

**CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK**



**A NEW  
ENGLAND TALE**

**ROMANCE CLASSIC**

**Catharine Maria Sedgwick**

# **A New England Tale (Romance Classic)**

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# **PREFACE.**

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The writer of this tale has made an humble effort to add something to the scanty stock of native American literature. Any attempt to conciliate favour by apologies would be unavailing and absurd. In this free country, no person is under any obligation to write; and the public (unfortunately) is under no obligation to read. It is certainly desirable to possess some sketches of the character and manners of our own country, and if this has been done with any degree of success, it would be wrong to doubt that it will find a reception sufficiently favourable.

The original design of the author was, if possible, even more limited and less ambitious than what has been accomplished. It was simply to produce a very short and simple moral tale of the most humble description; and if in the course of its production it has acquired any thing of a peculiar or local cast, this should be chiefly attributed to the habits of the writer's education, and that kind of accident which seems to control the efforts of those who have not been the subjects of strict intellectual discipline, and have not sufficiently premeditated their own designs.

It can scarcely be necessary to assure the reader, that no personal allusions, however remote, were intended to be made to any individual, unless it be an exception to this remark, that the writer has attempted a sketch of a real character under the fictitious appellation of "Crazy Bet"

*March 30, 1822.*

# CHAPTER I.

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Oh, ye! who sunk in beds of down,  
Feel not a want but what yourselves create,  
Think for a moment on his wretched fate,  
Whom friends and fortune quite disown.—BURNS.

Mr. Elton was formerly a flourishing trader, or, in country phrase, a merchant, in the village of ———. In the early part of his life he had been successful in business; and having a due portion of that mean pride which is gratified by pecuniary superiority, he was careful to appear quite as rich as he was. When he was at the top of fortune's wheel, some of his prying neighbours shrewdly suspected, that the show of his wealth was quite out of proportion to the reality; and their side glances and prophetic whispers betrayed their contempt of the offensive airs of the purse-proud man.

The people in the village of ——— were simple in their habits, and economical in their modes of life; and Mr. Elton's occasional indulgence in a showy piece of furniture, or an expensive article of dress for himself or for his wife, attracted notice, and, we fear, sometimes provoked envy, even from those who were wiser and much better than he was. So inconsistent are men—and women too—that they often envy a display of which they really despise, and loudly condemn the motive.

Mrs. Elton neither deserved nor shared the dislike her husband received in full measure. On the contrary, she had the good-will of her neighbours. She never seemed elated by prosperity; and, though she occasionally appeared in an expensive Leghorn hat, a merino shawl, or a fine lace, the gentleness and humility of her manners, and the uniform benevolence of her conduct, averted the censure that would

otherwise have fallen on her. She had married Mr. Elton when very young, without much consideration, and after a short acquaintance. She had to learn, in the bitter way of experience, that there was no sympathy between them; their hands were indissolubly joined, but their hearts were not related; he was 'of the earth, earthy'—she 'of the heavens, heavenly.' She had that passiveness which, we believe, is exclusively a feminine virtue, (if virtue it may be called,) and she acquiesced silently and patiently in her unhappy fate, though there was a certain abstractedness in her manner, a secret feeling of indifference and separation from the world, of which she, perhaps, never investigated, certainly never exposed the cause.

Mr. Elton's success in business had been rather owing to accidental circumstances, than to his skill or prudence; but his vanity appropriated to himself all the merit of it. He adventured rashly in one speculation after another, and, failing in them all, his losses were more rapid than his acquisitions had been. Few persons have virtue enough to retrench their expenses, as their income diminishes; and no virtue, of difficult growth, could be expected from a character where no good seed had ever taken root.

The *morale*, like the *physique*, needs use and exercise to give it strength. Mrs. Elton's had never been thus invigorated. She could not oppose a strong current. She had not energy to avert an evil, though she would have borne any that could have been laid on her, patiently. She knew her husband's affairs were embarrassed; she saw him constantly incurring debts, which she knew they had no means of paying; she perceived he was gradually sinking into a vice, which, while it lulls the sense of misery, annihilates the capacity of escaping from it—and yet she silently, and without an effort, acquiesced in his faults. They lived on, as they had lived, keeping an expensive table, and three or four servants, and dressing as usual.

This conduct, in Mrs. Elton, was the result of habitual passiveness; in Mr. Elton, it was prompted by a vain hope of concealing from his neighbours a truth, that, in spite of his bustling, ostentatious ways, they had known for many months. This is a common delusion. We all know that, from the habits of our people in a country town, it is utterly impossible for the most watchful and skilful manœuvrer, to keep his pecuniary affairs secret from the keen and quick observation of his neighbours. The expedients practised for concealment are much like that of a little child, who shuts his own eyes, and fancies he has closed those of the spectators; or, in their effect upon existing circumstances, may be compared to the customary action of a frightened woman, who turns her back in a carriage when the horses are leaping over a precipice.

It may seem strange, perhaps incredible, that Mrs. Elton, possessing the virtues we have attributed to her, and being a religious woman, should be accessory to such deception, and (for we will call "things by their right names") dishonesty. But the wonder will cease if we look around upon the circle of our acquaintance, and observe how few there are among those whom we believe to be Christians, who govern their daily conduct by Christian principles, and regulate their temporal duties by the strict Christian rule. Truly, narrow is the way of perfect integrity, and few there are that walk therein.

There are too many who forget that our religion is not like that of the ancients, something set apart from the ordinary concerns of life; the consecrated, not the "daily bread;" a service for the temple and the grove, having its separate class of duties and pleasures; but is "the leaven that leaveneth the whole lump," a spirit to be infused into the common affairs of life. We fear Mrs. Elton was not quite guiltless of this fault. She believed all the Bible teaches. She had long been a member of the church in the town where she lived. She daily read the scriptures, and daily offered

sincere prayers. Certainly, the waters of the fountain from whence she drank had a salutary influence, though they failed to heal all her diseases. She was kind, gentle, and uncomplaining, and sustained, with admirable patience, the growing infirmities and irritating faults of her husband. To her child, she performed her duties wisely, and with an anxious zeal; the result, in part, of uncommon maternal tenderness, and, in part, of a painful consciousness of the faults of her own character; and, perhaps, of a secret feeling she had left much undone that she ought to do.

Mr. Elton, after his pecuniary embarrassments were beyond the hope of extrication, maintained by stratagem the appearance of prosperity for some months, when a violent fever ended his struggle with the tide of fortune that had set against him, and consigned him to that place where there is 'no more work nor device.' His wife was left quite destitute with her child, then an interesting little girl, a little more than twelve years old. A more energetic mind than Mrs. Elton's might have been discouraged at the troubles which were now set before her in all their extent, and with tenfold aggravation; and she, irresolute, spiritless, and despondent, sunk under them. She had from nature, a slender constitution; her health declined, and, after lingering for some months, she died with resignation, but not without a heart-rending pang at the thought of leaving her child, poor, helpless, and friendless.

Little Jane had nursed her mother with fidelity and tenderness, and performed services for her, that her years seemed hardly adequate to, with an efficiency and exactness that surprised all who were prepared to find her a delicately bred and indulged child. She seemed to have inherited nothing from her father but his active mind; from her mother she had derived a pure and gentle spirit, but this would have been quite insufficient to produce the result of such a character as hers, without the aid of her mother's vigilant, and, for the most part, judicious training. In the



formation of her child's character, she had been essentially aided by a faithful domestic, who had lived with her for many years, and nursed Jane in her infancy.

We know it is common to rail at our domestics. Their independence is certainly often inconvenient to their employers; but, as it is the result of the prosperous condition of all classes in our happy country, it is not right nor wise to complain of it. We believe there are many instances of intelligent and affectionate service, that are rarely equalled, where ignorance and servility mark the lower classes. Mary Hull was endowed with a mind of uncommon strength, and an affectionate heart. These were her jewels. She had been *brought up* by a pious mother, and early and zealously embraced the faith of the Methodists. She had the virtues of her station in an eminent degree: practical good sense, industrious, efficient habits, and *handy ways*. She never presumed formally to offer her advice to Mrs. Elton; her instincts seemed to define the line of propriety to her; but she had a way of suggesting hints, of which Mrs. Elton learnt the value by experience. This good woman had been called to a distant place to attend her dying mother, just before the death of Mrs. Elton; and thus Jane was deprived of an able assistant, and most tender friend, and left to pass through the dismal scene of death, without any other than occasional assistance from her compassionate neighbours.

On the day of Mrs. Elton's interment, a concourse of people assembled to listen to the funeral sermon, and to follow to the grave one who had been the object of the envy of some, and of the respect and love of many. Three sisters of Mr. Elton were assembled with their families. Mrs. Elton had come from a distant part of the country, and had no relatives in ———.

Jane's relations wore the decent gravity that became the occasion; but they were of a hard race, and neither the wreck their brother had made, nor the deep grief of the

solitary little creature, awakened their pity. They even seemed to shun manifesting towards her the kindness of common sympathy, lest it should be construed into an intention of taking charge of the orphan.

Jane, lost in the depths of her sufferings, seemed insensible to all external things. Her countenance was of a death-like paleness, and her features immoveable; and when, during the sermon, an address was made to her personally by the clergyman, she was utterly unable to rise, one of her aunts, shocked at the omission of what she considered an essential decorum, took her by the arm, and almost lifted her from her seat. She stood like a statue, her senses seeming to take no cognizance of any thing. Not a tear escaped, nor a sigh burst from her breaking heart. The sorrow of childhood is usually noisy; and this mute and motionless grief, in a creature so young, and one that had been so happy, touched every heart.

When the services were over, the clergyman supported the trembling frame of the poor child to the place of interment. The coffin was slowly let down into the house appointed for all. Every one who has followed a dear friend to the grave, remembers with shuddering the hollow sound of the first clods that are thrown on the coffin. As they fell heavily, poor Jane shrieked, "oh, mother!" and springing forward, bent over the grave, which, to her, seemed to contain all the world. The sexton, used as he was to pursue his trade amidst the wailings of mourners, saw something peculiar in the misery of the lone child. He dropped the spade, and hastily brushing away the tears that blinded him with the sleeve of his coat, "Why does not some one," he said, "take away the child? This is no place for such a heart-broken thing." There was a general bustle in the crowd, and two young ladies, more considerate, or perhaps more tender-hearted, than the rest, kindly passed their arms around her, and led her to her home.

The clergyman of —— was one of those, who are more zealous for sound doctrine, than benevolent practice; he had chosen on that occasion for his text, “The wages of sin is death,” and had preached a long sermon in the vain endeavour of elucidating the doctrine of original sin. Clergymen who lose such opportunities of instructing their people in the operations of providence, and the claims of humanity, ought not to wonder if they grow languid, and selfish, and careless of their most obvious duties. Had this gentleman improved this occasion of illustrating the duty of sympathy, by dwelling on the tenderness of our blessed Lord when he wept with the bereaved sisters at the grave of Lazarus: had he distilled the essence of those texts, and diffused their gracious influence into his sermon—“Bear ye one another's burthens;” “Weep with those who weep;” “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, ye have done it unto me;”—had his preaching usually been in conformity to the teaching of our Saviour, could the scene have followed, which it is our business to relate?

We fear there are many who think there is merit in believing certain doctrines; who, mistaking the true import of that text, “by grace are ye saved,” quiet themselves with having once in their lives passed through what they deemed conviction and conversion, and from thence believe their salvation is secure. They are like the barren fig-tree; and unless they are brought to true repentance, to showing their “faith by their works,” we fear they will experience its just fate.

The house, furniture, and other property of Mr. Elton had lain under an attachment for some time previous to Mrs. Elton's death, but the sale had been delayed in consideration of her approaching dissolution. It was now appointed for the next week; and it therefore became necessary that some arrangement should be immediately made for the destitute orphan.

The day after the funeral, Jane was sitting in her mother's room, which, in her eyes, was consecrated by her sickness and death; the three aunts met at Mr. Elton's house; she heard the ladies approaching through the adjoining apartment, and hastily taking up her Bible, which she had been trying to read, she drew her little bench behind the curtain of her mother's bed. There is an instinct in childhood, that discerns affection wherever it exists, and shrinks from the coldness of calculating selfishness. In all their adversity, neither Jane, nor her mother, had ever been cheered by a glimmering of kindness from these relatives. Mrs. Elton had founded no expectations on them for her child, but with her usual irresolution she had shrunk from preparing Jane's mind for the shocks that awaited her.

The three sisters were led in by a young woman who had offered to stay with Jane till some arrangement was made for her. In reply to their asking where she was, the girl pointed to the bed.

"There," she said, "taking on *despotly*.———A body would think," added she, "that she had lost her uncles and aunts as well as her father and mother. And she might as well," (she continued, in a tone low enough not to be heard,) "for any good they will do her."

The eldest sister began the conference by saying, "That she trusted it was not expected she should take Jane upon her hands—that she was not so well off as either of her sisters—that to be sure she had no children; but then Mr. Daggett and herself *calculated* to do a great deal for the Foreign Missionary Society; that no longer ago than that morning, Mr. D. and she had agreed to pay the expense of one of the young Cherokees at the School at ——; that there was a great work going on in the world, and as long as they had the heart given them to help it, they could not feel it their duty to withdraw any aid for a mere worldly purpose!"

Mrs. Convers (the second sister) said that she had not any religion, and she did not mean to pretend to any; that she had ways enough to spend her money without sending it to Owyhee or the Foreign School; that she and her husband had worked hard, and saved all for their children; and now they meant they should make as good a figure as any body's children in the country. It took a great deal of money, she said, to pay the dancing-master, and the drawing-master, and the music-master; it was quite impossible for her sisters to think how much it took to dress a family of girls genteelly. It was not now, as it used to be when they were girls: now-a-days, girls must have merino shawls, and their winter hats, and summer hats, and prunella shoes, and silk stockings;—it was quite impossible to be decent without them. Besides, she added, as she did not live in the same place with Jane, it was not natural she should feel for her. It was her decided opinion, that Jane had better be put out at once, at some place where she could do light work till she was a little used to it; and she would advise too, to her changing her name, the child was so young she could not care about a name, and she should be much mortified to have it known, in the town of ———, that her daughters had a cousin that was a *hired girl*

There was something in this harsh counsel which touched Mrs. Wilson's (the younger sister's) pride, though it failed to awaken a sentiment of humanity. She said she desired to be thankful that she had been kept from any such sinful courses as sending her children to a dancing-school; nobody could say she had not done her duty by them; the minister's family was not kept more strict than hers.

“No,” said Mrs. Convers, “and by all accounts is not more disorderly.”

“Well, that is not our fault, Mrs. Convers, if we plant and water, we cannot give the increase.”

Mrs. Wilson should have remembered that God does give the increase to those that rightly plant, and faithfully water.

But Mrs. W.'s tongue was familiar with many texts, that had never entered her understanding, or influenced her heart. Mrs. Wilson continued—"Sister Convers, I feel it to be my duty to warn you—you, the daughter and granddaughter of worthy divines who abhorred all such sinful practices, that you should own that you send your children to dancing-school, astonishes and grieves my spirit. Do you know that Mr. C——, in reporting the awakening in his parish, mentions that not one of the girls that attended dancing-school were among the converts, whereas two, who had engaged to attend it, but had received a remarkable warning in a dream, were among the first and brightest?"

"I would as soon," she continued, "follow one of my children to the grave, as to see her in that broad road to destruction, which leads through a ball-room."

"It is easy enough," replied Mrs. Convers, (adjusting her smart mourning cap at the glass) "to run down sins we have no fancy for."

Mrs. Wilson's ready answer was prevented by the entrance of Jane's humble friend, who asked, if the ladies had determined what was to be done with the little girl.

Mrs. Wilson in her vehemence had quite forgotten the object of their meeting, but now brought back to it, and instigated by a feeling of superiority to Mrs. Convers, and a little nettled by the excuses of Mrs. Daggett, which she thought were meant as a boast of superior piety, she said, that as she had no dancing-masters to pay, and had not "*that* morning agreed" to adopt a Cherokee—she could afford to take Jane for a little while. The child, she said, must not think of depending upon her for life, for though she was a widow, and could do what she was a mind to her with her own, she could not justify herself in taking the children's meat"—and she would have added—"throw it to the dogs,"—but she was interrupted by a person who, unregarded by the ladies, had taken her seat among them.

This was a middle aged woman, whose mind had been unsettled in her youth by misfortunes. Having no mischievous propensities, she was allowed to indulge her vagrant inclinations, in wandering from house to house, and town, to town, her stimulated imagination furnishing continual amusement to the curious by her sagacious observations, and unending mirth to the young and vulgar, by the fanciful medley in which she arrayed her person. There were some who noticed in her a quickness of feeling that indicated original sensibility, which, perhaps, had been the cause of her sufferings. The dogs of a surly master would sometimes bark at her, because her dress resembled the obnoxious livery of the beggar—a class they had been taught to chase with pharisaical antipathy. But except when her timid nature was alarmed by the sortie of dogs, which she always called the devil's servants, crazy Bet found a welcome wherever she went.

It is common for persons in her unfortunate circumstances to seek every scene of excitement. The sober, sedate manners of the New-England people, and the unvaried tenor of their lives, afford but few of these. Wherever there was an awakening, or a camp-meeting, crazy Bet was sure to be found; she was often seen by moonlight wandering in the church-yard, plucking the nettles from the graves, and wreathing the monuments with ground-pine. She would watch for whole nights by the side of a grave in her native village, where twenty years before were deposited the remains of her lover, who was drowned on the day before they were to have been married. She would range the woods, and climb to the very mountain's-top, to get sweet flowers, to scatter over the mound of earth that marked his grave. She would plant rose bushes and lilies there, and when they, bloomed, pluck them up, because she said their purity and brightness mocked the decay below.

She has been seen, when the sun came rejoicing over the eastern mountain's brow, and shot its first clear brilliant ray on the grave, to clap her hands, and heard to shout, "I see an angel in the sun, and he saith 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such, the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.'"

Poor Bet was sure to follow in every funeral procession, and sometimes she would thrust herself amidst the mourners, and say, "the dead could not rest in their graves, if they were not followed there by one true mourner." She has been seen to spring forward when the men were carelessly placing the coffin in the grave with the head to the east, and exclaim, "are ye heathens, that ye serve the dead thus? Know ye not the 'Lord Cometh in the east.'"

She always lingered behind after the crowd had dispersed, and busily moved and removed the sods; and many a time has she fallen asleep, with her head resting on the new-made grave, for, she said, there was no sleep so quiet as 'where the wicked did not trouble.'

The quick eye of crazy Bet detected, through their thin guise, the pride and hypocrisy and selfishness of the sisters. She interrupted Mrs. Wilson as she was concluding her most inappropriate quotation, 'Throw it to the dogs;' said she, 'It is more like taking the prey from the wolf.' She then rose, singing in an under voice,

"Oh! be the law of love fulfilled  
In every act and thought,  
Each angry passion for removed.  
Each selfish view forgot."

She approached the bed, and withdrawing the curtain, exposed the little sufferer to view. She had lain the open Bible on the pillow, where she had often rested beside her mother, and laying her cheek on it had fallen asleep. It was



open at the 5th chapter of John, which she had so often read to her mother, that she had turned instinctively to it. The page was blistered with her tears.

Careless of the future, which to her seemed to admit no light, her exhausted nature had found relief in sleep, at the very moment her aunts were so unfeelingly deciding her fate. Her pale cheek still wet with her tears, and the deep sadness of a face of uncommon sweetness, would have warmed with compassion any breast that had not been steeled by selfishness.

"Shame, shame, upon you!" said the maniac; "has pride turned your hearts to stone, that ye cannot shelter this poor little ewe-lamb in your fold? Ah! ye may spread your branches, like the green bay tree, but the tempest will come, and those who look for you shall not find you; but this little frost-bitten bud shall bloom in the paradise of God for ever and ever."

Untying a piece of crape which she had wound around her throat, (for she was never without some badge of mourning,) she stooped and gently wiped the tears from Jane's cheek, saying, in a low tone, "Bottles full of odours, which are the tears of saints;" then rising, she carefully closed the curtains, and busied herself for some minutes in pinning them together. She then softly, and on tiptoe, returned to her seat; and taking some ivy from her broken straw bonnet, began twisting it with the crape. "This," said she, "is a weed for Elder Carrol's hat; he lost his wife yesterday, and I have been to the very top of Tauconnick to get him a weed, that shall last fresh as long as his grief. See," added she, and she held it up, laughing, "it has begun to wilt already; it is a true token."

She then rose from her seat, and with a quick step, between running and walking, left the room; but returning as suddenly, she said slowly and emphatically, "Offend not this little one; for her angel does stand before my Father. It

were better that a mill-stone were hanged about your neck." Then, courtseying to the ground, she left them.

Bet's solemn and slow manner of pronouncing this warning, was so different from her usually hurried utterance, that it struck a momentary chill to the hearts of the sisters. Mrs. Daggett was the first to break the silence.

"What does she mean?" said she. "Has Jane experienced religion?"

"Experienced religion!—no," replied Mrs. Wilson. "How should she? She has not been to a meeting since her mother was first taken sick; and no longer ago than the day after her mother's death, when I talked to her of her corrupt state by nature, and the opposition of her heart, (for I felt it to be my duty, at this peculiar season, to open to her the great truths of religion, and I was faithful to her soul, and did not scruple to declare the whole counsel,) she looked at me as if she was in a dumb stupor. I told her the judgments of an offended God were made manifest towards her in a remarkable manner; and then I put it to her conscience, whether if she was sure her mother had gone where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, she should be reconciled to the character of God, and be willing herself to promote his glory, by buffering that just condemnation. She did not reply one word, or give the least symptom of a gracious understanding. But when Mrs. Harvey entered, just as I was concluding, and passed her arm around Jane, and said to her, 'My child, God does not willingly grieve nor afflict you,' the child sobbed out, 'Oh no! Mrs. Harvey, so my mother told me, and I am sure of it.'

"No, no," she added, after a moment's hesitation; "this does not look as if Jane had a hope. But, sister Daggett, I wonder you should mind any thing crazy Bet says. She is possessed with as many devils as were sent out of Mary Magdalen."

"I don't mind her, Mrs. Wilson; but I know some very good people who say, that many a thing she has foretold

has come to pass; and especially in seasons of affliction, they say, she is very busy with the devil."

"I don't know how that may be," replied Mrs Wilson, "but as I mean to do my duty by this child, I don't feel myself touched by Bet's crazy ranting."

Mrs. Daggett, nettled by her sister's hint, rose and said, "that, as she was going in the afternoon to attend a meeting in a distant part of the town, (for," said she, "no one can say that distance or weather ever keeps me from my duties,) she had no more time to waste."

Mrs. Convers' husband drove to the door in a smart gig, and she took leave of her sisters, observing, she was glad the child was going to be so well provided for. As she drove away, crazy Bet, who was standing by the gate, apparently intently reading the destiny of a young girl, in the palm of her hand; fixed her eyes for a moment on Mrs. Convers, and whispered to the girl, "all the good seed that fell on that ground was choked by thorns long ago."

Mrs. Wilson told Jane's attendant, Sally, to inform her, she might come to her house the next day, and stay there for the present.

## CHAPTER II.

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Or haply prest with cares and woes,  
Too soon thou hast began.  
To wander forth.—BURNS.

Jane received the intelligence of her destination without the slightest emotion. The world was "all before her," and she cared not whither led her "mournful way."

Happily for her, the humble friend mentioned in the beginning of her history, Mary Hull, returned on that day, after having performed the last act of filial duty. Jane poured all her sorrows into Mary's bosom, and felt already a degree of relief that she had not believed her condition admitted.

Such is the elastic nature of childhood; its moral, like its physical constitution, is subject to the most sudden changes.

Mary having assuaged the wounds of her youthful friend with the balm of tender sympathy and just consolation, undertook the painful, but necessary, task of exposing to Jane, the evils before her, that she might fortify her against them; that, as she said, being "fore-warned, she might be fore-armed."

She did not soften the trials of dependance upon a sordid and harsh nature. She told her what demands she would have on her integrity, her patience, and her humility.

"But, my child," said she, "do not be downhearted. There has One 'taken you up who will not have you, nor forsake you.' 'The fires may be about you, but they will not kindle on you.' Make the Bible your counsellor; you will always find some good word there, that will be a bright light to you in the darkest night: and do not forget the daily sacrifice of prayer; for, as the priests under the old covenant were