

**PROVINCIAL PAPERS,
BEING A COLLECTION OF
TALES AND SKETCHES**

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Provincial Papers, Being a Collection of Tales and Sketches by Joseph Hatton

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JOSEPH HATTON

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BY

JOSEPH HATTON.

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TO THE READER.

Some of the papers forming this volume have previously appeared in print, and led a vagabond sort of existence, under a variety of guises, in the miscellaneous columns of newspapers, travelling in more than one instance to our colonies, and coming back to me in Cape of Good Hope and Australian mail bags. Others have enjoyed a more limited circulation: these I have fitted with new clothing (some with fresh titles) for longer journeyings. Several of the Tales and Sketches appear now for the first time, making up a collection of papers which have, at least, one merit—they are brief.

Anxious to please, I have naturally my misgivings. I fear that the affection which we all feel for our youthful days has prompted the introduction of one or two papers which are more interesting to myself, as early productions, than they will be to the reader from their own intrinsic merits. There

is one thing certain, if I have been guilty of such a mistake I shall soon hear of it—unpleasant news is a quick traveller.

A great philosopher has said that there was no book so worthless that he could not collect something from it. Colton says he has seen it observed that we should make the same use of a book that the bee does of a flower : she steals sweets from it, but does not injure it. Read me in this spirit, and the frail bark which I now launch, on the sea of literary life, may struggle through the storms, and shoals, and quicksands, it will have to encounter, and induce its author, like a merchant whose first ship has been successful, to despatch another in its wake.

J. H.

Bristol, 1861.

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MY GOOD ANGEL.

THE dreadful wailings of the maddened sea, the screechings of poor humanity struggling with death in the ocean, ring no longer in my ear, though they echo still in my aching heart. I have been rescued from a mighty gulf, snatched from the brink of the grave. There are flowers climbing up before my window, and soft breezes are rustling the leaves and the blossoms. The cold blasts of Winter have been chased away by the zephyr-breath of Spring, and when the Sun sends his genial messengers to gild my latticed casement, I am permitted to breathe the fragrant air and lift my bruised body from this rural bed of peace.

Am I awake? Are the horrors of that dreadful night, when we struck upon the fatal rock; are the succeeding months of pain and pleasure, in this humble cot, but the moving panorama of a dream? No! it is all reality. The footstep on the stair tells me it is real, and my nurse, though an angel, is a Peri of Earth. Listen to her soft tread! See how that graceful form glides into the whitewashed room, and deposits the health-restoring draughts on the little oak chest under the flower-bedecked window. Hark! now she speaks, soft

'musical words, like the murmurings of the streamlet which I hear at nightfall. "Am I better?" did you ask, my good angel? Who would not be better, in body and in soul, when an angel is his ministering spirit? She is gone! Would that I could kiss even her shadow on the wall!

* * * * *

When the raging fever was at its height ; when I fancied myself again battling with the angry billows ; when the waters rose mountains high, bearing on their towering summits white foam, like Alpine snows ; when the watery avalanches broke, in all their angry might, threatening to engulf me in their dunnest depths ; when my brain was on fire, and delirium drove away bodily torture, and shook me in its dreadful grasp ; even then I saw that angel face look down upon me with its great blue eyes, bringing transient gleams of Hope (Heaven's best gift to poor humanity) into the vaults of darkness and Despair. And when, in my lucid moments, I fancied that face merely a portion of my wild ravings, My Good Angel came to me, bade me be of good cheer, and "be sure to keep very quiet." Oh ! who shall describe the sweet sensation ? It was the sunshine of Paradise after the darkness of Hades. Twice was I snatched from the grave ; once when rescued from the sea ; once when saved from despair and death on a sick bed, by that angel face which came to me with the flowers of Spring and the first dawning of reason after the chaos of fever.

* * * * *

These memories will come back to me, though years have passed away, and Time has pencilled