

**AN ISLAND PLANT:
A NANTUCKET
STORY, PP. 3-81**

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An Island Plant: A Nantucket Story, pp. 3-81 by Mary Catherine Lee

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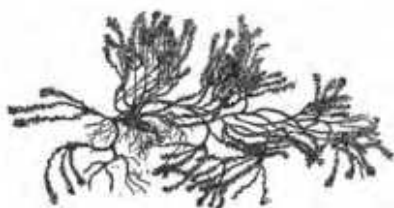
AN ISLAND PLANT

A Nantucket Story

BY

MARY CATHERINE LEE

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
SARA WINTHROP
SMITH*



NANTUCKET
Goldenrod Literary and Debating Society

1896

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Part I. The Kents



*Presented to Mrs. S. C. Campbell
1-20-32*

AN ISLAND PLANT.

I.

THE ROOTS.

WHEN Nantucket town was called Sherburne, the houses of the first settlement at Maddekett were left isolated upon the western end of the island. There they stood staring, with the chagrined expression of things conscious of having been left; toned at length into apparent resignation and serenity by a soft washing-in of gray; and brought finally to complete agreement with their setting of sea and sand by being propped up here and eked out there with the remnants of wrecks.

Most isolated, most lonely of all these was the abode of Phebe Nichols; yet more apart than the house itself was the soul within it. Daniel and Eunice Nichols, following the lead of other persecuted Quakers, had come to Nantucket, seeking peace and pursuing it. There they brought Phebe, their sole offspring, the child of their middle life, to womanhood, and left her for the eternal peace;

W.P.P.

left her to evolve such a case as she might from the conditions of more than a century ago, on the Maddekot plains.

Though she knew nothing of sacraments, there was, in truth, something of the sacredness and solemnity of a sacrament in those mute observances by which Phebe took up her inheritance, — accepted her loneliness with her patrimony. Loneliness, indeed, was by far the more considerable portion; for, beside their Bible, “a few strong instincts and a few plain rules,” Daniel and Eunice had brought hardly more than their pewter mugs and platters from the mainland. On the sands and poverty grass of Nantucket, where their humility of desire agreed with nature’s grudging moods, they had gathered together only such appointments as would protect and support their lives of duty, and, departing, had left these concretions of their virtues to bind Phebe to a hallowed spot.

In the rectitude and sincerity of her cherished furniture her father still expressed himself, for it was the work of his own hands. Her neat, sweet bedding, her mats of husks, and even her brooms of beach grass were the results of her mother’s patient industry; and in a pieced “comforter” and a braided woolen mat Phebe treasured the

relinquished garments of both her parents. There was hardly a suggestion of beauty in all her precious store, yet Phebe feared there was too much splendor of adornment in some baskets of stained withes, and woven ribbons of thinly-split soft wood, which she herself had achieved by barter with the Indians.

The indefinite matter of happiness can hardly be entered upon an inventory of Phebe's possessions, but there was something akin to it in her unconsciousness of the tediousness and poverty of her life. She was unaware, for example, that she lacked diversion, for she had never heard of the singular cases of persons who expected to be diverted. To her understanding, the daughter of Herodias pleased Herod by the skillful execution of some rarely difficult work.

On sunny days, Phebe knew the hour by the marks her father had made on the window-sill; on cloudy days, she guessed it; and the variations of dividing her monotony into portions, or accepting it entire, were her vicissitudes. She could not know that she needed a change when, after a week of storm, the sun came out, and she saw that it was twelve o'clock!

Now and then some matron of Sherburne gave her spinning and weaving or quilting to do; in