New England Bygones

Uncle Will Aunt Corinne

From their affec Nephew

Herbert

Christmas 1882

NEW ENGLAND BYGONES

BY

E. H. ARR.

(ELLEN H. ROLLINS.)

NEW EDITION, ENLARGED AND ILLUSTRATED.

INTRODUCTION BY GAIL HAMILTON.

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1883.

TO THE MEMORY OF

MY ELDEST DAUGHTER, MARION,

WHO DEARLY LOVED NATURE,

AND TO

MY SON PHILIP,

WHO WILL, I TRUST, IN THIS RESPECT RESEMBLE HER,

THIS BOOK

IS TENDERLY DEDICATED.

THIS book is published with no thought of an audience. It tells of real scenes, and of people who were actors in them; but the life it deals with is so very simple that it can hardly satisfy the exacting appetite of the reading public.

It is permitted to go into print especially for three children, with hope that their curiosity and affections may be stimulated by it towards those ancestors from whom they have gotten much of the good which is in them, and that from it they may turn with desire and appreciation to sources of what have been to me abundant and enduring riches.

Very delightful have been these reminiscences, taking me back to bygone days and much good company; reframing delicious pictures which have kept their color through forty years.

The children will read the book, because they will be partial.

Some old-time country livers, caught by its title, may run over its pages, recognize familiar things, and be quickened by them into pleasant memories.

All the more flattering will be this increase of readers, because I shall know that the hearts of such have been enriched by their sweet experiences of rural life.

E. H. A.

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NEW ENGLAND BYGONES.

This illustrated edition of New England Bygones is love's sorrowful effort to embellish a grave.

The author of the book was, in her own personality, far more remarkable than any work of her hands; yet, in seeking to perpetuate her memory and to diffuse the fragrance of her life after the gates of heaven have shut us out from her presence, nothing but her own work seems to us in any measure adequate.

Ellen Chapman Hobbs was born in Wakefield, New Hampshire, April 30, 1831, and died in Philadelphia May 29, 1881.

No person had a better right than she to speak of New England, for her blood and being came to her through all the English generations that have sprung from New England soil. Maurice Hobbs, her paternal ancestor, was born in England in 1615, and went thence to Hampton about 1640. His Hampton farm has ever since remained in the possession of his family,

and the elm-tree which his own hands planted, still, in its giant age, shelters his homestead and gives play-ground and resting-place to children of his name and lineage.

Mrs. Rollins's paternal grandmother was Sarah Hilton, a descendant of one of the three families which first settled in New Hampshire in 1623.

On her mother's side, Mrs. Rollins was descended from Edward Chapman, of Ipswich, Massachusetts, who came from the north-east of England, from near Hull in Yorkshire, about 1640,—certainly before 1642. Ipswich was at that time a sort of Castle Garden, and emigrants landing there from old Ipswich in England spread over Rowley, Hampton, and all the region round-about. So it came to pass in the fulness of time that old Maurice Hobbs, leaving his home headland of Lowestoft Ness, crossed the wild, wide sea and got himself born again under the shadows of Green Mountain, in the pleasant village of Effingham, New Hampshire, in the person of Josiah Hilton Hobbs. And six years later, old Edward Chapman, following him from the Humber, and sailing along the mouth of Ipswich River and past the Salisbury marshes, reappeared inland over against Effingham, in Parsonsfield, Maine, in the person of little Rhoda Chapman: and the two, Josiah and Rhoda, growing into comely youth's estate, and falling profoundly in love with each other, married and set up their family roof-tree in Wakefield, just below Effingham, where they lived in all prosperity—with some sharp family sorrow but with great family happiness—till Mr. Hobbs's death.

Here Ellen was born. Her father was a lawyer, highly educated and prominent in his profession; a man of marked ability, of unusual brilliancy, with the temperament of genius largely transmitted to his daughter. Her grandparents on both sides were farmers, and it was at their homes, especially at the Effingham farm, that she shared in full measure the rural life whose memory lingered through all her after-years, and mellowed finally into the short and swift yet infinitely tender and restful benediction of her books.

Wakefield itself was a small, secluded New Hampshire village. Its social range was narrow, as needs must be in those mountain hamlets whither railroad and telegraph had not yet penetrated. How deep and fruitful it was in all that gives richness and color to life, let the following pages attest. In her father's house Ellen learned to place a high, if possible an exaggerated, estimate on intellectual culture and scholarly attainments. Her father, fond and proud of his children, exacted from them prompt, logical mental activity, and Ellen responded with a vigor and intelligence, in childish proportion equal to his own. In the village, and in her grandparents' homes, she saw and formed a part of a simpler life, as healthful and sensible, but shaped by the emergencies of a severer fate and a more primitive observance of nature. It is impossible to add anything to the vividness of her own descriptions of her child-life,—the austere yet lofty and pathetic forms by which it was surrounded, the picturesque, wild, and romantic scenery in which it was set, and which she loved with an ever-increasing intensity. Her delicate perception

caught, her tenacious memory held, and her exquisite skill reproduced those early impressions with the minuteness and fidelity of the photograph, with the idealism and the immortality of art. The "Little Benny" of the following pages died before his sister Ellen was eight years old, but their mother, still living, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, bears witness to the faithfulness, in every ascertainable detail, of all his sweet, brief story.

Fortunate in her birth, Ellen was equally fortunate in her schools. At the excellent village academy—that institution so characteristic of New England, the outgrowth of her needs and the conservator of her power—Ellen was the pride of her father, the admiration of her teachers, the soul of thoroughness and truth. Thence she was sent, after a single term at Bradford, to the famous old Mary Lyon Seminary at Ipswich, Massachusetts, where she completed her school education under the care and personal tuition of Rev. John Phelps Cowles and Mrs. Eunice Caldwell Cowles. These loved and venerated teachers still live, and long may the pen lie idle that must one day trace their noble lineaments through the mists of memory. Not often is it given to such a mind as Ellen's to come under the tender training of two such minds as theirs,—minds differing as widely from each other as one star differeth from another star in glory, but always two stars, brilliant, high, shining only with a more serene and soft, but not less splendid lustre, as they

> "Mount to their zenith, to melt into heaven;
> No waning of fire, no quenching of ray,
> But rising, still rising, when passing away."

Eager to learn, with a strong natural love of literature, unaffectedly reverent of great thoughts, perhaps too contemptuous of small things, Ellen swept through her lessons like a devouring flame. There was for her no such word as task. Study was her enthusiasm. Recitation was its indulgence. Her teacher was the priest who fed the sacred fire. Yet she shared the innocent follies of girlhood, anathematized fate that had made her not beautiful,—at least in her own eyes,—and after comical and unrelenting analysis of her personal shortcomings, found merry refuge, by heaven knows what roundabout feminine reasoning, in the apparently inconsequent fact that at any rate her feet were smaller than her hands! It seems incredible that such a creature of air and fire should, even in her immaturest days, have had any quarrel with a body which, after all, served her passing well. Slender, delicate, animated, with a certain abrupt grace and an indescribable *spirituelle* archness suggestive of an all-pervading lambent vitality, I think no one ever looked into her speaking face or listened to her low, rich voice to miss anything of beauty or to feel anything but sympathetic admiration.

For a few months after leaving school she occupied herself with teaching,—a part of the time in the same school in which she had studied,—long enough to fix the knowledge she had gained and to strengthen and *mobilize* it by practical application to human nature; long enough to promise entire and distinguished success had she chosen to devote herself to that influential, arduous, and exacting occupation. But fate had allotted to her other work.

Among her father's most intimate friends in Wakefield were Mr. and Mrs. Daniel G. Rollins. Their son, Edward Ashton, was a few years older than Ellen, and the two made mud-pies together till he had nearly reached the august age of seven years. Then his father moved away to the village of Great Falls, and her father moved into the house he had vacated. But the family friendship continued. When Ellen journeyed home from Bradford it was at Mr. Rollins's house that she tarried by the way. When Ashton Rollins had been graduated at Dartmouth, it was in Wakefield, under "Squire Hobbs," that he prosecuted the study of the law, and while he studied law with the father naturally enough he studied love with the daughter; until, in the house in which he was born and in which her girlhood was passed, the two little playmates stood up and were married to each other, and fared forth into the great world to seek their fortune together.

I suppose she married honestly, believing herself to be heartily in love with her husband; yet, in the light of the love that grew afterwards, the strong absorbing affection that was as much as comprehensive and as constant a necessity of her life as the air and the sunshine, and which filled her and held her till death loosened every grasp,—if even death loosened that,—this early love seems but a feeble, girlish preference, hardly more than acquiescence born of habit, scarcely worth accounting of. Yet, perhaps, it had to be there for a beginning.

Mr. Rollins still lives, and of him I must say next to nothing. If he dies in my day, I will give him such a setting-out as shall

make
him glow
even in his grave,
and while he lives it must be said that
Ellen's marriage proved to be so extraordinary,
it so shaped and sheltered, fortified and devel-
oped her life, that to leave it out is simply to

say nothing. In any marriage the overwhelming chances were that she would be wretched, the only saving grace being that she would not be wretched long. That her actual marriage promised well could not have been rationally affirmed. The youth was healthy, manly, buoyant, full of humor. The maiden was fragile, nervous, intense. So much appeared on the surface, and for all that appeared on the surface they might quickly have perished of mutual impatience and disgust. What did not appear on the surface was the deep, abiding, inexhaustible adaptability of each to the other. It was time alone which showed that fate, for once, was wise and kind. A woman of peculiar and rarely delicate mould was consigned to a man who not only loved her, but knew how to cherish her. Where she was weak he was strong, with strength enough for both and to spare. If she was afraid, there was no attempt to reason away her fears,—she was protected. If she had a whim it was not disregarded as a whim, it was gratified. Her just and sensitive nature responded to this generosity. Too intent and earnest to be wholly fair, she had been apt to think that mirthfulness detracted somewhat from dignity, and it took her a little while to learn that fun and frolic do not lower the life they immeasurably lighten. The school-girl liking, which had not perhaps gathered in the full measure of a girl's ideal respect from the mud-pies of childhood and the lake picnics of subsequent student intimacy, deepened into a more than ideal confidence as she found her husband true to every public and private trust. She saw him advance in the regard of men. She saw herself surrounded—it is no small thing—with all the

comforts of material prosperity. Every aspiration of her nature was fed by his all-pervading fidelity. Not only was her mind respected, but her very caprices were cherished with the happiest commingling of tenderness and raillery. Her ambition was satisfied by his outward success, her tastes were cultivated by his constant assistance, her heart rested on his entire devotion. So her marriage, which began like any marriage, only with greater hazard than most because of her greater susceptibility, grew into the identity of interest, the acuteness of sympathy, the love which is self-love of a perfect union.

"Mamma," drawled one of her young children, after we had been listening to a picturesque and entertaining diatribe against a woman who had been bemoaning her sacrifice at going into the country for her husband's health. "Mamma, would you sacrifice us to papa?"

"Sacrifice you!" she cried, the lightnings of her wrath still flashing through her gentle voice and die-away manner, "I would see you all in Tophet for your father's sake!"

And notwithstanding the badinage it was essential truth, and her children "knew their place."

But while and where she *loved* she *made*. Where a man might have stooped she held him up by the compelling virtue of her own erectness. Exacting to the uttermost farthing, from those who came into her sphere, all mental rectitude and all moral force, she made it impossible for one to live with her and not live at one's best. Even for such as were brought into but slight contact, it went hard with the ignoble. She had not an

atom of that amiability which wraps good and evil alike in the mantle of inane praise. She had the awful gift of discernment,—she saw clearly. She had the rare gift of expression,—she spoke accurately. In her insatiable craving for the best she sometimes failed to remember that we are dust. She was so little compounded of dust herself that she was apt to forget its real ponderosity, and demanded wings where it was much that the poor, weighted human creature managed to walk. Her intellectual apprehension was so clear, her moral perception so acute, that she could not fail to discern and analyze every man, woman, and child who came before her. No external condition of theirs affected her clear insight. Wealth or poverty, ignorance or culture, modesty or self-assertion,—nothing veiled from her penetrating eyes the character that lay beneath. She divined without purpose, simply because it was in her to divine. She described, she dramatized, she improvised, because she was born an artist. In her books she has dealt with the past, and has naturally seen it through a golden haze; so we have chiefly soft, tender, poetic effects. Scarcely appears there at all the pungent sarcasm, the mental impatience, the delicately fierce invective, the odd imagery, the startling combinations and exaggeration, the radical dislodgments which joined with her inexhaustible benevolence to make her conversation and her letters altogether fascinating. Her commonest talk was piquant and forcible. Her hastiest note was elegant. The undress of her soul was tidy. The whole habit of her mind was scholarly. She was therefore the most unpretentious of women.

Happily, her severe exactingness was balanced by a boundless beneficence,—more than balanced, overweighted,—for where she had once befriended it seemed impossible for her to blame. Withal, her whole nature was informed with a subtile, feminine gentleness, so that even in her strongest moral repulsions she was winsome. Her sharpest disapproval was uttered in the voice of the cooing dove,—as low and soft. She revolted against religious and social convention with an appealing charm that made revolt seem more attractive than accord.

The history of her external life is marked by the same events as that of most women,—the birth and death of children, the requirements of her husband's profession. The early years of their marriage were passed in Great Falls, New Hampshire. Here little Willard Ashton was born and died, here little Marion was born, and here little Margaret died. The boy looked with too questioning eyes on the unanswering world, lisped too soon his little loves and thoughts, and died when only ten months old. Marion, sturdy, independent, self-willed, a little soul properly ensphered in the wildness and wantonness of nature, yet loving books with unquenchable ardor; full of poetry, alive with individuality, daring and defiant, with her father's strength, and her mother's intensity,—Marion kept up the fight and the fun for ten blithe years, but perished at last in the malaria of Washington. Little Margaret, little perfect human flower, unfolded her tender life only just enough to—

"Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."

Tokens of these children fall soft and fragrant, like petals from

fresh-plucked roses, all along their mother's after-paths. Especially were they ministering spirits summoned to comfort the sorrowful. To mourning mothers this mother revealed the grief she hid from the world, sometimes with almost too stern a repression.

"I think," she wrote to one such, "of your house with his helplessness and daintiness and beautiful promise gone out of it; and I know, because I *have known* just what a forlorn weight is tugging at your heart, and how hard it will be to get back again to the vocations and interests which occupied your life before this glorified child of yours got interwoven with the web of your life.

"You will never do that. You have gotten on to a higher plane. Henceforth this little child will walk with you, be growing ever and you growing with him. His early crown of angelhood, close upon your glorious crown of motherhood, has made you sure when you die of a child's welcome into heaven. If I die to-night three of mine are, I trust, safe before me. . . . Dear little Margie, I can never get away from the soft touch of her little hands. And next to that I am moved by a look she gave me one morning. Dear little things! They leave but few tokens, but such as they have take hold.

"Of one thing be sure: that the memory of your child will make your whole life richer and fuller and happier. By slow degrees there will come to you the second and serener joy in him of a second possession; . . . but after all, dear S., the facts are terribly stern, and only made tolerable by other facts just as stern,—that it is only for a little, when the same shall have passed upon us all."

And to another:

"Let me tell you how out of this triple loss there has come to us a thrice blessed possession of joy and consolation. These children are not dead to us. The great universe holds them, and somehow they seem in being to have expanded to the whole measure of the universe. They are never absent from us. Where we go they go. We know them just as we always did by name. They help educate our other children; we think of them always as progressing and surpassing in acquisition all possible earthly capacity of those they have left behind. Above all, we think of them as waiting to meet us."

And still to another:

"You will soon begin to marvel how this event shortens time, how it bridges the way, and how much more precious it really is to follow after than to go before.

"Perhaps you wonder at my writing, but truly such expression is a sort of second nature with me. So much riches have I in heaven that this world has not a shadow of hold upon me. My seeming indifference is my way of expressing the intensifying of so much of my life by the sublime mystery of death.

"If I am poor in such works as are seen, I am rich in sympathy with the bereaved, and out of that store, which is perennial, I offer much to you."

The loss of these children loosened her hold upon her other children. She loved them not less, but she had no sense of security in them. She watched over them with a fidelity that

found nothing insignificant. Their studies, their diversions, their companions, their clothes, their accomplishments and affectations, the caprice of the moment, the plans for their future,—everything that pertained to her children was her daily and hourly care. In finally establishing her home, in ordering her house, in all her fashioning and furbishing, in her foreign travel, her summer sojourning, her winter work, the one thing she had in view was the advantage of her children. She arranged play-rooms, built conservatories, held classes, cultivated flowers, took journeys, painted pictures, wrote books for one special purpose, for one assured public,—Lucy, Louise, and Philip. And with her almost fierce devotion she had a marvellous gift for overlooking non-essentials. She was microscopic in places where some mothers are telescopic, but she was equally telescopic where others are microscopic. She knew how every moment of her children's time was occupied; but when she had sent them into the large, open, country yard to play, she expected them to have sense enough to look out for themselves that they were not run over by the country wagons. And the little toddlers justified her faith, though the neighbors were sometimes horrified at their narrow escapes. She had not a moment's time or strength to posture her children for artistic or sentimental admiration, nor had she, it may be added, any to spare upon other people's children. She seemed sometimes indifferent, almost scornful, when she had exhausted her small store of strength upon the essentials, and took refuge in abstraction from any draft made upon her for the unimportant. She would not lose the hastening

glory of a sunset on the hills, though each baby were setting up a separate and sonorous howl in the carriage over some childish quarrel.

Mr. Rollins's business took them to Washington for some years, where he held the various offices which lead up to and include the Commissionership of Internal Revenue. The position was not much to her liking, and she did not take over-kindly to her Washington life. Her time and observation were not so fully absorbed by her family that she did not note the social and political world. She wrote, as she had written occasionally for many years, letters for the newspapers, all of which were widely read and well received.

The later, perhaps the serener, possibly the happiest years of Mrs. Rollins's life were passed in Philadelphia. The mild climate suited her feeble physical power. Her summers were spent on the sea-shore or among her native mountains, and her own beautiful home was not so deeply embosomed in the city as to banish sunshine and the birds. At her chamber window she could hear the winds sighing among the pines, and the light came to her broken and shimmering through flowers and greenery. Some months of European travel she was strong enough thoroughly to enjoy, and the Centennial Exhibition brought the world's treasures to her own doors. How wide and glad those doors swung open to all her friends through that gala season there are hundreds to remember. Everything she had strength to enjoy she enjoyed, and the rest she made up by the enjoyment of others. Her hospitality never knew

bounds for those she loved, though she was a great deal more rigid, I trust, than Heaven in excluding those of whom she did not approve. In these sunny, tranquil years her soul sprang up in all sorts of experiment. She studied, taught, embroidered, painted, wrote with fresh zest. She renewed and enlarged her youthful acquaintance with languages; read history and literature with young girls, the comrades of her daughters; sewed daisies and daffodils and peacocks' feathers all over her house till the muscles of her right arm gave out; covered jars and screens and plaques with numberless lilies and cresses,—since she wrought only for love, and of the great world of possibilities she loved to paint only the life of still water. It was as if some unseen, irresistible force urged her on, unwitting, to surround the husband and children whom she was so soon to leave with the visible tokens of her presence.

In many ways this strange urgency impelled her. She who had laughingly, but effectively, resisted all beseeching for her portrait, who was too timid to venture alone into the great city which lay only just beyond her garden gate, on that last winter proposed the portrait herself, selected her artist, and climbed, sometimes unaccompanied, into his sky-studio and gave him as many sittings as he required. A little stone, which Marion had held in her hand when she died, was taken from its box and made into a seal for her son, with suitable and suggestive inscription and appropriate setting. A copy of Appleton's Encyclopædia she sent to the little library of her native village, and, what was most unlike herself, she consented that her husband

should insert her name as the donor. While yet in her usual health and with no visible reason for expecting anything but length of days, she destroyed all but two or three of her published Washington letters, on the ground that their value had

been abated by the lapse of time and she did not wish her friends to be bothered with them after she was gone.

Her last work was her books. She wrote them rapidly, eagerly, for the king's business required haste. The leisure of her last two years was given to them at home and at the sea-

side. The second was begun as soon as the first was finished, and withal she took not haste enough, for an echo of sweet songs fell brokenly from her dying lips, never to be caught by voice or lute.

Death came to her stealthily, or shall I say, benignantly? With increasing weakness, but without pain or foreboding, she went gently down to the gates of death. And when they opened, behold, it was not death but life. In the last paragraph of her last book she had written:

"There is a chamber window out of which in childhood I used to watch the sunset-gilded crown of Red Mountain, and while sitting there I have often thought that in the afterglow of some fortunate day I would like to pass out of earth into heaven."

And it was so. In the early afterglow of her most fortunate day she passed from languor into life.

Her religion had always been a principle, never a barrier, never a bond. She had small respect for forms. She had indifference to forms out of which the inspiration had vanished. Death justified all her instincts. Faith upheld her, and let every shrinking human creature who may read these words gather courage; for this weak, timid woman went out alone into the great unknown without a fear.

Her last day came to her unwarned. Her physician, from an experience of nearly half a century, advised that nothing be said to herself or her children of her peril. The night had been not untroubled. In her dreams and her talk as she slept she was wandering in the White Mountains. The doctor's early

arrival found her awake and surprised. Of her nurse she asked what was the hour, and who had summoned the doctor, and immediately responded to the answer, "Then I am going to die, and I want to see my children."

Thus all barriers were removed. With entire calmness and clearness, and with a well-defined regard to the needs of each, to each dear child alone she gave last words which can only be cherished in their inmost hearts. To a few friends she spoke a calm and loving farewell. The greater part of her last day she was alone with her husband, and through him to her hosts of friends she sent parting messages. Her own family and her husband's family, hardly less dear, she remembered, name by name, with tenderest greeting. Everything was real and confident. It was exactly and only as if she were setting out a little earlier than they, on a journey which all would take, to a land where love awaited her. She talked of the past and the present as well as of the future, and her language was never more vigorous, her directions were never more clear. She desired that a book left at the house by a friend be returned, and that an account which she had overpaid be remembered. She designated tokens to be given to special friends in her name, and sundry of her own benefactions to be continued after her death. In no one word did she betray fear, regret, or apprehension. For weeks the habit of her life had so increased upon her that she could hardly bear to let her husband go out of her sight; but this last day, as if she wished to try a little what separation would be before it was enforced, she urged him to go away for

rest. To this peculiarly dependent woman, who for years had never been anywhere without him, who did not think she *could* go anywhere, even to her own mother's house, without him,—to her was given such new courage and strength that she went down unshrinking alone into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. "God is indeed merciful," she said, "that he has made me wish to go."

"Ashton, there is nothing, after all, in this world to really help us but Christ and his cross."

"Yes, Ellen, from science and philosophy and everything else, we must all come back to the cross."

"No," she answered, quickly. "No, go forward to it rather."

"I am not so devotional as you, but my faith is as strong. It began in my childhood, and I have clung to it always."

"At a time like this, omnipotence is nothing, omniscience is nothing; the love of Christ is everything. Ah! how that sweet, patient face of his looks out from all the picture-galleries of Europe, out of Holman Hunt's picture down-stairs—looks into my very soul!

"Tell mother that I will be waiting for her, and J. and H. and F. and M. that I will come down to meet them, and give my love to all your family. I have done with the world and will say no more."

When her lips had grown rigid, so that she could no longer frame a sentence, a whispered word would indicate the direction of her thoughts. "Rock," she hardly more than breathed, and "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land" and "Lead me

to the rock that is higher than I" would be repeated to her, and no child was ever more manifestly soothed and refreshed by mother-words than she by the wonderful mother-words of heaven.

Her children were watching and praying in the library that their mother might live to go to heaven on Sunday morning. By her they sent their love to Willie, to Marion, and to Margaret, and she promised them she would not fail to carry it.

Her breathing became labored. She had no pain, but great weariness.

"Marie, Marie," she softly said.

"Marie?" repeated the nurse.

"No," she answered clearly, "not Marie, but Marion." And raising her right arm and beckoning with her hand and index finger, as one calls to him another whom he sees, she continued, "Marion, my daughter, come, come!"

She spoke no more and suffered no more, but went so gently that love itself could not know the moment of her departure.

GAIL HAMILTON.

ETCHINGS

IN Northern New England, in the traditional good old times, to own a house was a condition of thrifty citizenship. For this a young couple would toil early and late with heroic self-denial. No matter how humble this home was, it must be one's own. When a man married, he at once set up a household, and, as he needed, he let out his four walls, and seamed and patched them. His barns ran over, and he added to them. He planted an orchard, and set out poplars before his door. The roughness of toil was ground into his bones and muscles. He grew hard-featured and hard-fisted, while his wife grew jaded and angular. Their children became like them. They were all weather-changed into a kind of peculiar peasantry, a readily recognized product of their condition,—the busy, honest, persistent, hopeful, helpful New Eng-

land farmer's family. The visible signs of their labors were hardly more than an orchard of straggling trees; the annual rotation of crops; and the daily spilling-out from the doors of family-life. It was a most simple living, easily described with few words; but the core of progressive culture, the nursery of strong character.

Their houses and their surroundings were such as might be expected. The apple-trees, which they set out, bore crabbed fruit, and were of little value; but, as a feature of farm-life, they served their purpose. There were always good apples enough for home use. The names of some of them, given by accident, became household words; and, when they had lived their life out, the excellence of their fruits passed into tradition. I could walk to-day to the very spot where stood Farmer M.'s Long-nose and Pudding-sweet,—two ragged, stalwart trees, famous in the district. The mildly-sour Long-nose tasted best when just picked from the greensward, and the mealy Pudding-sweet when sucked by the eater while sitting upon a low-lying branch of the tree which bore it.

An old orchard is a friendly place. Wherever you stumble upon one the spirit of homelikeness and past occupation are with it. If there are no house-walls to be seen, you are sure to find near by the rubbish of them, by which you know that once the simple processes of farm-life went daily on under its trees. The jagged, sprouting old stumps are the record of it.

On the whole, what farm appendage was better in possession, is better in memory, than its riotous old orchard? It was, in

spring, a rose-garden, which scented the air with attar, and filled the landscape with a transient glory. In summer, standing in the foreground of its overtopping verdure, the houses let out into it the homeliness of their vocations. Then into the postures and implements of housewives, and the work they did, passed the glamour of its growth and its sunshine. In it, and by it, people and things, otherwise unattractive, became beautiful incidents and accidents of it. You have not forgotten the bare-armed women, spreading their linen to bleach; pans scalding in the sunshine; the bee-hives; the grindstone; the mowers whetting their scythes, and other loose-lying debris of farm-work; the picturesque absorption of the orchard's summer-life. You hold fast in memory some tree, or trees, the ripening and gradual gathering of whose fruits were happy features of your childhood.

The orchard almost always started from the back-door of a farm-house, where burdocks and other rank-smelling weeds grew and waste waters trickled out; but it stretched into a verdure, the sweetness and cleanliness and tenderness of which could only be found under its trees. Here night-dews lingered, and apples mellowed toothsomely under the matted grass. Here was the couch of the tired laborer and the play-ground of children, who wore ruts in its sod, and half lived in summer upon its forage.

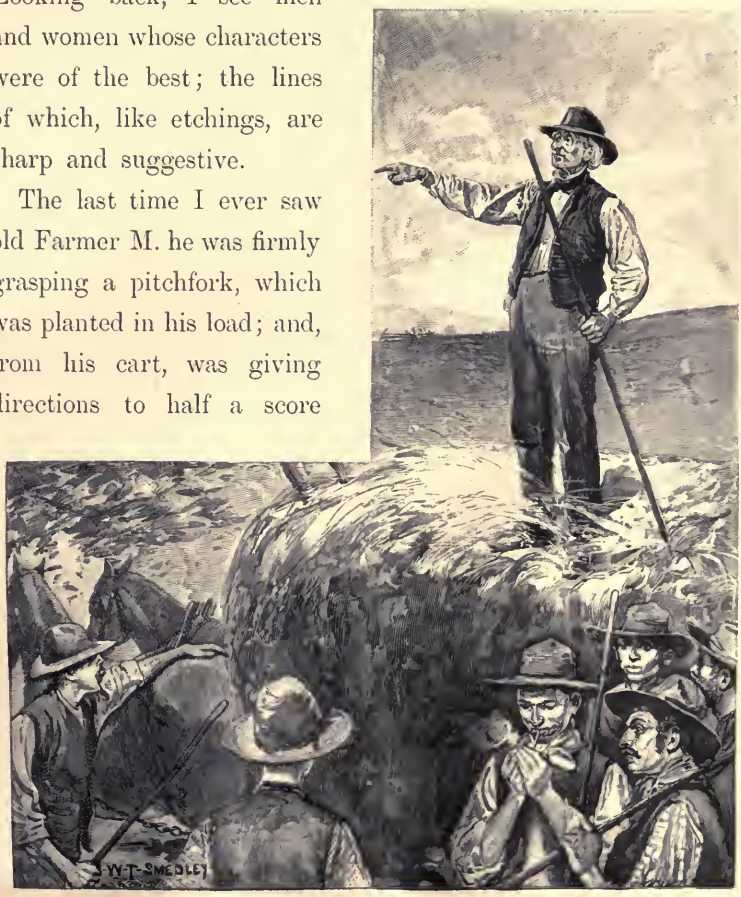
The Lombardy poplars, which were planted in front of these earlier farm-houses, were stiff, compact, erect trees, always aggressive upon the landscape. They were fast-growing, but of short-lived vigor, and died by early though slow decay. They were perhaps the natural outcrop of a generation which began

and ended with shoulder to the plough, and hand to the distaff; whose chief literature was the Bible; whose law was truth, and whose highest recreation was the rest of the Sabbath. You still see, here and there, these aged poplars scattered through New England. They are ghosts of trees, half dead, often isolated; yet, should search be made, sure to be found standing steadfast by the site of an ancient homestead. Often they linger in front of a square, flat-roofed old house, given over, like themselves, to decay; both come down from a long dead generation. They have a way of lifting themselves up and standing out from a landscape. One sees them from afar, like index-fingers, pointing backwards, not without pathos, to the past.

If the farmers who planted these trees seemed hard and stern, it was owing largely to their resolute fidelity to the necessities of their vocation. They were pioneers; the hewers out of a path to a broader culture. They were not unlike their own hills, which, though rugged and steep, were, at the same time, the glory of the landscape. They loved the homes to which they had given the richness and strength of their days. That power of association which comes from dwelling long in a spot, and which clings eternally to it, took deep root in them. At the same time, there went out from them, into their walls and furnishings, that sweetness of life-expression given to them by long use. Time mellowed their homes; scars enriched them; necessity added to them,—until, from very bare beginnings, grew the quaintly furnished, picturesque, simply beautiful old farm-houses.

Very much of the thrift and honesty peculiar to the New England race has flowed through this primitive and sturdy stock. Looking back, I see men and women whose characters were of the best; the lines of which, like etchings, are sharp and suggestive.

The last time I ever saw old Farmer M. he was firmly grasping a pitchfork, which was planted in his load; and, from his cart, was giving directions to half a score



of stalwart laborers. His hat was weather-beaten; his garments were coarse and ill-fitting. To one unused to country life, he

would have seemed a rough old man,—a common farmer; the worn-out owner of a few acres and a little money, gotten by working while others slept; by self-denial when indulgence would have seemed a virtue; one who doubled the toils of summer, and cheated himself out of the rest of winter,—a sort of barren waif, almost cast out from one century upon the shore of another.

Altogether otherwise this man seemed to me. I had known him from my earliest childhood. He had done faithfully the work which had been given him to do. Whatever lay within its scope and possibilities he had accomplished. Whatever of dignity could be given, by truth and industry and self-respect, to a farmer's life, had been given to his. Forty years before he had been a rustic king in his fields. He was a king still,—this old man of eighty-odd years. There was the same stamp of force upon him. He was old age wiser than youth; decay more potent than growth; weakness dictating to strength. Time had ploughed over him; but, if his hand had lost its cunning, his eye had not lost its fire. If his body was wellnigh spent, his intellect was unabated. As he stood, poised upon the fruits of his harvest, ruling, with positive will and clear judgment, his laborers of a later generation, he seemed like the old hero that he was; a half-defiant conqueror over circumstance, brave and resistant to the last. It was grand to see him, this half-wild son of nature, standing clear-cut against the blue sky, held up by the instruments and adjuncts of a life of toil; the wrinkled, aged harvester, tossed out at his last, with a sort of fierce ges-

ture, into this transient, but suggestive, picture. Clad in homespun, roughened by toil, with no acquired graces of speech, there was yet about him a certain expression of inborn dignity which compelled respect. His eye was piercing; his voice incisive; his words few; his manner forcible. He was an eager, honest, successful man, who had taken and held life by siege and storm.

This farmer's story will be read hereafter in character; not in books. It would be tame written out, the daily life of this man, who, through all his working years, tilled the soil in summer and split rocks in winter. But by and by some famous man will have inherited good blood from this farmer, who, in his plain village life, was known for his uprightness, his thrift, his intelligence, and his sagacity. He will be proud of this ancestor, whom the bad feared and the good honored; of this man, whose nobility of nature gave breadth to the narrowness of his calling. Some woman, with more than ordinary beauty, may owe it to this old man, whose sinews, given early to the tuition of nature, grew into symmetrical stature; and whose fresh young features were hardened, by care and exposure, into an expression of honest and heroic audacity.

S., the blacksmith, who shod horses by day and after nightfall reasoned with his neighbors in the village store, was a remarkable man. He was well read; was especially strong in history, and an excellent debater. His eyes were always bloodshot, and his face was as hard-lined as the steel bars upon which he wrought; yet, on Sundays, washed clean from the smut of

toil, it was a face worthy to be remembered. Then he was a noble-looking man, sitting, broad-browed, erect, and observant, at the head of his pew, where he followed Parson B.'s long and sensible discourses with the keen relish of an apt logician. This blacksmith shod horses admirably. His shoes fitted, and his nails never missed. In his chosen vocation he had a perfect career, because whatever he did he did well. People came to him from far and near, for no known blacksmith shod horses so well as he. In this merit of his work lay the pathos of his life; for this man, who shod horses, might have ruled men. The logic which swayed the loungers in the village store should have been given to his equals. It is a mystery why this stalwart wrangler, who might have figured and grown famous in the world, hammered away, all his days, at horses' feet in a village smithy.

There is no end to these remembered representative characters; quaint and positive, always grand, because underlaid by simplicity and fidelity to right.

These farmers did not adorn their houses much, either in-doors or out, for they were almost always work-driven and weary. Nature took up their task where they left it. They planted fences and gates and well-sweeps. She, with her frosts and stains and mosses, tumbled and embellished them. The saplings they started grew into prim poplars and dense, ill-bearing orchards; but there was about these half-worthless trees, in their moss-clad old age, a kind of fitness which served its time and purpose. When the square, brown farm-houses began to decay,

and farmers to graft their newly-planted stocks, the poplars and shaggy old apple-trees began also to die. Each was a sort of appendage to the other, and so they passed away together.

The sweetest and most natural outgrowth of old-time pastoral life was a love of, and clinging to, the old homesteads. Once New England was full of them; great, brown, roomy, homely houses, facing the south; led to by green lanes; shut in by

ancestral fields; standing quite even with the greensward, which they met with low-lying stones dug out from their own pastures. Each had its family burial-place,—blessed spot. They were all rich in springs and brooks and woodlands. They had added to them, year after year, the glory of trees and bushes and vines; the wild growth of seeds, flung by the winds into the crevices of walls and unused places. That which was peculiar to them, that which could not be simulated by art, was a certain beauty given to them by time and use and decay,—a sort of mellowing into the landscape of the piles and their adjuncts, by which each homestead took unto itself an individual expression for its owner and his descendants. The aspect of a farm-house was, to the children of it, as personal of recognition as the face of a father or grandfather. It was to be held in the family name, and go down with it. It was the sanctuary of homely virtues; the centre of family reunions; the place of its yearly thanksgiving; a spot from which its membership had enlarged and diverged; and to which, when they died, its sons and daughters were brought back for burial. In it, generation after generation, there was always one left. It was either a faithful son or daughter who had married one of her own sort. These men and women were spoken of as "the boys and girls" at home, and, as such, they were most admirable. No matter how little fitted they seemed to be for any other sphere, as the appendages and rulers of these old houses they could have hardly been changed for the better. They were a portion of their appropriate machinery, and stayed by them from choice, because their

lives had not grown away from them. The men had a certain audacity of mien; the simple abandon of persons whose dealings were largely with nature. The women had no artificial ways; little learning; but much good sense, and their greatest charm was that they were easily satisfied with small pleasures. Their children were the "country cousins"; as much a sweet feature of farm-life as were its dandelions and buttercups and daisies.

Thus, by rotation, the homestead was always filled. The foreign land, to which its indwellers all travelled, was the little burial-ground close by. The journey to this was short by linear measurement; but, reckoned by the events and worth of the days and months and years it took to get there, it was a travel wonderfully rich in effort and results. The external signs of this journey were the ruts in the boards and stones, worn by the steady tramp of feet. What you could not see was the life which had been constantly diverging from such fountains of piety, truth, and industry.

As I look back, what strikes me most in that old country living is its simplicity, its earnestness, its honesty, and its dignity. The men and women seemed to grapple with their inherited burdens. They were a race of born athletes and wrestlers with the soil; the natural outgrowth of it.

I see them walking, as they used, across the green fields to the meeting-house, which stood on a hill a mile away from my grandfather's, clad in their long-kept, variously-made holiday garments,—a quaint procession. There are samples of shawls and dresses, preserved by me in memory from the attire of my

grandfather's fellow-worshippers, every thread of whose real texture has been eaten away. I know just how they were worn. Old Dame H. had a soft, silky, crimson shawl, which she drew closely over her shoulders, and pinned three times down in front. The pins seemed never to vary a thread; and year after year her sharp shoulders rubbed at its warp and woof until it grew stringy and streaked.

There were coats and cloaks and dresses, so far removed from any suggestion of mode that their strangeness of make, joined with richness of fabric, gave dignity to them, and the men and women who wore them were the authors of a true style.

Old Squire S. never put aside his plaid cloak lined with green baize. His sons and daughters went away from the homestead, and came back richly clad in the world's fashions. That made no difference to him. He walked up the church aisle, year after year, in front of the gayest of them, with his old plaid, which wrapped him about like a tartan; and, through the singing of psalms, prayers, and benedictions, he stood, with the green baize flung over his shoulders, unconscious that there was anything queer or old-fashioned about him. There was nothing old-fashioned. He was a splendid old man, erect, proud, with a broad, white brow, and a grand record for brain-work in all the courts. The old cloak had become a kind of toga, invested by him with the worth of long association, and so had grown to be invaluably a part of himself.

There is a sentiment about old wraps, which have travelled with you, and stood by you when the flimsiness of other attire

has failed. It needs not to be woven in with camel's hair, and it does not suit the texture of lace. It is hostile to fashion, and comes only with using. It is tender, and touches you like keepsakes of lost friends. Your best imported wraps are those which you have brought across the sea yourself; which have the imprint of travel and good companionship; which have been tossed about in many lands, and had their colors mellowed by much usage. Such can never be duplicated nor simulated. They are a true tapestry, inwrought with a part of the richness of your life. Why cannot some web be woven fit for lifelong wear, so that memory may be allowed to crystallize about it, and then the mantles of those we have loved could literally fall upon us?

My grandfather built his house in the middle of his farm. All the farm-houses in that neighborhood were thus centrally located. Isolation was the result; so was also economy of working force,—no mean item where the soil was hard, rocky, and ungrateful, and bread was truly to be won by sweat of the

brow. Distance lent much beauty to these plain farm-houses. The long, tree-arched green lanes leading to them, their cumbrous gates, their straggling sheds, and half-slovenly profusion of wood-piles and carts, went into the picture; and the softening aspect of smoke and cloud and outlying verdure gave to them the baptismal touch of all-creative nature.

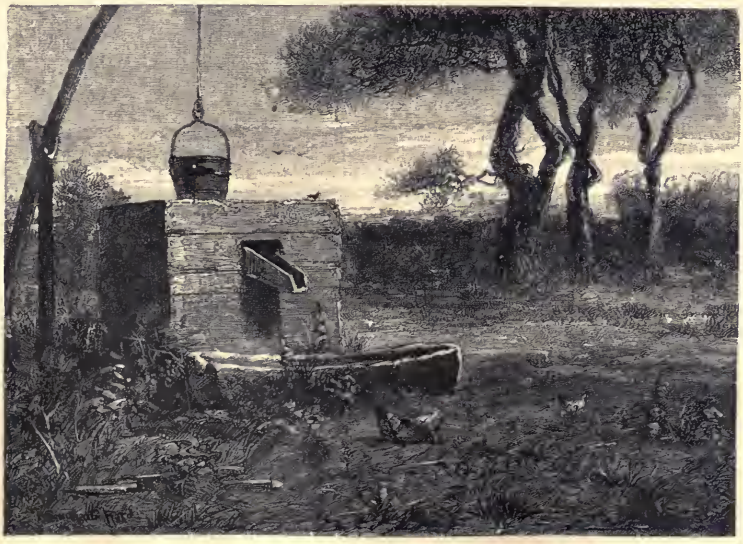
My grandfather's lane was overhung by stalwart elms and maples. Just at its entrance was a bubbling spring, whose waters trickled down by the way-side through beds of violets and wild flag. The lane itself was fenced in by a stone wall; in my day tumbled by frost and fretted with moss. Its turf was like velvet. Two deep wheel-ruts, the wear of years, ran through it, in and out of which the family chaise bounced rollickingly, for horses were sure to prick up their ears and quicken their pace as soon as they snuffed the cool spring. You know that pleasant sound, when, upon turning from the hard highway, their hoofs struck the porous soil. At the lane's farther end was a gate with a huge, upright beam, uncouth, clumsy, and slow to move on its hinges,—apt to sag,—ploughing a semicircle with its nigh end, and weighing heavily upon the shoulder of the opener. Endurance seemed to have entered into all the building plans of old-time workers; and size and weight were to them the emblems of endurance. About my grandfather's gate smart-weed and dock-weed and plantain grew profusely,—mean weeds; but Hannah, maid-of-all-work, distilled from them dyes and balsams. Beauty lay hidden in their juices, which Hannah expressed and fastened into her patiently spun and

woven fabrics of cotton, linen, and woollen. Over the gate and over the well a massive butternut-tree flung its branches. It stands to-day, with its trunk half-rotten, and I sit under it and seem again a child. Only for a moment, for, with the years that have gone into my life, something sweet and beautiful has gone out of it. Dear little Benny! you and I came first together through the gateway into the farm-house yard. A white-haired old man stood in the door to welcome us. It was late on a summer's day: so late that the cattle were lowing to be let through the pasture-bars; the work of the day was well-nigh past, and the dews and peace of night were beginning to fall. Sweet, sacred eventide! Gone are they all,—the dear old man, the beautiful boy, the herds, and the laborers who wrought with them. The structures, built by mortal hands, are rotting and tumbling; the tree is dying; the rest are shadowy things of memory. I look down into the deep old well, with its unsafe curb and sweep (how foolish I am!), for the trout little Benny dropped there more than forty years ago. I see nothing save green, slimy rocks and the shadow of my own face.

I say little Benny, because dead children never grow old. We talk of what they might have been, but we possess only what they were. Little Benny died more than forty years ago,—a beautiful, precocious boy. Had he lived, he might have been a famous man. He is only remembered as the loving, lovable child, and as such I go back to meet him. Very few are the lasting impressions of the forms and features of lost ones. Some intensity of word or look or action glorifies a moment of a

child's life, and makes its expression an imperishable thing of memory.

Marion, brown-eyed Marion, rosy, radiant, flinging back her hair with careless abandon, bursts into my room. By that one attitude and expression I best remember her. You can never know what unwitting posture of your child is to become a



treasure to you. If it dies, you will lose hold of its heart-rending reality, and will be consoled by the ideal suggestiveness of its occasional aspects. This is the healing which time, and time alone, brings to your sorrows.

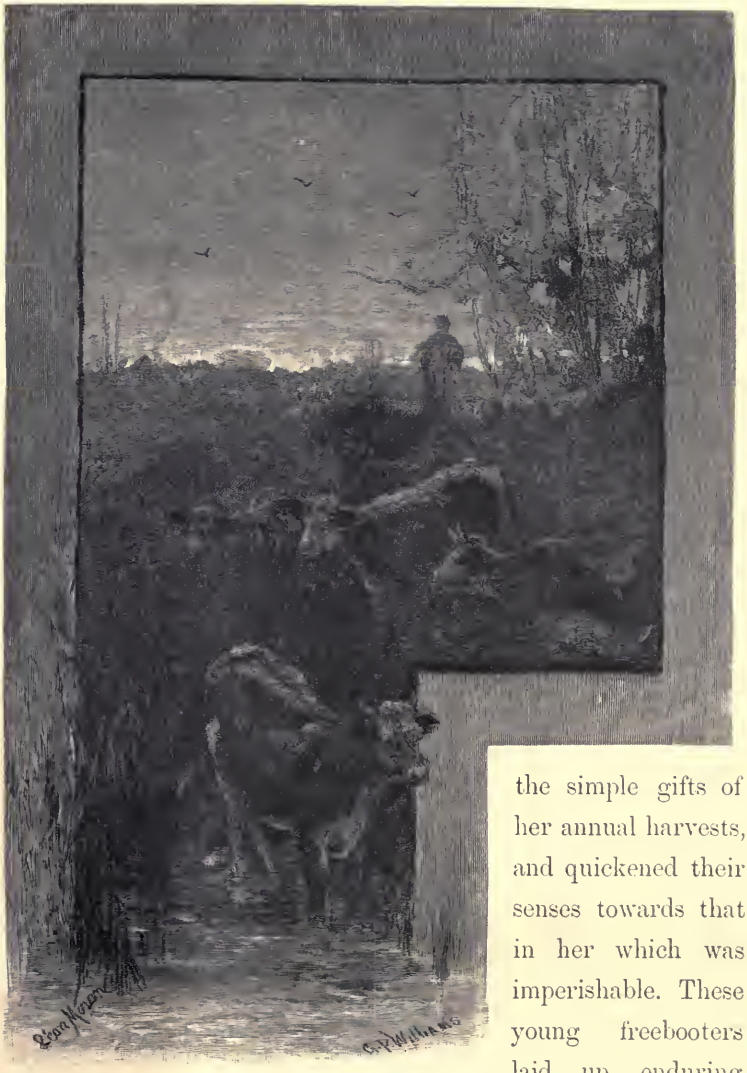
Thus talks the old well to me, treading cautiously upon its rickety platform. High up dangles the rusty bucket-handle;

the balance weight is gone; the sweep and beam are rotten and ready to fall. A spasm of tenderness seizes me; things take life. Summer days come back to me, and with them beautiful rural pictures of tired men and patient animals slaking their thirst. I shut my eyes and the yard is alive again. Oxen are lapping cool water from the trough; laborers are grasping the dripping bucket, poised on the edge of the curb; upon the doorstep sits my grandfather, his white hair streaming over his shoulders. How clear-cut the whole scene is,—this picture of common farm-life! The oxen lift their heads and blink their eyes, and then go back to their draught. It seems as if they never would be done. The men let down the bucket twice and thrice over, and up it comes, each time more coolly dripping than before. Its crystal streams splash back into the deep old well with a pleasant, resonant sound. Hannah comes out with her pails and fills them, and I, standing on tiptoe, lean over the curb and watch the water as it trickles down the mossy rocks. She is meanwhile unconscious, as I am, that through those simple acts our lives are being irrevocably woven together, each with the other, as well as with the drinkers and drawers around us, in a never-fading picture. Dear, cool, overflowing, delightful old well! your waters in those summer days were magic waters, and the creatures who drank of you, even the dumbest of them, were by you baptized for me with an undying beauty.

The heavy farm-gates, though uncouth and hard to manage, were made pleasant objects by age. The lane-gate of my grandfather, hugged by a vine, had put out grasses and weeds from

its joints, and was mottled all over with moss. The make of these gates was always a marvel. Pegs and supple withes stood instead of hinges; and a strong bar, fastened to their centre, ran, with a sharp angle, to the upper end of a tall post. They were in keeping with the well-sweeps, the ragged fences, and stone walls. They grew, picturesquely, into the landscape, and pointed out otherwise inconspicuous entrance-ways. These latter were often only slight wheel-ruts cut into the sods of the fields, so that the gate-posts served as signboards to benighted and weary travellers. They loomed up, gray and ghostly, out of the darkness of night, and were homely signals of hospitality in winter snow-wastes. "I see the gate,—we're almost there!" shouted Benny. We were making our first joint visit to my grandfather's farm, and the friendly bars and beams of this gate beckoned to us. Hospitable old gate!—which would never then budge an inch at my tugging; but which nevertheless always swung, with a right royal arch, wide open, to let me in.

A second gate, at my grandfather's, opened from the opposite side of the farm-house yard, just beyond the butternut-tree, into another lane. This lane went down into the pasture and the woodland. At its farther end were the clumsy, unstable pasture-bars, against which the cattle crowded at nightfall, and leaped past the fearless children who let them out. These farmers' children, who roamed pastures and woods, unmindful of herds, and came back shaggy and weighed down with all sorts of wild growth, were truly the foster-children of nature. Year after year of their half-untamed lives she gave to them



the simple gifts of her annual harvests, and quickened their senses towards that in her which was imperishable. These young freebooters laid up enduring

riches. Lying on her pasture-knolls, tossing about amongst her dead leaves, tramping through brooks and bogs and brushwood, they stumbled upon her treasures unawares. The berries and nuts and mints they sought were transient things; but the glories of the days which brought them entered into, and gave to them a good and delight which were eternal. Those children are made richer and better, who have early dealings with Nature; she gives to them a joy which will stand by them all their days. If they get it not, they will have missed something most admirable out of their lives.

In farmers' families, the driving of the cows to pasture passed by rotation from one child to another. Sometimes a man or woman of the household took up the task, from necessity or inclination, as a duty or diversion. They were, most often, thoughtful, observant men and women, to whom their morning and evening lessons, such as God gave to them in the changeful aspects of earth and sky, were, perhaps half unconsciously, well learned. Sweet scents and sounds and sights greeted them. They got from the morning strength for the day's burdens, and the peace of twilight lifted these burdens from them. I recall three men who, all through middle life and far into old age, morning and night, at unvarying hours, drove their herds to and from the pastures. Their cows knew them, and, in the virtue of patience, seemed quite as human as they. They were all three grand men, sensible, honest, and carrying weight in town affairs. This humble duty, cheerfully done, did but illustrate and embellish the childlike simplicity of their lives. There

could be no more pastoral picture than that of these respectable farmers plodding along the highway with their cows in the early brightness of morning. They were literally walking hand in hand with nature. Transplanted into a city, they would have been poor in its riches, unfitted for its pursuits and pastimes. On the country highway they were heirs of the soil; lessees of the landscapes and sky views; unconscious absorbents of the earth's

brightness and beauty. I know men in high places who look back with keen pleasure to their cow-driving days, when the lowing herds used to come across the rocky pastures to meet them, and who, from these enforced morning and evening walks, grew to be observers and lovers of nature. I remember with delight my grandfather's pasture, poor of soil and scanty of herbage; uneven of surface; its hillocks clad with moss and wintergreen; cut in

two by a clear, babbling brook; shaded here and there by clumps of trees; ragged with rocks and ferns and wild shrubs; marshy next to the mill-pond, as well as treacherous, and tangled with flag and bulrushes. Rare old New England pasture-lands! You were stingy of grass, but you were never-failing in beauty,—that beauty which was revealed to the children, who, next to the herds, were your true owners. Early in spring-time, against lingering snow-banks, came beds of blue and white violets; a little later, hidden among crisp, crackling leaves, pink and white arbutus,—sweetest of all spring blossoms. Ferns unfolded; mint scented the brookside; coltsfoot brightened its shoal bed; the marsh bristled with spiked leaves. With the coming of summer, the water-soaked and porous soil by degrees dried up. One had no longer to pick his way from stone to stone across boggy places (what early pasture roamer does not recall the overrated audacity of such passages?); ferns grew strong and deep-colored; bog onions curled their brown coils against the rocks (they would not pull now with the old relish); weeds and shrubs and stinted trees took on the gifts of the passing seasons, and, as you trod on them or brushed by them, sent out to you their wild flavors. Close by the mill-pond the soil was always soft, and marked by the hoof-prints of cattle. Here the pond was shoal and full of lilies. On hot summer days the tired animals would stand for hours knee-deep in the sluggish water, unconscious pictures of peaceful pastoral life. Their crooked trail, winding in and out through the dampest and shadiest portion of the pasture-land, had a friendly look. Its black line was easy to be traced far into

the evening, and was always a pleasant thing to stumble upon. It has guided many a wanderer home. What traveller has not had his heart gladdened by footprints in waste places? My path was treacherous and hard to follow, but it led one down through tall, sweet-scented bushes; across the shoal brook; over a long stretch of ferns; past rocks and crackling brushwood, into the alders and bulrushes and wild flag, outside of which were the shoal water and a lily-bed, where, stuck fast in the mud, was a rotting old boat, which the waves lapped lazily.

Here the children from far and near used to come for lilies, pushing with poles out into the pond. One summer day, at nightfall, a little girl was missing from a farmer's house. She had gone out in the morning and had not come back. Two weeks went by and no clue of her was found. Meanwhile the budded lilies blossomed on the pond, and other children went one day in search of them. They came back, not lily-laden, but with a great horror on their lips. Pushing about among the pads, they had come upon something which they dared not touch; something which two weeks before was fairer than any lily, but which now was an awful thing, to be hastily put out of sight.

On this shore the children used to plait rush caps and play with flag-leaves in mimic warfare. The black, soggy soil was honeycombed by their busy feet, and their constant companions were the cattle, who cooled themselves in the shoal edge of the pond. The blue of the distant hills, the sunshine, the shimmer of the pond, the verdure of forest and woodland and lowland

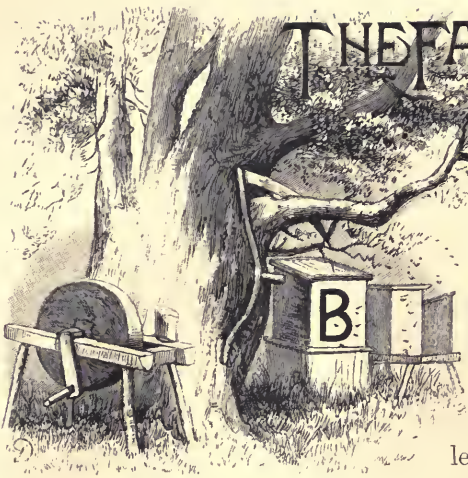
and upland overarched and surrounded and hemmed them in. Absorbed thus by the landscape, they were made transient features of its glory.

When the summer had passed, grasses bloomed, with a faint purple haze, on the uplands, and bushes flaunted in crimson, forerunners of the dying of the year. Rare pastoral scenes! Again I am watching the shadows of ancient pines, lying across the pond; herds browse the hillocks; I see the daintily coiling smoke of distant farm-houses; the coquetting of clouds and sunshine; the noble framework of hill and forest. The old music comes back,—the ring of the woodman's axe; the whiz of the mill under the hill; the lowing of herds; bird-song; insect-hum; and, above all, the drowsy lapping of the pond against its shore. Behold the beauty, the plenty, the generosity of my pasture!

What shall be said of the woodland, grand, solemn old woodland, with its pines, grim and ragged with time; full of pallid ferns and such dainty blossoms as love dark places; tangled with a wild undergrowth, and ankle-deep with the crackling waste of past years! Dense, damp, dark, stately old woodland,—I love all pines because of my early friendship with yours. Lying on the mouldy carpet of your waste verdure, I caught your whispers with the hidden sources of your growth, and watched you from my chamber-window as weird and wild you battled with storms. The whistling of a fierce winter's wind through a forest of pines is a mournful sound; it seems like a prolonged wail of the persecuted trees. No tree has a more striking mission than the

pine. It is the vanguard tree of nature. Grand, erect, beautiful, it enriches the low, sandy plain; climbing, strong and aggressive, ever climbing, it lies prone against the mountain-side, clothing it with eternal verdure. There is something pathetic in the wild gesticulations of these brave trees, flinging out their stinted and shrunken arm-like branches in defiance to the winds; stretching them back from the mountain-sides towards the valleys, until, planted among the clouds, they wax frigid and dumb and dead.

THE FARM-HOUSE



BACK through the green lane again to the old farm-house. I gently push open a door which leads into a hall, wherein I have sported away many a day in childhood. At the other end of this hall is another door, through which came, forty years ago, the odor of sweet-brier and honeysuckle. I tiptoe across the fragile floor and look out. Field-scents greet me, so familiar that I am almost dazed into believing that many things have not been, and that the dear old days have come back. Once a bench and basin stood beside this door, where tired laborers used to make themselves tidy for their meals. Just beyond was a kitchen-garden, with a beehive close by, and a grindstone under a maple. Bench and basin, hive and stone are gone, and burdocks and plantain have taken the place of homely vegetables; but the sapling little

Benny planted has grown into a massive tree. Who would have thought to have tracked him after a lapse of more than forty years? Is this not a true spirit communion,—this catching glimpses, among the shadows of the long past, of dear faces which have not grown old; this wistful turning back towards the sunshine of our earlier days?

My grandfather's kitchen was a sombre room, ceiled and painted brown; with huge beams, high dressers, and yawning fireplace. It had only two small windows, and was entered by nine doors. It was in reality the great hall of the house. What it lacked by day was light and sunshine. At night, brightened by a roaring backlog, it was full of cheer. Then its beams and ceilings and simple furnishings were enriched by shadows, and the pewter dishes upon its brown dressers shone in dancing firelight like silver. The two shelves, full of leather-covered books; the weatherwise almanac, hanging from a peg; the cross-legged table and prim chairs; the long crane, with its hissing teakettle; the brush; the bellows; the settle in the corner, and whatever else was there, all became fire-changed, and were mellowed into the bright scene. This room was by night the best part of the house. It was always the true heart of it; that vital centre from which diverged its indwelling life. It was the place where people lounged and lingered. Because its small windows let in few sunbeams, those which did come in were all the more precious. Because it was full of homely things, and was, as the women said, "most convenient," it had inwrought into it, as a picture, a quaint beauty of adaptation. Mellow,

brown old kitchens,—how many costly rooms simulate, in their furnishings, your inexpensive colors!

There was a dignity in the domestic labor of my grandfather's kitchen. Its workers wrested from the humility of their vocation some measure of that beauty which would have been thrust upon them by more gracious conditions of life. Their daily walk was narrow: it was almost bounded by their kitchen; but this latter was glorified by firelight and consecrated by use. The simple harmony of it, which has made it a charming thing of memory, was reflected upon these women. They became a part of it, and, as such, they are not drudges in plain garments, but quaintly-costumed life-studies in a picture of a delightful old room.

I can see now my stately grandmother preparing her noontide meal. Her checked apron and muslin cap were spotlessly clean, and she handled her clumsy utensils with a becoming deftness. Hannah, the maid, hovered around, ready to lend a helping hand. The crane, hung with pots, kept up a constant sizzling, and covered pans spluttered from ember-heaps in the corner. There was no hurry, no bustle, no rattling of dishes. Hannah blew a tin horn from the back-door. There was a swashing at the little bench outside. The crane was swung out; covers were lifted;

pans were taken from the corners; with perfect order the dinner passed from the fire to the table, well cooked, sufficient, and wholesome. It was not daintily served, with cut-glass and china, but it was full of the essence of vitality, and had the merit of utter cleanliness. My grandmother presided over it with a serious dignity untaught by rules of etiquette; and in no way was the discipline of her household better shown than by the utter decorum of its meals.

The kitchen floor was white and worn with much scrubbing,—hollows telling where its best seats by the hearth were. The doors opened into rare rooms: this one into a granite-walled dairy, as cool, clean, and compact as if it were cut from the solid rock. The next led into the cellar, full of compartments and bins and dark closets, crammed in winter with farm products. This storehouse never failed. Its apples were wild things, but toothsome, for they were the best from a great orchard, and one scented them from the stairway out of a long line of barrels. Nothing can quite equal for richness the flavor which a year's ripeness pours into a farm-house. It is only found in country homes,—this condensed sweetness, which has gone out of all the months of the year into the fashioning of the many things which were heaped and hoarded at the gathering in of the harvest.

How fruits stored in old cellars kept their freshness! That of one apple-tree in particular, at my grandfather's, never got its true ripeness until late in April. When first harvested it was crabbed, puckering the mouth. It was a tiny, bright fruit, profusely mottling its tree with crimson. It shrank and withered

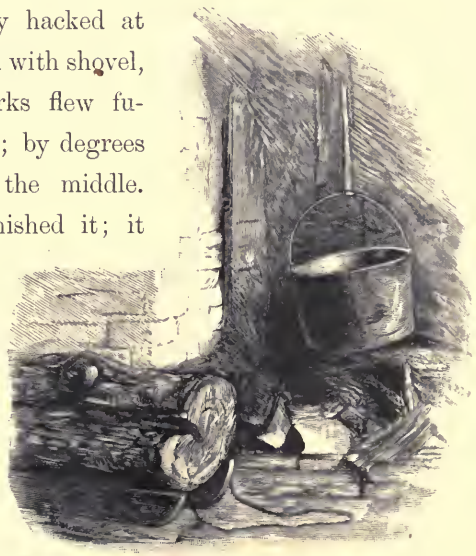
by keeping; but it grew palatable in inverse ratio to its size. I remember a branch, broken off by accident, which carried its relish into the days of June. It was a pretty thing, hanging from the cellar-wall,—a hardy waif from the dead harvest of the past year.

Two doors led into bedrooms, in which were chests of drawers full of homespun linen. Over the dairy ran the stairway, leading to chambers severely simple in furnishing, but clean, and made bright by sunshine. The floors of these chambers were kept strewn with sand,—a cheap, changeful covering, which at night I used to scrawl over with skeleton pictures, to be scattered in the morning.

The doors mostly opened with iron latches. These latches were clumsy things, lifting by a thumb-piece with a sharp click, and sending a shiver through one on frosty days. On the shed doors, made of wood, they were drawn up by the traditional bobbin. Brass knobs adorned the doors of the spare room. These were kept polished, and were held in high esteem. Their machinery, shut into a clumsy iron case, was screwed upon the outside of the door. As works of art none of these fastenings were much to be commended, but as quaint appendages to their homely doors were the best latches I have ever known.

The west room was the family "keeping-room," also lighted up at night by a roaring backlog. The brush and bellows in this room were pretentious with green and gold, and the shovel and poker were headed with brass knobs; but the fire was not a whit more cheerful than that in the brown kitchen.

I have sat hour after hour in that kitchen watching the backlog's slow consumption, half blinding my eyes with its flickering brightness. It was a long-dying, companionable thing, taking strong hold upon a child's fancy. It had been dragged to its place in the early morning, snow-bound and shaggy. It was defiant of its fate, and fought against it through the whole day. It truly died by inches. From its ends sizzled and dropped its sap,—its true life-blood; its substance fell off ring by ring; its ashes settled slowly upon the hearth. Everybody hacked at it; it was constantly plied with shovel, tongs, and poker; sparks flew furiously; coals flaked off; by degrees the log grew thin in the middle. At last a solid blow finished it; it snapped, and the parted ends fell without the iron dogs; the brands were ready to be raked up; the backlog was no more. Its life was jocund and brilliant. It was eloquent with fiery tongues, and the stories it told to a child, with crackling voice, went not out with its smoke.



Farmers were not stingy with their fuel, for the brush in the woodlands grew faster than they could burn the ancient

trees. My grandfather's backlogs were drawn through the house on a hand-sled,—snowy, mossy things, dripping with sap and shaggy with bark. They were buried in embers, and then supplemented with a forelog, which, in its own turn, was plied with lighter fuel and bolstered up with iron dogs. The building of this pile was an art; and the practical farmer knew how to adjust the size of the log to the day's consumption, so that it was quite sure to shatter and break in season for the early "raking up" of the night. This "raking up" at my grandfather's was his own care; and it was thought worthy of note in an almanac, when, once upon a time, his coals had failed to keep, and a fresh supply was brought from a neighbor's half a mile away. The ashes of those ancient wood-fires were full of virtue. They went to leach in spring for the making of family soap, and spread their richness far and wide over hungry fields.

The west room of the old farm-house was most cheerful in long winter evenings; not made so by social life or by artificial adornments, but rather by a sweet peace, and by the rich gifts of its outlying world. With face flattened against its window-panes, I, a nature-loving child, peered out at the glittering mill-pond and the dark woodland; traced the thread of a highway; caught the sound of transient bells; made friends with snow and clouds and shadows, and came to love its wild winter scenery. Without a love for nature, life in this isolated farm-house through the winter months, to one unused to it, must have been lonely and monotonous. In February, when the lane almost daily filled

with snow, my grandfather opened a highway through the "upper field." This was more easily kept clear, but it failed to entice many comers. People hugged their firesides through winter snows, and learned to be content. There was a largeness about the home-life of ancient well-to-do country people. They had space, great houses, and great rooms; and if they had little show, they had at least no shams. Their houses needed few furnishings, because so much embellishment was given to them by nature. Through many years, vivid and beautiful, have stood by me the rare adornments of my grandfather's great house. They were skies and woods and water and far-off hills let in through its windows; the shifting aspects of winter snows and summer verdure; and many especial revelations from earth and sky. It was a great house, so large that its uncarpeted chambers gave back an echo to my footsteps; and I never went up to its garret, which I did seldom and softly, without a feeling of loneliness. This garret was a weird place, with shelves and scaffolds packed with the waste of years, and its beams hung with dried herbs. It was dimly lighted by two small gable windows, and at the head of the stairway was cut in two by a rambling old chimney. More than any other spot in the house it had the air of age and decay. Its dealings appeared to be wholly with the past, and things out of which life had gone. All that was in it looked as if it had belonged to another century; and herbs filled the air with a sickish, musty smell. It was so far away from the living-rooms that few sounds of busy in-door life ever reached it. It was a gray ghost of a chamber,

in which nobody had ever lived; a sort of burial-place for worn-out and faded things. It was delightful to come down from it into the brighter rooms, which seemed, all of them, to be pervaded by some savory odor. Dried lavender and rose-leaves sent out their scents from chests and drawers; the dairy, the cellar, the cheese-room had each their own flavor; and the best essence of every edible seemed to disengage itself over the open fire. Johnny-cakes baked in the corner; pies cooked in the oven; meat roasted on the spit; potatoes boiled in pots; and from them all into the room came appetizing steams.

The old folks talked but little in winter evenings. My grandmother's knitting-work dropped stitches now and then, which she drowsily picked up with an "Oh, dear suz!" My grandfather, sitting opposite to her, by one corner of the hearth, dozed, with the ruddy firelight mocking at his wrinkles. Across them both, on the chest of drawers, on the bed-curtains, on the tall clock, on the white walls, danced this same firelight; out through the small panes it streamed over the waste of snow into the highway, cheering the cold traveller; bright, beautiful home-light. Peaceful, long-seeming, dreamy winter evenings, you made one used to the sighing of winds, the roaring of storms, the cold glitter of snow; and you taught one, through isolation, to find how much there is that is beautiful and satisfying to be gotten out of the roughest aspects and moods of nature; you also taught how simple may be the resources of a true home-life.

The door on the other side of the front entry opened into

the east room. This was the "best room," or, as my grandfather called it, the "fore" room. Most noticeable of its furnishing was the bed,—more for show than use. It was a tall structure, built up of corn-husks and feathers, not to be leaned against or carelessly indented. Its blue and white checked canopy, edged with knotted fringe, suspended by hooks from the ceiling, was spun and dyed and woven by the women of the household. Every piece of linen they used was of their own make. A pillow-case from that house is marked in plain letters A. D., meaning Abigail Drake, who spun and wove it there more than eighty years ago. The letters are stitched in with yellow silk (it must once have been black) after an ancient sampler. This sampler was a curious thing, running through the alphabet and numerals in several texts and various-colored silks, punctuated at the end by two skeleton birds, and winding up with this wise maxim, "Industry is its own reward." It also announced in written text that Abigail Drake, at the age of twelve, in such a year, wrought this sampler.

Such samplers were worked by girls in the village schools. Their letters were pricked in and out with extreme care, and the best executed of them were generally framed and hung in the fore room. They were as precious to those who made them as if they had been rare water-colors, and the measure of a young woman's accomplishment was taken from the skill with which she had done this task. As rags, these old samplers are worthless now; as the faded work of bright young girls of a past century, they interest one; for they are fabrics into

which, in long ago summer days, were inwrought some of the old-fashioned simplicity and patience and industry of a dead generation.

My grandfather's flax was of good grain. Its bed was just inside of the pasture-bars, making a dainty show of blue blossoms. There could be nothing prettier in the way of flowers than it was. Waving in the wind, it seemed like a bit of summer sky let down. It was tended with great care, and harvested and made ready for use with much labor. Failure of the crop by untoward weather, or any mishap in its preparation, was looked upon as a great misfortune.

In long summer afternoons my grandmother and Hannah planted their little wheels by the back-door, and hour after hour drew out the pliant threads which were to be woven, in the loom up-stairs, into variously patterned coverlets, table-cloths, and towels. One is touched in handling, at this remote day, the fabrics fashioned by these ancient women. It seems as if they had woven into them a warp and woof of their own vitality, and that the strength which went out of the patient workers entered into their webs, and gave to them a texture of beauty and endurance. This old farm-house pillow-case of mine is as firm as if its fibre had been plucked from the flax-bed but yesterday, and it is as lustrous as it was when the fingers which wove it first cut it from the beam. To nothing does the past cling more than to such ancient cloths. The threads you handle, which moth and mildew have marred, are not the real thing; that is a finer undershot, impalpable to

touch of stranger, but trailing down to you, like silken folds, glittering and precious with tenderest memories.

How many operations of breaking and bleaching and boiling those home products had to go through before they came out at last faultless as the fruits of foreign looms! The bureau, in the fore room, was always crammed with fine twined linens, white as snow, and scented with lavender and rose-leaves. How did those women accomplish so much? I look back upon them with pride and wonder; for my grandmother was no drudge: she was a true lady. Never was there a more dignified or better bred woman than she; never the mistress of a more well-ordered household. She was never hurried, never behindhand with her work; was given to hospitality, and was tasteful in her dress. Very few, in those days, were the complications of daily living; still I marvel how my grandmother managed to be so cultivated and so elegant, and yet sit, hour after hour, at the loom, plying her shuttle with no less persistence than, in spinning, she drew out her threads.

Across the huge beams, under and over each other, crossed and recrossed these threads, like a spider's web. I know by what manifold toil they were gotten there: by reeling, sizing, spooling, and warping, before my grandmother could begin to throw her shuttle. The work was slow, but it never flagged. Threads were broken and carefully taken up; quills gave out, and were patiently renewed; the web grew, thread by thread, inch by inch; the intricate pattern came out upon the surface, and pleased the weaver's eye; neighbors dropped in and gossiped

over and about it. The days wore on; the worker never failed at her beam; until, most likely at the close of some long sum-

mer's afternoon, the end of the warp was reached; the treadles stopped; the web was done. How delighted the women used

to be with their woven fabric, so slowly constructed, so quickly unwound! They stretched it out, clipped its hanging threads, held it up to the light, and stroked and caressed it as if it were a living thing. It would have been a mean web indeed had it brought them no high satisfaction. It may have been that spinning and weaving, by long practice, grew to be a sort of unconscious mechanical process; that the workers, in their long hours of monotonous employment, were given to meditation; and thus, from their double vocation, came perhaps that air of serious dignity common among the better class of farm-house women.

Nothing could be more picturesque or prettier, in country life, than the little flax-wheel, with well-filled distaff, being plied in a shady doorway by comely matron or rosy lass. The loom, with its web and weaver, made a classic picture; and its continuous thud, sounding hour after hour from an upper room, was a symbol of that pathetic patience which entered so largely into the lives of working women.

The fore room was seldom used. It was rather a store-room for household treasures; for such things as had been bought with hard-earned money were highly prized by these simple people. Its furniture was the costliest and most modern, as well as the ugliest, in the house. It was a sort of show-room. The china and glass in its cupboard were marvellously fine, and have come down as heirlooms. They are suggestive of the tendencies and tastes of women, who are traditionally most charming, through simplicity, because, from the force of their

condition, their lives could not be otherwise than simple. Their merit, therefore, is not so much in the fact that they lived so near nature, which they could not help doing,—that they took to themselves a beauty of which they knew not,—as that, while possessing the common instincts of woman, they bore burdens with heroic patience, and, through long, hard-worked lives, kept

up a holiday simulation of that ease and luxury which was not their own.

A narrow flight of stairs led, from the front entry, up to the guest-chambers. One of them was haunted. The ghost of this room was a harmless thing. A child of the house, Olly by name, had been found crushed in the woodland by a fallen tree. It was so long ago that his little grave had sunk far below its

fellows; yet his memory had been kept fresher than the turf above it by the legend of this east chamber. Its furnishings were quaint and homely: a huge oaken chest of drawers, rush-bottomed chairs, and a low bedstead hung with checked brown and white linen. Between the two front windows was a looking-glass in a queer little frame, with a silhouette picture of my grandfather and grandmother on either side of it. In a cupboard by the chimney was a set of fine china, painted in flowing blue.

In through its windows came the eternal, ever-shifting glory of the outlying landscape. As I looked out of these windows on summer mornings, my heart grew full, like a heart touched by love, so profuse in variety and beauty was the scenery of this wild, lonely spot.

SPRING-TIME AND HAYING.

THERE is no end to the coquetry of a New England spring. Some early March morning you look out upon a waste of snow. You are weary of it; you long to see life and growth and verdure come into the dead landscape. Old winter flings back against the pane scuds of snow and sleet. Then come dark days, clinging mists and warm rains, trying to patience and evil for invalids. Little water channels, with a melancholy gurgle, undermine the snow-banks. There is everywhere a gradual subsidence of surface. Tops of tall rocks peep out; highways get to be wellnigh impassable; cellars grow wet; brooks begin to roar and rivers

to rise; there is a universal sizzling and steaming. This grizzly, dispiriting commotion is the birth-throe of spring. Shortly the mossy housetops begin to smoke; the fields and pastures are full of bare knolls and patches; fences, which have been winter-buried, once more zigzag through the landscape, and dark lines mark the lanes and highways. Leaf-buds swell, and the frosts of the night melt before the morning sunshine. Little boys trundle their sap-buckets through the pastures, and you see that the yearly marvel of verdure is being inwrought into the branches and twigs of the bare forests. Another season of seed-time and harvest will be born unto you.

Chimney corners are deserted; farmers begin to bestir themselves. They sort over their seeds, put in repair their farm utensils, and, before they get fully harnessed to their out-of-door work, attend to their town affairs. What country-bred boy or girl does not remember that yearly meeting, when all the voters of the town swarmed about its great, bare hall, and cast into the ballot-box those tickets the making up of which had cost months of logic in the village stores and much hard feeling among honest neighbors? All the children were politicians that day; and the moderator, generally chosen for his loud voice, was as distinguished to them as if he had been made President of the whole republic. The elective process was a slow one; often so hotly contested that the count for representative to General Court was hardly reached at nightfall. The little boys who peddled molasses candy (most of it badly burned) gave out the bulletins of its progress. The slumpy drifts had to be cut down

beforehand to make the roads passable, over which, when their votes were needed, the feeble old men were taken at the expense of their party. The breaking up of the meeting was shown, to waiting housewives, by the thickening on the highway of returning farmers, most of them laden with budgets of gingerbread and candy. The women were as anxious for news as if there had been a great battle, and the zest of the day, to the children, was only surpassed by that of the annual muster.

This muster, or "training day," as it was more often called, was their best holiday, when the militia was drilled in a vacant lot of some fortunate town. What child ever forgot that show when once seen? As an early experience or a remembered picture, what could surpass it? How real the soldiers were with their muskets and bright uniforms! What a great man the captain was! And the drum-major, who ever saw his like? What a marvel of discipline the soldiers showed! what uniformity of step! what skill in evolution! what success of officers in horsemanship! All day long they went through their drills, and the gaping crowd stared and marvelled, half taking this play for a real thing and these men for true soldiers. Before daylight, from the country miles around, wagons full of living freight began to pour into the field, until it was half packed with sight-seers. These wagons were drawn close up by the wall as a safe place for the girls and younger children. The unharnessed horses, to be kept quiet with hay, were tied close by, and the larger boys got astride the wall or climbed into neighboring

trees. Booths were put up, and pedlers' carts stood thick in an inner ring. Gingerbread and candy were the staple articles of trade, with such bright gauds as would be likely to catch an uncritical eye. It was the custom for lasses to receive presents on this day, and because of this many a hard-earned penny was foolishly spent. It was amusing to see the plain farmers going about with their red bandanna handkerchiefs (show things) full of gingerbread, the extent of their day's dissipation. It was good gingerbread, with a sort of training flavor, which died out with the giving up of the custom of the day. At noon, when the soldiers dispersed for dinner, the most adventurous boys followed the great officers to the tavern, and looked in at the windows to see them eat, whispering to each other of the prowess of these dangerous men. It was not considered respectable for young girls to wander about among the crowd, so they lunched in the wagons, or on the greensward by them, and their nooning was the harvest of the dealers in gingerbread.

The climax of the drill was the firing off of the guns, which brought many an urchin down from his perch as quickly as if he had been shot in the head. Unbred horses did not relish the day, and were constantly making little side stampedes, no less exciting than the drill itself. A shower took all the feather and glory out of the show, and sent soldiers flying in front of the crowd. Before nightfall parties got mixed. Soldiers mistook themselves for citizens, and citizens forgot the deference due to soldiers. It was generally growing to be truly warlike, when at order of the great captain the trainers, led by music of bugle

and drum, marched magnificently from the field. The crowd waited. Men, women, and children seemed to devour with their eyes this departing glory; this toy pageant, which had given them a merry day; this mock soldiery, which had stimulated patriotic virtue; this thing, which was not foolish because it was so real to them. When it had fairly passed out of sight each went his and her own way, and, almost before the drum had stopped playing its marching tune, the field was deserted.

By the first of May morning sunshine begins to have power, and through your windows comes the gladsome gush of spring birds. The buried life of nature has burst its cerements; the earth is mellowing; trees are leaving, and sods are waiting to be turned. Here and there, under the shady side of fences or on distant hill-tops, lie strips of dingy snow. You do not mind them, for your feet walk over crisp mosses and tender grass; you rustle aside last year's perished leaves for arbutus, and close beside these same snow-strips you find violets. Anon the landscape grows picturesque with the blue frocks and red shirts of farm laborers, with ploughs and bonfires and oxen and children and slowly-moving carts.

To the farmer there seems to be no end to spring labor. Sowing and planting over, the upspringing seed is to be carefully watched and tended. Each day brings its weight of ever-varying cares. The New England farmer of moderate means truly gets his bread by the sweat of his brow. The vegetables and grains, which make up so large a portion of his fare, are raised by dint of prudent forecast, and the bringing to bear

of much practical philosophy upon stingy soil. In the spring, my grandfather and his one man-servant, with an occasional day of foreign help, were equal to the work of the farm. But in haying-time, thrice a day, a score or more of stout-limbed

laborers gathered around my grandfather's board, and the cupboard in the brown kitchen groaned under its weight of hearty viands. Sudden showers brought over willing neighbors, and now and then a traveller would stop a day or two to lend a

helping hand. My grandmother held these "transients" in low esteem.

These old New England farmers were apt to be "close" with their money. Who could blame them if they were? The gains of most of them came by slow accretions, and their lives were at warfare with the elements. They were generous in personal service, and where they would grudgingly give you a penny, they did not hesitate to use their strength for you. They were watchful to help with your exposed harvest, and they pitched and pulled and tugged and sweat for you without thought of reward. They were a well-informed class. Seed planting and hoeing their corn and potatoes, in dusty and uncouth attire, they seemed like patient animals. In talking with them one was astonished at their intelligence, begotten of their application and their dealings with nature. They had been well taught geography, grammar, and arithmetic. If a broad provincialism marred their speech, it was not because they knew little of the construction of language. They were apt with rules, and were better versed in the laws, which ought to have moulded their words, than many men and women of politer tongue. They were learned in whatever pertained to their craft, only that their knowledge was marred by a certain obstinate credulity. Students of almanacs, they became weatherwise from watching the clouds. Clinging to the traditions of their fathers, they were still not unskilful chemists for the soils which made up their own farms. They learned from practice the right rotation of crops, and thriftily turned their farm-waste into food for their

fields. They cared little for trees or shrubs or flowers, but readily fenced out for the housewife a sunny garden-patch. Weeds infested their fields and marred their crops; children trampled down their grass; thieving birds pecked at their corn and grain. They were a much-tried race, with sun and wind as often working them ill as good, yet they kept their courage and tempers marvellously well. Rough, with an undercurrent of softness; not cultivated yet wise; nursed by nature and led by Bible precepts; above all they pleased you by the healthy content with which they accepted their condition.

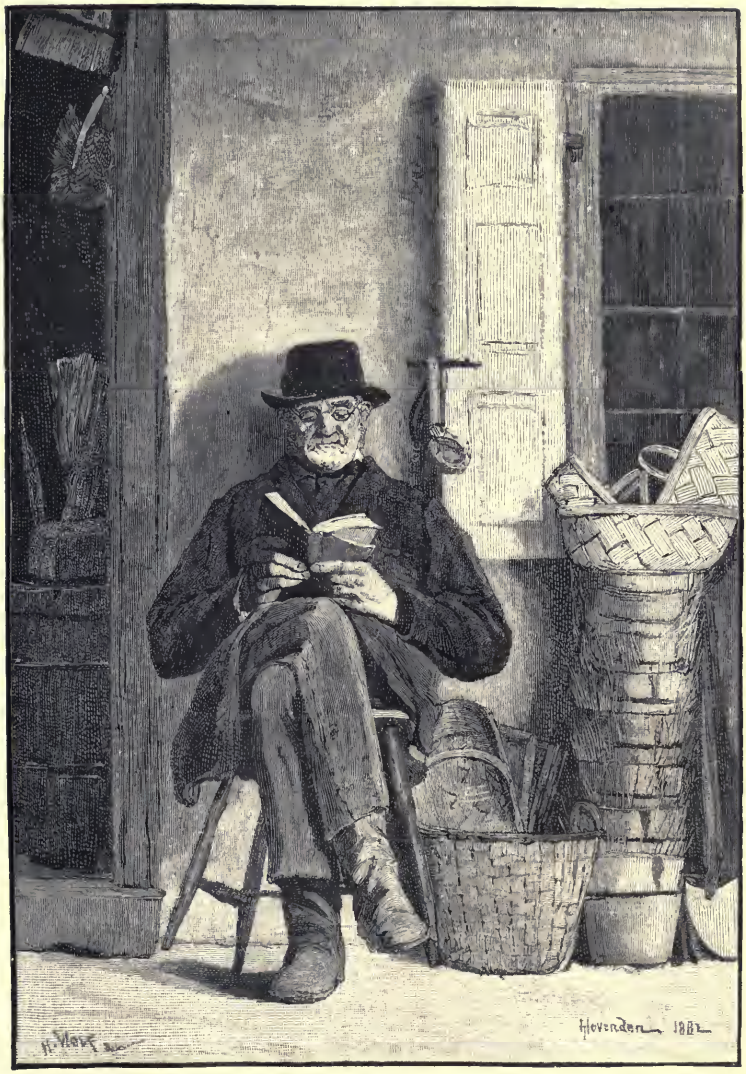
In winter, sitting on wooden benches by the stoves of country stores, they used to discourse and take counsel together. They much loved discussion, and party spirit ran high. Affairs of town and State and nation were handled with rude but close logic. These stores were queer places, full of all sorts of commodities, smelling strong of codfish, molasses, and snuff, and too often of New England rum. In long summer afternoons the humbler class of farmers' wives went to them to exchange dairy products for dry goods and groceries. A fresh supply of "storekeepers'" wares made a great stir. The women overlooked and talked about the meagre stock, and strung washed samples of its calicoes upon their window-sills to dry. They used to go past my grandfather's, to the store beyond the miller's red cottage, with wooden boxes tied up in squares of white cotton. These were full of butter. The more opulent of them drove clumsy wagons filled with various farm products good for barter.

Simple shoppers, but makers of rare bargains, inasmuch as

the stuffs you bought brought you solid comfort and true delight. They washed well and wore well, and the silk and sheen, which were not in their real texture, were imparted to them by the satisfaction which you had in them. Country maidens fitted their calicoes with care, and wore them with exquisite neatness. If they overrated the fineness, the dyes, and the becomingness of the fabrics, it was because their color blindness and their worldly ignorance helped them to be made satisfied and happy by very little things. They were as acceptable to each other and to their sweethearts in calico as they would have been, fashion taught, in silks and laces.

The candies of these stores were the delight of children. The red and white hearts shut up in dingy, brass-mouthed jars were in reality stale, but to the buyers of them the freshness which they lacked was given to them by their rarity.

The keepers of the stores, having leisure, were apt to be men of much intelligence. I found one of them, on an August day, sitting just outside his shop, his chair tilted back against the wall, so wrapped up in a translation of Homer's Iliad that he had no ear for a bargain. His recreation only illustrated, what is ever true of country life, that it holds in silence and humility many thinkers. This store was perched upon a hill, in an out-of-the-way place. All the inhabitants of the little village seemed to be either at work or play in its adjoining fields. He sat there alone, an old man, tall, massive, white-haired, his face beneficent with the peace of an untroubled life. He peered from over his iron-bound spectacles, keeping his place in his book with his


Hovenden 1882

forefinger, and answered my questions in an abstracted way, as if I were a bother to him. He was a beautiful picture of a vigorous happy old age. The pomps and vanities and vexations of society were nothing to him, and yet he was consorting with the best; and the glory of intellect and of age, and the bright splendor of the summer's day, wrapped him about like a garment.

The rum of those country stores made terrible drunkards, whose vices and idiosyncrasies were brought out, by their isolation, with clear-cut distinctness. Their wives were white-faced, hopeless women; their houses were dismal with the signs of a drunkard's unthrift. The whole tragedy was so plainly stamped that he who ran might read. No home was ever so little of a home as that of a drunkard in the country; no life ever seemed so utterly unnatural, so warped a life as his. The very blessings of his inheritance mocked at him. Space and quiet and sunshine and verdure, and every other thing which especially marks country life, only made more apparent his poverty and degradation. One could always tell the home of a drunkard, with its clapboards and shingles slipping off; its windows stuffed with rags; its unhinged doors; its tumbling outbuildings, shattered, ragged, leaning, tottering, solemn with the unutterable pathos of a lost life.

If you have never lived in the country, you can have no idea what grim and strange and repulsive spectacles these men become, on the surface of its pure, calm, undemonstrative life. I recall three who, on town-meeting and training days, used

to stagger up and down the highways. Children shrank from them as if they had been lepers. One of them had children of his own, who grew up rough and wicked, and became the outlaws of the neighborhood; to whom the fair landscape was only a field for plunder, and against whom the hearts of all the village people seemed to be turned. God forgive them! circumstance was hard upon them;—they were only drunkard's children.

Another was once possessed of a brilliant intellect. Poor, lost man! his house was the forlornest of all; perched high on a hill, tumbling, and fluttering with rags. His large and once valuable farm was overrun with brambles. His wife was never seen outside her wretched home. Her existence grew to be a sort of myth. She died and was buried, and no one missed her.

Jim, who danced in his cups, was foolish and diverting to the youngsters; still his antics seemed disgustingly uncouth in the decorous quiet of a country town.

When a young child, I went to the sale of a drunkard's home with the lawyer who had the foreclosure of a mortgage upon it. If I live to be a hundred years old I shall never forget that sale. The place had once been a fruitful one, and had come down from father to son through several generations. Drunkenness had wrested it from the hands of him from whom it was to be sold. The man's wife was a handsome but heart-broken woman. I shall never behold a look of more utter despair than that which her face wore that day. It was a harsh scene: I

see and hear it all,—the mocking sunbeams; the loud voice of the auctioneer; the coarse laughter of the crowd; the woman, pacing the floor, sighing, never speaking, and as ghastly as if she had been among the dead. The final bid came. With one wail she went out of the room, and I never saw her more.

The processes by which the year brings about her miracles are full of beauty. The humblest farm laborer can take no working posture which will not be picturesque, framed into a spring landscape. I recall the grain-sower flinging broadcast his seed; frolicksome urchins dropping the sprouting bulbs; bonfires from last year's stubble and new clearings, giving brown shadow to outlying verdure. Hoeing and ploughing and carting and cutting and digging; the men who worked, and the works they fashioned, were moulded into the earth's form and substance. It was as if the country were an ever-shifting kaleidoscope, constantly changing old forms and hues into new shades and shapes.

Its marvels began with the breaking up of brooks, when they started to roar and tumble and overflow their banks. The fish, which at night flashed by in these spring waters, gave a transient sport to men and boys, who sought for them by light of pitchpine torches. Flitting about with nets and spears, in the uncertain blaze of their bonfires, their loud shouts heard above the roaring of the stream, they gave a weird aspect to the valley; a charming exaggeration of the untamed scenery of early spring-time.

Nothing gives more expression to a field or pasture than one

of these brooks. Its wonders never cease. Its spring fury and overflow last but a few days. It is, in fact, a most placid thing, rippling over smooth pebbles or pliant grass, pure, transparent, and enticing. It is prettiest when running, in and out its tor-

tuous way, through pasture-knolls, full of rocky fords, its banks rich with ferns and wild flag and orchis,—or, better still, through the heart of an old wood, where it grows mysterious, and hugs to its soggy sides such plants as love shade and moisture. A brook is one of the friendliest, sweetest things you can stumble upon in your wanderings; and the one which you first knew is

remembered with much tenderness,—the dense woodland from whence it came; the ferns and pallid grass, which were half dragged out with it; the pebbly bed, into which it widened; the dark pool, beloved by trout; the show of coltsfoot, beset by housewives; the sharp-pointed rocks, which helped you over; the patch of orchis, and the long stretch of rushes; the mint and the bog onions,—but why go on? for this babbler was my brook and not yours!

As the season wore on grasses grew stout and tall; heavy showers lodged them; and truant boys and girls made unthrifty paths through the fields. Farmers began to whet their scythes and plant their grindstones under shady trees; sure signs of coming haying. The delights of those hayings have outlasted years, and the aroma of them still pervades every ripened field. Time has not changed the teeming life of nature. When I see little heads bobbing up and down in yonder meadow yellow with buttercups, I remember that strawberries used to grow where buttercups blossomed. New shadows are chasing each other over ripening grain; familiar fruits lie everywhere; the forest-trees, just as they used, overlap each other with shaded folds of intense verdure. Fulness of sunshine falls everywhere on fulness of vegetation. Back to me, through the features of the present, come memories of the past.

Late in June I hear a familiar sound,—the sharp click of a scythe making a beginning of the mid-year harvest. The year is waxing old. The yellow stubble of the first mown field tells that; and it has a suggestive desolateness. What odor so sweet

as that of new-mown hay? It is the breath of the dying grass, of which there is no wisp so small that, when I sever it, it shall not send forth this delicious scent to tell me of bygone days of abundant and beautiful harvests.

Of all the waste luxuriance which the earth pours forth in her yearly ripening, this is the most beautiful and beautifying. Lying broadcast upon fields, threading them in careless windrows; flung together in heaps; trailing from ladened carts; crowning oxen and laborers with fantastic wreaths; in whatever place it finds or flings itself, it is the same delightful, sweet-scented, dying grass. There is no earth so flat, no landscape so tame, that its yearly hay harvest shall not undulate it into lines of beauty. Up and down the dusty highway, jolting about uneven fields, the homely carts used to go, gathering up their precious loads, slowly wreathing their rails and wheels and shafts.

I can see my grandfather wiping the sweat from his brow, and curiously eying the sky,—treacherous sky, playing pranks with the best plans and labors, but all-creative in putting new life into a summer landscape. Piling up, snow-white, these clouds come, some hot August afternoon, out of the horizon, very beautiful at first, but treacherous, and the dread of hay-makers. They at once define their edges with a soft-tinted rose color, and grow apace. They roll on, with stately march, towards the zenith, right over the anxious workers and waiting harvests. Growing angry, getting lurid, overlapping each other with brazen folds, threatening, they sound their warning of low-muttered

thunder, condense their brightness into vivid lightning, and the whole sky grows dense and black with pent-up waters.

Farmers used to fly to each other's aid at such times, running like bees about the fields, goading and urging on their laggard

oxen,—Broad and Bright and Cherry and Star. Carts strained and groaned like living things; clouds flew higher and higher; little children tugged in the eager race; the hay blew out in long streamers with the wild winds; the scurrying drops came thicker and thicker; the storm burst at last; when, as if by

magic, men and oxen and teams vanished, and the wind and rain had their way with the mown and unmown grasses left in the fields.

The noonings were bright features of a haying landscape. At summons of horn, away went the workers through lanes and highways to their noontide meal. More often, to save time, they took it in the field. I see and hear it all,—men stretching their brawny limbs upon the hay-heaps; oxen chewing the new-mown grass under shadow of their loads; barefooted boys and girls scudding about with lunch-pails and pitchers; the drone of bees; the chirrup of grasshoppers; the babbling of the brook; the lapping of the mill-pond; and many undertones of nature brought out by the unusual quiet of this hour. Oh the peace, the glory, given by those summer noonings to the tired bodies and cramped souls of working men! Whether they knew it or not, something of the fervor of the meridian sunshine, something of the earnestness of the mid-day nature, something of the fulness of the mid-year harvest went into them, through their senses, and bore fruit in thankfulness and patience. Something of the narrowness of their ordinary lives went out of them unawares.

The nooning over, bustle again prevailed. There was no faltering, no let up, until the horn gave notice of the evening meal. Then, through lanes and highway, fields let out their workers, who cheered their homeward way with simple talk. They went over the day's labors; forecasted the sky, and planned the toils of the morrow; prone all to the rest of the coming

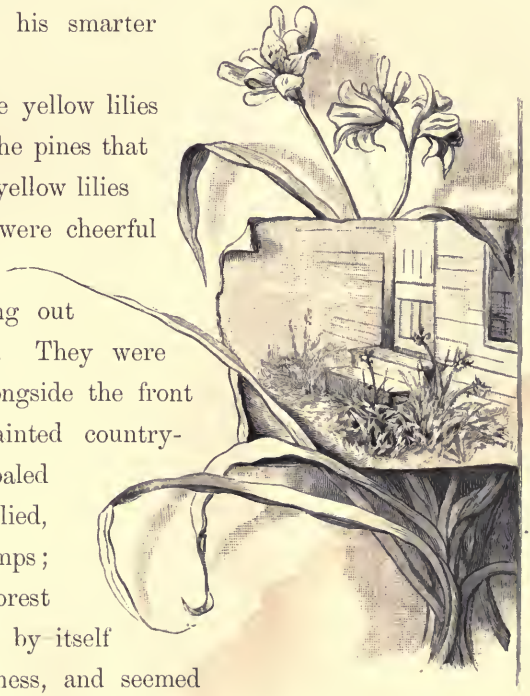
night. Into the barns were shoved the ladened racks, to be emptied in the early morning; down into the west sank the sun; over the beautiful creation of the harvest fell the older beauty of night; and unto weariness, and to the patience of labor, past and to come, floated, with noiseless motion, sweet, dreamless, strength-giving sleep.

THE VISIT

WE were would-be haymakers, Benny and I, jogging along with Jonathan the man-servant in an old market-wagon, towards our grandfather's farm. As remembered, we made a homely load, but a happy one. We were half wild with joy, and chattered like magpies all the way about our promised delights.

The whole universe was ours that day. We were not simply wayfarers to our grandfather's farm, but travellers at large; and the narrow circle of the horizon seemed as vast to us as the belt of the whole continent would now. We felt well; and if, in passing, travellers eyed us sharply, we were sure that they

knew us for young haymakers. It never occurred to us that our equipage was unusual. The only fault we found was with the slowness of our pace and the jolting of the springless wagon; but the one gave our quick eyes a chance to spy out way-side wonders, and the other sent the blood into our cheeks. I am quite sure that we had a better time than we should have had with my grandfather's pretentious chaise and one of his smarter horses.



I can see now the yellow lilies we counted among the pines that day. I have loved yellow lilies ever since. They were cheerful things to a child's eye, gleaming out from an old forest. They were almost as pretty alongside the front door-steps of unpainted country-houses, where they paled somewhat, multiplied, and grew in clumps; whereas in the forest each blossom stood by itself in flaunting brightness, and seemed to come out of the wood to meet you.

The country through which we passed on our journey was sparsely settled, and mostly covered with a thin forest of old

pines. This forest was full of a shaggy undergrowth of scrub-oaks and knolls of low huckleberry-bushes. The day was hot, and everything glowed with sunlight. In vain we turned our umbrella this way and that. Its whalebones creaked; the sun's rays pierced straight through it, past our straw hats, into our little brains; and we settled down, only to have our shoulders half baked by the high wagon-back. The sand of the road-side glittered; the wheel-tires sank into it and came up hot and bright. Each stone was a reflecting mirror, and the business of every leaf and twig seemed to be to absorb and send forth heat. The quiet was so perfect that the slightest crackle of a twig was distinctly heard. Yet, underlying this glare and seeming silence was a certain positive procession of sound.

We shut our eyes from sheer weariness, and were lulled to sleep by this soft drone of living, growing, ever-renewing nature. You country-livers know what this voice is, which has no alphabet, no written language, but which is nevertheless an all-pervading, thrilling monotone, best rendered in what are called her solitudes. Benny said he could hear things grow; and surely the wise little head both saw and heard many beautiful things that day.

So we young haymakers were not ashamed of the springless, rattling old market-wagon. Neither were we ashamed of Jonathan, with his homespun clothes and leathern whip, chewing his cud like an ox, and shouting to his horse with a never-ending "git ap." This horse was not a fine-looking beast. She was a true farm-horse, broad-backed and round-sided, carrying her head low, with a shaggy mane. She was old and not ambitious,

pacing along, at the rate of five miles an hour, with a lumbering gait which gave a double jolt to the clumsy wagon. She was, however, to be respected for her age and her safety; and, known by the name of Betsy, had been for almost thirty years carefully tended by the family of which she was a true member. New England farmers were all merciful to their beasts of burden, and this kindness was a natural expression of the ingrained justice of their natures.

But one horse in the neighborhood was older than this one of my grandfather's, and that belonged to the aged minister of the parish. His horse, roaming at large, was as much a feature of the village landscape as its meeting-house or its school-house. It grew into the history and the traditions of the place. It was an unaggressive, harmless animal, and came to hold a sort of feeble kinship with all the villagers. When an absentee asked after the townspeople and their affairs, he also asked after the parson's horse; and thus the unwitting beast came to be a representative of an enlarged humanity. This horse, long toothless and fed upon porridge, was so defiant of mortality that, out of sheer compassion, it was slain at last outside the village. I verily believe that the young men and maidens of the parish who had grown up during the lifetime of this dumb creature, and were used to the constant sight of it by the way-side, mourned the loss of the "parson's horse" with almost a sentiment of human friendship.

The Betsy of my grandfather's must have come of hardy stock, for she, too, outlived for several years her usefulness,

and wandered during the summer, a hobbling, gray pensioner, upon the shore of the mill-pond, where one day she was found stark and stiff, close by the old boat. She used, when past service, to limp up to the pasture-bars and lean her old head

upon the upper rail, giving us children a sort of blear-eyed recognition which was quite touching. To see this head bobbing up and down amongst the far-off alder-bushes was as pathetic to our child-hearts as if the poor creature could have talked and reasoned with us. We were glad when she gave up the ghost

in a natural way, for my grandfather could not consent to have her killed.

Benny and I did not after all make a very mean appearance on our first visit alone to our grandfather's farm. We were only two untaught children going to a haying. Our equipage and our dress were suited to our calling. We were bent on a kindly errand,—we were to carry youth and cheerfulness, and so joy, into the great lonely house of an old man. Being imaginative children, and having little book learning, that which we desired to believe, and which fact failed to give us, we coined out of our own brains. The seven-mile sandy plain, with its pines and dwarf-oaks, we declared to be no less than forty miles long; whilst a moderate-sized pond Benny confidently whispered behind Jonathan's back could be no other than the Dead Sea itself. Yet this simple-hearted Benny was over-wise for his years about everything which could be coaxed by search and observation from the outlying landscape of his home, and he was, besides, a charming young romancer. It is delightful to go back to one's days of just such fresh-hearted credulity. Some of our childhood faiths may have been very foolish indeed, but many of them were beautiful, and we are tender of them all in memory in after-years. We can afford to lose none of them, for these same foolish beliefs were wise to us once, and swelled the sum of our earthly joys.

In my grandfather's time, when railroads had not permeated Eastern New England, a long journey was an epoch in a child's life; and that was called such which was accomplished by several

days of slow-paced travel. It was made a subject for private devotion and public prayer. "Our brother and sister about to go on a long journey" became marked people in the parish. Neighbors "dropped in of evenings" to talk the matter over; and it was dreamed about and wrought for many weeks beforehand. The finest fabrics of the house were set aside and shaped over for that child who was going to Boston, or perhaps to some nearer town; to whom most likely was given especial and lighter tasks, as one upon whom the unction of travel had already fallen. The night before the start was a busy one in the farm-house. Many last stitches were to be taken, and the bandbox or small trunk to be packed by the careful mother. The child's wardrobe, made for the occasion, was meagre, but clean and strong. It was the best the farm had to give, and was fine to the wearer.

I can see Farmer Brown starting off with his daughter Sally, bound for Boston, just as he started over forty years ago. He was a well-to-do farmer, homely, but shrewd and honest, and had held high places of town trust. How exactly he is recalled! His broad collar seems to cut his ears with its sharp edges, and his stock clasps his neck like a vice. His blue-black homespun suit has been long made, but well kept, and its showy buttons are of double gilt. Sally's frock is of store calico, with a white ruffle in the neck. The shawl she wears, of some printed pongee stuff, is a family heirloom, which her grandmother wore before her. Her bonnet, too gay and too small for her, has just come from Boston, a gift from her seldom-seen uncle, who now and then thrusts a town gaud upon this neglected country relative.

The family of this uncle they are going to visit. The innocent souls have not waited for an invitation. With them the instinct of kinship is as strong as their faith in their religion. For six months the mother's busy brain and fingers have toiled over fine twined threads of wheel and loom, to weave for this young

girl an outfit suitable for this great occasion. She is a blithesome lass, just grown up, and is engaged to teach the village school.

They climb into the lumbering wagon. The younger children swarm about them, whilst the dear mother stands in the doorway with bared arms, shading her eyes with her hand, and watches

them until they are gone out of sight under the hill. Sally is the envy of all the other village girls, and mothers gossip together of this weighty journey of hers.

Many an aged country-reared person knows what that journey was to Sally; how grand and mysterious the town seemed to her, with its many streets, its crowds of people, its various wares, and its many lights; how, impressed and oppressed by it, she grew self-conscious and lonely, and wished herself home again. Her uncle's house was an enchanted palace to her, and she a dazed girl in it. It was revealed to her that what pertained to herself and to her father was not in keeping with her surroundings. They were plainly-dressed, homespun country-people, well clad alongside the deep greens and russet browns of their farm, but ill assorting with gay town fashions. She saw and took in much. Her keen senses and bright mind were quickened to a wider scope by this somewhat unpalatable taste of strange living. The day of her departure was a relief to her. She went back as she came, except that she was lightly laden with simple purchases. She was as warmly welcomed as if she had come from a foreign land. The trinkets she had bought were as marvellous to her mother and the other children as they would have been to her once. She somewhat pitied their ignorance, but kept her own counsel. She was wiser than before she went, but not quite so happy. A glory had gone out of her home which could never come back. Its rooms were lower and narrower; and their fitness had been lost from the garments which had been fashioned for her with so much care. Their

textures and dyes were homespun, and so less esteemed. She made a better teacher for having been to Boston, because she had more weight with her scholars. But the sweetest relish of her rural home had died out for her. In later years it came again, as a delightful memory. She would then have given half she possessed to have been starting once more from the old farm-house, a simple-hearted girl in calico by the side of the home-spun father, with the dear mother watching her from the doorway.

Our old horse plodded along so wearily that the shadows had grown long on the neighboring hills, and cow-bells were tinkling at the pasture-bars, when we drove through the gateway at the end of the green lane. Far away we had caught sight of our grandfather standing in his door. We knew him by his gray hair tossed in the wind. "He's an old dear," whispered Benny; "just a little cross sometimes, but never cross to me." No, he was never cross to little Benny, and seldom to any other child. He was a most orderly man, and was apt to lose patience when children upset his settled ways. He never was known to scold Benny, for the boy was his namesake, and had about him, he used to say, the look of those who die young. There was an unusual trembling of the aged hand which patted our heads, and a very tender greeting of the old man to us. Then he held us at arms' length, saying, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "So you young rascals have come to haying, have you? Well, I must say, your mother needn't have rigged you out like two Arabs; still, I think you'll do." Happy little Benny

thought he was praising our looks, and told me shortly that Arabs must be some grand people.

My grandfather was a keen-witted, resolute, handsome man of good English stock. His life was as methodical as clock-work. His thrift wrested a competence from the soil; but his best legacy to his descendants was a certain inborn freedom of soul. He loved every inch of his farm, not as a plougher and plodder, but as an observer and thinker. So positive and self-asserting was this high type of his manhood that his only son, when exceptionally well educated and of exalted rank in his profession, never seemed more than his equal. Having lived past his fourscore years, he ended his prosperous and reputable life by a death of serene dignity.

He was called stern by his fellow-townsmen; but no man or woman ever questioned his integrity. His career, considering the possibilities of his nature, was a narrow one, but of the best, so far as it went. It had little gilt and polish,—not enough of recreation,—but such as it was, he took it up patiently and faithfully, and got out of it whatever of good it had in it. He did with all his might whatever he had to do, which was so much that it crowded his life to the verge of servitude. He was serious and earnest, if not stern, because the demands of his lot left little room for lighter moods, so that a higher sense of justice and humanity was born of this half-tragic element of his condition.

The children of such fathers were well-trained children. The parent's will was law with them, and the law of the parent was

the word of God. These unpetted yet deeply-loved sons and daughters were truthful and honest. They were respecters of age, keepers of the Sabbath, and clean in all their ways, because their home tuition had been founded upon the highest principles of religion and morality. Tears and tender words did not come easily to such hard workers and simple livers. They had an element of heroic resistance to what they considered weakness, and a Spartan estimation of all tokens of it. Mothers could lay out their dead children for burial, and fathers could look upon them with tearless eyes. They would put them in graves close to their homes, and then go back to their old grooves, giving little outward sign. But the hurt was there, deep and for all time. These massive old heroes, these truthful, earnest wrestlers for duty, held their reticence as a comely instinct,—a sacred inner life.

The Christian New Englander of forty years ago was most reverent. His children were God's trust to him; as such he trained them, and as such he gave them up. If he unwisely crucified the tastes and desires of his sons and daughters, it was because of his own blind zeal and an overstraining of Bible precepts. If any of them, in morality, fell short of the home standard, he was more smitten by it than he would have been by their death.

After a supper of bread and milk, Benny and I were sent to bed, with orders to be up bright and early for the haying. The sun was already making great red streaks across the checked hangings in the east chamber when Benny's tap at

my door, and the patter of his little feet across the sanded floor, startled me from an uneasy slumber. I had been dreaming of the enclosure in the mowing-field. I thought we were gathering buttercups on Olly's grave, when a great pit suddenly yawned, and Benny fell into it. "Quick, we are almost ready," he shouted, and then ran away, "to help fix off," he said. He had pumped a basin of fresh water, which, with a clean towel, awaited me on the wooden bench at the back-door. I scrubbed my face and hands with zest in that tin basin, and would be willing to-day to taste, in the same homely way, the pleasant abandon of that summer morning, if with it would come back the scents and voices, the glowing light, and the simple occupations of its long-past, happy day.

We ate no breakfast, Benny and I, we were too happy for that; besides, a huge basket under Jonathan's arm was, Hannah whispered, "brimful of goodies." The leathern-handled keg puzzled us; but Benny was a philosopher, and, pointing to the flies swarming about its spigot, confidently declared that it held some savory drink.

The smallest rakes were laid aside for the new hands, as our grandfather jocosely called us, and we were left to follow after the loads. Our little fists grew red and speckled; but Benny said they would soon be tough like Jonathan's, and the fun of treading down the sweet hay and jolting over the sill of the barn more than made up for all our ills. "Our new hands ain't so green after all," remarked spruce David to his fellow-mower. "Tell better arter the new's off," was Jonathan's bluff

reply. "The old clown!" whispered Benny. "How clever David is!" said I.

By and by, when the sun had gotten into the zenith, we began to feel hot and tired, and cast longing glances towards the shady

rock by the spring, behind which were the keg and bundle. My grandfather, seeing us lag, took pity upon us, and sent us there to rest. We ate our share of the lunch, and took long draughts of sweetened water from the keg. Benny thought there was too much ginger in it, but drank freely. Alas! for the struggling fly which, sticking fast upon Benny's nose, daubed over with molasses, made us forget to put back the spigot.

When the thirsty mowers came round the rock the keg was empty.

"So much for babies in haying-time," growled Jonathan. My grandfather looked severe, and told us to "start for the house." So we did, David slipping round the rock to say to us that it was no matter, for he would fill the keg again.

We idled the afternoon sadly away in the old farm-house. True to human nature, we little ones turned against each other. "You are black as a crow," said Benny. "And you," retorted I, "are as speckled as an adder." "All from this hateful haying," Benny went on. Then, common grief making common cause, we came together again; and, pledging everlasting absence from the haying field, we dwelt in love and harmony until bed-time. Somehow my tired little body would not rest that night. I had another frightful dream about a deep pit and little Benny. I kept waking up; but the bed-curtains looked so black, and the dimly-seen windows so ghostly, that I shut my eyes and lay trembling with fear half the night. It was very late the next morning when I was awakened by the merry haymakers under my window, on their way to the mowing-field. Above every other voice rang out Benny's, glad and care free.

After that the haying-time passed away quickly and merrily. Best of holidays to me; from which have come some of the brightest pictures and purest sentiments of my life. Pay-day came. Jonathan and David received their well-earned wages; scores of transient helpers had come and gone; Benny and I each clasped in our brown hands four bright silver dollars.

The big gate opened to let out the market-wagon, with two joyous-hearted children. Their clothes were much the worse for wear, and they looked even queerer than they did when they came. They turned tenderly back to the white-haired old man, who watched them from the porch-door. "I'll come again very soon," called Benny. He did come, and the big gate opened wide to let him in.

THE summer harvest was past, but not the remembrance of it. Benny and I were ever counting the months, and then the weeks, before another haying. We spent our holidays in the making of miniature rakes, and were garrulous the whole winter with our simple memories. No story-book could give us pleasure like going over the past summer's homely life. We talked much of little things: of the maimed lamb that limped at our call to his evening meal; the speckled trout in the deep old well; the play rock; the herds; the apple-trees; and much, very much, of the dear, trembling old man, who never seemed old to us, over whom the unreasoning love of childhood cast the glamour of immortal youth.

There was to be a jubilee, in anticipation of which I had exchanged my grandfather's dollars for bright ribbons, whilst Benny's had gone into the price of a pair of fine gaiters. The long-wished-for morning came. Benny's little jacket, with a

white collar pinned to its neck, hung from a nail in the wall; his new gaiters stood upon the mantel. Benny could not wear them then. I entered into the sports of that day with all the buoyancy of childhood; and though I heard Benny's moans as I passed the half-opened door, I did not think at evening to bid him good-night or give him his wonted kiss. Giddy girl! That same sick Benny was the gay companion of haying-time. . Ever thus selfish is joy. What sympathy can gladness have with sorrow? If death has never entered your own household, you can carry little consolation to the mourner,—your words will be as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Days passed away; long, weary days. The gaiters still kept their place on the mantel; the white collar had become yellow with smoke and dust, but still it stayed. Benny no longer asked about the jubilee, and I shrank from his darkened room. How anxiously I watched the doctor's face as he softly emerged from the sick-chamber! How my little heart beat if ever its wonted benignant smile returned!

One morning (Benny had been ill two weeks) I was awakened by the rumbling of a vehicle. There was no mistaking the sound; it was the old market-wagon. In a few minutes I was by my grandfather's side. There was no tremulous grasp of the hand, no gentle greeting, no fond pat on the head. His thoughts were with Benny, his namesake.

"Tread softly," whispered the doctor, as I led my grandfather to the side of the sick-bed. He leaned heavily on his staff. and a tear trickled down his furrowed cheek.

"Benny will not help us hay another year," said the old man to me, in broken tones. How that death-knell fell on my soul!

Was Benny, the good, the beautiful Benny, to die and be buried in the cold, damp earth! It could not be; and yet, as I looked at him the terrible conviction forced itself upon me. His little

brown hands had become thin and white, his cheeks sunken. He opened his eyes.

"Benny, do you know me?" asked grandfather, fondly.

He murmured incoherently something about haying-time, the big rock, and the mowing-field. Again my grandfather dropped a tear. It was more than my childish heart could bear. I ran to my chamber, and throwing myself upon the bed yielded to the first sharp agony of life. Oh, it is a fearful thing to pass for the first time through the gates of sorrow!

It was dark, very dark, when I was awakened by a light tap upon my shoulder. I knew the touch; it was my grandfather's hand. I asked no questions, but followed him instinctively to the sick-room. I knew that Benny, my loved Benny, was dying.

There was no shrinking from the mysterious threshold. In the agony of that moment I could not cry, but stood by the side of the dear boy as cold, calm, and still almost as himself. There was no look of recognition, no word from the palsied tongue. One gasp, one quiver of the thin lip, and the fragile chord which bound his pure soul to earth was broken,—there was no longer in that household a little Benny. It was a most solemn death-room. A mother wept for her lost one, and refused to be comforted; a father was bowed in agony for the child of his heart; and, more touching still, the silvered locks of decrepit age mingled with the golden curls of lifeless childhood.

Thus it is—the child sports a brief hour; manhood leagues with mammon a few short years; and only here and there is given a long life.

Rummaging not long since amongst some old letters, I came upon one directed in faded ink to my grandfather. It could hardly be deciphered, so worn and discolored was it by time. It was a summons to Benny's bedside. At the bottom of the page, in an old man's tremulous hand, was this postscript: "Benny died of brain fever the next day, at ten of the clock P.M. He was my best beloved grandchild."

For weeks I mourned for my lost playmate. His chair kept its place in the corner; the miniature rakes were fondly cherished; the collar was still unpinned. By chance one day the chair was moved; anon the rusty pin was drawn from the jacket, and one by one the little rakes disappeared. The next haying-time found me almost as blithe and gay as ever. Thus evanescent are the griefs of early childhood.

Little Benny was buried on the old farm. It was my grandfather's wish that he should be. People came from far and near to his funeral. They made a quaint throng, —hard-faced men and women, serious and sympathetic, and young men and maidens, with a curious awe at this, in the country, unusual presentment of the sublime beauty of a dead child. All along the farm-yard fence, as far as to the farther gate, stood the homely teams of these people, who had left their tasks to show their respect and sympathy for their neighbor. This congregating of wagons about a country house was a sure token of woe, more significant and touching than any bands of crape; so also was the decorous going in and out of the silent throng. Seen from a distance, they made a

solemn pageant contrasted with the usual quiet of a country home.

Benny lay in his coffin between the windows of the "fore-room,"—that room which was never used save for some memorial purpose. Its doors and windows were flung wide open now, and the bright sunshine streamed athwart the child's face and kindled it into a marvellous life likeness. He had few flowers about him; but from the garden and the fields outside came the scent of blossoms he had loved, and sweet-smelling things were clasped in the hands of the women. He seemed not to be dead, but asleep; and most tenderly did nature caress this clay image of her child-lover with her best summer gifts. The mourners, with their dearest friends, sat about the boy, thus holding fast to him to the last. The preacher stood upon the threshold of the fore room, talking mostly to them, and praying for them with a painful personality. He did not, however, forget

the application of his text and the lesson of the day to the people in the other rooms. His voice pervaded every corner of the house, and the breeze caught it up and carried it to the traveller on the highway,—a solemn sound. When he had finished Farmer Brown, in his homely way, but with a voice tender with sorrow, said, "The mourners can now look at the child."

Did you ever respond to such a call? What measure is there to the agony of this last silent interview with the unresponsive dead; this unanswered greeting of one who, for time, is lost in the most irrevocable sense; this unheeded letting-out of the affections to what is already going back to dust?

Next to the mourners, the neighbors were invited to take a last look at the departed. Keenly, as if it were but yesterday, do I remember the sweet speech of this unpolished man; the instinctive shrinking of this tender-hearted rustic from thrusting a cruel fact upon those whom it most concerned. The relatives were asked to look upon their child as upon one who slept; the neighbors, for the last time, upon the dead. They all—men, women, and children—took their turn over the little coffin. They were greatly moved, even the hardest featured of them. Men drew their horny hands over their eyes, and women sobbed aloud over this child, whom many of them had never seen while living, but who, dead, wrought from their suppressed natures this miracle of emotion.

He lay there, his golden curls and long lashes sun-gilded, and clinging to his marble image with strange brightness. He was to them a new and beautiful revelation. He was as unlike their

own children as if he had belonged to another race. Death could not chisel the best of their own into his likeness. They saw, but could not comprehend, the rare quality of this child, and so they looked upon him and wept in wonder. He was too beautiful, they said, to be put out of sight; and nature seemed to rebuke them while she smiled upon all the stages of this his last and little journey. The sun sank towards the west, and from beyond the woodland and pasture it streamed across the open grave, and filled the thing itself with a waiting glory. The child was covered and carried across the green field, and let down into it; and in a little while all there was left of the sad pageant of that summer's day was a small brown mound in sight of the west room window.

It seems to me, as I look back, a sweet burial without dread, that carrying out of the lovely child from the old farm-house, amidst sunshine and tender mourning, and laying him down in the green field which he had made jocund the summer before with his delight. We talked of this boy as having been cut off, but after all his little life had been full and complete and well rounded; and when his short journey had come to an end, the sunshine which he had brought with him flooded and followed him. His burial on it glorified the farm. He was always there, not as under the mound with its lettered stone, but as a true little Benny, who, unresponsive to touch or speech, did yet roam about the place. He has never grown old, but has grown grand with years. The capacity of this child has been perfected by loving memory to the measure of the whole universe. He roams at

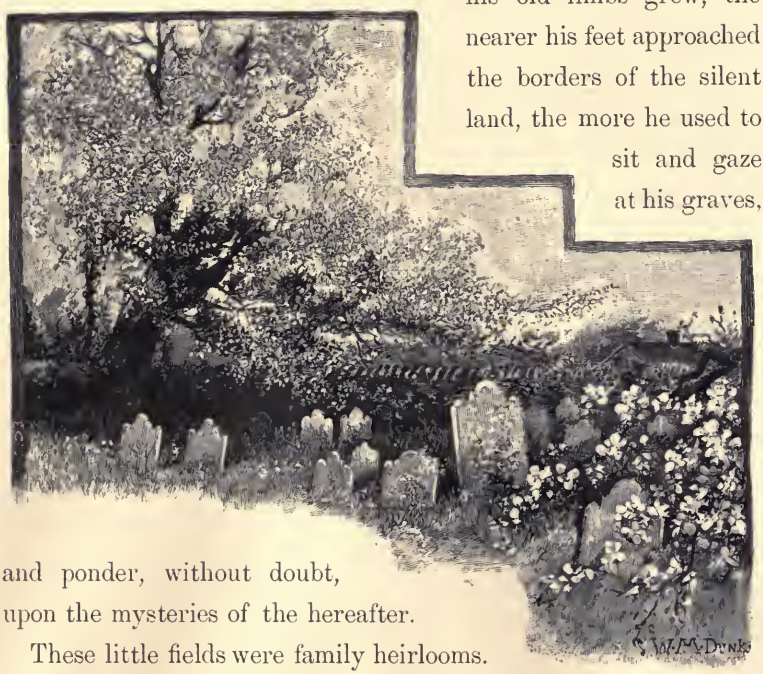
large. I shall never know him here again, by sight or speech or touch, but one day we shall, I trust, know each other, not as we were, but as we are to be.

Thus the watchers and waiters, whose going away from us tore our hearts, are to take the sting of death from us. They compelled us to shut them out of our earthly homes that they might welcome us into a heavenly. Dear children, you of earlier and you of later days, how will the mystery of your brief lives be unravelled when you shall come down resplendent to the shore of the shining river, that you may help over the old, the infirm, and the weary, who stayed behind and mourned for you!

THE BVRIAL-PLACE

MY grandfather's burial-place was within a stone's throw of the west room windows. To one coming from north or south, east or west, it was as conspicuous as the house itself. Its tablets were the ghosts of my childhood. They gave me many terrified waking hours, taking shape and motion to me as I stared at them from my chamber window. These family graveyards were a peculiar feature of the country. They gave pathos to a landscape, recording with tragic fidelity the sorrows and mortality of its inhabitants. My grandfather loved his burial-place. It was in the way of a straight path to the orchard and the mowing field, but he seemed glad to be turned aside by it. No spot, he said, was too good for little Benny. He used to sit hour after hour at the window which overlooked it, the wind softly lifting his silvery hair, while he silently contemplated this smallest, but most precious, of all his

fields. What was he thinking about? what memories touched him? what certainties awed him? Watching with the keen eye of childhood I got no sign, for the spiritual life of this reticent old man was chary of utterance. He knew that in this bed he should some day be laid at rest; and the more trembling his old limbs grew, the nearer his feet approached the borders of the silent land, the more he used to sit and gaze at his graves,



and ponder, without doubt, upon the mysteries of the hereafter.

These little fields were family heirlooms. No one could be so pinched by poverty, or so depraved in sentiment, as willingly to sell them. When farms changed owners, these were carefully exempted and fenced in. Occasionally circumstance so far removed, or Providence so blotted out, a posterity, that a grave became ownerless.

Even then humanity kept it from hard usage. No question of utility could uproot from the sod the claim upon it of its first occupants. It was kept by their memory as firmly as when they held in living hands its written title-deeds. There comes especially to mind such a burial-place. It was upon a hillock in the corner of a field, at the end of a green lane: a lovely spot overlooking a wide stretch of country. A sweet apple-tree, always in summer full of fruit, overhung it. I see the uneven mound now, matted with grass, strewn with golden apples, and only telling by tradition of the presence of the dead. I remember how stealthily children climbed up the wall and snatched at overhanging boughs. They were shy of the wind-falls on the other side, for these lonely graves were to fields what ghosts are to haunted chambers.

My grandfather's old farm-house, with its lands, may go to strangers; but the little field, first made precious to me by Benny's burial, shall remain undesecrated. Under every change of life I know that it will be to me and my children a hallowed possession. Its mounds, whose tenants have gone back to the dust from whence they came, have given place to hollows full of rank grass and yarrow. Its slabs of perishable slate are seamed and fretted by the wear and tear of many years. Its tumbled wall is covered with raspberry-vines and sumachs, and a maple-tree has grown monumental with the years which have eaten away the inscriptions from the stones beneath it. Not long since I visited the spot. I plucked a blossom from a strawberry-vine which had thrown its tendrils into an old grave, and

looked upon the uneven earth about me. Benny's little stone reproached me with its forty odd years of wear. I grew sorrowful. Then from the luxuriant outgrowth around me came the assurance of hope in death; every crevice of the crumbling stones was teeming with vegetation. Growth had been born of decay; from death had sprung beautiful life. The sod itself had been ripened by giving back to it its rightful dust. Why then should one mourn when a spirit, let loose from its bonds, exchanges its kinship with sin and sorrow and pain for a glorious immortality?

"Sacred to the memory of the dead!" This is the most common legend, and also the truest and best. There is no being so mean that he may not claim for himself this epitaph. The grave is common ground. So far as this world goes, it brings all to the same level. The beggar is as sure of his morsel of earth as the prince is of his tomb. The rankness of the one is as eloquent as the pomp of the other. The prince was clothed in purple and fine linen, and the damp mould clasped him; the beggar was clad in rags, and the busy grass wove for him a rentless covering.

The world is full of unknown graves, of whose tenants she tells no stories: the unmarked and uncared-for graves of people stranded by accident or circumstance; of slaughtered soldiers; of pioneers in new countries; of martyrs to liberty; of travellers in far lands. The sea is continually dragging into its hungry maw human life, which it absorbs and hides as relentlessly as it washes away the sands of its shore. There is an unutterable

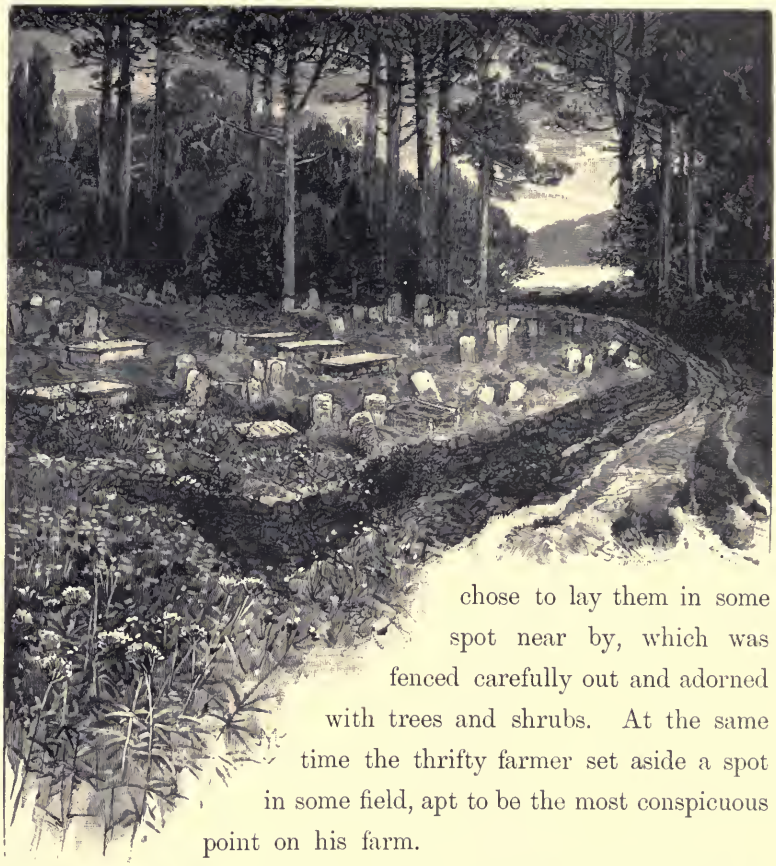
pathos in nameless graves. I have walked through acres strewn thick with soldiers' bones, the harvest of great battles. No inscription has touched me like the simple "unknown" which breaks the monotony of their epitaphs. It tells that there lies a man, no matter how long and well he has fought for his country, who was so undowered by fortune, so smitten by circumstance, that even his name has been lost! Yet no grave can be naked and forsaken, for trees and shrubs and grasses and flowers will grow on it, and over it spans the grand arch of heaven.

In the pioneer days of New England the churchyard was a favorite burial-place. The early settlers, beset by Indians, generally planted their meeting-houses upon hill-tops which overlooked the wooded country. They were thus less easily surprised, and better defended in case of danger. These meeting-houses had watch-towers; were strong with oaken beams and barricades; and on Sunday were filled with armed worshippers. To hold out unsleeping through long services was the chief effort of many of the overworked hearers. But the men, whose eyes were wide open, whose ears were quick to hear, whose thoughts were clear, condensed, their post was in the towers. Not an unseen shadow passed over the woodland; not an unheard twig broke in it; scarcely the rustle of a leaf escaped them. Death, or worse, might be the price of one minute of laggard service. What a grand picture one of these heroic old watchmen would make, perched, defiant and faithful, on one of those bygone church-towers; standing there as much a warrior against the

wildness of nature as the savageness of man. Gerome has painted a Mussulman calling to prayers from the minaret of a mosque. The turbaned old Turk, leaning from his lofty perch, gives a weird beauty to this cold, heathen picture. Our Christian watchman, lifted over the desolateness of the forest and the wiles of the savage, could not help standing out from such a foreground with a clear-cut and sublime distinctness.

It is curious to trace out on the highest point of some prominent New England landscape the almost hidden outlines of one of these Christian strongholds, invisible to the passer-by, but positive and well-defined to the antiquary. I have seen the latter coax out from a grass-grown summit the underlying sods of an old structure. He paced it for me, and told me where were its pulpit, its door, and its towers. He rebuilt for me this quaint house into the tamed landscape. One cannot at this day well appreciate the heroism of that armed devotion. It is easier to imagine how dazed one of the old watchmen would be to find himself suddenly resurrected upon his tower, with no foe to fight against.

When the Indians had passed away the meeting-houses were still, for convenience, centrally located; and, being used by a whole township, were often far away from any habitation. Later, however, the isolated meeting-house, with its "God's acre," was deserted. Population increased, villages sprang up, and new places of worship were built to meet the growing means and needs of the people. The old burial-grounds began to seem too far away and too lonely for the beloved dead. Village people



chose to lay them in some spot near by, which was fenced carefully out and adorned with trees and shrubs. At the same time the thrifty farmer set aside a spot in some field, apt to be the most conspicuous point on his farm.

Meanwhile the deserted plat, sown thick with the bones of Christian pioneers, was taken up and cared for by nature. Tradition clung to it, ghosts haunted it, vegetation ran riot over it, its walls tumbled, its stones were zigzag, it was ragged and uneven and wild, but beautiful. It lay upon the landscape a legend of the past, whether you read it in its rude inscriptions

or in the gray desolateness of its aspect. It came to be known as "the old graveyard,"—something incorporated into the history and atmosphere of the place; a solemn suburb, in the sentiment of which every villager had an inherited or acquired possession.

A mile away from a New England village, on the edge of a primeval forest, by the side of a deserted highway, have lain undisturbed for years the bones of its patriarchs. Here was once a meeting-house, but so long ago that nothing but tradition tells of its site. This meeting-house doubtless had its towers and its watchers; but the thing itself, and the actors in it, have literally gone back to dust. Only the undying beauty of the landscape remains, which embodies in it the ancient burial-place. This is almost surrounded by a pine forest, and is only separated by the thread of a grass-grown path from a beautiful lake. It is one of the sweetest spots I ever knew; and if a patch of earth can be sacred to the memory of the dead, this is made so by the dedication of munificent nature. The site of it, with that of the meeting-house, contrary to custom in troublous times, lies low. The shimmering little pond must have been delightful to the pioneers of the unbroken wilderness. Its shores can be but little changed from what they were in the days of the old meeting-house, for the pine-trees of its encircling forest seem as ancient as time itself. Were the pines, without undergrowth, and the pond and the highways good for strategic purposes, or were the builders of this ancient house beguiled by the exceeding beauty of the landscape? Three Indians, after a hard struggle, were once killed upon this pond, and the meeting-house outlived

their race; so I suppose the old savage drama was played out in it. Long sermons were preached; guns were stacked by its doorway; and up in its towers stood men, whose eyes never turned away from the road, the pond, and the pines. Of all the tragic and historic life of the spot, we have left only this forsaken burial-place.

Now and then a traveller, drawn by the shimmering of the little pond through the trees, follows the by-road which leads to it. He stoops down, pulls apart tangled weeds and grass, and tries to spell out some of its time-worn inscriptions. He finds the deeply-cut name of the last pastor of the church, and of scores of other ancient and godly men. What he fails to decipher are manifold texts of scripture and verses of old hymns, quaintly spelled and lettered. This now illegible stonescript was once tenderly illustrative of the virtues of the underlying dead. I recall, as if it were but yesterday, the last burial in that old churchyard; the rude bier; the procession of villagers following after the mourners; the sunshine and the silence of the day. The train wound slowly through the forest, by the pond, into the churchyard. There was no rattling of hearse and coaches; no crowd of gazers in holiday attire. It was a carrying of the dead with simple, solemn ceremony to the grave. The bier was set down; the villagers stood around it; and then the minister, with bare head, said, reverently, "Let us pray." His voice went through the old wood, across the pond, and seemed to fill all space.

I know of no service more beautiful and impressive than a

village funeral of olden times. I have been to many such, and each stands out in memory like a painting. The bereavement of one villager was the grief of every other. Silence and sorrow fell over them all. The presence of the dead hallowed a house. Hard-working women crowded in, and grew gentle and beautiful with sympathy. Bronzed men, with hands calloused by toil, lifted and folded the rusty pall as lightly as if it had been of gossamer. The preacher, standing upon the threshold of the "best room," filled the house with his simple words; hymns were sung reverently by untrained voices; relatives took a last look of their dead; neighbors followed after them; the lid was hammered down with that mournful stroke once heard never forgotten; the coarse-handed, warm-hearted men lifted the coffin as tenderly as they had handled the pall, and carried it outside where the bier waited to receive it. The house was hushed as it passed out, and the procession, called out by some neighbor, noiselessly formed behind it.

What a terrible passing out that is,—the going forth of a dead body never to return! Hope goes forth with the most forlorn departure of a living friend. Sickness, distance, time, all leave room for desire and expectation; death never. We cannot know our loss until our dead have left us. The presence of the lifeless body gives us a measure of consolation. It awes us by the symmetry of its marble beauty. The utter peace and silence which possess it steal also into us, and we sit comforted in the presence of our dead. But oh! who can measure the utter agony of that hour when they go from us for all time,

borne out unresisting, to be forevermore things of the past? If we call out to them, their own lips are dumb. Stretching out our arms for them, their own are bound and move not. Turning back to the desolated household, what utter emptiness is there, silence and darkness and nothingness where was fulness and brightness and presence! No echo of a voice in the air; no footfall; never so light a touch of the hand; gone, utterly gone; henceforth to be slipping farther and farther away from the treacherous hold of memory.

After a funeral the people were apt to linger, dropping off one by one, each to his own way and work; only relatives and near friends staying to sit down to unrelished baked meats. The bier, flinging out its fantastic arms, always marked the newest-made grave, and stayed upon it until transferred to that of a later comer.

I have listened hours to a village necrology from the lips of an old woman, who never missed the date of a funeral, nor forgot the way the wind blew on the day of it, or the meats the mourners ate. Her tales, told mostly in rude rhyme, were ludicrously minute, yet simple and touching. It was like the unrolling of a panorama of scenes, rough, perhaps, and sharply sketched by a few lines, but most admirable for truth and power. Tender traditions, quaint old customs, you are all a part of the treasures of bygone days.

Hannah and Jonathan

THERE were "hired men" and "hired women," but no servants, in my grandfather's day. These "hired" men and women were the sons and daughters of respectable farmers, who had simply transferred themselves into more prosperous homes than their own. There was no degradation in the change. Hard labor was the birthright of the average farmer's boy, and he cared little whether he drudged upon his father's farm or upon that of a neighbor. The girl who was neat and thrifty at home made a neat and thrifty "help," and as such she had her reward in a good name and kindly treatment. Her pay was very small as wages are now reckoned, but ample for the needs of her time. Her dress was suited to her calling. In winter it was of homespun woollen; in summer it was of strong gingham, also

home-made, but far prettier than the winter garment. The threads of the latter, spun in long winter evenings and dyed in the chimney-corner, made sombre, unbecoming stuffs. The ginghams, fancifully checked with blue or yellow, were the product of the flax-field. The rustic weaver, sitting in the sunshine on summer days, skilfully plied her shuttle, and from the seeming entanglement of white threads with blue and yellow and brown, rolled off from the beam of her loom an admirable web. It was clean-looking and strong, and into the making of it had gone some of the farm's most precious products. Underlying its texture were the dainty blue blossoms of the flax-bed, and skill and judgment had been brought to bear upon each of the many processes of its handling.

The garments made from it would now seem as quaint as the web itself. Hannah always wore when working about the house a long, broad apron, with gathered bib, tied at the neck and waist with strings. In winter this was of blue mixed cotton and wool cloth, and in summer of the checked blue or yellow and white gingham. It was an inseparable part of her working attire, a true servant's costume, as peculiar and becoming to her vocation as the peasant dress of any other country.

This Hannah, the "hired girl" of my grandfather, was a representative one. Her behavior was as befitting her station as her dress. Despite the seeming equality of her position in the household, she was utterly honest, patient, faithful, and respectful. She never changed her place, and she spun and wove and knit and stitched her strength into the fabrics of the house until her

hair grew gray and her eyes dim in its service. Long rule made my grandmother somewhat hard, and she was liable to exact from Hannah, as a right, that labor which she had first bought as a privilege. The lifelong serving-woman, by running in her narrow groove year after year, had become a sort of machine, and her mistress had learned to expect the unfailing working of it. The relation was not a tender one, but it was honest and respectable. In the soil of that New England life the pan lay close to the surface.

Such servants as Hannah were often sought in marriage by hard-working young farmers. They made faithful, thrifty wives, and their houses were scrupulously neat. They only shifted one drudgery for another, but in their own humble homes pride was added to the patience which they wove into the webs of their employers.

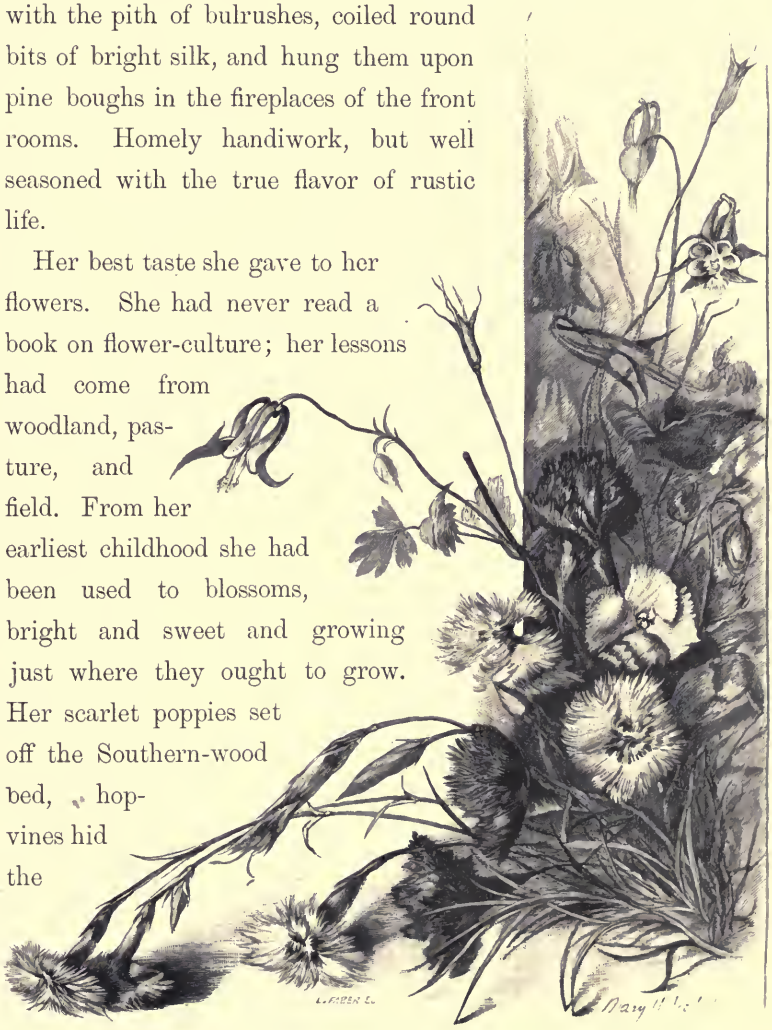
The neighbors talked of Hannah as having been a good-looking lass, but when Benny and I first knew her she was much the worse for wear. Still her faded gray eyes looked kindly upon us and we loved her. Nobody seemed to think that Hannah had grown old. Her name and her virtues were a perennial possession of the house and the neighborhood. She was always called "Hannah." Her dress and her ways never changed. What went to make up "Hannah" was the same through all years. By this the people knew her. The more unkindly time treated her body the more valued "Hannah" became. The serving-woman grew lean and wrinkled and ugly, but "Hannah" grew venerable and beloved. There was about her a certain

magnetism which ignored station. This humble serving-woman, this "Hannah" in her homespun tyre, filled with wild herbs and roots, carried healing with her to sick neighbors. She was so gentle that she was more welcome than her mistress. In that household into which death had come Hannah was sure to be. The softness of her voice and touch and step brought consolation with them. There was something in her life that preached,—that great faith which she had borne with her from childhood, and which she plainly shaped into simple words,—that utter self-sacrifice which clothed her like a garment, and put out of sight all that was homely about her. The sympathy she offered fell like balm where wiser speech failed.

Hannah had queer ways. She was given to interior adornments, and the fruits of her needlework were thick in the house. These were not fine, but considering the material from which she wrought them, and the time and patience which she gave to them, they were worthy of praise. She pinned black broadcloth cats to the wall, brought out in silhouette upon red flannel. As portraits they were failures, and little Benny was always saying to her that he was sure he had never seen any cats like them. She hung novel comb-cases under all the bedroom looking-glasses. These were of varied shapes and materials, some of broadcloth, some of straw, and less pretentious ones of covered pasteboard, all much stitched with colored silks. The patchwork about the house was endless. Hannah hoarded scraps of silk and cambric, and pieced them together into pin-balls, chair-cushions, and coverlets. She glued painted pictures to the inside of wide-mouthed

glass jars, which she filled with flour and planted with asparagus, thus simulating quaint vases. She embossed blown egg-shells with the pith of bulrushes, coiled round bits of bright silk, and hung them upon pine boughs in the fireplaces of the front rooms. Homely handiwork, but well seasoned with the true flavor of rustic life.

Her best taste she gave to her flowers. She had never read a book on flower-culture; her lessons had come from woodland, pasture, and field. From her earliest childhood she had been used to blossoms, bright and sweet and growing just where they ought to grow. Her scarlet poppies set off the Southern-wood bed, hop-vines hid the



ragged garden-wall, and lilies and rose-bushes ran riot in corners. She had her bachelor's buttons and marigolds and pinks, and a host of other common flowers, crowded against beets and carrots and parsnips, wherever she could get a chance for them. They ran parallel on both sides with the broad, middle garden-walk, flanked the edges of side-beds, and faced their outermost paths with a fringe of sweetness. Coming up two-leaved and tiny, they had a hard fight against my grandfather's and Jonathan's hoes; but they throve nevertheless, and ripened into the bloom and fragrance of the garden.

Lilac-bushes straggled about unpruned, and were troublesomely prolific. Forty years ago they stood compactly by the doorsteps and under the windows of most well-to-do-farmers' houses, from their toughness and brightness fit country shrubs. The grateful, abundant thing took kindly to any earth, to any location, climbing out of shade into sunshine, spreading rapidly in bright places, a good worker, and long suffering of ill usage. I remember one, shut into the angle of a tall fence, which, although most dense of foliage, was the grief of my early childhood, because of its barrenness; but which, the very first spring it reached the topmost board, was purple with blossoms.

Hannah's rose-bushes never had any pruning, save what nature gave them. Old stocks died down, and new ones came in their stead. They seemed always to be dying and coming to life again. They were unmercifully knocked about and trampled upon by spring workers; hens burrowed through their roots; and yet they always came out every spring as good as new, and bore

the largest and sweetest of roses. I do not see such roses now, so full of scent, so deep-dyed, as the double damask and white ones which blossomed in my grandfather's garden. It seems as if they must have gotten their strength from the rugged soil. The damask ones were like peonies for size, and their bushes, thick with full-blown flowers and buds, in every stage of opening, were only surpassed for beauty by those of the creamy-white rose, which were as soft-tinted as the first blush of dawn, and daintily-scented as the quickening breath of spring.

Hannah's flowers were all sweet-smelling, gracious, hardy, grateful things. Her pinks were marvels for color and scent. Her bachelor's buttons, blue and purple and white, perfumed the morning. Her columbines, wild denizens of the garden, kept always a woodland flavor. They got mixed and unsettled as to color, but held fast their untamed nature.

The pride of the garden were the two peony roots, just inside the gate on either side. They were amongst the earliest comers in spring, peeping up out of the brown mould with their great crimson leaf-buds, which speedily thrust up into strong stocks, to be the bearers of as many blossoms. How those peonies grew! New stocks came up every year, and each new stock seemed to bring with it a peony heavier and deeper-dyed than before. Jonathan tied them up every season; but still they waxed bigger and bigger, until a barrel hoop would not hold them. They were the envy of all the children, and the admiration of farmers' wives.

Poor unlettered Hannah, so patient in her round of homely

toil, so fond of flowers, had an untaught delight in beautiful things. Treading with weary feet her toilsome way, she transmuted the joys and sorrows and stinted incidents of her homely life into pure gold; and making the most of her meagre chances, has compelled me to remember her not so much by what she was as by what she might have been. We can never rate a person justly until we have disentangled the story of his or her life from the impetus or hindrance given to it by fortune. What Hannah was I know; what she might have been is suggested by her largeness of heart and sweetness of instinct. With proper scope here this serving-woman might have been a lady. Who shall say now that she was not a lady; and that what she was equal to, and got not in this life, she is in eternity finding in full measure?

But Jonathan. Ah, Jonathan! what shall I say of thee? The first sight I had of thee, thou wast sitting in the old market-wagon, smoking and cross-legged. When I last saw thee, thou wast sitting in the miller's door, still smoking and cross-legged. Unshaven, unshorn, with nose, chin, and cheeks all awry, his nether garments shrinking from his blue hosen, his bristly hair standing out from his weather-worn hat, Jonathan lounged on the low stoop, puffing away at his pipe, joking with "Molly" and the miller, and interlarding his slow talk with many a "yaw" and "wall."

Yet, with all his uncouthness of person, dress, and dialect, he was a true Jonathan, honest, self-reliant, hard-working, kind even to gentleness. He was tender of children, and merciful to all

dumb creatures. When a young lamb chanced to stray from the fold, it was Jonathan who stayed out two-thirds of the chilly autumn night until he had found it, and then nursed it until it was strong again. "Good Jonathan," said little Benny, in the wanderings of his sickness. "Good Jonathan," echoes my heart after many years.

THE WEEKLY ROUTINE

THEY lived at my grandfather's just as most of the well-to-do New England farmers lived forty years ago. On Monday morning, long before sun-rise, my grandmother and Hannah would be busy before two steaming tubs in the long porch. By this early start they got the freshness of the morning. The sun came up from behind the distant hills, lifted shadows from the woodland, mist from the valley, and cast a shimmer upon the dew-covered fields. It streamed through the porch-door, across the floor, past the washers, and exalted what was a little while before only the dull aspect of labor to a share of the brightness of the morning. There is a transient time between the uprising of the sun from the horizon and its full possession of the landscape, in which there is a sort of pictorial aspect of the meeting of day with night, which is exquisitely

beautiful. Only the country-liver can fully feel it—this dying of night with the birth of day—this supreme moment when the mists and dimness and low voices of the one exhale into the melody and brightness of the other. It is a daily miracle—this sudden transition from gray to rosy light—this unrolling of the dew-covered landscape—this assumption, in delicious crescendo, of sound—this quickening of the day's life over the sleep of

night—this flying of darkness, as of a ghost pursued, before the flooding of light—this oldest of all stories again told. Awake, for the day has dawned!

In those days women washed who went to church in brocades and satins. They used no machinery, there was no bleaching-powder nor blueing in their tubs, and yet their linen came out,

as Hannah used to say to my grandmother, "as white as the driven snow." These two women kept time at their scrubbing, and in the early morning, when they were fresh, hummed psalm tunes together. They were not belittled by this labor, but by their efficiency and content they gave dignity to it. It may have broadened their hands,—I am sure it did their chests,—but they accepted, with the utmost willingness, these clumsy and necessary toils of their living. How I longed to plunge my arms into the foaming, sparkling, rainbow-tinted suds, in spite of Hannah's bleached, parboiled fingers! When Jonathan had carried the tubs to the well for the final rinsing of the linen, it was my care afterwards to keep Betsy, the old horse, from walking under it, flapping snow-white upon the line. Those washing-days were some of the best play-days and dream-days of my childhood. Who can number the bubbles of both suds and brain which have sparkled and floated away in the atmosphere of their quaint surroundings?

The east-porch door was, my grandmother said, "a sightly place." Far away on the horizon, between two hills, nestled a small hamlet. The deep valley below was dense with an old forest, from which a belt of green fields arose and fell again to make a bed for the mill-stream, down to which stretched my grandfather's broad acres. The mill and the roof of the miller's red cottage were just in sight, and the clatter of wheels and the babbling of waters were pleasant to hear. Around the corner one caught a glimpse of the brook where Molly, the miller's daughter, bleached her linen, and Jonathan loitered with her

when his day's work was done. Farther on was Benny's little grave.

In that porch-door I used to sit and dream away the day, listening to the harmless talk of the washers, who never let a traveller go unheeded on the highway. What innocent gossip it was, as I hear it now, whispering through the years! "Where is the parson going this early?" "Who can be sick now? the doctor is riding like the wind." "I shouldn't think Mrs. Brown could spare Sally for school to-day." Thus one by one the wayfarers went by, and the washers watched and babbled until they grew tired with their work, and so unobservant and silent.

Twice a week, with much method and little bustle, quantities of butter and cheese were made ready for the market. The unctuous odor of those tasks comes back to me, and I still taste the all-pervading flavor of the cheese-room. I see the clumsy press, trickling with sour juices, the polished wooden bowls, the rows of shining pans set out to scald in the sunshine, mistress and maid, in checked homespun aprons, shaping the golden butter or cutting the tender curd. Dear, simple-hearted women! your work was the common task of a farmer's household, but you made it seem like a pastime by the skill you brought to bear upon it. It might have been drudgery in other hands, but in yours it only showed how little the dignity of labor depends upon what one does, and how much upon the way in which tasks are taken up. Untoward accidents sometimes happened. The cream would not give up its butter, or the cheese cracked in turning,

mishaps dreaded by skilful dairy-women. Old Nance, who lived in the edge of the wood, beyond the miller's cottage, was supposed to bewitch farmers' cows to the spoiling of their products, without mercy, and many a farm-house door had nailed upon its lintel a horseshoe as a charm against her plottings. If there was any virtue in them the old woman lay down often at night with uneasy bones. Old Nance was a forlorn, crazed creature, whose early history had been dropped out of speech, and who throve best in her half-savage woodland life. The farmers added to the pittance which the selectmen grudgingly gave her, so that she never suffered for food or clothing. Every ambition had died out of her. She seemed to have but one vestige of humanity left, and that was her affection for the living things in the woods about her. Birds were always hovering over her hut, and in winter the snow around it was thick with footprints of untamed creatures which had come to pick up the crumbs she had pinched for them from her poverty. Nothing could be more repulsive than this haggard old woman, crouching over her embers in her one-roomed hut, or groping with a faded shawl over her head for fagots amongst the white snow of the forest. She was a blot upon the landscape, this waif of humanity stranded alongside the purity of domestic life.

Uncouth old safe, dearer to my grandmother than costly bric-a-brac to modern fine lady, nobody seems to make nowadays such cheeses as bulged out your canvas sides, prettily mottled with tansy or wholesome yarrow, and crumbling under the knife when cut. They had a toothsome way of dissolving in the mouth,

and tickling the palate with a pleasant tingle. The fine grain of the products of my grandmother's dairy might have been due to the fineness of her own texture. I have more often tasted far coarser results from like material. Hers looked and tasted like the work of a lady.

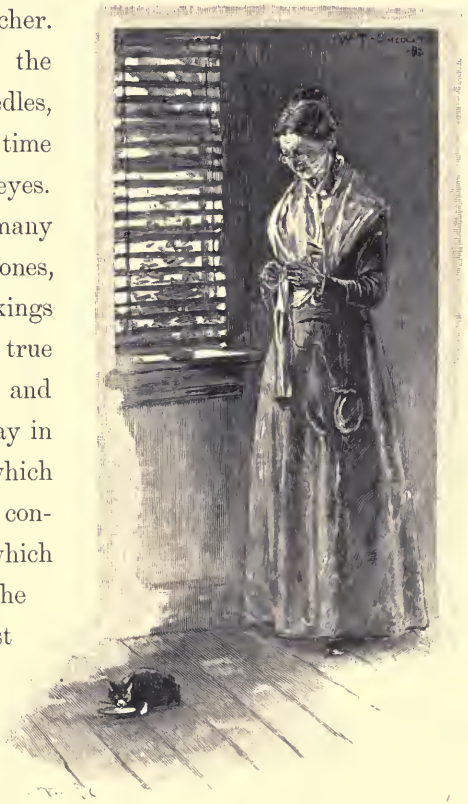
The heavy labor of the day over, and the hearth swept and scrubbed, my grandmother and Hannah, who were never idle, sat down to their mending, or the one went to her distaff and the other to her weaving. My grandmother was never handsomer than she was when sitting by her little flax-wheel, with a handkerchief of white muslin about her neck, her snow-white hair drawn under her plain cap, and the rosy sunlight of the waning day falling across her faded face and still fine figure. Upon her also fell, like a benediction, that soft-tinted later beauty which is the inheritance of vigorous, ripe old age. Hannah, glorified by the same sunlight, played her plainer part, and sat by her wheel or at her loom, her attire and mien adjusted to her station with a singular fitness.

The clatter of the loom in the chamber and the whizzing of the flax-wheel below made a constant hum of industry in the old farm-house. Much wool was also spun, and the moaning of the big wheel was the saddest sound of my childhood. It was like a low wail from out the lengthened monotony of the spinner's life. I used to stop my ears against it, and many a time have run down to the woodland to get away from its painful persistence. The same wail, taking other shapes, has followed me ever since, and after all there is to every life, even

the seemingly most fortunate, a deep undertone of complaint and resistance.

My grandmother's little flax-wheel was a gossipy thing, whirring away at racy bits of news falling from the lips of demure old ladies in broad frilled caps and square neckerchiefs. How like they had all grown by walking in the same rut all their days! The only individual flavor about them seemed to lie in the diverse figures on their snuff-box covers, and the varied stitchings of their goose-quill knitting-sheaths. How they talked and knit, and knit and talked, with tireless tongues, putting in marks at their narrowings; slowly shaping their socks with oft-repeated measurings! Upon one of them, flighty Huldah, I look back with peculiar liking. She was a full-blooded little gossip, the kindest of mischief-makers. Everything about her, her dried-up, sinewy figure, snapping gray eyes and shrill voice, her yawning calash, huge reticule, and broad pocket were in keeping with her calling. Everybody was glad to see Huldah's blue cotton umbrella bobbing up and down upon the highway; and no crone was surer than she of light rolls and a strong cup of tea. She always carried an umbrella through rain or shine because, she once confidingly whispered to little Benny, she was "just the least bit flighty in the upper story." She was particular about the quality of her snuff, and most generous with it. The cow on the cover of her box was the delight of all youngsters. Flighty though she was, she had, Jonathan said, "an uncommon taking way with her." She praised the farmers' crops and the gudewives' linen. She had a gift of making you pleased with yourself.

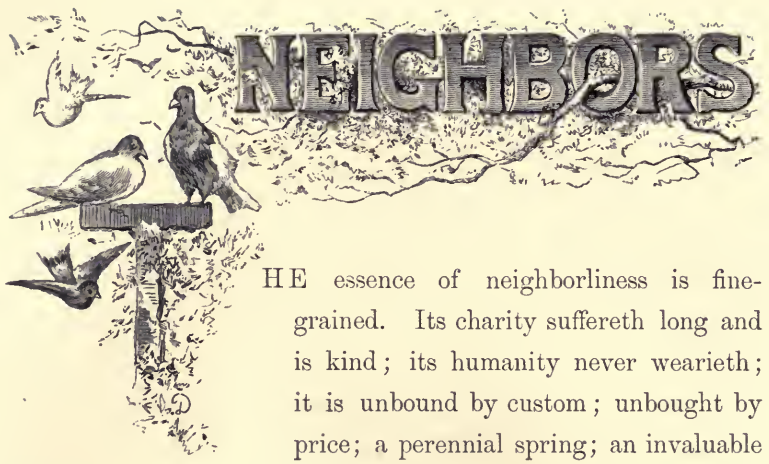
I can hear her now, "They du say, Jonathan, that Molly is just the peertest and pootiest gal in town. Lors me! Hannah, you can du more work than any other gal." She was most excellent in sickness,—endless in patience, and a sleepless watcher. There was a charm in the very click of her needles, which seemed to keep time with the blinking of her eyes. I was sure, though, that many of her stitches were false ones, and Hannah held her stockings in high contempt. Her true hold upon the patience and affections of the people lay in that very flightiness of which she was so pathetically conscious,—an infirmity which never fails to touch the sympathy of the rudest people. She professed to live with her brother, although her true abiding-place was with her townspeople at large. Her unbidden coming always brought them good. The charities of her simple heart were as broad and



healing as if her brain had been stronger, and the draft she made upon their pity came back to them in kindly acts. No hearth was ever too crowded to take her into its circle; no hand ever too busy to grasp hers in welcome. So this half-crazy woman, chattering and laughing with a wild wit, with no single external grace to commend her, through the mystic way of humanity passed like a beatitude across her neighbors' thresholds. Her foibles weighed with them as gossamer; but the sweetness of her mission stayed after her. Poor Huldah! The first time I left my grandfather's home alone her cotton umbrella stood by the door. She herself patted me on the head, called me a good child, and gave me a piece of dried gingerbread out of her snuffy reticule. The gingerbread I threw into the highway, but the quaint picture of the kind-hearted, wandering old woman—many years dead, and whom I never saw again—I cannot throw away.

Saturday at my grandfather's brought baking, with its morning bustle. Such a hurrying and scurrying and sputtering and splashing as there was! For a short space misrule seemed to have invaded the household. The big oven crackled and roared, whilst Jonathan plied it with fuel. Hannah was reckless with milk and eggs. My grandmother kept up a continued rattling of spoons and pans, and I seemed always to be in the way. Gradually materials took shape. The fire died down in the oven; Jonathan cleared and swept it, and shut it up. Shortly it was opened and tried, and then packed with pots and pans and plates, close up to the brim. Doughnuts sizzled and steamed

in the big pot on the crane, and the scent of food, cooked and uncooked, was far-reaching and positive, pleasant and appetizing. The household, by degrees, settled down. The doughnuts were skimmed out and the fat set by to cool. The hearth was swept; the floors and tables scrubbed; soiled garments were changed for fresh; and, with the twilight, peace seemed to come in through doors and windows,—peace to rest upon the white heads of aged man and aged woman, upon their man-servant and maid-servant, and upon the child within their gates.



THE essence of neighborliness is fine-grained. Its charity suffereth long and is kind; its humanity never wearieth; it is unbound by custom; unbought by price; a perennial spring; an invaluable gift. Behold in a woman your model country neighbor. She is lynx-eyed, but not over-curious; spontaneous, but not familiar; helpful, but not aggressive. She takes note of your necessities, which she relieves without ostentation. So great is her generosity of effort that she keeps no account in memory of those deeds by which she has made you her debtor. If she needs you she freely asks of you. She is more reticent of her words than her works; and weighs well her speech, that by it her social relations may not be marred. She is unmoved by impulse or prejudice. She may be hard of exterior, but tenderness dwells in her. If bidden to a feast she goes to it in her best attire, with serious dignity; but into the sick-room she

glides with unchanged garments, bearing with her the healing of herbs, softness of presence, and a feeling heart.

My first-born was buried from a country home. His short life had been of no use to any one outside of that home. To my neighbors he had left nothing worthy of remembrance; he had made hardly a ripple upon the surface of their quiet lives. He had simply come and passed away. Lo! what was wrought by the silent mystery of his death. They thronged about him. They touched his white garments with exquisite tenderness, and let fall upon them tears of pity and love. One of them wrapped him in his winding-sheet, smoothed his hair prettily, and touched his brow with a holy, motherly kiss.

Beloved country neighbors of another home, dear are the memories of your spontaneous kindness to me and mine,—you true, tender-hearted, free-handed, helpful, bygone neighbors. Tirzah, O Tirzah the good! you were hard-worked and plain; but you were so clothed upon with self-denial, kindness, and charity that my children loved you, and you were beautiful to them. They never missed in you any graces; to them you were pure gold. Dear old woman! when your weary feet shall pass over to the shining shore, two, I am sure, will gladly go down to meet you. Kind old Tirzah, may I some time see you in the beautiful garments of immortality! "God bless Tirzah!" lisped Marion, in infantile speech; and night after night went up this simple petition until the child's tongue forgot its cunning.

My grandfather's neighbors were scattered over a wide space of country. The nearest one of them was half a mile away;

but distance only seemed to lend zest to their intercourse with one another. Lack of diversion also gave impulse to it. The drama they all helped to play was upon a narrow stage, with few acts; and they, the actors in it, were so far apart that each stood out to the others most conspicuous for the right or wrong rendering of his part. Every incident and accident of one's daily life was, to his neighbor, what his costumes are to the player in the theatre, a sort of marking of him. His horse, his oxen, his wagon, and his dog identified him, like the wearing of a stage garment; and all his incomings and outgoings, all the ways of his household, were most familiar to his townspeople. Sunday noonings made neighbors; the courtesies of hayings and harvestings brought them together; and the leisure of winter revealed each to the other. They were compelled to be dependent upon, and so kind to, one another,—these simple, isolated people. They found relief from the restraint of labor and the suppression of their working days in their holiday garrulousness, and their eager recognition of every other man and woman as their neighbor. When clad in their best suits, with a little respite from toil, their whole natures seemed to rebound; and silent, stern men became eager chatterers. Very simple gossip it was, mainly of herds and crops and town affairs. They thronged the meeting-house steps on Sundays, gathered in knots about the village stores, and never failed on the highway to salute one another with much speech. The smallest mishap to the one was speedily known to the rest, and this large recognition came back manifold in sympathy.

Extreme deference was exacted from children to parents, and from youth to old age. Amongst the men there was little social assumption, save that the best thinkers, known as such, took unto themselves a certain boldness of speech. Their salutations

followed custom, and their common talk ran in grooves; but the mass of them were as strong in logic as their soil was in rock; and they were almost as easily turned as the latter from their slow-formed opinions. They were weather-wise almost to accuracy, and foretold to one another the coming and shifting of storms.

Nothing could be quainter upon the highway than the meeting in midsummer of two anxious farmers in their high-backed wagons. They stopped, compared the size and state of their exposed crops; and then fell to watching the clouds, each shading his eyes with his hand. Hardy, resolute, half-defiant, they had a sort of heathen aspect—these sons of and worshippers of the soil. Their hopes, and so their hearts, were bound up in the signs of sun and wind and cloud, and they naturally grew into such picturesque and harmless idolaters.

The women of my grandfather's neighborhood were more given to social distinctions than the men. The wives of "forehanded" farmers and professional men were apt to be somewhat exalted, or, in the speech of the times, "looked up to." This was because of a partial exemption from toil; and they lacked the intensity, the wild flavor, of those humbler women, who threw their whole strength and will into their vocations, and thus made themselves worthy of better things. What if these latter did seem like drudges, and grow hard and ugly to sight; the patience and the power and the will to do were still in them, and the price they paid for their fidelity gave a pathetic nobleness to the sacrifice.

The women were, as a class, religious. They were not emotional, busy, bustling Christians. They knew little about missions and Dorcas societies. There was not much poverty to tax their sympathies. They were learned in doctrines, firm of faith, and full of a simple reverence. They were never so fagged or burdened that they could not, on the Lord's day, lay aside their cares and toils, and go up to His house. It ought to have been

an easy thing for these women to enter into the kingdom. Their life here was so hard upon them that the life to come must have held out to their weary souls a picture, beyond all measure delightful, of the eternal rest, the everlasting peace of the true gospel.

The meagreness of their lot begot in many of them a stinginess about dollars and cents; but the most carnal-minded of them were truly reverent on the Lord's day; and they all endured frost-bites and long sermons, in their unwarmed churches, with a praiseworthy patience. Sweet to them was the hush of their restful Sabbaths. It was the sign and token to them of a Sabbath that should never end.

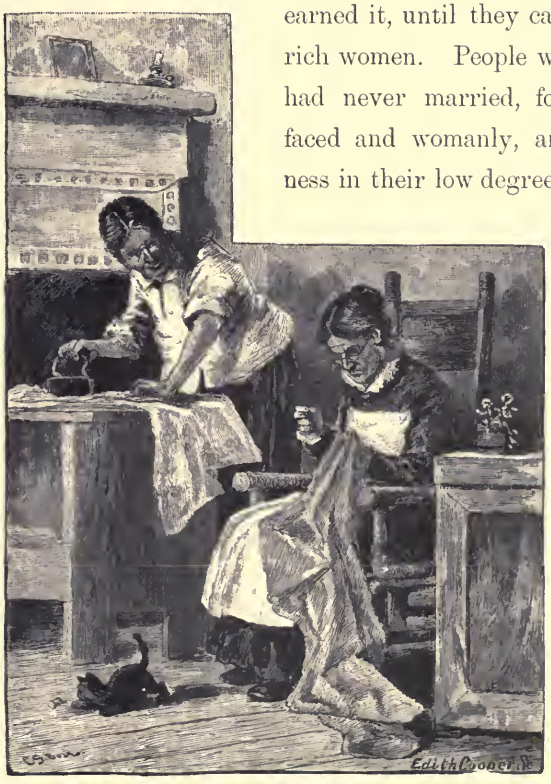
When their children were young, these ancient mothers had to clothe them with garments spun and woven by their own hands; and for the daughters, as they grew up, table-linen and bedding were to be stored away for their "fixing out." In my grandmother's day this thrifty forecasting of fate was the custom in farmers' families, and she was deemed rich to whose treasures gifts of silver and china were also added. Daughters were expected to marry. Marriage brought extra care and toil to a woman; but she did not shrink from that, for labor was her lot; and she of the humbler sort, to whom no suitor came, was quite sure to take up her narrower vocation as tailoress or dressmaker or household servant. It was thought to be generous in a farmer to let his daughter "learn a trade," thus freeing her from the heavier drudgeries of farm-work. There must have been cheapened lives, but there were, at least, no idle ones

amongst these women. They began their lustrous webs in early girlhood. They accepted their condition as they found it; they did with all their might what the Lord gave them to do, and so were in their calling true livers.

The tailoress, with her awkward goose, stitching and pressing coarse cloths into homely garments, grew gray-haired in the service of friendly neighbors. Her meagre pay, through long hoarding, rolled up with years. She got to be a house-owner and land-owner, and so a woman of repute and weight amongst others. Lucy and Hester were two such humble neighbors of my grandfather's. They were in middle life when I knew them; two sisters, to whom their father, in dying, had left a life interest in his house and estate. This was the usual way in those days of providing for the old age of unmarried daughters; not the most safe or generous way for them, but consistent with their training and habits of self-reliance. With health, they were sure to be self-supporting, and in sickness and old age they would be cared for, grudgingly it might be, in the rooms set apart for them in the old homestead.

Lucy and Hester might have well dreaded any possible dependence upon their brother, a crabbed, morose man, whose surly nature seemed to infect his home and all its surroundings. It was a dismal, joyless-looking house. Seen from a distance, it had a most inhospitable look, unsoftened by any green, growing thing, uncorniced, unpainted, grim, cold, forbidding. The room of Lucy and Hester seemed to catch all the sunshine lying about it. Their goose was always pounding at seams, their tongues

were always going in concert, and they were the busiest, cheeriest, plumpest, most prosperous of old maids. They had money in the bank; how much no one knew, but rumor added to it faster than their nimble fingers could ever have earned it, until they came to be esteemed rich women. People wondered why they had never married, for they were fair-faced and womanly, and full of lovableness in their low degree. They were fond of children, and took several little boys to bring up, but somehow these all turned out badly. One stole some of their hard-earned money, another tried to burn their house. People said the sisters were too easy with them. It may be, after all, that they had fallen upon their true vocation, and that they were jollier and more useful with their goose in hand than they would have been as wives and mothers.



Joseph their brother did not mar their comfort much, for they were not in his power. His wife died early of overwork, leaving her tasks and her discomforts as an inheritance to her daughter. This daughter, Abigail by name, was a tall, thin, but sweet-faced girl, who, when I first saw her, was drudging her life out for her cruel father. She had a lover in a well-to-do farmer from the next town, but she never married. The linen was all spun and woven and packed away; the bridal dress was made ready, and then, one June day, she who was to have worn it was borne out to the family burial-place.

Not long after the father died suddenly and unmourned. Then Lucy and Hester came into full possession of the farm. They took down the little sign "Tailoring done here" from their window, planted lilacs and rose-bushes about the house, and trained a creeper over the front door. They did not make many changes, but somehow the dismal look went out of the place, and the cheer, which before was confined to their own one room, now seemed to pervade the whole house. They were become, for the country, truly rich women; but, from force of habit, they kept basting and stitching and pressing until their goose grew too heavy for them. Then, from being the two tailoresses who worked about the town, they passed into the two cheerful old sisters, whose serene latter years and calm end were a rest and a lesson to their weary neighbors.

Very faithful to each other in their marriage relations were these ancient men and women. They were given neither to sentiment nor demonstration. The women promised to honor

and obey their husbands; and they did honor and obey them, not with weak servility but with trust and willingness. The twain were truly yoked together to bear life's burdens; and, working side by side, year after year, they grew to be most helpful and needful and dear to each other. Theirs may not have been the highest type of marriage, but such as it was it made each a necessity to the other, and whatever it lacked in grace and beauty it made up in truth and stability. If there was in it any actual or implied degradation of woman, this was shown in the preference of sons over daughters in the disposition of their small estates. The thrift and "fixing out" of the latter were thought to be sufficient for them, and the farm with its belongings was given to the sons. As a subject of contemplation, as a Sabbath picture divorced from toil, the pastoral, patriarchal life of one of these ancient families has a Biblical aspect,—something of the sweetness and simplicity of those historical households of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It was the life of a race of strong-minded, heroic, Christian laborers, who, from a substratum of mental, moral, and religious strength, sent forth a stream of migration as potent as the rivers which take their rise from the granite rock of their farms. If the women had been put forward forty years, many of them would have lost what now seem their peculiarities, and with them their chief charm, under the weight of what we call our superior civilization. But there was a certain class, small in number as it always is, whom no time nor circumstance could have spoiled. They were noble women,—women full of all manner of well-doing; fair to look

upon, with the beatitudes stamped upon their features as upon the pages of a written book; women who, walking in their humble condition, meek and lowly, came to be looked upon as in a measure sanctified, and were called "mothers in Israel." Their faces, set heavenward, cling to memory like the portraits of painted madonnas.

Other women there were, more worldly wise, under whose cunning hands the plainer women of the neighborhood were as potter's clay,—my grandmother was of such,—sensible, handsome women, whom no measure of labor could belittle,—full of magnetism and power and wide influence.

The stories of many of these ancient home-workers, written out, would be so many leaves from that pioneer, formative life which so embellishes and enriches the early history of New England. They were home missionaries, who gave to their neighbors their unsalaried labor, and to posterity the fruits of their wide-sown humanities and Christian graces. I have seen a whole village uplifted by the superior nature of a single, grand, thinking, faithful, Christian woman. She was the wife of a poorly-paid country minister. Her home was meagre, but her love of beauty great. She was not therefore poor, for what the country could give to any woman it gave to her. Her field seemed narrow, for her ability was large; but if her standard of living overreached that of her neighbors, her example stimulated their children to higher effort. Her mission was peculiar. Analyzed, its integral parts were small, in its aggregate not greatly recognized at the time, afterwards felt. The life of this

well-poised woman, wide in creative power but narrow-gauged by circumstance, in aspect bare, in actual experience full of the sadness of suppression, went day by day into the children about her, and that scope which was denied to herself she helped to give through them to their posterity.

She was neither stranded nor martyred. It was her vocation that, because of the nobility of her nature, she should shape those who copied after her. It was her lot that the self-sacrifice which was engrafted upon her other virtues should give to her life a pensive beauty; that she should better others by a certain impoverishment of self. What she longed for and got not, guided by her, others found. Her glory was that her true being was not bound by circumstance. She was not simply a village woman, she was a citizen of the world, for in giving wider sphere to others, she was only committing to them that part of her higher life most worthy to be developed and remembered.

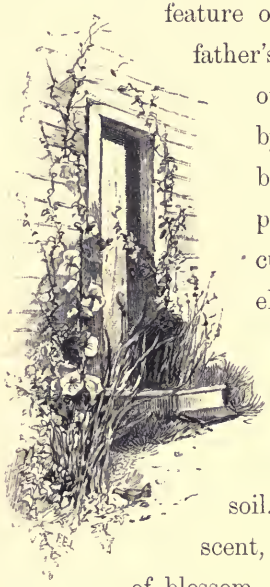
SUNDAY.

DEAR, delicious, bygone country Sabbaths, how out of harmony bustle and striving seemed with your days! A woman minding her dairy or a farmer storing his hay made a scandal, and a certain decorous dignity was given to necessary labor. How the aspect of the landscape changed with the ending of the week's tasks! Individual life tells in the country. Farmers digging in their fields, dairywomen busy before their doors, loitering children,

working oxen, all motions begotten of labor are greatly missed when withdrawn. The stillness of the Sabbath at my grandfather's was almost oppressive. Not a worker was to be seen, hardly a loiterer, only the silent processes of nature went on in the deserted fields. There was something sublime in this universal ovation of quiet to the sacredness of the day, in this giving to the Sabbath that full possession of rest ordained for it in its old creation. It was the instinct of a primitive and pure devotion, the spiritual expression of a people who knew of no compromise with duty. The keeping of the Lord's day meant with them a giving up of all work-day pursuits. The thoughts of many of them may have run in profane channels, but if so they gave no outward sign. If they forecasted to themselves plans for the coming week, they told not of it, and the most eager worker of them all fell readily into the subdued spirit of the day.

The farmers used to sit much by the windows of their living-rooms and look complacently over their fields. No wonder they loved their lands, for these had given back, for yearly care and toil, an hundred-fold in health and delight. I seem to see the old miller, ready for meeting, lounging in a rush-bottomed chair outside his little red cottage under the hill. The mill has stopped its clatter. Molly loiters with her pitcher at the spring, and the gray old house-dog lies on the door-stone snapping at flies in the sunshine. The minutest feature of that Sunday morning picture comes back to me: the lazy drone of the bees about the hive under the cherry-tree; the row of sunflowers close by

the garden-fence, tilting their faces up to the sun; the garden itself, full of savory herbs; and, above all, the trim, rotund miller, his ruddy face set off by a broad collar, and his meeting-suit untarnished by meal or flour. He was always waiting there every sunny Sabbath morning, so that he became a permanent feature of the landscape as seen from my grandfather's porch-door. The unhewn flat stone step of that door was a cheerful place. Close by it were the cucumber-bed, the dairy-bench, and the beehives. No pans were put out to scald on Sunday, the unpicked cucumbers grew apace, and the bees revelled in blossoms. It was the brightest, homeliest, rankest spot about the house.



A farm-house back-door is a paradise for weeds, and there is beauty in all these unbidden growths of the rank soil. They are overburdened with a wild scent, dense of foliage, deep of color, profuse of blossom, and prolific of seed. They locate themselves humbly and have few friends; but hardly one of them is without its use, and none of them would be unmissed from back-door vegetation. Here grew the unctuous cheeses of school repute; the beggarly plantain, close up to the steps, good for woodland poisons; edible dock and mustard, and many meaner weeds, redeemed by their riotous rankness. They were not worthless, for out from them came healing and food and dyes.

They were not mean, for they were an outcropping of the force of the earth, and so were an eloquent miracle of the life of the year.

The miller's Sunday suit cost much effort, from the first clipping of the wool of which it was made to the final handling of it by Lucy and Hester, the two tailoresses, who measured and stitched and pressed at the rate of two shillings per day. It did not fit well, but for wear and tear it was unsurpassed; and its owner had the consciousness that it had been honestly paid for, and would not have for a long time to be renewed. The broad collars of the men were made of homespun linen, their boots were clumsy, their hands coarse and distorted by labor; but they were sovereigns of the soil; strong, brave, honest men.

The dress of the better-conditioned class of women was much finer. Many of them owned rich satins and brocades. This outlay was, however, only for once or twice in a lifetime, and the heirlooms of imported stuffs which have come down from my grandmother were, without doubt, her show-dresses for many years. There was something sweet in this exalting by fine apparel of a mother of a household, in this hinting of vanity in these simple women, who would gladly have bought and worn the silken fabrics which they could not simulate in their own webs.

Behold the stately pomp of my grandmother's church-going. Jonathan brings the two-wheeled chaise to the front door, and out from the "spare room" comes a shimmer of black satin and

lace, and the figure of a woman, large, tall, white-haired, fair-faced, handsome, grand as any fashionable lady of to-day. In the hands which on the morrow are to help to do the family washing she carries a folded kerchief of fine quality, a hymn-book, and a sprig of Southern-wood. She looks, as I remember her, with no mark of earthly toil upon her form and visage,

like a quaint old portrait of a queen somewhere seen. Verily, what did this woman lose by the cheerful taking up of life's allotted burdens?

Wives and daughters of the less well-to-do farmers seldom owned more than one "best gown," and that of simple material; but their clean frocks looked wonderfully well, and the cheeks of the lasses were brighter than any ribbons they could buy. They were pleasant to behold as they walked in procession,

every Sunday, to the meeting-house. The wild country round about ran riot with vegetation, and they were a part of its brightness.

There was chance for romance in those church-bound walks, and many a well-to-do young farmer chose to go across the fields with his lass rather than by the dusty highway. At meeting-time, by the gate of almost every green lane stood a lumbering market-wagon, waiting for the "gudewife" and her little ones, whilst the "squire" and the doctor passed by in pretentious chaise. The highway was thronged with eager worshippers,—fathers and mothers, lads and lasses, many little children, with here and there an old man or woman. All were resting, happy, reverent. When the crowd had reached the meeting-house, the women and children and young girls passed in; but the fathers and older sons lingered around the porch,—the former to exchange greetings, the latter to stare at the blushing maidens. The young people were not free from that coquetry the seeds of which were sown in Eden, and which is as old as Eve. It took the girls a long time beforehand to adjust their simple dress. On Sunday mornings, Molly, the miller's daughter, used to plaster water curls upon her rosy cheeks. If her face was not adorned by them, she herself was truly made more lovely by this simple tribute to the church-door homage of her rustic lover.

The meeting-house was a quaint old structure, a fair specimen of buildings of its class in those days. It had the hanging, cylindrical, sounding-board; high pulpit, with its trap-door;

railed altar; broad galleries; double row of small windows; and square pews,—the whole built of plain, unpolished wood. It was not planned by skilful architects, yet, despite the ugliness of this old meeting-house, there was about it a kind of solemn grandeur. It was lofty and roomy, and had the venerableness which long use gives to any structure. Cobwebs hung in its out-of-the-way corners; age had richly stained the rude carvings of its useless sounding-board; and curiously-twisted veins and knots had come out, in long years, all over the panels of its galleries. There is something pathetic in this creeping out of the veins and fibres of ancient wood—as if they were the soul of it—to meet the destroying touch of time. Rare also is the aroma of these dying woods, breathing out from such as are mellow and brown and streaked with age; found only in old, unpainted buildings.

On summer days, through the open windows of this ancient church came resinous breezes from the pine wood beyond it, sunshine, and the sounds of busy, ripening, summer life. It was filled also with a reverent spirit of worship, and by them all it was glorified into a solemn and goodly temple. The coming up of the minister's white head from the trap-door, the nasal twang of the long-queued deacon dictating to his choir, the contortions of the fiddler, were all accepted as a part of the service, and the people were as unconscious of any element of the grotesque in their worship as they were rich in faith and divine presence. The musical directors of ancient choirs might not have been good singers, but they

were most devout choral worshippers of the Lord on the Lord's Day. Ancient meeting-houses had no chimneys, and the tiny foot-stoves of the women could not keep their bodies warm in winter. One can but think that perhaps the sturdiness of these ancient dames was in some measure due to the fact that the weakly ones were, in early life, winnowed out by exposure to such hardy customs.

My grandfather's old meeting-house on summer days was a picture-gallery, letting in rare landscapes through its windows. The meanest objects framed in these, and fixed by them upon a background of sky or verdure, became studies to tired, curious children, who let nothing pass by the doors unnoticed upon the visible highway. The stay-at-homes in the few neighboring houses were eagerly watched, and all the details of the houses themselves accurately scanned by them. They grew wise as to the habits and haunts of meeting-house spiders and bugs, and noted every bird-nested tree which could be seen from the pews. Every object within range of vision they knew well by sight. Nothing escaped them but the doctrines of the minister's long discourses.

What country-bred person will not recall with pleasure such unwitting Sunday studies of art, when he or she learned aerial perspective through the upper windows of a village church, and the best style of lawn-gardening from the landscape which stretched out from their lower panes to the horizon? All the natural beauties of the neighborhood were revealed; many secrets of form and sound and color were searched out until, through

these primary dealings with nature, a glimpse was given of the fulness and richness and glory of the universe.

The old-time country pastors were greatly loved and respected

by their people. They were treated with peculiar deference. They were accosted with humility and entertained with delight. They were poorly paid, but, like their parishioners, their habits were simple and wants few; and many of them eked out their

living by the use of land lent them by thrifty farmers. The Congregationalist ministers were the most learned men of the times; generally close students, rigid in doctrine, stern in discipline, and given to long, many-headed sermons. Other denominations believed less in especial training for the pulpit and more in what was termed "a call" to preach. Laymen left their ploughs and became exhorters; and the genuine "call" often developed rare power to control minds. The eloquence and success of some of these "called" preachers of my grandfather's neighborhood have passed into tradition. They showed an acuteness in the selection and adaptation of texts which often proved the seed of great revivals. Said one of these pastors, venerable with age, as he bowed over the coffin of an old patriarch, named Jacob, who in the fulness of a healthy and honored old age had died suddenly in the night-time, "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." The utterance, the attitude, the aspect of the trembling old pastor were perfect, and more potent than any sermon upon this desirable ending of a long and worthy life. At another time, leaning over the pulpit, he pointed to the shrouded form of a strong man, stricken down by the wayside, and exclaimed, in low and searching accents, "Who among you will give heed to this? Who will hearken and hear for the time to come?" Waiting, with solemn impressiveness, answer came to him in the sudden uprising of every member of the congregation. This inspired old man was gathered to his fathers. He was greatly

missed. Even little children mourned him, and for a long time the mention of his name brought tears.

In those days seldom was an aged minister cast off by his people because of his years. He was more apt to be endeared to them by his infirmities, and his speech to grow weighty with them in proportion to his past work and experience. The deference paid to him, especially by the young, was extreme. His learning, his freedom from coarser toil, his better attire, exalted the minister's vocation at any time of life; and when to the superiority of it was added the venerableness of years, he became to them a true patriarch; like the priests of old, as one ordained of God and not of men.

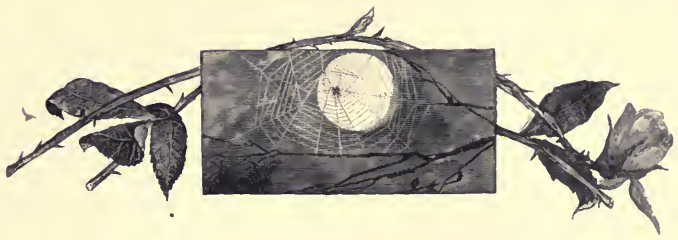
My grandfather's minister, when I used to visit the farm, was a trembling old man, with broken voice; but the thought of his dismissal never entered the mind of one of his hearers, and to talk of his death as a near probability cut their hearts as a personal bereavement. Gray-haired women spoke of him as belonging to a past generation. He had buried their parents, had given them in marriage, and brought his wisdom to bear upon the good and evil experiences of their after-life. He had been an eloquent man, and the inspiration of his speech had not yet quite left him. Indeed, there could be no eloquence more effectual than the simple appeals which came from the pious hearts and truthful lips of such well-tried pastors. From living so long with one people, they grew into their lives. There could be no joy or sorrow in the parish in which the beloved pastor was not called to share. The average sermons of those days,

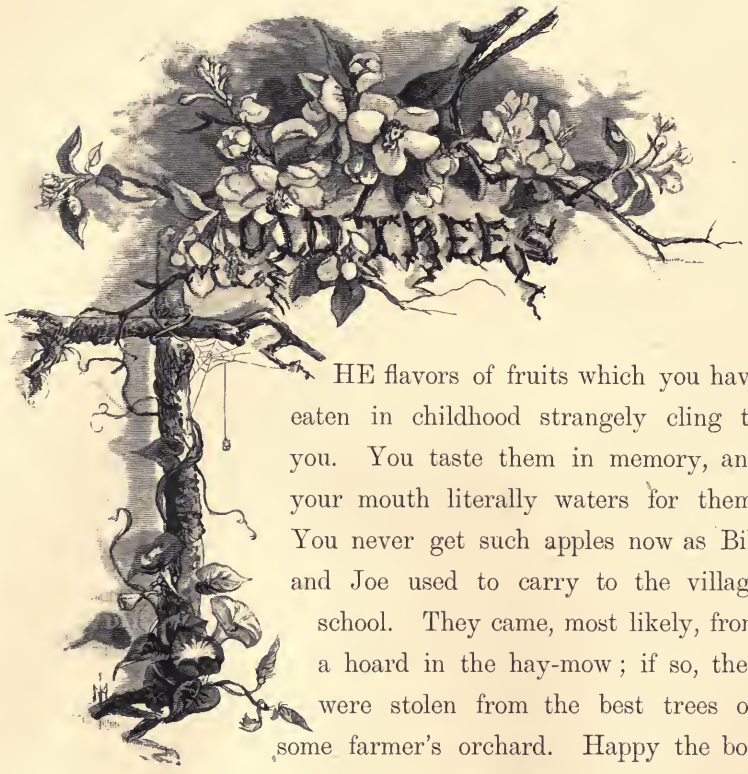
measured by rules of rhetoric, might, many of them, seem bare; but most of them were strong in logic, and they were all full of heart and truth, and so of power.

At noon, between Sunday services, the people scattered; in winter, with their lunch-baskets, amongst the nearest farm-houses; in summer the mothers, with their little ones, did the same, whilst the sturdy farmers lolled on the green. Lads and lasses strolled into the fields, where lovers sat down under the maples and oaks, or the willows by the brook-side. Children and sober maidens, like Hannah, were apt to turn into the churchyard. Many of the meeting-goers had some precious spot in that earth, and they never seemed to tire of reading the legends on the unpretending stones.

After the hour's nooning came the afternoon's service, just as long and strong in doctrine as that of the morning, and woe betide the uneasy youngster or dozing farmer upon whom the tithingman's watchful eye might fall. Sweet were the homeward walks, when lovers loitered and parents grew less austere. The rest of the day was wellnigh past, but its peace lingered. Its waning light fell with a soft glow upon fields and highway and home-bound worshippers. The latter, for a few transient hours freed alike from the cares which were past and the cares which were to come, grew kindly affectionate one towards another. This new-born life was decorous and sweet. Children joined one another; young hearts went out to meet young hearts; and, at the end of every green lane, neighbors parted with hand-shakes and good wishes. While this pleasant pageant was pass-

ing from the highway, the herds came up from the pastures. The duties of the new week crowded up to the twilight of the old Sabbath, and shortly the highway was deserted and silent.





THE flavors of fruits which you have eaten in childhood strangely cling to you. You taste them in memory, and your mouth literally waters for them. You never get such apples now as Bill and Joe used to carry to the village school. They came, most likely, from a hoard in the hay-mow; if so, they were stolen from the best trees of some farmer's orchard. Happy the boy or girl who innocently ate of the mellowed apples of such a hoard, which had been forced into ripening in their nest of dried grass. Their flavors were shut in by darkness, and their scents and tints, which would have exhaled in daylight, passed permanently into them. Their pulp melted and trickled through the fingers of eaters, with a deep color and a far-reaching

odor. Brought out from the pockets of boys and girls, they were as bright and fresh as the eyes which longed for them.

Straying through a field or pasture in childhood, you have come upon a wild tree loaded with fruit, of which you have plucked and eaten. You were hardy and hungry, and they seemed to you the best apples you had ever tasted. Passing that way in after-years, you call to mind this fruit's high relish, and are curious to try it again. You find the tree, half rotten, but its live limbs still bearing. You search in vain for apples like the old ones. You fling them from you by the dozens, for you find them all, whether on the tree or on the sod, sour and knotty and mean. You wonder whether the fine flavor has gone out of the apple with the decay of the tree, or a keen appreciation has gone out of you. No matter which; once you liked it, and the tradition will always be a real and pleasant thing. Fruit tastes better picked up from a sod. A yellow apple bedded in a tuft of green grass, besprinkled with dew, and crisp with early ripeness, palatable as you snatch it, may be a crabbed thing when bought from a huckster's stall. I used to eat freely of sweets and sours in my grandfather's orchard, and daily made its round, thrusting aside the grass for windfalls, puckering my mouth with acrid juices, flinging clubs and stones at favorite branches, and filling my pocket with fresh-fallen fruits. Very few of its apples were positively uneatable. This one might set your teeth on edge, or make your throat tingle, but you were likely, the very next time you passed the tree that bore it, to snatch at the same branch for the sake of the smart. Apples

which, when carried into the house and left lying about for a day or two, were thrown away as useless for cooking, picked freshly fallen from the earth had a keen, spicy tang, pleasant if sparsely taken.

There is hardly any wild apple so worthless than in it does not lurk a latent sweetness, waiting to be let loose by some condition of time or place, a racy and transient flavor to be caught on the wing. A toothmark sufficed for some of my grandfather's apples, for others a single mouthful; many were to be half eaten,—wormy windfalls, for instance, and the fruits of certain trees with sodden, watery cores. Others, mild and fine-grained, were relishable close up to the hulls. A few, compact with malic worth, seemed utterly to dissolve. Such fruit was to be found here and there in all old orchards, the delight of children, and oddly named by farmers' wives, pudding-sweets, long-noses, red-cheeks, and the like; wild apples, not large, but well-shaped, finely colored, and of good grain. Paths went straight from the back-doors to these trees, and the grass under them was matted and tangled. Trails were apt to lead from them to gaps in the walls, and much of their plumpest fruitage found its way into the hoards of thieving boys. The rich flavor of them all was due to their utter freshness. The true aroma of any fruit comes from the life of it,—life drawn from the sunshine, the showers, the air, and soil of its own locality. When you pluck it it begins to die. It follows, then, that the products of your own soil give to you alone their true ownership, and the finest reward of your tillage is that to you only can they offer their unimpaired juices.

I knew a tree once—old when I first saw it, dead now—which stood in an angle of a country garden. Close in the corner was a rhubarb-root, and along the fence a row of currant-bushes; rank growths all of them, but good hiding-places for windfalls. Never was a tree so beset and persecuted as this. Its higher branches always hung full of forked sticks; the hard-trodden sod under it was thick with leaves, and the currant-bushes and rhubarb-root were trampled and torn. Three or four of its huge branches stretched over the fence, and the smart-weed bed underneath them was always hunted by eager children. Long poles were lying about outside, which, after all the apples had been knocked from these overhanging branches, were slyly thrust under the fence for more, and this was called "hooking" by the young pilferers. This apple-tree made early risers of the children of the house which owned it; and after a storm sharp was the contest for the gathering of its windfalls. It had a slow decay, a natural kind of ageing, and left off bearing limb by limb. The sparser its fruit was the more precious it grew, and the last few apples of the season were always the best esteemed of all. They were truly wonderful apples,—piquant things,—small, bright yellow without, mottled with brown-edged, crimson spots; snow white and sparkling within; tasting best when knocked out, late in autumn, from the fork of some high-up branch. It was only a great, wild apple-tree, but it grew into the life of the house, and the whole summer long gave to it a surprising measure of beauty and comfort. Its blossoms were of pink and white, the prettiest of their kind,

and they perfumed a whole village. The setting of its fruits was the delight of all the neighbors' children, and the giving of them, when ripened, became a hospitality. They were thick and beautiful amongst the green leaves, and the underlying sod, enriched by them, was the best-beloved spot of the whole garden.

Ungrafted trees have a riotous way of growing, making up in size what they lack in fruitage; and the thinnest-bearing of them, when in blossom, perfumes the air as sweetly as the best. The trees in my grandfather's orchard which bore the meanest fruit seemed to have the most and brightest blossoms, and for a few days were the glory of the landscape. You can never forget the scent of apple-blossoms; nor, when once seen, the beauty which is given to plain things by them. An old apple-orchard has a pathetic interest. Its trees decay slowly, lingering after those who planted them, with gnarled trunks and distorted limbs, keeping watch over the ruins of deserted homesteads. If you see a few, solitary, half-dead apple-trees in a field, or stumps of trees buried in suckers, near them you will be quite sure to find a cellar,—filled with stones and bricks and tangled wild-growth,—the site of an ancient home. You may find these dying old trees overhanging the walls of grass-grown country highways. If you will dislodge their tumbled fruit from between the stones, you will often be well repaid by their wild and racy flavor. Even if you cannot eat them, they are pleasant to look upon; and the tree which, in all lands, best holds its own, which seems nearest to you, is the tree which has always been a generous giver to you, the homely, grateful, apple-tree.


Chas. H. Smith

Best of all orchards, my grandfather's, full of great trees, waxing old and weak; with their trunks rotted, their barks shaggy, their limbs all dead at the ends. Dear old orchard, with your smooth turf, your many fierce-fruited trees, your few but sufficient ones bearing apples of rare worth! Going back in memory to your gathering, I walk straight to the sweet trees and the sour trees of your best repute. I hear the thud of your brimful carts, pouring their loads into the press, and see busy hands heaping up the fallen fruit. The gifts, that the summer suns and winds and rains have given to you, lie beautiful upon the earth, in balls of crimson and green and gold. Your yearly mission is over, and the air is fragrant with the life that has passed into them and out of you, with the growing and ripening of the year. I forget,—the thing was and is not; the harvest was bountiful, and was gathered in; the trees waxed old and died.

On the side of the orchard nearest the house a row of later-planted trees had been grafted, but with so little care as to stock that their fruits were no better than cross-breeds, with a strong leaning to native wildness. Moreover, the trees themselves, too old for the process, did not take to it. They were unhealthy and tricky of bearing, and seemed to be trying to thrust off their superadded branches. Many of the oldest trees were rotten to the core, yet still persisted in bringing to the orchard their yearly gift of leafage, flower, and fruit. After a strong wind it was always feared that one or more of them would be found prostrate upon the ground. The fall of one sent a thrill of sorrow through the household. It was sure to have been endeared by some tender

association, had been marked by a name, and was not lightly to be parted with. It was pitiful to look at its branches, heaped and crushed, covered with their last greenness; its trunk jagged and rotten; a worthless wreck to be put out of sight.

The wild pear was a hard, uneatable thing, properly called choke-pear. Unlike the apple, it never surprised you by any palatable variations, and, save that the housewives sometimes stewed it into a tolerable preserve, it was of little use.

The garden cherries of ancient homesteads were less untamed, more serviceable than the pears. Almost every garden held two or three trees, the fruit of which was much esteemed for cookery. This cherry was round, plump, richly red, and thoroughly relishable when plucked from the sunny side of a well-tended tree. A profuse bearer, this tree, with its high contrast of fruit and glossy, dark-green leaves, was an ornamental thing, often standing in the front yard of the house. It was apt to straggle in its growth and get shaggy as to its bark, but was pleasant to look upon from its white blossoming until it was stripped by the frost. It was an early bloomer, thrusting out its snow-white petals before its leaf-buds had burst open, almost the first floral gift of spring to the quickening life of the garden. All cherry-blossoms have an untamed look and scent, as if in them the richness and flavor which goes into later flowers had gotten snow-bound. They are very dainty; they come suddenly, and flutter and fall and melt away, as if they were really born out of frost-work. Little children used to carry sprays of them to school, and later they beset the trees for fruit, fighting with

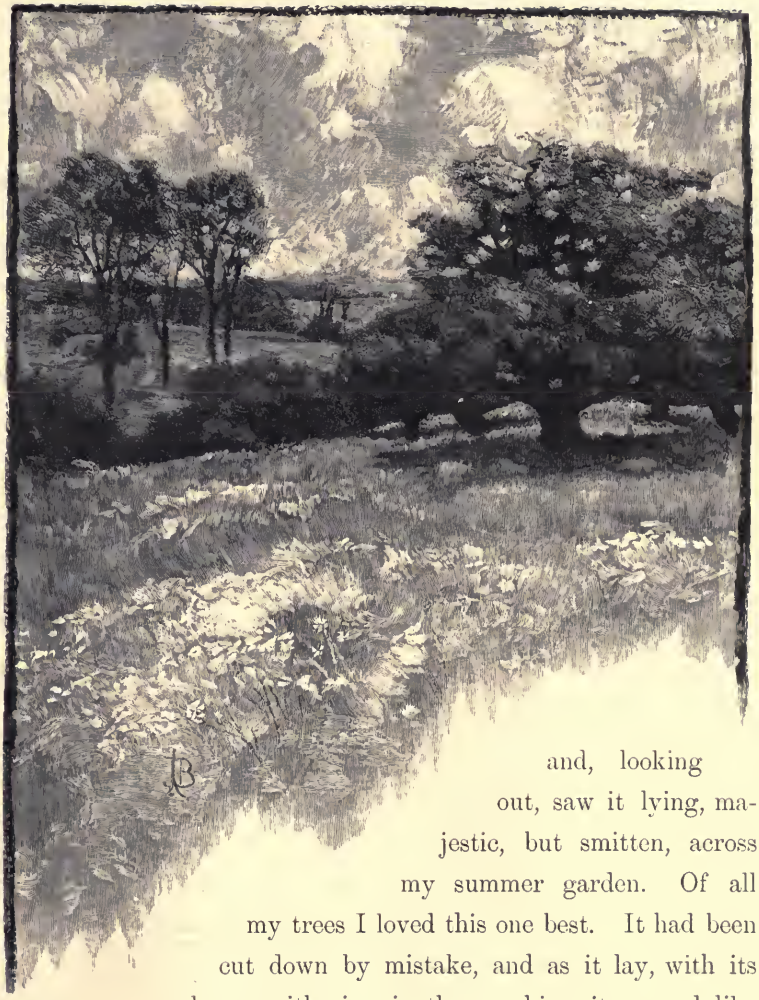
the birds for their short-lived harvest. I remember two great, scraggy, old trees, hard to climb, whose close-set branches nipped like a vice, but which held, quite up in the sky, fruit full of imprisoned sunshine. For several weeks, in cherry-time, they were noisy trees. There were always two or three children wedged between their forked branches, who chattered and ate and kept a flutter amongst the flocking birds.

Half-way between the house and woodland was a wild cherry-tree, which bore blossom and fruit with a riotous profuseness. The wild cherry was a savage of its kind. This one rose straight as an arrow from a heap of rocks; a tall, handsome tree. The rocks were matted with sumachs and blackberry-bushes, and the place was said to be snaky; yet it was lovely with its tree and shrubbery and white flowers, and was always strewn, in fruit-time, with broken twigs and forked sticks. The wild cherry is a prettier tree every way than the tame red. It is round-trunked, pyramidal, glossy-barked, with breezy, profuse, white blossoms and small black, graceful, clustered fruit, and it binds up in its fibres rare, healing juices. Black-cherry trees often stand thick along old walls, unnoted by the farmer until quite grown. They give to the rocks in spring a beauty which the sumach, with its crimson leaves, gives in autumn; for a few days they outline a field with their pure white, pendulous blossoms. Their fruit looks toothsome, but is pungent and acrid; yet, like the wild apple, when plucked from the sunny side of a tree, in field or pasture, it would not fail there to please you. Nobody ever plants wild cherry-trees, but they spring up freely in out-

of-the-way places. Close by fences and in rock-heaps, they easily escape hostile ploughs, and thrust themselves picturesquely out of the rubbish of a field into the features of a landscape. They are hardier and less liable to disease than the garden species, and the balsam which runs in their veins is not of more worth than are their varied aspects of beauty.

Plums were once raised with little care in extreme New England. Peaches were also an infrequent growth. Black gum has nearly killed out the former; severe winters the latter. Like all later-maturing fruits, ripened under the slow processes of a New England summer, the plums were pulpy, fine-grained, and delicious. They are to be regretted, as the one thing which, in this bleak climate, simulated a tropical fervor. My grandfather's half a dozen plum-trees, when last seen, were black, blighted and unsightly; and the single peach-tree had dwindled down to suckers, sprung from the past winter's blight.

But after all the tree which has best stood wear and tear, which presents itself to me, seeking for it, with the most familiar aspect, is the butternut-tree by the well. No matter how rotten its core is, how ragged its branches, I love its old age even better than I did its youth. Next to that my heart goes out to the trees, spared by the woodman's axe, in the woodland beyond the orchard. I saw a strong man once crying like a child, because of the cutting down of an old tree upon his lawn. He said all his children had played under it, and it was a part of his life. I felt sorry for him, for his grief brought back to me the morning when I missed my great maple from my chamber window,



and, looking out, saw it lying, majestic, but smitten, across my summer garden. Of all my trees I loved this one best. It had been cut down by mistake, and as it lay, with its leaves withering in the sunshine, it seemed like a murdered thing. It was lost from my window; it was gone from the landscape; it had been cruelly torn from the remem-

bered image of a dead child,—this speechless yet speaking thing, which had grown into my heart.

Trees have their social aspect. Many have been intimately known by me; solitary trees, and clumps of trees, and forests of trees, memorable by association. How you love to recall the trees which grew about your old homestead! You were drawn to them by little things. In the forked branch of this you watched a bird's nest, out of the rotten trunk of that grew a thrifty fern, here you perched aloft, there you swung. In varied ways the rugged old trees catered to your young delights and wants, and grew beautiful and dear to you. Trees were my childhood companions, constant to me and I to them. I learned their tricks of costume and ways of growth. I cannot this day tell in what dress I loved them best; whether in the tender green of spring, the deeper colors of later days, the crimson and gold and russets of autumn, or the soft grays of the dying year. There were groups of trees in pasture and lowland at my grandfather's, which are joys of memory, because of rare shadings and colors which were cast upon and overlapped into them by the passing of the seasons. There were four trees standing in the middle of the rocky pasture whose interlocked branches were unfolded, like the pages of a richly-illuminated book, by the autumn ripening of their leaves. Standing by themselves, they were the most prominent things to be seen, bright as flame in the sunshine. They were yearly emblazoned upon the gray pasture, and it was as if the condensed richness and ripeness of the year had poured into them its old wine.

All woods have their speech: grim old woods, tangled and matted and solemn and dark; treacherous woods, wet and mossy and full of pitfalls; odorous woods, bright with ferns and flowers and streaks of sunshine.

Looking at painted forests, there are apt to come to me things never put upon canvas; such as the sweet odor of a smoking, resinous wood, caught at midnight from a burning forest; a subtle, far-reaching, never-to-be-forgotten scent, the breath of dying pines. With the scent comes also a little cottage planted against a savage background of blackened trees and smouldering sod, a weird forest night scene, burned into a child's imagination. No country habitation could seem more alone than this house at midnight, close by the highway, in the heart of a forest, dimly disclosed by moonlight, its lamps all out, its tenants sleeping, so lonely, so fragile, so exposed, and yet so peaceful, so strong, so safe, respected by man's humanity, watched over by God's providence.

Of all voices of the woods and the night, the low wail of the whippoorwill is the saddest. It was a bird of ill omen to farmers' wives, and the woodland passed into evil repute because it was haunted by one. Any sound thrust in a forest upon the silence of night is positive, and what would be unnoticed in the daytime becomes a terror or a support to the benighted traveller. The thud of his horse's hoofs and the rattle of his wheels do not shut out the slightest crackle of twigs, and he hears many strange sounds which he cannot disentangle from the darkness.

I hear, as if just passing it, on my way to my grandfather's,

in the heart of the long forest, the lapping of a pond at night upon its shores. The horse shies at the waves and the driftwood, the wheels grind into the sand. The bridge at the outlet is said to be treacherous, and the outlet itself is sullen and dark. In the mile-away horizon the moonlight brings out the one little cottage by the inlet, within a stone's throw of which its owner went down through a yawning breathing-hole, into which he had driven from across the pond one cold winter's night. My companion tells the old story, and adds to it later accidents. Meanwhile we near the bridge and the inlet, which seems to yawn to swallow us in. We urge the horse carefully, and he, with half-human instinct, plants his feet reluctantly upon the bridge. It sags to one side, and the water ripples past the wheels. We hold our breaths for a minute, and then the passage is made. It was a foolish thing to do, but the risk gave to me a remembered rare voice of a solitary old wood.

THE DISTRICT SCHOOL.

EE the children as they used to come from the village school,—a noisy little mob, ripe for mischief. A wagoner drives along. The boys swarm upon his cart like bees, tangled together and dangling behind with scarred and mud-stained feet. The farmer either "whips behind" or leaves the struggling mass to disentangle by a gradual dropping off. The children who were left stop a moment. Poised, expectant, they all stand, until some foremost fellow plunges his broad bare feet into the hot, soft sand, scoops it along, and flings it aloft. Away they all rush, with a whoop and a hurrah, ploughing along the road, half smothered by the dust they fling about them.

Nothing could be more charming than the groups of school-bound children in early summer mornings, simply clad, chattering like magpies, making the air ring with their laughter. Their

prattle was mostly of flowers and birds; of the treasures of fields and pastures and woods, and their many little adventures in their close dealings with nature. They were as hardy and untrained as the mullein and hardhack and wild rose of the unploughed roadside; and they were as sweet to look upon as were the blossoms of these weeds.

In summer the scents of fields and woods used to get into the school-rooms; especially of the ferns, which sprang up all along the stone walls, by the roadside, and in the damp, shady corners of the fields. What country-bred child does not remember these tender, dainty roadside ferns which the children used to stick in the seams of their desks, and into every available crack in the school-house walls? Beds of them grew crisp in a field back of the school-house in my grandfather's district, where the grass around them was above the heads of the smaller children. The man who owned this field was at war with the scholars, for they would pluck the ferns, and the way to these led through his tallest grass. A wild cherry-tree stood in the centre of this field, and its ragged wall was covered with berry-bushes. When it was mowed scythes were tripped by hard-trodden trails, and the old farmer was heard to say to his men one summer that "the young cusses" had cut up his field like a checker-board. He hacked up the fern-bed, cut down the cherry-tree, and tore up all the wayside berry-bushes. But dear old Mother Nature outwitted him, and the next year the ferns came up again as rank as ever; strawberries and wild-flowers grew where the trees and bushes had been; the eager children

made new trails after new things, and crisscrossed the field worse than ever.

There was something delicious to the children in their stolen marches upon this forbidden field. I see them now, leaping at recess past the gap in the wall (that gap which would never stay mended) into their trails, neck deep in grass, tumbling and

tripping as they went. Their faces are beautiful, framed in memory by the ferns and grains and grasses of long since dead harvests; they bring with them an Indian summer afterglow of sentiment.

The school-house yard was a sunny spot, defined by four flat corner-stones, good for the game of goal, crisscrossed by two hard-trodden paths, and littered by loose-lying sticks and pebbles. Its stone wall was jagged, thistle-lined, and much beset by bees.

In the corner next to the school-house was an ever-present gap. You know how handy such wall-holes used to be in your childhood; how your bare feet clung to the smooth rocks, which had tumbled to the other side. You have doubtless yourself helped make them in pasture boundaries, or been the bruised victims of unpremeditated breaks. Nobody ever seemed to know how this hole came. It was a school mystery, incessantly mended and as incessantly undone.

Close by this gap was one corner of the goal-ground. The lively game of goal was played by the girls at recess, the largest ones claiming the stones and right of way. They flew eagerly from rock to rock, cheeks aglow and hair streaming. The smaller girls either watched them or strayed alongside forbidden fields for wild forage. The game of goal was too tame for the boys, who, when their turn came, rushed uproariously out, skimmed along the walls, tumbled with somersaults into the fields, hurrahed up and down the highways, irresponsible, dirty, happy; seldom getting through recess without a free fight. The small boys played marbles on the sunny door-steps, or exchanged pocket treasures around the school-house corner. When the teacher's knock put an end to the uproar, they tumbled in as they had tumbled out, marvellously disentangling at the threshold of the school-room.

The teachers of the winter schools were a mixed race. Well-educated farmers sometimes eked out their incomes and filled up their winter leisure by teaching school. Such were always savage disciplinarians. A boy seemed as tough of hide to them

as "Cherry" and "Brindle," who drew their carts. They were fertile in punishments and cruel with the ferule,—green, birchen, supple ferule, used for the tingling and blistering of so many outer integuments. These teachers were apt to be nasal readers, but they were infallible in spelling, geography, and book-keeping. They were not much given to oral instruction, but followed one up closely in the multiplication table, abbreviations, and laws of punctuation.

The village teachers were called masters and mistresses, for many of them a fitting title, mimic despots as they were. Often bright young men, for the sake of the meagre pay, taught these schools. They were apt to have a hard time of it, and had to be strong of muscle and will not to get "smoked out," or unmercifully bothered by uncouth tricks. The winter schools were rough. Farmers' boys, freed from work, many of them grown to man's estate, flocked to them with slate and copy-book and text-books, to lay up that stock of school learning which was to make them oracles in the village stores, moderators in town-meetings, and representatives to general courts. They were difficult to manage; puzzled the master with hard sums and knotty questions, and roared out their conceits like young giants. They stamped through the snowy entries, shaggy-coated, puffing like engines, rubbing their frosty ears; uncouth, yet honest, patient, and full of a rude humanity; worthy, hard-working farmers that were to be. Here and there one different from the rest, a "queer fellow," so called, drifted apart from his schoolmates, so that, years after, they were wont to turn wearily from

their ploughs and boast that in boyhood they had mated with a famous man.

The zeal of all of them was great after learning. Their patience was pathetic. The dullest of them hacked away at their books as doggedly as they did in summer at the rocky soil. Passing along the highway in winter evenings, you might behold, through the exposed windows of farm-houses, young boys deep in their tasks, by the light of tallow-candles and open fires; and it was pleasant to see the "old folks" watching them with a sweet pride, only surpassed by the conceit of the young learners. The books they used were few and seldom changed; but they seemed then to be good enough, and the recitations from them were the best of their kind. These district schools were nurseries of talent and ambition. Their conditions of severity and restriction have sent forth great and famous men. The most laggard scholars were yearly bettered by them, and the bright ones got from their three or four winter months of hard study as much as most boys and girls get nowadays from nine months' tuition.

The discarded books of these schools are often found in the closets and garrets of old farm-houses, with their thick brown covers and worm-eaten leaves. Their text is of quaint lettering, but their sense is unabated by time, and one feels tempted to go back to the use of these potent things of the past, whose obsolete rules have taught so many wise men. Turning them over and following them is like talking with friends who, long ago, helped to make us what we are. Did you never, in later

life, run across a reader (long since out of print) which was used by the schools of your youth? Its pages seem as familiar to you as nursery rhymes, and you feel towards it as tenderly almost as if it were a human thing,—this stilted old reader, whose solid literature was one of the stumbling-blocks of your childhood. You have not forgotten its standard declamations and dialogues, thrillingly rendered by loud-voiced boys and girls; and the oft-repeating of its much prose and rhyme made you forever intimate with them. The names of men who made your school-books are household words to you, and when you would teach your children, your tongue trips upon the rules which they taught you.

What unpenned literature is bound up in books! The stories printed on their pages are often less pathetic, less tragic, than the real life scenes which touch or sight of them can bring back to you. I confess to an awe in handling ancient books, and follow their tender, mouldy pages as if I were in the presence of their past owners. The fading names upon their fly-leaves have the helpless significance of all memorials of the dead. There is a sad delight in rummaging through an old library,—in dragging out from corners and upper shelves volumes tucked away as worthless, but redeemed into preciousness by past use of them. Books that you used in your school-days, you curiously turn over for the marks you left in them. Gift-books, which have been thrust aside, are taken back, for the memory of him or her who wrote upon their blank leaves pleasant messages. Guide-books and books that you read upon journeys thrust their titles

upon you, and set you again on your travels. Books once read with friends quicken your memories of social life. Books with strange names in them, picked up from stalls, affect you like human waifs; and ancient books, of quaint dialect, like ghosts of the past. But before all others are the books which never get tucked away in corners; those which were read last by the loved and lost. How many have such, with marks left in; pencil touches; a stray letter; names scrawled,—pitifully meagre, unsatisfactory traces of hands which can never again turn them! Take from me my books, most of them, if you will, but do not dare to touch the precious volumes in blue and gold turned slowly over by the fingers of my dying child. They left no soil on the page, but their sacred imprint is no less indelible to me. Dear old books, all of you,—no matter how much your printed leaves lie, the overlapping text, legible alone to faithful love, can never be false! You may grow mildewy and musty, but ever tender and beautiful shall be the associations with which you are bound.

Ancient school-houses were not built for comfort. Their seats were high and narrow, their desks awkward and inconvenient. Their chimneys were large, fireplaces broad and smoky, and the floors in front of them were sure to be worn with the tramp of uneasily-seated children, who in winter went up to them in never-ending procession. The worst-used place in the whole district was the school-room. Youngsters hewed and hacked at their desks with a revengeful persistence. The plastering of the walls was covered with rude inscriptions, and the ceiling overhead

bespattered with ink and paper squibs. No boy or girl ever plead guilty of any of these mars and blots, but many additions went each term into the aggregate of this spontaneous frescoing. The old school-room in my grandfather's district was full of

scrawls and names and quaint maxims. Almost every teacher had his or her profile in it, done in tolerable outline by roguish fingers. No law had force against this custom. The scribbling of the school-room had become a second nature to the scholars, and it seemed less culpable because the rough, blotched walls

upon near inspection resolved themselves into art exponents of child-life; made up of outline leaves and flowers and birds and scraps of rhyme,—crude pictures of what had gone into and out of the children's days. The marring of school-rooms thus, in one sense, becomes their embellishment. The names, whittled indelibly into desk-lids and door-posts, and all the traces of by-gone child possession,—these are the true ghosts of scholars and school-days that are past.

In summer the rows of small, opposite windows in old school-houses, open upon the children's necks, inured them to draughts; and nothing could be purer than the breezes which blew from every quarter of the heavens into these wide-opened rooms. In winter up the big chimneys went most of the heat, and with it all the bad air; whilst through cracks and chinks without number blew the biting but health-giving north wind. It was hard on little boys and girls in corner-seats; but then they were all well wrapped up in homespun suits, and were always going to the fire to warm their tingling fingers and toes. Every comer into the room let in a blast of cold air. At recess the boys tumbled into the snow, and came back shaking it from their garments. Two or three deep in a semicircle they hugged the fireplace, and sucked at snow-balls crushed in their half-frozen fingers till the tap of the master's ferule sent them unwillingly to their desks.

The floor about the fireplace was always soppy in winter with incoming snow, and in summer was sure to be wet from slate-washings and the careless upsetting of dippers. Close by it,

upon a low bench, stood the water-pail, the filling of which on summer days was a rare privilege to the older girls. The spring was quite far away, close by the edge of a wood. It was a pretty sight to see them bursting into the school-room, staggering under their load: rosy, laughing, with their aprons full of flowers and mint from the brookside. The water of the spring had a snaky repute, but it was freely drank of by all the children, and in various ways catered largely to their comfort and delight. On hot summer days the larger girls used to splash it about, and it would trickle down the aisles to scatter in dust-bound globules over the dingy floor.

Peculiar, positive, and unlike any other, was at night the summer odor of these school-rooms. The thick dust, ground fine by the tramping of restless feet, elsewhere musty, here seemed to be scented with the withered roses and ferns and mint left behind them by the half-wild children. Apple-cores, scraps of paper, and bits of pencil were scattered about, and now and then the sweeper came across something from out the treasures of a boy's pocket. The latter often in school-hours found a way to the floor, and got lodged in the teacher's desk. It was curious to look into the children's boxes, and see in them how mischievous boys and girls had whiled away the laggard hours; how many apples and ginger-cakes had been slyly eaten, and cubby-houses built from books, unbeknown to the teacher. The desk of the latter, fast locked, was always fragrant with confiscated fruit.

The aspect of one of these rooms after the day's work was over was tenderly suggestive. It was a place out of which a

jocund life had gone, and the waste scattered around was made up of such things as the children had gotten out of their stay in it. There was something poetical in this leaving behind them the scents of the weeds and blossoms which they had plucked,—the fading memorials of the delights of a day that had passed.

The person who found solid comfort in the winter schools was that master who boarded 'round in country districts, and tasted the cream of kindness in farmers' houses. He sat in the best seat, in the corner, through winter evenings, book in hand, reserved, prim, feared, if not hated, by the youngsters. His presence quickened the life of a household. Best dishes were brought out, and dainties came upon the table. The "fore room" was most likely opened, and neighboring farmers came in of evenings to converse with this son of learning. The housewife was more spruce in her attire, and the children were "fixed up" for the occasion. Some of these masters were like watch-dogs, and from their corner no covert sneer escaped them. The hard school usage of many a boy and girl dated from dislike come of these transient tarryings.

The summer school-mistresses, mostly farmers' daughters, seldom brought much learning to their tasks, but they were generally good-natured, and in favor with their scholars. Hard-worked mothers sent their younger children to them as freely as if they had been hired nurses, and the lower row of seats was always full of the druling, sleepy little things, with legs helplessly dangling. Patchwork and samplers were allowed in these schools, and curious pieces of their faded old needlework

are still to be found in country farm-houses. The securing of the summer schools was often the cause of ill-feeling. Much canvassing was done, and committeemen were chosen with reference to particular candidates, who went before them to be examined in arithmetic, grammar, geography, and writing. The school pay was meagre, but a large item then to the girl of simple tastes and habits.

It was astonishing how much the glory of the summer depended, to the children, upon the nature of the mistress. All the sunshine they got in their school-hours seemed to pass through her; and by her disposition, as much as by the book lessons she taught them, she did her work at moulding their characters. A cross mistress turned their sweet into bitter, and made the otherwise happy days long and wearisome. The children took upon such their natural revenges. They brought her no flowers; they lagged at their books, and withdrew from the aspect of the room much of its wild summer adornments. But this was only a transient suppression; outside they were the same romping, riotous, nature-loving children.

If you have fortunately been one of these school-children, you recall the features and accidents of my picture,—the low-roofed school-house; its adjoining wood-shed, littered with chips; the beaten play-ground; the outlying field, full of buttercups; the wayside, thick with thistle and mullein and hardhack; the overhanging trees, the fallen fruit of which was lawful plunder; the near wood; the far-off mountains; the blue sky overhead; the sunlight; the shadows; the moving life of the scene. You see

the traveller coming down the thread of a highway on the distant hill; the farmer's daughter spreading her clothes to bleach in the orchard; working-men and oxen in the fields; the shimmer of the near stream. You hear the brook's babble and the hum of the insects; the song of birds and the drowsy undertone of nature. You see and feel it all,—the onward processes of life; the unerring growth of the year; the resistless tramp of time. Very much would you give to leap back for a day upon the old goal-ground, that you might lie upon the grass, a scholar and a dreamer, and again watch that narrow landscape, which grew into you with a fruitful minuteness, and which has been the stable groundwork of the best landscapes of your maturer life.

THE COUNTRY STORE

FORTY years ago the village store was the rallying-point of all the country round it. Such was William Saylor's of Whitefield Corner. The long bench for loafers, and the feeding-troughs for horses in front of its door, were no less its sign than was the painted board, on which was inscribed in gilt letters the owner's name. Bench loafers were perennial. They were the lazzaroni of village life; as much its grotesque embellishment as gargoyles were of gothic architecture. Three of them are distinctly pictured in memory upon the outside wall of William Saylor's store, against which in summer they used to sit and sun themselves, given to whittling and expectoration. Their intermittent talk was like the dull

drone of bees. With sluggish curiosity they eyed the passing traveller, and were somewhat stirred by the coming of the stage. Smoking blackened pipes with short stems, they occasionally exchanged what they called "chaws of terbaccer;" and with a dialect of their own, were of the class which has been the source of the slang so often falsely given in story as a type of the prevailing speech of old-time New England. These loafers were rarely disabled by liquor, but were spoken of as "soaked;" and even when past this recognized boundary of sobriety, were generally harmless. Nor were they lacking in a certain instinct of civility. If a comely matron or pretty lass alighted from her wagon before them, they forebore comment upon her charms until she was inside the store. When their bench had been usurped by their betters, they slouched across the way to the cobbler's shop or the tavern.

In haying and harvest times, when the laziest of them were absorbed into adjacent fields, William Saylor himself would come out and sit on the bench, waiting for such stray custom as dairy work or daily farm wants might bring to him. Nobody could seem less busy or more contented than he, basking in the sunshine. In truth, he was both busy and anxious. Alert for customers, he was reckoning his profits and forecasting future trade. He had some reputation for gallantry; but what shopper was ever harmed by his well-turned compliments? His graciousness was the more commendable because nature had marred his proportions by several deformities; otherwise he would have been, people said, a handsome man. His love of gossip was pro-

verbial. There was a Whitefield saying that what William Saylor did not know was "not worth knowing;" also, that no talking could go on where he was without his "putting in an oar." By the more worldly-wise he was called sharp at a bargain, but he was trusted by simple farmers' wives with credulity. The earliest remembered errand of most Whitefield children was to his store. His profits came in by cents; the abject industry of a whole year bringing him but a few hundred dollars. Yet he was looked upon as "well-to-do," for he lived generously in a large house, overhung by trees, and for years had been both postmaster and town-clerk. He was a tireless officer, ferreting out marginal writing upon newspapers, and exacting fines with relish.

Becky, his wife, was one of the neatest housekeepers in Whitefield. Her shining floors were the terror of dirty boys. Her garden, overlooked by the meeting-house, was a wonder and delight. Never were such double poppies and marigolds as it held; never such red apples, such purple damsons, such fat currants and gooseberries; and though its flowers jostled each other with odd variety of color, they were a great delight to uncritical eyes.

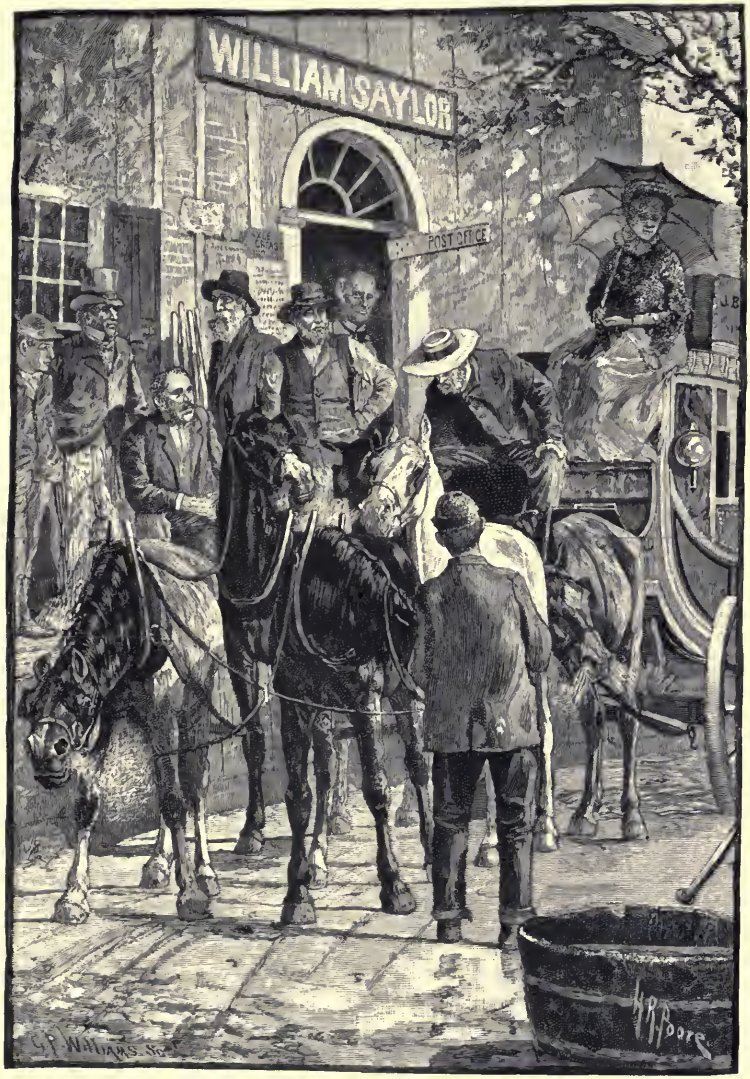
It had the name of being a stingy garden. Even windfalls by the roadside were begrudged the passer-by. That which was really its best fruit, however, could not be withheld,—that sense of beauty and luxury which went out from it into the hearts of tired women, who, in meeting-time, used to keep their eyes fixed upon its blossoms, while gratefully breathing its scents. As they

sat swinging great palm-leaf fans, with a sort of rhythmic motion, their patient faces, softened by the day's ease and contentment, were picturesque, and, in a measure, beautiful.

In a city, William Saylor, with his maimed body, would have been tossed about, an unknown waif, by its all-devouring current. In the little village of Whitefield, bolstered up by kind neighbors, his executive force was projected upon the surface of its life, an important factor. He was the spry, bustling, curious, kindly, courteous, loquacious storekeeper, who taught fashions with confidence and facility; grasping, yet trusted; oracular, but humble; fallible, while on the whole well-meaning; full of harmless conceit; unstinted in paying hospitality; half admirable; half grotesque. Peace to his ashes!

How many people, who are hidden away unnoticed in towns and cities, might, in the quiet of some country village, rise to a high individuality, and make a lasting impress on neighborhood life!

William Saylor always seemed to be hopping in and out his box of a counting-room, the walls of which were zigzagged with broad tape, stuck full of bills and letters. These were, for the most part, yellow with age; and the uppermost ones, with faded labels, had served as roosts for generations of flies. This littered room was the very heart of the village. Each day the stage-driver flung into it his mail-bag, which linked retired people to the wider world; and from it every night William Saylor carried in a small, leather-covered box, thickly studded with brass nails, the profits of his day's trade. How well I


WILLIAM SAYLOR
POST OFFICE

recall Moses, the stage-driver, as he dashes up, six in hand, with a loud "Whoa," almost flinging his leaders on their haunches! Windows swarm with faces; the loafers forget to puff at their pipes. Out flies a leather bag, caught by the postmaster halfway; and in a twinkling back it comes, little lightened by loss of the Whitefield mail. A snap at the heads of the leaders; a prancing; a dash,—away flies the coach in a cloud of dust, and the loafers settle back to their pipes. Later, in the silent, deserted street, William Saylor, holding tight his leathern box, spry as a cat despite his lameness, flits past closed houses to his home.

The stage-driver's bustle, the trader's caution, the coming of the mail, were but ripples from the great far-off tidal waves; and yet these ripples marked the day quite as much for the village of Whitefield as did the tidal waves for populous towns.

Over the store were two chambers, one of which was the office of an able, hot-headed lawyer, who had been heard through a hole in the floor threatening to kick an obstinate client downstairs. William Saylor was suspected of keeping an ear open to this hole; but secrets could go up as well as down, and though curious, he was discreet. Why it was never stopped can be no mystery to one country-born, who well remembers the tendency in rural life to drift with plans into the indefinite future,—to "put off;" a dallying due much to lack of means for execution; more to an instinctive acquiescence with the sluggish tide of custom; for thus one taketh his ease.

In the other chamber were kept farming utensils and such things as would crowd the store below. It was curiously rugged, and without like domestic associations, had somehow the atmosphere of a farm-house garret. It was humanized by a library of books, most of which had been in use for half a century. Long since mellowed, they had begun, many of them, to decay; and not one of them was so fresh as to seem out of place in this spot given over to cobwebs and dust.

The store-shelves rose from floor to ceiling, and were packed close with a medley of such things as the actual wants or mild vanities of a plain people might suggest. "Dry-goods" were arranged with some eye to effect. Red and blue and yellow fabrics made contrasting streaks, while various fancy articles dangled from thick-set hooks in partitions of shelves. Under the counters were odds and ends of traffic. Thence came cotton batting and "factory yarn," and woollen skeins spun by farmers' wives.

A peculiar odor pervaded the place. Sometimes it was of molasses, sometimes of fish, and again of tea or coffee. There was always a faint scent of snuff in the air. When the trap-door of the cellar, in which were kept the butter and pork, taken in barter, was lifted, there came up a strong smell of New England rum. The spigot of the molasses hogshead in the back part of the store seemed to be always drizzling into a tin measure, which in summer made an excellent fly-trap. The molasses had then a yeasty trick of foaming, and was apt to sour. Once in a while it "sugared."

The floor of that portion of the store given over to groceries became in time thick coated and almost black. Save for its daily sprinkling and sweeping, the place was perhaps never cleaned. Yet this gradual accumulation of grime was such a familiar feature of long-used, unpainted buildings of this sort, that I am not sure it would have been so well or gratefully remembered had it been robbed of its brown and cobwebby encrusting.

This all sounds homely; but you might search in vain on city streets for the mellow, pleasing aspect of an old-time country store. Entered by a narrow door; dimly lighted; full of oddly-mixed commodities; its unplastered ceiling black with smoke, and crossed by beams hung thickly with quaint things; rust and mildew lurking in corners and creeping along edges of shelves; shop-worn webs, the better for mellowing; fresh goods upheaving the older on the shelves, and easily traced in strata; the mysterious maw "under the counter;" it was as rich and warm in tone as an old Persian prayer-rug, and the barbaric flavor of its mingled odors was, strange to say, agreeable. It needed no show-window, for the woman who had once rested in its shade from the heat of the day never broke away from its charm. How many people pleasantly remember the calicoes of such stores, deep dyed in indigo blue and red; the bandanna handkerchiefs mottled with white; the cotton thread, knotted in "hanks" and exhausting the best range of color!

These old-time country stores, driftwood for a time of the

quickened current of isolated life, are nearly all gone. Their successors are garish and commonplace.

Twice a year William Saylor went by stage to Boston and bought a new stock, the coming of which, and its tossing about in bales and boxes in front of his store, was a village event. Not many high-priced articles found their way to Whitefield through him, his trade being mostly with farmers' families. In a row of drawers, however, were kept an occasional piece of silk, and a few webs of lawn and lace. The lawn was of good quality, and from it, when her turn came, she who had never known gay attire was sure to have her last robe decorously fashioned by loving neighbors. From the lace were made caps worn by matrons past middle life, the borders of which were prettily wrought with floss. Such webs were apt to get what was called "shop-worn." Yellow streaks went into them and indelible creases; positive tooth-marks of time.

William Saylor never abated his price because of these brands of long possession. He always assured women that they would "wash" or "wear out." Perhaps he had an artist's eye for the mellowing of his goods. How could he help loving that creamy tint,—that tint of perfection which creeps along its folds into meshes of old lace; indeed, into all long-woven undyed fabrics!

Sometimes, in unaccustomed ways of trade, strange articles found place upon the storekeeper's shelves, and were readily bought by innocent villagers. There was often peculiar fitness to proposed uses in the things thus taken up; isolation ever

forced new styles into congruity, or at least into lack of antagonism, with that intense personality which was wont to possess village people. Such portion of their attire as was meant to be ornamental became doubly so for its rarity.

All thrifty Whitefield women once carried beaded bags; bright woven things, come down as heirlooms. Again poke bonnets appeared, made from a ribbed, pale-yellow, paper stuff, in imitation of leghorn, and called Navarino; a pretty head-gear when it had been skilfully cut and sewed together.

Nothing could be homelier than the country wagon drawn up on a summer's afternoon in front of Saylor's store. While the farmer slipped the blinders from his horse and dealt out oats or hay, the housewife pulled from under the seat boxes and bundles, which the twain tugged up the store-steps with the laggard pace of hard workers. Before their barter had ended the horse had munched his oats, lapped his trough clean, and had begun to chew its wood. There were three of these troughs, much gnawed by cribbing horses. Trivial facts, yet chronicling to an observing eye a life current which, under more dramatic conditions, would have seemed motionless and stagnant.

The farmer and his wife stepped more lightly when they came out. Their bundles were smaller, and they had been enlivened by the sight of store-goods. Ploughshares and hoes, unsullied by use, had delighted the man's eye, while the housewife had feasted hers upon silks and muslins folded in the drawers.

There was something pathetic, almost sacred, in this aptitude to receive impressions from such simple sources. I have seen old-time Whitefield barterers, while handling with roughened fingers soft webs which rarely adorned other than village bridals or burials, seem as delighted by their touch as children are with toys. Then they pushed them away, took up the fruits of barter, and went home contented.

The corner on a late autumn day was like a miniature fair; then William Saylor had not a minute to spare from his twine and his yardstick. Incoming and outgoing wagons kept up a constant procession. Women pulled over his goods, and what they were too poor to buy they talked about with admiring neighbors. The men made their coarser purchases and lounged by their horses, while a row of loafers smoked and gossipped on the bench outside. I dare say not one of them took note of the beautiful outlying scenery; but they were none the less enframed and embellished by it.

Winter always sent the loafers inside, where they exchanged their bench for wooden-bottomed chairs around a roaring stove. Horses scenting littered oats and hay would stop of their own accord before the troughs; and a double row of them, shaggy with buffalo-robes, was often to be seen standing at the corner. With them came sleds full of wood, waiting for customers, and "regular teams" stopping for "bait." After Thanksgiving, before the roads began to drift, people were in the habit of going often to the corner. Their constant passing enlivened the highway; and sound of bells was grateful in a silence otherwise so profound.

Such silence always pervades in the open country a snow-covered landscape. In summer there is ever the drowsy undertone of growing nature, but winter is rest, and rest of nature is silence.

The still, moonlit, winter nights of Whitefield Corner were sublime. The high-perched little village, but a speck under the great arch of a glittering sky, with its wall of mountains, seemed sometimes nearer to the other world than this. The people and things I describe are pleasant, brown shadings of its white-winged memories. The apparent life of the villagers was restful and quiet; underneath was a strong still undertow. These simple-hearted people truly lay upon the bosom of nature. Hence came to them poetry and sentiment and a measure of sadness, resulting from undiverted companionship with her forces. They who floated, or were lightly tossed on the surface, were quiescent and happy. Only those who touched the undertow felt with pathetic, often tragic power, how small a relation their own little strand bore to the great ocean of life.

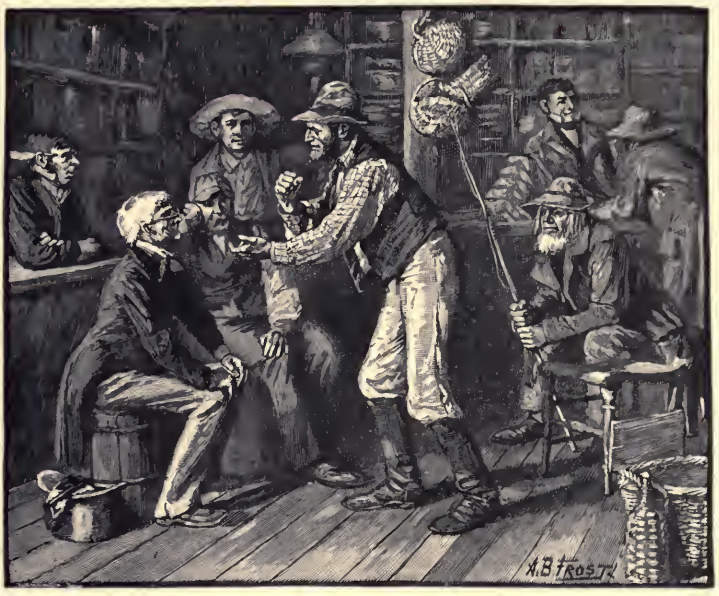
William Saylor's store was more than a lounging-place in winter. It was an unorganized lyceum, fed by the classic library shut up with the ploughs and hoes in its chamber. There a wise blacksmith and a well-read carpenter held high dispute with the college-learned lawyers and doctors, while a row of eager listeners sat perched upon the counters. Several men were absolute winter fixtures of the place. Old Squire Saylor, William's father, night after night growled his approval

or dissent from the self-same corner; and beside him, the "twin farmers" drifted into a serene old age. Most of his visitors were tireless whittlers, and kept Saylor well supplied with kindlings. A goodly-sized monument might have been built to the best lawyer from the pine sticks which he had pointed, through force of habit, in his not too many leisure hours. Unoccupied composure is the outcome of polite society. These villagers were possessed of the demon of work; and this whittling of the store loiterer was but the oozing through fingers' ends of ingrained force.

Farmers liked to drive hither on moonlit nights, to hear what they called "college learning." They had a way of saying to their "gudewives," "I guess after I've foddered the cattle and done up the chores I'll go to the corner." They talked there by themselves of stock and produce; of sickness and mortality; compared the girth of cattle; made note of prices; forestalled the weather; praised the work of wives and daughters, and sometimes the latest sermon; found little fault, and did little mischief by their chatter. A sudden coming in of the minister stopped all lighter talk, and turned the loafers into dummies. Shortly afterwards they carried to their homes a full news budget of harmless gossip.

The knot of wise men seen by the light of an oil lamp through a small eastern window of William Saylor's store made a quaint picture. Half of them were classically educated; all good thinkers, to whom the loafers were no more than warts of fungus to trunks of old oaks. They abstained from liquor, which

was then a common beverage, because of the dying entreaty of one of their number, with whom they had passed many jocund evenings over cards and wine. He warned them with awful emphasis, and nothing better illustrates their strength and in-



tegrity of nature than the fact that at the first real presentiment of danger they turned with the sharpness of a right angle into ways of utter sobriety.

The story of their reformation and its tragic cause was handed down with that distinct minuteness with which all village traditions are preserved. Upon the dying man's own testimony he

was given over to outer darkness; and children were told his last words as a part of their moral training. So much does a single life stand out in the country; no career is concealed, no death-bed curtained. All is open to the sun, which happily for many years after shone, in the little hamlet of Whitefield, on nothing so sad as this man's new-made grave.

Save the periodical sprees of three chronic tipplers, liquor seldom disturbed the quiet of the village street. Stinginess, and their own cider, kept farmers from indulgence. The temperance lecture of the brilliant, dying comrade controlled some; while others were restrained by that superior learning and consequent self-respect which before the days of railroads marked the professional men of country villages; such men as in William Saylor's store made a village autocracy, and were the fountain-head of politics if not of morals.

Before town-meetings, earnest voices might be heard through the closed door; and through the little window was seen much gesticulation. Brawling was infrequent; if, however, dispute rose above high-water mark, it spread like a civil war. Once a harmful bit of gossip exuding from the store, set two families at swords'-points for a generation. A severe breach was hard to heal. These same people, who were ordinarily unswerving in paths of rectitude, were apt to be as obstinate as mules when they went wrong.

As a rule the eager talkers were self-contained. Their most excited moods were easily calmed by stepping outside into the serene atmosphere of the village street. There all was peace.

Horses stamped the snow and jingled their bells; the same moon and stars that looked down upon the splendor and traffic of great cities smiled on the quiet village of Whitefield Corner; where women and children watching the night would say, "It can't be late, for there's a light in William Saylor's store."

At nine o'clock Saylor always shut his window blinds. Then the talkers and their listeners always went home. The horses were unhitched; the lamp put out, and almost before the store-keeper had withdrawn his door-key from its socket, women would begin to call out, "It's bedtime, for William Saylor's is shut up."

How many of you have known such a store, into whose threshold and floor the stream of a bygone village life has worn its path! It can never be repeated. The conditions of its existence are passed. Never again will the women of Whitefield innocently shape their own fashions. They are no longer shut in from the prying eyes of the outer world; nor yet, alas! from its pomps and vanities. A way has been opened for them into the very heart of the land.

But where is the heart of the village? Absorbed; only the ghost of a memory haunting the ghost of a store! Years ago, the lamp which sent out its beams through that little window cheered a whole landscape,—a great white landscape, high up; shut in; a calm retreat of untroubled minds. The snow and the silence remain, but the simplicity, culture, and comradeship, fostered by enforced isolation, are gone.

THE LIGHTS ARE OUT.

AFTER THE SUMMER.

LOCUND country harvests; blessed dying days of the spent year,—how delightful, seen from an upland, was the exuberance of your finished vegetation! Farms were like gardens, with patches of corn and later grain and clover and soft-tinted second grass. Orchards were full of apple-heaps; pumpkins and squashes dotted the fields: sumachs flaunted by the roadside and outlined the walls; forests were aflame; bushes kindled in field and pasture. The earth was alive with workers. The life of every household seemed to have poured itself out upon the landscape, to which, beyond the brightness given to it by the deep-dyed colors of the perfected year, was added that afterglow of the summer, which marks the true harvest days. These days are the richest of the year, for they hold its dying, its life, and its resurrection. They are full of its miracles. The incoming season is pushing out the old; and the husks which are thrust out in the process, the stubble of the

cornfields, the withered vines and weeds, the things that have been blighted by frost, or sapped by the fruits which they have borne, lie thick on the brown earth. The refuse of the outgone life and its incoming fruits are fused together in a sort of mellowed glory,—a final and transient burst of brightness from the spent season, which is giving back to the farmer tenfold for his labors.

To one driving at night through the country, what can surpass its beauty, the offspring of its devastation? Over all, fair and solemn and stately, watches the harvest moon. There is a gray glitter to everything. Objects bristle in the clear, cold air. Shadows beset wood and highway, and lie upon rock and hillock and field and pasture. Shadows lurk in corners, stalk before and stretch out behind. The whole landscape takes life. Trees and fences seem to move, and far-away objects play pranks with your horse. Every sound is crisp in this night air. The frisking of your little dog through the wayside bushes snaps their twigs like the click of pistols. Anything stirring in the wood, or out of it, sends an echo flying over the resonant fields. Farm-houses and barns are bright with harvest lights. Distance and moonlight lend charm to mild festivities, and girls, seen from the highway, move and work amongst their sheaves with a classic grace. If the doors of the barns are shut, then from cracks and crevices and gable-windows streams the ruddy light, and merry as bells burst out the singing voices of young men and maidens. Their songs are mostly quaint ballads, swelling full upon the night air.

One of these old barns was an attractive place, with its ceiling

lofty and cobwebbed, its gable-windows far up and dusty and dim, its walls flanked on either side by solid mows of sweet-smelling hay, which clung to the boards and beams way up to the rafters. It was full of the odor of the dried ferns and flowers that had been entangled and cut down with the grasses; and ladders and

working-tools, leaning against its mows, blended in beauty with its many-shaded browns, as did every senseless thing and dumb beast and living man within its walls.

Behold an ancient husking-party,—merry gathering. The barn is dimly lighted by candles in tin lanthorns, hung high on pegs. The homely structure suffers a night-change into a lofty

hall, with arches and stained roof and fretted beams. A new life seems to be born into the withered grass. It clings to and twines about the jagged wood with a fantastic carving. A whole year has gone into the mixing of the colors of this picture, in the shadows of which sit the huskers of the corn harvest. The brawny arms of young men and the plump arms of maidens keep time to their music. Some are breaking the ears from the stalk; others are stripping the husks from the ear, lightening their tasks with the babble of flying tongues. Stout men bear brimful baskets of golden ears to the granary; heaps of cast-off stacks are made compact; crisp white husks pile up against the shoulders of the girls and fly about their ears; cheeks grow red and eyes brighten; spirits rise; jokes are cracked; pranks played; and many a flirtation plied with unconscious grace. The end comes at length, the last basket is sent out, the husking is over. The thrifty farmer, who has slyly put back his clock and delayed his supper, blows a horn, and just as the lanthorns begin perhaps to wane, out from the barn burst the rustic merrymakers, eager for the harmless festivities of farm-house parlor and kitchen.

The supper is abundant, homely, and wholesome, and the huskers, with appetites sharpened by labor, partake heartily of it. The hardy workers keep no late hours, and midnight finds the farm-house silent and deserted, whilst groups of merry youths send their chatter and laughter echoing back from lane and field.

On the morrow the host will go out early to inspect his granary, and make right any careless assorting of ears. The stalks will

be stowed away on highest mow for future feed. If kindly disposed, he will leave the ragged butts to be picked over by careful housewives. How forlorn these women looked, with shawls pinned over their heads, rummaging for white husks; intent, silent, plying their task with bare and sinewy arms, their wrinkled, careworn faces tanned by exposure, it was hard to think of them as having once been rosy, laughing girls, handsome helpers at bygone huskings. They tramped along the highway with crowded baskets and bundles, satisfied, and unconscious that in thus taking up the fag-end of the harvest they were only gray workers and bearers of burdens. Their husks made sweet beds, and the mats they plaited were serviceable and cleanly.

Busy, prudent, working woman! the same thrift which has spread her joints and hardened her face has also helped to build her comfortable home. Here are the shining pans on the bench beside her; the kitchen-garden, just beyond, alive with bees; the water-barrel, half buried in sunflowers; the plantains and burdocks; the wood-pile, tossed about, with axe and chopping-block near it,—all incidents of a pleasant picture, for this is the back-door of a farm-house, and this woman the simple housewife, whose walk in life is with these homely things.

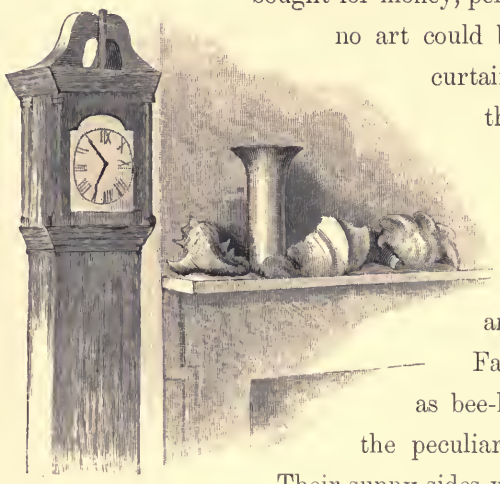
She was plump and fair and rosy-cheeked once. In childhood she roamed the fields and pastures, and went to the village school. As she grew older she had much heart in rustic merriment. She showed taste in dress and a love for flowers. A natural grace was born in her. Something called gentility came to her, so that

the garments she wore fitted and became her. She had her little romance, begun and ended at an apple-bee or husking. Dressed in her prettiest frock, with a bright ribbon at her throat, she was then most unlike this hard-faced woman standing by her door. Here she is a background to part of her belongings. She has burnished the pans, and weeded the garden, and dipped water from the barrel day after day. Suns have risen and set, years have begun and ended, and the wearisome cares have also come round in never-varying procession, until she has gotten to be what you now see her, a patient, faded worker,—the spinner and weaver and purveyor of a household.

These hand-maidens of nature, isolated from art, unconsciously expressed much beauty in their humble wares. The webs they wove were unadulterated, pliant, and lustrous; their dyes, drawn from homely weeds, were rich and tenacious; their polished bowls, scooped out from knotted wood, were prettier than any silver plate; their flax-wheels were stringed instruments; and many things of their daily handling were elegant for shape or color.

Who has ever seen a more pleasing sitting-room than that of many an old-fashioned country-house, with its deep-toned home-spun carpet, its dark mahogany, its tall clock in the corner, its narrow mantel, high up, filled with sea-shells and a stray vase or two; its low walls; its windows shaded by lilacs and over-hanging elms? The brass knobs on drawers and doors, and in chimney-corners, were pleasant spots of brightness. The brass-tipped, lion-clawed table-legs were the best-made things of their

kind. The clock in the corner, with its quaint machinery, its involved registering, and its loud ticking, was the unlying chronicler which was to last long after the family died,—a thing beautiful for the richness of its material and the stately expression of its form. A soft brown pervaded the room, which was brightened through its windows by more perfect landscapes than could be bought for money, perfumed by scents which no art could bind up for sale. The curtains and carpets, the threads of which were dyed with barks and weeds, had the wild color of things which had grown in fields and woods.



Farm-houses were busy as bee-hives in autumn with the peculiar work of the season. Their sunny sides were hung with strings of sliced apples and pumpkins; yards were littered with barrels and casks and loaded carts; sheds were crammed with the outpouring of the year. The women were eagerly taking up the loose-lying threads of their work, chopping, pickling, preserving, assorting their butter and cheese for the market, setting their dyes, and making their woollen webs into garments.

When the harvests had been gathered in, the mellow flavor of them seemed to pervade the whole house; and there was not

a room which was not in some way graced by the products of the past year. The garret was crammed, and the kitchen beams were hung thick with earth-grown things: strings of bright peppers, bunches of herbs, long-necked squashes, braided seed-corn, and much else precious to the farmer,—summer forage of his fields. The most valued gifts of his farm were kept here, in sight and out of reach,—the sacred seedlings of the coming year. The cellar beneath was full of the fatness of the past season. From its bins came the odor of many field crops; out of casks and barrels the scent of the year's vintage.

The farmer is planted in his chimney-corner. His year's work is over, his harvest is gathered in. Asleep by his hearth-stone, with the ruddy firelight dancing over him, he is a picture of calm content,—an honest man, with few wants, enriched by nature, and so made happy by her. His room is also fire-gilded into a place of rare delight. The fruits which he has by hard labor wrought out of the earth's bosom, strung over and around him, cling like carved things to the beams and walls; so that, without knowing it, this homely man sits, a life study, by his own hearth-stone.

With the ending of the harvest peace seemed to fall upon the farm-houses; they were filled with the glow of blazing fires and the inturning of the out-of-doors life. It was a simple, sweet life. Memories of winter evenings spent at my grandfather's come back to me. They bring to me the glory of age, the simplest forms of domestic life, and the beauty of winter landscapes. They give to me a perfect fireside picture in a quaintly-

furnished room, in the chimney-corner of which sits an old man with flowing white hair, a beautiful old man. Outside, to the far-away horizon, stretches the undulating, snow-covered landscape, on which, in gray outline upon a white ground, one sees many beautiful things which were hidden by the verdure of summer; many shapes which have been revealed by the dying of leaves and grass. Skeleton trees and bushes and naked woods seem to be thrust out in aerial mezzotint—soft, gray, and shadowy. The piercing firelight streams through the windows, and stretches out and joins hands with the moonbeams, and goes dancing over field and pasture, even to the far-off hills.

WINTER PLEASURES.

How utterly transforming to the country is the first positive snow-fall of winter! It is a thing of life; it clings and hangs everywhere. Its great, fluffy ridges and folds put out of sight fences and rocks and hillocks and highways, and bleach the gray

surface of the landscape into a dazzling whiteness. Under this new veneering the most untidy farm-houses are beautiful, and the worst-tilled fields as good as the best. Waking up into such a change some winter morning is like going into a new world. It is coming out from the gray mourning of the almost dead year into a sublime white silence.

Every country-born person can recall such greeting of an early snow, to meet which he has gone forth with elastic step and heart. Slowly and picturesquely motion is thrust upon the scene. Walkers, scuffling through the light snow, trail slender paths along; smoke coils from chimneys; cattle are let into the sunny barnyards; life spills out from the farm-houses; troughs are chopped free from ice; men begin to hack at the wood-piles and draw water from the wells; teams are harnessed; children start for school,—the new landscape is alive with workers, thrust out with startling distinctness from its snow background.

Directly off from roofs and fences and rocks and higher hillocks, with the sun's march, slips this snow covering, and from the beautiful, evanescent picture arises another, with added warmth and life and color. To one driving through a forest at such a time it is as if fairies had been at work and laden its minutest twigs with a rare white burden. Snow-clad old wood, through which I passed years ago on my way to my grandfather's farm, you are as lovely in memory as you were in reality then. It is early morning. The air seems to crackle with the magic of frostwork. Fleecy fringes are falling from the overburdened branches and fling over me great, foam-like

flakes; the horses' hoofs sink deep and noiselessly. Footprints of wild animals are thick in the wood, and all along the way-side are tracks of squirrels, rabbits, and such harmless things. Loaded teams grow frequent and sleighs fly past. The sound of bells is crisp and loud. Betsy pricks up her ears and flings out a spray-like cloud on either side. The little dog following after shoots over the wall, bounding neck deep into the unbroken snow, sniffs at the tiny footmarks of game, plunges into the wood, and I hear him barking shortly after far ahead. Twigs begin to snap. There is a crackle through the wood, the sun is climbing up, the snow is melting, and falling from the trees sinks with a fluffy sound into the cooler bed below. Sharp and distinct is the voice of this dissolving panorama. As the sun gets power the snow garment shrinks, and all of a sudden it glides off from the grim old wood.

Often a mist or rain, coming upon the newly-fallen snow, crystallizes it into solid shapes, and the sun gives to this frost-work a bewildering beauty. Nothing could surpass my old wood thus clad. It was a sublime, many-arched, crystal cathedral, outlined with flashing brightness. What a transient thing it was! As quickly as the sun gilded it, just so quickly did it demolish it. Glittering pillar and frieze and cornice suddenly disintegrated, and under the gray, naked, old trees thick-strewn twigs and fast-melting icicles were all that was left of this palace of carved ice.

How short the winter days used to seem! how clear-cut they were by snow and cold and lack of growing life! What winters

those were of forty years ago, when snow-drifts blotted out the features of a landscape and levelled the country into a monotonous white plain; when people woke in the morning to find their windows blocked up, and the chief labor of months was to keep their roads open!

Much joy the young people got out of these same snow-drifts. The crusts which hid the fences gave them ample coasting-fields, and they burrowed like rabbits in the drifts. I remember a village, beloved by Boreas, which was beset by mimic Laplanders, who used to call out to surprised travellers from their caves in the piled-up wayside. In this same village the adventurous boy used to shoot over highway and fence, across fields, past a frozen brook, up to the edge of a forest a mile off. His small craft was liable to strand by the way, and lucky was he if he did not bring up against the jagged bark of some outstanding tree. His sled was home-made, of good wood, mortised and pinned together, and shod with supple withes, which with use took a polish like glass, and had seldom to be renewed.

Boys and girls slid and coasted through their childhood, and this keen challenge of the north winds, this flinging of muscle against the rude forces of winter, shaped and strengthened them for after-labor. They glided along the highway, over the ruts made by iron-shod wood-sleds; they guttered the snow-drifts with tracks; and wherever the rain had settled and frozen in the fields or by the wayside, they cleared and cut up the ponds with their swift flying feet. Ploughing knee-deep through freshly-fallen snows to the village school, roughly clad, rosy-cheeked,

joyous, they eagerly beset passing sleds and sleighs, hanging to stakes and clinging to runners, from which they tumbled into the school-house entry, stamping it full of snow. The girls were not a whit behind the boys in their clamor and agility. They slid down the steep snow-banks and up and down the ice-paths, swift and fearless, and burst into the school-room almost as riotously as the boys.

Tea-drinkings were the usual social diversions of the farm-house winter life. They were prim occasions, on which the best china, linen, and silver were brought out. Pound-cake and pies and cheese and doughnuts and cold meats were set forth, and guests partook of them with appetites sharpened by the rarity of the occasion. Neighbors from miles away were liable, on any winter's evening, to drive into my grandfather's yard for a social cup of tea. The women took off their wraps, smoothed their cap-borders, and planted themselves, knitting-work in hand, before the hearth in the best room. The men put up their horses, and coming back, they stamped their feet furiously in the entry, and blustered into the sitting-room, filling it with frosty night-air. They talked of the weather, of the condition of their stock, of how the past year's crops held out, and told their plans for the coming year. The women gossiped of town affairs, the minister, the storekeeper's latest purchase, of their dairies, and webs, and linens, and wools, keeping time with flying fingers to the tales they told. The unconscious old clock in the corner kept ticking away the while, and Hannah, in the next room, set in order the repast, to which they did ample justice, growing more garrulous

when inspired by the fine flavor of hospitality. They came and also went away early. When the outer door and big gate had closed after them, there had also gone out with them all extra movement and bustle from the household. Every spoon and fork

and plate was already in its place, the remnants of the feast had disappeared, and the family was ready to take up on the morrow the slackened thread of its working ways.

The leave-takings of these ancient hosts and guests were simple and beautiful. They shook hands and passed salutations and

good wishes with as much gravity as if they had been going to some far land; and the pleasure which the visitors avowed in the graciousness shown them was heartfelt. Merrily jingled their bells from out the farm-yard into the highway, and softly dying out with distance, the sound came back from the far-off hills in pleasant echo.

Tender, true hospitality, simple customs, rare entertainments, you left no sting, no weariness behind you. You gave and impoverished not. You were ungilded but dignified and decorous, healthful and pleasure-giving. If you were plain, you were not inelegant, for your silver was pure, your china quaint and costly, your linens were fine-twined, your viands were well cooked and wholesome. You were simply served to simple guests, but not without etiquette and the essence of style. The host carved with dexterity, and the hostess, in her busy passes, was instinctively observant of the tastes and needs of her guests. That which garments lacked in material and make, the ruddy firelight imparted to them, painting these robust farmers and matrons into rarely-costumed pictures. What of high culture was wanting to their speech, was given to it by the sweet piety and purity of it. They talked of what made up their daily lives, and that was the yearly marvels and glories of ever-dying, ever-renewing nature. The men, discoursing of winds and rains and cattle and grasses and trees and grains, stumbled upon many truths of high philosophy; and, reviewing with earnest faith the sermons of the Sabbath-day, showed themselves well grounded in all gospel doctrine. The women, innocently prattling of the webs they

wove, drawing in and out the threads of much discourse, mixed with it many a fine-spun sentiment, and the golden overshot of the few but keenly relished diversions of their serious lives. The serving-maid and serving-man listening to them, and catching the glow of the firelight past them, went into the background of the picture, to be quaint creatures of remembered scenes. They themselves, observant and reverent of their elders, felt the sweets of hospitality in their own hearts; and in ministering generously unto others were themselves being ministered unto.

The winter lull of vegetation was often spent by my grandmother and Hannah in the spinning and dyeing and weaving of woollen fabrics, to be afterwards fashioned into quilts. The most esteemed of these were made of glossy, dark flannel, lined with yellow, with a slight wadding of carded wool. For such a quilt the best fleece was set aside, and many dyes steeped in the chimney-corner. Fastened to a frame, it was in summer the fine needle-work of the house. Neighbors invited to tea helped to prick into it, stitch by stitch, the shapes of flowers and leaves. They came early and bent over it with grim zeal, helped on by the gradual showing of the pattern. They loved to take out the pins and roll up the thing, counting its coils with delight. The quilting of it was hard work, but the women called this rest, and were made happy by such simple variation of labor. They kept up their harmless babble until sundown, when one, more anxious than the rest, catching sight of a returning herd, would exclaim, "The cows are coming, and I must go." Shortly they might all be seen hurrying hither and thither through green

lanes, back to the cares which they had for a few hours shifted.

The finishing of this quilt made a gala day for the neighborhood. It was unrolled and cut out with much excitement. When Hannah took it to the porch-door to shake it out, the women all followed her, clutching its edges, remarking upon the plumpness of the stitched leaves, and the fineness of its texture. It was truly a beautiful thing, for it was a growth of the farm,—an expression of the life of its occupants, a fit covering for those who made it.

The winter diversions of the young people were just as simple as those of their elders. What could be quainter than the singing-school, held in a country school-house, with its rows of tallow candles planted along the desks, and its loud-voiced master pitching his tunes? The young men sat on one side and the maidens on the other. Its wild music was heard far away. The tunes sung were of long repute, and what was wanting in melody and harmony was made up by the zeal with which they were roared out. To many of the singers the walk home was the best of all, when, in undertone, they lengthened out the melodies which had been taught them.

Apple-bees and spelling-matches sometimes brought together the fathers and mothers of the district, as well as their sons and daughters. The former were apt to mean frolics, which carried more confusion than profit into a farmer's kitchen. The latter were the occasions of much healthy merriment.

After all, the true zest to these diversions was given to them

by the bright moonlight, which generally brought them to pass. It was a welcome comer, and turned the introverted evening life of the farm-houses out into illuminated lanes and highways. Solemn highways on gray winter evenings; one got easily bewildered in them and thrown off from his track. Objects loomed up out of the snow, and harmless things took strange shapes and looked ghostly in distance and whiteness. Horses were apt to shy, runners bounced with a sharp click upon the uneven path, and bells rang sharply in the clear, cold air. Merry, merry bells, telling of coming and departing guests,—the one jocund voice of winter, putting the traveller in heart, making glad the listening ear, ringing right joyously into farm lane and yard,—who does not welcome with delight the old-time jingle? The sound of country bells, struck out by the slow, measured pace of farm-horses, was of prolonged measure. It was deep, too, because the bells were made large and of good metal. The peculiar sound of each farmer's bells became as much his personal possession as his own voice, and they were quite sure to last his lifetime. As much as the winds the bells gave voice to the season. It was joyous mostly, yet with a wild pathos in its music when dying out in tortuous country ways, with that sad indistinctness of any sound which has wellnigh passed into silence.

Akin to the bells for sweetness of expression were the farm-house lights, starring the landscape and telling the traveller of peaceful indoor life. Driving through the country, silent with the rest of winter, one cannot overestimate the companionship

and friendliness of the lighted windows of outlying habitations. The breaking of a farm-light upon your sight is like the grasp of a living hand, and with it comes out to you the peace of firesides; by it, unawares, people send forth to you the warm glow of hospitality. An unlighted house in the sparsely-settled country is most forlorn. It is a body without a soul,—a thing which ought to be alive and is not.

In the simplicity of ancient country life the homespun curtains were seldom let down at eventide. The farm-houses were mostly the length of a lane from the roadside, and so the pictures of their indoor life were sent out from their small windows through a softened perspective. What could be better than the white-headed old man dozing in one chimney-corner; the dear old grandmother nodding in the other; the middle-aged son and daughter resting over light work; the back-log, getting ready for its raking up; the walls, hung with tokens of sleeping child-life, such as slates, caps, and comforters,—homely things, catching the light of dying embers!

How bright the winter sunsets were, how clear and starlit the nights, how bracing and electric the air, how much more generous than harsh was that climate which, while it blotted out vegetation, at the same time spread over the landscape a great spectacular glory!

Shut in by frostwork from sight of the out-of-doors world, have you never, when a child, breathed upon an icy pane; and, through the loophole thus made, caught a condensed view of the glories of a winter's day?

Picturesque upon snow were the most common movements of farm-life. Men, chopping logs, seemed more like players than workers. With what steady swing their axes rose and fell! how these glittered in the sunshine! The chips that flew freely about, tilted at all angles, how fresh they were, with their prettily-marked lines of yearly growth, their shaggy bark, and their scent of sap! The sound of the axe was resonant and cheery,

putting life into a farm-yard. It echoed still more pleasantly from a woodland, whence it came with a muffled indistinctness, like a regular pulse-beat of labor. The choppers seemed never to tire; only they stopped now and then to brandish their stiffened arms, and gaze at their growing piles with thrifty pride. They wore mittens of blue and white, striped, or knit in a curious pattern, called "chariot wheels," by the housewives. Many of them had leathern patches upon thumb and palm.

How contentedly the cattle stood chewing their cuds and

blinking their eyes; looking askance at the long icicles which hung from eaves of barns, and trickled drops upon their backs! Women came out with baskets and buckets for wood and water; and, in the silent attitude of labor, paused for a moment and basked in the sunshine. Wood-laden sleds dragged along the highway, with boys and girls clinging to their stakes; and the teamsters' shouts to "Broad" and "Bright," mingled with the chatter and laughter of boys and girls. Roofs lazily drying, smoked in the sunshine; and you heard the weather-wise farmer saying to his neighbor, "It thaws in the sun to-day."

Beautiful was the heavily coiling smoke in the crisp, morning air. How deliciously its opaque whiteness was piled against a background of sky! What a charming aerial welcome it was from the morning life of the farm-house!

Beautiful was the fantastic piling of storm-clouds, forerunners of winds; and beautiful were the rugged drifts made by flying snows.

Hush!—I am young again. The homely scenes have all come back,—the old workers into their old ways and places, and the earth they deal with wraps them about with its splendor. Snow King, grand old master, variously carving out the features of a winter landscape, I salute you!

Dear dwellers in that old-fashioned home, I salute you also! You seem to me in memory as stately and as beautiful as one of the tall oaks of your own possessions. Nature was your god-mother. She led you in childhood through her fields and pastures and woodlands. She distilled for you the best balsams of

her trees and shrubs. You unwittingly quaffed them as you went with her, and they gave you health and strength and lease of a long life. They inoculated you with a taste for pure pleasures. Your frames, your manners, your desires, your whole life, had a flavor of the land that bore you. You were the true outgrowth, the real aborigines, the rightful, harmonious, delightful denizens of the soil, you long-dead, but never-to-be-forgotten dwellers in my grandfather's home!