which had been as nothing had my life been one of action.

TUESDAY. My nerves must be strangely attenuated. I hear the slightest sound—my sight is so distinct that
meseems I see through the lids—and the perfume of the flowers which Dolly brings me affects me to
faintness, all but the rose, that loveliest of flowers, which has an odor, so fresh, so like the elements of all
other sweet smells that I can bear it always. It is to the senses what beauty is to the soul. I begin to awake
to a sense of what I am and what I might have been. Oh God! spare me the sight; I cannot bear it now. Too

late, too late, for the material world, for the bonds are wasted to a thread which bind me here. I feel as if buoyed by the wings of angels, as if even now their pure forms were defined in the thin air. I hear pleasant voices in the garden of the soul, and I tremble not to that which says "where art thou?" Am I not here a child even now? I am glad to see that I have but small space left me, for my thoughts grow too mighty for me, too might for this prison house. The great fighting, trafficking, hard world is too terrible a world for me to encounter. I will e'en try to dream again. I will put by the stirrings of this spirit for truly it is not meet for me. I will read that which it prompted me to write last night.

DESPAIR

There is a Lake whose sullen wave Reflects no image on its breast; No flitting bird its wing doth have, No blossom on its margin rest; But silence, solemn and profound, Broods on the solitary shore; And crumbling ruins strewed around Tell those who come returned no more.

And thus my bosom hushed to rest, Shall break no more its death-like sleep. With dreams perturbed no more oppressed,

I wake no more, to watch and weep. My perished hopes revive no more, Hushed and for aye my trembling fears; Faith points no promise from the shore; I nothing have to do with tears.

Ah! wherefore o'er this sullen lake Must I my lightsome banner fling? Why on its stagnant pulse awake Where dead knells only round me ring? My freighted barque goes silent down, A sealed up mine of wealth is there. One fitful gleam a moment thrown, Then sinks in silence and despair.

Alas! it is not well to write in this wise; yet I thank God, who has given me more strength to endure than things like these might seem to imply. It must be that when a Poet utters his complaint he does so because he hath strength beyond, and he permits his heart to bleed, as it were, because he hath a great strong heart, which is eased thereby.

There was little more than this, the life-long record, it would appear, having been destroyed, rather than have it desecrated by the action of uncongenial eyes. And thus, unknown, unministered to, in silence and in grief, lived and died one of God's blessed messengers for good, a sweet bird of song, which might have soared to the very gates of heaven; but mew'd in the owl's nest, grew fearful at its own voice, and thus expired.

Freeditorial 

