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A

BUSY METHUEN MAN

AND

HIS DESCENDANTS.

OR

A STORY OF THE OLDEN TIME.

BY DEACON JOHN E. FOSTER.

WEST HILL PRESS,
ITHACA NEW YORK.

1902.

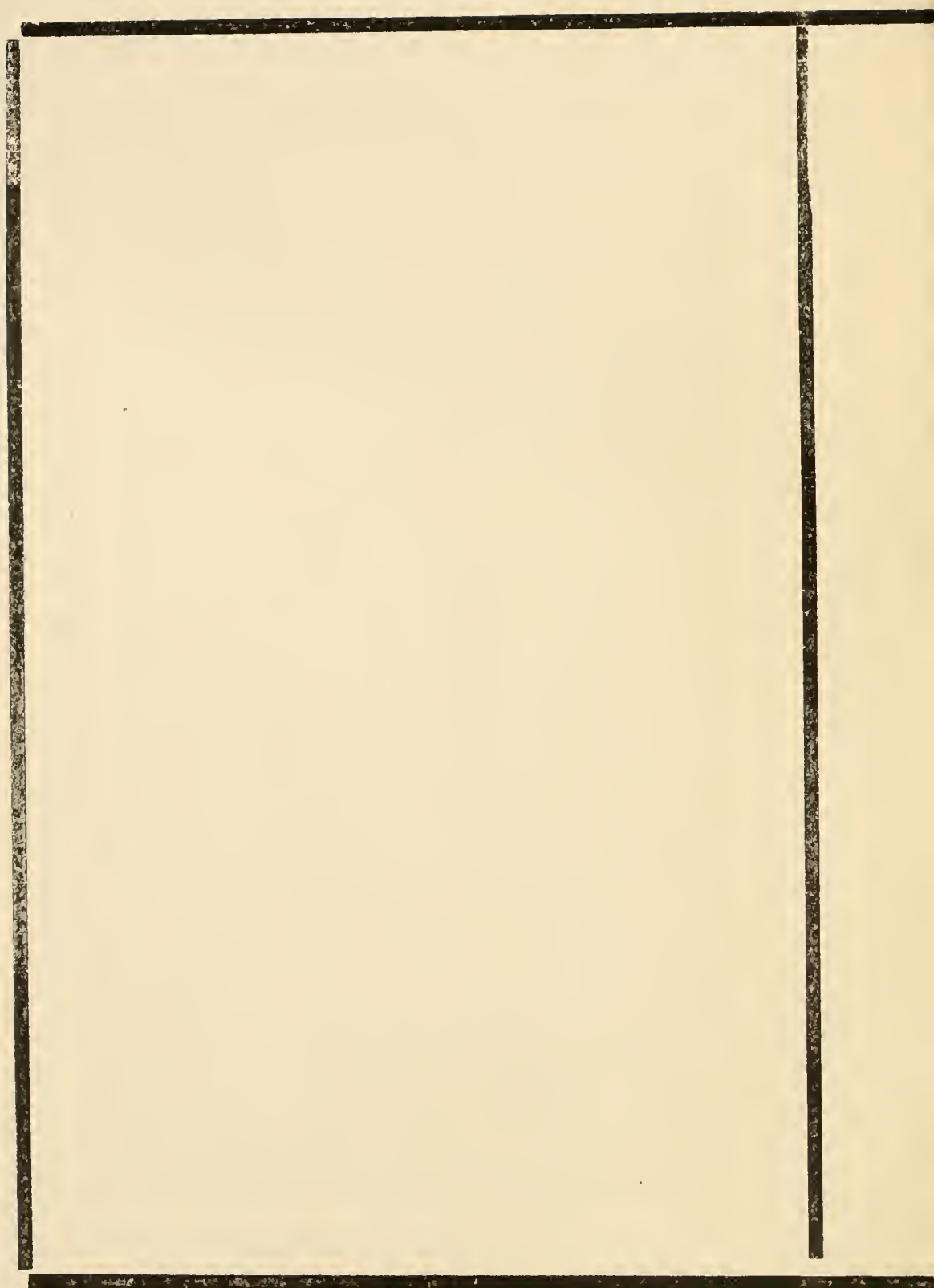
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A BUSY METHUEN MAN AND HIS DESCENDANTS.

The records of the early settlers have furnished an untailing source of romantic themes for the historian, poet and novelist. A wierd interest clusters around deserted houses and old cellar holes filled with the accumulated brush of ages.

Specters come up from the vasty depths of old wells. Imagination runs riot along the overgrown highways and by-ways trod by the pioneers who fought the great battle of life under difficulties that we know nothing about. It was in the time that tried men's souls and brought to the

front the stuff of which they were made. The men and the women who first pitched their tents and built their cabins in the waste and howling wilderness were heroes and heroines of no ordinary type; they laid the foundation; they commenced to unroll the volume of the book filled with antique thoughts, that breathed of a paradise, of home, of family, of fireside, of independence, of liberty to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, with none to dictate, to molest or make afraid.

Is this record of a people passed away a strange one? Not at all. The inspiration of necessity was upon them, that nerved them to endure hardness, to accomplish the fixed purpose of their hearts. Illustrious examples of this we have all along the pathway of history.

Noble success is not found at the end

of flowery paths. Persistent struggle is the price of achievement.

Prior to the incorporation of the town of Milford, N. H., in 1794, a goodly number of sturdy, enterprising families had taken root in soil that then became Milford. These families were distributed in all the component parts that were at that time incorporated into a town of which its inhabitants have never been ashamed. Many of those old families are represented in the town to day.

As the original roots died out, new and vigorous shoots sprung up that had their period of growth, of branches, of buds of promise, flowers of beauty, and a fruitage that has been inwrought into the warp and woof of the Milford Town History, cropping out there in the record of every one of a hundred years.

Some years before the incorporation of the town, a family had been transplanted from Massachusetts's soil and placed on the boundary line that separated Amherst N. H. from Hollis, which passed over Federal Hill in its course from east to west.

The name of Barker is synonymous with Tanner. In the dialogue between King Edward the Fourth and the Tanner of Tamworth, we have the following lines ;—

“What craftsman art thou?” said the
King,

“I pray thee tell me trowe,”

“I am a Barker,” Sir, by my trade :
Now tell me what art thou?”

The family of Dea. Nehemiah Barker which early drifted to New Hampshire from the old historic town of Methuen, Mass., in the ever ceaseless march of

empire and civilization from east to west. The parent stock was planted in the ancient town of Haverhill, Mass., way back under his Majesty's reign, King George the Second.

The town of Haverhill is one that is beautiful for situation, built upon a gentle acivity on the north bank of the Merrimack River. Many years ago the town was famous for its handsome bridges, its various manufactures, its navigation its landscape scenery : Golden Hill, Silver's Hill, (both typical of these days,) Plug, Round, Great and Creek Ponds, fine inland Lakes covering area of 750 acres.

In its early years it was particularly famous as headquarters and camping ground for the indians, the Pawtuckets.

I remember in my boyhood days the thrilling interest that took possession of my whole being as I read the account of

the cruel capture of Hannah Dustin of Haverhill, in March, 1695. Confined to her bed with an infant only six days old, she and her nurse, Mary Niff, with her infant were carried away by the Indians. The infant soon became an incumbrance, and its head was dashed against a tree in the sight of its mother, who with the nurse were carried on to Dustin's island in the Merrimack, near the mouth of the Contoocook. There they were notified that they must be stripped and run the gauntlet through the village: but that night, while the Indian band slumbered and slept the heroic Mrs. Dustin and nurse conceived the plan and carried it into execution, of dispatching ten of the twelve with the Indian hatchets and returned to their homes bearing with them the Indian scalps, for which prowess the Great and General Court awarded a grant of fifty pounds.

As early as 1724. we find Stephen Barker, a then prominent man in Haverhill, Mass., heading a vigorous movement for a new town to be taken from that township. He brings a petition before the Great and General Court for that purpose. The opposition was strong on the part of Haverhill, but Stephen and his helpers prevailed, and Methuen, named after Sir Paul Methuen, was incorporated, and Stephen Barker was empowered by the said Court to call the first town meeting, which was held March 7th, 1736, at which meeting he was elected on the first board of selectmen of the new town, and soon held commission as "justice of the peace."

At the first town meeting it was voted "that the selectmen have power to agree with an orthodox minister to serve in the

work of the ministry for the year ensuing and not to exceed five and forty pounds and find minister his diet."

Stephen Barker took an active part in locating and erecting a meeting house, which was on Powder House Hill, but, ere the frame was covered, local contentions grew so strong it was taken down and removed to Meeting House Hill, where later it was closed in and made ready for dispensing the gospel, and at a special town meeting for the purpose, it was voted to "appoint a day for fasting and prayer to spread our united supplications before the Lord for his gracious assistance and conduct in our endeavors to settle a minister among us."

Later on the minister was settled and the town "voted that there shall be but one pew in the meeting house and that to be for the minister's family, the

rest to be fitted with seats."

In a little more than forty years of the early history of that church, sixty children of the Barker family were baptized and one of the early deacons was Ebenezer, son of Stephen, and later Nehemiah, son of Ebenezer Barker, filled the office of deacon creditably up to the time he removed to Hollis (now Milford, N. H.) in 1787.

Ebenezer Barker, Esq., son of Stephen Barker, Esq., was for the time in which he lived a well educated man, a man of ability and business tact, possessing to a great extent family characteristics inherited from a long line of ancestry back and transmitted to his descendants in a descending line, to the end of the Barker chapter. These characteristics were conscientious honesty and strict integrity of character; a race possessed of strong

convictions and religious tendencies.

Ebenezer Barker was one of the busy men of his day. As deacon of the church he was practically and actively interested in all that pertained to its life and work : a leader and moving spirit in the affairs of town, holding for many years the office of town treasurer, and often on the board of select men. He was teacher in the public schools, and sometimes kept a select school. He was sought after to administer upon estates, and write the wills of those expecting to die, which wills were worded in the most solemn and religious way. When differences of opinion arose among neighbors and fellow-townsmen the settlement was often referred to Ebenezer Barker.

As Justice of the Peace, he drew up nearly all of the legal papers, agreements, bonds, writs of attachments, re-

turnable to himself as trial justice. He, as His Majesty's Justice solemnized or legalized many of the marriages; so many that at the time of his decease twenty of those marriages had not been recorded by the Town Clerk and a bill of eight shillings was filed in the administrator's account to pay the same.

A certificate of publishment was as follows:—

“These lines may certify whom it may come before, that Thomas Webster of Kingston and Elizabeth Merriett of Methuen hath been published in Methuen by posting their names and intentions on the Meeting House door and no objections hath been made against their proceeding marriage.

Richard Whittier, Town Clerk.
Dated at Methuen, July 4th, 1765.

The following commission was granted to Ebenezer Barker. at Boston, on the fourth day of Feb., 1762, in the second year of the reign of George the Third:—

By the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King Defender of of the Faith, & c.

To all unto whom these presents shall come, Greeting. Know ye that we have assigned and constituted and do by these presents assign, constitute and appoint our trusty and well beloved Ebenezer Barker, Esq., to be one of our Justices to keep our peace in the County of Essex, in our Province of the Mass. Bay in New England.

Under this commission he was to cause to be kept the laws and to chastise and punish all persons offending against them and to have before him all those that shall break the peace or attempt anything against it. He was to enquire into all man-

ner of thefts, trespasses, riots, routs and unlawful assemblies and all and singular other misdeeds and offences which were against the common good of the Province.

Three months before this commission was granted the Great and General Court of his Majesty's Province enacted the following laws:—

“Be it enacted by the Governor and Council, and House of Representatives— That every person or persons that shall after first day of Dec., next, assault, rob, and take from the person of another, in, or upon, any highway, street, passage, field, or open place, any money, goods, clothing or other things whatsoever, and shall thereof be convicted shall be adjudged guilty of felony, and suffer the pains of death accordingly, without benefit of the clergy.”

Also. “Whoever shall be convicted of assaulting or offering any violence, or insolence to any woman or womankind

in the fields, streets, or lanes of any town or despoiling them, damnifying or defacing any of their attire or ornaments, or attempting the same, shall be publicly whipped not exceeding ten stripes, or by being committed to the house of correction for thirty days and receive the discipline of the house and find surities for good behavior in the future."

To these laws I think might be appended the Bible reason for the execution of wholesome laws, "That thus shall ye put evil away from among you."

I find that those old Provincial Laws of Mass, were almost identical with those of N. H., at the same time. In New Hampshire the least offence referred to was to be punished by being tied to the public whipping post and receive ten stripes well laid on for the first offence, and in addition to the whipping, they were to be branded in the hand. What young lady

would, I ask, accept the burnt hand and link her destiny to a graduate from the whipping post? For drunkenness, for the first offence, a fine of five shillings, and if the convict was not able to pay the fine, he was to be set in the stocks not more than three hours. For profane cursing and first offence a fine of one shilling: if not paid the culprit was to sit in the stocks two hours; for more than one profane oath at the same time a fine of two shillings and to be set in stocks three hours.

One legal document drawn by Ebenezer Barker, Esq., seven years after receiving his commission is recorded in Hollis History, page 117; it is a deed of sale of two human beings, a negro man, Cicero, also a negro woman, Dinah, the consideration being the sum of sixty pounds: deeded by Jacob Whittier of Methuen, Mass., to Col. David Webster, of

Plymouth in the Province of New Hampshire. Those slaves taken to Plymouth formed a part of the 384 slaves held in New Hampshire at that date. Two more were owned in Hollis.

The first regular newspaper published in this country was the Boston News Letter started by John Campbell in April, 1704: the first number was carried to Harvard as a great curiosity. The News Letter was a weekly of very small size, but it was enough for the city population of eight thousand. In 1714, twenty years later, there were four papers with a yearly circulation of only 170,000 copies: the population was then one million.

In 1775 there were 37 papers published in the country: in 1800 we find 359. We have drifted far away from the time of Campbell, who could hardly print three hundred copies in a week. Now the

New York World has a daily circulation of nearly 600,000 and several other dailies have about the same. The total number of papers now published in this country is 17,960, a larger number than is now (1896) published in England, Germany, France and Italy combined. When we consider the immense circulation of these papers and the number of pages, we are truly amazed at the progress and power of the press since the days of Ebenezer Barker, but we have abundant reason to fear that all these leaves are not for the healing of the nations: from the influence of some of them at least, we may well offer the Sheriff's prayer, "God save the State."

To illustrate the common occurrence of those days, I quote from the Essex Gazette of Feb. 16, 1771, published at Salem to which Mr. Barker was a subscriber:—

“Yesterday between eleven and twelve o'clock, two men were brought to the post, one of which received twenty lashes well laid on, being convicted of breaking open the store of Mr. Isaac Hill of Dover. The other received ten stripes, being convicted of stealing a sheep. They were both afterward remanded to Gaol.”

Now the reporter of the above does not say what was done with the stolen sheep but proceeds to say that an extraordinary fat sheep was brought to the market, which weighed thirty pounds to the quarter and the tallow twenty-two pounds and that all who saw it declared it to be the fattest sheep that was ever brought to Boston market or any other; and that Lt. Gov. Hutchinson purchased one side of it, and the Hon. John Hancock, Esq., the other.

Who of us has not admired the patriotic

inspiration that thrilled the soul and nerved the arm that penned the first bold signature to that immortal declaration of American Independence, but can we longer wonder, when we know that he lived on the fattest mutton ever sold in Boston market? This side of mutton was bought about five years before that old historic autograph was placed upon the charter of American Independence, but the supply of fat mutton might have held out, for the same paper reports that there were about twenty more sheep on the the same farm nearly as good.

The newspaper reporter is no new invention, for we find that away back in those old bygone times he was ever alert for something sensational, and perhaps there was no place where he could find more feeling items than at the public whipping post where he could note the

records of physical persuasion well laid on.

Massachusetts at that time had a provincial government under his Majesty. King George, so the editor was expected to keep in touch with England as well as America and post his readers on current events on both sides of the water.

English society was greatly agitated at the time over the momentous question of war or no war with Spain on account of the Falkland Islands, which were considered of but little account anyway; so the editor facetiously says:

Did Oliver Know

In the regions below,

What insults from Spain we now bear,

He'd forget all his pains

And rattle his chains

And bellow aloud for war.

Ebenezer Barker lived to a good old

age, having filled his life with usefulness, doing faithfully whatever his hands found to do. He died in 1771, leaving but little of this worlds goods, but a good name which is rather to be chosen than great riches.

His son Nehemiah, then 36 years of age, had already become an active business man, filling positions of trust and responsibility in the church and the town. Feb., 1777, he was drafted for the Revolutionary war, having received notice on Dec. 5, 1776 to be ready at a minutes warning, agreeable to General Court act, but being unable to go at the time, he put in a substitute for three years paying fourteen pounds in addition to the bounty which was paid by the town of Methuen to Nathan Barker, substitute—17 cattle one year old, and paper money, 9£.

I notice that in those days it was cus-

tomary on the death of a husband for the surviving widow to put on mourning at the expense of the estate, filing a bill therefor. When Nehemiah Barker administered on his father's, Ebenezer Barker's estate, the Hon. Nathaniel Rogers, Judge of Probate, allowed the widow for mourning, two pounds, which was filed as part of the administrator's account.

In 1782, Dea. Nehemiah Barker, then 52 years old, having disposed of his estate in Methuen, removed with his family to Hollis, N. H. : his son Joel, then 23 years of age accompanied him, and they settled on the farm now owned and occupied by Moses Freeman Foster on Federal Hill, Milford, which farm remained in possession of the Barker family for many years.

Soon after the settlement of the family in Hollis, N. H., the young man Joel had

occasion to cross the lot to the nearest neighbor, Edward Foster's to borrow some article desired by his mother for culinary purposes. When he returned he astonished his mother by declaring that he saw a beautiful little girl over there and he had already decided to wait until she grew up and have her for his wife.

This was indeed a romantic resolution for a young man 23 years old to make, but no more strange than than true; that resolution took possession of his whole being and the interest then awakened in that baby girl, as the years went on, ripened into love, and became mutual, and the young Joel often had errands across the lot, when not sent by his mother, and perhaps the old folks thought the visits were too frequent and too long, "but such is life," as some of us have known by experience. So to Joel and Sally life began

to take on a new meaning : after waiting and watching eleven years, on Christmas eve, 1793, they stood at the marriage altar and mutually pledged to walk the ways of life together till death do part.

From this union originated the Barker family as known by the older citizens of Milford, N. H. The children were Joel, Benjamin, John and James ; Hannah, Sarah, Nancy and Mary. They all eminently inherited the sturdy, conscientious honesty of the race from which they descended. Yet the boys were boys, and had some of the peculiarities of other boys and one of those peculiar things was to slip their heads out of the mishaps or wrong doings on the farm. On one occasion the father walked out into the corn field early in the afternoon where the four boys had been hoeing all the forenoon. The object of his visit seemed to be to see

if the work was faithfully performed. Stopping and carefully scanning one row he enquired who hoed it. Three of the boys, Benjamin, Joel and James, declared that John had hoed it. The father made no reply, but carefully looked along several rows, then stopped and said ;

“Who hoed this row?”

“John,” all answered in chorus.

The third time the father tested them but the response was the same, “John hoed that row.”

The old gent then came up to the boys and in a very quiet and sarcastic manner, said, “John, you have done your work very well, and I think you have done more than your share ; you can have the rest of the day to yourself, but the rest of you boys see to it that you work and work well till sunset.” and they learned a wholesome lesson.

These four boys grew to man's estate. Joel, only, married in early life; he and his estimable wife pursued the even tenor of their way together for nearly half a century. She was a woman of fine education, culture and refinement, and these were coupled with an excellent christian character. They had no children, but cared for those of other people. Benjamin and John married later in life; James never married. Not a child was left to perpetuate the Barker name, which has become extinct in Miford, and nearly so at Methuen, one family only remaining in Methuen, and they have no children. Three of the daughters lived to marry and have families. Mary married Hiram Wheeler, lived in Nashua and had two children, but the whole family are dead. Sally married Aaron Wood of Merrimack; two of the three children are

still living, Sarah Wood somewhat known as a woman possessing very excellent traits of character: Hannah (1833) married Benjamin Spalding; had three sons two of which succeeded to man's estate. Jacob Franklin Spalding in early life became a somewhat popular Methodist minister, but after several successful settlements, he left preaching and permanently settled as a physician at Salisbury, Mass. and now has most of the local practice.

Hon. Warren Foster Spalding entered a vigorous journalistic career in Boston in 1870. In addition to general contributions to newspapers and magazines, he had the editorial management of the Commercial Bulletin, Boston Daily News, has held the position of General Superintendent of prisons, Secretary of State Board of Commissioners of Prisons, and member of the Massachusetts Legislature in

1894 and 1895.

The Barkers were among the first in the Town of Milford and the State, yes, in New England, to espouse the cause of the oppressed and downtrodden slave of the South. They were pioneers in the cause of human rights in a time when it cost something to champion the cause of the black man, even here in New England. Few men dared to provide for, protect, or in any way succor the fugitive slave fleeing from his relentless master. Fewer still were the men who dared to be conductors on that mystical underground railroad between the sunny South and northern climes. It required courage even in a land of freedom, for a man to stand up and say that the black man had certain inalienable rights that the white man was bound to respect, such as life,

liberty and the pursuit of happiness ; but at last the idea began to take possession of Christian men and women that there was a higher law than the National Fugitive Slave Law, and that a righteous God would not hold them guiltless if they attempted to arrest and return to bondage the man guilty of no crime except the pursuit of a God given right. The first anti-slavery meeting ever held, for ought I know, in the State of New Hampshire, was called by John Barker to meet at Federal Hill School House in Milford. At an early hour the people gathered from near and far. Very few had any sympathy with the movement. Some boisterously opposed and came for the purpose of denying the right of free speech. The discussion had not proceeded far before the excitement became intense and the meeting closed with little less than a mob.

But the Barkers were not discouraged; they stood firmly to their convictions, and later John Barker became an aggressive worker in the cause in the Congregational Church, with which he united about the time that the Rev. Abner B. Warner, that mighty champion of human rights, was installed as pastor. He was a young man whose heart God had touched. In him John Barker found a man after his own heart, as may be shown by a series of resolutions introduced by them and discussed in several church meetings and adopted by the Congregational Church, of Milford, N. H., Dec. 14., 1840. A few extracts from these resolutions will show that there was advanced thinking and advanced conviction in that church at that time.

“Resolved That it is our deliberate conviction that slavery in whatever form

or whatever country it exists, is contrary to the the eternal and immutable principles of justice and the spirit and purpose of Christianity, and is therefore a sin against God, which acquires additional enormity when committed by nations professedly Christian."

"Resolved that those professors of religion, who are still guilty of those sins are not worthy of fellowship with the saints or recognition as ministers of Christ until they have repented of and forsaken their transgressions."

"Resolved, That it is neither impolitic or wicked to discuss this important matter and that the pulpit is an appropriate place and the Sabbath a fitting time to attend to the claims of God's oppressed and suffering people."

"Resolved, That we as a church earnestly protest against the course wherever

pursued of receiving into the treasury of the Lord the avails of unpaid labor and the price of slaves and souls of men."

Thus I have very briefly followed the intricate and partially obliterated pathway of a family history, commencing back back more than 170 years, more than half a century before the declaration of American Independence. The History in itself is not perhaps unique, but its presentation before this society should be suggestive to others to go and do likewise.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to bring to you "this story of the olden time," these records of a busy life passed here in the early history of Methuen; of a man who must have had much to do with the good order and peacableness of this goodly town in its early years. I have papers and records that are good evidence that the first inhabitants of this town

like those of other New England towns, had a battle to fight, obstacles to overcome that you know little of, surrounded as you are to-day by wealth, prosperity and everything that exalts and embellishes New England life. The search that I have made among a bundle of faded and musty papers to gather these facts has impressed upon me the importance of the preservation of old documents and papers, and also that we should seek out and bring from their hiding places these mementoes of the past. A worn out and faded scrap of paper may be the key to unlock a volume of history. The object of the historical society is to decipher the hieroglyphics of bygone ages and to preserve the mementoes of the past :--

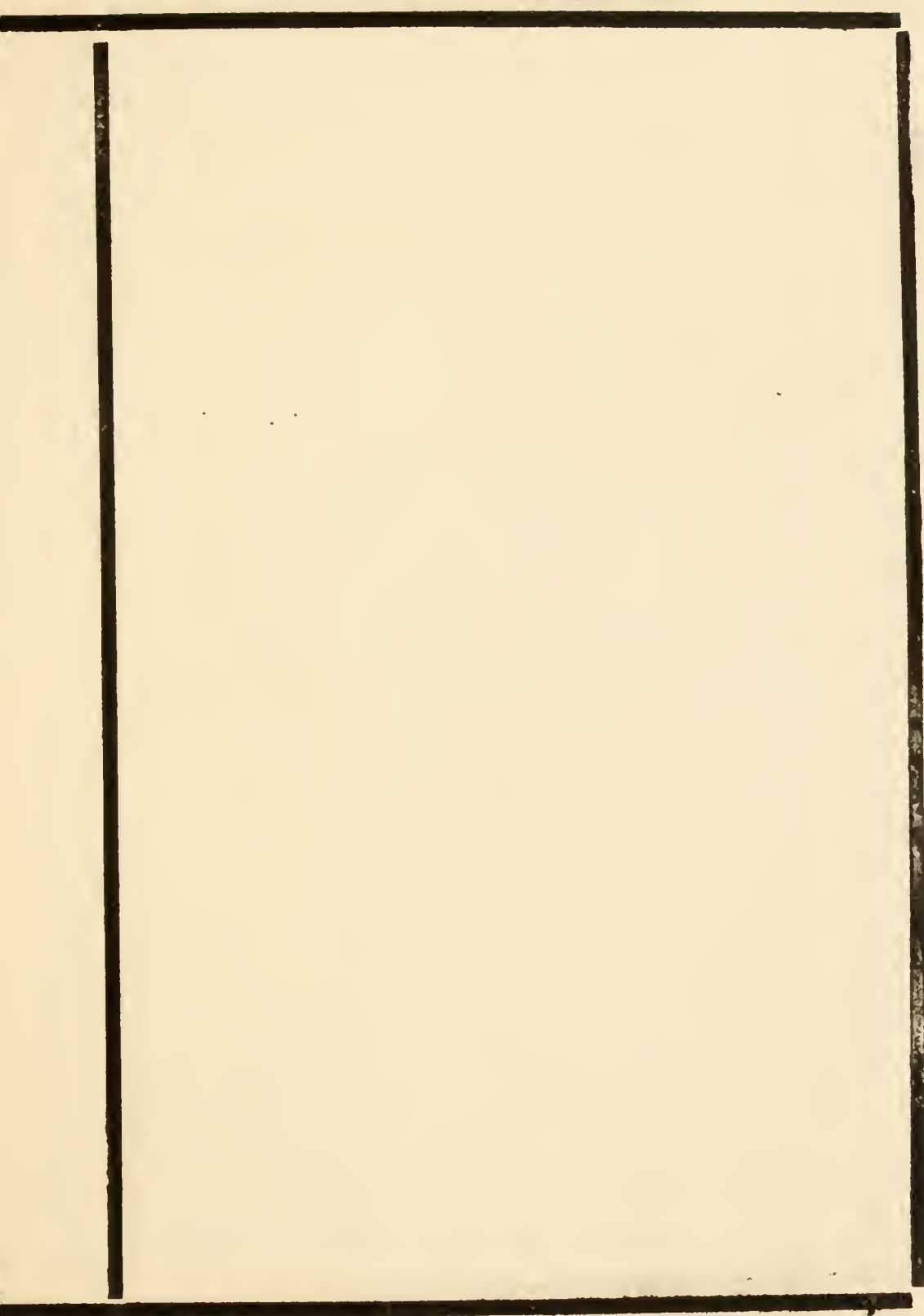
“they bind the memory fast,
To those whose lives teach where our
own most securely may be cast,

For the future is safest when it strives to
emulate the past.

What dearer privilege indeed than to do
as our sires have done.

To follow in the paths they proved, to
finish as they begun,

To give to our children undefiled all that
our fathers won?"



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