

**HERMIA
SUYDAM**

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Hermia Suydam by Gertrude Franklin Atherton

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FROM HERBERT SPENCER'S CHAPTER ON "THE WILL."

To say that the performance of the action is the result of his free will is to say that he determines the cohesion of the psychical states which arouse the action; and as these psychical states constitute himself at the moment, this is to say that these psychical states determine their own cohesion, which is absurd. These cohesions have been determined by experiences—the greater part of them, constituting what we call his natural character, by the experiences of antecedent organisms, and the rest by his own experiences. The changes which at each moment take place in his consciousness are produced by this infinitude of previous experiences registered in his nervous structure, co-operating with the immediate impressions on his senses; the effects of these combined factors being in every sense qualified by the psychical state, general or local, of his organism.

HERMIA SUYDAM.

CHAPTER I.

A SECOND AVENUE HOUSEHOLD.

WHEN Crosby Suydam died and left exactly enough money to bury himself, his widow returned to New York, and, taking her two little girls by the hand, presented herself at the old Suydam mansion on Second Avenue. "You must either take care of us or see us go to the poor-house," she said to her brother-in-law; "I am not strong enough to work, and my relatives are as poor as myself." And she sank into one of the library chairs with that air of indifference and physical weakness which makes a man more helpless than defiance or curse. Did John Suydam still, in his withered, yellow frame, carry a shrunken remnant of that pliable organ called the heart? His brother's widow did not add this problem to the others of her vexed existence—she had done with problems forever—but in his little world the legend was whispered that, many years before, the last fragment had

dried and crumbled to dust. It must be either dust or a fossil ; and, if the latter, it would surely play a merry clack and rattle with its housing skeleton every time the old man drew a long breath or hobbled across the room.

John Suydam's age was another problem. His neighbors said that the little yellow old man was their parents' contemporary. That he had ever had any youth those parents denied. He was many years older than Crosby Suydam, however, and the world had blamed him sharply for his treatment of his younger brother. Crosby had been wealthy when he married, and a great favorite. Some resentment was felt when he chose a New England girl for his wife ; but Mrs. Suydam entertained so charmingly that society quickly forgave both, and filled their drawing-rooms whenever bidden. For ten years these two young people were illuminating stars in the firmament of New York society ; then they swept down the horizon like meteors on a summer's night. Crosby had withdrawn his fortune from the securities in which his father had left it, and blown bubbles up and down Wall street for a year or so. At the end of that time he possessed neither bubbles nor suds. He drifted to Brooklyn, and for ten years more, struggled along, at one clerkship or another, his brother never lending him a dollar, nor offering him the shelter of his roof. He dropped out of life as he had dropped out

of the world, which had long since forgotten both him and his unhappy young wife.

But, if John Suydam had no heart, he had pride. New York, in his opinion, should have been called Suydam, and the thought of one of his name in the poor-house aroused a passion stronger than avarice. He told his sister-in-law that she could stay, that he would give her food and shelter and a hundred dollars a year on condition that she would take care of her own rooms—he could not afford another servant.

It was a strange household. Mrs. Suydam sat up in her room all day with her two little girls and in her passive, mechanical way, heard their lessons, or helped them make their clothes. Her brother she met only at the table. At those awful meals not a word was ever spoken. John, who had atrocious table manners, crunched his food audibly for a half-hour at breakfast, an hour and a half at dinner, and an hour at supper. Mrs. Suydam, whose one desire was to die, accepted the hint he unconsciously gave, and swallowed her food whole; if longevity and mastication were correlatives, it was a poor rule that would not work both ways. She died before the year was out; not of indigestion, however, but of relaxation from the terrible strain to which her delicate constitution had been subjected during the ten preceding years.

John Suydam had her put in the family vault, under St. Mark's, as economically as possible, then