WHEN NEIGHBORS WERE NEIGHBORS

GALUSHA ANDERSON

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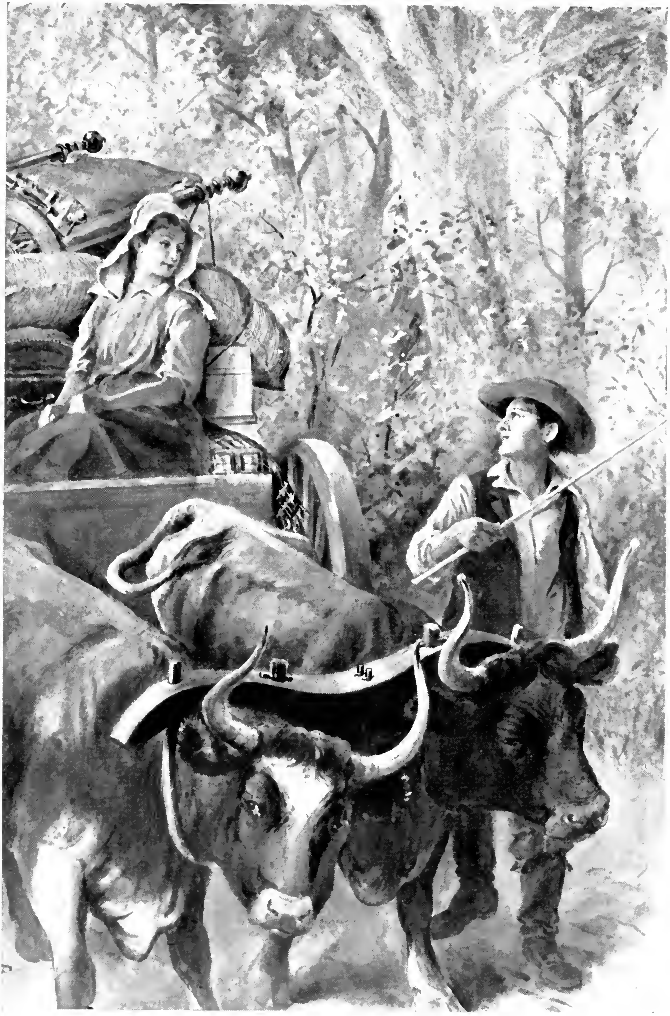

THEIR BRIDAL TOUR IN AN OX-CART WAS WELL NIGH A DELIRIUM OF JOY.—*Page 15.*

WHEN NEIGHBORS WERE NEIGHBORS

A STORY OF LOVE AND LIFE IN OLDEN DAYS

BY

GALUSHA ANDERSON, S.T.D., LL.D.

Professor Emeritus in University of Chicago

> The ancient rural character, composed
> Of simple manners, feelings unsuppress'd
> And undisguised, and strong and serious thought.
>
> WORDSWORTH.

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WHEN NEIGHBORS WERE NEIGHBORS

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TO THE CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, AND
GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN OF
JOHN ERSKINE AND AUNT LUCY

FOREWORD

I WROTE this book because I did not see how I could help it. I had long possessed an intimate knowledge of at least one rural community, which I knew, not as an outside observer, but from personal experience. I was born there, was a pupil in its schools, attended its churches, shared in its sports, took part in its industries, and entered into its political, social, and religious life. It and like communities have already quite passed away. I felt irresistibly impelled to give to others the vivid picture of my boyhood home, which still glowingly lingers within my own mind, lest in an unexpected moment it should perish forever.

So I have as faithfully as possible transferred that picture to the printed page. I have tried to present every phase of the life of that primitive country neighborhood, all of its industrial, intellectual, social, political, and religious activities; all of its sturdy virtues, and, as charitably as I could, its petty faults, some of which were as ludicrous as they were vexatious.

Had I the power, I would immortalize the love that united forever the hearts of John Erskine and Aunt Lucy. It shines out in every part of my story, and

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lights up the close of it with a more than earthly radiance. Nor should we fail to note that in neighborhoods like this we discover the rugged foundation virtues from which is derived all that is most valuable and stable in our national life.

Hoping that my story may be both instructive and entertaining, I commit this child of my brain and heart to the public, whose verdict, in the long run, is always just.

GALUSHA ANDERSON.

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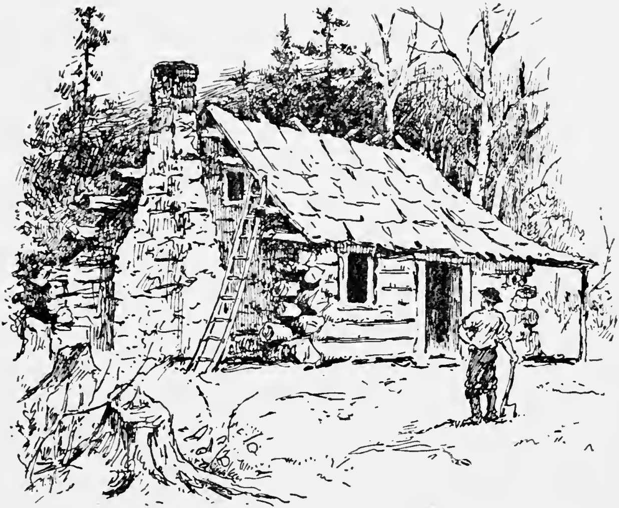


When Neighbors were Neighbors

CHAPTER I

SUNRISE

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, in a new and straggling village of what was then regarded the far west, although it was east of Lake Erie, there lived a sturdy young man by the name of John Erskine. His health was perfect. He stood full six feet in his stockings, was broad-shouldered, with muscles like iron. His great frame was compact and symmetrical, his under jaw square and strong, his lips straight and firmly set, his hair coarse and black, and from under his heavy eyebrows gleamed small, bluish-hazel eyes.

Of the pioneer community to which he belonged, he was one of the most energetic and enterprising. He was able and ready to do whatever was demanded. His ringing ax drove back the primeval forest. He plowed and planted, and reaped the abundant harvests that grew from the virgin soil. He split rails, made fences, laid stone walls, dug and stoned wells and built log houses.

But while he worked incessantly, he accumulated little or no property for himself. He was one of nine children. His father, a sort of happy-go-lucky Scotchman, a Presbyterian elder, a justice of the peace and a cobbler, needed what his children could earn to meet the multiplying necessities of his numerous family. Still, John did not rebel against his lot. Endowed with large benevolence, the service that he rendered his father's household was always free and hearty.

United with his benevolence was unflinching courage. No difficulties daunted him, no dangers terrified him. While he feared God, he never feared the face of clay. Near the close of the war of 1812, just as soon as his age permitted, he enlisted as a private in the army, marched with his regiment to Buffalo, but before he had been under fire in the field, peace was declared. He laid down his flint-lock musket with deep regret that he had been denied the privilege of taking part in at least one pitched battle.

In enduring the manifold hardships of a frontier life he was greatly helped by his abundant humor. This he seemed to have inherited from his father. He saw the ludicrous side of the most adverse circumstances. While naturally sedate, some humorous suggestion would call forth his hearty laughter. In later life his reminiscences were largely of the humorous incidents and situations that had been woven into his experience, and he so portrayed them that all who heard shared in his contagious mirth.

His educational advantages were very poor. He had the privilege of spending only a few weeks in the school of his pioneer settlement. The elementary books studied were crude and the teacher was still cruder. He did however, in school and out — chiefly out — learn to read and write, to add, subtract, multiply and divide. During his whole life he read but a very few books. Among his favorites were the Bible and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. He at times dipped into Josephus and the State statutes. He read, not very diligently, a weekly religious, and a weekly political paper. But scant as his education was he spoke his mother tongue, with the exception of a very few words and phrases, quite correctly. In fact, in the best sense he was an educated man. He thought consecutively and expressed his thought clearly. But his discipline of mind was acquired in mastering the things that he was called upon to do, rather than in learning the contents of books.

Feeling his deficiencies, he was unusually modest. He often deprecated his lack of ability and knowledge. Over and over again he said, and meant every word of it, "I never knew much." Unused to society, he was awkward, bashful and reticent when by chance he found himself drawn into some social gathering. While he had native talent, which, under more favorable circumstances, would have enabled him successfully to command an army, or adorn a judgeship, he shrank from the society of his peers, and when thrown among them was usually only a silent listener; but that in intellectual insight and grasp he was at least their equal was evident from his just and lucid criticism of their views, when without restraint he conversed with those whom he loved under his own roof.

Now there came into the pioneer village, where John Erskine lived, an attractive and efficient young woman by the name of Lucy Webster. She like John was ready for any service at home, and also often took responsible positions in the households of her neighbors. She was expert in all kinds of housework. She washed, cooked, baked, spun and wove, and whatever she did was thoroughly and neatly done. Her education in books like John's was meagre, but she was more self-confident and self-assertive than he. Without conceit, she was conscious of her own power, and so felt quite at home in any society. Easy and graceful in manner, she became the favorite of the village.

She and the bashful John chanced for a few weeks to be serving the same family; he in work on the farm, she in the house. During the day they occasionally met, and at meal-time sat at the same table. Though embarrassed he always greeted her with genuine courtesy, for deep down in his heart he was a true gentleman. Her winsomeness somehow caught his eye and touched his heart. He said but little, but she chatted freely while he listened with feelings which to him were altogether strange. He grew unusually self-conscious; he keenly felt his awkwardness; he hardly knew what to do with his hands and feet, and when he spoke he scarcely appreciated what he was saying. To him the meals became a fascinating ordeal. He came to them with misgiving, but he would not have missed them for the world. What the spell was which had fallen upon him he did not yet know. She had observed his coyness and embarrassment whenever they met, and understood it.

An incident connected with her service now revealed to John for the first time her native shrewdness, tact and hatred of injustice, and awoke within him the most ardent admiration for her. Their employer was a slaveholder. The gradual emancipation act of the State had left him still one poor negro slave. When in a passion, as he often was, he was bitterly cruel to his helpless chattel, whipping him with a large rawhide till his back was welted and bleeding. The suffering slave told Lucy Webster his doleful tale. She at once said, " When you get the wood ready for heating the brick oven, put the rawhide with it and your master will never get hold of it again." " But," said the darky, " I'se 'fraid he'll kill me." But she said, " You needn't be afraid; I'll stand between you and all harm." So on baking day that dreaded whip went up in flame and smoke. Soon after the master in hot wrath, wishing to castigate his black slave, fussing and fuming, looked in vain for his cruel whip. In his long search, his anger gradually cooling, he left Sambo unchastised. Lucy and John knew and kept the secret and rejoiced together over at least the temporary defeat of oppression.

Weeks passed by. John Erskine had at last found out what ailed him. He loved Lucy Webster and longed to tell her so. Still he feared that that might be presumption, so he kept what he thought to be a secret locked up in his heart. He lay awake nights and thought about her, and when through sheer weariness he fell asleep she illumined his dreams. Every time he saw her the fire in his heart became hotter. One evening, when their day's toil was over, they met, as if by chance, under some locust trees near the house. The air was deliciously cool, the heavens were cloud-less, and the full moon shone brightly. They talked of what they had been doing, and spoke of the village gossip. To converse with each other even about such commonplace things gave them unwonted pleasure; still it fell far short of satisfying the deep craving of their hearts. It was growing late. Their conversation must soon end. The earnest, hesitating John, summoning all the powers of his will, by a tremendous effort, declared to Lucy his tender passion. But this did not surprise her; for weeks she had been hoping and expecting that he would make this confession. She was no flirt; but sincere and straightforward in every fibre of her being. So at once she frankly made known her love for him.

Their love now projected itself upon every object around them. The moon never before looked half so beautiful and the leaves of the trees took on a brighter sheen. They were in paradise, for true love is paradise. Their lips somehow came together; it was the spontaneous seal of their mutual confession. There was one warm embrace and then softly spoken came the reluctant good night.

Two more souls had been united and forevermore were one. How hearts are blended God only knows; it is a secret beyond the ken of mortals. But the joy that flows from it is by far the most exquisite that earth can yield. And these two lovers on that night could not for a time from very gladness sleep, and when at last soothing slumber softly shut the doors of sense upon the outer world, they sank into elysium. When they awoke to the duties of the next day, they found their toil lightened and sweetened by a new and mighty motive. Old things had passed away, behold all things had become new.

But who was Lucy Webster? Her father was of English, her mother of Dutch, descent. She was one of fourteen children, thirteen of whom grew up to manhood and womanhood and had households of their own. In the round of the years she had more than fourscore nephews and nieces. There was no race suicide then. Her father, a man of wonderful vitality and exhaustless energy, was a blacksmith, wagon-maker and farmer. Her mother was his equal in strength and resourcefulness. Both were Christians of the downright sturdy sort, who always advocated righteousness and scrupulously practised it.

When the oldest daughter, Lucy, fell in love with John Erskine and was betrothed to him, she was only eighteen years old. She was five feet seven inches tall, plump and strong, well proportioned, her neck rather too short for ideal beauty, nose somewhat prominent with its lines sharply cut, red lips firmly closed, a high forehead, soft, silken black hair and full black eyes. If she could not be called a beauty, she was so sprightly and graceful in movement, so sensible and vivacious in conversation, that she was a universal favorite. And when the people of the village learned of her engagement, many wondered that she should have fallen in love with that bashful, awkward John Erskine, who was eight years her senior; but she was able to look beneath the surface, and discern his rare nobility of character; and she had made no mistake.

After mating came nesting. John had always intended to be a farmer. He had heard of land many miles away that could be bought on credit. Thither, ax in hand, he went on foot. Walking was easy since his feet were winged by love. As he trod the rough paths, blazed through the primeval forest, he thought of Lucy, now the mistress of his heart, and in imagination painted over and over again the place where they should live. He selected a farm covered with a great forest of beech and maple, basswood, ash and elm. He bought with merely a promise to pay one hundred acres. It was a brave act. All that he had in the world was two young steers, a yoke, a log-chain, an ax, and two dollars in money. To clear away the giant trees and coax the virgin soil to pay for itself and also support his anticipated family was a task before which the stoutest heart might have quailed. But he faced these formidable obstacles without a tremor. Not even a suggestion that he might fail entered his mind. His natural fearlessness reenforced by his new love made him invincible.

He felled the trees on the spot chosen for his future home, dug a cellar, built a comfortable log house of three rooms and an attic with a great open fireplace, dug and stoned a well, and cleared the forest from three adjacent acres of ground, one of which he plowed and sowed to winter wheat, reserving the other two for planting in the following spring. And while he accomplished all this single-handed and alone, he did odd jobs for some neighbors a mile or more away to pay for his lodging and meals. He had no luxuries; his fare was of the plainest; he lived perforce the simple life. But his coarse food and hard work were a genuine joy, since every stroke of his ax and every burden borne was for the bright-eyed, sensible girl in the pioneer village miles away.

Two or three times during that summer of heroic toil, on Saturdays he excused himself to those that lodged and fed him, saying that he should not be back till Monday, since he had urgent business at home. With what an easy, elastic step he walked those long miles through the woods! The anticipated meeting at the end of his journey well nigh annihilated time and distance. We need not peep behind the curtain. Everybody knows what happened when he arrived. But late in the autumn he came home to spend the winter. He did such work as came to his hand, and was constantly busy. He and his betrothed often spent the long evenings together. The winter quickly glided away. The months "seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her."

In the meantime Lucy Webster was diligently getting ready for the happy event so nearly at hand; providing such clothing for herself and furnishings for her forest home as the limited means at her command would permit. She could have neither silks, nor satins, nor laces, yet even such attire never graced a lovelier girl. If she had had them in profusion, they could have added little to her charms and nothing to her worth. Besides two or three plain but neat dresses, a few sheets and pillow-cases, a half dozen blankets and bedquilts and a great, luscious feather-bed were in process of making. Then, in the most meagrely furnished homes, the fathomless feather-bed was regarded a prime necessity, though now, except in some back towns, it is quite discarded.

At last the wedding day dawned. The nuptials were celebrated in the evening under the roof of the bride's father. He lived in a roomy log house. Being a popular man and widely known, and the bride and groom being general favorites, hosts of friends longed to attend the wedding, and more were generously invited than could comfortably get within doors. The betrothed couple were plainly but tastefully dressed. There were however no frills either in costume or ceremony. The bashful groom was self-conscious and embarrassed, but the self-possession and ease of the bride helped him pass the ordeal creditably. Some of the young people present, having observed his evident confusion, told him that it was quite excusable, since never having been married before, he had not quite got the hang of it.

When the newly married pair had received the congratulations of their numerous friends the wedding feast was spread. The beverages were water, tea, coffee and cider. Some of the guests were disappointed that there was nothing stronger; but John Erskine, though living in a community of hard drinkers, was a total abstainer, and Mr. Webster, thinking that his new son-in-law was about right, had furnished the feast to his liking. As to edibles, the tables were loaded with all that the new settlement afforded, roast pig, luscious chicken pie, venison and wild turkey; bread and butter, cheese, doughnuts and great frosted cakes stuffed with raisins. There was more than enough for all, and the good cheer continued till ten o'clock or later; but by eleven all the guests were gone. The happy couple spent the first night of their married life at home in the room set apart to the use of visitors.

The next day they took their wedding trip. At four o'clock in the morning they were astir. They breakfasted at the gray dawn. And then — O ye who ride over paved roads in carriages trimmed with broadcloth and silk, and drawn by prancing steeds, or in luxurious automobiles and Pullman cars, look upon this scene of bygone days — and then a great two-wheeled ox-cart, drawn by slow-footed Buck and Bright, was backed up to the door; and in it were soon placed a hair-covered trunk and boxes filled with clothing, bed and table linen, blankets and bedquilts, steel table knives, two-tined table forks, and a few spoons of solid silver. To these were added some dishes of earthen ware and tin, some kitchen utensils, wooden pails, washtubs, kettles, a wrought iron spider, and a Dutch tin bake-oven. Then the bride brought to the cart a flax-wheel, made seventy-five years before, a present from one of her aunts. It now adorns the parlor of one of her sons. When it had been carefully stowed away, John slipped in some iron wedges, presented to him by his father-in-law, an iron-bound beetle, two hickory ax-helves and a log-chain. On the top of the whole was laid a bedstead tied on securely with a long cord. At the front was a narrow board seat for the bride and bridegroom, over which Mrs. Webster had thoughtfully thrown a plaid shawl. Now came the adieus. Of course all were happy, but when the father and mother kissed their departing daughter tell-tale tears, even while they spoke words of cheer, somehow stole down their cheeks, and some glistening drops furtively slipped from Lucy's eyelids as if in contradiction of her fun and frolic. Both the smiles and tears were true exponents of their feelings. Sadness and joy were contending with each other, but joy won. Lucy with the spring of a cat climbed to the seat in the cart, while John slower in movement took his place beside her. "Good-by!" "God bless you!" was mutually spoken, hands waved parting salutes and that unique wedding tour began.

John Erskine was now supremely happy. He had won for his bride the brightest and most winsome girl in that pioneer village. He sat beside her in an ox-cart, driving on toward their new home. The oxen and cart were all his own. By his industry during the winter he had added the cart to his possessions. It was brand-new and filled with the dowry of his bride. This was its pristine service. Did a cart ever receive a more sacred and romantic dedication? Bride and bridegroom, jolting over the new and rough road, were in the third heaven. Everything around them reflected and enhanced their bliss. It was early spring. The forests through which they slowly rode — and they did not wish greater speed — were bursting into leaf. Here and there they saw the dogwood starred over with blossoms. The mated yellow birds, bluebirds, and robins filled the wood with their sweet, passionate songs. Wild flowers were peeping out from their wintry beds. The bride, ravished by their loveliness, pointed them out to her husband and descanted on their fresh beauty. While with her he delighted in the birds and flowers, still to him her face and voice were lovelier than they. So, enchanted by what they saw and heard, and filled with the deep satisfaction that flowed from their mutual love, their bridal tour in an ox-cart was well nigh a delirium of joy.

But this could not last forever. Late in the afternoon they arrived at the log house that the bridegroom had prepared for his bride. It was in a dense forest. While the bride now saw it for the first time, from her lover's description of it she had often painted it in her imagination. On seeing it she felt no disappointment; it was even better than she had anticipated. And John had for her some little surprises. He had never told her that he had built for his oxen a good log barn a few rods from the house and had put into it sufficient hay and provender for immediate use. So when the cart was backed up to the door of the house the tired oxen were unyoked and fed in the new barn. Then together bride and bridegroom looked over the house; she admired it and, to the joy of John's heart, praised the skill and thoroughness of its construction. She was specially pleased with the great, open fireplace with its huge iron crane. This crane had been made at a blacksmith shop about two miles away and John had brought it to his new home on his shoulder. Wood, which he had thoughtfully brought in last fall, now well seasoned, lay near by in the corner. The house needed to be warmed and dried out, so he proceeded to make a fire. As matches had not then been invented, he took a small bunch of tow, a flint and a piece of steel, and striking the flint with the steel, a resultant spark ignited the tow, which in turn set fire to the kindling wood. Abundant dry beech and maple was laid on the great andirons and the hot flames were soon leaping and roaring up the wide-throated chimney. And this was their only house-warming.

The cart was now unloaded. The articles brought for housekeeping were put in their appropriate places. The bedstead was corded — there were no bed-springs then. The tick, which has now been replaced by the moss or hair mattress, was stuffed with oat-straw, which John by his kind forethought had provided months before. Such unexpected previsions added much to the bride's happiness. The feather-bed surmounted the newly stuffed straw tick; on it were spread immaculate linen sheets and a handsome bed-quilt; the pillows were soon in place and the marriage bed was ready.

Kitchen and dining room were one. In it they stood the plain basswood table on which they put the food left over from the wedding-feast and thoughtfully sent along in the cart by Mrs. Webster. The teakettle was hung on the crane over the blazing fire, and while they waited for it to boil, just as the glowing sunset lighted up with its splendors the great forest of beech and maple, they walked out to view the surroundings of their humble home. At the first glance the bride had another pleasant surprise. To the left of the house was an oven, built of stone and brick, large enough to bake bread, and pies and puddings for a numerous family. The bride had often used such an oven in the village that she had just left and was happy now in the consciousness that this one was her own. John now showed her the ground staked out for a vegetable garden and an orchard, and the acre of wheat that he sowed in the autumn. It was green and growing and had in it the promise of an abundant harvest. As they returned to the house the singing teakettle began to boil, the pot of tea was soon ready and with glad hearts they sat down to eat their first meal under their own roof.

All of English or Scotch descent rejoice in being the possessors of houses and lands. They are never quite happy till they own in fee simple estates large or small. Oh the solid comfort a man has in sitting under his own roof, by his own fire and putting his feet under his own table! This consciousness of ownership enhanced the joy of the bride and groom as in their new house they ate together for the first time. It was the crown of all the exquisite pleasures of the day.

These brave, sturdy pioneers in that dense forest were almost as much alone as were Adam and Eve;

but they did not feel this isolation. Their mutual love banished loneliness. Full of hope and gladness, they gave themselves to their daily duties. At the early dawn John's ax woke the echoes of the woods, while Lucy with equal zeal did the work of the house. Neither for a moment doubted that by their united efforts they should be able at last to pay for their farm. So they made a garden, and set out apple, peach and plum trees, quince, gooseberry and currant bushes. The productiveness of the soil, enriched for unnumbered years by leaf-mold, was simply marvelous. The garden produced abundantly, and John's acre of wheat yielded almost fifty bushels. What he did not need for his own use he sold. The money that it brought him gave him increased assurance that his farm in due time would pay for itself. Still he knew that to attain this, incessant hard work would be required; so with amazing push, without any help from others, he added, during the first year of his married life, ten more acres to his clearing.

A swarm of bees from a great hollow limb of a towering basswood lighted on a low bush near John's door. He made for it a rude but capacious hive, into which he allured the bees. While he toiled they gathered honey for him and for his bride. So the bees of the wood became their helpers.

Finally, to the unbounded gratification of husband and wife, just before they reached their first wedding anniversary, a daughter appeared under their humble roof. Never was a babe more welcome. She was a priceless gift from God and they hailed her as the crowning joy of that happy year.

CHAPTER II

PROSPERITY AND DRAWBACKS

As the years rolled by John Erskine prospered. He cut the forest from four fifths of his farm and divided what was cleared into lots of a few acres each. These small fields he carefully cultivated. By a rotation of crops and frequently plowing under luxuriant growths of clover he kept up the fertility of the soil. No harvests in the neighborhood were more abundant than his. He often had from two to three tons of clover and timothy to the acre and forty to sixty bushels of wheat, and other crops in proportion. His sheep and swine and cattle multiplied. He paid for his farm, abandoned his log house, built a capacious frame house and a great barn, which, when crammed from foundation to ridgepole, was often too strait to receive his great harvests, so that at times he was compelled to stack in the field some of his hay and unthrashed grain.

To be sure there were some years when his crops were cut short by frosts or drought. Once when the early rains had not fallen and the grass of his meadow was short, thin and wiry, I met him as he was raking up by hand his meagre harvest — there were no horse-rakes then. When he had raked along to the end of the field, he said to me, "This hay is like self-righteousness, the more you have of it, the worse you are off." Thus in a single sentence he preached a sermon of mighty import that I could never forget.

In 1836 there was a cold summer. Every month there was frost. Corn and all the more tender plants were either greatly damaged or killed outright. John Erskine, still considerably in debt for his farm, was unusually sober and silent. Like many of his neighbors, he could not clearly see his way. Pay-day was coming and how with an empty barn and granary and corn-crib could he meet its just demands? But at times he heartily enjoyed the humor of the strange situation. The hogs having no corn, nor little of anything else to eat, were very poor. A wag said, "They are so thin that you can read Watts' psalms through them." Another remarked: "Over in our end of the neighborhood they are so lean that we have to buy salt codfish to fry the pork in." Still another declared: "Our pigs are so thin and slender that we have to tie knots in their tails to keep them from slipping through the fence." Such preposterous exaggeration provoked mirth, relieved the mental strain and helped to tide over the general disaster. The universal suffering made creditors considerate, and honest John found his creditor ready to accommodate him. So his craft weathered the financial storm and finally with flying colors sailed triumphantly into port.

But John Erskine's family grew in number as the products of his farm multiplied. Within eleven years from the time that he and his bride moved into their new log house they were blessed with eight children, three sons and five daughters. These children were noted for their upright lives and stainless characters; there was not a black sheep among them. Some of them, together with their children, have been eminent in military and civic life. Families like this are the backbone and hope of our nation.

Now, thrifty John Erskine might have become rich in money as well as in children had it not been for certain defects in his make-up, some of which were akin to virtues. When in debt he was as uneasy as a fish out of water till his creditor was paid, and it was his invariable rule to pay promptly just according to the contract, and if possible to anticipate the time of payment by three or four days. But when all indebtedness for his farm and buildings was canceled, and he owed nothing to any living soul, he continued to make money. But just here, from a business point of view, he failed. It apparently never occurred to him to invest his funds. He did, to be sure, freely put his gains into such fertilizers and agricultural implements as he thought necessary to make his farm most highly productive, and he also amply provided what was required for the comfort of his wife and children, but, unlike some of his neighbors, he never shaved a note, nor loaned money that was secured by mortgages on real estate; in fact he never made a money investment of any kind whatever.

Still, he never hoarded money. He had an open heart and an open hand. He contributed liberally to sustain the churches and schools of the neighborhood, and was always giving to the poor. Here is a specimen of his benevolence. He would say to one of his sons, "Yesterday, when I passed Mrs. James's house, I saw that she was out of wood. I want you to harness the horses and draw her a load of beech and maple and throw it into her yard. If she asks you about it, just say that I told you to do it." Thus quietly and unostentatiously he met the wants of the needy about him.

A poor woman, who wove to support herself and family, wished to buy wheat of him to be ground into flour for the use of her household. In vain he insisted on giving it to her; but when he saw that to refuse her request would make her unhappy, he filled a bag with the wheat, shaking down the measure and heaping it up. Some months after she came again for wheat, naïvely saying, "Your wheat goes further than any one else's," not knowing that he had delivered to her nearly a third more than she had bought.

But his cash was diminished not only by such praiseworthy benevolence, but also at times by his incautious agreements. His cardinal moral exhortation was, "Keep your promises." One of his grandsons paid him a visit. When the boy returned home, his father asked him, "What did your grandfather say to you?" He replied, "He didn't talk much with me, but when I bade him good-by he said, 'My son, always keep your promises, if it takes a right arm.'" And he illustrated and enforced his teaching by always keeping his, although some of them, rashly made, were hard to keep. But like the righteous man portrayed by David in the fifteenth psalm, when John Erskine "swore to his own hurt he changed not;" he never modified nor backed out from even a verbal contract because it would cost him more than he had expected to fulfil it.

When he had gotten his farm into prime condition, he made the raising of seed-wheat a specialty. In this he had marked success. His wheat became famous in all the country round about. Sometimes, before his crop was ripe, farmers contracted for so much of it as they needed to sow their fields. A few miles away lived a godless landowner, who, measuring everybody in his own peck measure, did not believe there were any honest men. To him Erskine promised to sell after harvest forty bushels of seed-wheat for a dollar a bushel. The agreement was not put into writing, it was merely spoken to the ear, it was only breath. There was abundant opportunity for a tricky man to get out of it. The motive to repudiate was strong, such as a close-fisted, covetous soul could hardly have withstood. Before wheat harvest was over wheat was readily selling for a dollar and a half, and seed-wheat of a superior quality could not be bought for less than a dollar and seventy-five cents. But did Erskine go back on his merely verbal bargain? His wheat was ready for delivery. The man who maintained that all men were dishonest was driving along the road with empty wagon on his way to John Erskine's wheat-barn. He met one of Erskine's near neighbors, and stopped for a few minutes' chat, during which he said: "Erskine promised before harvest to sell me forty bushels of his seed-wheat for a dollar a bushel, but of course he won't do it; wheat is up to a dollar fifty and his wheat is worth even more than that." But the man with whom he was talking asked: "Did Erskine really say that he would sell you that wheat for a dollar?" "He certainly did," was the emphatic reply. "Well, then he will do it," said John's neighbor. To this came the response: "I don't believe it. All men are dishonest, and Erskine will never fulfil a mere verbal agreement, when by so doing he will lose money." But John's neighbor, persisting in his view, said, " On your way back tell me how it came out."

The purchaser was soon at Erskine's barn, where he was courteously received, though but few words were spoken. John had neither time nor ability for palaver. In a kindly tone he said, " Your wheat is ready," and helped the buyer load it upon his wagon. When this was done the purchaser asked: " How much shall I pay you?" Erskine in an unmistakable tone of indignation, deeply feeling his honor assailed, replied: " Did I not say that I would sell it to you for a dollar a bushel?" and the shameless buyer, handing honest John forty dollars, drove away. Without a syllable of apology he permitted Erskine to carry out his verbal, incautious contract to his pecuniary damage. But " business is business." Still, the purchaser lost infinitely more than he gained. He kept in his pocket about thirty dollars that, by his own acknowledgment, belonged to his neighbor, and by so doing lost in character more than any human intellect can weigh or measure. While Erskine lacked about thirty dollars that in justice should have been in his pocket, his enrichment of soul, that came from uncomplainingly carrying out his foolish agreement, was immeasurable. One gained in pocket but lost in soul, the other lost in pocket but gained in soul. Which gained the more? But on his return, the purchaser to his credit frankly said to John's neighbor, with whom he had conversed an hour before, "Erskine kept his word; I give it up, there is one honest man."

But John Erskine had another ingrained weakness, a weakness that elicits admiration, though more than once it cost him dearly. He never could believe that anybody was dishonest and untrustworthy till he was compelled to by some bitter experience. Against the earnest protest of his most intimate and valued friends he trusted in money transactions those that were utterly unreliable and of course suffered loss. His proneness to take men at their own valuation and unhesitatingly to receive their spoken word as a sufficient guarantee in business deals, led him at times carelessly to discard the passing of the necessary papers for safely closing up important contracts.

When he had reached the full flower of his manhood he enlarged his farm by purchasing an adjoining field of forty acres. On half of it was a growing crop of wheat, which he bought for two hundred and seventy-five dollars, and when he had harvested it he paid for it. He purchased both the land and wheat of a widow. Of course the bereaved woman, whom he had long known, would never do him any wrong. He had such unbounded confidence in her that, when he paid her for the wheat, it never occurred to him to take a receipt for his money. The mourning widow did not fail to note his neglect. A year passed by when she demanded the money for the wheat. Honest John told her that he had paid her for it more than twelve months ago, and clearly stated all the circumstances of the payment. To his astonishment she was unable to recall the transaction or any of the circumstances pertaining to it. He returned to his house quite broken up over his disappointing interview with the forlorn but wily widow. He now felt quite sure that she had given him a receipt for his money. Again and again he went carefully through all of his papers, but he could not find it. Conscious of his absolute integrity he refused to pay her the second time. But as he had taken no receipt for the first payment the lone widow felt quite sure that legally he was at her mercy. Since she wanted money, she had neither scruple nor pity. She bemoaned herself as wronged and declared Erskine a heartless robber; so she sued him. The suit became notorious. Not only the neighborhood, but the whole countryside was talking about it. The trial came on before judge and jury. The case of the plaintiff was quickly presented. The evidence for the defendant, while wholly circumstantial, was strong and convincing; but he had no receipt to present to the court and jury, incontestably showing that he had paid the clamant widow. Two of the ablest lawyers in the county appeared for the litigants. The attorney for the defendant presented his case with clear, unanswerable logic. The judge seemed to be with him, and evidently the jury was favorably impressed. But the lawyer for the plaintiff was both glib and eloquent of tongue. He spent but little time on the evidence in the case, but worked up the jury over the wrongs and woes of the lonely and defenseless widow, while he scathingly denounced the defendant as an unjust and heartless debtor, who was trying to rob her of her just dues. There were tears in his voice, and tears on the cheeks of some of the jury, who were sworn to decide the case according to the evidence. Then followed the impartial charge of the judge. The jury retired for deliberation but returned in an hour, having found a verdict for the disconsolate widow.

John Erskine had sat silent and attentive during the trial. For the first time in his life he had heard how hard-hearted and unjust he was; how for the sake of a little money he was trying to rob a weak and defenseless woman. But no complaint fell from his lips. He promptly paid his lawyer and thanked him for his able effort on his behalf. Without a murmur he met the costs of the suit, and borrowing the required cash paid the poor widow the second time for her wheat and took a receipt for his money. He was a sadder, but hardly a wiser man. And while he felt deeply the bitter wrong that he had suffered, no mortal ever again heard him refer to it. That was his way. He never cried for spilt milk.

But he suffered at times not only from incautious promises and overconfidence in men, but also from the tenacity with which he held his opinions. When his mind was once fully made up he was as immovable as a mountain of granite. This was the Scotch of it. His neighbors thought that he was sometimes too "sot" in his ways. Such stubbornness now and then resulted in disaster. Bent on doing some impracticable thing, a sanhedrin of archangels could not dissuade him from it. On he would go till he ran his head against a stone wall ten feet high and three feet thick, was knocked over backward by the impact and saw in a moment myriads of stars. He would then pick himself up and, illumined by the astral light that had so suddenly flooded his brain, apologize to his friends for having rejected their counsel — he was inherently polite — and go right on with his work in life as though nothing had happened. He very much needed to heed the motto of David Crockett, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead."

While this unreasoning stubbornness was not often in evidence, it occasionally cropped out. A friend engaged in a business enterprise, which of course was sure speedily to yield large returns, wished to borrow of him a considerable sum of money which he just then chanced to have in hand. The only security offered was the enterprise itself. His wife, who excelled him in financial sense and insight, protested against the loan, saying, "John, if you put your money in there, you'll never see it again." But he, feeling cocksure that he was right, contrary to her earnest and oft-repeated advice, carried out his purpose. He did it out of the kindness of his heart, just to tide his friend over to prosperity and wealth. But after an heroic struggle, the enterprise into which he had put his cash failed, and his money was gone forever. He had done his friend no good and himself and household great damage. His stubbornness had emptied his purse and planted in his heart sharp, bitter regret that he had refused to listen to her whom he so tenderly loved and whose judgment in money matters for years had proved to be invariably right.

Thinking of the financial disaster that he had unwittingly brought on himself, he saw that informally but really he had gone surety for another; and that he had taken upon himself the whole financial risk, while his friend had taken none. He now found that the Bible was against becoming surety for one's neighbor, and that the real philosophy of surety is: If he for whom you become surety succeeds, he makes all and you make nothing; if he loses, you lose all and he loses nothing. But neither Bible nor philosophy could save him now; it was too late.

But while John Erskine, like the rest of mankind, was not perfect, he was a good man of a high order. Although known to few outside of his own neighborhood, like the renowned Wellington, "He stood four-square to all the winds that blew."

CHAPTER III

BIRD'S - EYE VIEW

We must now take a bird's-eye view of the country neighborhood to which John Erskine and his young wife belonged. It lay somewhere between the Hudson and Mississippi Rivers, and the Great Lakes and Mason and Dixon's Line. It was about three miles square. As we have already incidentally suggested, it was covered with a forest of beech, maple, elm and basswood. It was however bounded on the north by a tamarack, and on the south by a cypress, swamp. The surface of the ground was rolling. Low hills rising gently above the general level added much to the beauty and charm of the landscape. Little by little the forest was largely cleared away. Each farmer however reserved for timber and fuel several acres of woods, which in summer formed a leafy background to green pastures and meadows and fields of golden grain. Here and there murmured a silvery brook the banks of which were fragrant with mint and through whose crystal waters darted hither and thither tiny fish. A larger stream skirted one side of the neighborhood where eager anglers caught bullheads and pickerel, and where Saturday nights in midsummer farmer boys, some of whom walked long distances to enjoy the luxury, bathed and swam.

At first all the dwellings of the neighborhood were built of logs, but as the farmers became thrifty these were replaced by frame houses, cheap and plain but not unattractive. Most of them were painted white, and a few were adorned with green blinds. Some however were unpainted and in by-places log houses still lingered.

The front yards were usually shut in by board or picket fences. Before the houses by the roadside were set hard maples and elms, which added beauty to the scene and in the hot days of summer cast a grateful shade. In the front yards bloomed lilacs, pink and white roses, snowballs and snow berries. There too the grass generally throve, the busy farmer, who then had never heard of a lawn-mower, cutting it with his scythe only once or twice during the entire season.

Here and there by some of the houses, or in adjoining gardens, were hives of droning bees. By many a front door clambered the morning-glory and sweet-scented honeysuckle; while hard by, in gardens rudely kept, bloomed in their season the peony, pink, sweet-william, marigold, bachelor's button, hollyhock and sunflower, while by some kitchen doors the dahlia grew thriftily and bore a wealth of beauty. Often in the same enclosure with the flowers, currants, melons and vegetables were cultivated. There, too, was the never-failing bed of caraway, whose aromatic seeds rendered more toothsome the sweet-cakes of the housewife, and by their pungency kept her awake in church, when there was not sufficient pungency in the sermon to excite her flagging sensibility. On this account the boys of the neighborhood dubbed caraway seed, "wake-seed."

Not far from most of the houses were prolific orchards of apple, cherry, peach and plum trees, which in time of bloom made the whole countryside glorious with color, and filled the air with delicious fragrance.

The farms were small. The largest in the neighborhood did not contain more than two hundred acres, while the average farm had about a hundred, with only seventy-five or eighty under the plow. These small estates were cut up into lots of from five to twenty acres each. The fields were fenced with dry stone walls, or with rails, laid so that they formed a series of obtuse angles. The fence bore some resemblance to a serpent in motion, bending in and out, and was generally called by the farmers a "snake-fence."

In summer many of the small fields were covered with growing, maturing crops; here was a patch of Indian corn; there the ripening golden wheat rippled before the wind; just beyond was the meadow of clover with its wealth of blossoms and ravishing odor. On every hand there met the eye fields of oats, barley, peas, potatoes, and buckwheat, pastures where roamed small flocks of sheep and a few milch cows with distended udders and some fatting steers. But even in its physical aspects the neighborhood was not a paradise; some farms were slovenly kept, some fences broken down, some buildings dilapidated, some gates off their hinges; filthy pig sties and dwelling houses were often too near each other for the highest enjoyment; some flocks and herds in the midst of plenty were half-fed and scrawny; but these repulsive sights were the exception, not the rule, and even they by contrast gave a keener appreciation of that which was beautiful and attractive.

And each season had its own peculiar charms. In the autumn the forests of oak and maple were ablaze with crimson; and while the fields from which the grain had been reaped were bare and brown, the ever-cropped and ever-springing pastures were still green. Barns were bursting with plenty, the cut corn stood in shocks, while scattered over the fields among the corn-stubble glowed the yellow pumpkins. The corncribs were piled high with golden ears, stacks of hay and grain dotted the whole face of the country, and orchards bent down under their load of ripened and fragrant fruit.

Then winter came with its witcheries. How delicate was the tracery of the tree tops seen against a clear sky! How exquisitely beautiful was the mantle of snow that covered the fields and under the moonlight gleamed as if it were woven of countless myriads of diamonds! The flocks and herds quit the frozen pastures and found shelter in warm well-filled barns or by great stacks of hay or straw. Wagons gave way to sleighs, and the air was filled with the music of jingling bells, which but faintly expressed the joy of the boys and girls, who, wrapped in skins and furs, rode for pleasure in defiance of stinging winds and biting frosts. The long evenings, too, brought gladness to those that came together in the spacious kitchens of the farm-houses, sat before the great open fireplaces filled with flaming logs, told stories, cracked nuts and jokes, ate luscious apples and drank sweet cider.

Most of the inhabitants of my country neighborhood were originally from New England. When they emigrated to this chosen spot in the wilderness they were poor in this world's goods, but intelligent, honest and brave. They came to create wealth by their unstinted toil, to build for themselves comfortable homes, and train their children for God and humanity.

In my boyhood a majority of these pioneers were reaching middle life. Many of their children were in their teens. Some that had married remained at or near the old homesteads, while others, with the spirit of enterprise that they had sucked in with their mothers' milk, had gone west. At times they returned and made our eyes stand out with wonder as we listened to their marvelous tales of the great corn and pumpkins that grew somewhere toward the setting sun; but we regarded most of their yarns as mere moonshine. We were in fact a rather secluded community. We had not been greatly stirred by the mighty movement westward, and the essential character of our neighborhood, in spite of increasing wealth and comforts, did not change rapidly.

Moreover, by force of circumstances, we were a somewhat exclusive set. We prided ourselves on being quite purely American. There was to be sure one negro family by the name of Johnson, that lived in an obscure spot, near the tamarack swamp on the northernmost limit of the neighborhood. When any of them appeared at the store or post-office they were a genuine curiosity. At one time some youngsters poked fun at them on account of their black skins, when in rebuke John Erskine said, "Boys, you can't tell what a man is by the color of the house he lives in." Those sneering lads never forgot that. Honest John was a man of few words, but when he did speak he usually hit the bull's-eye.

For forty years there was but one Irishman in our community and he was a transient. A Dutchman did settle on the outskirts of our territory, became a landowner and an excellent citizen; still, he was nuts for the boys. Some of them, living near him, declared that he once missed his gimlet and after spending an hour or more looking for it gave it up as lost; but when he pulled off his boots at night he found it in one of them. On another day at the country store he put his watch in his mouth, letting the chain hang out, and bet a dollar that no one, taking hold of the chain, could pull the watch out. A young man standing by promptly took the bet. Grasping the chain he said to the Dutchman, "Are you ready?" He answered, "Ja;" and since he could not utter that Dutch affirmative without partially opening his mouth, the young man as the under jaw went down pulled out the watch and handed it to him amid a roar of laughter from the company that had gathered round. Such incidents belonged to our impromptu amusements.

After a time three Englishmen appeared among us. Coming from the rural districts of their native land, they played fast and loose with the letter h, putting it on where there was none and taking it off where there was one. They put their 'ats on their 'eads. Behind their 'ouses they 'ad *h*ash barrels, and at times sold their *h*ashes to the pot*h*ash maker. One of them made a *h*ash walk in front of 'is 'ouse, and put some of 'is *h*ashes around 'is *h*apple trees. All these were downright good men but an unfailing source of amusement to the boys and girls. In a prayer and conference meeting one of them exhorted the young men to beware of the *h*adversary of their souls. "Don't let 'im," he said, "get 'is nose *h*into your tent, for *h*if 'e gets 'is nose *h*in, 'e'll get *h*in 'is 'ead, and *h*if 'e gets *h*in 'is 'ead 'e'll snuff up *h*all the *h*air." It was a good exhortation, but it had the opposite effect from what the speaker intended; the young men burst into a laugh. How could they help it? And that devout Englishman probably thought that the *h*adversary was 'aving 'is own way.

But this English trio differed somewhat in dialect. One of them said to his fellow, "This morning I could 'ardly get my bute on my fute;" the other replied, "*H*it's not 'bute and fute,' *h*it's but and fut. You should say, I could 'ardly get my but on my fut."

We had also one Frenchman of whom later I shall speak more particularly; but aside from this small group of foreign-born citizens, who gave us a new social sensation, our neighborhood was genuinely American and for the most part Yankee.

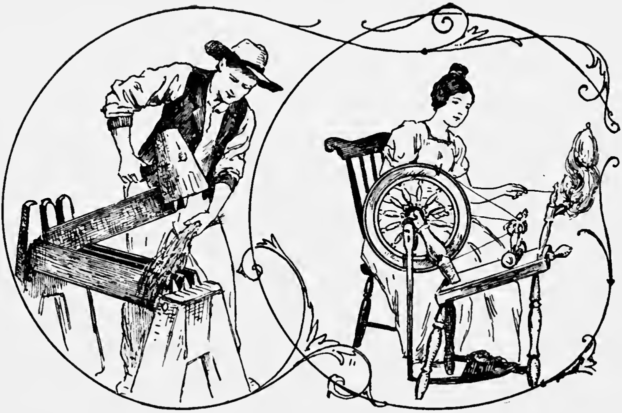
We were of course a community of farmers and our chief crop was winter wheat, which was sowed broad-cast and reaped with the sickle or cradle or with both. The first settlers of the neighborhood thrashed all their grain with the flail, but in my boyhood thrashing-machines of the crudest kind appeared to lighten our grinding toil.

But in addition to wheat, the landowners, to meet their varied wants without being compelled to buy in the market, raised a variety of crops. Each farmer had a few acres of corn and peas on which he fatted his hogs; a few acres of oats with which he fed his horses; a few acres of meadow, where clover and timothy grew, making an abundance of sweet hay for his stock in winter. Each one also had his potato-patch in those halcyon days, when potato-bugs were unknown; each his own fruit orchards. Pretty much everything which they ate or wore they raised or made. They produced their own flour, corn meal, meat, vegetables, eggs, butter, cheese and fruit; many of them their molasses and sugar, and not a few of them most of the garments which covered their backs. These diversified industries made these land-holders quite independent of the whole world, and enabled them to pay for their farms and to accumulate wealth.

Of course into this community of farmers came blacksmiths to shoe the horses and oxen, to sharpen the plow coulters, to set the tires of cart and wagon wheels, and to do any odd jobs that naturally fell to Vulcan; coopers to make the apple, cider, flour, and pork barrels; carpenters and joiners to build the houses and barns; and masons to lay foundation walls. These were the inevitable and necessary adjuncts of an agricultural neighborhood.

It remains for us to notice that in this primitive community laziness was at a vast discount. A slothful man was a butt of ridicule for the whole countryside. A drone in a beehive found it more tolerable than he among these driving, thrifty toilers.

Such is a bare outline of my country neighborhood in the heyday of its existence. But when John Erskine and his resourceful bride settled in it there were scarcely a dozen families within its bounds. It was crossed by only one wagon road, and that was but a poor apology for a highway; all other roads so called were merely rough trails blazed through the woods. So John and his winsome bride were among the foundation stones of that rural community and while unpolished they were solid, seamless granite.



CHAPTER IV

PRIMITIVE INDUSTRIES

It is not strange that my country neighborhood steadily grew rich. Everybody in it, man, woman and child, worked. Each had his part to perform and did it not as a task but as a joy. Toilers both in the house and in the fields often broke out into song. And if we now specially note the occupations of John Erskine and his lusty family we shall get a fair view of what was quite generally done on the farm and in the houses of the whole countryside.

As we observed in the preceding chapter, the leading industry of our neighborhood was the raising of wheat. Now, when Erskine harvested, thrashed and marketed his crops, he always retained in his bins and cribs an abundance for the use of his household. Once in two or three months he sent a quantity of wheat and corn to the grist-mill to be ground. When his farm was only partially cleared and his resources were small, the grist was carried on horseback, the bag containing it, with an equal portion in each end, balanced across the horse; if, however, the grist was large, in the ox-cart; but when John had become thrifty, in the lumbering two-horse wagon. Some younger member of the family was usually detailed for this agreëable duty. The mill was seven or eight miles distant. Any fairly intelligent boy could ride the horse, sitting just in front of the bag of grain, or seated in the cart, guide the slow and patient oxen, or in the wagon, drive the plow horses. It was in fact such a nice thing to get away from the farm for a day, to ride across the country, to greet at the mill other boys that had come on the same errand. The responsibility was not great. Since the miller received the grist, and took toll from it for his pay, all the boy had to do was to wait till his flour and meal were ready and then take them back home. Whenever I went to mill, I thought that the tired horses with me also enjoyed the let-up. They seemed to be half human. I formed a real attachment to one that I cared for and often rode and drove, and now in my old age I often think of him, and at times dream about him, and long to see him again. I wonder if horses are immortal?

But I am wandering from my story. While we that had come from different neighborhoods waited for our grists, we lounged about the mill, looking with wonder at the whirling millstones, and at the flour that came spinning from the spout; or we wandered about the straggling village, taking now and then a bout at wrestling or a hand in a ball-game. I thus made the acquaintance of a boy who deeply impressed me. He was extremely hot-tempered yet had remarkable self-control. This perfect balance of opposite qualities caught and held my attention. He was having a scuffle with Billy Pattison and thought that Billy didn't play fair. He was sissing hot with rage; his eyes glared and flashed; his fists were clenched to mete out vengeance, as he hissed between his chattering teeth, "Billy, Billy, when I get over being mad, I'll lick you in an inch of your life." His anger soon cooled and then of course he no longer wished to whip Billy. It was an important object-lesson. It said to me, "Keep control of yourself even when you are hottest."

But when John Erskine's grists had been returned from the mill, before the numerous mouths that gathered around his table could have wheat bread, Johnny cake and hasty pudding, much intelligent labor was required. Every housewife in the neighborhood was a baker, but none was more skillful than Aunt Lucy Erskine. She understood her business, knew just what to do and had the tact and force to do it in the nick of time. And while her work was manifold and taxing, she did not look upon it as drudgery; it was all a labor of love and so a constant delight.

When Erskine built his frame house, cooking-stoves were quite rare, and none had yet appeared in the neighborhood; so beside his large open fireplace he constructed a great, brick oven. Some years afterwards, when cooking stoves had become common, he put a large one into a capacious kitchen that he had added to his house; but old habits are not easily laid aside, so he put into his new kitchen a great fireplace, which was usually boarded up; but at times it was open, and then beech and maple logs crackled and blazed on its massive andirons, just to renew for a little while the old life with its old comforts. Who does not love a hot, glowing, open wood-fire? But Erskine also built, again, I think through force of habit, in his backyard, another large brick oven. And while Aunt Lucy ordinarily baked in the oven of the cooking-stove, in the spring, summer and autumn, especially when great occasions demanded large supplies, she used the brick oven out in the open.

I saw that brick oven more than once. It rested on a solid stone foundation about four feet by seven. Inside it was five by three, two feet in height and arched over. Its walls, laid in mortar, were about six inches thick, so that when its heavy iron door was shut, all cold air was wholly excluded. On baking days, while Mrs. Erskine and her daughters were kneading the dough for a batch of bread, and making cakes, puddings and pies, a fire was kindled in the oven with dry basswood and fed with sound maple or hickory. It was kept briskly burning for an hour or more, till the oven was piping hot. Then the flaming brands and glowing coals were removed with a long-handled fire-shovel, and when the soot and ashes had been thoroughly brushed out, in went the pans of rising dough, the cakes, pies and puddings, and the iron door was shut. The hot oven did the rest. What light, delicious loaves, what appetizing cookies, pies and puddings came out of that old oven! And what a raft of them Aunt Lucy had to bake to satisfy the craving appetites of her robust children, and of her sisters and nephews and nieces that often paid her a visit of from one to six months. They were thrice welcome under her roof — the more the merrier.

Near the last of November, when freezing weather set in, she made her mince pies for the winter. They could doubtless be counted, but I shall not attempt it. For two days the great brick oven to its full capacity received and disgorged nothing but mince pies. They were all carried into the meat-pantry, which John had built in the corner of the corn-house, piled up one upon another like Pelion on Ossa till they formed a square pie tower, and left there to freeze. Whenever one was wanted it was brought into the kitchen and, after having been thawed out and made hot in the stove oven, it was ready for the table. And the last pie eaten in March or April was as fresh and toothsome as when first taken from the oven. Jack Frost is a wonderful preserver of mince pie!

But the brick oven brings to mind also the tin Dutch oven. It was usually about three feet long, one and a half wide and from two to three feet high, partitioned off by horizontal slides, and open on only one side. When the biscuits, cakes or pies had been placed within it on the partition slides, it was set on the hearth with its open side toward the hot coals of the fireplace. When skilfully managed it did its work well.

Now if we add the spit on which meat was roasted by being constantly turned before the open fire, the heating of water for tea and the boiling of vegetables in iron kettles, that hung from the crane over the flames of the fireplace, we shall have before us the way in which cooking was done in my country neighborhood in early times.

Another industry of the neighborhood was the making of butter and cheese both for home consumption and for the market. Each farmer kept several cows and carried on a little dairy of his own. The merging of individual interests was not then known.

Every mechanic also kept a cow, but having no farm usually pastured her in the road. For most of the year she afforded him all the milk and butter that he needed. But since the cows turned unattended into the highway might at times wander far in their long pasture, each cow had her own peculiar bell, which revealed her whereabouts. The tinkling of the various bells, as the kine cropped the grass of the roadside, became a very familiar sound. I seem to hear it now across the interval of more than seventy years. But each of these bells proclaimed a diminutive dairy in the house of even the poorest among us.

Moreover, every man had a pig or two, while the thrifty farmer had from ten to twenty. Fatting them on peas and corn, he transmuted the larger part of those crops into pork, which not only filled his own barrels, but the surplus sold in the market put into his pocket considerable needed cash. Hog-killing time afforded much unwholesome excitement for the farmers' boys, but also a welcome transition from salt to fresh meat. How "licking good" the spareribs and tenderloins were! In due time the linked savory sausages appeared. While a gross application of Milton's line, they seemed to us with our voracious appetites, "Linkéd sweetness long drawn out."

But the season was not so pleasant for the schoolmaster who boarded round. Each farmer of the school district had his own time for pig-sticking and invited the teacher just then to board with him for a few days. So the poor pedagogue was doomed, *nolens volens,* to eat hog's liver most of the time from October to the holidays.

Immediately after the slaughtering of the swine, the side-pork was cut up, packed in barrels and salted; the hams, shoulders, jowls and belly-pieces were pickled and in due time smoked — every farmer had his smoke-house for curing meats; the heads, legs, feet and ears were made into souse; the bristles that grew on the hog's spine were saved and sold to the brushmaker. Even in that early day, very little was allowed to go to waste. So the farmers were both pork-raisers and pork-packers.

Their wives manufactured soap. For this purpose the wood-ashes were carefully saved. At the time of soap-making they were leached out. Ordinary apple barrels served as leaching tubs. Waste grease of all sorts that had accumulated in the farmer's house during the winter was put into a large iron kettle out in the yard, — no sensitive housewife would endure that fetid odor indoors, — the lye from the leaching ashes was poured over it, and it simmered for many hours over a slow fire. As by degrees the lye boiled down, more was added from time to time, until the alkali had wholly decomposed the grease. When cooled it was soft soap. Pour it into the soap barrel and stand the well-filled barrel in the cellar. In every household in our neighborhood soft soap was used both for washing clothes and hands and faces. Why not? It was just as pure as hard soap. But housekeepers, like Aunt Lucy, kept some sweet-scented cakes of soap in the guest chamber for the use of strangers, while the family daily used home-made soft soap. Perhaps the difference was merely a matter of sentiment and taste. But to her many accomplishments Mrs. Erskine added that of soap-maker.

But as a foil to the malodorous industry just briefly considered we now turn to a more agreeable occupation. Most of the farmers had maple groves from which they made syrup and sugar. In March, as soon as the snow began to melt they tapped their trees, usually by boring holes into them with an inch auger. In these holes they inserted spiles, about eighteen inches in length, along the grooves of which the sap ran and dropped into wooden buckets. Even the spiles and buckets were home-made. When the sugar-maker gathered the sap from the buckets, he carried it in two pails, hung balancing each other at the ends of a wooden yoke, that fitted his neck and shoulders. This yoke he devised and made for himself. The sap was stored in one or more hogsheads, which had at first been brought to the country store, filled with New Orleans molasses. It was then boiled down in large iron kettles. The whole procedure was very crude; modern methods of making maple sugar had not then been dreamed of. But primitive as the appliances were, the output from these sap-bushes, as the owners called them, was often abundant, and in quality high-grade.

No one that lived in the old neighborhood can ever forget the jolly days when we " sugared off." With what exquisite delight we youngsters dipped the boiling sugar from the kettle and poured it out of our long-handled, iron spoons upon chunks of hard, clean snow, where, instantly cooling, it became a delicious wax. No art of the candymaker has ever produced anything half so toothsome. As we feasted upon it, how the maple grove rang with our merry shouts and irrepressible laughter! And the memory of John Erskine's kindness to us lingers like sunlight in our hearts. When we visited him on " sugaring off " days, he entered into our fun and was a boy again. He urged us to eat all that we could of his boiling, bubbling sugar syrup, and we thought him the best man on earth.

But while the people of our country neighborhood drew sweets from their sugar maples, they also went into partnership with the bees in honey-making. They furnished the hives, and the bees the honey. The hive was just a plain, little, board house, about two feet square, saw-toothed at the bottom on one side to admit the bees, with some horizontal slats across the space within on which the bees built their honeycomb, and set on a solid foundation, slightly aslant to let the rain run off. A heavy stone was usually laid on top of it to prevent its being overturned by the wind. In most cases it was set outdoors in the corner of the house-lot, or under near-by apple trees, but here and there a farmer placed his beehives under a shed, opening to the south. It was a fascinating industry, the theme of poets, suggesting arguments to theologians, and it was a satisfaction to the partner of the bees to know that while he toiled to win bread, they were busily gathering honey to spread on it.

The field of their activity was enticing. Honey-laden flowers abounded. They rifled the unnumbered blooms of the orchard and basswoods; the countless blossoms of red and white clover both in early summer and autumn gave up to them their treasures. The buckwheat also with its abundant but rank sweet allured them. The busy, buzzing workers exacted toll from a host of other flowers too numerous to mention, that, before the severe frosts came, they might lay up the winter store both for themselves and their business partners. So in fall and winter, upon most of the tables of our community there was honey in abundance, both strained and in the comb. Nothing was more satisfying to our young palates than clear clover honey spread on light hot biscuits or pancakes. When that combination was set before us, we talked little but ate much.

No one in the neighborhood took greater care of his bees than John Erskine. In seeming appreciation of his kindness they repaid him manifold. One incident in connection with them illustrates a trait of his character to which we have already referred. One of the most slippery men in our community, Andrew Mattox, lived about a mile from John's door. Nobody had the slightest confidence in him. One day late in September, apparently by chance meeting Erskine near his house, he fell into conversation with him. John, proud of a hive full of honey that stood in his back yard, asked Mattox to come and see it, and finally asked him to lift it gently so as not to disturb the bees. As he did so he said, "There must be a hundred pounds in it." "All of that," replied honest John. When the artful spy had gone, Aunt Lucy said to John, "If you expect to have any of that honey you better take it out of the hive and bring it into the house." "Why so?" he asked. "Why so!" she replied, "that sly fox that you have been showing it to will make way with it after dark." Now John, verily believing that the man distrusted by all his neighbors was quite honest, said, "Oh, he won't steal any more than I would." The next morning the hive was gone. Did Aunt Lucy say, "I told you so"? No, she was too true a lover for that, she simply said, "It's too bad." And John, usually very careful and pure in speech, let the lever of the balance tip just a little and exclaimed, "I swan!"

Rumor was rife that Mattox, who kept no bees, had a plenty of honey and was sending his nearest neighbors generous portions of it. John was strongly urged to take out a search warrant and if possible find his lost property, and, if found, to punish the thief. But he said, "No; if no evidence should be found showing Mattox's guilt, it would be too bad to have disgraced him by searching his house." So the incident sank into sweet oblivion. Erskine often said, "It is far better to suffer wrong than to do wrong," and he faithfully lived up to this motto.

But at times the bees, disdaining man-made hives, set up business for themselves in secret places of their own choosing. A bee hunter found a great swarm of them in a huge, hollow basswood that stood on Erskine's farm. In such a case the finder and owner of the tree shared equally in the booty. John joined the bee hunter in cutting down this massive basswood, full five feet in diameter at the butt. When the giant fell with thundering crash, one of its great limbs, about two feet through, was found to be a mere shell in which the bees for a long time had deposited their gathered honey. The finder and owner took from it twelve pailfuls of pure honeycomb. Both had enough and to spare; their neighbors feasted with them on the sweet spoil.

Fruit-growing also held an important place among the industries and pleasures of our neighborhood.

All the farmers had orchards, and one vied with another in the effort to produce fruit of the highest quality. While they grew currants, gooseberries, quinces, peaches, plums, cherries and a few pears, apples held the chief place. Early harvest apples, pippins, pound-sweetings, Rhode Island greenings, spitzenburgs, gilliflowers, seek-no-furthers, northern spys, russets, and baldwins were abundant; while apples of an inferior sort for cider grew galore. There were but few grapes and strawberries, and as to raspberries and blackberries they grew wild in the corners of the snake fences, by stone walls and at the edges of the woods.

The orchards in bloom were a glory and joy. The pink flush of the peach-trees, the commingled white and delicate pink of the plum, cherry and apple trees ravished the eyes, while the air was freighted with their delicious odors. Every spring, for a few days, the fruit trees thickly covered over with blossoms transformed the whole countryside into a paradise. And that which delighted the senses was a mute but exquisitely beautiful prophecy of the coming harvest.

That prophecy rarely failed. When autumn came in the place of blossoms was ripe fruit. How delicate and varied were the hues of peach and apple! how subtle and pleasing their fragrance! Which was the more beautiful, the bloom or the fruitage? Who could tell? But in nature beauty and utility often go hand in hand. What delights the eye and satisfies the smell also ministers to the palate. So now from the orchards of our neighborhood hundreds upon hundreds of bushels of apples for fall and winter use were stored in fruit-barns and cellars. In all the farmhouses, for several months, apple pies, apple dumplings, apple puddings, fried apples, and apple sauce tempted the appetite, while on every table stood a dish or basket of apples of which any one at any time could partake as his desire prompted him. This dish of apples was usually replenished at the beginning of the long winter evenings; but when the appetite for apples had become partially cloyed the family sometimes neglected to provide a fresh supply.

Such neglect once evoked a peculiar and instructive incident. One of John Erskine's grandsons paid him a visit. The boy lived in a big city where apples cost money and so were not always plentiful on his father's table; but the boy's appetite for them was keen. One evening during his visit none had been brought up from the loaded bins in the cellar. While he longed for some he felt diffident about asking for them. His grandfather as usual said but little; the other members of the family were away at a social gathering. The house was very still; the old clock, standing in the corner of the sitting room, went tick tock, tick tock, tick tock, and to poor, lonely George the evening seemed to be well-nigh unending. About eight o'clock he said, "Grandpa, let's have prayers." His grandfather, as if half in doubt, hesitatingly replied, "We don't usually have prayers till nine, but as you wish it we'll have them now." Since George was a Christian boy, his grandfather said: "I will read a few verses of scripture, and then I want you to pray." This unexpected request pleased George immensely and he cheerily responded, "All right." When the reading was over, grandfather and grandson knelt and George began to pray. He thanked God for all his mercies, and asked Him to bless grandma, mama and papa, his brother and little sister, his uncles and his aunts, and finally said, "O Lord bless grandpa and put it into his mind to bring up apples in the evening, and this I ask for Jesus' sake, Amen."

After they rose from their knees there was a moment's silence, and then grandpa said: "George, when you want apples you needn't go 'way round through the kingdom of heaven to get them, but come straight to me and ask for them." Then Mr. Erskine, laughing inwardly over George's prayer, went down cellar and brought up a tin milk-pan full of greenings, spitzenburgs and gilliflowers and, setting them on the table, bade his ingenious grandson eat to his fill. Thus the main part of the lad's prayer was quickly and abundantly answered.

At the time of apple gathering, when the choicer varieties had been picked and carefully stored, the cider-apples next claimed attention. At the present time, everyone that raises an abundance of apples has his own cider-mill, but in our primitive country neighborhood there was only one mill, which all could use by paying for the privilege. And this is a rough sketch of it.

There was a shed about twenty-five by one hundred feet. At one end of it was the apple-crusher. This crusher was simple and crude in construction. Two perpendicular, oak cylinders, about sixteen inches in diameter, stood close together. In one there were many mortises, on the surface of the other, tenons made to fit nicely into them. To one of them was attached a long sweep or pole, to the outer end of which was hitched a horse, that went round and round in a circle, turning the vertical cylinders. There was a wide, open-mouthed hopper, whose sides slanted down to the cylinders. Into it the apples were shoveled or poured. Beneath it was a square, water-tight receptacle to receive the crushed apples. The hopper was filled. Round and round went Jack, making the vertical cylinders revolve. The tenons of the one slipped into the mortises of the other. The apples caught between them were crushed and ground to pulp, that fell into the vat below.

At the other end of the shed was the cider-press. It, too, was a rustic affair. On a firm foundation there was a square oak platform, slightly tilted. Near its outer edges was a shallow gutter, along which ran the apple juice till it poured into a large wooden tub. Clean wheat or oat straw was spread over this platform. On the straw was placed a quantity of pomace or crushed apples, and the ends of the straw were carefully bent back over it. More straw was then spread upon that first layer, on that more apple-pulp, which was deftly folded within the straw. So layer upon layer was added till there was no room for more. On the top of it all was placed a heavy covering of thick plank. Above this was a massive beam, pierced by two iron screws about four feet long and five inches in diameter. The screws came down from the beam headfirst. Through each head was an eye, like the eye of a needle, into which were thrust wooden hand-levers, by which the screws were turned, pressing down with their iron pates more and more the pomace beneath. This screwing down went on till by human strength it could be carried no further.

In the fall the farmers brought their apples by wagon-loads to this crude mill, apples sweet and sour, fair and gnarly, sound and rotting; for some foolishly thought that apples of any sort were good enough for cider. The wiser ones carefully stored their apples in bins to shield them from wind and boys, while others dumped them in great heaps on the ground. There were some, however, who drew their apples to the mill on the day when they made their cider, carefully culling out in their orchards all the unsound fruit, maintaining the self-evident proposition of John Erskine, " The sounder the apples, the better the cider."

The old mill surrounded by heaps and bins and wagon-loads of apples of all colors and sizes attracted the boys as molasses does flies. The farmers took their turns at the mill, and someone, from early October to late November, was there making cider. How delighted we youngsters were to take a hand in the work, to put apples into the wide-mouthed hopper, to drive the toiling horse around the path that had no end, or help press out the luscious juice by turning down the iron screws upon the pomace with the wooden levers. Then by common consent we were permitted to drink our fill out of the great tub into which the golden stream of cider ran, or — and this was the climax of our fun — to suck the cider through straws out of the bung-holes of newly filled barrels.

But aside from cider-making, it is interesting to notice how these pioneer farmers disposed of both cultivated and wild fruits. The day of canning had not yet dawned, but they preserved some choice fruits with sugar in earthen or glass jars. Such precious preserves were not for ordinary family use; they graced the table only on extraordinary occasions, such as a tea party, a quilting bee, or a visit from relatives that lived far away. Moreover, they dried much of their fruit, not artificially as now, but by the fireplace or stove, or outdoors under the rays of the sun. Blackberries, raspberries, currants, peaches, plums, apples and often pumpkins were thus treated, so that the farmer and his family might have fruit in some form the year round. Dried apple pie, long a butt for cheap jokes, was made in the late spring, when the green apples were all gone, and their toothsomeness largely depended on the skill of the maker. Mrs. Erskine's dried apple pies were famous throughout the whole countryside. She made the crust short and flaky, the body thick and meaty, seasoned the apple delicately, and baked the pies to a T in her great brick oven. The most fastidious in taste, having once eaten them longed for more. The humblest kind of a thing may be lifted up and glorified by skill.

In the evenings of the early autumn, when the supper was over, the dishes washed, and the chores all done, John Erskine brought into his spacious kitchen two or three bushels of fall apples. He and one of his boys, with some rude apple-paring machines, began to take off their skins. Mrs.

Erskine and two of her daughters quartered and cored them, and tossed the quarters upon the large family dining table, where two of the younger children with long, coarse needles strung the quarters like beads on strong cotton strings. All worked busily till the evening job was done. The result of their united toil was a great pile of apple-quarters, strung like necklaces, lying on the table. Their work was no drudgery; they had been but dimly conscious of it in the interplay of their thoughts; while their fingers were busy they had talked over the events of the day, discussed the affairs of the neighborhood, and dipped into State and national politics.

The next morning, at the gray dawn, Aunt Lucy hung the strings of apples outdoors on wooden racks to dry. The housewives of the neighborhood had various methods of drying apples; when it was cloudy or rainy they hung them on racks indoors or on poles held up by hooks in the ceilings of their kitchens; sometimes they dried them, as well as other fruits, on boards indoors or outdoors. In autumn the kitchen was often a bewitching spot. There the family ate, except on great occasions. To sit at table with apples and pumpkins drying on poles above you, hanging in golden wreaths on racks to the right of you, to the left of you and in front of you, was such a strong reminder of the bountiful-ness of Providence, that those thus embowered could hardly fail to give thanks.

But late in the fall, when the frosts began to nip, the apples stored in the fruit-barn must be made into sauce, before some zero blast, unexpectedly sweeping down upon us from the northwest, should freeze them hard as pebbles. So honest John and his family, like most families of the neighborhood, gave themselves to the delightful task of sauce-making. In the evening he brought apples in bushel baskets into the wide and cheery kitchen, well lighted with tallow candles. Kerosene had not then been discovered. John and his oldest son once more man those primitive apple-paring machines. The youngest son hands them the apples from the basket, one by one, and they keep him busy; the rest of the family quarter and core them, and throw the quarters into a large copper boiler. Near Aunt Lucy stands a small basket, filled with large, yellow quinces. Now and then she pares one of them with her knife, quarters and cores it, and throws the quarters in with the apples. She does this to give the sauce an alluring flavor. During the evening all of those quinces are mixed in with the apples. At last the great square boiler, often shaken down, is heaping full and running over. To bed now, for the day's work is ended; but this task will be renewed each night until enough apples and quinces have been peeled, quartered and cored to make a barrel of sauce.

On the morrow, before the crow flies, Aunt Lucy has the great boiler of apples and quinces stewing over a slow fire. She pours over them several quarts of boiled cider. It was the genuine stuff. John raised the apples and made the cider, and she boiled it down. It was no chemical concoction, but nature's real Simon Pure.

It was a grave responsibility to make a third of a barrel of apple sauce at a time. If by some oversight it should be spoiled — such a large quantity would be spoiled! But Aunt Lucy has not failed in her onerous task. The sauce is quite perfectly done. Taken from the fire it is left awhile to cool. The oak barrel, clean and sweet, stands in the pantry of the corn-barn, waiting to receive the precious deposit. The sauce might be perfect, but if the barrel were impure the sauce might thereby be damaged or ruined. Aunt Lucy has wisely seen to all that. She takes no foolish risks. The half-cooled but steaming sauce is now poured into the barrel. On each of the next two days another boiler of sauce is added. This was a still greater responsibility; for if the third installment had not been quite right, it would have spoiled the whole. But the maker of the sauce triumphed not only once, but three times, and the barrel was full of appetizing sauce.

The cold strengthens. The sauce freezes. There it stands, keeping company with that stack of congealed mince pies. Jack Frost, bitter though he may be, keeps both perfectly sweet, during all the long, snowy winter. When sauce was wanted, it was brought in from the corn-barn pantry in a large earthen bowl, and put into the stove oven. When thawed out and warmed through it was ready for the table. It was always good; the remembrance of it even now makes the mouth water. Anyone at the table, who chanced to find in his portion a piece of quince, thought himself specially fortunate. And what a lot of trouble this wholesale making of apple sauce saved! Apple sauce for months on tap! This is a scintilla of the wisdom of the old country neighborhood; and the making of sauce by the barrel was a unique industry.

But the denizens of the neighborhood by their varied vocations not only filled their mouths but also covered their backs. They never thought of buying what they themselves could make. Since they lived where the winter was cold they must have warm clothing and this they manufactured in abundance under their own roofs.

We have already seen that each farmer had his flock of sheep. They were profitable in more ways than one. They fertilized his fields over which they roamed, satisfied his appetite with wholesome food, by their tallow lighted his house and greased his cowhide boots, and by their fleece put a golden lining in his pocket and shielded his body from the frosty blasts of the north. Late in the spring, when the weather had become warm, each farmer washed his sheep. For the boys this was always a time of rollicking fun. Coming only once a year it was out of the ordinary and broke up for the nonce the monotony of our life. We used to look forward to it with eagerness. Then, too, the neighbors often lent each other a helping hand. More than once I helped John Erskine and his boys wash his fine well-kept flock. Not far from his home and mine was a large pond, the water of which turned the great wheel of a sawmill. On one side of the flume was a large pen into which we gently drove the timid sheep. Not being accustomed to bathing, like some unwashed humans, they shrank shivering from the enforced plunge that awaited them. The mill-owner, who sold the privilege of washing sheep to anyone who cared to lead his flock there, lifted about two inches a plank in the side-casing of the flume, making a fall of pure water about four feet in height by ten long. We now in turn seized each one of the shivering flock and held it under the waterfall. John Erskine, who always believed in being thorough, saturated the wool of each frightened, struggling sheep with soft soap and then put the soaped victim under the falling water. It paid to do it. How we enjoyed sousing those silly sheep in the foaming flood! Not knowing what it was all about how they struggled to free themselves! After the lapse of more than six decades I can still hear their plaintive bleating as in our glee we held them under the cleansing cascade, and the oft repeated admonition of honest John, who was as tender-hearted as he was thorough, "Boys, keep their heads above water." The work was soon done and we were sorry that the flock was not larger. We had in fact ducked every little sucking lamb just in sport — "just to get him used to it," we said. Then without change of clothing, wet as drowned rats, we drove the cleansed sheep slowly home; with their wool heavy with water they could not be very fleet of foot. Did we catch cold? Never once. I wonder now how we could do such things with impunity.

Two weeks or more passed when the sheep were sheared. As this also was an annual event the youngsters eagerly anticipated it and greatly enjoyed it. To see the fleece cut off close to the sheep's hide, to hear the clip, clip of the shears, and the protesting bleat and kick of some luckless ewe when an amateur, bungling shearer carelessly nipped off a piece of her skin, to watch the strong wether when freed from his heavy coat of wool, bounding in joy from the shearing-floor, jumping and skipping as he went to his pasture, afforded us great fun. With us sheep-shearing day was a high day. We were always sorry when it was over.

And now the wool was turned over to Aunt Lucy. She and her daughters with supple, willing fingers picked and cleansed it. When that was done it lay in a great snowy pile on the barn floor. Linseed oil was scattered over it, and then what sport they had as with sticks, rakestales and broom handles they mixed up the wool, making it fly in every direction, while the rafters of the barn echoed their merry shouts and laughter. When the oil had been thoroughly diffused through it all, it was bundled up in large woolen blankets, the ends of which were pinned together with thorns from the thorn-bush.

It was now sent to the carding-machine, which was driven by water and patronized by all the household manufacturers of our neighborhood. There it was carded and made into rolls. In the farm-house these rolls were spun into yarn on wheels turned by hand. We now see these wheels in museums and occasionally as curiosities and heirlooms in the houses of the rich. There were three of them in my father's house, used almost constantly in summer and autumn by my mother and sisters. The hum of those wheels now lingers in my ear like far-off music; while the ability and skill to spin by hand thread of uniform size, and reel it off from the full spindle into skeins of so many knots, awakened my boyish wonder.

Now, since almost all of the wool was white and only a few pure white garments were needed, many of the farmers' wives colored their yarn. They dyed it black, indigo blue, yellow or madder red. Then to their many accomplishments, they added that of weaving. Aunt Lucy was pre-eminent in the neighborhood both as dyer and weaver. She made a study of these arts, put brain into her work and gloried in it. In autumn she was always busy at her loom. Besides weaving for her numerous and growing family, just by way of accommodation she occasionally did a job of weaving for others. She was always accommodating somebody — that was the way she was made up.

Well, what did she weave? Woolen plaid for her daughters' winter dresses, the colors of which were modest and tasteful; even now it would be attractive; gray cloth in which she clad her husband and sons. It was a mixture of black and white wool, for there were black sheep in John's flock. This cloth when woven was sent to a woolen mill to be fulled and dressed. When made up into garments either by Aunt Lucy, who at times took a hand at tailoring, or by some local tailor or house-to-house tailoress, and adorned with brass buttons, the wearer reasonably felt proud of his suit. Such cloth in the shops of merchant tailors to-day would be sought for and would command a high price. Since it was made of the uncolored wools of the flock it went by the name of "sheep's gray"; but a bumpkin of the neighborhood, who had a genius for blundering, to our great amusement always called it "sheepskin gray."

But Aunt Lucy also wove woolen sheets and blankets, a luxury in the unheated bedchambers of farmhouses, with the mercury at times below zero; also cloth for aprons, skirts and shawls and now and then a rag-carpet. So all that was of any worth in cast-off garments was made to cover our floors. What we had worn on our backs, we at last trod under our feet. Let no modern derisively smile, for from the loom of Aunt Lucy came rag-carpets that were neat and decorative, and once she wove a beautiful yarn carpet for her precious parlor, that nobody trod on except on great occasions. She spun and dyed the yarn and the finished fabric was a great triumph. She must have been proud of it, but nobody could tell from any word or act of hers whether she was or not; she took her triumphs simply as a matter of course; but just the same all the neighborhood admired this crowning product of her skill, and John — well, no words could express his admiration of it and of her — the her with a capital H.

But the women of the neighborhood not only wove but also knit. Knitting was a universal art. Every housewife and every girl knit. Anyone that would not was a lazy hussy, and anyone that could not was next door to a fool. Every self-respecting woman always had her knitting at hand. She knit as she talked, knit while visiting her neighbors, knit while she sat warming herself by the stove or the fireplace, knit when she was half asleep and was waked up by dropping a stitch, knit in the morning, knit at noon, knit at night, — the gentler sex of the whole countryside knit, knit, knit; knit stockings for themselves and socks for the men-folk; knit white stockings, and gray socks with blue toes, blue socks with red toes, and for variety pied socks or ring-streaked and speckled; knit mittens so comfortable on frosty days, mittens white, mittens gray, mittens blue or blue striped with white for the boys, and such pretty red mittens for the dear girls; knit comforters to wrap around the boys' necks, white and blue shawls, tippets and leggings of various hues. In their unending knitting they did not forget the ministers, who, whatever else they lacked, were never in want of home-made hand and foot wear. On cold days their warm toes and fingers were grateful reminders of the thoughtful kindness of the knitters of their flocks. While a part of the product of the knitting needles was sold, it was mostly for home consumption.

The women also manufactured linen cloth. A few farmers raised a half-acre or more of flax. The growing of it greatly interested me in my boyhood. It stood out in contrast with all the other crops in the vicinity. Its stalks, about two feet high, were so slender, graceful and wiry. In what billowy beauty it waved and tossed before the wind! How inexpressibly delicate was its blue bloom! I thought no flower equalled it in all the countryside. Then when the bloom was shed, the innumerable bolls that appeared, at first green, but when ripe, looking like an expanse of little brown skulls, all this remains a pleasing picture on the walls of my memory.

When John Erskine's flax was full-grown and began to take on a sombre tinge, since its stalks were valuable to the very root, he did not cut them off but pulled them up and spread them on the ground in the sun. When dry, he bound them in small bundles which he carried into the barn. Laying the flax on the floor, with his flail he thrashed out the seed. This he carefully winnowed and put into bags. It was very valuable and readily sold for a high price. The coveted linseed oil was made from it, and the refuse, after the oil had been extracted, was molded into oil-cake and fed to cattle and horses. But John kept enough of the seed for sowing, and for poultices, which Aunt Lucy effectively applied to wounds and bruises. With the doctors far away, she became quite a skilful physician in all ordinary ailments and had her own remedies always at hand, among which she gave a high place to flaxseed.

After thrashing out the seed John spread the flax-stalks in the open field and left them there to rot, that is, until the woody fibre, under the touches of sunshine and rain, became very brittle. When this process was complete, he once more carefully stored the flax in his barn. Then, when a rainy day came, sheltered from the storm, he dressed it. First, he broke it on a break which he himself had made. Its construction was very simple. Two oak blocks about three and a half feet high, eighteen inches wide and six thick, stood about six feet asunder, united by four thick strips of oak, about three inches apart, their upper edges sharpened, and their ends mortised into the upright blocks. Above these were three corresponding strips, their lower edges sharpened, and fitting loosely into the interstices between the strips below. The upper strips, fastened by a pin at one end to the stationary, and into a movable, block at the other, were lifted up by a strong wooden handle. When up, to my boyish fancy, the break looked like a great mouth watering for flax. And yet it seemed queer to me, that unlike the jaws of man or beast, the under jaw was stationary, while the upper moved up and down. Just note the break in action. Erskine took a great handful of flax-stalks, and, lifting the upper jaw, laid them across the lower, then brought down the upper again and again upon the flax until all the brittle fibre of the stalks was shivered into ten thousand pieces, or till, in my boyish thought, they were chewed up fine.

The flax when broken was swingled. An inch and a half board, about five feet by one and a half stood perpendicularly, the lower end mortised into a solid pedestal, while the edges of the upper end were carefully rounded and smoothed. John Erskine held in his left hand a bunch of the broken flax so that it hung over the upper end of the board; in his right grasping the swingle, a wooden instrument in form much like a sword, but with a dull edge, he struck it again and again till he had separated from it every vestige of the wood fibre.

Near the swingle-board was the hatchel; it was just four or five rows of iron spikes of uniform length fastened into a wide, smooth, thick plank; through these spikes John now drew the swingled flax till the coarser fibre, the tow, was combed out of it. He then doubled it up and tied a string round it. How flossy it was! How soft to the touch! He laid it, as though it were a precious treasure, in a large basket. And as he had opportunity he went on breaking, swingling, hatchelling until he had gotten out of the flax-stalks all that was of any worth. His great basket had been more than once filled with those downy bunches of flax-fibre. But what will be done with that pile of tow that he has hatchelled out? We shall see; nothing of value will be permitted to go to waste.

Aunt Lucy now takes possession of the tow and flax. She stows them in the attic of the house. The flax spinning-wheel, given her by her aunt and brought on the wedding journey to the new log house in the wilderness, is made ready. She sits beside it, spreads on the distaff a bunch of the flax, puts in place the band to the fly-wheel, works the treadle with her foot, dips her finger in a little cup of water that hangs near the distaff, and deftly transforms the flax into thread, which is wound upon the whirring spindle. When the spindle is full of thread she reels it off, forming skeins of linen yarn. The work goes on during every spare hour until all the flax, and all the tow as well, has become thread. And now this "worthy woman," who "seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands," who "layeth her hands to the distaff" becomes the skilful weaver and "maketh linen garments." No wonder that "her children rise up, and call her blessed" and "her husband praiseth her."

She wove cloth for linen sheets, grateful to the touch when hot nights came; cloth for linen towels; tow cloth, strong and durable, from which she made dresses for her younger daughters and trousers for her husband and sons, and at times linen handkerchiefs were a product of her loom. A few years since one of her daughters, a gracious woman of full fourscore years, with commendable pride showed me an excellent linen handkerchief made by her mother. She tenderly cherished it as a precious memento of a mother's industry, skill and thoughtful care for her household.

But among the handicrafts of the neighborhood we must not fail to notice that most of the people made their own candles. Of course if they had chosen to do so they could have bought them at the store; but those who had beef or mutton tallow, instead of selling it, usually manufactured it into candles; mutton tallow, since it was harder and whiter, was always preferred. Meeting one day a grandson of John Erskine, he inquired about his grandfather's neighborhood and wanted especially to learn how the farmers there made candles. I told him that here and there a man run them in tin molds, but that most of the people made dipped candles. That I might make the process clear to him, I said: "Take two chairs or boxes, set them from ten to fifteen feet from each other, connect them by two parallel strips of board a foot apart. Take thirty or forty wooden rods, about sixteen inches long and a third of an inch in diameter, such as the farmer could easily whittle out of a white-pine board with his jack-knife; hang to each rod six candle wicks about two inches apart; place these rods upon and at right angles to the parallel strips of board so that the dangling wicks will hang between them in parallel rows. Now bring a large kettle, fill it half full of hot water, then bring the melted tallow, bubbling hot, from the fire, and pour it on the water. Don't be afraid, tallow and water never mix. Now in turn take each rod in your hand and, having immersed the wicks in the liquid tallow, put it back in its place; while it awaits its turn for the next submergence, the tallow absorbed by the wicks will cool. Keep on dipping till the lower ends of the candles are just large enough to slip into the socket of an ordinary candlestick. Since at each dip the melted tallow runs down a little, the candles are larger at the bottom than at the top, — that is unavoidable. Now let them hang all night, the cold of the night will harden them. In the morning bring the candle-box. There are thirty rods and six on a rod; so you have fifteen dozen of tallow dips. Now put the box in the cellar, where it is always cool, but put it up on a high shelf where the mice can't reach it, for hungry mice are great tallow nibblers." Then I said to my questioner, "Do you now see how your grandfather and his neighbors made dipped candles?" And he replied, "Yes, I see." "Well," said I, "it is a lost art now, but we shall never sigh for it."

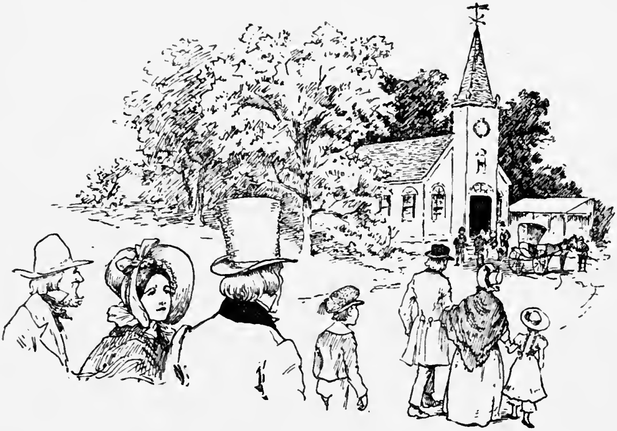
As we have before said, all kept cows, and there was hardly a person of either sex who did not know how to milk. Of course all made butter, both for their own use and for barter at the store. The housewife exchanged her butter for such groceries as she needed, a little tea, less coffee, some allspice, two or three ounces of cinnamon, a few cloves for her pickles, a cone of loaf-sugar almost as hard as a stone, to be used only when she had company, and a half-dozen nutmegs to make her custards savory. Sometimes she bought with her butter a few needles and thread, calico for a dress, some cotton cloth, a comb or a sunbonnet. The butter industry was a godsend to the farmer's wife.

Moreover, cheese-making was common. Some housewives reduced it to a fine art. They used no skimmed milk as nowadays. The milk was brought warm from the cows, carefully strained, and poured into a sweet, clean tub, where it was at once converted into curd. So all the richness of the milk went into the cheese. Now, since every farmer had a cheese-press, when the curd had been fitly seasoned, and packed into a cheese-hoop, it was pressed till all the whey was squeezed out of it. Then the compacted, finished cheese, wrapped in a cheese-cloth, was thoroughly greased with butter and put up on a shelf in the pantry to age.

But the dairy was supplemented by the hennery. Everybody in the neighborhood raised hens. Patent hatchers being then unknown, we relied on natural incubation, and it never failed us. We had eggs in abundance, eggs boiled, fried, dropped on toast, made into omelets; we had custard and custard pies; we had chicken roasted and fried, chicken fricassee, baked chicken pie and chicken potpie. All this shows how large a place was filled by the cackling hen, that even now is more valuable to the nation than all our gold mines.

But while among fowls hens were our chief industry, we also had ducks and turkeys and geese, the last not so much for food as for feathers. During the summer the poor, luckless geese were picked once in six weeks. It was downright cruelty to animals. I repeatedly witnessed the torture. Once I helped Mrs. Erskine and two of her amiable daughters do the naughty deed. We drove the fine, plump geese into a stable, and I caught them one by one and handed them over to their fair tormentors. The geese were laid on their backs in the laps of the pickers, and all the feathers were plucked from their smarting bodies, except a small tuft left on either side to support the wings. The frightened geese squawked in pain, but their pitiful cries were unheeded. If any goose in self-defence bit the picker a woolen stocking was slipped over its head and neck so that to the torture of having the feathers torn out of its living flesh was added that of half smothering. Yes, I saw the kind-hearted Aunt Lucy, apparently without any pity do that cruel thing. Why not? It was a universal custom. All her neighbors did the same, and feathers so secured were called live-geese feathers and were used in making the great feather beds that every housekeeper must have, especially for company. In the cities and larger villages, one saw then as now, here and there, a sign that read, "Live-geese feathers bought and sold here."

Such were the chief industries of my country neighborhood. Taking them all into account, they bespeak the high character of the men and women that wrought there so long ago and reveal the secret of their thrift. While they were consumers they were also producers, and they produced vastly more than they consumed. They were also intelligent, not so much from what they read in books and papers as from what they did. In mastering their varied crafts they learned how to observe accurately and to generalize justly and clearly. Like other communities they had their full share of dunces, but at the same time not a few men and women of wit and wisdom.



CHAPTER V

MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

Some of the first settlers of my country neighborhood were genuine Christians. Before their migration westward, while living in New England or eastern New York, they not only got religion but religion got them. Being part and parcel of their own selves they could not, even if they would, leave it behind them. Where they went it went. Having children, they set about the work of educating them as best they could. As soon as they had put roofs over their heads they united in building a log schoolhouse. They had a double purpose in constructing it. There week-days their children should acquire the rudiments of secular knowledge, and there on Sundays all who would should unitedly worship God. Thus at the start the church and the school, springing out of the same root, began to grow side by side. But the church, with its manifold and salutary influences, shall first claim our attention.

Before these God-fearing pioneers had any minister they assembled each Sunday in their log school-house to worship God. They sang hymns, read and commented on the scriptures and prayed. Some of the more gifted in speech exhorted. Their words were plain and direct, and none could miss their meaning. Occasionally someone read a sermon of Wesley or Whitefield or Jonathan Edwards. Once in two or three months some traveling minister spent a Sunday with them, preaching in the forenoon, afternoon and evening. All hailed such an event with enthusiasm; they came from miles around on foot, in ox-carts, lumber wagons and on horseback to hear. After the preacher had gone the people for days discussed what he had said. As the inhabitants of the settlement increased, ministers of different denominations visited them more frequently. At last, the log school-house was no longer large enough to accommodate the growing congregation. Relief was at first afforded by erecting in another part of the neighborhood an additional and larger school-house. Here, after a while, two very sensible preachers held a protracted meeting. They agreed upon a division of their labor. One of them had an unusual ability in preaching God's law, the other in proclaiming his love, grace and forgiveness. Each forenoon the former let loose the thunders of Sinai against all sin and unrighteousness; each evening the latter with tenderness and gentle persuasiveness told the people how willing God was to forgive even the worst of sinners; in the morning, the people said, the one cut them down, in the evening, the other bound up their wounds and healed them. While they faithfully proclaimed God's wrath against sin and his willingness to forgive, God's hatred of sin and his love of the sinner, a deep sense of God's presence pervaded the whole community. Each one began to feel, he knew not why, that God was very near. With this apprehension of God came deep conviction of sin. Many repented and began to lead a new life.

Some, however, fought against God's ambassadors. The school-house in which the protracted meeting was held was on the corner of Eli Furbur's farm. Eli had a strong body, vigorous intellect and tenacious will. Though a son of godly parents, he was irreligious. He lived for himself, was proud and self-conceited. He scouted all revivalistic meetings; in his opinion they were mere excitement, emotion, froth. He snorted in derision at the meeting now going on in the school-house. With unwonted zeal he gave himself to work, but could not banish it from his mind. The meeting was an unwelcome guest, that persisted in walking with him, and sitting down with him at table, and going to bed with him at night. He was greatly vexed when the thought of God in some mysterious way stole in upon him, and he determined to break up that senseless protracted meeting.

Close by the school-house were a lot of logs to be split into fence-rails. When the congregation had come together in the forenoon, Furbur appeared with his ax, beetle and wedges and began his work. He made all the noise he could and kept it up incessantly; but, while he greatly disturbed the meeting, it still went right on, no one seeming to notice him. However, the preacher did pray fervently for the noisy rail-splitter, and the people said, Amen; but while he delivered his sermon with freedom and power, his sentences were punctuated by the strokes of the ax and beetle. Furbur now saw that he had failed; he had neither silenced the voice of his own conscience nor the voice of the preacher. Thinking much during the afternoon, he concluded that he was not acting like a man of sense in condemning a meeting, which he had not attended. So he determined that, instead of trying to break it up, he would go and hear what the preachers had to say. The next forenoon he was on hand, and as he listened his prejudice was swept away. At the close of the sermon he rose and said to his neighbors, " Yesterday I was so opposed to this meeting that I tried, as you know, to break it up by splitting rails; but now I have decided that as for me and my house we will henceforth serve the Lord." An old man, who heard Furbur's confession, afterwards said to some youngsters: " Boys, you better not try to 'rastle with the Lord, he'll throw you every time."

Among those that attended the memorable meetings in the school-house was John Erskine. While outwardly blameless, under the searching preaching of the law he felt himself to be an awful sinner. For a time he said nothing, but thought much. He began to pray in secret. His conflict with sin and self was long and sharp; at last he submitted to Christ as his Savior and King, especially as his King. Consciousness of reconciliation with God came to him not suddenly, but like the gradual dawning of the morning. Then in a few simple words he told his neighbors of his new faith, and took his stand openly on the Lord's side. To the day of his death he was as unshakable as the hills. But he had what was then called a law experience. Through life he always had a deep sense of sin; he never fully realized how completely God through Christ had forgiven him. Alternating shadow and sunshine swept over him; now sober almost to melancholy on account of his transgressions, now breaking out into songs on account of God's forgiving grace.

But Aunt Lucy, busy with her children and her housework, did not attend the protracted meeting, and seemed to take no interest in it. But she could not escape that subtle and mighty spiritual influence that pervaded the entire countryside. She too began to think. One night she felt such deep conviction of sin that she could not sleep. Lying in her bed, she prayed for forgiveness, and all at once her soul was flooded with light and joy. This was an experience so absolutely new and strange that she woke John up and told him about it; but he said that he had never felt that way and did not know what it was. He then for the first time told her his experience, so different from hers. Always practical and resourceful she said, "Let's get up and pray." So, before the faintest dawning of the morning, they knelt beside their bed and prayed for forgiveness, and that God would lead them into the truth. When they rose from their knees, she was so full of joy that she had no wish for further sleep. She said to John that she must tell Mr. Smith, who lived about half a mile away, of her new experience, for she wanted him to have it, too. So at the gray dawn she was at his house and found him just coming out of his door. She at once told him what a change had been wrought in her and how full of joy she was. When she had finished, he said: "I've been so troubled about my spiritual condition that I have not slept much during the night, and I'm glad you've come." And she said, "Let us pray." In a moment they were on their knees. Her neighbor gave himself then and there to Christ, and they rejoiced together over the forgiveness of their sins.

This vividly reveals to us the push and power of Aunt Lucy. Converted in the night, before the sun was up she was preaching her new-found faith to a neighbor half a mile from her door. When he had received her message and was saved she, rejoicing, returned to her home and got breakfast on time for her household.

That protracted meeting lifted the whole neighborhood up into a higher life. To be sure all did not become Christians, but so many did that the improved moral condition of the entire community was clearly manifest. True religion always flowers and fruits into pure morals.

Three churches had sprung up in the neighborhood, a Presbyterian, a Baptist and a Methodist. Into these folds the recent converts were soon gathered. John Erskine, brought up a Scotch Presbyterian, and Aunt Lucy an Episcopalian, after much thought and calm deliberation, to the surprise of their relatives, became Baptists. John, noted for his steadiness of purpose and manifest uprightness of character, was soon chosen a deacon in his church. Feeling himself unfit for the office he begged to be excused from it, but at last yielded to the unanimous insistence of his brethren. The position from which he so modestly shrank he adorned for more than forty years. His religion was his life. It expressed itself in all his dealings and intercourse with his fellow men. He did injustice to none; good to many. He treated his farm-hands with rare kindness. He sedulously guarded all their rights. He fed them well, paid them fully and promptly, and never allowed them to work overtime. It was customary to stop work at sundown. Just before sunset, John would call out, "It's time to quit." Sometimes his help would say, "Let us finish what we are at just now." Then, in stentorian tone, came the reply, "NO, drop it, do that to-morrow; and if there is no to-morrow you won't have to do it at all."

In his house he was cheerful, and by his humorous speech and kindly manner made all about him happy. But he was very strict on some points. Regarding dancing and card-playing as horrible sins, he absolutely forbade his children to indulge in either. And they never ran counter to his will, except occasionally on the sly. Aunt Lucy believed in a little more liberty, but thought it best for all to heed the will of the head of the house. Her children, however, noted that when a violinist played skilfully in her parlor, she seemed unusually animated, and said, "When he played I felt like dancing." It brought back the days of her girlhood, when she sometimes knew what it was to —

"Trip it as you go,
On the light fantastic toe."

But John doubted if the influence of a fiddle — he never said violin — were good.

He also kept holy the Lord's day. He was not so tenacious about it as to make his children unhappy; but he did no unnecessary work on Sunday, nor did he permit any over whom he had control to do it. If his hay, dry and ready to be put into the mow, were about to be wet by an approaching shower, he would not touch it even if it should rot in the field. Once in the early spring the weather suddenly became warm on Saturday night, and the sap of the maple trees began to run freely. By Sunday noon the buckets were full and began to run over. John's eldest son said to him, "Father, the sap-buckets are full and running over. The neighbors are gathering their sap, and don't you think that we ought to gather ours and save it?" His emphatic reply was: "It's the Lord's sap and if he wants to pour it on the ground it is none of my business. My stewardship begins to-morrow morning." But his children noted that it began a great while before sunrise on the next day.

One summer, just after the wheat had been cut, while it stood in shocks in the open fields, there came a long, drizzling rain. The farmers were anxious. If the rain should continue the wheat would sprout and their crop, which was their mainstay, would be ruined. But on Friday night the heavens cleared, and on Saturday the surface of the bundles of wheat became dry. So, some farmers, fearing that it might rain again, began on Sunday to draw their wheat in and pack it away in their barns. John Erskine had a great crop of it, had in fact much more at stake than most of his neighbors; but he paid no attention to his wheat on that bright, beautiful Sunday. Instead, he took his family in his two-horse wagon to church. As he drove along, observing what his neighbors were doing, he said to his youngest son: "These men are committing a double folly; they are putting their wheat in mow while it is wet. It will heat and spoil. And they are breaking the Sabbath." When Monday came the heavens were still clear. John's sons asked him if they should not begin to draw in the wheat. He, to their amazement, said, "No," and gave himself to other tasks. Not until late in the afternoon of Tuesday did he put any of his wheat into the barn, and then only a single load, saying again and again to his importunate sons, who of course knew more than "the governor," "It must not be put in the mow until the bundles are dry in the center."

During Wednesday and Thursday he put his whole crop under roof. On the following Sunday, when driving to church, he saw his neighbors, who a week before had stowed their wet wheat in their barns, taking it out and standing it in the open fields to dry, for it had already heated in the mow and begun to mildew, greatly damaging it. So he said again: "My son, we should always keep the Sabbath because God has commanded it, but it pays to keep it. See our neighbors. Last Sunday they worked to put the wheat in their barns, and now they again break the Sabbath by carrying it out to dry. Never forget that it pays to obey God." Was not this humble deacon right?

Now, as the community increased in wealth, and log houses gave way to frame, the churches built meeting houses where they regularly worshipped, though for a long time the school-houses in emergencies were also used for that purpose. The Presbyterians were distinguished by having a stone meeting-house. It was neither imposing nor beautiful, but, like the staid people that worshipped there, it was solid. The audience room was in the form of a parallelogram, with a high pulpit at one end and a higher gallery for the choir at the other, while between the two were rows of high-backed pews. The pews had doors opening on the aisle, that shut the occupants of each pew in and everybody else out.

In my day this church had four successive pastors, always called by the people either elders or ministers. These ministers were all college graduates. In this also the Presbyterians were distinguished from the Methodists and Baptists. But a stone meeting-house and a college-bred minister were enough to make ordinary mortals a little proud, and, by many a word and act, these staid Presbyterians showed that they were not wholly impervious to this subtle sin.

The first minister of this church whom I remember, was a young man, very precise in manners and dignified in bearing. He never seemed for a moment to forget that he was a minister, which perchance was rather a virtue than a fault. He wrote all his sermons with scrupulous care and read them to his congregation, with very little action or warmth. This method of preaching was not popular with the people, especially since the sermons had hardly a symptom of genius; but as he presented faithfully the essential truths of the gospel, his success, measured by years, was not inconsiderable.

He was smooth-shaven and wore a wide, white stock and standing collar, whose stiff, sharp edge came dangerously near his ears. He seemed to me, boy as I then was, a very sober mortal. If his approach did not fill me with awe, it made me feel that in such a presence anything like boyish fun would be utterly out of place. But he took a deep interest in us, and we learned by degrees that he had a kind heart. We all respected him, some of us came near loving him. He at times amused and instructed us by some simple experiments in chemistry and electricity, which to our boyish minds were very wonderful.

A part of the time he kept, what was called, a "Select-School." He taught some favored, advanced pupils Moral Science. This filled the small boys with wonder. We thought; "Shall we ever know enough to have a study like that?" He awakened within some of us a desire to go to college, somehow, somewhere. But we had never seen a college nor a college professor. To our callow imaginations a college was something very high, very august, and well-nigh unattainable, a thing foreordained for the elect few.

This dignified minister, having been called to another church, was succeeded by a man far abler in the pulpit; so at least the boys and girls thought. He was not so prim nor precise as his predecessor. He dressed and acted very much like the rest of us, and we were wholly at ease in his presence. Like Zacchaeus he was small of stature; his hair curled all over his head; he wore in the pulpit a turn-over collar and a black necktie. He stirred us up by his preaching. In his sermons he poured forth his thoughts with great force and vehemence, and when under full headway amused us greatly by strangely moving his curly scalp backwards and forwards, as though it were under complete control of his will. We got through him a new idea of a Presbyterian minister. We learned that a preacher of that denomination might be at the same time both genial and pious. He unbent and came near to us. He touched us with his sympathy. In return we gave him our confidence and affection. While at times he awakened our humor and stirred us to innocent laughter, at others he made us think to some purpose of spiritual and eternal realities. But such a man of course was needed in a broader field, and all too soon he left us; but the good which he did remained and will forever. Some of his impassioned, eloquent sentences, uttered more than sixty-five years ago, still cling to my memory.

His successor was a red-headed man of small calibre. He wore a white necktie, was shy in manner and quite destitute of personal magnetism. His sermons were meagre in thought, and he read them in a hesitating, hitchy way. Moreover, they lacked the accent of conviction. Nobody seemed to be impressed by them. A poor sermon, badly delivered, is not half so attractive as a wired and rattling skeleton. But the preacher was pure in character, and exemplary in conduct. In spite of all his drawbacks he did good. Let no pulpit pygmy despair. But in one thing he excelled; he was a mighty hunter of birds.

He not only shot pigeons and quail, we all did that, — but also robins. To shoot a robin I then thought was mighty mean, and think so still. But he excused himself for it, since he shot them to protect the cherries.

This fact of his ministerial career among us brings to mind two interesting characters. The minister was a bachelor and lived with one of his deacons. A Mr. Le Clerc also made his home there. The latter was the mystery of the neighborhood. Whether he were bachelor or widower no one knew. He gave no information about himself. He was evidently a Frenchman, but spoke English fluently and correctly. He was apparently about sixty years old. He had enough money so that he could live comfortably without work. He dressed well, took snuff from a gold snuff-box, carried a red and yellow bandanna, wore a white neck-cloth with standing collar, and when he went to church always donned a shiny silk hat and a swallow-tail coat. Being a Presbyterian, it was conjectured that his ancestry must have been Huguenots. He was graceful in manner and unaffectedly polite to all. But whence he came, and what his life hitherto had been, no one among us ever found out. He was a gracious old gentleman of courtly mien, full of the milk of human kindness, who mysteriously appeared among us, and for many years lived before us an irreproachable life; but beyond that none of us knew an iota of his history. Whenever I think of him, an exhibition of his mercy is vividly before me. About forty feet in front of the east veranda of the farm-house, where he and his pastor, the noted bird-hunter, lived, was a row of cherry trees, which were red with ripe and ripening fruit. The robins were flitting about among the branches, eating their fill and bearing away the luscious cherries to their hungry broods. The tender-hearted Frenchman stood on the veranda, looking with evident delight on the bewitching scene, when the clerical Nimrod came out of the house with his shot-gun to slaughter the marauders. Two robins alighted on a cherry spray, and all aquiver were eagerly feasting, their heads and tails bobbing up and down. The ministerial hunter lifted his gun to fire at them, when Le Clerc frantically flourished his bandanna and cried, "Shoo! shoo!" Away flew the frightened robins, while their protector, laughing, said, "Good, good, you ought not to shoot them, innocent creatures." But his pastor responded, "That's too bad! if we don't shoot them, they'll eat up all the cherries." I have always been grateful to that mysterious Frenchman for the lesson of mercy which he by his act taught me.

But the deacon, under whose roof lived both the slaughterer and the defender of the robins, was a marked character. His name, Karl Craigton, sounded like clashing rocks. He was tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, bull-necked and as hairy as Esau. Matted brown locks, with a tinge of sandiness, covered his head; small, reddish hazel eyes peeped from beneath unusually heavy, shaggy eyebrows, while his face, even up to his cheek bones, was covered with a thick, stubbed, sandy beard. He looked as though he might have been a lineal descendant of some Scandinavian viking. He was embodied hardiness. The heaviest, most exacting labor of his farm seemed to him but a sportful trifle. He gloried in all sorts of work, and drove hard both his hired men and his horses. But he spared himself no more than he did others.

A single incident, among many, shows his exceptional hardihood. His wheat was ripe, and he began, with herculean energy, single-handed to cut it with his cradle. By a misdirected stroke, he ripped with his scythe the calf of his leg, making a ghastly wound full six inches long. The physician and surgeon lived two miles away. Since his yellow grain needed to be cut at once, he could not spare the time to send for him. So, to staunch the blood, he bound up the wound with his bandanna, and going to the house, threaded a coarse needle with white thread and sewed up his gaping wound. He then went back to the field, and till sunset the ripened grain continued to fall before the masterful strokes of his cradle. Was he not a grim hero?

But his moral character was seamy. He was secretive and tricky. While doing some good, at times, when his clandestine acts were brought to light, his neighbors were stunned and disgusted with his meanness. He reduced knavery to a fine art. He had a yoke of steers beautifully matched. In the spring or early summer he was expecting to sell them at a high price. But he left them out nights in an open shed, and when unexpectedly the mercury fell to twenty degrees below zero, the tail of one of them froze so that, after a few days, the lower part of it dropped off. And now since the steers were no longer caudally matched, their market value was greatly decreased. But the wily deacon was equal to the emergency. Finding on a dry hide a tail of the same color, he adroitly wired it to the stub of the tail that remained, so that to all appearance the steers were now as perfectly matched in tail as they were in head or horns. A buyer came. He admired the steers that were so perfectly matched and readily paid a high price for them. After a while the despicable trick became known, and its author felt the scorn of the entire neighborhood; but he was a striking type of bigger thieves since his day, like the sugar-weighers of New York.

He was a lover of money, and easily tempted to use almost any method to obtain it. He no doubt meant to be good, but contrary to his purpose he was now and then astonishingly bad. Once on a time he visited a city full twenty miles away. There he saw a juggler, with a crowd around him, putting by sleight-of-hand a five-dollar goldpiece under one of two hats. Many a novice thought that he could easily tell the hat under which he put it. If he could, the goldpiece would be his; if he failed, he must pay five dollars to the juggler. The deacon looked on for a while, and then feeling sure of his game said: "It's under the hat to your right." The hat was lifted up, but there was no goldpiece under it. And the deacon before the laughing crowd shamefacedly paid his five dollars. It griped him to lose the money, but there was no help for it. He thought that no one acquainted with him would ever find out what he had done; but one of his neighbors was there on the outskirts of the crowd and, thinking the incident too good to keep, told others of it. It came to the ears of his brethren in the church. The elders called him to account for gambling. He acknowledged his fault, but at the same time urged in palliation of it, that he intended when he had won the five dollars to give it to the minister.

He was devoted to his church. He attended regularly all of its meetings. On all occasions he spoke in praise of it. He gave money to support the pastor, but not in large sums. He was proud of what his church achieved, and was even ready to give it credit for what others had done. A mile away the people of that part of the neighborhood held meetings in a school-house, where about twenty had been converted. These converts asked for membership in the Presbyterian Church. When the request was under consideration, the slippery deacon spoke heartily in favor of receiving them. He was slow of speech. It was difficult for him to frame his sentences. As a forerunner of every phrase was a guttural ahem-ahem, succeeded by a slight but audible grunt. So he began his address to the church, " Ahem-ahem-ahem, Brethren, — ahem — ahem — as a church — ahem — we have — ahem — great reason — ahem — to congratulate ourselves on our rapid increase. For one — ahem — I am heartily — ahem — in favor of receiving — ahem — these converts into our church." So he proceeded with continued and abundant ahems to extol the enterprise of his church.

Now since the church, aside from two or three members, had not so much as once attended the meetings at the school-house where these applicants for church membership had been gathered into the kingdom, the boastful remarks of Deacon Craigton stirred up a good sister, Aunt Jane Lacey, to reply to him. She was a matron full fifty years old, tall, lank and sallow. She was a godly woman without any fanaticism. There were no frills either to her piety or her speech. She wore a dark calico dress and a very long sunbonnet. As she rose to her feet every eye was on her. She never spoke unless she was profoundly moved, and the audience was intent to catch every word that might fall from her lips. She stepped out of her pew into the aisle. She was partially bent over. Fixing her eyes on the boastful, self-righteous deacon, she said, with a marked nasal twang, emphasizing her words not only by her intonation, but by jerking her head up and down: "I am sure that we are all in favor of receiving the converts into this church. But they were not converted through our labors. We have nothing to boast of." At this point, looking the *aheming* deacon straight in the eye, and, bringing down her sunbonnet-covered head with an unusually violent jerk, she added, "Don't you think that we ought to give Gawd all the glory?" The deacon was squelched. The atmosphere was cleared. The converts were received, and the glory was given not to the church, but to God.

Now let no man judge the entire church by Deacon Craigton. Why not judge it rather by Aunt Jane Lacey? There were scores of persons in that obscure country church, who were pure in life and Christlike in spirit; why not judge it by the many rather than by the one? Does one black sheep in the flock make the whole flock black? But even Deacon Craigton was often upright and true. Why not judge him by his best acts rather than by his worst? A man said one day, " Deacon Craigton is a rather sorry specimen of a Christian." A gentleman hearing the remark asked, " Did you know him when he was from seventeen to twenty-one?" His defamer replied, " Why no, I did not." " Well," said the questioner, " if you had, you would now see, notwithstanding all his faults, what a miracle of divine grace he is."

The successor of the robin-shooter was an unusually able man. He preached with great force and at times with rare eloquence, but he proved to be a hypochondriac. One Sunday at midday, returning to his house after preaching, he was seized with the hallucination that he had lost his head. He searched for it for three days, looking, in his efforts to find it, under every bed and bureau, into every cupboard, drawer and dark corner of the parsonage. He asked everyone who called upon him if he had seen his head anywhere. At last to his great joy he discovered it under the bureau in his bed-room. It was Wednesday, just after dinner, when he found it, and now his friends saw that he was utterly unconscious of the lapse of time since the preceding Sunday. He asked his family if they were not going to church. When told that it was Wednesday, he could not at first believe it, saying that he had preached in the morning and must preach again in the afternoon.

Some ministers differ from this worthy parson; they lose their heads without the slightest suspicion of the loss, and of course never find them.

During the pastorate of this hypochondriacal preacher there was an amusing incident in reference to his wife. She was an intelligent woman, pleasing in manner, and had fine taste in dress. The older women of the congregation thought that her wardrobe was richer than was befitting a minister's wife; so they appointed a committee to visit her, and expostulate with her on making such a display of finery. She received them without irritation or resentment, heard without protest all that they had to say, and, with a smile, thanked them heartily for coming, and for their solicitude for her and the reputation of the church. Still she intimated that her good sisters might have made a mistake as to the costliness of her dresses, and began to ask them what their dresses, which they then had on, cost per yard. They told, and lo! their dresses were much more costly than hers. While they were puzzled and embarrassed over their mistake, she went on without a word of censure to say that the secret of her dresses looking so rich lay in the way that she made them and put them on. So the conference ended in a pleasant chitchat on true economy in tasteful dressing. The committee left wishing a thousand blessings on the Christian woman who, instead of resenting their intrusion into her personal and private affairs, had deftly seized the opportunity to give them, in a sweet and winsome way, a much-needed lesson on good taste in dressing.

The Methodist church had a new pastor nearly every year, sent them by the bishop; and since the church was in a country neighborhood, he naturally did not send them the best preachers under his authority, but usually men who could not have filled acceptably the pulpits of larger places. Yet the congregations of the neighborhood were as intelligent, take them by the hundred, as the congregations of the city, especially in the Bible and Christian doctrine. But they could not pay as large a salary as churches in the city and so must be content with second-rate talent.

> "For what is worth in anything
> But so much money as 't will bring?"[1]

As there was but little to break the dull monotony of the farming community, we always hailed with delight a new face and a new voice. So each year the new Methodist preacher was greeted by a large, curious, eager audience. He was always popular at the start, when he preached his best sermons. And then the protracted meetings, held during the long winter evenings in the plain, wooden meeting-house, lighted by tallow dips, were the delight of the youngsters. In those meetings excitement often ran high. The preacher at times uttered his thoughts in stentorian tones, and pounded his pulpit and Bible with his fist, while men and women in various parts of the house cried, "Amen!" "Glory to God!" "Bless the Lord!" Some of them also sighed like a furnace or emitted sepulchral groans. Others clapped their hands and exclaimed, "Come now, Lord, come in mighty power!" To most of us this was the height of enjoyment. Nevertheless, these noisy meetings sometimes did great good. Some, who attended them for laughter and fun, felt, before the meeting closed, premonitions of coming judgment. Somehow hell on the one hand and heaven on the other seemed not very far off, and the conviction stole into some hearts, that it was the part of wisdom to shun hell and turn their faces toward heaven.

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[1] Hudibras P. II., C. I., Line 465.

The coming annually of the presiding elder was also a great occasion. He was usually a man of ability, and evidently preached his best sermon. The people of the neighborhood turned out to hear him, and at times packed the meeting-house. They keenly appreciated a good discourse. The boys used to wish that all the ministers were presiding elders, so that they could have good preaching the year round.

Within the bounds of the neighborhood was a beautiful primeval forest. There, in God's cathedral, whose pillars were the tall, straight trees, under the leafy arches of pendent limbs, the Methodists held in midsummer their camp-meetings. Most of the people of the neighborhood, without respect to creed, attended them. Denominational walls for the time being were broken down. Christians of different names preached and prayed together, and the forest rang with their songs of praise.

But there too, at times, were enacted the wildest extravagances. Men and women prayed at the top of their voices, and, as the excitement rose, a score at a time would pray, and each would utter his petitions with the full capacity of his lungs, — and that capacity seemed marvelously great, — until bedlam itself seemed to have broken loose. Sometimes persons fell to the ground, became pale and rigid, and were oblivious to all that was passing around them. Hours sometimes elapsed before they awoke to consciousness.

At these meetings much of the preaching was good, many of the exhortations were sensible and weighty, but mingled with these were talks that were strange and grotesque. On one occasion a Methodist brother, who wished to say something to promote a closer union of the various denominations, said: " Brethren, there was Paul, he was a good, old-school Presbyterian and one of the greatest men that ever lived. Then, there was John, a good old Baptist, but one of the best men that ever breathed; but there was good old David, who exhorts us to shout for joy and clap our hands, thank God, he was a Methodist."

The Baptists for many years were served by the same pastor, Elder Josiah Martin. He was also a farmer. He did not however preach that he might be able to farm it, but farmed it that he might be able to preach. What he raised in his fields reenforced his small salary of two hundred and fifty dollars a year, so that he could live respectably among the people. He made it his chief business to care for his church and congregation.

He was wholly a self-made man. He had received but the slightest education in the crudest of district schools, such as sprang up in the western wilderness. But he had seen a good deal of the world. He was a drummer boy in the war of 1812. He was also a pioneer in the van of that column which was pushing westward, to lay the foundations of thriving agricultural communities. With his ax he had assisted in clearing away the forest, and transforming the wilderness into fruitful fields. While thus engaged he was converted to Christ at a meeting held in a log school-house, which he had helped to build. He united with others in forming a church. As they had no pastor, his brethren urged him to preach. Feeling himself utterly unqualified to do so he at first refused; but at last, yielding to their importunity, he carefully thought out a sermon, but, greatly embarrassed as he rose to preach, he utterly forgot what he had prepared, and stood for two or three minutes dumb and blushing before the audience. He then began to relate to them his Christian experience and, with an overflowing heart, talked on for three quarters of an hour. Several who heard him were converted. He preached again in the afternoon with even greater power. The little church now called him to be their pastor, and the elders of the scattered churches of the wilderness assembled, laid their hands on his head and prayed. That was his ordination to the Christian ministry; but all who knew him felt that preceding that was God's own ordination. And so, called of God and approved by men, he went on proclaiming the truth to the day of his death. Still, he was always lamenting that he had not been educated in the schools, but he sat daily at the feet of Christ, the greatest of all teachers. By patient study he made himself familiar with the scriptures, and became a workman that "needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

In a fairly intelligent neighborhood, for many years, he so preached that those who were the most difficult to please delighted to listen to his sermons. They were not constructed according to the pattern given in the mount at Newton or Princeton, but they were orderly in arrangement, clear in thought, packed full of common sense, and delivered with force and unction. To be sure, when he became thoroughly aroused, he fell into a sort of sing-song tone, so that a wag declared that the old elder did not sufficiently distinguish between the preaching and the singing service; but the tone was never permitted to rob his utterances of that sturdy sense for which he was distinguished among his neighbors.

He had always put a very low estimate upon his own discourses, and desired very earnestly to excel. And since many other ministers wrote their sermons and read them to their congregations, he determined to do so, too. So, one week, he wrote out his sermon in full, and on Sunday morning started for church with it safely stowed in the crown of his plug hat. He was on foot and the wind was blowing furiously. Soon a blast lifted his hat from his head, and carried it over the fence into an adjoining field. The sermon, written on detached pieces of paper, flew on the wings of the wind in various directions. The elder found his hat, but unable to gather up the scattered pages of his discourse, he was compelled to preach without them. This was his first and last attempt, while in our country neighborhood, to preach from manuscript.

When greatly stirred by his subject, as he often was, he became a Boanerges in the pulpit. He had large lung power, and on occasions did not hesitate to use it. And in the hot Sunday afternoons of July and August, he occasionally laid off his coat and preached in his shirt-sleeves. He did indeed proclaim the gospel, that God is ready to pardon and save, but like many preachers of that day, he also let loose the thunders of God's law, and many who heard him were deeply convicted of sin and felt that they must repent or perish. A little more of that kind of preaching to-day might greatly quicken the public conscience.

He never permitted work on the farm to interfere with his preparation for the pulpit. During the weeks of haying and harvesting, like his neighbors, he worked every day, early and late in the fields. While he toiled he very seldom spoke to anyone; his thoughts were busy with his sermons. It was then that he preached best. In harvest time his audiences were largest, since the people expected the ablest discourses at that season of the year. I well remember one of these harvest-time sermons, preached more than sixty-five years ago. It was a clear, beautiful Sunday. The audience was large. There was scarcely a vacant seat in the meeting house. Elder Martin, full of bodily vigor, rose to preach. He announced as his text, "But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." A titter spread through the audience. Every eye was on the speaker, every ear was open to his message. With great earnestness he set forth the fact that the manifold blessings that God bestows upon men led them often in their pride to rebel against him. To illustrate and prove this he cited many examples both from the Bible and secular history, and then appealed to the people not to let their rich harvests lead them to forget God and rebel against him, but rather to devote themselves and their increasing wealth to him. That was a timely sermon. It deeply impressed all who heard it. For days the people talked about it. There were able preachers long ago, even in obscure places.

Moreover, the elder was popular with the boys. He understood and loved them. They thought that there was nobody quite equal to him. Then, he had been a drummer boy in a real war, and in their eyes he was a hero. Some of them bought snare-drums and, to their great delight, he taught them how to play on them. At times in summer evenings, for a mile around the parsonage, the neighbors could hear the roll of the drum as the elder drilled the boys in the art of handling their drumsticks. He drummed some of the boys into the kingdom of heaven.

Many would probably call the prayer meetings of my country neighborhood old-fashioned. But there was power in them. The pastor read the scriptures and presented at considerable length some thought which he considered pertinent and important.

After this there followed testimonies, exhortations, singing and prayers. Both men and women took part. When they prayed they got down on their knees and with great earnestness offered their petitions to God. They sang the hymns of Watts and Wesley. Nobody was in a hurry to go home. They acted like persons who had very important business to transact, and who did not intend to leave the place, where they had assembled, until it was done. They would often pray, exhort and sing for two or three hours. They sang with the spirit, whatever one might say of the understanding. One good old deacon, who always, save when eating his meals, had a generous quid of tobacco in his mouth, used to both pray and sing through his nose. But the hymns were full of biblical truth. Many of them are the best lyrics in our language. The old tunes admirably fitted the words. When I now hear some of the flashy hymns of to-day sung to fiddly-diddly tunes — is it because I am an old fogy? — I long for the hymns and tunes of my boyhood. I would gladly walk twenty miles to hear that old, tobacco-chewing, Baptist deacon sing the following hymn through his nose, to the tune of Windham,

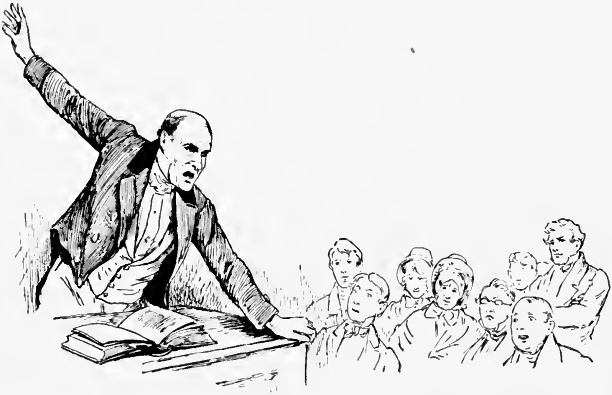
"Broad is the road that leads to death.
And thousands walk together there,
But wisdom shows a narrow path,
With here and there a traveler."

At the regular preaching service, the singing was by a chorus choir. The Baptist meeting house was like the Presbyterian in its general, internal arrangements. There was a very high pulpit in one end of it for the minister, and a still higher gallery in the other for the singers. Between the two sat the congregation in their high-backed pews. In the choir gallery the men sat on one side, the women on the other. The musical instruments were the flute, flageolet and bass-viol. The violin, or fiddle, as it was called in the neighborhood, was ruled out, because from time immemorial it had done service at dances, and by sinful associations had been irredeemably corrupted. By common consent it was given over to the devil, to whom, the Christian people seemed to believe, by prescriptive right it belonged, but the bass-viol, or big fiddle, as the boys called it, was permitted to praise God in the sanctuary. It was an unsolved puzzle to my boyish mind, why a little fiddle was so devilish and a big fiddle was so godly.

When the elder had given out and read the hymn, the chorister pressed his pitch-pipe between his teeth and then held it to his ear; the bass-viol player drew with great dignity his bow across the string which would give the proper key; the flute and flageolet blew the harmonious note, then the whole choir struck in and sang. At the sound of the first note. the whole congregation rose, turned their backs to the preacher and their faces to the choir, that they might not only hear, but see the performance. The singing was far from being artistic, but it was very hearty and loud, and as the people were not so cultivated in music as to be fastidious, it unquestionably helped their devotions.

All the churches in our neighborhood sustained Sunday schools. In the opening exercises, besides scripture reading and prayer, we sang some familiar hymn; but there were then no Sunday school songs, nor Sunday school papers. We had a small library in which were some good books. But there was one thing of inestimable value; we were required to learn all of our scripture lessons by heart. Anyone who would not, or could not, do this was made to feel that he was sadly deficient. And we did not study the Bible kangaroo-fashion, as they often do to-day, but we began with a gospel, and learned so many verses each week without skipping, until we had gone through several chapters or the whole book. What many of us learned became the foundation of a liberal education; the thought contained in the lessons colored all future acquisitions of knowledge. New wine may be good, but sometimes I think that the old is better.

Thus my country neighborhood was well cared for religiously. All had the opportunity of public worship. Within the bounds of the neighborhood there were, every Sunday in the year, at least six sermons preached, and often more. There were weekly prayer-meetings in the churches and in private houses. There were Sunday schools and Bible classes. Still all did not fear the Lord. This neighborhood, like many others, had some of the best and some of the meanest of mankind.



CHAPTER VI

THE MILLERITE EXCITEMENT

During 1842 and a part of 1843 my country neighborhood was greatly agitated by Millerism. William Miller, who resided at Low Hampton, Washington County, N. Y., began as early as 1831 to predict the speedy second coming of Christ. His views spread throughout several States, and tens of thousands believed that the end of the world was at hand.

According to Miller's interpretation of prophecy, Christ would come in 1843. As the specified time drew nearer, the excitement grew more intense in communities where his notions were adopted, and in many other communities where it was thought that these notions might possibly be true. At last our remote and peaceful neighborhood, which was kept in contact with the outside world only by a slow two-horse stage and a slower postboy on horseback, began to boil and bubble with this widespread agitation. It seemed to be as pervasive as the atmosphere, and no household, however hidden from public view, could remain untouched by it. Everyone had something to say about the speedy coming of the Lord, and the judgment that was expected to follow it. Some to be sure condemned the whole agitation as groundless and foolish, but the frequency with which they recurred to the subject showed that they were by no means free from anxiety concerning it. Others thought that it was possible, if not probable, that Christ might soon appear " in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," while a few were very confident that he would come to judge the world in the following year. Some rejoiced in view of his expected appearing, while others, though some of them were professed Christians, evidently convinced that they were not quite ready for his advent, were filled with apprehension and a feeling akin to alarm.

In December of 1842, there came into our neighborhood, from Vermont, an excellent minister, gentle in manner, who calmly measured every word that he spoke. He was earnest, thoughtful, candid, and seemed to be quite free from fanaticism. In his utterances he never for a moment betrayed any undue excitement. He won the esteem and commanded the confidence of all, and had not the shadow of a doubt that Christ would come in the following April. And notwithstanding the Lord had declared that no one, not even the angels in heaven, knew the day of his second coming, this man quietly announced, with all the positiveness of a Hebrew prophet, that Christ would come on the twenty-third day of April next.

Now, so long as the time of Christ's coming to judgment was somewhat indefinite, that indefiniteness to my boyish mind robbed the event of much of its horror. Even if the Lord should come in 1843, he might not appear, I thought, until the very last days of December, and that would give me, after New Year's, about twelve months to adjust myself to the new situation. Then Christmas, his birthday, would be such a fitting time for him to come, so that his first and second coming would occur on the same day of the month. So I laid out a beautiful plan for the Lord to follow. But the absolute definiteness as to the day of Christ's coming, and that day so near, tended to make " each particular hair to stand on end." Our boyish fun, though perfectly innocent, lost much of its charm. In imagination we saw the heavens rolling up like a scroll, the earth wrapped in flames and " melting with fervid heat."

For a whole week that calm, solemn, positive minister lectured every night in the Baptist church on the speedy second coming of the Lord, a subject which was now absorbing most of the thought of the neighborhood. Great audiences, still as the grave, greeted him. Excitement ran deep and strong. The thoughts of the people, though unexpressed, were hot within them. The lecturer hung up maps on which were represented all the great epochs of history. Then he began to interpret the "ten horns" and the "little horn" of Daniel's prophecy, and also "a time and times and the dividing of time," together with "a time, times and a half," and declared with dogmatic positiveness just how long the periods of history were which were designated by such symbolic language. Starting with the king of the kingdom, represented by the "little horn," and adding the years designated by "a time and times, and the dividing of time," it brought us just to 1843, when the Lord was to appear and judge the earth. Then in some way, I do not now remember how, he also arrived at the same result by subtraction, multiplication and division. Those were all the rules of arithmetic with which I was then acquainted, and by each one, with unerring exactness, he had demonstrated that Christ was to come the second time in 1843. I never before had taken such breathless interest in figures. I was too young to criticize his premises, his interpretation of scripture or his process of reasoning, but I saw that he added, subtracted, multiplied and divided correctly. Now, somebody had taught me that atrocious falsehood, that figures never lie, and I concluded beyond a peradventure that the Lord was coming to judge the world the very next year, and on the twenty-third day of April. I became a very thoughtful, serious boy. When I thought of my numerous pranks, I felt sure I was not quite ready for the judgment. In my anxiety I asked my father about it. He was a wise man, and evidently wishing to use passing events for my good, said that he did not know when the Lord would come, that it might be in April or even before, and that the only safe course to pursue was to be ready.

The lectures were at last finished. The people had been profoundly impressed by them. They were excited when the lecturer came; he left them still more agitated. Nearly all thought that the Lord might come in April; some were fully expecting him at that time. A man, who was a notorious drunkard, out of very fright quit his cups, attended regularly all the services at the Baptist meeting-house, professed conversion, talked and prayed, and was anxious to unite with the church. But Elder Martin was wise and thought that he had better defer his public profession for a season. Yet I noticed that when the neophyte talked or prayed, the old elder said " Amen " very heartily as though he believed in his sincerity.

Elder Martin, who had been a thoughtful, open-minded listener to his brother minister from Vermont, when the lectures were over, preached an able sermon on the text, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." That partially cleared the atmosphere, and, in a measure, quieted the general agitation, but in spite of the text and the sermon, Christ might come on April twenty-third, — nobody knew. So the excitement continued; nothing just then could stay it.

We saw that the silent, straightforward John Erskine was unusually sober, and that at every spare moment he was studying his Bible. As a result of his study, he declared that he did not understand unfulfilled prophecy and did not see how anybody could. He said that if we went right on doing faithfully our daily duties, we should be prepared to meet the Lord, whenever he might come. That seemed to be good, hard sense. Aunt Lucy heartily endorsed his view, but she put it in this way: "Nobody knows when the Lord will come; we'd better tend to our own business and the Lord will tend to his." And amid the widespread agitation, her soul was unruffled.

But the end of this religious excitement drew near. The thought of the entire community being concentrated on April, the first quarter of the new year sped away with incredible swiftness, and the dreaded month, unwelcome to many, was too speedily ushered in. Most of the people were apprehensive and solemn. Before we were fairly aware of it, the ominous twenty-third dawned. The air was thick with smoke. The sun, shorn of his sparkling rays, looked upon us through the mist with his great, dull, red eye. It was a strange, weird scene. Everything seemed to suggest that some great catastrophe was at hand. The duties of the morning in and around the farm-houses were mechanically performed. No one seemed inclined to talk; when it was necessary to speak, the utterance was in a subdued tone. Then, all at once, there was a deep, rumbling sound in the earth beneath; the ground swelled and heaved; the dishes rattled on the shelves; a brick here and there fell from the top of a chimney on the roof. It was an earthquake.

All business in the neighborhood was speedily suspended. Men and women gathered in knots to discuss the situation. The most skeptical in reference to the immediate coming of Christ began to waver. And now two men in a buggy, drawn by a large, fine, spirited horse, drove like Jehu along those country roads. Into the yard of every farm-house they threw a hand-bill, warning everybody to be ready, since the Lord would come on that very day. This warning, re-enforced and emphasized by an earthquake, produced the greatest alarm.

The day wore on. Many of the people wandered about listlessly. Some farmers began again to work in their fields, but without much energy or purpose. Near the close of the day a godless wag, who always saw the ludicrous side of even the most serious things, driving a poor horse before a dilapidated buggy, met the men who were warning the community by the hand-bills, that the Lord would come on that day, and stumped them to swap horses with him. They remonstrated with him for his wickedness, but he persisted, saying, "My horse will last you till night, and then the Lord will come and you will not need a horse again. But your horse is so fine, he will be of great service to me." But they refused and drove on. The hectoring wag declared that they denied their faith by their refusal.

On that evening the sun set in blood. Many whispered, "What will occur before midnight?" A band of Christian men and women, more enthusiastic than the rest, but having a very sordid view of the robes of righteousness worn by the saints in glory, arrayed themselves in white garments, assembled in one of the churches, sang hymns of praise, expecting every moment to be summoned to mount into the air to meet their Lord. But while they waited and worshipped, the clock struck twelve, and the Lord had not come. Mr. Miller, with the best intention, had blundered. The white-robed worshippers stole away one by one to their homes. The spell was broken, the strain was over, the whole neighborhood, weary from anxiety and watching, slept profoundly; it was in the main the sleep of the just.

Over one ludicrous incident some made themselves merry. A middle-aged man, of dubious character, felt quite sure that Christ would come before midnight. While, like all others, he was very anxious on leaving the earth to go to heaven, still, deep down in his soul, he had some misgivings as to his fitness for the society of the redeemed. In his perplexity, he longed to be alone; so, instead of going with the white-robed to the meeting-house, he went into an adjoining field and climbed to the top of a haystack, and, tossed between hope and fear, lay down to wait the Lord's appearance. Wearied out by the excitement of the day, he fell asleep. Some mischievous boys, that had observed him, about midnight set the haystack afire. They stood near to see the result. As the flames shot up beside him, he awoke, and they heard him exclaim, "In hell, just as I thought!" But perceiving that the flame and smoke were only on one side of him, he slid off the stack on the other side. On reaching the ground and feeling of himself, he found, to his great relief, that he was neither dead nor damned, and that he still had a chance to repent of his sins and keep out of hell and get into heaven. Let us hope that he took that chance.

The next day things in the neighborhood assumed their wonted aspect; and Christian men began to appreciate as never before the words of Christ, " But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."

But what of the man who was reclaimed from drunkenness and professed conversion because he believed the Lord was coming on the twenty-third of April? He got drunk on the twenty-fourth, and kept up his drunken spree for three weeks. He drank as though he had lost some months of swinish enjoyment, and must by diligence in drinking redeem the lost time. Washing a hog does not change its nature — it is still a hog, and at the first opportunity will wallow in the mire. Still the excitement had done even this poor sot some good. It had kept him from his cups for nearly six months, and that was better than unbroken inebriety.

CHAPTER VII

SCHOOLS

In my country neighborhood there were four district schools. Since they had the same general characteristics, I shall confine my story to the one where my "young idea" was first taught "how to shoot." One will fairly represent the whole. And, first, the schoolhouse shall claim our attention. With your face turned toward the rising sun, it stood on the right side of the road. A piece of ground in the shape of a triangle had been cut out of two adjacent farms, the apex of the triangle terminating at the line fence which separated these two landed estates. On two sides of the triangle was a rail or snake fence.

At the base of the triangle the schoolhouse was built. Its front line was the line of the dusty or muddy highway. About sixty rods across the field to the south was a swamp of willows and elms, on the border of which flourished birch, maple and beech. But there was not a tree on the grounds of the schoolhouse, nor in the immediately adjacent fields.

The schoolhouse of one story and an attic was built of wood. At the front of it was an entry, lower than the main building. On either side of the entry were shelves, on which, on one side, the girls put their bonnets — they did not in those days wear hats — hoods and shawls; on the other side the boys stowed their hats or caps and comforters; they wore no overcoats even in the coldest weather. Having thus doffed and stowed their head-gear they entered the main room. This room was square. The floor was uneven. The walls were roughly plastered. In the center of the room stood a great box stove, red with rust. Around the whole room, against the wall, immediately under the windows, was built one continuous, sloping desk. Its continuity was interrupted only by the door at one end and the teacher's desk at the other. Underneath the continuous desk was a shelf, where the pupils, — scholars they were then always called, — laid their books and slates. Before it were long stationary benches without backs. On those hard, wearisome seats sat the older scholars, the boys on one side of the room and the girls on the other. In front of them, around the whole room, and nearer to the box stove, silent and repulsive in summer, roaring and red-hot in winter, was a row of low pine benches with backs, where the younger children or "little shavers" sat.

The building neither within nor without had a touch of color. Most of the houses from which the children came were painted red or white, and some of them were even adorned with green window blinds, but not a drop of paint stained the pristine wood of the building where they were being educated. Without, under the influence of the weather, the clapboards and shingles had become dun or dark-gray. Within, the continuous desk on the boys' side was full of notches, clandestinely cut with pocket knives. The rule against cutting the desk seemed only to stimulate our vandalism. There were no curtains to the windows. In summer the hot rays of the sun poured through them upon that long desk of knotty pine. To my boyish fancy the knots were eyes, and when under the solar heat the turpentine started from them, I thought that in blistering agony they shed tears of pitch. In cold days in the winter when it was necessary to keep the stove in the center of the room sissing-hot, while those next to the walls of the schoolroom were suffering with cold feet, the little children, who sat near the great heater, were half baked.

No criticism of this ever occurred to me in my boyhood; then I knew of nothing better; but after the lapse of years, it seems to me that human ingenuity could hardly have contrived a schoolhouse more cheerless and forbidding.

The chief things taught in the school were the three R's — "Readin', 'Ritin', and 'Rithmetic." Having learned the names of the letters we were taught to put them together, and so make words. We were not bothered as children are now with learning the sounds of letters. Of course we made the sounds, but happily did not know it. Fortunate children we!

We laboriously learned tables of words and then shutting up our books, the teacher pronounced the words one by one, and we spelled them. We stood in line on the floor; if a boy or girl missed a word, and the next one spelled it correctly, he took his place in the line above the one that missed it. So we were always trying by spelling correctly to get to the head of the class. The exercise stimulated us by appealing to our ambition and pride. We first spelled words of one syllable, then of two, and we climbed this rising scale until we reached the longest words in the language. When in Webster's spelling book, we got to the table of words beginning with baker, and called on that account, "The Baker Table," we were greatly set up. But at last we reached the table that began with the word, incomprehensibility. This was regarded a high attainment; and when, at the top of our voices, as we were encouraged to speak, we could reel off the eight syllables of that word, we esteemed ourselves learned. As we spelled the syllables we pronounced them as follows: I n, in, c o m, com, incom, p r e, pre, incompre, h e n, hen, incomprehen, s i, si, incomprehensi, b i l, bil, incomprehensibil, i, incomprehensibili, t y, ty, incomprehensibility.

But the highest achievement was to spell correctly what was called, " The Trouble Table," words having the same sound, but different in spelling and meaning. For a long time this table was an enigma to some of us. The teacher explained nothing. We simply learned, as well as we could, by rote what was placed before us. Well do I remember my boyish struggles over the words, " Style, manner of writing. Stile, steps over a fence." There were no stiles in our neighborhood. Of what was referred to I had not the slightest conception. The comma between the word, stile, and its definition, signified nothing to me. I read as though there were no pause and took " steps " for a verb. " Stile steps over a fence "; what sort of a creature it was that stepped over I could not imagine. Maturer experience cleared up the mystery.

In the back part of the spelling book were the " Abbreviations." These we were compelled to commit to memory. For a long time the meaning of

A. M. was to me an unsolved riddle. Knowing nothing of the uses of commas and semicolons, I paid no heed to the punctuation that separated the different definitions. "Master of Arts; before noon; in the year of the world." Now, as I read them without respect to the pauses, as though they were one simple, unbroken sentence, when the teacher pronounced the enigmatical letters, "A. M.," I responded in one breath, "Master of Arts before noon in the year of the world." "Well done," the teacher said. But he did not know that I, who had answered so promptly and glibly, was puzzling my brain over the profound questions: What is a Master of Arts? What is meant by the year of the world? If it is the first year of the earth's existence, who so early was made Master of Arts, whatever that might mean? And what could "before noon" in a year mean? What before noon of a day meant everybody knew, but "before noon in the year of the world," that was an enigma. We were not encouraged to ask questions. We never thought of mentioning our difficulties to the august schoolmaster or schoolma'am. We simply brooded over them in silence.

A classmate of mine who stumbled at these abbreviations proved himself to be rather fruitful in literary invention. The teacher, looking him squarely in the eye, pronounced to him the enigmatical letters, "B. V.?" Of course he had read many times that they stood for "Blessed Virgin." But he did not know who the Blessed Virgin was. To be sure, he had often read and heard of Mary, the mother of Jesus, but living in a community wholly Protestant, he had never heard her called the Blessed Virgin. So what B. V. signified had utterly slipped his mind. But the teacher, still eyeing him, repeated sternly B. V.? B. V.? What does it stand for? And the staring, blushing boy answered, "Barrel of vinegar." He had seen that. His answer now looks to me like a stroke of genius.

When we had once gone through the spelling-book in that dry, grinding way, we were turned back as far as the "Baker Table," and in the same mechanical fashion we spelled it through again. And this was done about twice a year, for several years.

Just for the fun of it, we engaged in spelling matches. In the winter, in sleighs, the bottoms of which were covered with fresh straw, with a plentiful supply of blankets and buffalo robes, drawn by stout horses encircled with tinkling bells, great loads of boys and girls, with shouts and laughter and song, were driven to some neighboring schoolhouse, where the contest in spelling took place. The ride over the snow, which sometimes covered the fences by the road-side, was even more attractive than the spelling match. When those who thus assembled were ready, at the word all stood up and continued to stand.

Then one of the teachers present began to pronounce words, and we spelled round in turn. Anyone that misspelled a word sat down. He was then a dead cock in the pit and could spell no more than night. So the work went on, and the excitement grew more intense, as one after another failed. He or she who stood up the longest was said to have spelled the rest down, and was declared the victor. It was a very innocent and exciting recreation. But some of the best spellers, when tested by words found in ordinary reading, would fail. To spell the tables of words in the spelling-book was possible from a mere mechanical memory, but to spell correctly such words as "which," "though," "cough," "separate," and "receive," found in a book of history or in a newspaper, required a knowledge of orthography.

But our spelling-book was also a reading-book. Under each table of words, or else on the opposite page, were scraps of prose or poetry. Some of the prose was simply detached sentences, having no possible connection with each other, and containing neither interesting thought nor sentiment. Two of these sentences, which, to my great disgust, it is impossible for me to forget, were, "A toad jumps like a frog"; and "A load of oak wood is worth more than a load of pine wood." To have such vapid stuff engraved forever on the immortal substance of one's soul seems to be a too grievous retribution for simply having studied diligently Webster's spelling-book. Still, in the latter part of the book, the story of "The Young Sauce-box" up in a tree, stealing apples, who, laughing at the owner that tried to frighten him from his perch by pelting him with sods, was quickly brought down to the ground by the virtue which was found in stones, made some amends for the arid prose through which we had to pass in order to reach it. This story we read with ever fresh delight, until our books at those pages were quite worn out.

From the spelling-book we were inducted into the "Easy Reader," which had here and there gleams of sentiment and sense, and at last the more proficient were put into the "English Reader," which was full of the best English prose and poetry. Of much of it we gained at the best only a misty conception, since none of our teachers seemed to think that it came within the scope of his duty to explain the meaning of what was read. His sole office, as he apprehended it, was to see that we pronounced the words correctly, — which, to be sure, was and is an important part of rudimental education. But in spite of the inadequate teaching, that old "English Reader" was to me a priceless blessing. Many a brilliant passage of prose, and many lines of the best lyric poetry from its pages became forever part and parcel of my thinking.

In addition to reading, we all studied geography, or, as we pronounced it in our ordinary conversation, "g'ography." We pored over our maps, such as they were, and committed much of the text to memory. It was good education as far as it went. But in those days we were never put to the work of drawing maps, nor were we taught physical geography. Our teacher told us that the earth was round, and since we had no globe in the school-room, he illustrated his declaration by thrusting a stick through an apple, which he turned round and round on its axis. This was good teaching, but the fact was strange to us and aroused our curiosity. The earth on the map looked flat, and as we walked over it, we could not discover its roundness. Some of the boys thought that if it were round, we should drop off when it turned over, and all the water in the creek and mill-pond would be spilled out. No one as yet had taught us the great law of gravitation. But by our study we acquired a fair knowledge of the United States as it then was; but most of the territory west of the Mississippi was labeled on our maps, "The Great American Desert." We had to learn the names of the States, bound them, tell their capitals, their great rivers and mountains and name their principal products. We were always delighted to have the teacher ask, "What are the principal products of North Carolina?" If we had forgotten what the other States produced, we were sure about that State, and at the top of our voices used to answer, " Pitch, tar, turpentine and lumber."

But there was one pathetic incident connected with our study of geography, which reveals the power of pictures over young minds, and shows how pernicious at times that power may be. To illustrate the occupations of men in Louisiana, there was in our geography a cheap woodcut of a sugar plantation. A company of negro slaves was pictured as toiling among the stalks of sugar-cane, while near them stood a slave-driver, wearing a broad-brimmed hat and carrying a whip under his arm. There sat by my side in that dingy, old school-room a bright, popular boy. He would often turn the leaves of his geography till he came to that picture, and then sit in silence gazing at it intently. At last the sight of his eyes engendered in his mind his purpose for life; the thing which he was to do was born in his thought. He said to me: " When I get to be a man, I am going to be a slave-driver on a sugar plantation." I laughed at him, but his secret purpose could not be shaken by ridicule. I then resorted to reasoning, and tried to put before him, as well as I could, the cruelty and horror of such an occupation. But he said that it would do him good to lash the black rascals. Time glided on. Both he and I were on the verge of early manhood. He ran away in the night. His father and mother, brothers and sisters, knew nothing of his whereabouts. A few months later they were shocked to hear that he was a slave-driver on a sugar plantation in Louisiana. He continued in that vile occupation until the Civil War broke out, when he enlisted in the southern army, and was shot to death on the battle field. His life was shaped and wrecked by a picture of oppression in *Olney's Geography.*

All the older scholars learned to write. Our teachers taught no theory of the art, they probably had none. What we learned was by imitation and practice. First of all, we made our own writing books. We took ordinary foolscap paper, doubled the sheets over, sewed them together, put on a cover of brown paper, and the book was done. That was a sensible procedure. The teacher wrote at the top of each page a copy, and we imitated it as well as we could, writing it over as many times as there were ruled lines underneath it on the page. The farther down we got from the copy, the worse we wrote. Many of our copy books were filled with frightful blotches; but the awkward letters were the embryo out of which at last emerged many a fair hand. If one would learn to swim he must plunge in and do his best, so if one would learn to write, a theory, setting forth how it should be done, avails but little, but with a fair copy the thing must be attempted, and practice at last secures at least a legible hand.

We all used quill pens. Most of the quills were plucked from geese raised on the farms in the neighborhood. The teacher made our pens for us. At the half hour devoted each forenoon to writing, here and there, from different parts of the school-room, was heard the cry, "Make my pen?" or "Mend my pen?" and the teacher, penknife in hand, hurried hither and thither in response to this importunate summons. How smoothly those quill pens moved over the paper! There were some good things in "ye goode old tyme," and that was one of them.

But oh! the dreariness of figures! Most of us studied for years *Adam's Arithmetic,* "'rithmetic" we called it. Winter after winter I ciphered doggedly through Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, Division, Compound Numbers, and the tables of Weights and Measures; but each year, just as I got to Fractions, to my great relief, school, as we said, let out. Then the following year, I went over the same dreary path, since each new teacher thought that it would be best to begin at the beginning and be thorough.

During the hours of school, when we came to a sum, as we called it, which we could not do — we had never then heard of solving a problem — we cried out: "Assistance!" but usually left off the first syllable, so that our cry was: "'Sistence!" Then the teacher would come, work out the sum or problem on our slate, and, without giving us any explanation of his work, hand it back to us, so that we were usually just as wise as we were before we cried: "'Sistence!" But that sum was a milestone, and having passed it, we knew that we should not reach it again until we traversed the same weary road a year hence; so, with a sigh of relief, we went to work on the next sum. The time came at last, after long tiresome years, when our reasoning powers had been more fully developed, that, in the course of four months, the length of our winter school term, we went through the whole of that hated arithmetic, and gained a fair knowledge of it. Is not arithmetic the most difficult science to teach, if its processes must be explained? And yet every little child in the schools is put to learning it, often under teachers that do not understand it and of course cannot unfold it to others.

But grammar was the most advanced study of my country school; it was the cap-sheaf. We studied *Brown's Grammar*. Who Brown was I never knew. We were compelled to learn by heart the rules which he laid down, and most of the observations under them. Many of us had at the best a very vague idea of what the rules meant. Why the teacher required us to commit them to memory was then, and is now, a mystery. To most of us it was an onerous task, which profited little or nothing. But we grimly stuck to our job, till our grammars grew dog-eared, and recited mechanically many a rule without the ghost of an idea of what it was all about. Still, we did learn to pick out of a sentence its subject and predicate, to note the qualifying words and phrases, and that was no unimportant acquisition. But all the time that we were learning by sheer force of will the rules of grammar, and applying them as best we could in parsing, in common conversation we constantly and frightfully murdered the king's English, and no teacher corrected us.

We hailed with delight the last and crowning recitation of the school-day. All the smaller children were dismissed at four o'clock. The room was still. From four to five the advanced pupils parsed, as well as they could, portions of *Milton's Paradise Lost,* or *Pope's Essay on Man.* The exercise sharpened our wits and by degrees the meaning of the poet dawned upon us. Each one gave his own views and defended them by all the rules of grammar, which he could summon to his aid. While this work was far from perfect, it proved to be of incalculable value to those who earnestly engaged in it. They learned to think after him the thoughts of the poet and in a measure at least to imagine as he imagined. The exercise, crude as it was, opened up to them a new world.

Just before we were dismissed for the day, came the roll-call. The teacher pronounced in alphabetical order the names not of his pupils, but of their parents or guardians. He did this to ascertain how many had been in attendance during the day from each household, and the oldest child from each family responded by giving the number. John Erskine usually kept his eight children in school and often one or more of his nieces or nephews, whom he had invited to spend the winter with him. When the teacher called out "Erskine," and his oldest daughter responded "Nine" or "Ten," as the case might be, there was often an audible titter.

To maintain the school, each patron was assessed according to the number of children that he sent to it. A poor man, sending a half dozen, paid a large school-bill, while a rich man who sent none, went scot free. For many years John Erskine, neither rich nor poor, but thrifty, had the honor of paying the largest school-tax of any one in the district.

In winter the teacher was always a man, in summer a woman. The winter session was four months, the summer five. In the winter the teacher was hired by the month, in the summer by the week. The schoolmaster received from sixteen to twenty dollars a month, the schoolma'am from one and a half to two dollars a week. Of course they were kept, they "boarded 'round."

In summer the services of the older children were needed at home, in the kitchens and on the farms, while the younger children were kept in school. But the days were full of sunshine, interesting work was going on in the fields, the schoolroom was repulsive to sight and smell, the meadows and woods were green, the budding and blooming flowers were bewitchingly beautiful and fragrant, the air was freighted with the odor of new-made hay, and it did seem to us that the school would never end. Each summer was a wearisome, interminable age.

Both in winter and summer we were stimulated to good order and to study largely by flattery and illusive hopes. When we were dull, we were told that we were bright, and we believed it. When we read or spelled or recited, we took our places in line, and were ordered to "toe the scratch" or to "toe the mark," made by the loosely-matched boards of the floor. Then we all looked at the teacher, nor would he proceed until every eye was upon him, when at the motion of his hand, all the boys made a low bow, and all the girls courtesied. This was good military drill, and also a practical lesson in deference and politeness to superiors. Often near the close of some exercise, the teacher would say: "He that will stand up straightest and speak up loudest, will be President of the United States." The girls could not of course share in this delightful prospect, but the boys, stirred by this glittering prize, stood up so straight that they leaned over backwards, and read and spelled as loud as they could yell, and each one seemed verily to think that at no distant day he should be the successor of Washington and Adams and Jefferson. For one, I feel somewhat resentful that this positive promise, made by one of the citizens of the Republic, has not been kept. I fulfilled my part of the contract; I toed the mark, stood up straight and spelled so loud that I nearly raised the roof, but nobody ever thought of making me President. I fear that I shall go down to my grave with a deep sense of disappointment and loss.

But when, as a means of discipline, flattery failed, corporal punishment was resorted to. The smaller children were sometimes seized by the nape of the neck and hustled with frightful speed several times around the stove, or they were thrown up towards the ceiling and caught as they were coming down, to the imminent peril of life and limb. The older boys were made to stoop over and put the forefinger on a mark, when the part at a safe distance from the vitals was smartly spanked with a ruler or welted with a rod. Sometimes when a lad was sitting on his bench, his leg, between the knee and hip, or his arm, between the shoulder and elbow, was sharply feruled. Now and then a dull or disobedient boy was compelled to go to the neighboring wood and cut switches, beech or birch, and bring them to his teacher, that he might be flogged with them. Corporal punishment was often administered because pupils had failed from any cause to learn their lessons. One dull, good-hearted boy was cruelly whipped, two or three times a week, because he did not learn the multiplication table. He was an honest lad who tried hard but was unable to accomplish his task, and that stupid teacher learned at last that he could not beat the multiplication table into the boy's head by mauling his legs till they were black and blue.

But the boys sometimes outwitted the teacher, or, as he was more fitly called, the schoolmaster. A lad was sent to the woods to cut some beech rods with which he might be chastised. He performed his errand promptly and even with cheerfulness. The master told him to take off his coat, and was quickly obeyed. He then raised high above his head one of those withy, blue-beech switches and brought it down with all his might on the boy's shoulders, when it snapped into a dozen pieces, and the coatless lad stood grinning and unhurt. The boy, when he cut the rod in the woods, took the precaution to cut it round and round with his sharp knife in several places, without ostensibly disturbing the bark. It looked all right, but when it bent by the force of the blow, it broke. The whole school burst out into loud, uncontrollable laughter, and to the credit of the master, he appreciated the practical joke, heartily joined in the merriment and, without further attempt at chastisement, sent the boy to his seat and his tasks.

One of our schoolmasters made many threats, but hardly ever carried them out. The boys soon learned that his bark was worse than his bite. He made sharp speeches about the terrible things he would do if we did not behave, but not following his brave words by act, he gradually lost his grip on us. A lad, gifted with a retentive memory and having an immense stock of impudence, learned by heart one of those scolding harangues. On a certain afternoon of the week the pupils were required to declaim, or, as it was called in that country school, to speak pieces. When the boy, who had at his tongue's end the master's diatribe, was called upon to speak, he delivered it with rare powers of mimicry. The whole school laughed and cheered. The poor schoolmaster, red in the face, pounded furiously on his desk and shouted, "Order! Order!" But every moment the confusion and uproar grew in volume. At last it was Bedlam broke loose. Then suddenly, without any preconcerted action, but by a simultaneous impulse, the windows of the schoolroom on all sides were thrown up, and almost all the pupils, both girls and boys, jumped out of them. There was not one in the school who dreamed of such an ending when the excitement, raised by the delivery of the master's scolding began. A few moments later that poor, defeated teacher — a really good-hearted fellow — walked rapidly away. He looked neither to the right nor the left. He disappeared in the distance, and was never seen in the neighborhood again. Moral: if you bark, bite; but it is better neither to bark nor bite.

All, except the pupils that lived very near the schoolhouse, brought with them their dinners or lunches, usually in tin pails or baskets, and ate them during the hour of nooning from twelve to one. The farmers being generally thrifty, these lunches were abundant in quantity. They consisted of bread and butter, the butter often sprinkled over with sugar; doughnuts galore; pies, apple, mince, custard, blackberry, raspberry, gooseberry; slices of corned beef, fresh pork, fresh chicken, mutton, sausages, cheese and apples.

We have already noticed that the neighborhood was famous for its great apple crops. This luscious fruit in the winter formed an important part of the lunches of the school-children. One school-boy, named Tom Jenkins, had very large pockets in his coat, that he used to stuff every morning with fine apples from his father's well-filled bins. He sat on the bench before the continuous desk built against the walls of the schoolroom. On the shelf underneath it, just back of his seat, he was accustomed to stow his apples and wait for the hour of noon, when he ate an incredible number of them. But Tom, sometimes weary of his lessons, was strongly tempted to turn his face to the wall and furtively eat an apple. One day, yielding to temptation, he partook of his appetizing fruit. Towards noon, fearing lest some boy who sat near had stolen some of his apples, he began to count them. He missed one; he had utterly forgotten that he had eaten it himself, and burst into tears. He boohooed till all the school was looking at him in wonder. The teacher, thinking that something very serious had happened, asked him sympathetically what was the matter, when he answered, sobbing as though his heart would break, "Somebody has stolen one of my apples." The teacher said, "How do you know that?" He replied, still crying aloud, "I had twenty-two apples under my desk this morning and I have got only twenty-one now." The whole school roared with laughter, when they thought of poor Tom having only twenty-one apples left for his lunch. But when the boisterous merriment had partially subsided, a boy who sat near Tom cried out, "The apple he's lost he ate himself, I saw him!" This added fresh fuel to the fun, and for many weeks poor Tom was joked about that meagre lunch of twenty-one apples and about that cruel thief, his own stomach, that had stolen and hidden from sight that one luckless apple.

There were some customs, connected more or less intimately with the school, that are worthy of a passing notice. Both at home and at school the boys were instructed always to bow to strangers whom they met on the road, and the girls to courtesy. So to all that passed us on foot or horseback, in wagons or carriages, we lifted our chip hats and made a deferential bow, while the girls, in their woolen or calico or tow frocks, gently courtesied. The origin of this custom I never knew, but that it was most commendable is beyond question. It instilled into our minds genuine politeness.

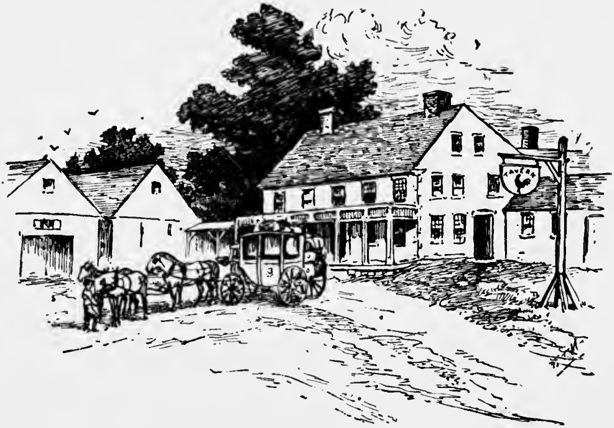
Most of the children in summer went barefoot; not because their parents were unable or unwilling to provide them shoes, but because they preferred it. As soon as the frost was out of the ground, bare feet began to appear, and boots and shoes were not again put on until the freezing days of autumn came. In fact, the barefooted formed a sort of aristocracy, that ridiculed without stint those who were so tender and delicate that they could not lay aside shoes and stockings.

In the winter the schoolmaster usually took off his coat, hung it up on the wall back of his desk, and did his work in his shirt sleeves. This custom was so deeply rooted that any teacher who refused to conform to it, we set down as an upstart and a failure, and our prophecy usually proved to be true. Who can succeed in the face of adverse public opinion? It must be changed or obeyed.

But in spite of all our teachers, the people were generally unacquainted with the past tense of do. They said, " I done it," " he done it," or " they done it." When a boy I was not a little surprised to learn from a minister, stopping at my father's house, that there was such a word as did. Of course I had seen it a thousand times when reading, but had never used it in common conversation. It is something of a mystery how fairly intelligent neighborhoods become almost wholly infected with some gross forms of false syntax.

Aspirations were awakened in some of us for a broader education than the district school afforded. So, accompanied by a friend, I found my way to an academy in an adjoining county. This school was not very well equipped with either buildings or apparatus, but it had an able, enthusiastic faculty. It had something better than bricks or books, — it had brains. Here both boys and girls were thoroughly drilled in science and language. The tuition was only twenty dollars a year, while rooms and board were furnished for a dollar and twenty-five cents a week. More than two hundred students sat down at the tables in the great dining-hall. In each division at the tables the sexes were about equally divided, and we were encouraged to converse with each other in the best language that we could command. This was an important part of our education, and was highly prized by all of us. Some of the conversations at meals resulted in permanent attachments and life-long alliances. Returning to our country neighborhood at the close of the school year, we told the boys and girls there the wonderful things that we had seen and heard.

One peculiar, mirth-provoking incident I can never forget. Mr. Vrooman, evidently of Dutch descent, was the steward of the academy. He was tall, muscular, red-haired, red-whiskered, partly bald, with a small, restless, reddish eye peeping out from under a heavy eyebrow. He was of nervous temperament, and capable of intense passion. I went into his office one day to pay my bill, and found him with his face flushed, excitedly pacing his room. It needed no ghost to tell me that he was all ablaze. I said, "Why, Mr. Vrooman, what is the matter?" "Matter!" he cried, "matter enough. I ask only a dollar and a quarter a week for board. I provide good food, too. But some of the patrons of this school, whose children I've fed for months, have kept putting off the payment of their bills. At last some of them have come here to-day." His excitement became intense as he poured forth the hot torrent of his grievances. At last, his breath short and quick, his face as red as a live coal, he exclaimed, "Why, notwithstanding the low price of the board, they've been trying to beat me down, *to beat me down,* sir. Why, sir, when the Judgment comes, Omniscience can't deal individually with such souls, — they'll be too small for Him. Why, sir, the only thing that He can do will be to put a myriad of them in a little box, a *little* box, sir, and d—n the box!"



CHAPTER VIII

TAVERNS AND TEMPERANCE

In my country neighborhood were two taverns, about a mile apart, one at Ramville, the other at Lambshanks Corners. On the top of a pole about fifteen feet high, standing out in the road, each had a semicircular sign so conspicuous that no traveler could fail to see it. On each sign in large, black letters was the name, "Tavern," and beneath the name on one was painted a cock in red and yellow, and on the other some Redcoats, retreating before our valiant Revolutionary fathers.

The taverns were two-story frame buildings. When new they had been painted white, but in the lapse of years, sun and rain had left only a faint suggestion of it. The roofs were blackened by age. Here and there under the solar heat the shingles had curled up. There were no window-blinds, but the windows of the second story had paper curtains covered with highly colored figures, that it would have been no sin to worship, since they were the likeness of nothing in the heavens above, nor in the earth beneath, nor in the waters under the earth. All the floors were bare except those of the parlors, which were covered with faded two-ply carpets. On the corded bedsteads were ticks stuffed with oat-straw, which, being tougher and softer than wheat straw, was esteemed a luxury. Covering some of the straw-filled ticks were fluffy feather-beds, which in winter, with no fire in the bed-chambers, were a boon; but sunken in them in the summer, if the traveler could sleep at all he dreamed of purgatorial fires, especially if, in addition to the sweltering heat, he felt the sharp teeth of some crazy bedbug out on a nocturnal hunt for blood.

For the exclusive use of ladies, there were in some of the best sleeping rooms plain wooden washstands, with white or yellow bowls and pitchers, a cake of mottled, scented soap — called at the tavern shaving soap — and a linen towel. But men were required to make their toilet downstairs at the back door, where stood a barrel of rainwater and a bench, on which was a tin washbasin and some soft soap in a wooden dish;

while just inside, in the back hall, hung on a roller a tow towel for all, which was ordinarily changed once or twice a week.

But when business was brisk and guests multiplied, rows of cot beds were put temporarily in the great ballroom, for the accommodation of belated travelers. But men of sensitive nerves found it quite difficult to sleep in company with stentorian snorers. On one occasion a Dutchman, occupying one of the cots, was kept awake by the nasal blasts of his fellow travelers. He, with others in the same plight with himself, was studying how to become oblivious to the hard breathing, the sighs and snorts of their more fortunate companions, when one of the snorers came, as snorers often will, to a complete collapse, ushered in with a sort of crash as though every bone in his head had suddenly snapped asunder, and then was absolutely still; at which the Dutchman exclaimed, "Tank Gott, one ish det." Those who had been kept awake like himself burst into a simultaneous roar of laughter that waked the sleepers. They, suddenly lifting themselves up on their elbows, asked, "What's to pay?" When told of the Dutchman's thanksgiving, they, too, exploded in mirth and for a quarter of an hour the old ballroom resounded with their boisterous jollity.

On the tables of these country inns was always fresh milk, unwatered, together with home-made bread, fresh eggs, pork salt or fresh, mutton, and, in fall and winter, sometimes chicken or goose, while on great occasions roast beef or turkey was served and, in their season, such fresh vegetables as grew on adjacent farms. As to beverages, guests were regaled with cambric tea; coffee, barley or Java, and cider, new or hard. On a Fourth of July, a fellow standing at the door of the tavern at Ramville kept crying, " Dinner is ready, walk in, gentlemen; we have today a great variety of meat — ram, lamb, sheep and mutton."

But the barroom was the chief place of resort. It was the largest room on the ground floor. Its curtainless windows were apparently never washed, except on the outside by the driving rain. The pine floor was stained with mud and tobacco juice. Near the center of it was a large, rusty box stove, kept hot in the winter with generous sticks of beech and maple. The plastered sides and ceiling were dingy with dust and smoke. By the walls stood two or three unpainted, backless benches, while scattered here and there were a few straight-backed, wooden chairs. On the side farthest from the outside door was the bar, shut off from the rest of the room and only entered by a half door at the end. What was hidden behind and beneath its long, high, wooden counter was always a wonder to small boys. But we could see at the back wall shelves, their edges adorned with saw-toothed red paper, on which stood decanters filled with liquors of various hues, and a few tumblers on whose upturned bottoms rested lemons. The air of that repulsive room was freighted with the fetid after-odor of tobacco, mingled with the fumes of rum, gin and whiskey, making a scent that no imagination can paint, no words depict. Experience alone can give a knowledge of it. To know, one must smell.

The habitual drinkers, and many that only occasionally took a social glass, together with some young men, attracted by what they might see and hear, were accustomed to gather in that malodorous hole. In winter, when the storms drove all indoors, they could be found there day and night; and in summer evenings, after the long day's work on the farms was over, they smoked clay and cob pipes, told yarns, sometimes salacious stories, retailed the gossip of the neighborhood, discussed the political questions of the hour, played checkers or cards, and the vanquished treated the victors. In summer they occasionally took a hand at baseball in some adjoining field, or pitched quoits in front of the tavern, or raced their plow-horses along the dusty road, and ended these contests by setting up drinks at the bar. By degrees appetite grew imperious, and some would not leave the barroom till the small hours of the morning, and then intoxicated go reeling home. Families were unutterably miserable, farms were neglected, scanty incomes worse than wasted, and children ran about ragged. The hard drinkers were rapidly becoming physical, as they already were moral, wrecks.

Now these abominable taverns were after all only a true exponent of the earlier and dominant notions of the neighborhood. At first, the drinking of intoxicating liquor was almost universal; a total abstainer was a rare bird. Farm laborers as a matter of course expected whiskey as a beverage. In harvest time they never supposed that they could work without it. If a farmer were so singular as not to drink it himself, he bowed to the general custom and provided it for his hired men. While John Erskine, loathing the smell and taste of liquor, never drank a drop of it, he, nevertheless, during the first years of his residence in our neighborhood, furnished whiskey for his help in haying and wheat harvesting. He used to relate a unique incident growing out of this. Filling a jug with whiskey for some men working in the hay field, he carelessly left about two quarts of the liquor in the family water pail. When Aunt Lucy got supper, thinking that the whiskey was water, she emptied it into the teakettle. When at table, she first poured a cup of tea for an old toper who, on tasting it, smacked his lips and exclaimed, "I vow, that's good; it touches the right spot." Honest John took a sip from his cup, and laughing said, "Lucy, you've made your tea of whiskey." When to the merriment of all, he had explained the mystery, she found that unwittingly she had made a tea-whiskey toddy, and the seasoned toper drank with avidity three cups of it.

But when John was converted and made a deacon in the church, believing that whiskey ruined both the souls and bodies of men, he refused any longer to provide it for his farm-hands. Some of them, at the time of wheat-harvest, said that they would quit work unless they had it. But honest John replied, "I shall be sorry to lose you, but I can't give you a drop of whiskey if my wheat is never harvested." He had got his foot down and a thousand horsepower engine could not move it a hair's breadth. However, only one man left him; the rest, standing by him till the end of harvest, thanked him for their enforced abstinence.

John Erskine was among the foremost temperance reformers of our neighborhood. By word and deed he sustained every effort put forth to suppress drinking. He did what he could to induce temperance lecturers to come and speak to us. He deprecated the existence of the execrable taverns at Ramville and Lambshanks Corners, and with great earnestness warned the young men to keep out of those soul-destroying barrooms.

But at last deliverance came. The Washingtonian temperance movement, that swept over most of the

States of the North, invaded even our secluded community. When the attention of a few of the more prominent and influential families was aroused, they began to agitate the subject of total abstinence in the houses of their neighbors, in the country store and in the churches. By this hand-to-hand discussion, general interest in the reformation of those given to drink grew rapidly. Temperance papers were now scattered far and wide. The pastors of the churches blew their trumpets with no uncertain sound. Mass-meetings were held, and the ablest speakers that we could secure harangued the already excited crowds. Young men and women, boys and girls, went to these temperance meetings in wagons or sleighs, fitted up to carry comfortably from thirty to forty, and drawn by two or three spans of horses, decked with banners on which were temperance mottoes. At these popular gatherings temperance songs were sung by a great chorus, and the volume of sound was swelled by bass-viols, flutes, clarionets and flageolets. Many signed the total-abstinence pledge and were called teetotalers; some, however, stood out stoutly against this, averring that they would not sign away their liberty. But in spite of all opposition, the good work went right on, and not a few of the hard drinkers were reformed. The whole neighborhood was at fever-heat. Everybody was discussing temperance. On all sides the people, while engaged in their daily work, could be heard singing temperance songs. A favorite one began,

"Bright water for me, bright water for me,
And wine for the tremulous debauchee,
It[1] cooleth the brow, it cooleth the brain,
It maketh the frame once strong again.

Chorus
Then fill, fill to the brim,
Let the flowing crystal kiss the rim,
It cooleth the brow, it cooleth the brain,
It maketh the frame once strong again."

This reformation gave to the whole neighborhood a higher moral tone, and the churches soon began to long for a still richer blessing. With wonderful unanimity they began to pray for a revival. Coming together night after night in their meeting-houses and in one of the schoolhouses, they besought God to awaken backsliders and regenerate and save impenitent sinners. They not only prayed but sang, usually the best hymns of Doddridge, Watts and Wesley, but in the schoolhouse their singing took on some free, rollicking songs that were very popular. This is one of them:

"Where now is good, old Moses?
Where now is good, old Moses?
Where now is good, old Moses?
Safe in the promised land.

He went up from Mount Nebo,
He went up from Mount Nebo,
He went up from Mount Nebo,
Safe in the promised land.

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[1] This "It" refers to the water, not to the wine.

By and by we'll go and meet him,
By and by we'll go and meet him,
By and by we'll go and meet him,
Safe in the promised land."

In the same way they sang of all the distinguished saints of the Old and New Testaments. I remember that Abel went up by acceptable sacrifice, Noah through a flood of waters, Daniel through a den of lions, Paul through a Roman dungeon, and so on to the end of the chapter. Though a homely, simple ditty it celebrated the triumphs of faith in the past, and expressed the confident expectation of heaven in the future.

Moreover, all that attended these meetings had perfect liberty in expressing their thoughts. A brave young man told those assembled that he could not become a Christian on account of the imperfections of professors of religion, and then went on to tell the mean things that some of them had done. A lay Presbyterian elder said in reply, that he had no word of defense for any wrong acts of church members. " But," he added, " O young man, you do not know how imperfect professed Christians are, and you never will know until God by his spirit reveals to you the corruption of your own heart! Then, and not till then, will you understand how bad we are. But as each man must live his own life, and die alone, and be judged for what he is and does, and not for the lives and acts of other men, it will be very foolish in you to stumble over the imperfections of professed Christians into hell." It was a straight talk on both sides, wholesome for both saints and sinners.

But the prayers of God's people were marvelously answered. The entire community became thoughtful and serious. Two men, members of the same church, who had quarrelled and said hard things of each other, one night as they lay in bed began to think how wickedly they had acted. The divine Spirit touched both hearts at the same time. The next morning one of them started on horseback to find his brother, whom he had shamefully abused, that he might confess his fault and ask forgiveness. He found him making fence-posts by the roadside. They had not spoken to each other for months. Sitting on his horse he said, "Good morning," and was surprised that his salutation was heartily returned. He quickly dismounted. There was mutual confession and forgiveness, with tears of contrition. The shameful feud was ended, the hatchet was buried, and brotherly love was triumphant.

When evening came, these reconciled brethren were at the prayer-meeting, where they publicly confessed their unbrotherly conduct and asked for forgiveness. The members of the church, seeing in this the answer to their prayers, were overjoyed. Another backslider present now rose up and said: "Brethren, my heart is like a lump of ice. Oh! that it would melt and run out of my eyes." It was evidently melting fast, for tears were wetting his hairy cheeks. And now the revival, so ardently prayed for, came in earnest. It spread through all the countryside. A year before all were talking about temperance; now everybody was talking about religion. It was more than a revival; not only were indifferent professors of religion quickened, but those who had stood aloof from the churches were won to Christ. Most of those who had been reformed the preceding year were now transformed by the Spirit of God. Some old topers, untouched by the Washingtonian movement, repented, quit their cups and began a new life. The barrooms were deserted. The sale of liquor no longer profitable, the taverns, after a vain struggle, shut their doors. More than threescore years have since passed, but no inn nor saloon, nor any place where intoxicating liquor is sold, has ever since existed in that country neighborhood. The old taverns, that for years so deeply disgraced us and made so many households wretched, have long since disappeared, — not a vestige of them remains. It is sometimes possible to rid a community of liquor-selling, with all its attendant evils, without invoking the extraneous force of the law and the courts.

CHAPTER IX

FAMILY LIFE

THE character of a nation is determined and measured by that of the average family. It will be in physical strength, courage, intelligence and morals what the families are of which it is made up. A clear conception of the family life of a typical, northern country neighborhood of seventy-five or eighty years ago will give us a glimpse of the foundation on which our Republic has been built.

And, first of all, in most of the households of our neighborhood the husband and wife were really one. They were united in purpose and work. However, except in some extreme emergency, the women never toiled in the fields; but they were so thoroughly acquainted with their husbands' affairs that, when any exigency demanded it, they could wisely direct the farm-hands. Once when John Erskine was called away from home for a day, he left Aunt Lucy in charge of the outdoor work. He had hired a lad about seventeen years old to harrow a plowed field near the house. The young fellow, when he began his job, found that the cart stood on the corner of the lot that he was to harrow, and he insisted on its removal. Aunt Lucy said, "There is nobody here to take it away. Draw your drag around it." He refused to do it. She asked him why. He said, "I don't obey orders from women." She was not wrathy, but determined. She quietly walked up to him, took from his hand a black-snake whip, and thoroughly warmed his legs with it. She then handed the whip back to him and said, "Now, drag around that cart and go on with your work." He did so. He both took an order from a woman and was forced by her to obey it. While this was a unique act in her career, it reveals the firmness of her fibre.

Now, beginning with the physical or outward life, let us ask, what did these pioneer families eat? In portraying their industries, I have in part already answered this question. They always had on their tables enough of wheat or corn bread; milk, butter and cheese; fruit, fresh, dried or preserved; sugar and syrup from their maples; honey from their hives; pie, apple, custard, currant, pumpkin or mince, — pie for breakfast, pie for dinner, pie for supper, — all the common garden vegetables, potatoes, beets, carrots, parsnips, beans, onions, cabbage, lettuce, and the ever-present cucumber pickle. They also had in their season, green corn, muskmelons and watermelons. But as to flesh diet, salt pork was the mainstay. Of course fresh spareribs, highly-seasoned sausages, cob- or hickory-smoked hams formed pleasant gastric interludes; while at long intervals a little fresh beef or mutton or chicken delighted our palates; but when these infrequent episodes were past, we went back to salt side-pork. For our six o'clock breakfast it was sliced and fried. The lard tried out of it in cooking was poured over it on the platter. Each one at table was helped to a slice or two, with fried or boiled potato on which was poured a spoonful of the liquid lard, — that was our gravy. How we ever digested such fare is a mystery now, but we did, and flourished. Hard work on the farm made our digestion strong. Our dinner was at twelve, when our meat was usually boiled salt pork, and our dessert the ubiquitous pie. Supper was served at five o'clock, and generally consisted of bread or hot biscuit and butter, sauce of some sort, pickles and pie. Occasionally for a relish a little dried beef was added, and in summer some lettuce. For drink we had cold water, weak tea and milk.

But at times feasts broke up this dull monotony. Aunt Lucy had become famous for her occasional good dinners and suppers. Her numerous children and invited guests made a full and jolly table. At such times salt pork stayed in the barrel, while chicken, full-grown but fat and tender, took its place. A chicken-pie that filled the largest, deepest milkpan was placed before us, piping hot, from the great brick oven; or a delicious pot-pie, plentifully stocked with balls of dough, light and cooked to a T, stood steaming on a great platter. Beside it was an ample dish of mashed potato, packed hard, with a cup-like scoop at the top filled with melting butter. Two or three other vegetables, new-made butter, creamy milk and fresh bread also tempted the appetite. For dessert there were custard and apple pies, so thick and fat and rich that they would have tempted the gods. But instead of pies, Aunt Lucy sometimes brought on one of her matchless rice puddings. In making it she had used eggs, perfectly fresh, and cream-laden milk, while all through the rice were plentifully scattered great, plump raisins. No one ever partook of this dainty dish who did not long for another like it. After more than threescore years, it lures me still.

But now and then her children and visiting relatives besought her for waffles, and always wanted them for supper. She heard their greedy cry, mixed a great wooden bowlful of batter, made a hot fire in the kitchen stove, took down the waffle-irons from their shelf, anointed them with lard or butter, and filling them with batter, thrust them into the fire. How rapidly she turned out the waffles, piling them up one upon the other, in two stacks on a large, hot, earthen platter, and filling the holes in the surface of each cake in one stack with butter and maple syrup, and in the other with butter and honey. She kept on until the twin stacks of waffles were about sixteen inches high. Then all eagerly sat down at the table. When grace had been said, Aunt Lucy helped all bountifully to the hot cakes. She asked each feaster, "Syrup or honey?" While each pile of waffles was very popular, the one saturated and dripping with maple syrup usually carried off the palm. If, on any such occasion, the piled-up waffles proved insufficient for the voracious feasters, Aunt Lucy quickly cooked more, carrying them to the eaters hot from the irons, and each buttered and sweetened his portion to suit his taste. All ate till there was no room for more. At one of these feasts a small boy, a grandson of John Erskine, said with a sigh, "Oh, grandpa, my belt is so tight!" One of John's sons said, "But weren't they 'waffle' good!" and the rest threatened to thrash him for such a "waffle" pun.

But such feasts were very rare. All the people of the neighborhood lived frugally, as we have indicated above, content with abundant but plain food.

But what did the people wear? When I noted their home manufactures, I spoke of the gray cloth worn by men and boys, and the woolen and tow frocks by mothers and their daughters. But the usual, everyday summer dress of women was calico, and very pretty it was when new, while the variety in pattern added not a little to its charm. But most Sunday and party dresses were of richer material, alpaca, poplin, bombazine or silk. Now and then an elderly housewife managed, by careful saving, to buy herself a black silk gown, which she wore on Sundays and festive occasions to the day of her death. The dress became a part of her personality, so that one could hardly think of her in other costume. If I should ever meet her in heaven, I should expect to see her in that black silk dress.

As to common, every-day head-gear, all of the fair sex, old and young, wore sunbonnets of straw or some kind of cotton stuff, stiffened with pasteboard or whalebone. They projected beyond the face, and had a cape that covered the neck. It was a sensible, fitting head-covering. It shielded from the sun the face of maid and matron, and kept the skin free from tan and freckles. And when did the rosy countenance of a country lass ever look more beautiful and bewitching than when, on some bright, sunny day, by chance one caught a glimpse of it deep within a blue or white sunbonnet? But for Sunday wear, the great ambition of the elderly ladies was to don a Leghorn bonnet, which, like their black silk dresses, they wore for a lifetime.

The women also had calfskin shoes with low heels. The high heel, on which women are now stilted and made giddy, was then quite unknown in the country. Still the young women wore, at church and parties, white stockings and kid shoes or slippers, black, bronze or blue; and it should be noted that as time went on there was a manifest change in dress from the coarser to the finer.

But concerning the dress of men and boys, I can speak with better grace and greater authority, having more certain knowledge of it. We wore from day to day what befitted farmers; in winter we donned our suits of home-made "sheep's gray." While neat in appearance, it was thick and warm. Although the mercury in winter was often at zero, very few overcoats were seen. The older men sometimes indulged in them, but the young men and boys, with very rare exceptions, went without. Never having worn them, we youngsters felt no need of them. Nor did we have underclothing. The only shirts we had in winter were woolen, and we never dreamed of such a superfluity as drawers. We simply crawled into our woolen shirts, jumped into our pants, pulled on our home-knit socks, put on our vests, coats, boots, caps and mittens, and, if the snow was deep, having tied or strapped our trousers firmly about our bootlegs just above our ankles, we were ready for the fiercest blasts of winter. In such scanty garb we experienced no great discomfort even in the coldest weather. If at times we shivered and our teeth chattered, we soon found relief in running, leaping, swinging our arms and slapping our hands. In winter we all donned caps, in summer, chip hats. Both men and boys wore pegged, stogy boots, kipskin or cowhide; but in warm weather all the boys, and even many young men in their teens, went barefoot, while cotton shirts and cotton or tow pants replaced those of wool.

But on Sunday we affected a higher style. If we still wore chip hats, they were neat and clean, having been bought specially for Sunday wear; but some of us had straw hats of which we were quite proud. We also often put on starched shirts, some even wore linen collars with neckties of various hues. A few appeared in narrow, black satin stocks and black satin vests. Moreover, there were trousers of fustian or corduroy or velveteen or kersey, and coats of cheap broadcloth, and some wore even calfskin boots. I remember having become the proud owner of a black satin stock and vest, some fustian pantaloons and a pair of the coveted calfskin boots. Having been permitted to purchase them for myself, wishing to appear as genteel as possible, I selected a pair a size too small for me. How fine my little feet looked! I am sure that I was the proudest boy in all the neighborhood, but what torture I endured! It did seem to me when at church that the sermon would never end, while my poor feet throbbed and ached. Sin in that case was certainly its own punisher, and the punishment was ruthlessly meted out. Almost every week the shoemaker stretched my precious boots and, persevering in my pride, when they were about half worn out, they became tolerably easy; but retribution for that boyish vanity continued for years in stinging corns.

On Sunday in summer, John Erskine always wore a straw hat, dark gray pants, a black cloth vest, a kersey or linen coat, and calfskin boots. The boots must have been of the best quality, for they lasted him for many years. His dress was very fitting to himself and his surroundings, attracting attention neither by its shabbiness nor by its fineness. In winter he often put on a suit of home-made cloth, with brass buttons and a soft black hat or cap.

In person the people, take them as a whole, were fairly cleanly, although there was not a bathroom in the whole neighborhood. Here and there to be sure there was a portable tin bathtub, that was occasionally used; but most of the people in summer took a bath only once a week in a washtub. Of course they washed their hands and faces before each meal, but as to full baths they were irregular and too often quite neglected. To secure them in the hot days of summer, we youngsters resorted to various expedients. On Saturday nights we often went in groups to the great creek, that skirted our neighborhood on the south, or to the millpond, where we dove and splashed and swam, and, after rubbing down, put on clean clothes. So, in various ways, we were fairly washed at the close of the week. I remember, too, that during showers I sometimes stood under the waterspout, through which poured the rainwater from the roof of the wheat-barn. This gave me an invigorating shower-bath direct from the clouds. An ingenious brother of mine put up a rude shower-bath in the horse barn, beneath which we were often refreshed during the sweltering days of July and August. But when winter came, bathing so far as possible was avoided. Who could blame us? We slept in rooms without a particle of heat. We jumped out of bed into a freezing atmosphere in which we saw the fog-like vapor of our breath. So we quickly got into our ice-cold clothes, ran to the warm kitchen, hastily cleansed our hands and faces, and sallied forth through the creaking snow to do our morning chores. Through all the winter we seldom washed from top to toe. Would those who now bathe in heated rooms and in tepid water have done better than we, had they lived as we did?

Leaving the physical, we turn now to the intellectual life. In this, as in other things, there was no uniformity. Families with the same surroundings differed from each other in mental discipline and intelligence. Still, all of them to some extent appreciated the worth of education. They gladly sent their children to the district schools, and cheerfully paid the school taxes. All the adults of our neighborhood, save one, could read and write. Almost all of them took either a weekly secular or religious paper, and many of them took both. They read them thoroughly, advertisements and all. To be sure they were too apt, even as men are now, to take what their papers said as law and gospel. But even partisan information was better than none. These weekly journals kept them in touch with what was going on in the nation and, to some extent, in the world, even though the ocean cable was not then dreamed of.

In some families the papers were read in the evening to all in the household who wished to hear, and all were urged to listen.

At John Erskine's, Aunt Lucy was often the reader. The lamp-stand was brought out from the corner where it stood in the daytime, and placed at the center of the sitting room. On it stood a tin or iron candlestick, in which was a tallow dip. Beside the candlestick lay the snuffers on a short brass tray. Honest John and the children sat in a semicircle around either the sheet-iron stove or the open fireplace. When the candle was lighted, Aunt Lucy began to read the news and editorials of the religious weekly, regarding that as most important. She stopped now and then to snuff the candle that had become too dim, while John and some of the older children asked questions about certain items of news that they had not clearly understood. She re-read these that they might get the facts lucidly in mind. Then she read the editorials, and they fell into discussion over them, in which she took a hand. They became so absorbed in debate that before they were aware of it, bedtime had come.

On the following evening the oldest son, who had already become something of a politician, read to the family the political news and editorials of the New York *Weekly Tribune.* Just as the night before, the reading was punctured by questions and discussions. Such readings and debates went on, irregularly it may be, week after week, and while all the families of our neighborhood did not do this, it was a custom that widely prevailed. A community of such households could not fail to become fairly intelligent.

Then in almost every house there were some books.

All had the Bible and most of the people read it; while *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Sparks' Life of Washington,* some popular history of the *Revolutionary War, Milton's Paradise Lost, Thomson's Seasons,* and *Pollock's Course of Time* were found in many houses. Moreover, each of the three churches and each school district had a small library from which books could be drawn. These books awakened in some minds a love of reading which led to higher intellectual attainments. Still, I can never forget how some books from the Sunday school library discouraged and depressed me. They were biographies of Christian boys in whose characters I could not find a single flaw. If it meant that to be a Christian, then I concluded that my case was hopeless. So the flawless characters, instead of attracting, repelled me. They seemed uncanny. They did not belong to my world. I found relief in turning to the Bible, where men of God were represented as imperfect. Jacob during a part of his life was a cheat; Abraham, the father of the faithful, lied; Peter, the foremost apostle, denied his Lord, cursed and swore; and even John wanted fire to drop from heaven and burn up those who differed from him and his Master. These sins of the saints comforted me, and I began to think that I might perhaps be a saint, too. However, it took me some years to find out that there never were any such boys as those depicted in the

Sunday school books; that the authors had mentioned only the virtues of those whose lives they had attempted to write, and had said nothing of their faults; while the Bible painted even the best of men just as they were, warts and all. Still, in justice I must say that those immaculate boys, pure creations of the imagination, were an ideal which revealed to me my own great defects and kindled within me some desire for a better life; but the Bible in truthfully portraying men as they were inspired me with hope.

The books of the school-district library were mostly historical and biographical. They gave us at least some just notion of European wars, especially those of England and France, also the main facts pertaining to the colonies and our Revolutionary war. As boys we were specially charmed and excited by the history of battles. Napoleon fired our imagination, and we debated with each other concerning his character and campaigns. Some extravagantly praised him, while others with equal extravagance called him a bloody monster. But Washington was our perfect hero. We thoroughly believed in him, hatchet, cherry-tree and all. We never told a lie but that the remembrance of him reproved us. His charmed life, when he led the forlorn hope at Braddock's defeat, his unruffled patience at Valley Forge, his calm courage in crossing the Delaware, his final triumph at Yorktown, made him in our boyish eyes the hero of heroes. But among our favorite books was *Wirtz's Life of Patrick Henry.* We often declaimed at school the speech of the immortal Virginian, ending with the words, "Give me liberty or give me death." So the school library not only stimulated and developed our intellectual life, but it also awoke within us a national patriotism.

The debating societies, which in winter met in the school-houses, were also a mental stimulus. They were made up of young men and old. At times they discussed some very frivolous questions. For a whole evening I heard mature men debate the following resolution: "Resolved, that the horse is a greater benefit to mankind than the ox"; for another evening, the somewhat higher question: "Resolved, that there is more pleasure in anticipation than in participation." But they often debated subjects of greater importance, such as the tariff, nullification, the annexation of Texas, the abolition of slavery, temperance in alcoholic drinks or total abstinence. Once, when they discussed the last question, the school-house was crowded, showing how greatly the people were interested in the problem which so deeply involved their happiness. I can never forget that packed house, the people bubbling over with excitement, since I then made my maiden public speech and took the crowd by storm, especially when, in momentary embarrassment, I spoke of "a great and extinguished man." For this ludicrous blunder my family and cronies for days laughingly guyed me.

But the religious life of the most influential families among us was the crown and glory of our neighborhood. While some households were irreligious and godless, a large majority of them said grace before meat, and some of them when they came to their tables craved God's blessing and, after eating, gave him thanks. Full half of them also had once a day, and some of them twice, family worship. More than once I spent several days at John Erskine's in harvest time. Every morning before breakfast his family assembled in his spacious kitchen. All his harvest hands were invited to join them. Although he was a strenuous pusher in farm work, for that half-hour of devotion he acted as if there were no work on earth except to worship God. Reverently opening the family Bible, he deliberately read a portion of it, clearly enunciating every word. To him it was a message direct from God. When the last word of it had been uttered, there was a moment of solemn silence. He was evidently thinking of what God had just spoken to him; then, falling on his knees, he began in turn to speak to God. His prayer was short, earnest and tender. No one listening could well doubt that God was right there and John Erskine was talking to him face to face, pouring his heart, swelling with emotion, into God's heart.

He thanked the Lord for blessings temporal and spiritual. When sometimes in special trouble, he said: "We thank Thee, O Lord, that it is as well with us as it is." At times he uttered this petition for himself: "O Lord, forgive our sins, blot out our transgressions, we want to be right with Thee." He prayed fervently for the prosperity of the church, the salvation of his neighbors, and the conversion of the whole world. This reminded him of the means for its accomplishment and he added: "O Lord, bless the young men studying at Hamilton, make them faithful ministers of the New Testament, and raise up many more to preach the Gospel, for the harvest is great and the laborers are few." But the climax of his petitions was for his children, whom he called "our dear ones"; his heart seemed to swell up into his throat; there was a momentary pause. God, in his thought, became his own personal possession, and when utterance broke through the barrier of emotion, he exclaimed: "O my Lord!" It was a godly father in travail of soul for the regeneration of his offspring.

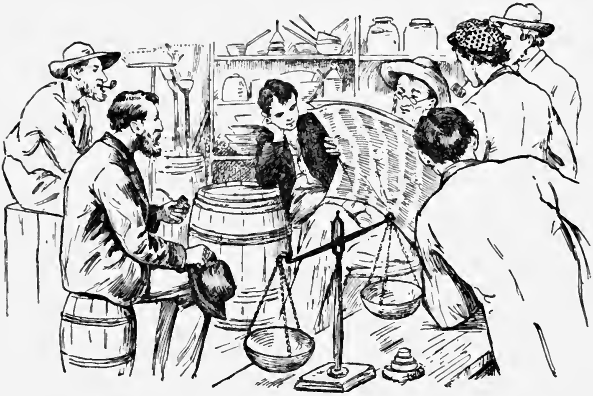
Occasionally, after reading the scripture lesson, he would ask Aunt Lucy to pray. To his request she always cheerfully responded. She was more fluent in speech than he, and her petitions often took a broader sweep than his. She frequently prayed: "O Lord, open every door for the gospel among all nations." Here were two souls, busy day in and day out with their manifold duties on the farm and in the farmhouse, that had come into such intimate fellowship with Christ that their sympathy, like his, encircled the whole earth.

They had family worship again in the evening, and faithfully maintained it as long as they both lived. In this they were not peculiar; with suggestive variations of manner, in house after house throughout that primitive neighborhood could be daily heard the voice of prayer and praise. Such a fact suggests, with one slight change, the familiar lines of Burns:

> "From scenes like these our country's grandeur springs,
> That makes her loved at home, revered abroad.
> Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
> 'An honest man's the noblest work of God.'"

These households of prayer were noted for their hospitality. Strangers asking for food and lodging were seldom turned away. Honest John never shut his door in the face of any man asking for food and shelter. Indians, that could not speak a dozen words of English, partook of his bounty. Some of them were beggars. They asked for pork, which they called "quishquish," and got it. Asking, when thirsty, for water, which they, like the Romans, called "aqua," they drank freely at his well. But a family of Tonawandas, by the name of Parker, greatly interested the entire neighborhood. They were fairly well-to-do. Mr. Parker was a farmer, but in the winter made Indian baskets. Each year after the wheat harvest was over, he started out with a wagonload of them, and peddled them through several townships. His wife and two sons often went with him. One of these sons, Ely Parker, graduated at West Point, and for several years was Comptroller of the State of New York, and in the Civil War served on the staff of General Grant. On account of the excellence of his penmanship, he was chosen to engross the terms of surrender at Appomattox. The Parkers, when on their peddling tours, more than once stayed over night with Erskine, in part perhaps because Parker, like Honest John, was a Baptist deacon.

But Erskine at times stretched the virtue of hospitality quite beyond reason and prudence. One summer evening there came to his door a greasy, nasty, unkempt Italian Jew. He could speak but few words of our language. He looked like a man that might cut your throat for half a dollar. He asked for supper and bed. "Yes," said John. Aunt Lucy and her children, out of fear, protested. In reply Erskine merely quoted a verse of scripture: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." There was no help for it; the lord of the castle had spoken. When the repulsive stranger had eaten heartily, he was given a bedroom in the second story of the house, where, on the same floor, Erskine's sons and daughters slept. The doors had neither locks nor fastenings of any kind. His children slept feverishly that night, with one eye open. But the malodorous guest snored in contentment. He was astir early the next morning. He ate and departed. At breakfast the children told their father that they felt very sure that that stranger was no angel; if he was, he hid his wings; instead of being robed in white, he was robed in dirt, and they concluded that, if he came from heaven, it must be a very nasty place; but their father was happy in having tried to help a poor fellow who, by divine grace, might perchance become an angel.



CHAPTER X

SOCIAL LIFE

All men have a strong social instinct, that reaches out for fellowship beyond the individual household. So the families of our neighborhood, like drops of water, intermingled, forming a larger society. We were molded, we knew not when nor how, into a compact brotherhood, having identical interests, aspirations and hopes.

During the earlier history of the neighborhood, its social life found expression in the unheralded, informal calls made by one or more families on another. In a busy farming community, such calls were usually in the evening, and more frequent in winter than in other seasons of the year. Those thus thrown unexpectedly together, of course freely talked over things of common interest, asked after each other's health, discussed the best remedies for any prevailing epidemic, and made the usual trite observations on the weather. How many poor mortals, either in the country or the city, would be quite dumb in society, if they were never again permitted to speak about the weather, over which they have not the slightest control, and for which they are in no degree responsible. However, such trivial themes soon gave way to graver topics, which were frequently shrewdly handled. Then, those who had informally met became reminiscent, and told stories of their past lives. To a group of neighbors, gathered around my father's open fireplace, I often listened, when a small boy, with breathless interest, during a long evening, as they told blood-curdling stories of bears and painters. They never called the latter beast puma or panther. They told of hair-breadth escapes as painters leaped at them from the trees. For a long time afterwards, whenever I went through the woods, shivering fear ran in waves down my spine as, tripping on hastily with upturned eyes, I searched the branches above me for some crouching painter; however, I never found one until one day I visited a menagerie. Such neighborly visits and chit-chats relieved the dull monotony of farm life, and in a measure satisfied our yearning for society.

We, however, found a more common meeting-place at the store. Let no one of the present generation proudly claim that the department store is of recent origin. Long ago in our country neighborhood there was one where you could buy anything from a paper of pins to an ox-yoke or a log-chain, from a chip hat to a pair of cowhide boots, and from a calico dress or a roll of ribbon to a plug of tobacco, or a quart of molasses. Here, too, was the post-office, and here the people of the neighborhood naturally gathered. Evenings and stormy days it was a general rendezvous for men. Here they smoked their clay pipes and cheap cigars, gossiped, joked, talked politics and swapped yarns. They warmly discussed slavery and the tariff. Never having read much, their debates were usually rather meagre in thought, and since each one detailed simply what he had gleaned from his weekly political paper, their positions and utterances were one-sided and partisan. But hearing both sides presented led the more intelligent to do some independent thinking. I remember well hearing them one day discuss protection versus free trade. The contention was earnest, but altogether good-natured. At the height of it, who should come in but a self-conceited Whig, James Bean, who had the New York *Tribune's* arguments for protection at his tongue's end. With flaming ardor he threw himself into the fray. He was voluble, incessantly so; no one could get in edgewise a syllable in opposition to his, or Greeley's views. With apparent erudition, he illustrated his arguments from the history of economics and from present transactions in the market. In every utterance he seemed to say,

> "I am Sir Oracle,
> And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark."

In this case, no dog got a chance to bark; but a small vessel soon runs dry, and in four or five minutes we got the last feeble squirt from this protection keg; and then Jim, as the boys called him, with an air of triumph, marched out of the store, shutting the door with a bang, as much as to say, "Answer that if you can."

For a moment there was profound silence. Of course all knew that we had just listened to a smart declamation from the columns of the *Tribune,* delivered with correctness and unusual vehemence. Oscar Gooch broke the silence, not with an altogether original, but a pat, remark: "Well, what that man don't know would make a very large book!" This was followed by a burst of laughter, clapping of hands and stamping of feet.

Oscar Gooch was a peculiar character. His ancestry was Dutch, but he had been thoroughly Yankeeized. He was over six feet tall, broad-shouldered, muscular and rawboned. He never wore whiskers, and evidently shaved at least twice a week. His corduroy pants were thrust into the legs of heavy, cowhide boots, and he usually wore a dilapidated chip hat. Free and easy in his way of living, while an industrious worker, he accumulated very little property. He and his family were somewhat poorly housed, clothed and fed; yet they always seemed contented and happy. He was quite free from self-conceit, in fact he regarded himself as a country bumpkin. He, however, underestimated himself. He had a clear mind, broad humor, quick wit, and was quite a favorite with the boys. He could tell a good story in few words so as to bring down the house.

Sometimes the store-loungers vied with each other in preposterous, ridiculous yarns. One day Tom Jones said that he had found out how to keep from being bitten by mosquitoes at night. "How do you do it, Tom?" asked half a dozen. "Why," he replied, "I just put in large letters on a poster at the foot of my bed, STICK NO BILLS HERE; and it works like a charm." This was greeted with a hearty laugh, and then Pete Roach said: "Out on the Mississippi River are the biggest, most bloodthirsty mosquitoes on the continent. A man, driven half mad by them, turned a caldron kettle over him to keep them off, but they stuck their bills right through it. Having a hammer in his hand, he clinched them on the inside. Unable to pull their bills out, they just flew away, carrying the kettle with them." Over that there was a long, loud guffaw. And as no one was able to say anything more utterly absurd in the mosquito line, they began to tell astounding stories about horses, but in these yarns Gooch reached the climax. He said, "You know Sam Munger's three-year-old colt, don't you?" "Yes," they said, "and it's an awful fine colt." "Yes," responded Gooch, "and it can run faster than any hoss on earth. You know that big thunderstorm last Tuesday afternoon, don't you?" "Of course we do, but what's that got to do with the colt?" "Why," he replied, "I saw the lightning, when it rained hardest, chase that colt three times around an eight-acre lot, just two lengths of the fence behind, and it couldn't catch him — it just gave it up. There isn't another such hoss made." We may not be able to explain it, but there is humor in such fantastic exaggeration. The crowd, their sides shaking with laughter, said that Gooch had taken the cake, and they set up for all, doughnuts and a lemonade. Happily the store had nothing stronger.

On a rainy day, Ambrose Hutchinson was one of the company that loitered in the store. Ambrose, while an industrious farmer, managed to read not only some of the best political papers, but also a goodly number of excellent books. What he read he thoroughly digested. By his studious habits he became a fairly well-educated man. Conscious of his intellectual strength, he greatly enjoyed getting into controversy with his neighbors. So, as soon as he appeared in the store, he went into quite an elaborate argument in favor of the annexation of Texas. Though positive and dogmatic, the crowd liked him as a man, and listened to him patiently. At last, however, Gooch broke in upon his discourse. "Now," said he, "Ambrose, stop right there." Then, rehearsing the main points of Hutchinson's argument, he added, "As sure's you're born, Ambrose, there's no foundation for your basis." Gooch's ludicrous bull provoked such boisterous merriment that, for a few minutes, all business in the store was suspended, while both the storekeeper and the loungers, laughing till they shed tears, were saying to each other, "There's no foundation for your basis;" and we heard no more that day about the annexation of Texas.

Some men of our neighborhood never lounged at the store. Prominent among them was John Erskine. He used to say to his sons, who sometimes lingered there to hear the jokes and stories and share in the fun, "Don't fool away time at the store; the storekeeper don't want you around, and what you see and hear will be of no benefit. Never treat anybody to anything, nor let any one treat you; there's no good in it." It was the soundest advice, and if not always heeded, it could never be forgotten.

The churches, also, in an indirect but effective way, satisfied our desire for social life. Every Sunday most of the families of the neighborhood met at the meeting-houses. They came afoot, on horseback, in buggies and wagons, or, when snow covered the ground, in cutters and sleighs. They vied with each other in horses and rigs. They chatted with one another, as they hitched their teams under the long shed back of the meeting-house. Usually getting to the church fifteen or twenty minutes before service, they gathered before the door on the broad, roofless platform, or, on stormy or wintry days, in the roomy vestibule, where stood the great box stoves, which warmed, or were intended to warm, the audience room, and there shook hands and heartily conversed with each other. The elder also often appeared among us, enlivening all with his cheery greeting. When a boy, those moments of social intercourse were to me the brightest and most enjoyable of the whole week.

After the morning service came the Sunday School, where the children and their teachers met; the grown-ups had a Bible class by themselves. At the close of the school, we had half an hour or more before the afternoon sermon, to talk and eat our luncheon. Our conversation, far from being distinctively religious, was about the district school, the spelling-matches, our sports, farm-work, calves and colts. But one man, Horton Bean, of whom I shall more particularly speak before my story is done, used often to talk to us so earnestly and cheerfully about the Lord Jesus and His willingness to save us from sin, that we boys were always glad to see and hear him.

The afternoon service was always rather wearisome to the boys. Not that the good old elder did not preach well — he always did; but already having had a sermon, a Sunday School and two socials, we were nearly tired out. When a jug is full you can't pour any more into it. And this was as true of our elders as of ourselves. Some of the hard-working farmers would get drowsy under the mellifluous tones of the preacher. Sitting in the gallery and looking down upon those in the pews, I sometimes saw a tobacco-chewer sleeping, his head fallen backward, his mouth wide open, revealing on his tongue a generous quid — "cud" we called it — of tobacco; and instead of listening to the sermon as I should have done, I kept thinking what would happen if, in his nap, he should swallow it!

But even the prayer-meetings contributed to our social enjoyment. In the winter many attended them. Both men and women prayed, and with united hearts and voices sang familiar hymns. They told their Christian experiences, and counseled one another in reference to spiritual things, which, as some of the older brethren said, "took hold on eternal realities." This was social intercourse on a high plane. It was also strictly democratic. There were no class distinctions. All stood on the same level. However poor in this world's goods, or deficient in education, they belonged to the élite of the earth, the godly whom the Lord "has set apart for himself." Such intercourse was a foretaste of the "social joys" of heaven.

Moreover, the singing-school, held each winter in one of the meeting-houses, was an important social factor. Everybody was urged to join it, and, for a very small fee, receive instruction in the rudiments of music. Each season we began with the musical scale, and from that went on to the singing of strains and tunes. We seldom had any musical instrument to lead us, but were given the key of the tune by a steel pitch-pipe; still, at times we received such help from flute, flageolet, or bass-viol as amateur musicians could afford us.

Usually at the close of the school we gave an Old Folks' Concert. We then dressed like men and women in "ye goode olden tyme;" wore buff vests, ruffled shirts, yellow or white breeches, reaching to the knees, with long stockings and knee buckles, blue coats with brass buttons, and powdered wigs. When we could not secure enough of such dresses to go around, togging ourselves out as best we could, we presented a rather motley scene of commingled ancient and modern costumes; and this added to the amusement of the crowd. Crowd it was, since the whole neighborhood, old and young, turned out to hear and see — especially to see. During the concert the steel pitch-pipe a part of the time gave place to one more ancient. This was a thin wooden box, into which the chorister blew. At one end of it was a slide, which, being slipped backward and forward along a graduated scale, indicated any key that might be desired. Then, from buckwheat notes, we sang some old tunes with their bewildering fugues — the real fugue, the inverted fugue, the double fugue — filling the air with heterogeneous sounds; strains, one in a higher, another in a lower key, answered to each other and sometimes chased each other in almost breathless haste, till all at last ended in restful harmony. Such tunes, sung with spirit by a large chorus, even if the performance were rustic and crude, gave to the people exquisite enjoyment. It was their opera. Then there were tunes in the minor key, which reached the core of our hearts and stirred, gently but profoundly, our tenderest emotions. I can never forget the haunting lines of a hymn sung in that key,

"Spare us, O Lord, aloud we pray,
Nor let our sun go down at noon;
Thy years are one eternal day,
And must thy children die so soon?"[1]

An occasional hymn and tune of that sort now would restore to our song-service an element of power that we have unwisely permitted to drop out of it. Old as such music is, it would be new to the present generation.

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[1] Winchell's Watts, Hymn 619, Psalm 102, 2d Part, L. M. 2d Stanza. Windham. Denton.

Now, the singing-school, and the choirs that it engendered and fostered, did much to satisfy our social wants. Singing together was itself a rare social joy; but we met before the school opened and had our talks, quips and fun. When our musical drill was about half through, we had an intermission for fresh air, conversation and romps. Some of us boys were fully as much interested in the girls as in the singing, and at the close of the school each lad, with some fear of a rebuff, offered to see some lass to her home. If he did not get the mitten, he proudly sallied forth with her on foot, or in a cutter, drawn by a spirited horse girt with jingling bells. Then when her home was reached, the lingering parting at the gate — why should I tell it all?

Moreover, the church sewing-circles were no insignificant element in the social life of the neighborhood. These circles, to which of course only women belonged, were, like all their kith and kin, benevolent associations. The members of them met at stated times in private houses, and sewed for the sick and poor among us, for poverty-stricken ministerial students, and for destitute home missionaries out on the western frontier. As they sewed, they talked; while their needles flew, their tongues wagged. They blessed the needy with their fingers, and one another with their words. While they clothed the naked, they satisfied their craving for society. If now and then some unruly tongue, "set on fire by hell," stabbed a priceless reputation, for the most part the conversation was at least innocuous, if not Christian.

Each one that entertained the circle, at the close of the day gave a tea to all present. Then the hostess spread her table with the best that she could command, set before her guests cups of steaming, fragrant tea; light, hot saleratus biscuit; fresh, golden butter; maple syrup or clover honey or both; her best cheese; a little sliced, dried beef; thick, rich custard pie; and cucumber pickles. Often the things that tempted their appetites led them to discuss culinary art — the best method of making this or that.

It was customary to invite to this supper the gentlemen belonging to the family of the hostess. So it came to pass, on a time, that one of the most facetious characters of our neighborhood sat at the table with the ladies of the Methodist sewing-circle. This tall, robust, round-headed, brown-haired, blue-eyed, open-faced man was always bubbling over with fun. If a shadow ever fell athwart his path, no one ever knew it. He seemed to live in perpetual sunshine. He saw the ludicrous side of everything. He often laughed at the most solemn things in the services of the church; not because he was irreverent, but because something in them suggested to his mind some grotesque image. By trade he was a carpenter and joiner, but always called himself a "wood-shark." His jocosity broke out under all circumstances. Riding one day on horseback along one of the country roads when a thunderstorm was approaching, he dismounted at a man's gate, ran swiftly up the walk to the front door of the house, and knocked with all his might, as though he had some vastly important message, the delivery of which could not be delayed for a moment. The owner of the house hurried to the door and, quickly opening it, nervously asked, "What's the matter?" When the joker, with apparent earnestness and anxiety, answered, "The top of your chimney is open and" — pointing to the coming shower — "it will rain in if you don't cover it up." Turning on his heel he hurried back to his horse, hastily remounted, and rode off at great speed, leaving the householder standing in the doorway and shaking his sides with laughter. Now, this practical joker, his face brimming with merriment, sat at tea with the ladies of the sewing-circle. They were discussing their different methods of making cucumber pickles. One of them, tasting a very sour pickle, said, "Now, this is too sharp." He at once ran the pickle fork into another, full half an inch through, with a round, blunt end, and feeling the end with his forefinger, said with great apparent gravity and politeness, "Here is one, madam, that isn't sharp." And

Sam's joke at the supper of the sewing-circle was soon on every tongue.

We also had, once in a great while, church socials that were held in private houses. They were much like the more modern article. We all came together, looked each other in the face, asked "How are ye?" profoundly observed "This has been a fine day," and inquired of each other how the cattle and sheep were standing the hard winter. By degrees the young folks became segregated in the kitchen or the chamber above, when there was often fun and frolic, lively and loud, and sometimes, on the sly, a little love-making. The entertainment was usually brought to a close by an abundant and substantial supper, such as the countryside afforded, at which the elder usually spoke some cheery words and offered thanks. Then, of course, — and this we thought the best of it, — the boys went home with the girls. Let no one now say, "How stupid it must have been!" It was of great worth to us, since for a short time it lifted us out of our ruts, enlarged our sympathies and strengthened our friendships.

Each year brought, too, its donation parties. Money was not plenty, some of the church-members were stingy, and the salaries of the preachers were meagre and mean; so they were eked out by donations. The donation party was usually held at the pastor's house, and each one, without any consultation with others, brought what he or she thought might be useful to the minister and his family; so there was a great deal of random and useless giving. Sometimes there was a glut of fancy slippers, broidered handkerchiefs, socks and mittens. But the farmers bountifully provided for the pastor's table, piling up in his kitchen, flour, corn meal, salt pork, hams, sausages, chickens, potatoes, turnips and cabbages. A committee appointed for the purpose appraised what was donated and, at the close of the evening, its total value was duly announced. Many regarded the donation as an act of benevolence, when in fact the church and community were poorly paying the preacher in produce for his manifold services in spiritual things. It was indeed no more a donation than the payment of a note would be. John Erskine, while never behind the very chief of contributors at the donation parties, always protested against them. He urged that the pastor should have an adequate salary, so that he could purchase what he needed and when he needed it, instead of being burdened with a superabundance on some given evening in the year, much of which, being superfluous, he could never use at all. But these donations revealed a curious and suggestive fact; many, who could not be induced to give money to support the preacher, contributed quite freely articles that in the market would readily have brought them considerable cash. Is it universally true that money always looks a little more precious to men than things, however valuable they may be?

But the donation party was of great worth to us all. It was an attempt, however bungling, to do good to the most important man in the community. It made us think of somebody beside ourselves. All the givers were happy. A very small degree of self-forgetfulness engenders joy. Meeting in order to help another, the party became one of the most important social events of the entire year.

But at times, wholly aside from church activities and ignoring denominational lines, the young people of the neighborhood had parties purely for social purposes. Of course those that attended them were specially invited. This sometimes gave rise to heart-burnings; some that received no invitation, feeling themselves slighted, were resentful. One day I heard Aunt Lucy giving sage advice to one of her sons, who felt hurt because he had not been invited to a neighborhood party. She said to him: "Never wish to go where you're not wanted. Then, you don't know why you were not invited; it may have been a mere oversight. None of us is of any great importance. And if it is an intended slight, you shouldn't care — one man's just as good as another, if he behaves himself. If you have proper self-respect, you won't care a fig for the slight." I am sure that her son could never have been persuaded to part with that nugget of wisdom.

The select company having come together, what should be done? Of course the usual things, the small talk, the attempt at wit, the sallies, the flings, the refreshments, were all plain sailing; but beyond these, what? What should their amusements be? The prevailing sentiment of the neighborhood was against card-playing. The discipline and rules of the churches, to which many of the young people belonged, forbade it. In justification of this, it was asserted that cards were the instruments of vice. With them, blacklegs gambled; to play cards only for amusement might form a habit that would lead one to play for money. Card-playing, it was urged, has a wrong tendency. If you begin it, no knowing where you will end. The only safe course is not to touch it with even one of your fingers. This reasoning then and there triumphed. There was no shuffling of cards at any of the social gatherings. While a few of the more reckless sometimes ventured to play under cover, any young man was disgraced in the eyes of the community if a pack of cards was found in his possession.

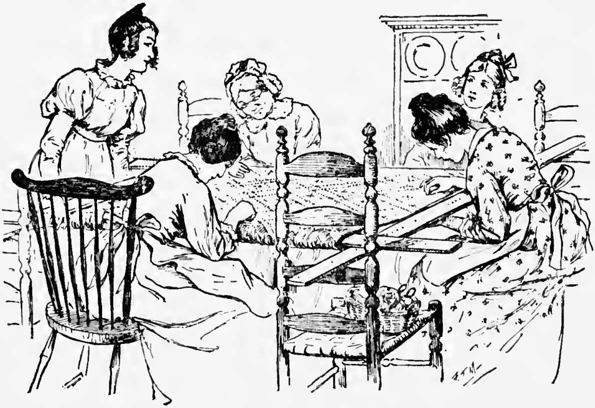
The weight of public opinion was also against dancing. The churches condemned it. It, too, tended to evil, they said, and since the violin — "fiddle," they called it — was used at dances, it was in general disrepute. While the opposition to dancing was not quite as sweeping and positive as against card-playing, still it was strong enough to exclude it from most of the young people's parties. Nevertheless, now and then, some coterie of youngsters, braving public opinion, danced, and for days were the talk of the whole countryside.

Honest John Erskine got his foot down on cards, dancing and all like follies, and no persuasion could move him an iota from his position. Like Roderick Dhu, he seemed to say,

> "Come one, come all! This rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I."

And whatever his children may have thought, none of them while under the paternal roof ever played a game of cards, and I doubt if any one of them ever danced a jig, except on the sly.

Card-playing and dancing being excluded, the young people at their parties sensibly resorted to other amusements. They propounded riddles and conundrums; played fox and geese and checkers; even played blind man's buff, that always seemed to some of us even more objectionable than dancing — but I am pleading neither for the one nor the other. There are scores of harmless, healthful amusements against which no one can successfully urge even a plausible objection; and the young people of my country neighborhood, without playing cards or dancing, found an abundance of ennobling recreations which satisfied their social desires. Still, there were dancers among us, as we shall see.



CHAPTER XI

BEES

Not honey-bees nor bumblebees, but men gladly uniting to help one another. In pioneer communities, sorely needed assistance, that could not be purchased with money, was often freely granted by neighbors. It was a difficult task to build a log house single-handed and alone, but the heavy work of putting the logs in place was quickly and easily done by the united effort of a few friends. So the early settlers of our neighborhood became mutual helpers in doing the harder jobs, or work left undone on account of sickness. Such companies of benevolent workers were not confined to either sex; and, as specimens of the whole, I wish to portray, as well as I can, three or four of these bees.

The sewing-bee shall first claim our attention. This was at times wholly benevolent. Some mother, on account of ill health, had been unable to do the necessary sewing for her family. The neighbors, knowing her necessities, gathered at her house to help her out. They often generously carried with them the cloth for the garments to be made, and superabundant provision for their supper. Those swift and happy needles before sunset finished all the sewing needed by the afflicted family; and after supper there was left for the table a large amount of wholesome food. Such thoughtful, generous help did much to cheer back to full health and strength the wife and mother who, on account of disease, had been unable to do her own work. Such a bee blessed both the helpers and the one helped.

> "The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

The quilting-bee was also common. The women of the neighborhood generously helped each other in making bedquilts. Usually before the company of stitchers came together the preliminary work had been done; the quilt basted together, attached to the frame, and the pattern for quilting marked with chalk. Everything was ready for the final work. Then, as many as could gather around the frame began to ply their needles, following out the lines for stitching. Such a bee was also a social. While the good women stitched, they talked. The gossip and repartee made their work a joy; and if the bedquilt was not too crazy, it was completed at a single sitting. The supper now followed, enticing in itself, but made doubly so by the consciousness of having wrought a good work for a neighbor.

Turning now to the men, we notice first their raising-bees. When the inhabitants of our neighborhood, abandoning their log houses and barns, began to construct frame buildings, the frames of the new structures were made of very heavy timbers. The beech or oak sleepers, beams and corner posts were from twelve to eighteen inches square, and the studs, braces and rafters were in due proportion. The carpenter first prepared all the varied parts of the frame. Every stick of it was made ready for its special place. Each mortise was dug out for its corresponding tenon, and pins were made to hold the timbers firmly in place. If, when the parts of the frame were put together, there was a single timber, even a brace, that did not fit, the carpenter who had done the job wellnigh lost his reputation as a builder.

When the frame was fully prepared, the owner invited his neighbors to help put it together, or, as they said, put it up. The carpenter of course bossed the job. Many strong and willing hands soon laid the heavy sleepers on the solid stone foundations already prepared for them, drove the tenons of the sleepers into their awaiting mortises, and pinned them there with large, tough oak or hickory pins. Then by putting together a part of the frame of the lower story, they formed a bent, which being raised to an upright position, the tenons of the corner posts and studs slipped into mortises in the sleeper, where they in turn were securely pinned. Then another and still another bent went up till the frame of the whole lower story was in place. This done, planks were thrown across the joists of the frame, and on them the bents of the upper story were formed and lifted to position. Now the rafters, often poles four or five inches in diameter, hewn on the upper side, and the ridge-pole, ordinarily a timber five or six inches square, were put in place, all mortised and carefully pinned together. When all was done, some venturesome youth would sit astride the ridge-pole, near the gable end, and in triumph swing his chip hat to the cheering crowd below.

When the timbers of the bents were large and very heavy, as they usually were, to raise them and put them in place was the tug of war. At first all laid hold with bare hands and lifted with a will till the bent was up five or six feet, when one after another seized a pike with which to push it up further. The pike was a pole about three inches in diameter, with a sharp-pointed spike in the end. The spike was thrust a half inch or so into the timber, and then with a united push of the pikes the heavy bent went slowly up, the boss standing by, crying, "Together now, heave her up — all together, heave her up." When nearly perpendicular, a score of pikes were thrust into the opposite side of the bent to keep it from toppling over and to hold it steady until every tenon had slipped into its mortise in the sleeper. The horizontal timber that at the top united the bents of the upper story, and on which rested the feet of the rafters, often had to be hammered down, the tenons of the timbers underneath it slipping very tightly into their mortises. So some man of steady nerve would stand on it and pound it down with a sledge. I once saw a great, burly fellow doing this. He had a hard job, for notwithstanding his heavy blows, the timber on which he so firmly and bravely stood was forced down very slowly into its place. While he was incessantly striking with his ponderous hammer, the boss, standing on the ground below, kept on bawling, "Pound her down, pound her down." The great, strapping fellow, without stopping his hammering for an instant, in stentorian tone cried in response, "I be, ain't I?" Whenever after that I was exhorted to do what I was already doing to the best of my ability, the cry of that muscular farmer would come to mind — "I be, ain't I?"

I once attended a raising-bee at John Erskine's. The neighbors put up for him the frame of his new horse barn. When the job was done, he invited all, according to the invariable custom, to a bountiful repast. Here we saw the hand of Aunt Lucy. For drink we had cold water, milk, sweet cider, and coffee; and the rough board table was spread with sandwiches, piles of doughnuts, powdered with sugar, great frosted sweet cakes filled with raisins, called raisin cake, apple and mince pies, delicious cheese, and cucumber pickles. As I stood in the crowd, munching a piece of Aunt Lucy's toothsome cake, I overheard a conversation between Eli Furbur and Tom Hart. Tom said, "I can't eat cheese, it goes against my stomach." "That's my case," said Furbur, "it always goes against mine, and an all-fired lot of it."

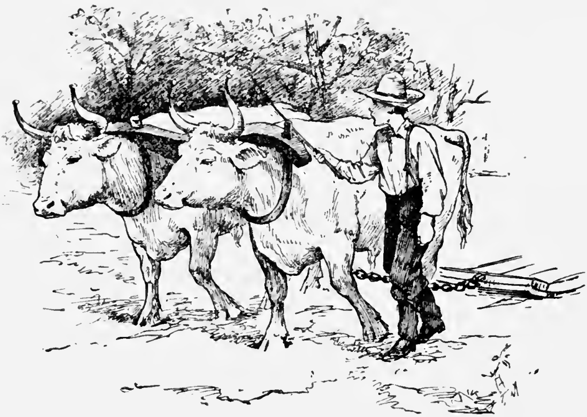
The husking-bee was unique and worthy of special mention. The usual time for it was an evening in the latter part of October. The Indian corn, cut near the ground and stood up in shocks, having become thoroughly dry, was drawn into the barn. The stalks, still upright just as when shocked in the field, were closely packed together on the large, central barn-floor, often covering full three-fourths of it. Tin candle sconces and lanterns were hung overhead from the joists and beams, casting a dim light. The huskers, having come together, began their evening's work. Men, young, middle-aged and old, and sometimes women, especially young women, took a hand. The stalks, as the ears were husked out, were bound in bundles and stowed away upon the adjoining mow; the ears were thrown into baskets which, when full, were emptied into a great bin just off the main floor. The huskers being numerous, the floor was rapidly cleared. The stories, the repartee, the jokes made the task more a frolic than a labor. Ten o'clock soon came. The husks had been torn from the last golden ear. No stalks remained on the great floor. The young women with the coarse barn brooms quickly swept away the husks scattered here and there. Between nine and ten some laughing lassies put in an appearance, but too late to do much husking. They came apparently merely to jolly the lads and add to the merriment of the hour. But Sam Drake, who lived in an adjoining township, was one of the bee. He brought under his arm a bundle that he carefully deposited in the wheat granary. When he joined the huskers he gave some of the boys a significant wink, which they answered with a knowing chuckle. He was over six feet tall, sallow, lean, muscular, with shocky black hair, and hazel eyes around which laughter lurked. He spoke with a drawl, but was full of genuine humor. He had a great warm heart, and everybody liked him, even the puritanical, who did not approve of all that he did. Now, the farmer in whose barn this husking-bee was held had no objection to dancing, and the young people had arranged with him for a hop when the husking was done; hence the late coming of some young women; hence the presence of Sam Drake, the most skilful and popular fiddler of the whole countryside. The bundle that he deftly deposited in the granary was his celebrated old violin, in a green baize bag. So when the girls began to make the dust fly with their brooms, Sam got his green bag, pulled his fiddle out of it, mounted a scaffold on the right, seated himself on an overturned half-barrel, and began to tune up. The older people now left and, after partaking of a bountiful lunch at the farmhouse, went home, some of them deprecating the follies of the rising generation; but all the young people stayed at the barn. Not that all intended to dance; some had never practised the art, and therefore felt themselves unequal to it; others refrained out of respect to their parents, who disapproved of dancing; these, however, gladly stayed to witness it. They refrained from the pleasure, not on their own consciences but out of respect to those whom they honored and loved. As spectators they were at times not a little embarrassed. Standing on the outskirts of the company, they were now and then compelled to step back quickly, sometimes pressing against those who stood behind them, to avoid being punched in the ribs by the elbows of the stalwart dancers.

When all were ready and the young men had chosen their partners, Sam Drake, with his peculiar drawl, began to call off the figures of the dance. He threw his whole soul into both his fiddling and his words. He was in love with his violin, and the music that he drew from it voiced his emotions. A connoisseur would say that it lacked technique — we knew no such big word in our country neighborhood — but it had something higher and better than technique, — it had soul. And with all his heart Sam believed in the dance. He said, " It is the very rhythm of the soul." Led by such an enthusiast, the dance was full of pleasurable excitement. To be sure, the girls wore no fine gowns, for they had none, and if they had had them they would have been quite out of place in that dusty, dimly lighted barn. And the young men danced in the same suits in which they had husked the corn. Most of them wore their stogy boots; a few, however, who had been told beforehand of the dance, wore their Sunday calfskins. But the dress of all was quite in harmony with the occasion; and full of gladness, they danced the square dance, the round dance, the Virginia reel, and a young man of Scotch descent attempted the Highland fling. Midnight came. The low-burning candles, already once replenished, and the flickering whale-oil lamps told them that their fun and frolic must cease, but even then, in the rare exhilaration of the moment, they sang, " We won't go home till morning! "

But at last, reluctantly quitting the place of their glad dance, they went, a happy, laughing band, to the farmhouse, where they partook of the feast spread for them in the kitchen; after which, with great glee and considerable nonsense, they noisily bade each other good-night. Reaching their homes, they crept silently into their beds. They had not the privilege now accorded to city society, of sleeping late in the morning, but were compelled to rise with the sun and give themselves to their exacting duties. Their weariness and unusual stupidity showed that the last night's so-called recreation had been dissipation; instead of building them up, it had for the nonce weakened and exhausted them.

Now, there was only a family here and there in our neighborhood that would have permitted a husking-bee to be topped off with a dance. Most of them, as we have already stated, regarded such frolic as sin. When John Erskine was told of the dance and that two of his own children had witnessed it, in a few calm, earnest words he condemned it, declaring that those that looked on with pleasure were as bad as those that took part in it, and clinched his declaration by quoting the proverb, "You might as well eat the devil as to drink his broth." But Aunt Lucy, never forgetful of the pleasures of her girlhood, said, "They needn't have danced so late, it wasn't decent to get home at two o'clock in the morning." But John, always believing her to be quite perfect, did not seem to notice her covert compromise with what he deemed unmitigated evil. She ever kept clearly in mind the difference between the use and abuse of a good thing, while he at times failed to apprehend it.

But while dances were few and exceptional, bees were frequent, and while the latter indirectly ministered to our social life, they were first and foremost a marked exhibition of neighborly kindness; they showed how ready all were to help others; they were the glad, hearty expression of good comradeship; they bound the hearts of the entire neighborhood together, and by anticipation put into concrete form Edward Everett Hale's "Lend a hand."



CHAPTER XII

RECREATIONS

FIRST of all, the recreations of the children shall claim our attention. In the warmer seasons the grass, flowers, trees, fruits, birds, the buzzing bees and gorgeous butterflies were a never-failing delight, while murmuring creeks and tiny waterfalls charmed them, and even the rocks and pebbles yielded them exquisite pleasure. In winter the frosts and snows, the ice-laden forests glittering in the sunshine, coasting and skating brought to them exhilarating gladness. Whatever their elders did, the smaller children played through the livelong day. The little girls kept house. Any corner of the dooryard, of the kitchen or the barn, served for a house; shingles, pieces of cast-off boards or overturned boxes were utilized for shelves, bits of broken china and glass for dishes. They served mimic meals, washed and sewed, and rocked their rag babies in sap troughs. They played quilting-bees and had parties, sometimes dressing in the cheap frocks of their mothers, asking the boys to attend. But the little boys played horse, harnessing themselves in tow strings; plowed, sowed, hoed, harvested, and thrashed. They played jackstones and marbles, made and flew kites. While they often thought the school a drudgery, when it was over they had recreations galore. Happier times than those they have never since seen.

I remember with what unbounded delight I used to roam through the woods, meadows and pastures. Every object and every scene seemed to bewitch me. Having as yet no care, I simply revelled in God's wonderful world. Sometimes in summer there came into the neighborhood from another town a boy about my own age. I took a great fancy to him, and more than once we tramped together, barefoot, through the fields. We ran hither and thither, admiring this flower or that bush, just as fancy led us. The bull-thistles were in full bloom. How beautiful they were upon their stiff and prickly stems! They had also a wealth of honey, and the bumblebees were busy rifling them of their sweet treasure. With a swoop we caught them in our chip hats, and swinging them round and round till they were drunk, let them go. With their tiny brains turned topsy-turvy, they flew uncertainly and lazily away in a zig-zag line, while we gleefully watched them. There may have been a tinge of cruelty in our sport, but then we did not think of that; we were just having a good time. That chance friend of my boyhood became a distinguished preacher, and whatever comes from his pen has the graceful touch of a true literary artist, and nothing ever so turned his brain as to cause him, in teaching religion and morals, to take a zig-zag course.

We also had our pets. John Erskine kept a dog, Boze, that the children all loved. I do not know his breed, but he was of medium size and reddish brown. He was never cross, and was always ready for a frolic with the little folks. Towards evening he drove the cows from the pasture to the barn. When set on the herd, he never caught heifer or steer by the nose or ear, as the bulldog is apt to do, but by the end of the tail, and held on till the beast was half frightened out of its wits. If his master came in from the field with burs on his clothes, Boze would at once pick them off. He seemed unusually intelligent. But he had a sad end. He was sleeping, on a summer afternoon, in the dooryard, when a gawky lout, who had been hunting without success, shot him, apparently because he thought he must shoot something. Honest John never opened his lips; he evidently knew no words that would do justice to his feelings, but Aunt Lucy tried to express her indignation, and was fairly successful. The children of the family and neighborhood tenderly buried Boze with lamentation and tears.

Cooing doves, " white and pied and blue," held a high place among our diversions. A dry-goods box made a very good dove-cote; two small holes, cut in the side of the barn, with a narrow platform before them, were the doors through which the gentle beauties entered. They nested. Soon wide-mouthed, down-covered nestlings appeared. Peeping through a crack, we saw the old birds feed them. They very soon became almost large enough to leave their nests. Unbeknown to us, the old tom-cat had observed them. He liked good fat squabs. In the night he got into the dove-cote and ate them all up. The old birds alone escaped. In the morning, as we viewed the marks of the grim slaughter, we were full of wrath and tears, and although Tom was one of our pets, we pursued him with sticks and called him a bloody tiger and every other bad name that we could bring to mind. But we soon plucked up courage, and, nailing down the dove-cote so firmly that no tom-cat could ever move it, began anew. Soon again there were eggs and squabs and doves, and at last our flock became so large that it was a burden. Then, when our backs were turned, some one was permitted to slaughter a half-dozen of our iridescent pets, for a pot-pie. What a descent!

Woodchuck hunting was in summer a favorite pastime of the small boys, and sometimes even those of larger growth took a hand in it. One day I and an older brother of mine undertook with our shovels to dig out a groundhog. After strenuous toil in the hot sun, we reached her den, deep in the ground; but she was not there. We found, however, one of her offspring that she had left behind in her nest. I carried it home, proudly and tenderly, dug a hole for it in the back yard, fed it milk and fresh clover leaves, and it grew rapidly. It was soon following me about like a dog. It sunned itself on the veranda, or slept, when the air was chill, by the kitchen stove. To my great delight, it often ate standing on its hind legs and holding the food on which it feasted in its fore paws. It was ravenously fond of sugar, and frequently went with me into the attic, where the cakes of maple sugar were kept in a large wooden tub; and when, breaking off a piece, I gave it to him, he stood up very straight and devoured it greedily; but he always wanted more, and gave vigorous expression to his desire by energetically scratching the side of the tub. Late in the autumn I heard him digging a hole under the stoop; he worked fast and hard, making the dirt fly, and, as he went down deeper, pushing it up and out with his paws and nose, while he packed the inner wall of his hole till it was quite smooth and solid. He now gathered pieces of paper, grass and leaves, and carried them down into his new home for a bed. He then went into his den to sleep for full four months, while the frosty, biting winds howled and the snow flew. How could he do all this and do it so perfectly, without ever having been taught?

In the following April, I saw him come out of his hole. He seemed very glad to see me, and, running across the veranda to the outside door of the sitting room, he vigorously scratched it with his paws. When I opened it, he hurried across the room to a door opening on the chamber stairs, and in turn scratched that. It, too, was opened, and he ran up to and across the chamber, to a door opening on the attic stairs. I also opened this, when he scampered up into the attic, and went straight to the sugar tub, which he scratched with all his might. He got what he wanted, and broke his long fast by devouring a generous lump of maple sugar. What was it — instinct or memory or both?

My fat woodchuck pet stayed with me during that summer. He was popular with all the household. Every one was happy in feeding him. Never was a waif treated more kindly. He, however, evidently knew no gratitude. He discarded his den under the stoop. His wild nature asserted itself, and early in November he ran across the field to the woods, and I saw that sugar-loving pet never again.

Following quite a prevalent custom among the farmers of the neighborhood, my father at times let me call some sheep or calf mine. It did not, of course, actually become my property, but since it was spoken of as mine, I took the deepest personal interest in it.

One winter he said that there was an ewe in his flock, which was so timid that she did not get her share of the fodder, and he was afraid that she would die of starvation before spring came. He proposed to call her mine if I would coax her to eat corn. This aroused my ambition to do what he had failed to do. Snatching up an ear of corn from the crib, I appeared among the sheep, most of which were eager to eat it from my hand, but the emaciated ewe ran away with fright, as fast as her legs could carry her. My job looked discouraging, but the half-starved, silly sheep ran into the basement shed under the barn. She was there alone. I crept noiselessly up to the corner of the shed where she could not see me, threw the ear of corn around the corner, and the trembling simpleton ate it. The next day I renewed the experiment with success. The third day I stretched my hand, holding the corn, around the corner. I heard her scamper away, but after long waiting, she ventured back. On the following day I stood before her with the tempting grain. She ran to the farther side of the shed and there stood shivering with fear, but saw me toss the corn towards her. Each day she came nearer and nearer to receive the dainty morsel. Within a week she was eating out of my hand; and at last whenever I appeared in the barn-yard she ran to me, and, often rearing up and putting her fore feet on my breast, ate the corn that I held aloft. My triumph was complete. My pet grew fat, and I was almost bursting with pride over my success.

I remember, too, that John Erskine gave two calves to his youngest son, who was greatly set up by it. The gift gave him a sense of responsibility and ownership. He looked carefully after them, and talked about their fine points. When they were a year old, Honest John made a yoke for them, but told his son that he must yoke them up himself. He evidently wished to develop his self-confidence and independence; but to put under the yoke for the first time two half-wild, yearling steers was a formidable job for a twelve-year-old boy. But nothing daunted, he shut his calves in the barn-yard, and began early in the forenoon the tough task of yoking them. He soon had one end of the yoke on the neck of the off steer, but how to get the neck of the nigh steer under the other end of it was the tug of war. Here his real battle began. He seized the calf by the head and horns, but the frightened beast dragged him hither and thither till, exhausted, he was compelled to quit his hold. He tried gentler means and, after long coaxing, got his infant ox near the yoke, when the one already yoked ran away. And the hard fight went on without intermission for six hours, when the victory was won. At last the young steers were securely yoked. The plucky boy now tried to drive them around the barn-yard, but the frightened creatures in some way got mixed up, and in a jiffy the yoke was under, and the lower ends of the bows above, their necks. How it was done the young steer-breaker could not understand. Honest John appeared on the scene and said, "Aha, the little rascals have turned the yoke," and helped his tired boy to straighten out the tangle. The next day his son yoked his little oxen without much difficulty, and his father soon made for him a small stone-boat, on which he rode after his young team. He drove twice a week to Ramville to get the mail for the family. He was proud of his calves and of his success in breaking them to the yoke. And he had gotten out of it more than he knew, not only fun but character.

The recreations of country children build them up in body. Most of their sports are out in the open, and linked with natural objects. Such pastimes impart useful knowledge, whet and develop the powers of observation, and give to boys and girls tact, perseverance and hardihood.

The recreations of the older folks were, for the most part, rough and rugged. Many of them rejoiced in the hunt. In July and August pigeons were plentiful; they sometimes flew in countless numbers. Once I remember that for several hours they nearly shut out the light of the sun. If not in such vast flocks, every year they swarmed in our forests. They were mischievous, freely feeding upon the fields of grain. The farmers fought them as pests. Sometimes they snared them, and they incited all to shoot them. Every rifle and shotgun, every old flint-lock musket was cleaned and scoured and oiled for service, and for days we devoted as much time as we could spare to pigeon-hunting. On all sides, the woods rang with the shots of eager Nimrods. Each strove to outdo the rest in bagging the largest number of birds. At the close of the day we met at the store to compare results, and to treat each other to root-beer and candy. Every one had been invigorated by his sturdy sport, and the next day took hold of his wonted tasks with new zest and zeal, while in his home salt pork for a time gave way to pigeon pot- or pigeon baked-pie.

Aunt Lucy had a son in college, who came home one July, bringing with him three of his classmates. The woods just then being plentifully stocked with pigeons, she told them that she should be delighted to cook all that they might shoot. Although they were novices in handling fowling-pieces, they managed each day to bring down with an old blunderbuss enough birds to keep the pot full. What delicious pigeon pot-pie she made! The birds were always tender and juicy, the dough was light and porous, and those college boys, after a week's sojourn, went away singing her praises, touched by her overflowing kindness, laughing at her sparkling wit, and declaring that of all earthly paradises a farmhouse, with Aunt Lucy to run it, took the cake.

A little later in the season, when the Indian corn was ripe and Jack Frost from the treetops was sending rattling down acorns, chestnuts and beechnuts, squirrel-hunting became an exciting sport. Black, gray and red squirrels abounded in all the forests of the neighborhood. They were often so numerous that they devastated the cornfields nearest the woods. They stripped the husks from the ears and ate the kernels, leaving simply the cob on the stalk, or they cut off with their sharp teeth the stem of the ear and carried the whole ear away to their dens and nests. It was a strange sight to see a black squirrel, carrying in his teeth a white ear of Indian corn as long as his own body, running with it along the top rails of a snake fence, and, when he reached the woods, carrying it up some great basswood or elm a hundred feet high and dragging it into his hole. When I witnessed that wonderful feat, my sympathy was always with the black marauder. When with his booty he safely reached his house in the hollow limb of a great tree, where little, hungry, squirrel mouths waited his coming, I felt like cheering.

But the farmers in defense of their crops mercilessly shot these graceful, nimble denizens of the wood. It was a sport that required more skill than pigeon-shooting. The shotgun or musket, loaded with bird shot, was the weapon used to bring to earth and pot the feathered thieves with their iridescent necks; but in hunting the shy and agile squirrel, that ran with twinkling feet over the high treetops, every self-respecting sportsman used only the rifle. Of course some, thoughtlessly or for want of a better weapon, took a mean advantage of the squirrel and blazed away at him with their fowling-pieces; but most of the men of our neighborhood condemned and scorned such unsportsmanlike conduct. Relying on their trusty rifles, they aspired to hit with a single bullet only the head of a squirrel, many yards away or in the tops of the highest trees. By constant practice they acquired great skill in marksmanship. Seeking simply to excel in their sport, they were unwittingly fitting themselves to serve as sharpshooters in the army during the great Civil War. They vied with each other for the championship in bagging squirrels, but never permitted themselves to become so unsportsmanlike as needlessly to slaughter the graceful tree-climbers. All that they brought down with their rifles were prepared for the table. Fried squirrel or squirrel pot-pie was a dish to tickle the palate of a king, and in autumn it often added to the pleasure of our meals. So while squirrel-hunting was an exciting, exhilarating recreation, it was even beyond that a real utility — it defended the farmer's corn and gave variety and richness to the farmer's food.

But late in the fall we sometimes indulged in a hunt still more exciting, if less useful — the raccoon hunt. This animal, while far less numerous than the squirrel, being omniverous, evidently put among his dainty dishes the farmer's maize. Being also a nocturnal prowler, he feasted on this grain while the owner of it slept, and tore down and trampled under foot far more than he ate. So the question was, coon or corn? — and corn tipped the scale. The marauding raccoon therefore was condemned as a pest, and ruthlessly hunted as an outlaw; to slaughter him was a virtue. But the young men who went "cooning" had little or no thought of the utility of their sport; they hunted the wily beast just for the boisterous fun of it. When, in September or October, the hard day's work on the farm was over and the silver moon was climbing the eastern sky, a band of young men gathered at some previously designated spot. They had two or three rifles, two or more coon-dogs, and a couple of axes. They showed no signs of weariness from their hard work since the dawn. They bandied jokes, and the woods near-by echoed their shouts and ringing laughter. On now they tramped across the fields, through swamps and marshes, till they reached some coon-infested place. All are silent; the dogs are unleashed, and quickly scent the tracks of the game. Some luckless coon, flying before the dogs, reaches, and begins to climb, a great tree. Crack go the rifles;

if they do their deadly work, the jig is up. But often the climbing coon, escaping the whistling bullets, hides in the treetop. The dogs, running nervously around the trunk of the tree, howl and bay, but in the pale moonlight no eye can see the panting, shivering beast. Bring the axes; now the chips fly; at last the great tree sways a little; hold the dogs back so that they will not be maimed when it falls; stand back, it's coming down! There it goes, thundering to the earth. Quick as a flash the yelping dogs leap into the fallen treetop and seize the maddened raccoon. For a moment there is a fierce battle, and then the poor creature, that put up so brave a fight for life against such fearful odds, lies limp and dying at the feet of ten or fifteen exulting young men.

But catching the coon is not the end of the night's sport. Dry logs and sticks are gathered; if other fuel is not at hand, a half dozen rails, taken from the farmer's fence, are split up. The stolen heap of wood is fired, and we gather round the crackling flames, while some of the party search a neighboring cornfield for ears still green and sweet, which we roast before the fire; and there, after midnight, we feast on our neighbor's crop. We have cut down one of his valuable trees, burned up some of his logs and fence rails, and consumed full twenty-five ears of his corn. We have done more damage in one night than the voracious coon we killed could possibly have done in an entire season. But proud of our petty victory, we carry home his lacerated carcass, take off its skin, which is of some value, and nail it to the side of the barn, till we have a chance to sell it in the market for a few cents. Such was the vaunted recreation of raccoon-hunting when I was a boy. John Erskine, who always had a soft side towards our fun, said, "The young bloods mean well; but I'd rather have one or two raccoons than ten or fifteen two-legged coons that roam the woods at night, when honest men sleep, and not only eat up my corn but chop down my trees and burn up my fences."

At times, we also found recreation in fishing. The sluggish creek, stretching along the south side of our neighborhood, was well stocked with pickerel. When weary of hard and long continued labor on the farm, just to give a little variety and spice to life, we said to one another, "Let's take a half day off and have a little fun fishing."

Our fishing tackle was crude. We had no bamboo fishing rods with reels; such luxuries were then unknown to us. Our fishing poles were tall, pliant saplings, which we cut with our jackknives. Now, when our poles, — we never said rods, — lines and hooks, sinkers and bait were ready, we started off like colts just turned out to pasture. We danced, capered, shouted and sang as we made our way for two or three miles, by the road and across the fields, to the deep pools in which the pickerel congregated. We were soon at work, each in his own way, some angling with bait and some trolling with the flying spoon. A great pickerel leaps up and swallows a spoon-hook. The fisher gives one vigorous jerk to imbed the barbed hook deeply in its jaws, and then lets it scurry hither and thither until its strength is on the wane, when he exultingly lands it upon the grassy bank. Further down the stream is Mike Roach, fishing with worms. A voracious pike seizes his baited hook; there is another sharp contest, when that incautious fish, greedy of worms, wriggles and squirms on dry land. An amateur fisher loses both bait and hook; a ravenous pickerel, to get the worm, takes it hook and all, even biting off the line. Some, in haste to land the hooked fish, lose them just as they are lifted to the surface; and these, of course, are always the biggest fish of the lot. Some catch none, not indeed from any lack of skill — it is simply a case of poor luck. Others succeed that nobody thought would, and some utterly fail that were quite certain of success. Our little fishing party was a suggestive miniature world.

At last, weary of our sport, we come together, good-naturedly chaffing each other, and count up our catch. All, the lucky and unlucky alike, share equally in it. But before we turn our footsteps homeward we take a plunge in the creek; after which, carrying in pride our finny prey, we tramp back to our homes, guying each other and telling big fish stories. Our outing has rested and invigorated both mind and body, while the breakfast tables of a dozen families are made more attractive by our catch. To be sure, some of the stay-at-homes declared that salt pork was far better than fresh pickerel, but we noticed that they managed in some way to worry down a good fat piece of the fish.

In early spring when the streams ran bank-full, we often fished at the sawmill and in the adjacent creek for white suckers. We did this in the night, because the district school was still in session and we could not be absent from it. Moreover, the darkness enhanced our fun. We always had a log fire on the bank of the creek near the pond and mill. What youngster does not glory in a bright, warm fire in the open, on a dark and chilly night! When wet and shivering, we gathered around the flaming knots and logs to dry our dripping clothes and warm our legs, blue with cold. As suckers would seldom bite a worm-sheathed hook, we fished them both with the spear and with the small hand-net. The net was attached to a frame with a mouth from four to five feet wide. We thrust it into the bed of the creek, held it firmly to the bottom, while one or two waded down the stream toward it, thrashing the waters with sticks. When the waders reached the net, it was lifted from the water, often having in its meshes a half-dozen to a dozen panting, squirming suckers. Those too small for the table, we threw back into the water, telling them that they were too young to be out nights. But often, leaving the net, we used the spear. We waded into the stream, bearing in our left hands flaming torches. Under the flash of our flickering lights, the fish would go down to the bottom of the stream and lie perfectly still, except a gentle to-and-fro movement of the tail, when, with a quick thrust of the spear, we pierced them.

About midnight we gathered for the last time about our blazing logs, " dried out," as we called it, and then bore our white booty to our homes. Was wading in cold water for hours, leg-deep, recreation? We did not so call it; we just said, " It's lots of fun."

At times the older men of the neighborhood spent a day fishing in Lake Ontario. This involved a very early morning drive of many miles in a two-horse wagon; then diligent work all day on the lake, both with hook and line and fishing net. They caught perch, trout and bass and, now and then, a sturgeon. I remember how good these fresh fish tasted, and even the coarse, oily sturgeon agreeably tickled my young palate. The semi-transparent cartilage in the sturgeon's nose we cut into small balls, which, on account of their wonderful elasticity, gave us youngsters a deal of joy. Moreover, the amateur farmer-fishers for days depicted their racy experiences as they cast the line or drew the seine, and a great longing sprang up within us, who stayed at home, to see the great lake and draw the gamy fish from its blue waters.

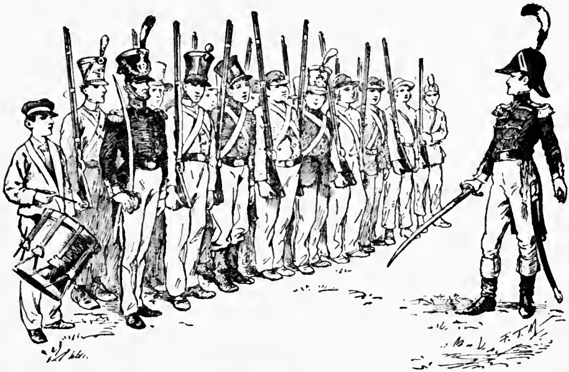
But new conditions evoked new recreations. As the farmers and mechanics became thrifty, they indulged in conveniences and luxuries that before had been beyond their reach. They began to ride in polished buggies, drawn by spirited horses with shining harnesses, and in winter, in cutters of stylish make, filled with warm, soft blankets or fur robes, the horses girt with bells. These vehicles delighted the young men, who wished to ride with the girls just for the fun of the thing, or were impelled to this form of pleasure by a soft but mighty passion that had mysteriously been born within them. On some summer or autumn or winter day, a half dozen or more jolly fellows would start out in buggies or cutters for a day of rest. Happily there was room in buggy or cutter for only two. To spend a whole day alone with one's "best girl," to talk with her where there was no ear to hear but hers, with her to admire wood and meadow and silvery creek and fields variegated with green and yellowing grain, and hills clothed with flocks, or in winter, muffled in fur robes, behind merrily jingling bells, to fly by vast stretches of unbroken, glistening snow, to note the fantastic shapes in which the wind had wreathed it, was recreation that might have been coveted in Paradise. The happy couples drove along the same roads about half a mile apart, and at last brought up at some country tavern, where their tired, hungry horses were rubbed down, watered and fed, while the lads and lasses feasted on the best that the hostelry afforded. When their hilarious dinner ended, they found their way back to their homes by other roads than those over which they came. The drive back was long, but it seemed so short. Before they were aware of it, they stood at the gates where they were to bid adieu to their sweethearts. Was it merely a handshake or a kiss or both? The deepening shades of evening will hide and keep the precious secret.

Ball-playing, also, often relieved the tedium of our country life. We played barnball, one old cat, two old cat, and baseball. The last two games were generally played by the older young men of the neighborhood. We usually indulged in this sport in the long days of summer, after the work on the farm and in the shop was over, or in connection with some raising-bee, or on some summer holiday; and occasionally we took for it two or three hours of a Saturday afternoon. Weary as we might be from our exacting toil, under a July or August sun, in the dry and dusty fields, a game of baseball always put new life into us. We did not play it scientifically, as men do now; we had no expert to drill us; we were just clumsy amateurs. We had no padded gloves, nor wire masks for our faces; but the balls were not as hard as those used to-day. I often caught with bare hands behind the bat, and bear to this day the evidence of it in a partially disabled finger. But no professionals of our time ever had greater enthusiasm than we sometimes attained in our struggle for supremacy. In the game we found both recreation for our jaded bodies and invaluable physical and intellectual discipline. It taught us how to think in pressing emergencies, and act quickly and with precision; also, how to bear ourselves manfully in both victory and defeat.

The game gave rise to a case of conscience. A son of John Erskine, about twelve years old, united with the church. He was passionately fond of playing ball; but the church covenant forbade it. Each one received into membership vowed to abstain from "ball-playing and tavern-haunting." To keep this agreement required all the will power that young Erskine could summon; but he triumphed over himself. At last, he opened his heart to his father, who at once said, "Why, my son, the covenant has no reference to such games of ball as you play with the boys. It merely prohibits the games that end with a treat at the tavern; so it couples 'ball-playing' with 'tavern-haunting.'" A great load rolled off the conscience of that young Christian; and now, made stronger in character by having for many weeks strictly kept his covenant as he had understood it, he entered with keener zest than ever before into the ball games of his playmates.

A game of quoits also at times furnished healthful diversion. When we could not obtain iron rings, flat stones or horseshoes answered for quoits. Throwing heavy weights with precision disciplined both eye and muscle. Some objected to the sport because it was at times topped off by drinks at the tavern. But as guzzling liquor was no part of the game, a young man bravely defended it by saying, " I pitch quoits for the glory of God! " He could do that, and doubtless did.

" All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." To break up the monotony of farm life and save ourselves from stupidity, we punctuated our hard work with vigorous sports, that rested our bodies and brightened and stimulated our minds.



CHAPTER XIII

HOLIDAYS

In their season glad holidays came. We had all too few of them; in fact only three, New Year's day, General Training and the Fourth of July. To be sure, to a limited extent we also observed the birthday of Christ. When it dawned we cried to each other, "I wish you a merry Christmas." We gave some presents. But the spirit of the Puritans, who hated Christmas with all their hearts, still swayed and controlled many of us, and we gave the holiday, now so generally and lavishly celebrated, an indifferent welcome.

But New Year's was a "high day" with us. The night before the Methodists met in their house of worship and, joined by many others, watched the old year out and the new year in. They confessed their sins, wishing, as they said, to have all old scores settled up. They prayed earnestly — at all events, many of them prayed very loud — and sang hymns at the top of their voices. Then, as the clock struck twelve, they all fell on their knees, and while some prayed the rest cried, "Amen," "Grant it, Lord," "Glory to God," "Hallelujah." So the old went out and the new came in amid much fervid confusion.

In the homes, the children, and even some of larger growth, hung up their stockings by the fireplace. In the dead of night Santa Claus slipped noiselessly down the chimney and filled them, without waking a single expectant sleeper. We wondered how he could avoid burning his feet with the glowing coals on the hearth. At the gray dawn the houses rang with the laughter of children. The white-bearded donor from the North Pole had in some way learned their wishes, and brought them just what they wanted, but he did not always bring them as much as they wanted. Their cry for more showed how unmistakably human they were. As they danced for joy, the real Santa Clauses, looking on and listening to their merry prattle, were even happier than they. On that glad morning breakfast was always later than usual. Since it was a holiday, nobody was in a hurry. All were just glad. Each gleefully said to the other, "I wish you a happy New Year."

Then in all the houses of the neighborhood mothers and daughters made ready for callers. It was the universal custom for the young men to make during the day, beginning as early as nine or ten in the forenoon, as many brief calls as time and strength would permit. Each caller was offered a cup of tea or coffee or a glass of cider, with cake and cheese, and sometimes pie and pickles. When there was enough snow, many gave the long evening to jolly sleigh-rides. The whole day from morning till midnight was one unbroken festival.

The militia of our State was organized by law for regular military drill. In every township there was at least one company of an hundred men or more, which was called together at stated times and put through the manual of arms by some old soldier, either of the Revolution or of the War of 1812. This was called Company Training. But every year, early in October, at some place in the county, the companies from the towns, by mutual agreement, came together to be drilled *en masse*. This was General Training, which became a county holiday.

The young people with great zest attended this annual military display, and the old folks went with them to keep them out of mischief. Even John Erskine, the most unremitting worker in our neighborhood, went with Aunt Lucy and entered heartily into all the pleasures of the day. The season was one of the most interesting of the year. The Indian corn stood in shocks in the fields dotted over with golden pumpkins; the fragrant apples still loaded down the trees or filled barrels scattered through the orchards or were piled in heaps for the cider-mill, and all the forests were dashed with brown and yellow and crimson. Over the same road years before, in early spring, Erskine had driven his ox-cart with his young and blooming bride by his side; and now as she sits beside him in his fine two-horse wagon, filled with their robust children, he is conscious of a love for her, stronger and more tender than he had ever before felt, a love mingled with pride and admiration. He found on this glad holiday that his honeymoon was still waxing. So on that cool, clear October morning, he was filled with unwonted happiness; love burned undimmed on the altar of his heart, while his eyes and hers were everywhere feasted with the exquisite beauty of autumn.

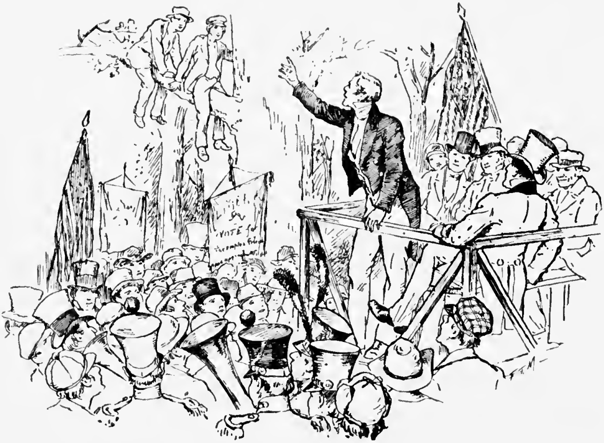
The bewitching drive is soon over. Love makes long journeys short. John Erskine, with wife and children, is ushered into the noisy crowd. All the companies of militia have assembled. They make a full regiment, but to us youngsters they seem to be a great army. We are specially taken with the Continental hats of the officers, bedecked with feathers and colored cockades. In praiseworthy rivalry, each company strives to outdo the others in soldierly bearing, skill in handling their flint-lock muskets, and in orderly march-ing. And a captain from Hungary amuses us by saying to his men, "Hold up your heads and look savage!" All are not in uniform, and so present a somewhat motley appearance, but all have muskets with newly scoured bayonets. In the presence of a gaping throng, they are marshalled on the main street of the village, and march six abreast to a meadow of about forty acres on the outskirts of the town. The first battalion is led by shrilling fifes and rattling snare-drums, the last by a brass band with its booming bass drum.

On the border of the field, where the maneuvering takes place, are hucksters of all sorts. They sell combs and brushes, shoe-blacking and shoe-strings, tops and jumping-jacks, handkerchiefs of many colors, and suspenders, needles and thread, neckties and chip hats, cider and gingerbread, pie and cheese, and all of them are crying up their wares or commending their viands and drinks. One fellow keeps vociferating, "Come up, walk up, run up, tumble up, any way to git up, here are galluses fit for a king, cheaper than dirt!" We buy what our slender purses will permit, drink lemonade and cider, eat gingerbread, pie and cheese, gaze at the wonderful marches, countermarches and evolutions of the militia, listen enchanted to fife and drum and the brazen braying of the brass band, till sunset; and then, weary and sleepy, in springless wagons, lumber back to our far-away homes. And this unique holiday came to gladden us each year. One of the most vivid recollections of my boyhood is this General Training Day.

In many ways, however, the best of our holidays was the Fourth of July. All work, except the necessary chores, was laid aside. Some farmers, quite worn out with hard toil, did nothing but lounge about, napping on their verandas or on the ground in the grateful shade of their trees. Others walked listlessly in their orchards or groves. But absolute suspension of activity does not always give the weary the most perfect rest. A change of activities is often more effective. So, some spent the day fishing or hunting, and some in the afternoon indulged in a game of ball or quoits. A goodly number of the young men went buggy-riding with their sweethearts, the stars and stripes fluttering from their horses' heads. But some of us put the hay-rack on a strong wagon, and so furnished it with board seats that it would accommodate from twenty-five to thirty, hitched to the wagon two spans of horses, decked with the national flag, drove through the neighborhood, picked up a load of boys and girls — the girls dressed in red, white and blue — made our way to a distant village, where we listened to the reading of the Declaration of Independence and to an oration of a gifted citizen. He told us, in grandiloquent style, what our Revolutionary fathers suffered that we might be a free and independent people, and impressed us with the notion that we were just the bravest, biggest nation on earth; and, knowing nothing to the contrary, we believed it. But strange to say, the patriotic lies — or shall I say prophecies — that those bombastic orators used to utter have now pretty nearly come true.

When the oration was over, we all turned into the tavern, fed and refreshed our horses and also our girls and ourselves. At dinner we nearly filled the great dining-room. We consumed a large quantity of beef, lamb, pork, beans, beets and new potatoes, and drank deeply of poor coffee and sour, thin lemonade. However, with appetites more than satisfied, we took our seats again in the spacious hay-rack, horses and driver were in place, when we gave three cheers for the bountiful landlord, just to make him feel good, three cheers for the orator of the day, and three times three for our glorious country. As the echoes of our cheers died away, crack went the driver's whip and we started off at a gallop for a ride across the country, about the noisiest, happiest band of mortals on the footstool. What Munchausen yarns we told, as we rode! What moldy jokes we cracked! How our laughter rang out over all the countryside! But before sunset we were home again, and our weary horses were feeding peacefully in their pastures.

As the shades of evening deepened, by a common impulse a crowd gathered together in Ramville. When it was fairly dark, our rustic fireworks began. Firecrackers, little and big, were thrown helter-skelter. Now and then, to our great delight, a whole bunch at a time would be touched off by some prodigal youth, and its crack, crack, crack would be made doubly sonorous by its being exploded in an empty barrel. Farther down the road, near the creek, a little, old, rusty cannon and the loaded anvil of the blacksmith vied with each other in patriotic booms. Fire-wheels of various sizes, fastened to posts or board fences, fitfully lighted up the street with their various-colored whirls of flame and sparks. Fiery serpents flew zigzag through the air, and often dove into the dust, where they burst with a dull sound. Pop, pop went the Roman candles, illuminating the houses and trees with their glowing balls of red, white and blue. And, keeping the best wine till the last of the feast, about ten o'clock a few precious rockets — we couldn't afford many — flew with a wild rush and whiz far up into the sky and, exploding, sent a shower of brilliantly colored globules in graceful curves downward toward the earth, while the excited spectators cheered. But the very last was the best of all. It was home-made and unique. We soaked in alcohol from fifty to seventy-five balls of candle-wick. We lighted them one by one, and flung them flaming into the yelling crowd on the street, that broke up into two companies, facing each other a few rods apart. Grasping with bare hands the burning balls, they threw them up into the air toward each other; as they came down they were caught and thrown back to the opposite company. So they were hurled back and forth. It looked like a veritable battle with balls of fire. Some timid boy at first would be afraid to catch them or pick them up with his bare hand, when some one would cry out, "Take hold of it and throw it quick — it won't hurt you, if you don't hold on to it." How brilliant and beautiful were those parabolas of light! And when fifty or seventy-five flaming balls all at once were flying in graceful curves through the darkness, the scene was so bewitching and thrilling that I could never forget it. But the last flickering flame of the burning balls was soon quenched, and all was dark. So ended our patriotic holiday on the main street of Ramville.



CHAPTER XIV

POLITICS

For many years in our neighborhood, as in the nation, there were only two political parties. We were all either Whigs or Democrats, and each one took a weekly paper that maintained his special political views. This no doubt tended to foster narrowness and partisanship; but this baleful effect was in a measure overcome by the numerous debates that sprang up between neighbors, as they casually met during some exciting political campaign. In these controversies the dominant political issues were pretty well aired, and each partisan learned the position of his antagonist and his reasons for it. So by their contentions they got and gave light, and gained in breadth of view. They grew more liberal by attrition; and while none of them ever made the slightest pretense to learning, they were, taken by the dozen, thinking men of fair intelligence, and endowed with those homely virtues that are the highest attributes of good citizenship.

Of course we had school district, town, county, State and national politics. Usually the minor elections passed off quietly. A few prominent local politicians fixed up the ticket, and without protest the rest voted it. Occasionally, however, questions arose even in the township or school district that agitated us all. Then, on election day, all the voters turned out. Sissing-hot they discussed the issues which divided them, till they were red in the face. The whole town seemed deathly sick with a burning fever; but the ballot-box took the physic, and the next day the whole community was convalescent, well on towards complete recovery.

I once attended in the evening the annual meeting for the election of trustees of our school district, when some radical differences of opinion found strong expression. A sharp debate sprang up. I sat till near midnight, filled with boyish wonder to hear good men abuse each other, but noticed that, when the divisive question had been settled by a majority vote, peace resumed its noiseless sway. It was a suggestive object lesson, showing how the most bitter controversies among intelligent men can be permanently settled by popular suffrage.

Now and then, the county or State called some man from our obscure neighborhood into its service. Such an event made us feel that we were of some importance in the world. Once Joseph Hunter, a very worthy citizen among us, was elected supervisor of the county by barely one majority. All tongues were busy with an incident so unusual, and that "one majority" added not a little to Hunter's local renown. The year of his election was noted for its great crop of apples. John Story was helping the recently elected supervisor harvest his apples, when Hunter said, "John, you needn't be particular about picking up every little one, just pick up the largest and best and let the rest go." John, who stuttered badly, replied, "M-m-mister Hu-Hu-Hunter, wo-wo-one sometimes ma-ma-makes a m-m-mighty difference!"

At times some zealous abolitionist came to stir us up on the cruelties of slavery. One of these speakers brought a colored brother with him to enforce his flaming appeals. Each in turn eloquently portrayed the enormities of slaveholding and the slave traffic. A hospitable Democrat asked them to stay with him over night. Towards bedtime he said to them, "My family is large and I have but one spare bed. Have you any objection to occupying the same bed?" Quick as a flash, to his great amusement, the negro replied, " Not the slightest objection, sah, not the slightest." So they slept together without damage to either.

But I now wish to give simply some reminiscences of national political events which agitated our humble community. I have no recollection of Martin Van Buren's first Presidential campaign; but I do remember when the schoolmaster at times asked, " Who is the President of the United States?" that I felt very proud when I was able to answer, " Martin Van Buren." Knowing that, it seemed to me hardly necessary to know more. I do, however, vividly recall the campaign of 1840, when William Henry Harrison ran in opposition to Van Buren. At that time the people were aflame with excitement. General Harrison was from Ohio, which was then a part of the far west. He had been Governor of the Northwestern Territory. He was a military hero, having defeated the Indians at Tippecanoe. He had worn a coonskin cap, and had a reputation for hearty, frontier hospitality; it was proclaimed that his latch-string always hung out. At the side of his log cabin stood the oak cider barrel from which he regaled his guests. Such, at all events, was the popular view of him. He caught, as few Presidential candidates ever have, the eye of the people and fired their imagination. The log cabin, the coonskin, and cider barrel became the popular symbols of his campaign.

In Rochester, Western New York, on the Fourth of July, 1840, I witnessed, with a company of our neighbors, a spectacular Whig procession. A brass band led it, while at its center were fifes and snare-drums. There were many wagons, covered with large platforms and drawn by flag-bedecked horses. On the platforms were men and women actively engaged in home industries; they were shearing sheep, picking, carding and spinning wool, weaving cloth, breaking, swingling and hatcheling flax, churning butter and making cheese. There were also mimic flour and cotton mills. Wheat was being thrashed with flails, and there were representations of cider mills and stacks of cider barrels, while a great barrel or tun was rolled in the procession by four men along the street. The last of the long line was a log cabin on wheels, with coonskins nailed to its sides, and its hospitable leather latchstring hanging out. There were also a variety of banners on which were crude portraits of Harrison and Tyler; and since Van Buren had the reputation of being natty in dress, here and there, dangling from poles, were effigies of him in his swallow-tail coat; while the song, which very early in the campaign became widely popular, was sung by the enthusiastic crowds:

> "Tippecanoe and Tyler too,
> And with them we'll beat any man;
> Van, Van is a used-up man,
> And with them we'll beat little Van."

When the procession was over, we went down the Genesee River to a place where a Harrison log cabin had been erected, with the ubiquitous coonskin nailed upon its outer wall. Inside in one corner was a cider barrel. On one side of the room near the door was a cartoon, in sketchy style, about five feet by three and a half, which represented Harrison as a giant with his head thrown back, his great mouth wide open, holding above it between his thumb and forefinger, by the tip ends of his swallow-tailed coat, a kicking Lilliputian Van Buren, as if about to swallow him at a single gulp.

The next day we told those who stayed at home the funny things that we saw and heard; and our weekly political papers were full of mirth-provoking incidents of the strange Presidential campaign, all of which so stirred even our staid community, that the boys as they toiled in the fields and the girls as they worked in the homes sang:

"Tippecanoe and Tyler too."

Harrison's triumph is now ancient history. The dapper little Van of Kinderhook was "a used-up man." He went down to defeat before log cabins, coonskins and hard cider.

In 1844, when Clay and Polk struggled for the Presidency, the excitement was nearly as intense as in 1840, but the battle was more dignified and rational.

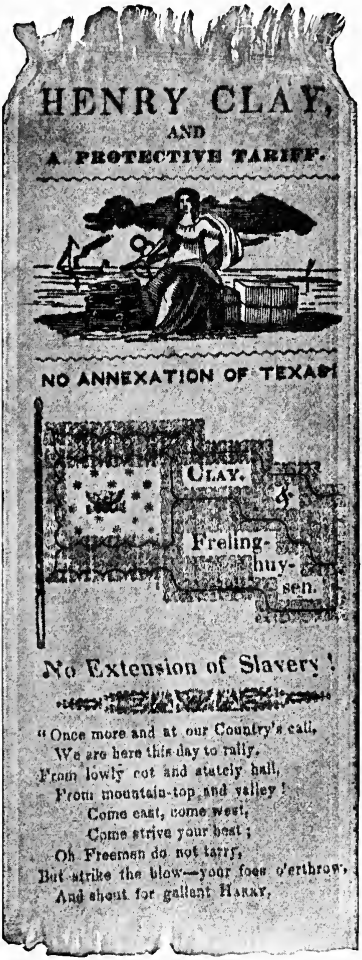
While home industries, internal improvements and a strong Federal government still held the center of the stage, the great moral question of slavery had indirectly thrust itself in and claimed serious consideration. The South, wishing more slave States, favored the annexation of Texas, while in the North some Democrats and the great mass of the Whigs opposed it. Mr. Clay stood between two fires. He was really in sympathy with the view of the northern Whigs, but if he should openly proclaim it, that would defeat him in the South; if he should declare himself in favor of annexation, that would defeat him in the North. His true policy, if he would gain the Presidency, was to keep still. But in his anxiety to win, he wrote a private letter — strictly private, mind you — opposing annexation. His opinion was to be secretly used for his benefit in the North. But the fact that he had written such a letter leaked out, nobody knew how, and that ill-starred epistle harassed him and his party throughout the whole campaign. If he had written one letter less, he might have reached the height of his ambition, — who knows? Well, he did say when defeated, "I had rather be right than President," and the northern Whigs were proud of him for it.

His nomination was warmly hailed by all his party, and by some Democrats. He was a magnetic orator, a national idol, a man that awakened intense enthusiasm and the most ardent devotion. But when Polk was nominated, I heard a fairly intelligent man ask, after having cudgeled his brains, "Who in thunder is Polk?" But his very obscurity helped him in his campaign. He had never done nor said anything of national importance, and so could not be seriously criticized. It is the man famous for his words and deeds, that can be talked down or up.

During the summer and autumn large political meetings were frequent. Both men and women swelled the throngs that attended them. The excitement was so intense and widespread, that even from our obscure community we went to great Whig rallies in neighboring villages or at the county-seat, in wagons drawn by four or six horses, tricked out with star-spangled banners. On the way, the young men and women made the countryside ring with the popular campaign songs. At the place of meeting we marched, waving our flags and displaying our mottoes, led by brass bands discoursing patriotic airs. When at last we gathered round the speaker's stand, some noted quartet sang the most taking Whig songs, while the good-natured crowd clapped and cheered. Then the best stump speakers that could be procured told us of the preeminent virtues of our party and candidates, of the prosperity that would come to the country if we should be successful at the polls, of the dire disasters that awaited us if our opponents should triumph; and we had not the slightest doubt of the truthfulness of these utterances. Still, at times, the speaking was of a high order. William H. Seward once captured us with his plausible, eloquent talk. He began his speech in a way so witty and familiar, that he at once caught the amused attention of his great audience. In a grove had been erected a platform, on which the local celebrities were seated. Some young men, wishing to get near the speaker, climbed up into the trees hard by the staging. When introduced, Mr. Seward was greeted with loud and protracted cheering. When it died down, he in silence surveyed the scene before him, casting an upward glance to those in the branches above him, and then said in a conversational tone, clearly heard by all: "Fellow citizens, I have been often told of the host of Whigs in this county, but I never knew before that they grew on trees!" A simultaneous roar of laughter followed, and when it was over that delighted crowd listened for an hour to an able speech, enlivened by humor and ever and anon flashing with wit.

At these great political gatherings the admirers of Clay wore many beautiful silk badges, pinned on the lapels of gentlemen's coats and the gowns of women. On these badges was stamped some Whig shibboleth or snatch of some popular song. I have used one of them as a book-mark for sixty-seven years, and here present a facsimile of it, which may be of interest to the present generation.

During this stirring campaign, John Erskine said little or nothing, but was evidently doing considerable thinking. Now and then he attended a political meeting, but went and came away in silence. He greatly admired Clay both as a man and a statesman; but deep down in his heart a fierce moral battle was fought to a finish. In the interest of what he deemed to be right, the warmest personal favoritism was swept aside. By slow and painful steps, he had reached his conclusion, which he modestly announced to his more intimate friends, "I shall never again vote for a slaveholder for President." Those whom he most highly esteemed tried


HENRY CLAY,
AND
A PROTECTIVE TARIFF.
NO ANNEXATION OF TEXAS!
CLAY.
&
Freling-
huy-
sen.
No Extension of Slavery!
"Once more and at our Country's call,
We are here this day to rally,
From lowly cot and stately hall,
From mountain-top and valley!
Come east, come west,
Come strive your best;
Oh Freemen do not tarry,
But strike the blow—your foes o'erthrow,
And shout for gallant HARRY.

Clay Campaign Badge

to dissuade him from his purpose. Aunt Lucy, the idol of his heart, said to him, "If one of two slaveholders is to be elected President, I should vote for the one that I thought would do the least mischief." But honest John was immovable. He would not, however, vote for James G. Birney, the Abolition candidate, regarding him as extreme and impractical. He cast his vote only for State officers and a congressman. Such an incident was the harbinger of Lincoln's declaration long after, that the nation could not continue to exist half slave and half free.

To help on the campaign of the distinguished Whig candidate, a paper was started called *The Clay Bugle.* Nearly every Whig in all our countryside took it. I remember with what boyish enthusiasm I read it. To me, Henry Clay was then the greatest man on earth. After the election Oscar Gooch expressed my own disappointment, when he naïvely said, "Why, I thought Clay was going to be elected, — *The Clay Bugle* said so."

In 1848 the Whigs nominated General Zachary Taylor for President, evidently not on account of his having any special fitness for the office, but because they believed that his military fame, acquired in the Mexican war, would make him a good vote-getter. In this they were not disappointed.

The opposing candidate, Lewis Cass, was a very able man, with large experience in public life. He, too, was a general and had fought in Canada in 1812; but his military laurels were old and faded. He was a lawyer and United States senator, very ambitious to crown his career by being President. But, caught in the meshes of the anti-slavery agitation, he failed to reach the goal. California knocked at the gate of the Union, wishing to be admitted as a State; but the terrifying question was whether she should be free or slave. This had to be settled by the United States Senate. Mr. Cass saw that if he should vote to admit her as a free State, he would lose the political support of the South; if as a slave State, he would alienate the vote of the North; so he made a notable speech in the senate, advocating that she should determine for herself at the polls whether she should be free or slave. He called this settling the slavery question by popular sovereignty; and Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois, at a later day, following in Cass' footsteps, styled it squatter sovereignty. But this adroit way of concealing his own opinion and avoiding the real issue so as to offend neither the North nor the South returned "to plague the inventor."[1] His duplicity was crystallized in a satirical song, which was widely sung during his Presidential campaign; I heard it hundreds of times in my own secluded neighborhood:

"And there was Cass, though not a dunce
He'd run both sides the track at once;
To win the race would all things copy,
Sometimes pig and sometimes puppy."

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[1] Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 7.

But this was not the only thorn in his side. Martin Van Buren, one of his political rivals, intensely desired to be President once more, and thought that his party should have nominated him instead of Cass. He bolted, and became the nominee of the Free-soilers. This drew off from the Democrats the special admirers of Van Buren, and also many others, who felt that the time had come to oppose openly at the ballot-box the further extension of slavery. This split in the Democratic party was the handwriting on the wall.

The campaign was quiet and dull. The defeat of Cass seemed a foregone conclusion. Still there were some brilliant campaigners, but beyond a question the most popular speaker on the stump was Van Buren's son, John, familiarly called "Prince John." He was taller than his father, well-proportioned and muscular, with a florid face, hair slightly sandy, and a clear blue eye. He had a musical and far-reaching voice, and, while he spoke without apparent effort, everybody even in his largest audiences heard him perfectly. He had vigor of thought, overflowing humor and flashing wit. I thought him the wittiest mortal that I ever heard speak. Addressing a throng in Ohio, he said, "You may think that I am like a lad that I saw the other day in the road, pushing with all his might against an overturned cart-load of hay and crying as though his heart would break. I said, 'My boy, what's the matter?' He blubbered out, 'I don't care anything for the oxen and cart and hay, but dad's under there.' " He pithily put the issues of the campaign, kept his audiences rippling with laughter, and secured lots of votes for "dad;" enough at all events to defeat Cass.

I wish also briefly to mention the Presidential campaign of 1852. The Whig party, torn with dissension over the question of slavery, was rapidly falling to pieces. While apparently destined to certain defeat, ignoring its able statesmen, and hoping once more to be aided by the fame of a military hero, it nominated for the Presidency, General Winfield Scott. While he had shown marked ability in camp and field, the rank and file of his party doubted his capacity for the highest office of the Republic. Being proud and vainglorious, he was unpopular even in the army. He had in him also a dash of demagogism. I heard him make a short speech to an audience in which there were a good many Irishmen; making a direct appeal to them, he declared that he liked to hear their rich brogue. It was such a palpable bid for Irish votes that many laughed derisively. The impression also got abroad that his nomination was a trick of the politicians. This popular belief was humorously presented in a large cartoon, that was conspicuously posted in most of the cities of the North. The cartoon was simply a great rooster, with brilliantly-colored feathers and long, sharp spurs, while its head was Scott's. Around its body was a crimson sash, from which on the left side a sword hung. From the mouth of the Scott head a scroll was flung upward, in which were printed these words: "Cockadoodle doo, I'm Bill Seward's cock, whose cock are you?" For a disintegrating party to nominate such a candidate was to court defeat, which in this case was no coy maiden.

The opposing candidate was Franklin Pierce. In native ability he was inferior to Scott. Some one said that he was quite a man up in New Hampshire, but spread over the whole Union was "mighty thin." But his party was united, and he was thoroughly subservient to it; in short, being ready to do the bidding of the cotton lords, he was overwhelmingly elected. But the campaign was inexpressibly dull. Political meetings were few and my country neighborhood, during the entire summer and fall, scarcely felt a quiver of excitement.

In closing these political reminiscences, I wish to note an incident worthy of preservation in something even more enduring than marble or brass. The polling place of our neighborhood was in the tavern at Ramville. The ballot-box was in an apartment adjoining the barroom. At the window where the votes were received stood, to the right and left, the challengers, representing the two great political parties. These guardians of the purity of the suffrage were men in whom all reposed undoubting confidence. Each voter, as though awed by the majesty of the law and government and the great gravity of his duty, when he came within ten feet of the window, through which his vote must pass, reverently took off his hat and held it in his hand as he approached the polls, gave his name to the judges of the election, and deposited his ballot. He left the polling window with the same gravity of manner as that in which he approached it. That scene profoundly impressed my boyish mind with the dignity and solemnity of voting. I have never seen the same reverence at the polls elsewhere, and have concluded, perhaps erroneously, that it was a peculiarity and distinguishing excellence of my country neighborhood.

CHAPTER XV

QUEER PEOPLE

I BEGIN with Fulcard Peters, a unique character. He was of medium height, black-eyed, black-browed, black-haired. Thick, frowzy locks covered his pate. His hirsute neck and hands were black as a raven's breast. His short, stubbed beard covered his face like the soot of a chimney. His left foot had been crushed and was so misshapen that the side, instead of the sole of it, pressed the ground when he walked. He consequently moved with a halting, rolling gait. He was a farmer in a small way, and did odd jobs for his neighbors when opportunity offered. He had a wife and seven daughters, and needed for their support all that he could in any way honestly scrape together. He was a devout Presbyterian, prayed daily with his family gathered around him, and on Sundays went with his wife and children, neatly clad in their calico or woolen frocks, to the house of God.

He was an excitable, enthusiastic man and, since his geese were always swans, was uniformly happy. What he had was a little better than anything possessed by his neighbors. He had the best wife in all the world and the best girls on earth. At one time he raised a colt, the good points of which he was constantly praising; but he would end his extravagant harangue, swinging his arms and raising his voice to a high pitch, by saying, "It is not perhaps the best colt that ever was, but it's a right smart chunk of a colt, a right smart chunk of a colt." And almost every boy in the neighborhood was wildly swinging his arms and in a like high, shrill tone was repeating what Peters said about that wonderful colt.

He was a natural actor. He enforced his thoughts by profuse, angular gesticulation and ever-changing attitudes of body. One day he said to some of his neighbors, "I'm nearly dead with rheumatiz'; my right shoulder is tur'bly painful; it's so stiff that to save my life I can't raise my hand above my head." And as he spoke, to illustrate his words he thrust his right hand up into the air two feet above his head. His friends laughed immoderately, but he, quite unconscious that by his spasmodic act he had flatly contradicted his words, wondered at their merriment.

He was apt to become mentally inverted. One morning he came, rolling and panting for breath, into the blacksmith shop, and in an excited way cried out, "Mr. Ponton, Mr. Ponton, can I borrow your gatepost to hew my broadax?" — reminding us of another who, in a like inversion of thought, attempting to say, "That caps the climax," blurted out, "That climbs the capax."

Of quite a different type was Mr. Ebenezer Knohull. Although grown up to manhood, he was still merely a strapping boy. He retained through life his girlish voice. In many other respects he never "put away childish things." He was a member of the church, and by fits and starts did the duties that he had sworn to perform. He was a Baptist, and when believers were immersed, he was conspicuous by his attentions and helpfulness. He was also the master of ceremonies at funerals. After the sermon, which we always had on such occasions, there being no undertaker — our community was not sufficiently developed for that — he opened the coffin, and announced, with as much dignity as a boyish man could command, in what order we should proceed to take our last view of the face of the departed. When this was over, he told the relatives of the deceased that they now had the opportunity of taking the last look. He proudly notified the pallbearers when to take up their burden, and directed every movement at the burial. He did all this in a kindly way, for he had a good and tender heart, but his acts were flavored with such a manifest consciousness of his own importance as to make them doubly interesting.

He had a childish pride in dress. He was as proud of every new article of clothing as a peacock is of its tail. He once donned a fresh pair of calfskin boots, and immediately went to John Erskine's to show them. He fell into conversation with Aunt Lucy, but she, to his great disappointment, failed to notice them. At last he said, "I smell new leather. What can it be?" Then, looking hither and thither apparently to solve the mystery, he exclaimed, "Oh! it's my new boots!" The story, too good to keep, got out, and almost every boy in the community was repeating Knohull's words and laughing about his keen scent for new leather.

This boyish man was a dyspeptic, at least he thought so. His table was always loaded with an abundance of food and like a growing youngster he ate heartily, often doubtless overloading his poor stomach. I once took dinner with him. He had boiled pork and cabbage, great, mealy, boiled potatoes with their jackets on, string beans and squash, cucumbers and green corn, bread and butter, and honey, milk and coffee. It amazed me to see the dyspeptic eat. He devoured generous portions of most of the viands under which his table groaned. At last he sat back in his chair, put his hands upon his abdomen, and sighed. I began to pity him, when he said, " I have either eaten too much or not enough." Groaning in his pain, he added, " The trouble is I haven't eaten enough." Then, to my utter astonishment, he bolted two more large potatoes, a good-sized cucumber, two slices of bread, and drank a cup of coffee. Then, declaring that he felt better, he left the table and smoked his pipe with evident enjoyment. That suffering dyspeptic lived on to eat and groan till he was almost ninety. In such a case, who can separate the real from the imaginary?

Now, there was apparently nothing that this dyspeptic did not know. He had exact and comprehensive knowledge of every question mooted by his neighbors. He never indulged in opinions, but, undisturbed by even a shadow of doubt, gave us the absolute facts pertaining to every problem that arose for solution. The probable or possible had no place in his thinking; he just knew. Omniscience was one of his foibles. He was always so cocksure that his dogmatism was fairly sublime. It gave no offense, but contributed largely to the gayety of the neighborhood. Knohull's infallibility became a standing joke. Any matter for which no satisfactory solution could be found was, with a merry twinkle, referred to the oracle that scoffed at mysteries. A stranger entered the blacksmith shop and asked Mr. Greely, who stood at the forge blowing the bellows, if he had seen in the road any stray calves.

Mr. Greely answered, "No, I haven't," but, after a moment's reflection, added, "I know a man who can tell you just where they are. His name is Knohull, and he lives over yonder across the field," pointing out his house. "Did he tell you," inquired the somewhat puzzled stranger, "that he had seen them?" "Oh, no," responded the blacksmith. "Then," asked the questioner, "why do you say that he knows where the calves are?" "Why," was the ready response, "there is nothing that he does not know."

Then this omniscient mortal was a veritable Munchausen. Not that he ever intentionally told a lie; he meant to be truthful in all that he said. In all business deals he was square and trustworthy. What he promised to do, he did. But whatever he imagined was as real to him as sawing wood or digging potatoes. In relating any transaction in which he was involved, he made no discrimination between facts and fancies. All alike was fact to him, and in his vanity he always painted himself as the martyr or the hero. His great stories of what he had seen or done or endured kept all about him in good humor. If he himself had dyspepsia, the laughter that his preposterous yarns evoked did much to fend his neighbors from that fell disease.

Here is one among many of his imaginative creations. He was always prominent at raising-bees. In putting up the heavy frames of barns or houses, he took bravely hold of the hardest and most dangerous work. On such occasions his very vanity often made him a hero. Once his head was caught between two timbers, and squeezed till he saw stars. He declared that his skull literally cracked, and that some men, standing forty feet from him, distinctly heard his cranium split. But notwithstanding, he went right on working with his neighbors till the job was done. He told that glaringly absurd story for years, and every time he repeated it he added a little to it. He had no more doubt of its absolute truth than of his existence. Men listened to it and chuckled. So, to many other important services he added that of being the unwitting source of amusement to the community. He was a notorious and attractive personality, that we could not for a moment have spared.

Still another eccentric character sometimes amused and sometimes amazed us. It was Eben Whitney. While only middle-aged, having been a hard worker, he already showed some signs of decay. He was round-shouldered, and usually walked partially stooped over with his hands locked together across the small of his back. He was quite bald, with thin, coarse, gray locks hanging from the sides and back of his cranium. He was bullet-headed. His eyes were small and steel-blue; his eyebrows were only faintly perceptible; his lips were rather circular as though pursed to whistle; his under jaw turned up at the end like the prow of a canoe; his nose, while straight cut, lay on his face like a piece of smooth dough, with the end bent down as if intending on the sly to leap into the sucker mouth just below. But in spite of his peculiar makeup, he was a man of great energy and power.

He was the largest landowner in the neighborhood, but a slovenly farmer. His house had only a faint suggestion of having once been painted; his gates and barn-doors were off their hinges; his rail fences were dilapidated; his stone walls were tumbling down; burdocks, thistles and alder bushes grew undisturbed around the edges of his fields; but he often plowed, sowed, mowed and reaped with unusual vim. In summer he was up with the sun. At that early hour his oxen were yoked and his horses harnessed for their toil. He drove them without mercy, yelled at them with the full power of his lungs, and that, at times, seemed almost limitless. If they did not move to suit him, he swore at them and cursed them in ringing tones. The more he swore the madder he got, and the louder he bawled. He could be heard a mile around. The people called him the Roarer. His favorite oath was "Dod blast ye." To his credit be it said that he at least attempted to veil his blasphemy. But he often threw off all restraint and roared out his cursing without any disguise. His own voice seemed to inflame him, and, while he swore, he belabored his oxen and horses with a black snake whip, or sometimes, in his flashing wrath, pounded them with a club or a crowbar.

He had in him a strain of cruelty. He kept a fierce bulldog and delighted in setting him on his hogs and cows. There was scarcely an ear in his herd of swine or his bevy of cattle that had not been lacerated by the teeth of that savage dog. To hear his pigs squeal and his steers bellow from fright and pain gave him a sort of grim joy. Of course he did not always act in that way; such conduct came by fits and starts. He was very emotional and passionate. Tossed hither and thither by sudden ebullitions of feeling, he appeared to be a bundle of contradictions. When his resentment was kindled by some fancied slight or indignity, he poured forth the bitterest, foolishest words or resorted to the meanest, most contemptible acts; then suddenly, his better nature asserting itself, he would utter honeyed words of appreciation and praise, or lavish deeds of kindness on the person that he had just bitterly denounced. When seen in one mood he was regarded as a very mean man; when in the other, as a noble, generous soul.

Like most emotional persons, he was also imaginative. What he did not see he pictured to be vastly more attractive than what was under his eye. The place where he spent his early life was a paradise that he never tired of praising. The great West, of which he had read but had never seen, was to him the grandest and most attractive portion of the earth. He dilated on its vast corn and wheat fields, and the marvelous machinery with which the farmers tilled and reaped their broad acres. To some extent he caught their spirit, and had the honor of first introducing into our neighborhood the McCormick reaper. Crude as it then was, it was a wonder to us all.

He stupidly fell out with Aunt Lucy, because while she borrowed his tea-salver to use at the marriage supper of her oldest daughter, she did not ask him to the wedding, to which none but relatives, aside from the officiating elder, were invited. The day after the nuptials were celebrated, he strode to her door in a towering passion, bawling out, "I want my *sarver;* blast it, to borrow my *sarver* and not ask me to the wedding!" She, though thus suddenly surprised in her own castle, guarded her lips, made to the wrathful, jealous fool no explanation and uttered no word of apology, but, handing him his salver, politely thanked him for the use of it. As he went back to his own house, carrying it under his arm, still muttering his spleen and vengeance, he instinctively felt that he had been for a moment in the presence of one far superior to himself; that she, high-spirited as she was, by her self-control and politeness had gained a complete victory over him. He had not reached his own doorstep before he began to see that he had made an awful fool of himself, and was already ashamed of his wrathful conduct. Just as he started with his precious "*sarver*" from Aunt Lucy's door, she said with a hearty laugh, "He's got a conniption fit; he'll get over it," and he had gotten over it within twenty minutes.

His resentful jealousy was for a day or two the talk and merriment of the whole neighborhood, while he went about with a hangdog look. At last, by seeming chance, he came by John Erskine's veranda, where Aunt Lucy was sitting, and began to talk pleasantly with her of his early life and experiences in Dutchess County. The tête-à-tête was full of good will. Neither made any allusion to the lacquered tea-salver. He did not, because he wished her to forget the past, and she did not, because she was a Christian lady. Soon after, he sent her a basket of luscious apples. The Roarer was now as good as, in his hot temper, he had been vulgar and despicable. He lived a double life; one day Doctor Jekyll, the next Mr. Hyde. By turns he shocked and amused us.

Religiously, he was for years a discordant note among us. While most of his neighbors went to church, he, out of mere bravado, often worked in his fields on Sunday or went hunting or fishing. The sharp crack of his shotgun or rifle harshly broke in on the calm of the Sabbath. Still he had some redeeming traits, and chief among them was his tender love for the wife of his youth. She was a noble woman. With almost infinite patience she carried uncomplainingly the burden of his eccentricities and boorishness. She died. With bowed head, quivering lips and streaming eyes, he buried her. Some of his neighbors for the first time learned what a tender heart beat beneath all his outward roughness. About three years afterward he married a buxom young woman. She evidently accepted his hand for his broad acres. They quarreled, parted and were divorced. He then wooed and won a quiet, unobtrusive soul. They were happy. Two or three children, the fruit of this union, came to gladden his heart. His oldtime rudeness was gradually disappearing. To the astonishment of all, he began to attend church. God touched his heart and made him a new man. He cursed no more, but prayed. A violent inflammation put out his eyes. His wife led him by the hand along the country roads. With his outer eye he saw nothing; with his inner, he saw clearly. He was gentle as a dove. Onlookers could hardly believe that he once filled the neighborhood with his wrathful roaring and made their ears tingle with his profanity. With his soul full of the peace of God, he at last passed on into the other world, deprecating his past follies and grateful that they were forgiven.

At the opposite extremity of the neighborhood lived Hamilton Serenus. The boys familiarly called him Ham. He was a large man, not portly but compactly built. His hair was blond and his expressionless eyes were a dull gray. He had an open countenance, hardly pleasing but not repulsive; he was a decidedly neutral character. His body must have had nerves, but there was no outward manifestation of them. Nothing seemed especially to attract or repel him. Apparently he never had an emotion of joy or sorrow. No one ever saw him excited; his life ran on as smoothly and noiselessly as a river of oil. He went listlessly through the routine of farm-work. He plowed and planted and reaped, but neither droughts nor floods nor frosts gave him any anxiety. Threatened conflagration of the roof over his head failed to disturb his equanimity. Between ten and eleven o'clock at night some young men, passing by his house, saw the shingles afire from flaming soot, that had fallen from a chimney, burning out. They excitedly rushed into his unlocked house and cried, "Mr. Serenus, your roof is on fire!" He was in bed locked in slumber. Half aroused, he sleepily asked, "Is it?" In a rage they unitedly vociferated, "Yes, it's blazing in a half dozen places!" In a provokingly quiet tone, he said to his exasperated young friends, "Boys, won't you set up the ladder and carry some pails of water up on the roof and put out the fire?" "Yes," they thundered, "and we'll do it mighty quick or you'll burn up, if you don't git out of bed." He evidently had undoubted confidence in them, for while they, agitated and alarmed for his safety, put out the fire, he drowsily laid his unperturbed head back on his pillow and was again soon in tranquil slumber.

This strange man lived on in the same unruffled serenity till he was a hundred and four years old. He was afflicted with no disease except old age, and that of course was incurable. The last day of his earthly life dawned. Leaning on his cane, he took his usual morning walk. When it was over, he lay down on a lounge to take his accustomed nap. He slept as quietly as a new-born babe, and never woke up. He was in his second childhood, and without disturbing him his Father gently took him home to care for him. While his heavenly life is doubtless more glorious than was his earthly life, it can scarcely be more serene.

But Samuel Curtis, an altogether different type of man, lived to be older than even the placid soul that we have just considered. He stayed with us till he was an hundred and seven. He had been a soldier in the Revolutionary War, and was very proud of the paper, signed by George Washington, which certified his honorable discharge from the army, after the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. At his funeral his flint-lock musket, with its shining bayonet, lay upon his coffin, while this precious paper was pinned to his shroud over his unthrobbing, patriotic heart. He was a marked man among us, tall, lean, agile, retaining to the day of his death the bearing of a soldier, often boasting, not in an offensive way, of his service to his country.

Some of his family, however, were decidedly peculiar, and their careers affected in no small degree the character and history of our neighborhood. He had seven sons. While some of them were true men and good citizens, the rest were generally believed to be corrupt and crooked. Whether or not they justly deserved their shady reputation, public opinion for a long time was overwhelmingly against them. Still, their father never lost confidence in them, and publicly boasted that there was no family like his seven sons. But on one occasion John Story, our boss stutterer, said, "M-M-Mister Curtis, I-I-I've heard of wo-wo-one just such f-f-family." "What family was that?" asked Curtis. Story replied, "Ma-Ma-Mary Ma-Ma-Magdalene's."

One of his sons, a six-footer, lean and gaunt like his father, was notoriously lazy. He worked only when driven to it by absolute necessity. His chief aim in life was to eat and sleep. It was against his principles to do any work whatever between meals. At times, however, he was compelled to labor in order to get something to eat. A farmer hired him to shear a few sheep. He was clipping a rich and heavy fleece from one of the largest ewes of the flock, but he carelessly now and then snipped off a piece of the poor creature's hide. At last, she vigorously protested by hard kicking, and he was too lazy to hold her till he had completed the clip. With her fleece half cut off, he let her slip from his grasp, saying, "Go, you old *yoh*, till you get over your stew," and the half-sheared sheep ran out of the barn and across a field, from which, the autumn before, Indian corn had been cut. The dry, stiff stubs of the stalks still remained. The half of the fleece that had been shorn from the forepart of the ewe's body, caught by the corn-stubs, was torn away piecemeal, so that the flight of the frightened sheep was marked by bits and bunches of her wool. The story of it quickly crept through the neighborhood. At night it was told, and laughed over, at the store. Oscar Gooch said that the sluggishness of Martin Curtis reminded him of a yoke of oxen in an adjoining town, that were so lazy that, when drawing the plow, the only way that you could tell whether they moved or not was by sighting them across a stick, and that the off ox was too lazy to wink when a fly lighted on his eyeball. What the later life of this indolent mortal was I never knew, but I presume that in due time he died, if he weren't too lazy to draw his last breath.

His brother Warren, in body, was his exact contrary. While only medium in stature, he was excessively fat. He tipped the scales at three hundred. When riding in his one-horse wagon, he filled the entire seat. He was a familiar figure, often seen on the road, driving at a slow trot his bob-tailed gray mare; but no one ever sat beside him because there was no room for another. The boys, with a keen eye for a pat name, called him Old Wad, from "wad," to pad or stuff out. The whole neighborhood adopted this nickname, and while it must have been galling to his feelings, the good-natured fat man was never known by word or act to resent it.

But in disposition, as in body, these two brothers were opposites. Strange as it may seem, while the lean, tall one was sluggish, the short, corpulent one was energetic. The latter was always astir early in the morning, and he did his work promptly and thoroughly. But some of his neighbors would have it that he was an enterprising sheep-thief. On this, for a long time, public opinion was divided. At last, however, he was arrested for the alleged crime.

His preliminary examination in court took place in November. The day was cool and pleasant. Close beside the country store was an empty harness-shop, twenty-five by fifteen feet. On one side of it was a platform about ten by five, and a foot high. On this platform stood a cross-legged basswood table, with a chair behind it. At the appointed hour, Squire Bean appeared with two volumes of State Statutes under his arm, which he placed on the table, together with foolscap, goose-quill pens, and an earthen inkstand. Excitement ran high. The men and boys of the whole countryside seemed to be there. The improvised courtroom was soon packed almost to suffocation with a curious, pushing, noisy crowd. Many, unable to enter, stood outside round the door, craning their necks to get a glimpse of what was passing within. Pettifoggers, who seldom had a chance to air their legal wisdom, appeared for both the complainant and the accused. The question to be settled was whether there was sufficient evidence of the guilt of the defendant to warrant the court in binding him over to the Grand Jury. The battle began, and every moment waxed fiercer. When the pettifoggers became too virulent, Squire Bean, proud of his position and authority, shut them up and sat them down. All that was really known pertaining to the accusation in hand was admitted as evidence, and all mere gossip was sternly ruled out; and the amount of baseless rumor was immense.

At last the accused was permitted to tell his own story. As he was put under oath to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," the feeling of the crowd grew even more intense. He declared unequivocally his absolute and entire innocence. He testified that several of his neighbor's sheep at one time broke into his pasture, and mingled with his small flock. They were, however, soon separated from his sheep, and returned to their owner, and none of them, so far as he knew, remained in his fold. Awhile after, to supply the wants of his family, he killed a sheep, when a report sprang up that the slaughtered beast belonged to his accuser; if it did, he had no knowledge of the fact. Such was the substance of his testimony. His story was straightforward and entirely reasonable.

But he was sharply cross-examined. His good name, what was left of it, trembled in the balance. He was in imminent danger of being indelibly branded as a sheep-thief; and in our country neighborhood that was the most despicable of all thieves. In comparison, a horse-thief was quite respectable. Standing in the presence of a possibility so much to be dreaded, weighed down by collops of fat, in a room that had become hot and foul by being closely packed, eyed by suspicious and unsympathetic neighbors, pelted with the questions of a merciless pettifogger, it was not strange that the beaded sweat stood out on his forehead; still, not a few onlookers regarded even that as an evidence of his guilt.

He carried in the large right-hand pocket of his sack coat, a great, red bandanna, with which he again and again mopped his brow. A mischievous lad slyly slipped into that pocket the hind leg of a sheep, and when the accused next took out his handkerchief, he also pulled out the sheep's leg, which fell to the floor with a resounding whack. There was one simultaneous shout, followed by roars of laughter, stamping of feet, clapping of hands, and hideous catcalls. For a few moments the courtroom was a veritable Bedlam. Squire Bean cried, "Order, order," but he could not in the least degree suppress the hooting, yelling and laughter; a man might as well attempt to still a tornado by whistling against it. Old Wad blushed and perspired and grinned; he seemed at bottom to half appreciate the grim practical joke. When the uproar died away the examination was soon completed. The impartial judge promptly announced that there was no evidence on which he could justly bind over the accused to the Grand Jury.

Notwithstanding the decision of the court vindicated the defendant, for many years the strong suspicion that he was a sheep-thief persistently hung over him. While in all probability he was innocent, half the children of the neighborhood, hearing the talk of their elders, regarded him as a thief. But like an honest man, he resolutely faced the adverse public opinion. As the years rolled by, he steadily grew less rotund in body, till at last he was spare and straight, and with his superfluous fat went also his unsavory reputation.

But what he was reputed to have done was ineradicably woven into the history of our neighborhood. The place where he lived has ever since been familiarly called Lambshanks Corners, and the place where he was examined before Squire Bean was known for half a century as Ramville. Both men and neighborhoods often unjustly suffer from detracting tongues; we should be absolutely sure that a man is bad before we call him so; and when we are quite sure of it, even then we ought not to proclaim it unless it be absolutely demanded for the public good.

But chief among these queer folks was Joseph Tight, whom everybody called simply Joe. When I first knew him he was about forty years old. His face was covered with a brown, stubbed beard. Most of the farmers shaved at least twice a week, but Joe did not trouble himself to cut his beard more than twice a month. He was slightly bald, and the thin locks which remained were already sprinkled with gray. His small eyes were bright and keen. His nose, while short, was straight and well-cut. His lips were thin and firmly compressed. He was about five feet eight inches tall. His body was muscular and well-knit. He looked like a man whose inner self it would be very difficult to reach. Whether his surname was prophetic of his character, I know not, but it was the one word which most perfectly expressed him.

He dressed poorly. In the winter his coat, pants and vest were shoddy. He wore no linen, but donned a red woolen shirt, a cheap cloth cap, and stogy boots. In summer he went barefoot, wearing a coarse cotton shirt, tow breeches and a chip hat.

He was a bachelor. Whether in earlier life he had ever felt the flame of love no one ever found out. There was a rumor that a betrothed had died and that, out of absolute faithfulness to her memory, he had resolved never to woo another. But this was mere gossip, with probably no better foundation than the surmise of a fading spinster, who would have been glad to have wedded Joe with his dollars. Compared even with the most thrifty in the community, he was rich.

He owned two valuable farms, and held mortgages on the estates of those who were not as prosperous as he. He had money in the bank. When circumstances were unfriendly to his neighbors and they were compelled to raise money at a sacrifice, he always stood ready to shave every well-secured note. He knew how to get money, and he knew how to keep it.

He lived in an unpainted, story-and-a-half house. A maiden aunt was his housekeeper. The rooms of his domicile were meanly and scantily furnished. His aunt, who faithfully served him, was cheaply clad. She bought most of her poor clothing by furtively selling the hens' eggs at the country store. She knew too well how futile it was to solicit cash from her thrifty nephew.

His table was spread with the bare necessities of life. Bread and butter, potatoes and salt pork, beans and onions were the chief articles of diet. To these were added Dutch cheese, skimmed milk, and in their season such small fruits as the aunt could coax from the ill-kept garden; but she could never draw on Joe's purse for any luxuries. In fact, he often gave his harvest-hands for dinner nothing but bread and milk. The cream had been so completely removed from the milk that it had a bluish hue and was on the verge of becoming sour. At a midday meal, Joe sitting at the head of the table, one of his harvesters, having tasted the milk, remarked, "This milk is under pungent conviction, if it has not already met with a change." By all odds Joe was the most penurious mortal of the whole neighborhood. The richer he became, the stingier. He held his purse by the strings, and the more he put into it, the tighter the strings drew. He begrudged to passers-by the smell of his clover that crept over the stone wall into the road. To every appeal for charity he pleaded poverty, and when he denied a request for money his lips shut like the jaws of a steel trap.

But this miserly bachelor had a soft spot in his heart. He would cheerfully go out of his way to serve any of his neighbors, if the service did not require him to part with his money. To help others he was willing to give nerve and muscle, but the cash, which he had gathered and over which he gloated, never. Yet he longed for immortality, — who does not? Die he knew he must, but to be utterly forgotten was to him abhorrent. He knew well enough that, living as he did, no one when he was gone would ever put at the head of his grave even a cheap marble slab. So he determined that, while living, he would raise a monument to himself. He astonished the community by buying one of the best lots in the graveyard, for which he paid the cash. There were no cemeteries in our country neighborhood; our burying-places were simply and baldly graveyards.

Joe's neighbors, usually generous in their estimate of others, began now to think that he was at last growing benevolent; at all events, he was now able to part with some of his money; but they soon saw that his old selfishness was simply manifesting itself in a new form. He went to a distant city and purchased a granite monument, which was transported to his new lot in the graveyard. This act, so unusual, so contrary to the customs of our countryside, set everybody to talking. But Joe, apparently oblivious to the untoward gossip that filled the air, had a solid foundation of stone laid, on which the monument was placed. This consisted of a polished granite base about eighteen inches thick, three and a half feet long, and over two feet wide. Upon each corner of the base was a granite pillar, about three and a half feet high, and on the pillars was laid a massive canopy. On the end of the base, before which Joe's prospective grave was to be dug, was carved the name, Joseph Tight, and the date of his birth. Underneath was left a space where the day, month and year of his death were finally to be chiseled, and where perhaps some text of Scripture would be made to tell a lie. The monument, though so utterly incongruous with its surroundings, was a wonder to the neighborhood, and in fact its only specimen of art.

Soon after the erection of this sepulchral pile, the Methodists determined to remodel their meeting-house. Everybody was asked to contribute, and there was a generous response from all, without respect to their denominational preferences. Joe's new and costly monument awakened a hope that he would now break the uniform record of his life, and give some money to this praiseworthy enterprise. But when asked by the most winsome young woman in the Methodist congregation, as usual he pleaded poverty, and when he said no, those thin lips of his shut, as they were wont to do, like the lips of a vise.

The young men of the neighborhood now determined to teach their stingy neighbor a wholesome lesson. A half-dozen of them at evening twilight strolled along the road toward the burying-ground. A hard shower, with thunder and lightning, suddenly swept across the sky, driving them for shelter into a cattle-shed. In a few minutes a torrent of rain fell. When they emerged from their hiding place, the hollows by the roadside were full of water. As they went on their way, dark clouds still hung over them, so that it was pitch-dark. Coming to the graveyard, they saw in it what seemed to be a ghost. It was white and appeared to be struggling to lift itself out of a grave. Ever and anon it bowed its head to the earth and then suddenly lifted it up again; and at times when the head was elevated, it wildly threw its arms about. The young men shivered with fear. The cold sweat started on brow and spine. Their scalps began to creep, and "each particular hair" seemed "to stand on end." Leonard Matthews at last broke the oppressive silence by faintly whistling, when in whispers his companions dared him to get over the fence into the burying-ground. This dare roused his faltering courage, and he started on his perilous adventure. Each step made him braver. Cautiously he soon climbed over the fence, and with quivering flesh and timid step, he went slowly on toward the ghost. Coming near it, he saw it bow its head and heard it hiss, like the Old Serpent in Tartarus. He stood as though riveted to the earth. Horror shook his spirit; but thinking of the challenge of his friends, he pumped up courage to take another step forward, when the frightened ghost, with head erect, began to retreat, crying as it went, *gans, gans, gans.* He burst into a loud laugh. Those who had dared him were soon by his side, berating themselves for having been frightened almost out of their wits by a white goose.

A hollow in the ground, filled with water by the copious shower, had attracted the goose, that was ducking itself and in its joy splashing the water with its flying wings. Hence the ghost and its movements, seen at a distance in the dark. I do not say that all supposed ghosts are white geese; but this one was nothing but a white goose, and a company of usually brave young men stood before it for nearly a half hour, congealed with terror. They were a set of goslings, but those who poked fun at them might have been no braver.

The squawking ghost gone, the heavens cleared and the stars twinkled. Soon the full moon lifted its shining face above the horizon and began to climb toward the zenith. The night became almost like day. The young men, bent on mischievous fun, found a stray hog in the road and killed it. They then carried it into the graveyard, laid it on the base of Joe's monument, between the pillars beneath the canopy, and wrote under his name, in the place left for the record of his death, with red chalk, in large bold letters, "This hog is dead."

The next day the whole community was filled with a quiet, pleasurable excitement; to be sure the people were too good to approve of vandalism, in fact they sharply condemned it; but their faces involuntarily rippled with smiles while they uttered their words of disapprobation, and nobody seemed to be able even to guess who the culprits might be. Joe was too shrewd a man openly to show resentment. His thin lips were hermetically sealed, and no one knew his thoughts and feelings. He quietly removed and buried the hog, and went on as usual with his tasks. He was mean, but he was a man.

A few years after, Joe died and, like Dives, was buried, — buried by his monument of granite, not indeed with pomp and parade, but, according to his own request, unostentatiously and cheaply. His ruling passion was strong even in death. When the earth had been heaped up over his body, his charitable neighbors fondly hoped, against pretty strong evidence, that, through the boundless grace of God, he had gone where his bonds would not burn nor his gold melt. But they could not help thinking, if their hope should be realized, how delighted Joe would be to gaze at gates of solid pearl and to walk on streets of solid gold. Still, they feared that he might carry off the gates and dig up the streets.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "HORNET"

THERE was one man in our neighborhood so very peculiar that he belonged to no class, but stood wholly apart by himself. I call him the *Hornet* reluctantly, for the cognomen may possibly do him some injustice. He was amiable by fits and starts; so is the hornet. When stirred up, the hornet stings; so did he when his inflammable passion was fired, and the tiniest spark would often produce combustion. Then, with incredible swiftness, he flew hither and thither, piercing with his sharp, venomous sting the fairest reputations in the whole countryside.

In stature this strange mortal was only five feet five.

He had a shock-head of coarse, brown hair, heavy, shaggy eyebrows, a small, grayish, hazel eye, a Roman nose, a mouth with lips straight-cut and firmly set, and a strong, square lower jaw, with double teeth all around it. He carried his right shoulder two or three inches higher than the left, and was bow-legged. When he walked he toed in, like an Indian. He was lean; his compact body was simply bone, sinew and muscle. There was not a lazy hair on him. He was the distilled essence of energy, a steam engine on legs.

He owned two farms a mile apart. He never worked long at a time on either, but flitted from one to the other; now for an hour or two he toiled with all his might on the one, and then drove his team like Jehu to the other, where, for a short time, he made the dirt fly, then driving swiftly back to the home-farm, he laid hold on some new piece of work there. He never continued long at any one task. With incredible energy, for an hour he pitched into one job, and then dropped it for another. He was by turns in this field and in that. For a short time the grass fell before his swinging scythe, then the weeds in his corn-field for an hour were uprooted by his busy hoe. Now he was picking up stone, then he was cutting up the burdocks and Canada thistles that came uninvited to torment the farmer. When his yellowing wheat was ready to harvest, he drove back and forth between his two estates as though he were mad, cutting a little here and a little there. He was at his tasks by four o'clock in the morning. As soon as the crow was up, we could hear him whetting the scythe of his grain-cradle, and often at eight in the evening he was still cradling or raking and binding his grain.

He went through with twice or thrice the motions necessary for the accomplishment of his work. An onlooker might justly conclude that he believed in a maximum of labor for a minimum of result. The present generation has to learn from books how we harvested grain in "ye goode olden tyme." In my boyhood, wheat was generally cut with the cradle and laid by the cradler in an orderly swath across the field. He was followed by one who raked up the grain into bundles, and bound them with bands which he deftly made of the newly-cut straw. This was hard work when the cradler was strong and ambitious to cut more acres of grain than his neighbors. Triumphantly to take the last clip from his cradle at sunset was a glory and joy like that of a conqueror. More than once, when in my teens, that exulting experience was mine.

Now, Jim Bean seldom hired any one to help him even in harvest-time; he loved his money too much to expend it in that lavish manner. He and his overworked boys unaided reaped and gathered in the ripened grain. He alone was often both cradler and raker and binder. He would first cut a half-acre or more of his wheat, then rake it up into bundles and bind it. His movements while at this work were nervous and quick and astonishingly numerous. He raked up the grain into a bundle, jumped over it and made the band to bind it with, jumped back over it again and bound it, leaped over it the third time, threw it out of the swath, raked out the butts of the bundle, and with flashing movement went through the same senseless process in binding bundle after bundle. One day I saw Oscar Gooch, standing in the road with puzzled look, watching Bean as he was raking and binding wheat; at last with a laugh he said, "Why! he's raking and binding, isn't he? I thought at first that he was fighting bumblebees."

He was often noisy, as well as unusually active. He indulged in shrill whistles and cries. What they all meant was a mystery to us. When his horses, drawing heavy loads, needed urging, we could hear him at a long distance cry, "Hep-hep-hep-hep," so that the boys nicknamed him "Hep," and in view of his short stature, they often irreverently called him "Little Hep."

While he was strong and agile in body, he was also keen and alert in mind. His educational advantages had been meagre, but he diligently read some weekly papers, among them the New York *Tribune*, and a few fairly good books. Having an unusually retentive memory, he could glibly retail all that he read. He had Greeley's editorials at his tongue's end. His mind was methodical. He took up one subject after another, such as agitated his neighborhood or the country at large, and investigated them as thoroughly as he could with the scant helps at his command. In turn the tariff, the annexation of Texas, the abolition of slavery, total abstinence, or some religious question claimed his attention and absorbed his thought. And whatever problem he had in hand, for the time being excluded from consideration all others. He incessantly talked it both to acquaintances and strangers. Once, I remember, he became absorbed in the subject of baptism, and must constantly discuss it with somebody, or burst. Seeing a stranger driving along the road, he ran across the field in which he was working, jumped over the fence into the highway, and planting himself in the wagon-track before the oncoming traveler, cried out, "Sir, have you of late examined the subject of baptism?" The stranger, half in doubt as to the sanity of his questioner, stopped his horse and courteously replied, "No, I have not." Then Squire Bean poured out upon him a flood of borrowed erudition, to which the stranger, having listened with an incredulous smile, scarcely knowing whether the scene of which he seemed to form a part was fancy or fact, drove on laughing over the strange and ludicrous incident.

At another time the subject of total abstinence took possession of him, and on all occasions had the right of way. He talked it at home, on the street, in the store, in the houses of his neighbors, — talked it to the old, to the young, to the wise and the unwise. One evening he called upon John Erskine that he might give vent to his boiling, bubbling zeal. He began at once to shower on the good deacon the scraps of knowledge that he had industriously gathered and stowed away in his noddle, concerning the deleterious effects of alcohol on the blood, arteries, brain and stomach. Although, as we have before noted, honest John had always been a temperance man, he sat and listened, dumb with amazement, to the torrent of information that ceaselessly flowed from the clattering tongue of his neighbor, on a subject with which, up to that time, he had thought himself fairly familiar.

Squire Bean, having at last exhausted his fund of knowledge on the destructive effects of alcohol, turned to the discussion of the comparative amounts of it in whiskey, brandy and hard cider. Now the Squire had at times heard some of his neighbors say, "I don't see the *pint*," or, "He made that *pint* very clear," and in some way he had learned that such a use of the word "pint" was wrong. But in correcting the mistake, he was so zealous and thorough that he had apparently wholly eliminated the word "pint" from the English language. So, as he went on volubly with his discussion, he said, "I suppose that there is about one-fifth as much alcohol in a *point* of hard cider as in a *point* of whiskey." Now up to that moment no one of the Erskines had said a word; they were respectfully silent, while their glib-tongued neighbor talked on without a break; to have tried to get in a word edgewise would have been foolhardy; but when honest John's sons and daughters heard the phrase "a *point* of cider — a *point* of whiskey," there was a suppressed titter which in spite of themselves became a low but audible laugh. The Squire's Niagara of words ceased. He fidgeted a little. He evidently had not the slightest notion of what all at once made that group of children so mirthful. He dropped some commonplace remark about the weather, rather abruptly said, "Good evening," and was gone. Before he was five rods away the subdued laughter swelled into a roar, and ever after the "*point* of cider" and "*point* of whiskey" contributed to the gaiety of their life.

This unique and really talented man was a member of the Baptist Church. To his credit, he daily read the Scriptures and prayed with his family. His brethren, recognizing his ability, made him superintendent of the Sunday School, and he ably met the responsibilities of this important position. His fellow citizens elected him justice of the peace, and no one in our neighborhood ever filled the office with greater ability and probity. He showed by the manner in which he presided in the court and by the keenness and justness of his decisions that, if he had had a thorough college education, he might have ranked among the ablest members of the bar. But alas! he had another side; and that other side generally held the stage.

He was both ambitious and jealous. When those two qualities are united in the same character, look out for trouble. He had a brother named Horton. No two men were ever more unlike than these two brothers, James and Horton Bean. The latter, take him all in all, was the brightest ornament of the whole countryside. When a young man he taught district school, and as a pedagógue was very successful and popular. He afterwards was chosen superintendent of schools, and became a favorite of the teachers and the people. He was made supervisor of his county for a series of years; with marked ability he represented his political district in the legislature of the State, and was strongly urged by his fellow citizens to become their representative in the national congress. *Mirabile dictu!* this he modestly and firmly refused. He was well fitted for such a responsibility. The political history of our republic was at his tongue's end, and he had a clear grasp of the currents of national thought, but he thrust aside the honor so warmly proffered him, declaring that he was not capable of filling so high an office.

He was also a genuine Christian. His piety was manly, without a touch of namby-pamby. If ever a man walked with God, it was he. He talked with the Lord as a friend talks with a friend. He was a student of the New Testament. While working on his farm, he carried a leather-bound copy in his trousers pocket. When unobserved by others, he took it out and read two or three verses, and when he had gotten a thought on which he could meditate, he replaced it and went on with his labor. His words were always pure. No one ever heard him in conversation use any expletive whatever; as his Lord commanded, his speech was simply "yea, yea; nay, nay." He often by word commended to others the religion of Christ, but did it so simply and naturally and with such a kindly spirit that he offended no one; but he still more strongly commended it by his life. To a remarkable degree he lived over again the life of Christ. If any one did him an injury, he seized the first opportunity of doing that man a favor. He taught us by example how to return good for evil. And there was no jollier soul in our neighborhood; but his jollity was on a high plane; it partook of the joy of his Lord.

One day, his face brimming with delight, he asked me to step into his garden. There he had trained a grapevine over an oval lattice about five feet high. The clusters of grapes, lying close together on the lattice, formed a roof that was purpling in the sunshine. With a hearty laugh, he exulted over his success and said, "I cultivate this vine according to the Scripture. Jesus said, 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away;' don't you see that I have cut off every unfruitful branch? 'and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' That is just what I have done. I have removed from every fruit-bearing branch all parasites; and just see what quantities of grapes hang on these branches." And his glad laugh was so contagious that I laughed too. While he instructed me, he filled me with his own joyful spirit.

I met him one day as he was returning on foot from the creek, a mile away, where he had fished for an hour or two. He was carrying by a string two fine pickerel, and was happy over his catch. In a cheery tone he suggested the outline of a sermon that had occurred to him while he fished. Quoting Jesus' words, "I will make you fishers of men," he said, "There were places in the creek where I could catch no fish, because none were there. So if we are going to catch men, first, we must go where men are. Then I found, when I got to the places where the fish abounded, that I could catch none of them unless I had the right kind of bait. So, in the second place, when we go where men are, we can't catch them unless we offer them the truth, just as Jesus taught it. In the third place, we can't catch fish if we are violent in our movements; that frightens them away; so in catching men, we must be gentle, and present the truth to them in love. And in the fourth place, I found that after a pickerel had taken my hook, if I attempted to lift it up with a jerk from the water, it got off my hook or made way with it. So when men take the bait of the gospel, we must not try to jerk them by main force into the Kingdom, but let them have line to play with, and we shall be able to draw them from the world into the Kingdom of God." The spirit of such a man was contagious. All profoundly respected him, and almost everybody that knew him, loved him.

But his own brother envied him. No one ever heard James speak a favorable word of Horton; but on the contrary, he whispered in every ear open to him his malignant slanders. The gadding hornet seized every opportunity to plant his fiery sting in his own brother, and that brother one of the noblest of Christian men. And Horton bore it all in absolute silence. He never uttered a syllable in his own defense; it was not necessary for him to do so; no decent person for a moment believed the detestable mutterings of James. But Squire Bean determined, when occasion offered, to tell in bold tones what a despicable wretch Horton was. The coveted opportunity soon came. It was the annual meeting of the school district to elect trustees. Horton Bean was uniformly elected a trustee without a dissenting vote. He never sought the office; he never stooped to any of the corrupt methods of the small, unscrupulous politician; the office sought him, since he was manifestly best fitted for it of any man in the community. But little James Bean wanted it, and tried hard to secure the votes of his neighbors by abusing Horton. His backbiting, however, evidently had made little or no impression, since not a single ballot was cast for him. This enraged him. Although it was already half past nine o'clock, he took the floor and, for three quarters of an hour, poured out a speech of incredible bitterness. He was smart, tonguey, incisive. He scolded like a fish-woman. His fellow citizens, dumb with amazement, heard him without protest to the end. I was a youngster, but shall never forget how, as I listened, every nerve in my body seemed to quiver. For the first time I learned that a good man might be accused, even by his brother, of doing despicable things that he abhorred and of which he was incapable.

When the Squire sat down, he heard from his neighbors no word, and saw no sign, of approval. The house was still as death. All eyes instinctively turned to Horton Bean. He rose in his own defense. He was intensely in earnest. His moral character had been called in question, and that by his own brother. Still he had perfect control of himself. His mind was methodical; he answered James' speech point by point, and showed how foolish and baseless his reckless accusations were. His lucid, candid reply brought relief to all present. It was near eleven o'clock at night when the meeting adjourned. All went to their homes in silence, filled with chagrin that their usually peaceful neighborhood had been disgraced by blatant slanders, poured out on the fairest man among us.

But Jim Bean was also busy in other quarters. He fell out with his pastor, Elder Josiah Martin. The elder had raised on a piece of rich swamp land a great crop of white turnips, and Squire Bean bought ten bushels of them for sixty cents. He declared that when cooked they turned out to be stringy, and that the Elder had cheated him. This alleged crookedness of his pastor now became the theme on which he unceasingly harped. He told it wherever he went; he reiterated it to men, women and children. All about him grew weary of the absurd yarn, but he never. For ten long years he kept at it.

He was "smart as a whip." Nobody but a man of great ability could have talked ten years about ten bushels of turnips for which he paid the enormous sum of sixty cents. But he was as tight as he was smart. He pinched every silver quarter that he got hold of till the eagle on it squealed. He had various and accumulating grievances which he incessantly aired. His imagination was active. Every mole-hill swelled up into a mountain. For a long period he quit the Church. He did not care to associate intimately with his neighbors. When the pathmaster called us out to work on the road, at his own request a job was assigned him apart from the rest. With his neighbors all around him, he lived an isolated life. He became constantly more and more morose and misanthropic. He refused to speak to some of his old acquaintances; still, if any one would listen to his fancied wrongs, he always poured them forth with a few new touches, that were pure creations of his imagination. At last, the community dubbed his oft-repeated diatribe, "Jim Bean's lingo," and spoke of it with derisive laughter.

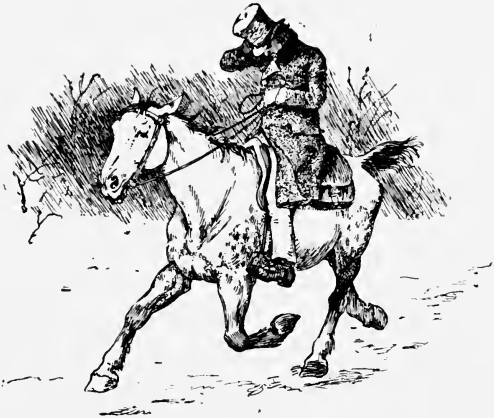
Horton Bean in a true Christian spirit, forgiving the wrongs done him, several times had patiently listened to the absurd and slanderous "lingo" of his brother. At last he said to his wife, "I shall never listen to it again." A few days after he had occasion to visit James, and found him about ten o'clock in the forenoon, working in one of his fields by the roadside. He had been with him only three or four minutes, when his brother started in on that malignant, threadbare harangue. Horton Bean was an agile man; turning his back on James, he put his fingers in his ears and, running with all his might, leaped over the fence into the road; he did not, however, take the road to his own house, but flew across it, leaped over the opposite fence into the field, and without slacking his pace ran across one field after another, leaping the fences and with his fingers in his ears rushed up upon his own veranda. His startled wife hurried out to him, exclaiming, "Why, Horton, what is the matter?" He answered: "I told you that I would never hear that 'lingo' again. James began it, and I ran with all my might till I got here." By sundown all the neighborhood had heard the story. Without the utterance of a word a sharp rebuke had been administered, and all the people said, Amen. But for years after James never again spoke to Horton.

At last we look in upon a hay-field council. John Erskine, in one of his well-cultivated meadows, was mowing a heavy crop of clover and timothy. It was about the middle of the forenoon, when Mr. Watrous, one of his fellow deacons, put in an appearance. He had come to counsel with him as to what the Church ought to do with Jim Bean, who for years had been viciously backbiting his brethren, and, foremost among them, his own pastor. "Well," said honest John, measuring his words, "that is a difficult question. His wife and two of his children are faithful members with us, and in disciplining him we don't want to offend and injure them. Perhaps we shall do most good by letting him go on unnoticed. Then, we must avoid, if possible, making a martyr of him; he would never tire of showing his wounds. He seldom speaks to me, although I never did him any wrong. I confess that I can't quite make him out. I always speak to every living thing about me, to my pigs, my horses, my cattle, my sheep, my dog, and all make some answer; the dog wags his tail when I say good morning to him; but when I say good morning to Bean, he often passes on with no more notice of me than if I didn't exist.

Why, he isn't as polite as my dog. Still, a few days ago, having some business with him, we had a square talk and I asked him why he destroyed the peace of the whole neighborhood and kept up such a row? He said that he knew it was wrong, but he couldn't help it; he was so constituted. "I swan," — for so the good deacon sometimes swore, and in this case the provocation was unusually great, — "I swan, it is hard to endure that little pest."

But the rising indignation of honest John was stayed by the arrival of the pastor, Elder Martin, who had come to consult with Erskine about that sheep of his flock, which had turned out to be a hornet. Erskine and Watrous said, "That is just what we've been talking about," and rehearsed to the Elder the substance of their conversation. Now, the patience of the Elder was almost gone. With incredible long-suffering he had endured in silence the vituperative tongue of Squire Bean. He had, however, begun to think that further forbearance might no longer be a virtue. "Why," he said, "for ten years, while he has been incessantly slandering me, I have carried him in my arms, hoping that he might be led to change his course, but there is no sign of improvement; in fact, his viciousness constantly increases. If he were only a big devil, I could get along with him; but he is such a *little* devil, there is no dignity at all about him."

These words from the good-natured, charitable Elder fairly stunned his deacons; they had never before heard such an outburst from his lips. But the question as to what should be done was still unsolved. While all three felt that severe measures should be employed, all were in doubt as to the wisdom of such a course. At last Elder Martin said: "Perhaps we'd better let things slide on as they are a while longer, keep right on at our church-work as though Bean didn't exist, just as you, Deacon Erskine, keep on mowing until it's done." Honest John believed the Elder's counsel to be right, it being in substance what he himself had suggested; still, unable wholly to suppress his irritation at the pestiferous conduct of Bean, he responded, "I suppose that is our best way, but it's hard for me to mow right on, without saying a word, with a hornet in my breeches." The good deacon's observation brought down the house. There was a hearty laugh, a warm hand-shake, and a fervent good-by. John Erskine mowed on, and Jim Bean, through the kindness of his brethren, went unwhipped of justice.



CHAPTER XVII

BUCOLIC DOCTORS

THERE were two in our neighborhood. Everybody called them doctors; the cognomen, physician, was seldom heard among us. One of them, Dr. Hatfield, was well-read in medicine and surgery, and kept abreast with all discoveries that pertained to his profession. He was always neatly dressed and, in manner, unaffectedly polite. He was, in short, "An affable and courteous gentleman," who commanded universal respect.

To a greater or less extent we all shared in his experiences. When anybody in all the countryside was ill, everybody there quickly knew it. Without telephone or telegraph the report of it flew on the wings of the wind and became a common topic of conversation. We learned, as if by magic, when the doctor was called, whether he drove hard or leisurely to see his patient, what he thought the disease was and what remedies he was using to overcome it. One only had to be sick in order to secure the sympathy of the entire community.

I remember a unique incident that arose from the general interest of all in those that suffered from sudden attacks of illness. Squire Bean owned a mare that was as peculiar as her master, — and that is putting the case strongly. She was such an uncommon brute that she deserves a special portrayal. She was generally called Jim Bean's black mare; but this was hardly accurate. She was, to be sure, covered with long, very dark hair, that was trying to be black, but the ends of it were a dull muddy brown. She was knock-kneed, and quite tall, because her crooked legs were unusually long. Bushy, heavy fetlocks stretched down to the ground behind her coarse, ponderous hoofs, — hoofs as far around as a breakfast plate. She was hollow-backed. Her ribs in spite of her thick, tawny hair were quite visible. Her neck, long and slender, suggested that she might have descended from some blooded sire; if so, the descent was very great. Her mane, like the hair of a college boy, was parted in the middle, and hung in shaggy, tangled tufts on both sides of her neck, while her forelock stood in a matted bunch on her forehead, a sort of horse pompadour. When on the move she held her nose so high in the air, that her face was nearly parallel with the heavens. Her tail started out all right from her backbone, but after a descent of about six inches, it turned quite abruptly to the right for about three, and then resumed its course toward the ground. No one with even half an eye for the grotesque, who chanced to see this uncouth beast, could ever forget her. If a thing of beauty is a joy forever, this strange brute, I am sure, is an everlasting joke.

One day, the oldest son of Squire Bean, mounted on this four-legged monstrosity, without a saddle, with only an untanned sheepskin between him and her sharp backbone, having for a bridle an ordinary headstall with blinders; one of the blinders, its front fastening being broken, flapping in the wind; her nose lifted towards the sky, her crooked tail lashing the air, came with break-neck speed down the road, the ground resounding beneath her massive hoofs. Deacon Erskine, thinking that the boy had been sent to call Dr. Hatfield, and judging from the speed of the mare that some one at Squire Bean's had been desperately, if not fatally, injured, standing behind his gate by the roadside, cried out, "What's the matter?" The boy, without slackening the pace of his shaggy, high-nosed Bucephalus, yelled at the top of his voice, "Dysentery,

dysentery, dysentery!" The deacon, in spite of the probable serious sickness of his neighbor, burst into a hearty laugh. Some of the family joined in his merriment. The whole neighborhood, hearing the funny incident, chuckled. The doctor soon put his patient to rights, and was greatly amused when he heard the deacon's story, and thought of the mad rush of the frightened boy to his door and his own swift drive of two miles to Bean's house on account of a baseless fright. The excited boy, bestride that queerest of all horses, screaming the mirth-provoking response to Deacon Erskine, unwittingly contributed much to the good humor and good health of all.

The urbane Dr. Hatfield was a skilful physician of the old school. In a country neighborhood he could not of course be a specialist. He was called to treat every organ of the body from the scalp to the soles of the feet. According to the custom of his day, he sometimes resorted to phlebotomy and gave generous doses of calomel and jalap. He extracted teeth, set broken bones, amputated limbs, and helped most of the children of the countryside into the world.

A woman noted among us for her feeble health and ugliness of face went out for an afternoon drive. Her horse took fright and ran away. She was thrown out of her buggy upon a pile of stone by the roadside. A leg, an arm and her jaw on both sides were broken. Her neck was also bent so that her head leaned at an angle of about forty-five degrees over her right shoulder. Everybody supposed that the frail creature would die; but Dr. Hatfield skilfully set the shattered bones and, to the astonishment of all, she recovered and was as strong as usual, although her neck seemed hopelessly bent. Nevertheless the doctor, having studied the case thoroughly, came to the conclusion that if, in some way, the head should be struck a hard blow on the side towards which it leaned, the neck would be straightened. At last he himself determined to administer the salutary blow. On a cold, wintry day he called upon his patient. She, regarding him as her greatest benefactor, was full of polite attentions, even assisting him in taking off his overcoat. When, however, he pulled his right arm from the sleeve, he swung his hand with great force and struck the woman on the right side of the head. With a shriek she fell to the floor. He raised her up, begging a thousand pardons for having been so careless as to hit her. He tenderly placed her in an arm-chair, and when her fright and faint were over, she was overjoyed to find that the crook in her neck was gone. At last her neck, like her leg and arm and jaw, was as good as ever, and the skilful, heroic doctor had one more claim on her everlasting gratitude.

But on the opposite side of the neighborhood from Dr. Hatfield, lived Dr. Ramus. He belonged to no school of medicine, but announced himself an eclectic.

This was very convenient, since whatever he might do would be strictly within the lines of his profession. In his practice he made liberal use of roots and *yarbs.* He also concocted an ointment, that he called, after his own name, *Ramus' Grease.* What its ingredients were, we were left to guess. Some who professed to know, declared that it was a compound of lard, sweet oil, tobacco juice and opodeldoc. Since there was no drug store in our neighborhood, the doctor was compelled to carry his drugs, roots and *yarbs,* and magical grease in his great leather saddle-bags. He often went on horseback to visit his patients, his well-worn saddle-bags, united like the Siamese twins, in perfect balance, slung across his horse behind him. It was a sort of peripatetic drug store. His horse was an old gray mare. In winter he wore a dun-colored overcoat, that bore the marks and stains of long service. On his head rested a fur, stovepipe hat, against which the storms of many winters had beaten, and the nap of which had never been smoothed by a brush. His boots were heavy kipskin, his pantaloons and vest homespun gray, with brass buttons. This was his ordinary rig; of course, like every one in the neighborhood, he had a finer suit for Sunday. Mounted on his logy gray nag, his great saddle-bags on either side sticking out from under his coat tails, or else rattling along in his shackling gig, he was a conspicuous figure among us.

His knowledge of medicine was far from profound. He had taken up the profession in order to make money. Not a few of his most intelligent neighbors declared him to be a shallow quack. It seemed to me that, in some way, the first two syllables of his name, *igno,* had been lost. But it was astounding what faith many fairly intelligent families had in him and his skill. He was called to visit the sick far and near. With great assurance he administered medicine to many in distress, who, recovering in spite of it, attributed to him the blessing of restored health. And then to ward off all future ills, he sold them a tin box of "*Ramus' Grease,*" and left them filled with admiration of his unequaled wisdom.

But while a quack may be able to deceive himself and ordinary folks in administering medicine, some simple surgical operation is quite sure to unmask him. The excellent, amiable wife of Squire Bean, in yawning, slipped her jaw out of joint. She was of course in great distress. The nearest neighbors were summoned, but none of them had ever before heard of such a case and could render no assistance. Squire Bean's oldest son mounted the notorious black mare, and urging her to her highest speed in half or three quarters of an hour reached the house of Dr. Ramus, whom he excitedly summoned, telling with bated breath the desperate condition of his mother. Ramus drove in his gig to Squire Bean's, as fast as he could incite his gray mare to go. When he reached the gate, she was panting and covered with lather. Seizing his immense saddle-bags, he walked confidently into the house, firmly believing that no mortal malady could withstand the omnipotent virtue of his enchanting grease. Of course he found his patient's mouth wide open, and since it had been in that condition for more than two hours, she was in exquisite agony. He, ignoramus, chucked her hard under the chin to see if he could not shut her mouth, and she moaned with pain at this well-intended but brutal treatment. He then said that she had lockjaw, which was occasioned by the contraction of the cords of the neck. To relax the cords so that the mouth would shut, he said that it was only necessary to rub her neck freely with "*Ramus' Grease*" and dry it in with a red-hot iron shovel. In the kitchen was a large brick oven, and a long-handled fire shovel made of a single piece of iron, the shovel-blade perfectly flat, with which the brands and coals were removed from the heated oven, and the bread, beans, and pies put into it for baking and taken from it when done. In this oven Squire Bean quickly kindled a roaring fire and, thrusting the flat blade of the shovel into the flaming firebrands, it was soon at a white heat. Then Aunt Lucy, who had come to help her neighbor in distress, while believing the whole proceeding to be the veriest nonsense, held the glowing shovel close to the neck of her suffering friend, while

Dr. Ramus constantly bathed the cords of the neck with his magical grease. It was a hot day in August. The mercury was above eighty in the shade. The poor, helpless victim dripped with perspiration. Her face was about as red as the red hot shovel held near her neck. She cried in her terrible agony; but the awful torture went relentlessly on for two hours, Dr. Ramus all the time affirming that very soon the cords of the neck would become relaxed, so that this strange lockjaw, with the mouth wide open, would be overcome.

At last Squire Bean, unable to endure the sight of his wife's agony any longer, sent his son post-haste for Dr. Hatfield, two miles away. The boy, half crazed with fear, lest his mother might die, rode up furiously to the doctor's office, leaped from his barebacked black mare, and in a voice stifled with emotion summoned the doctor to come quick to his father's house. "Who is sick?" asked the doctor. "My mother," said the blubbering boy. "What's the matter of her?" kindly inquired the doctor. "She's got the lockjaw," replied the boy with some impatience. "Is her mouth open or shut?" asked Dr. Hatfield. The lad, exasperated, fairly screamed, "Open!" "Then," replied the unperturbed doctor, "she has not lockjaw. I will soon be at your house."

When he arrived, with quiet dignity he entered the room where his patient lay, bowed courteously to Dr.

Ramus, waved away with his hand the grease and red-hot shovel, put his thumbs firmly on the teeth of the jaw, grasping it underneath with his fingers, and strongly pulling it down and a little forward, it slipped into its sockets. To her inexpressible relief the mouth of the greased and long-tortured woman shut. The "lockjaw" was cured. Science and quackery met. The contrast suggests its own impressive lesson.

Dr. Hatfield, without deigning to utter a word concerning the case, took his hat and said politely to the amazed company in the room and to the discomfited quack, "Good day," and was soon in his gig driving leisurely back to his home, while Dr. (Igno) Ramus was volubly declaring to the family that the action of his grease on the cords of the neck had prepared the way for what Dr. Hatfield had done so quickly. "Had it not been," he insisted, "for the effect of the grease, neither Dr. Hatfield nor anybody else could have shut her mouth."

Strange as it may seem, Mr. Bean, clear-headed on many subjects, believed this silly stuff, and even bitterly criticized Dr. Hatfield, who had so quickly relieved his suffering wife. The doctor, for driving two miles on that sweltering summer day, and setting his wife's jaw, charged him only two dollars; but he declared the bill to be exorbitant and for two long years refused to pay it. At last, however, he did pay it, stopping the doctor in the road for the purpose, but to the last vehemently protested that the charge was too high. The good doctor said nothing in defense of his bill, nor of the long-delayed payment of it, but, silently putting the two dollars in his pocket, drove on. A few days after, he borrowed of Squire Bean forty dollars for six months, giving his note at seven per cent. When the note matured, he made no move toward paying it. To the great and constant exasperation of his creditor, he drove every day, on his professional rounds, past his door, in apparent obliviousness to that sacred forty-dollar note. At last Bean could endure it no longer. Seeing the doctor coming in his gig, he ran across the field, leaped over the fence into the road, and shouted, " Do you not know that that note is due? " The doctor drew rein, and quietly said: " Squire Bean, I have a problem that I wish you to solve; if a man waits two years for two dollars, how long ought a man to wait for forty dollars? " Bean felt the just rebuke and acknowledged his wrong, while the doctor then and there paid the matured note, principal and interest.

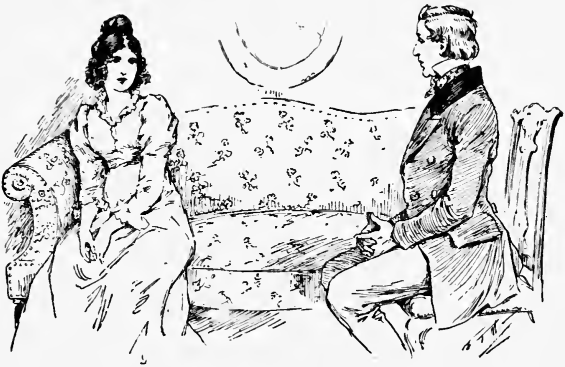
But if Bean believed that *" Ramus' Grease "* alone made it possible for Dr. Hatfield to set his wife's jaw, Aunt Lucy, who, against her better judgment, had held that red-hot shovel to her neighbor's neck, did not. Whenever she spoke, she said plainly what she thought. Listening to what Ramus said, after Hatfield left, about the wonderful effect that his grease had had, she was too indignant longer to keep silence. She said to the family, " I don't believe a word of his explanation; it's all fudge." This enraged Bean and he determined to feed fat his grudge against her. She remained awhile longer to do what she could for the comfort of Mrs. Bean, but when her weary and exhausted neighbor and friend fell into a profound sleep, Aunt Lucy donned her sunbonnet and started for her house. She had not gone over thirty rods, when she heard behind her the sharp crack of a rifle, and a bullet went singing by her ears. Looking around, she saw Squire Bean with his smoking gun. She hastened her pace, lest he might shoot again, and was soon relating to her own family this strange story. Honest John, full of righteous wrath, rose to avenge the outrage against her, who was the apple of his eye. But he always wanted to look any foe of his in the face; so he went straight to Bean. When thus confronted, if Bean ever had any courage it oozed out of him. He confessed that he shot towards Mrs. Erskine, but declared that he had no intention of hitting her; he only wanted to scare her. The deacon, half believing that he told the truth, concluded to let the matter drop, but shamed the waspish Bean by asking him, if he thought that that was a proper way to treat any woman, and especially one who, out of love to his wife, had toiled all day for her life and comfort. Such was Jim Bean. He shot because his cussedness was up.

"When he was good he was very, very good,
And when he was bad, he was horrid."

In the following winter, Bean was drawing home on his lumbering sleigh, from a neighboring swamp, a load of cedar rails. Going down a hill, the rails slipped forward till they touched his horses. The frightened team ran a short distance and overturned the sleigh. His son, who was with him on the load, had his back bruised. He was brought home and gently laid in bed. Dr. Ramus, who in his comprehensive ignorance had cruelly tortured Bean's wife only a very few months before, was called. He diagnosed the case, and said that the boy's spine was broken. Some of the neighbors, who were present, doubted it. So he sat his patient, who was thin and spare in flesh, up in the bed and had him bend over forward. The outer processes of the spine, when it was curved, were naturally a little thrown apart. Laying his finger between two of the processes, he said: "There, you can see for yourselves that the spine is broken and partially separated." But the patient was not paralyzed, nor did he feel any special inconvenience from having his broken spine bent like a bow.

In a short time the lad recovered, but as he never liked to work, that broken spine, which had so lately knit together, was a sufficient excuse for his discarding all labor on the farm; it was quite impossible for him to work even in the garden, or to do the lightest chores.

He was therefore put into a dry-goods store in a neighboring village, where for years he sold calico, ribbons, lace, thread, needles and pins without doing any damage to his shattered backbone. I am afraid that he never fully realized the vast debt of gratitude that he owed to Dr. Ramus, whose magic grease drew, and knit, together his disparted vertebrae, so that while sufficient weakness remained to preclude working on the farm, he still had sufficient strength to be a clerk in a store.



CHAPTER XVIII

LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

I SPEAK not of love as it is depicted, a thousand times over, in popular novels, but of the genuine, artless, childhood attachment of Robert Butterworth and Julia Tripp. They were born in our neighborhood and there grew up to maturity. While their homes were not very near each other, they often met at school and church. They were generous, happy children, and favorites with their playmates, but, ever and anon, by some mysterious influence, they drifted aside from the rest and, to their mutual delight, found themselves alone. Of course they were not yet self-conscious; they were too young to analyze their feelings; they simply loved to be together, to talk about their things and plays, to run and romp with each other. When not attending to their lessons at school, or to the preacher in church, they were exquisitely happy in looking, and winking, at each other. Without any well-defined purpose, they were carrying on a flirtation, when the pedagogue, busy with his absorbing duties, did not see them, or the parson was thundering forth his most solemn appeals.

When in spring they roamed hand in hand over the fields or through the budding, leafing woods, plucking wild flowers, adorning their brows with apple or dogwood blossoms, gleefully listening to the sweet songs of the birds; or, when in autumn, they eagerly picked the mellow, fragrant fruit of the orchard or gazed with rapture on the crimsoned maples and oaks, they were full of unwonted joy, but did not yet ask themselves why everything seemed so much more beautiful when they were together, than when each alone looked upon the same scenes.

Thus happy in each other, their childhood at last blossomed into youth. Then came the thought of mating, they knew not why nor how. They began to be introspective. They fell to analyzing, as well as they could, their emotions. With this self-examination, their jubilant, childish joy, in large measure, faded away. The flower is beautiful, but if in your effort to understand it, you pull it to pieces, you destroy its loveliness and charm. So now the happiness that for years had ravished their souls was diminished almost to the vanishing point when they seriously tried to find the root of it.

At last, Bob, as everybody called him, found that he was in love with Jule, her name for short among her familiar friends; but even the thought of telling her of it filled him with embarrassment. For years, with unrestrained freedom, he had told her everything in his mind and heart, and she with equal liberty had declared herself to him. But now he felt strangely restrained, shut in and shut up, when in her presence. She, too, in a measure had grown bashful and retiring. When in church they glanced at each other, their cheeks flushed. This was an unusual experience. At last Bob determined to tell Jule that he loved her. He put on his best clothes, shined his calfskin boots, donned a "Sunday-go-to-meeting" linen collar and colored cravat, used comb and brush till every hair on his head lay in the right place and pointed in the right direction, and eyed himself again and again in the glass to make sure that every article of his dress looked spick and span. During the past few years he had visited Julia scores of times with never a thought of what he had on. But to love without knowing it is one thing; to be clearly conscious of it is quite another. So Bob, now quite fully realizing his burning passion for Jule and spruced up in his best, walked on toward her house with a growing consciousness of the great responsibility that he was about to assume. She received him with her wonted gladness, but wondered why on a week-day he was so scrupulously clad. She also soon felt the evident restraint under which he was laboring. Nevertheless, they talked on for an hour or two about things which once interested him, but now had lost for him all their former fascination. He found that he could say what he did not care to say, but the thing that he had come to declare lay deep down in his inner consciousness, and he could not coax nor force it from its hiding place. He felt that he adored Julia as never before, but he had not sufficient power of will to confess it to her. Beaten and chagrined, he bade her a hasty good-day; but on reaching the gate that opened into the road, turned and looked at her, as she stood half puzzled on the veranda, and threw her a parting kiss, she all the time wondering at Robert's unusual bearing and conduct. As he went back to his home, he fairly cursed himself for having been so chicken-hearted.

Some days passed by when, cherishing in his heart his former purpose, he visited her again. In the time that had elapsed, he had gathered strength and courage. But to him it was an unfathomable mystery that it should require any courage to tell the girl with whom he had played all his life that he loved her. He now realized that he was confronted by a condition, not by a theory. Once more they were together; once more their tongues were busy with what, under the circumstances, he did not care a fig for. Again and again he was about to tell the tale of his heart, but mysteriously failed. At last the conversation slackened; there came awkward moments of silence; she looked inquiringly into his face; he blushed; the skin seemed to draw as tight as a drumhead across the bridge of his nose; his eyes felt as big as two tea-saucers, when he finally broke the oppressive silence by saying: "Julia, for several weeks I have been trying to tell you that I love you and want you to be my wife. Why it has been so hard to say what I wished to say most I can't tell; but I'm glad at last to be able to do it."

Julia was surprised, not at what he told her of his love, but because it had been so difficult for him to do it. She received his declaration quite as a matter of course, and said, "I've always thought you loved me, as, for years, I've loved you; but, Robert, as to becoming your wife, I must have time to think of that; what you ask quite takes my breath away." Since it was not a question to be discussed, but silently to be thought out, it was for the nonce dropped by them both. Other things claimed their attention and monopolized their conversation; still, while they chatted, the subject which by mutual, tacit consent had been tabooed was after all uppermost in their thoughts: while both talked of something else, they were all the time thinking of that. And as they conversed, they felt for each other a strength of affection and a glow of love such as they never before had experienced. Their souls seemed to touch, blend, and become one.

In this new experience they were inexpressibly happy, but it was an ecstasy felt, not spoken; neither attempted to tell it; no words at their command could adequately express it. With mind and heart flooded with this new joy, they kissed and parted; he anxious as to Julia's final decision, she to think for a few days concerning the question, Shall I become Robert's wife? Its answer involved the earthly destiny of them both. But deep down in her heart and his, the question had already been answered. On the declaration of his love, had not their souls met and run together like two drops of water? Was not the resulting experience one of quiet, profoundest joy? Robert anxiously longing for her reply, soon appeared again, when, instinctively knowing his chief, absorbing thought, she hastened to meet him, and placing her hand confidingly in his, the first word that fell from her lips was, "yes." And now the happiness of both was rounded and complete. For them both, a new, broader and happier life had begun.

But our most exquisite joys are often marred; on sunniest days shadows may suddenly darken the sky. Did the course of true love ever run perfectly smooth? Julia at times became depressed and melancholy, and this arose from the depth and intensity of her love for Robert. He was a handsome, captivating fellow, a little above medium height, straight as an arrow, square-shouldered, robust, with luxuriant black hair, worn pompadour, dark hazel eyes and a fair, white skin. While usually quiet in manner, he was full of good-nature and fun, and a favorite among the girls of the neighborhood. When, at public gatherings, they at times largely secured his attentions, the spirits of Julia were dampened. For the hour she became moody and silent. Without knowing it, she was fitfully jealous, and of course temporarily unhappy. She had no solid reason for doubting the faithfulness of Robert, but he now filled her whole horizon, and the remotest imaginary danger that some one else might win him from her, filled her with fear, and for the hour destroyed her happiness. Robert, apprehending and generously appreciating her feelings, loved her all the more for her temporary fits of jealousy. A few assuring words from his warm, true heart would quickly drive away the shadows, and again they walked blissfully together in the sunshine of unsullied love.

Serious courting usually precedes the mutual declaration of love; but in this case the order of events was reversed. Their love springing up in childhood, in their artlessness they did not suspect what it was that so often drew them together and filled them with inexpressible happiness. As men drink the sweet, cold water that flows from some hidden spring, simply content to quench their thirst, without a thought of the source from which the satisfying draft comes, so for years they tasted the sweets of love in utter unconsciousness even of its existence. But at last, when they mutually discovered and declared it, while the consciousness of it gave them a deeper, richer joy than they had ever before felt, it also revealed in a measure the more serious aspect of life. Conscious love brought with it a keen sense of impending responsibility. Together, at no distant day, they were to take up and bear the burdens of a household. Play-days were nearly over; toil and conflict were about to begin. Standing on the threshold of active life, they instinctively felt that the situation demanded careful, patient consideration.

By force of public opinion, courtship in our neighborhood was always carried on with propriety and decorum. Lovers generally met in the evening, within doors. The parlor of the father or guardian of the damsel, sought in marriage, was lighted up. The young man, seeking her hand, first called upon the family, and after a brief visit, which, in his impatience, often seemed long, by common consent all, save the lovers, withdrew and left them to themselves. Their tryst usually continued till ten o'clock or later. Two or three nights of each week were often given to this delightful, yet serious business. When Robert and

Julia had declared their mutual love their courtship really began. Of course the whole neighborhood soon knew it. Some said, "Bob and Jule are sparkin';" others, that they were "settin' up nights," and many wondered if their parents approved of it. Such curiosity and gossip disturbed no one; it was customary and expected.

But at last by a strange happening one of Robert's "sparkin'" nights became notorious. It was Sunday evening. He had stayed with his sweetheart till near midnight. As his house was full a mile distant from hers, he had come, as he occasionally did, on horseback. It was a moonless, cloudy night, as dark as dark could be; but familiar with every foot of the road, he felt no fear; he could safely ride on his trusty nag back to his father's house without even a glimmer of light. He bravely started homeward, but his horse, at times uncertain of the path, stopped and suspiciously snorted. In the rayless night he, half unconsciously, began to whistle, apparently to keep his courage up. He had to cross a creek, which was in itself no narrow stream. Its banks, where the bridge was thrown across it, were marshy. Athwart the oozy ground, a roadbed of earth, on either side of the creek, had been made to the abutments of the bridge, a strong wooden structure, with side-railings. When Robert reached this bridge, he could see nothing, but confidently relied on his faithful steed to carry him safely over. But when about two thirds the way across, his frightened horse refused to go further, blew a blast from his nostrils, and tried to turn around and go back. Robert succeeded in stopping the trembling beast and dismounted. Then he saw, as well as he could judge, just beyond the further end of the bridge, on the side of the roadbed leading up to it, two great fiery eyes. Whichever way he turned those burning orbs were upon him. They had at first alarmed his horse, so that the poor beast was all aquiver, and now they filled him with consternation. Cold sweat started on his forehead; cold chills chased each other in swift succession down his spine; there was a sense of goneness at the pit of his stomach; the small of his back seemed to be giving way, and his knees shook. At first blush, he thought that he would go back to Mr. Tripp's, knock at Julia's window, and ask the privilege of sleeping on the lounge in the sitting room till daylight; but then it occurred to him that the whole neighborhood might learn the story of his fright and make him the butt of its ridicule. He quickly concluded that he could never endure that; the bare thought of it put new determination and courage into him. He tied his trembling horse to the railing of the bridge. He resolutely faced those flashing eyes. His only weapon was a heavy rawhide. Grasping it firmly in his strong right hand, he stealthily crept a few feet toward the mute monster crouching by the roadside. He stopped and for a moment gazed toward his waiting foe. He worked up resolution to yell at it, but the only response to his cry was the dismal echo of his voice in a near-by swamp. The horrid creature, only a few feet in front of him, neither stirred nor gave forth the slightest sound; still, its awful, flaming eyes, never for a moment turned away from him, flashed their fire into the very marrow of his bones. The absolute stillness of this "gorgon dire" enhanced the shivering terror. If it had growled or moved its head or switched its tail, that would have afforded some relief; but just to stare at one with great, shining eyes, each of which glowed like a furnace, and remained as motionless and still as a stone, was enough to frighten an archangel. Robert could hear his heart-throbs; his breathing became rapid and audible, but his courage did not utterly fail. Lifting his rawhide high above his head, he now went with rapid pace straight up to the silent monster and struck it with all his might right between the eyes. He was amazed to see one eye fall to the right, the other to the left.

Whatever had laid wait to devour him, he was now certain that he had split its head open with no more formidable a weapon than his riding whip; yet in the dense darkness, he cautiously stretched out his hand to feel his demolished foe, thinking that perchance he might thrust his fingers into hot, running blood, or oozing brains; but instead he grasped a stick covered with velvety fuzz. It was a large mullein-stalk. About three feet from the ground, it was forked. On either branch of the fork was foxfire. These two touches of phosphorus made the glowing eyes that had nearly frightened out of their wits both horse and rider. When, with his big rawhide, Robert struck the awful beast between the eyes, he split the mullein-stalk from crotch to root. When the fact was fully revealed, horror gave place to mirth. He laughed aloud and the neighboring cypress-swamp caught up his jollity and laughed too. He remounted his nag and rode on to his home, glad, at every step, that he had not in his fright returned to Mr. Tripp's.

His courtship days all too soon came to an end. Again and again he and Julia had talked over the future, with all its varied possibilities. The Butterworths and Tripps were greatly pleased with the match, although Mr. Butterworth thought Robert too young to become at once the head of a household, and earnestly advised him first to take a college course and after that, when he knew more and had reached mature manhood, to wed. If this sound advice had been followed, Robert's life would doubtless have been broader and richer. He was above the average in native ability, and a thorough college drill would have enabled him to adorn any profession that he might have chosen. But fervid love is not only blind but deaf and cannot hear the voice of reason. Julia filled

Robert's entire field of vision. He seemed quite incapable of seeing aught else. College studies, acquired ability for greater usefulness, and higher honors had no charm for him. He must have Julia and have her without further delay. So Mr. Butterworth laid aside his long-cherished ambition for his son, and reluctantly consented to his early marriage.

Three or four months thereafter, the wedding day was set. The whole countryside was on the tiptoe of expectation. The marriage was to take place in the evening at the home of the bride. All relatives of the Tripps and Butterworths, near and remote, were invited to witness the nuptials and also many of their more intimate acquaintances among the neighbors. The guests filled the spacious farm-house. The long parlor, where the knot was to be tied, was crowded. Elder Josiah Martin was there ready for duty. The bride and groom, neatly and tastefully dressed, soon appeared. All necks were craned to see them. "What a handsome couple!" was whispered here and there. The marriage ceremony was simple and brief. The prayer of the Elder was short and fervent. Then the youthful couple were warmly congratulated.

When these informal and hearty ceremonies were over, all were invited to partake of the wedding feast in the large dining-room. The tables groaned under their appetizing burden. But the banquet had only just begun, when, outdoors, on all sides of the house, there suddenly burst forth a bewildering discord of nerve-racking sounds; scores of tin horns were tooted; tin pails and tin pans were pounded; snare-drums rolled and snapped; bass drums boomed; castanets or pieces of dry bones went whackety-whack, whackety-whack; corn-fiddles screeched and muskets and shot-guns added their bang, bang.

It was a horrid din. The nervous and timid were thoroughly alarmed, and their fright, for a time, was greatly enhanced by an ignorant blunder of a country bumpkin. He evidently thought that if his musket were loaded with only powder and wad he might hold its muzzle to a window and fire without doing any damage. The simpleton tried it on the upper sash of one of the parlor windows and, to his amazement and the consternation of the wedding guests, blew the window panes, sash and all, half the length of the long room. Just in front of that window, in the track of that splintered and flying glass, a few minutes before, Robert and Julia had stood, as they joined hands in marriage and received the congratulations of their friends; but no one was injured since all were now at the tables of the wedding supper. Still, the sharp report of the gun and the sudden shivering of glass made the timid shriek and turn pale, and, for a few moments, threw the nuptial feasters into a panic.

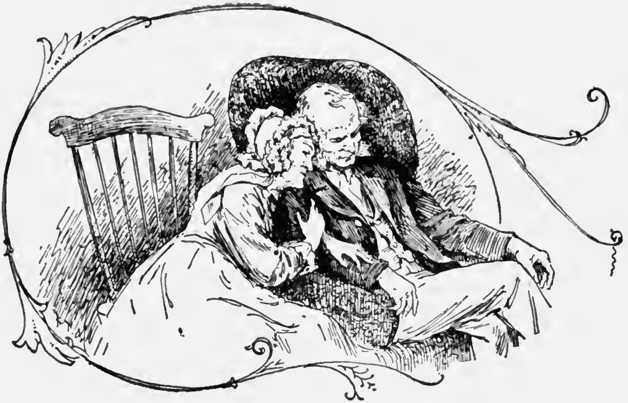
Two of Julia's brothers went out to remonstrate with the boys and found them in rare good humor;

they were only having a little fun; just giving Bob and Jule a smart send-off; and they asked for a taste of the wedding feast, and the young men took out to them roast chicken, cake, cheese, and coffee. They received the viands with a loud hurrah; then both those within and without feasted, for a time, in peace; but those without, quite unwilling that any one should think them cowed and afraid, when their exacted feast was over, once more filled the air with their diabolical noises, till we seemed to be in Bedlam. The discordant, ear-splitting din ended in a cheer, three times three. Then we heard footsteps and voices growing more and more indistinct till, at last, there was welcome silence. The horse-play of these clodhoppers had come to an end.

I saw John Erskine at the wedding in his calfskin boots and black broadcloth coat, with Aunt Lucy in her black silk dress. Honest John was full of indignation against the noisy crowd outside. He said, "I never heard such an infernal racket; it's an outrage." But Aunt Lucy replied, "It is hardly decent, but I don't think the boys really mean to do any mischief." This was like her; she was always half apologizing for even the rudest fun.

The present generation calls such a nocturnal carousal around a house where a wedding is being celebrated a charivari; but in my country neighborhood no one even knew the jaw-breaking word. Since horns were predominant in the sham serenade it was simply called among us a "horning-bee." It was, to be sure, a low-lived custom, which still lingers in some back towns of New England and the Middle States.

During the progress of the supper, which was suddenly so rudely disturbed, Robert and Julia slipped away in the darkness, unnoticed by the noisy louts in the yard, to enjoy a short wedding trip. Thus ends this brief story of true young love and marriage. Still, in justice I must add that Robert made good in life. He was a thrifty farmer, a brave and efficient soldier, and a sane force in the politics of his adopted State; and Julia, a constant inspiration, stood bravely at his side.



CHAPTER XIX

SUNSET

Not of the neighborhood; which, though its customs and the character of its inhabitants have radically changed, is still there; but the old residents are all in their graves. Here and there is found a descendant of some family of the past generation, but even these blood representatives of bygone days are now well stricken in years. The old American stock has been largely replaced by Irish and German, but the same fertile farms are still yielding abundant harvests.

But I wish to portray, as well as I can, in a few words, the sunset days of the two lives that have run like a golden thread through all my homely story. To

John Erskine and Aunt Lucy the old neighborhood had been made sacred by a thousand tender associations. To it they had made their bridal tour in an ox-cart. There they had cleared away the forest and tilled the soil, built houses and barns, planted orchards and cultivated gardens of vegetables and flowers; there their children had been born and educated and had gone out from under their roof into the wide world, and there both of them had been born again. For nearly forty years honest John had adorned the office of deacon in the Baptist church. But their birdlings had all flown from the nest, mated and gone. Why should they remain alone in their spacious farmhouse, which for years had been filled with the happy voices of their children, but now was silent? There was one spot even more sacred to them than the old neighborhood, where they had so long lived and wrought, more sacred than the farm and house where they had spent so many happy days and eventful years, and that spot was where in early life they met and loved and wedded. It was then a small, straggling, pioneer settlement, but, in the lapse of time, it had become a well-built and beautiful village. Its attractive houses, embowered in maples and elms, were fit exponents of its increasing wealth. A seminary for young ladies, with its flourishing schools of art and music, had made the village a center of culture and refinement.

To the astonishment of his neighbors, John Erskine offered his well-cultivated farm for sale. A thrifty friend at once bought it, and honest John purchased for himself a plain, but comfortable house, with two acres of ground, in the village of his betrothal. When it was made ready for occupancy, he rode from his country neighborhood back to the place of his courtship, not as he had driven many years before over the same road with his young bride in a cart, drawn by oxen, but in a neatly-finished buggy, drawn by a spirited horse with a silver-trimmed harness. The same road and the contrast between the vehicles in which they went and returned brought to their minds and hearts a flood of tender memories. Their honeymoon during all the long years had never waned. They were ardent lovers when so long ago they took their wedding journey, but they loved each other now more deeply and tenderly than they did then. As they drove on, every tree and flower, the song of every bird, and every fruitful field seemed freighted with joy. Their hearts overflowed with gratitude to God, who had so richly blessed them with worldly goods and with children, and had given to them such perfect happiness in each other. When they reached their new home, they were specially glad in the thought of being once more in the place where they had first felt the stirring and bliss of young love.

Here, in a small way, John was still a farmer. He could not put aside the deep-rooted habits of a lifetime. He had his barn and cow that he personally cared for. He cultivated his garden and fruits, while Aunt Lucy delighted in her flourishing flowers. She had marked success in raising pinks and peonies, asters, roses and dahlias. The soil was good, and a plentiful supply of wash-water poured each week upon the roots of the plants assured a great harvest of blossoms.

They at once united with the church. Every Sunday they were in their pew. They joined the Bible class, attended the weekly prayer-meeting, and helped on, to the extent of their ability, every good work. At the midweek gathering for prayer and conference, honest John, dropping on his knees, would offer to God a short, earnest petition. So sincere was he that all loved to hear his supplication. His pastor told me that on one occasion he prayed, "O Lord, forgive us our shortcomings," and then was silent for a full minute, when he added, "O Lord, forgive us for our no-comings-at-all." This, in his mind, seemed to clear the ground thoroughly, so that he went on without further halt to the end of his petition.

They also heartily seconded every move made for the material or moral improvement of the village. At one time the question of licensing liquor saloons was agitated and was to be decided at the polls. A beautiful river ran through the village, about equally dividing its inhabitants. Immediately before the election, Aunt Lucy, when more than seventy years old, visited on foot, and conversed personally with, every voter on her side of the river. She was a sane, persuasive talker, and those who cast the ballots voted out the demoralizing saloon by a large majority. This shows what a voteless woman can do in politics.

But Aunt Lucy specially gloried in church work, and such was her consummate tact, that she could approach and converse with any one about his or her religious life without giving the least offense. She was welcomed by not a few as a wise and safe spiritual guide. No difficulties daunted her. Her quick, practical solution of knotty problems was sometimes amazing. On her street lived two married women, who wished to unite with the church, but their husbands were bitterly, even violently, opposed to it. One of these men, a German, lived directly across the street from John Erskine's. His wife stepped out a few minutes one evening to call on a friend, and on her return found the lights in her house extinguished and the doors and windows shut and bolted. She knocked and called unheeded and was ruthlessly kept outdoors all night. In the morning, Aunt Lucy, having learned of the outrage, called on her neighbor and said to him, "Mr. Lehmann, I hear that you locked Gretchen out all night." "Yesh, Mishes Ershkins," he replied, "I did." "Well," she asked, "don't you feel ashamed of it?" "Vell, Mishes Ershkins," he answered, "to tells zhe truth, I do feel a leetle 'shamed." She said, "I am glad that you are a little ashamed, but wish that you were very much ashamed." "Vell, Mishes Ershkins," he responded, "jusht to tells zhe truth, I never vas so 'shamed in all my life." "Good," said she, but, keeping the main point in view, at once asked, "What are you going to do now about Gretchen's joining the church?" He replied, "I vill do nottins 'bout it; she do jusht vat she please, I never say anutter vort." Aunt Lucy had won, and had the joy of knowing that ever after there was peace in that house.

The other petty persecutor of his wife lived up the street about two blocks from the Erskines. He was of Yankee stock, and so stoutly opposed to his wife's wish that he declared his purpose to kill himself if she should unite with the church. Aunt Lucy called to see if she could not pour oil on the troubled waters, and found him standing in his kitchen, sharpening the blade of a pocket-knife on a whetstone. She kindly and courteously spoke to him about the rumor of his intended suicide. "Yes," he said, "if Martha joins the church I'll make way with myself." She looked him straight in the eye and said quietly but firmly, "No, you won't." With fury in his tone, he cried out, "Why not?" "Because," she replied with perfect coolness, "when men commit suicide they do not announce their intention to their neighbors." He made no reply; he could not, but began to whet his knife with redoubled energy. Seeing now that her game was within her grasp, she began to play with it, as a cat does with a mouse. Back of his house was a toolshop. So she teasingly said to him, "I hope you're not going to kill yourself with that little knife you're whetting." He snapped out, "Perhaps I shall." She continued with exasperating coolness, "Oh, don't try that, but go out to the shop and take the broadax and make sure work of it." He jumped and yelled with rage, threw down knife and whetstone, and bolted from the house as if shot from a gun.

He did not harm himself. He never had had the slightest intention of so doing. He had merely put up a shallow bluff to frighten his timid wife. But he had now talked with a wise woman, who had tauntingly pulled off his mask. The calmness and ease with which she had done it enraged him, but at the same time it shamed him out of his brutal folly. He was, however, too stubborn to confess this with his lips, but thereafter neither by word nor act did he oppose his wife in making a public profession of her faith.

But either from resentment or humiliation, he would in no way recognize Aunt Lucy. For a time she ignored this, but said at last, "I think I can bring him to." It was spring and he was busy making his garden that bordered on the street. One day as she was passing by, she stopped to observe what he was doing, and, without any salutation, said: "How fine your garden is! I've often seen it and wondered where you learned to make garden so nicely." He was at once all smiles, and giving her a sketch of his career, told her where he learned the art of gardening. Still expressing her admiration of his good work, she walked on. She had captured him. A few days after she said: "Rogers," for that was his surname, "is the politest man that I meet; he's the only one that takes off his hat when he bows to me."

Honest John and Aunt Lucy, in doing good to their neighbors and in their increasing love for each other, found their cup of happiness brimful. To be sure they missed their children, for each of whom they daily prayed. They were hungry for letters from them and when the coveted missives came, they read them over again and again. But they found partial compensation for the absence of their loved ones in the thoughtful, hearty attentions of many in the village by whom they were highly esteemed. Moreover, now and then, lifelong friends from their old country neighborhood came to spend a few hours under their hospitable roof and to renew past fellowships by eating at their table. At such times they lived over again their pioneer days and fought over once more their old battles, and sometimes with heart and soul they sang together:

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days o' lang syne?"

Among such visitors came one day Squire Bean. He was mellowing with age. For hours he and Erskine talked over their experiences as neighbors in past years, without making the most distant allusion to what had once marred their relations with each other. It was the Squire's way of making the *amende honorable.* By that friendly visit he said in act, "Let all the wrong done by me in the past be forgiven and forgotten." So honest John understood it and rejoiced over it. With mutual good wishes they parted. A few weeks thereafter the Squire died. His old neighbors, remembering the good in his life and forgetting the bad, tenderly buried him. They chiseled his virtues in granite, but wrote his faults in sand.

A few years after Erskine and his bride — she was always his bride — began their village life, they celebrated their golden wedding. Between thirty and forty of their children, grandchildren and near relatives assembled under their roof, each bringing some golden gift. Nearly forty sat down to the wedding supper not far from the spot where a half-century before John Erskine and his young bride joyfully entered into the bonds of wedlock. It was sunrise then, now sunset was not far away. During all the intervening years few clouds had darkened their sky. Their eight children were all alive, with households of their own. Those able to be present recounted past experiences. One of them framed his in doggerel verse, to the great amusement of the happy, laughing group.

The festivities that began in the morning continued till late at night. While bride and bridegroom entered into them with heart and soul, honest John seemed at times half dazed. He could not get it into his head that his children and relatives esteemed him so highly. He had never thought much of himself and was now amazed at the attentions shown him and the eulogies poured out upon him. He felt certain that his bride more than merited all the praise that was bestowed, but evidently thought himself quite unworthy of it. He seemed to think that his children had either made an egregious blunder or else were poking fun at him. Still, while heavily discounting all encomiums of himself, to be surrounded by so many of his children and children's children gave him the deepest satisfaction, and their heart-felt, tender attentions ever after lingered like sunshine in his soul.

But as the sun was going down, a cloud now and then stretched itself along the radiant horizon. Honest John lost, through an ill-starred enterprise, most of his hard-earned cash. It was no scheme of his own; he too generously loaned his money to help others. He gathered in a few fragments from the wreck, barely enough, with the strictest economy, to help him on to the end of his earthly journey. While this was a sore trial, he bore it with his accustomed silence. He did not live for the things of this world; he had "gold refined by fire" laid up in heaven. So in spite of his financial loss, he still was happy.

But a blacker cloud threw its shadow upon him. More than twenty years before, while watering some of his cattle at a well in one of his pastures, he was smitten down by an apoplectic stroke. He lay for a time insensible in the field. When he revived, he made his way, with staggering steps, to his farmhouse. He did not know what had befallen him. Accounting for his feeble, uncertain movements, he said that some one hit him with a club on the back of his head. In a few days he seemed quite well again, except that his memory was somewhat impaired. He now resumed his farmwork with his usual energy and push. But the insidious disease lurked in his muscular, sinewy body. It stealthily crept on its way, silently fastening its relentless grip on the whole nervous system. Honest John, by imperceptible stages, grew more and more forgetful. With sadness his most intimate friends noted the evidences of his bodily and mental decay. For a long time he was happily ignorant of his real condition. But at last he detected it. He discovered that within three hours he had told the same story twice over. This revelation nearly crushed his spirit. Strange as it may seem, this strong man firmly resolved that he would never speak again, except to conduct family worship. For three days he unswervingly carried out his purpose. Aunt Lucy was deeply grieved and greatly alarmed. She appealed for sympathy and help to a son-in-law in whom Mr. Erskine had great confidence. This son-in-law, coming to her aid, happily found his voluntarily-dumb father-in-law working alone in the orchard and began to talk to him. His words were effective. Honest John broke his silence by saying, " Three days ago I found myself telling the same story twice within a very short time and I determined, since I had become such a fool, that I would never talk to anybody again, but I see now how unwise I've been."

At times, just for a little while, he failed to recognize even his own children. Late one evening one of his sons came from his distant home to see him, but he did not know him. When at last it dawned upon him that the man who stood before him was really his son, he rose from his chair and in a courtly manner said: " My son, I beg your pardon; I never knew much, and what little I did know I seem to have forgotten; I wish you good night." And, as though ashamed, he at once betook himself to his chamber and bed.

Conscious now of his growing infirmity, he was in mortal dread lest some day he might forget to conduct family prayer. So he asked Aunt Lucy to enter into a covenant with him to have family worship the first thing after dressing in the morning, in order to make sure that this important duty and privilege should never be neglected. Rising usually at four o'clock in summer and at five in winter, they read the Bible and worshipped at the gray dawn. Whatever honest John might forget, he never once forgot to bow at the family altar. A rare man was he!

But he was quite unconscious of the full extent of his malady. What his friends clearly saw, he but dimly realized. At times as bright in intellect as in his best days, he not unnaturally concluded that he was fairly holding his own. But in fact, his nervous power was steadily declining. His sleep was light and fitful. He dreamed much, and his dreams to him were very real. While he slept his mind was specially active on religious subjects. One night, in a clear voice, he quoted Scripture, one passage after another, and when some verse specially pleased him, he clapped his hands, as men cheer the sentiment expressed by some public speaker. Aunt Lucy, a little anxious over his unwonted enthusiasm, woke him up. She told him of his unusual conduct and said to him, "I thought you were becoming a shouting Methodist." To which he replied: "Well, a man must express his feelings in some way."

Two or three nights afterwards he was again quoting Scripture in his sleep with even greater enthusiasm than before. When Aunt Lucy gently aroused him, he asked, "Where am I?" She told him where he was, and when at last fully conscious of his surroundings he said: "I thought that I was in the New Jerusalem, and if I were only there, I should never want anything more." The next day, when attempting to rise from his armchair, he fell heavily on the floor. His limbs no longer obeyed his will. Loving hands helped him to his bed, and within forty-eight hours he was "there." Aunt Lucy, who had been lovingly ministering to his wants, as earth was receding and the New Jerusalem was opening before him, said calmly when he had ceased to breathe, "Safe over Jordan at last!"

Friends and relatives from far and near crowded his house at the funeral hour; they dropped their silent tears on his grave; here and there in the mourning throng men said: "He was an honest man!" "He was a just man!" "He was a good man!" The Bible had been his great book. Two well-worn family Bibles have descended as heirlooms to his children. He had tested by experience the truths uttered by prophets, apostles and his Lord. He exemplified in his life the great requirement "to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God."

Aunt Lucy was left alone; still her oldest daughter, living in the adjoining house, faithfully and tenderly cared for her. One of her sons urgently entreated her to make her home with him, but she firmly refused to do so. She declared that as long as strength and reason lasted she would keep and direct her own house. Being more than threescore and ten, many regarded her as an old woman, but continuing strong in body and vigorous in mind, she had no consciousness of advancing age. She said, "I should never know that I was old if I didn't look in the glass." She diligently read the newspapers and kept abreast of all the political moves in the Republic and all the great religious enterprises throughout the world. She never spoke of the past unless somebody asked her pointblank about it, but was deeply interested in all that was going on in the world about her. She became acquainted with some of the young ladies of the Seminary, and two of them roomed in her house. She entered with zest into their affairs, helped them get ready for parties and the public exhibitions of their school. To accommodate an aspiring young artist, she posed for him as an old woman. The girls never ceased to sound her praises.

She was popular in the village. Many often ran in to have an hour's chat with her. She charmed them with the freshness of her thought and the brightness of her wit. One of her callers was an allopathic physician, who held her in high esteem. He came so often that he and she had become familiar friends, but one evening in his conversation he ventured on dangerous ground. He said, "Mrs. Erskine, I hear that you have a homeopathic physician." She courteously replied, "Yes, when I'm sick, I call a homeopathic doctor." He then went on to say, "I once, for three years, thoroughly examined the whole subject of homeopathy and came to the conclusion that it's a humbug." She quietly remarked, "You are not as smart a man as I thought." He, amused at her observation, asked, "Why not?" "Because," said she, "by your own confession, it took you three years to find out that a humbug is a humbug." Her shaft pierced but gave no pain, for the doctor shook with laughter.

Beginning to be troubled with deafness, she consulted her physician, who, after a careful examination, said that, in his judgment, nothing could restore her hearing and in all probability her deafness would grow worse and worse. Quick as a flash she replied: "All right, doctor, I've heard enough!"

Her eyesight also partially failed so that she found it difficult to read. Still able, however, to hear tolerably well in one ear, friends read the newspapers to her, so that she kept thoroughly posted on passing events. She also gave much time to silent thought. So great were her accumulated resources of mind and heart that she never felt lonely. I once met her at this period of her life. She made some shrewd criticisms on politicians and national politics, and then said that she had been thinking much on God's sovereignty and man's free agency. "This question," she asserted, "used to trouble me, but I see now how it is; it's plain enough when you take hold of it right." What her solution of it was I do not know, but it evidently satisfied her; and it was an inspiration to talk with a woman almost ninety years old, who was delving into this problem of the ages.

But her battle of life was about fought to a finish. She was suddenly seized with la grippe. With unruffled serenity she said, "This is my last illness." She was, however, still so vigorous in body and mind, that those most intimate with her thought that her notion of her approaching end was an illusion, born of the mental depression incident to the disease by which she was stricken. But, in spite of the skill of the physician and the assiduous efforts of her friends, she steadily grew worse. The day of her departure dawned. She said to those who watched at her bedside, "I wish now to pray and to pray aloud; I want no one to disturb me by coming into my room; I wish to be alone." Her request of course was granted; but the oldest daughter sat near the door of the room in which her mother lay and heard every petition that fell from her lips. She first prayed for her eight children, calling each in turn by name from the oldest to the youngest, telling the Lord all about them and praying importunately that each might be saved and guided by the Holy Spirit. Then she prayed for her grandchildren, presenting each by name to the Lord; after this for her friends and neighbors, and crowned her numerous petitions by pleading for the salvation of the whole world. Two hours were spent in this earnest, tender intercession, and the prayers of Aunt Lucy were ended.

She now called for her oldest daughter, with whom she had a final, heart-to-heart talk, saying, among other confidences, that, having done all she could for her children, she was perfectly content. A few minutes of calm, peaceful rest followed, when she suddenly sat up in bed, stretched out her hands before her, looked right ahead intently, and in a clear voice cried, "John, I'm coming." She lay back on her pillow, and in less than half an hour fell asleep as quietly as an infant sinks to slumber on its mother's breast.

In early life she was handsome, and now the beauty of her fresh womanhood, such as it was when she and John first met, came back to her face again, and a smile of ineffable sweetness lingered around her silent lips. The joy of meeting John once more had been caught, and was being held, in that winsome face of clay.

True love had bound their hearts in one. With the passing years it had grown broader, deeper, richer. John's death had but increased it. It could not be confined to the earth. It outlasted time. Across the gulf that separates two worlds one lover hailed the other with the glad words, "I'm coming." The love that began on earth goes on in heaven, and will go on, and on, and on forever.

All of Aunt Lucy that was mortal was tearfully borne from her door to the cemetery. Children and grandchildren, with loving hands and aching hearts, tucked mother and grandmother in her bed, beside that of her beloved John, for her last, long sleep. The slumber of these life-long lovers shall be unbroken till the voice of their Lord wakes them up in the morning of the resurrection.

How clearly all now saw that the clouds, which now and then stretched themselves athwart their western sky, had only made their sunset all the more resplendent.

ADDENDUM

The country neighborhood that I have tried to portray is a microcosm. The little world of my boyhood is a faithful miniature of the greater world of my manhood. There is not one among all my varied acquaintances in city and country, whose type is not readily found in the rural community where I was born and brought up. In it were some eccentric characters, that by their very oddity attracted more attention than all others; just as it is always and everywhere; but the rank and file of the neighborhood were a normal, every-day sort of folks, who, though they never specially caught and held the eye of the public, did most of the work on the farms and in the shops and gave to society a high moral tone; so it is also in all the world. There were some contemptible tricksters, foreshadowing the greater scoundrels of the twentieth century. There were a few that were admired and followed, not because they were peculiar, but on account of their genuine ability and spotless integrity; the counterpart of this I have found in every truly democratic community. Some were far from being models of morality, but even they were good in spots, and a few of them grew better as they grew older. The antitype of this also I have often seen in the wide world.

Then I gladly note the fact that the good of my country neighborhood far outweighed the bad; that if its goodness were put into one scale and its badness into the other, the latter would quickly kick the beam. Imperfect as all human organizations must be so long as their constituent units are imperfect, take the community of my boyhood as a whole, it largely possessed those humble but priceless virtues, that are both the foundation and glory of our Republic.

THE END.

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