More Good Times at Hackmatack

Mary P. W. Smith
End
With love and
a very happy
Christmas
From
Grandma.

Dec 25 - 1893 -
"Here’s some cup cakes I baked a purpose for you."
Page 52.
MORE GOOD TIMES

AT HACKMATAACK

BY

MARY P. WELLS SMITH

AUTHOR OF "JOLLY GOOD TIMES; OR, CHILD-LIFE ON A FARM," "JOLLY GOOD TIMES AT SCHOOL," "THE BROWNS," "THEIR CANOE TRIP," "JOLLY GOOD TIMES AT HACKMATAACK."

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PREFACE.

THIS book continues the story of child-life in one of the hill towns in western Massachusetts fifty or sixty years ago, as set forth in the first volume of "Jolly Good Times at Hackmatack," by the doings of Parson Strong's children and their friends. An effort has been made to present those "good old times" faithfully; still, some such unconscious anachronism may have crept in as an aged gentleman in Rowe, Massachusetts, discovered in the first volume. A niece read the book to him, of which he was pleased to express general approval, but added this criticism, —

"I should n't have thought she would have made them pop corn in a corn-popper; if she had said they popped it in the warming-pan or the old bake-kettle, it would have seemed more natural."

Alas, Uncle Solomon! hard indeed is it to prevent the corn-poppers of to-day from intruding into the tales of long ago.

Critics may deem my stories of the old New England life too optimistic. I can only say that,
like the impressionist, I paint it as I see it, or, rather, saw it. The typical New Englanders of my childhood were not the hard, narrow, sordid, pinched, morbid beings it seems to be the modern fashion to depict them. True, their limited means compelled hard work, close economy, careful expenditure, since every one was expected, as a matter of course, to support himself, to live within his means, and pay his debts honestly; but their hearts were warm, their hospitality generous, their feelings kindly, and their attachments deep, real, and strong, if not demonstrative. Children were brought up to mind, because it was right they should; and to work, both because their work was needed, and because industrious habits were felt to be the only guarantee of an honorable and successful future; but there was also much kindness and wise indulgence of young folk that warms to-day many a heart to the memory of old friends, long since passed away, but never to be forgotten. "England expects every man to do his duty," Nelson's watchword, was also the watchword of New England. To fear God, do your duty, tell the truth, and be industrious,—this was the New England ideal; and until we can replace it by a better, we can hardly afford to belittle it.

Reluctantly do I lay down the pen that has striven to make the old days live again, trusting,
as I do so, that, in the words of Whittier's "Snow Bound," —

"... haply, in some lull of life,
Some truce of God which breaks its strife,
The worldling's eyes shall gather dew,
    Dreaming in throngful city ways
Of winter joys his boyhood knew;
And dear and early friends — the few
Who yet remain — shall pause to view
    These Flemish pictures of old days;
Sit with me by the homestead hearth,
And stretch the hands of memory forth
    To warm them at the wood-fire's blaze!"

MARY P. WELLS SMITH.

AVONDALE, CINCINNATI, OHIO,
June 30, 1892.
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MORE GOOD TIMES
AT HACKMATACK.

CHAPTER I.

SPRING, AND NEW PLANS.

It was a Saturday morning in March. The warm spring sunshine was making the great snow-drifts on Hackmatack hills shrink and slowly melt away, running down into the many brooklets that wound through the valleys until they broke the rotten ice that bound them, and swept on, great muddy torrents, far over their banks, to swell the flood in the Ashuelot and Miller's rivers, and, finally, the Connecticut. The roads were almost impassable. There was neither wheeling nor sleighing,—only deep mud alternating with deeper drifts of slumping snow.

Becky and Dan were slowly plodding through the soft snow, up one of the highest hills on Grandma Bullard's farm. They were aiming toward the maple grove on its summit. Dan's cap was pushed far back on his head, and Becky's hood was untied;
and both were flushed and panting, for it was hard walking.

“What a great patch of bare ground!” said Becky, rejoicing as her feet touched the soggy soil. “Oh, how nice it is to see the ground again, and how sweet it smells! Doesn’t it smell springy to-day, Dan?”

“Yes,” said Dan, “and ’Rasmus declares he heard a robin early this morning. I guess he must have been mistaken. Maybe it was a bluebird. But I’m awful glad spring has come, anyway. Did you know, Becky, that they’re going to begin tearing down the old church in about two weeks?”

“Really, Dan?”

“Yes, certain sure. It’s all decided. Mr. Mosely was up to see Father about it yesterday. Father’s going to preach a farewell sermon about the old church two weeks from to-morrow.”

“But where are we going to meeting then?”

“Meeting’s going to be in the hall in the old tavern.”

“Oh, what fun!” cried Becky, who, like all children, liked change and novelty, and foresaw possibilities of amusement in “going to meeting” in the old tavern which the church had never afforded.

Now they plunged into the snow, that still lay a foot or two deep in the maple grove. Dan drew an old jackknife with a broken blade from his pocket, and bored a rough hole in the bark of a big maple. He and Becky watched the hole anxiously. Presently clear drops like water began slowly to trickle down.

“Hurrah! It runs!” cried Dan.
“How delicious it tastes!” said Becky, sucking the sweet sap from her finger tips.

“We must hurry right down and tell Uncle Zach,” said Dan.

Uncle Zach was at work in the barn, mending a harness. The great doors stood wide open, and the hens were straggling about in the square patch of sunshine that lay on the dusty floor, picking up stray oats. The frisky mare looked out of her stall, seeming so serene and gentle that a child might play with her. The cattle stood out in the barn-yard chewing their cuds with a peculiarly peaceful, dreamy look, as the warm sunlight gratefully penetrated their rough coats, apparently absorbed in visions of the green pastures and still waters of the coming summer.

Suddenly Dan and Becky came puffing and panting in. They had raced down as fast as the slumping snow allowed, each determined to get the “first tell” of the great news.

“The sap’s running, Uncle Zach!” they burst out together.

“You don’t say so!” said Uncle Zach, with remarkable calmness.

“Oh, yes, it’s running just like anything!”

“Well, if that’s so, we must see about tapping the trees, I guess.”

“Won’t you get down the troughs to-day, Uncle Zach?” urged Dan. “I’ll help you.”

“So will I,” said Becky.

The sap troughs were kept upstairs, in the wood-house chamber, and must be brought down and washed, ready for use on the next day.

As Becky was scrambling behind Dan up the
wood-house stairs, which were almost as steep as a ladder, unluckily for her Grandma Bullard came out into the wood-house.

"Becky Strong!" she exclaimed, "where under the canopy have you been? Your pantalets are sopping wet!"

Becky's pantalets, which came to her shoe tops, did indeed show but too plain traces of her recent struggle through the melting drifts.

"I've only been up to the maple orchard with Dan to see if the sap is running, and it is, Grandma, like everything, and Uncle Zach is going to tap the trees to-morrow!"

"Well, I never did!" said Grandma, quite unsoftened by this delightful piece of news. "Who would ever have thought of your traipsing way off up there through the snowdrifts? I supposed you were out at the barn all the time with your Uncle Zach. I don't know what your Grandma Strong will say, I'm sure. Come right into the kitchen and dry your pantalets the first thing you do."

"Oh, Grandma," cried Becky, in bitter disappointment, "can't I help get down the troughs?"

"No. Come right along into the kitchen this minute."

"Oh, dear," said Becky, bursting into tears, "I hate pantalets! I wish I were a boy!"

"Don't cry, Becky," said Grandma, whose government was a mild despotism tempered with cookies and doughnuts. "I'm baking cookies this morning, and here's one right out of the oven."

As Becky was very hungry after her scramble up hill in the fresh air; and as Grandma Bullard's
caraway-seed cookies were considered the choicest of delicacies by the children, her tears were soon dried, and she chatted merrily away while the hated pantalets, badge of her unfortunate sex, steamed dry before the big fire in the kitchen fireplace. She told Grandma the great news about the tearing down of the old church. Grandma was not so pleased as Becky thought she would be.

"Well, well," she said, sighing and shaking her head, "so the old church has got to go! Time the old folks went too, I guess, and left the coast clear for the smart young folks. Dear me, what a changing world this is!"

When Becky and Dan went home at night, they found 'Rasmus waiting for them at the gate, to tell them an even more exciting piece of news than the tearing down of the old church.

"You can't guess what Father is going to do," said 'Rasmus.

"What is it? What can it be?" cried Dan and Becky, seeing by 'Rasmus's manner that the matter was most interesting and important. "Do tell us, 'Rasmus."

"He's going to move our house up into the Centre!"

Dan and Becky were so overcome by this startling news that they hardly knew where to begin asking questions; but 'Rasmus adding, "He and Grandma are talking it all over now in the study," they hastened into the house to learn all about this exciting new plan.

When Mr. Strong had built his house, he had tried in vain to purchase land in the Centre, near the
Jolly Good Times at Hackmatack.

church. Old Mr. Harding, who owned the only unoccupied land there, stoutly refused to sell.

"I won't sell a rod of my home lot to the parson or any one else," the old gentleman had said.

So Mr. Strong had been forced to build his house on the turnpike almost a mile from the Centre. Since he had built, the turnpike had been altered, leaving Mr. Strong's house at the end of an unused road. All through the long winters he had to keep his own road open to the turnpike, unless the drifts were unusually heavy, when sometimes a corps of the men and boys of the parish came with ox-teams and broke out "the parson's road." It was extremely inconvenient, both for the people and the minister, to have him live so far from the Centre.

Mr. Harding had died, and Uncle Josiah Bullard had recently bought his place and moved into the village,—a change which delighted the children, especially Becky, who found in her cousin Sarah Jane a most acceptable comrade of her own age. Of course Uncle Josiah was glad to sell Mr. Strong the long-desired lot.

This lot ran back and joined Mr. Strong's land. What Mr. Strong now proposed was to move his house across lots up into the village, as soon as the state of the ground permitted, and this was the plan he and Grandma were now discussing in the study, with some excitement, it seemed, at least on Grandma's part. Her spectacles were pushed up into her cap ruffle, and she had drawn one needle out of her knitting work, never minding the dropped stitches, gesticulating emphatically with it as she argued with her son.
"I never heard tell of such a crazy piece of foolishness in my born days!" she exclaimed. "A wild goose proceeding, if there ever was one! I wonder at you, Erasmus, at your time of life. I should suppose you would have more sense. It can't be done."

"Mr. Mosely says it can, without difficulty, and without great expense. He will contract to do it."

"How's he going to move a great house like this, I should like to know?" asked Grandma, scornfully.

"Expects to hitch his old mare to it, I suppose, and trot off with it as easy as if it were a hen-coop!"

"He intends to cut the house in two."

"Cut it in two!" exclaimed Grandma in horror, rolling up her eyes as if she already beheld the familiar ceiling parting over her head.

"Yes. He will take the main part, the two-story part, first, then the ell, then the wood-house."

"Oh, what fun it will be!" said Becky.

"Won't it though?" said Dan, who saw visions of rides in the moving house, and all sorts of novel pleasures and excitements ahead.

"Fun!" said Grandma, "that's all children know about it. I don't know but if a hurricane struck this house and tore it all to pieces, you children would think it fun. But this moving business is going to be full as bad as any hurricane for us."

"Shall we live in the house while it is being moved, Father?" asked Becky.

"No; we shall take a few rooms in the old tavern, and move our things up there and stay till we can settle back in the house again."

"Yes," groaned Grandma, "if we ever are settled
again. Mark my words, Erasmus," she added solemnly, "if you undertake to move this house, you’ll be sorry for it. Let well enough alone, say I. We can go on living here just as well as we have all these years."

"Well, Mother," said Mr. Strong, "time will show who is right. The advantages of the change will be so great that I have made up my mind to try it; and I expect to live to see the day, Mother, when you will rejoice in it as much as any one of us."

Grandma made no reply. She thought of that verse in Proverbs, "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth to counsel is wise," and, but for the presence of the children, might have quoted it to her son. In the silence, the March wind wailing down the big chimney seemed a foreboding of coming evils to her. But soon her active, practical mind recovered its cheerfulness, and began to revolve plans for the future.

"If we've got to tear up and move," she said, "Lyddy Ann and I may as well go right to work and make soap as soon as we can. 'Rasmus, I want you to get the ashes out of the cellar and set the leach going right away. And Mrs. Dole told me yesterday that Eldad Hawks is going to butcher a beef creature next week. Their folks are going to take a quarter, and I guess, Erasmus, we’d better take one, and so lay in a good stock of corn-beef against the moving. Becky," continued Grandma, "you and Dan bring down the carpet rags. I guess we must have pretty near enough for a carpet; and if the house doesn’t all go to pieces carrying out your father’s moving scheme, I shall be glad of a new
carpet to put down in the keeping room when we settle again. The old one's most gone."

"Oh, dear, I'm sure I hope there's enough," said Becky.

Sewing carpet rags had been the burden of her young life for the past winter. It had seemed an endless task. Many an afternoon had her grandmother spent cutting up all sorts of old woollen garments into narrow strips, which Becky had to help sew together. Grandma Bullard had dropped in socially now and then of an afternoon and worked with them, her nimble fingers giving the work a great impulse. The result of all this industry was now displayed, as Dan and Becky brought down from upstairs a large basket full of great balls of the rolled-up strips, all colors of the rainbow, though dark hues predominated, the cast-off garments of the "men folks" having furnished the bulk of the material. But Grandma Bullard had contributed an old purple dress and some red flannel, from which fine effects were expected, and Grandma Strong had dyed some old sheets a brilliant orange, while a gay dress of Lyddy Ann's also made a good showing.

"I shouldn't be surprised if there was enough," said Grandma, surveying the balls critically. "I guess, Dan, you'd better take them up to Aunt Rhoda's this afternoon and see what she says to them. Everything we can get done before moving will be clear gain."

"Oh, can't I go too?" begged Becky. "I do love to go up to Aunt Rhoda's so much, and I haven't been for 'most a year."

"The travelling's very poor," said Mr. Strong,
“Becky’s worked real smart on the rags,” said Grandma, “and I think, Erasmus, she’s fairly earned the right to go. Old John hasn’t been used much since the travelling’s been so bad, and I guess he will take them up there all right, if you drive real slow and careful, Dan.”

“I can’t drive any other way now, if I try,” said Dan.

Becky spent the rest of the forenoon helping Grandma sew the balance of the rags with a light heart, glad that the tiresome task was really done at last, and joyous in the pleasant visit the afternoon promised.

Miss Rhoda Benson and her brother Apollos lived on a small farm about three miles from the Centre, on one of the highest, bleakest hills in town. They had been born on the stony little farm, and here their lives had been passed in a struggle to make both ends meet. Apollos was rather slow and easy-going, and his ways were sometimes felt to be a trial by his more energetic sister.

“’Pollos aint a mite forehanded,” she sometimes confided to Madam Strong. “He’s as slack and easy as an old shoe. There’s always ‘time enough,’ ’Pollos thinks. He’s always a sayin’ to me, ‘What’s the use of hurryin’ and tewin’ round so, Rhody? You ought to take it a little easier. The world wa’n’t made in a minit.’ Goodness knows if I did n’t tew round some, we’d both a ben in the poorhouse before this.”

But both Aunt Rhoda and Uncle ’Pollos, as every one in town called them, if they were poor, had been endowed by nature with cheerful, kindly dispositions
Spring, and New Plans.

that were fortunes in themselves. Everybody liked them, and they liked everybody. Especially was this true of all the children. Aunt Rhoda had a loom, and added to their small income by weaving rag carpets for her neighbors. She also went out spinning. Grandma Bullard, who always wove her own carpets, and spun her own yarn, and asked no help of any one, considered it a painful sign of the degeneracy of the times that so many people now hired their spinning.

"It's an awful shiftless way of doing, in my opinion," she was wont to say. "Girls aint brought up thorough as they used to be. Why, when I was young, every girl knew how to spin as much as she knew how to sew, and a girl wasn't thought fit to be married unless she had a good big pile of linen sheets and tablecloths and blankets made up, all of her own spinning and weaving, too. But, land's sakes, I dare say half the girls in Hackmatack now would n't know a flax wheel from a reel, if they saw them. Folks are getting afraid of hard work nowadays, I think. Shiftless doings, shiftless doings!"
CHAPTER II.

AUNT RHODA AND UNCLE 'POLLOS.

IMMEDIATELY after the twelve o'clock dinner, Dan and Becky set forth for Aunt Rhoda's, the balls of rags pinned up in an old sheet filling the whole front of the chaise. Old John, who had been shut up in the stable longer than usual, was in fine spirits, and bent himself to his task with cheerful alacrity. Now he sank down in the deep mud to the fetlocks, pulling his feet out again with some difficulty; now he splashed through slush, half snow, half water; now he slumped in melting drifts to his knees. Sometimes the drifts were so soft and deep that the fences each side of them were taken down, and Dan had to drive out into the adjacent fields around them.

But little cared the children if they did plod on but slowly, or if the old chaise did bob about like a ship on a stormy sea, lurching now this way, now that, and sometimes threatening to go over. The March sun shone down warmly on them, the March wind blew in their faces, and tousled old John's mane with blustering cheerfulness, and there was a feeling of coming spring in the brisk day that made them happy.
“Cyrus Dole was up at Uncle 'Pollos's last week,” said Dan, “and he says that Uncle 'Pollos has really broken in a pair of yearling calves so he can drive 'em just like oxen.”

“I don't believe it,” said Becky.

“It's so anyway, for Cyrus told me he drove them himself. Uncle 'Pollos has made a little yoke to just fit them. I hope he will let me drive them.”

“I hope Aunt Rhoda hasn't forgotten what she promised me,” said Becky. “She said the next time I came up, she would have some pieces of her mother's paduasoy wedding-dress hunted up for my new doll.”

They now began to ascend the long hill up which the road wound through thick woods, until it finally came out at Uncle 'Pollos's farm. The snow still lay quite deep in the woods, and was traced all over with the tracks of foxes and wild rabbits, zigzagging prettily about, clustering thickest around the hemlocks, whose low-drooping green boughs made warm sheltered nooks. It gave Dan a thrill only to see a fox track running across the road.

“My, wouldn't I just like to be up here at night!” he said. “Things must go on lively here then. Just see how thick the tracks are.”

“It seems as if there were a fox or rabbit village here,” said Becky, “and as if these were the streets where the people go about their business. How cunning they must look, jumping about in the moonlight!”

“When I'm in the woods,” said Dan, “I often think of the old Sheomet Indians that used to be so
plenty around here. I wished they lived here now, — it would be so exciting."

"I don’t wish so," said Becky. "I don’t see how women ever had the courage to live here when it was all wilderness. Grandma told me a true Indian story this morning when I was sewing."

"What was it?" asked Dan, who, lying lazily back in a sunny corner of the chaise, leaving old John to pick out his own way, felt in a mood to be entertained.

"It was about the romantic wedding of one of our own ancestors, way, way back,—Ebenezer Strong. He was one of the very first settlers in Ashfield and a Baptist preacher. He was engaged to a very nice girl named Remember Ellis, and of course they wanted to be married."

"Well," said Dan, "why didn’t they get married then? That seems very simple."

"Why, there wasn’t any minister then in Ashfield except Ebenezer himself, and the nearest minister was Parson Ashley in Deerfield, about twelve miles away. There was no road, of course,—only a rough bridle path through the thick woods, marked by blazed trees. It was during the French and Indian War, and the woods were often full of savage Indians. In spite of the danger, they finally decided they must run the risk of going to Deerfield to be married, as there was no other way. Ebenezer took Remember behind him on his horse, and his old father, Chileab, who was a very resolute, determined man, rode before them on another horse with his gun, to guard them from the Indians. I suppose Ebenezer had a gun too. So they rode through the woods. How they
must have strained their eyes and ears at the least sound, and how Remember's heart must have beat if a branch rustled or a twig cracked, expecting to see a horrible Indian spring out on them! I guess she kept tight hold of Ebenezer!"

"Well," said Dan, expectantly, "what happened to them then?"

"Nothing. They were married all right, and made their wedding journey safely back, without even seeing an Indian, and lived to a good old age."

"Pshaw!" said Dan. "I supposed at least one or two of them were killed."

"If they had been, we shouldn't have been here now," said Becky.

"Why, yes, we should too," said Dan, unable to lose a sense of his own identity, even in imagination.

"Some one might have been here," said Becky, "but it wouldn't have been us exactly."

"Well, we're here now, anyway," said Dan. "What's more, here we are at Uncle 'Pollos's at last."

They drove into the yard of a little, black, story-and-a-half house, with a sloping, moss-covered roof coming almost to the ground in the rear, and a tall well-sweep near the side door. Through the kitchen window, Becky caught a dissolving view of Aunt Rhoda, who peeped out, dodged back, peeped cautiously out again, and then emerged on the broad, flat door-stone, beaming with smiles.

"Well, I never did!" she exclaimed, "if it aint you, Becky Strong! How d'ye do, Daniel? I'm proper glad to see ye both. When I first see the shay and old John a drivin' into the yard, I wuz all took
a back; thought maybe it wuz the parson and madam a comin' to call, ketchin' me in all my old duds. The goin's so bad I wa'n't expectin' no one to­
day, and I've ben jest a drivin' business. You'II have to take me jest as you find me. Come right
along in. I see you've brought the rags for the
new carpet. Bring 'em in, Dan, and I'll look 'em
over.”

Dan, having deposited the rags on the kitchen
table, asked, “Where's Uncle 'Pollos?”

“Oh, out to the barn, putterin' round about some­
thing or other. You’ll find him out there somewhere.
But won’t you have a piece of warm gingerbread,
Daniel? I've jest took a pan out of the oven, and
I'm sure you and Becky must be hungry after your
long ride.”

Any mortal boy or girl who smelt Aunt Rhoda’s
warm gingerbread would have been hungry imme­
diately; so it is no wonder Dan affably accepted a
huge chunk, and walked off munching it to the barn,
while Becky ate hers with much satisfaction, as Aunt
Rhoda examined the rag balls with the critical eye
of an artist.

“You can tell your grandma, Becky,” she said,
“that I think she's got a plenty of rags here for her
keepin' room carpet, and maybe a strip over, to lay
down where the travel's hardest on't. They're nice
rags, too. That purple'll stripe in real handsome.
Tell her I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it turned
out one of the prettiest carpets I ever wove. I'll go
right at it as soon as I git Miss Pratt's out of the
loom.”

Aunt Rhoda, leaving her spinning wheel to stand
idle, now took up her knitting work, and settled down to enjoy her visitor.

"Well," she said, "what's the news? What's goin' on down at the Centre? I haint ben out anywhere, I don't know when, and nobody's ben in, and me and 'Pollos is clear behind the times, don't know what is a happenin'."

Becky was happy in having two such exciting items to relate as the intended moving of her father's house, and the tearing down of the old church. Aunt Rhoda gave vent to a fire of "Dew tells," "You don't say so's," and "I never dids," highly gratifying.

"I don't blame your grandma a mite," she said. "I should feel jest so if I wuz in her place. It's a resky thing to do. And so the old meetin'-house's got to go at last! It makes me feel kinder bad, I must say, though I ain't so set agin it as sum folks. I've ben to meetin' there all my life, and my father and mother before me, and Father's funeral wuz 'tended there. Seems as if a part o' me had gone into those old walls. Mother used to tell about my bein' took to meetin' to be baptized the next Sunday after I wuz born. It was a bitin' cold day in January, and the parson's hands were so blue with cold that Father said he expected I would squall right out in meetin', sartain sure. But I didn't,—wuz as good as a kitten. Well, I've ben a goin' to meetin' a good many years in that old house sence that first time. It's terrible cold in the winter season. Seems as if I should freeze sometimes, spite of my foot-stone, and I start off so chilled to ride up onto the hill that I often expect to get my death o' cold. I s'pose it's really best to have a new meetin'-house, but it duz
kinder stir me up to see the old one tore down. Me
and 'Pollos must be sure to git down to hear the
parson’s farewell sermon, goin’ or no goin’. Lucky
you cum up, or maybe we would n’t have heard a word
on’t till ’twuz all over, we live way off up here so
in the woods, like a couple of old chipmunks. Have
your folks hearn tell about me and 'Pollos losin' the
day of the week?" 

“No,” Becky said, wondering what Aunt Rhoda
could mean.

“Well, I’m glad on ’t. I ’spected it’d be all over
town before this. If it gits round to Parson Strong’s
ears, I want him to know the rights on ’t, so I’ll tell
you all about it. You see week before last it wuz
sech miserable weather, and 'Pollos and me both had
colds, we did n’t stick our noses out-doors hardly, and
the goin’ ’s so poor, no body cum in. Then I baked
bread a Thursday 'stead o' Wednesday, as usual, and
that kinder threw me out. One day’s pretty much
like another up here, anyway. It wuz partly 'Pollos’s
fault, too. After his cold broke up, I kep’ a tryin’
to start him out. I sez, ‘'Pollos, dew for pity’s
sake muster up snap enough to git down to the
Centre, and go to the post-office, and borrow the last
"Boston Weekly Messengers" of Squire Drake, and
find out what’s a goin’ on in the world.’ But I
couldn’t stir him. He said, ‘Wait a while, there
wa’n’t no hurry about it; soon ’s he got enough corn
thrashed, he’d go down to mill.’ Well, Saturday, as
I s’posed it wuz, I got up earlier than usual, and I
wuz bound to put things through that day, you ’d
better believe. I never felt more drivin’ in my life.
I hed 'Pollos churn, and after the butter cum I
worked it, and then I spun up a good lot of rolls, and then I set down by the winder where I could see the passin' and went to sewin' on sum shirts I was makin' for 'Pollos. 'Pollos he went out to the corn-house and was makin' the flail fly pretty lively for him. I noticed more teams than usual a drivin' past. The folks seemed to be all dressed up, and I kep' a wonderin' who wuz dead, thinkin' there must be sum funeral I had n't heard tell on.

"Well, 'long 'bout noon, who should cum a drivin' into the yard but Deacon and Miss Totman. I hed n't seen no one for sech an age, I wuz terrible glad to see 'em, and I brought 'em right in here where I was a sewin'.

"'Noticin' you and 'Pollos wa'n't at meetin' to-day, we thought we would jest call in and see if you wuz sick,' sez the deacon, sez he.

"'Who's dead?' sez I.

"'Dead?' sez the deacon, a starin' at me as if he thought I'd gone crazy as a loon. 'Why, no one, as I knows on.'

"'What's a goin' on at the meetin'-house then?' sez I.

"'Why, it's Sunday, it's meetin',' sez Miss Tot-
man, who spied my sewin' and began to mistrust how the land lay.

"My, wasn't I dumfoundered? 'Fore I said an-
other word, I dashed out o' the room like mad, —'spect the deacon did think I had gone ravin' dis-
tracted then, but there wa'n't no time to be lost ex-
plainin', —and I jest put her for the corn-house, where 'Pollos wuz hard at work a thrashin', lookin' so sort o' peaceful and satisfied. He wuz gittin' ahead
better 'n usual. You ought to have seen him when I bust in on him like a whirlwind, and sez, —

"'For mercy's sake, 'Pollos Benson, stop that thrashin' this minit! It's Sunday, and the folks are a drivin' by from meetin'!'

"'Pollos stood stock-still, with his flail up, for 'bout a minit, 'fore he sensed my meanin,' as if he'd turned into a pillar of salt like Lot's wife. He don't often use strong language, but he did bust right out then and say 'I vum!' Then he and I went into the house, and explained it all to the deacon and Miss Totman. Miss Totman she laughed as if she'd die, and the corners of the deacon's mouth twitched sum, if it was Sunday. Why, besides all the rest I'd done, I'd half made a shirt for 'Pollos, and he'd thrashed out so much corn that he went down to mill the next day."

Becky thought this very funny, and laughed a good deal at Aunt Rhoda's mistake.

"That wa'n't the end on't," continued Aunt Rhoda. "Tuesday mornin', bright and early, who should cum a drivin' up the hill but Abner Plunkett, lookin' as solemn and important as a judge. It seems he'd took it into his head that it wuz his dooty as tithin'-man to drive up here and inquire into the bizness. The Plunketts allers wuz puffed up with conceit, — it runs in the blood, so they can't help it, I s'pose, — and Abner's the worst o' the lot sence he wuz 'lected tithin'-man. When he made known his errand, I wuz so mad I couldn't speak for a minit, and even 'Pollos got riled up for once. He bust right in, before I could git started, and he sez, sez he,
"'Abner Plunkett, I wuz born right here, and here I've lived, man and boy, goin' on nigh seventy year, and my walk and conversation's tolerably well known in Hackmatack by this time, I guess. Folks won't think me and Rhody's set up for Sabbath breakers in our old age, I guess, and you've no call to interfere or make any fuss.'

"Abner began to stammer forth something about it's bein' his dooty as tithin'-man; but then I bust in, and sez, —

"'Abner Plunkett, I knowed you 'fore you were born, I might say. I tied your first cap on your head when you wuz took to the meetin'-house the first Sunday in your life to be baptized. The idee of a boy like you (he aint forty yit), a darin' to cum up here to discipline me and 'Pollos for Sabbath-breakin' that wuz members in good and regular standin' long before you wuz born!'

"I wuz a goin' to continuer my remarks, but Abner didn't wait to hear no more. He whipped up his horse, and put her as if he'd ben sent for. 'Pollos declares he's goin' to make a chalk mark on the corn-house door, — short ones for week-days, and long ones for Sundays, — so's not to git took in so agin. I keep the 'Farmer's Almanac' handy, and look at it pretty often, you may depend on 't. And now I'll git down my piece-bag, and see if I can find some pretty pieces for that new doll Daniel brought you from Boston. I want to see it. I hear tell it's a perfect beauty."

After the piece-bag had been successfully rummaged, Becky went out to the barn, carrying two big golden-brown russet apples. She found Dan "geeing"
Jolly Good Times at Hackmatack.

and "hawing" the yoked calves about the barn-yard smartly, while Uncle 'Pollos seemed engaged in training a half-grown bay colt. He had a halter around the colt's neck, and a folded blanket on her back, and was leading her about, talking to and patting the pretty creature, as graceful and nearly as wild as a deer.

"Cum here, Becky," said Uncle 'Pollos, "and I'll give you a leetle hossback ride."

"I'd love to ride her," said Becky, "but her eyes are so bright, and her ears stick up so, and she looks so gay, I'm almost afraid."

"You need n't be scared a mite," said Uncle 'Pollos. "She's used to bein' handled. She's as gentle as a kitten."

"I'll ride her," said Dan.

"No," said Uncle 'Pollos, "you're too heavy. Becky's jest about the right heft. Cum here and git acquainted with her first, Becky."

Under Uncle 'Pollos's directions, Becky talked to the colt, and patted her, and fed her an apple. Then from a rocky ledge, — plenty of which protruded from the soil around Uncle 'Pollos's, — with some affectation of shying on the colt's part, and many a "Sho now!" "Stand still, Nanny, that's a lady!" from Uncle 'Pollos, Becky was finally mounted on the colt's back. Nanny held her head very high, her eyes flashed nervously and her ears played back and forth more restlessly than ever; but she suffered herself to be led all around the yard with Becky on her back, equally to the delight of Becky and Uncle 'Pollos.

"That's what I call eddicatin' a colt," said Uncle
Aunt Rhoda and Uncle 'Pollos.

'Pollos, with great satisfaction. "Critters can be eddicated, same 's folks. It jest makes my blood bile, the way sum folks treat a hoss. They take the most spirited, high-strung, narvous critter God ever made, — 'cept a woman,— and scare it and whip and lash it till the poor thing 's half crazy with fright and pain, and then they lash it sum more for actin' bad, and call that ' breakin' ' a hoss! Why, my hosses jest grows up broke, and they 're as sensible and reason­able as folks is. I can manage 'em with a word, 'cause they 've allers been treated kind, and their reason 'pealed to, and that makes 'em reasonable critters. I guess you 'd better git down now, Becky, but I 'll give you a longer ride next time you cum."

The colt being let loose, as having been sufficiently educated for that day, Becky turned her attention to a large yellow cat which came out of the barn, and which received her attentions with affable condescension.

"Now, there 's cats," said Uncle 'Pollos; "sum folks sez cats haint got no sense, and you can't teach 'em nothin', and I don't know what all. First, they starve 'em, and then say they 're sly, thievin' critters, 'cause the poor dumb things eat whatever they can find. Fact is, most folks don't know nothin' 'bout a cat 's natur'. Cats is shy, timid critters, and you 've got to treat 'em well, or you don't find out what 's in 'em. Did you ever see Tabby jump? No? Cum here, Tabby."

Uncle 'Pollos clasped his hands, and holding his arms down like a hoop before the cat, said, "Jump, Tabby."
Tabby, grown somewhat fat and lazy, stuck her ears back, and was reluctant to show her accomplishment; but on Uncle 'Pollos's saying again, "Jump, Tabby! jump, I tell ye," she sprang through the hoop twice, to the admiration of the children.

"I didn't suppose you could teach a cat tricks," said Dan.

"You can teach most any critter tricks if you're kind to 'em, and take pains enough," said Uncle 'Pollos, stroking Tabby's sleek sides. "Tabby can open a door jest as easy as I can; jest stands up on her hind legs and presses her paw on the latch."

"I'm going to teach Snoozer to do those tricks," said Becky. "But oh, Dan, look, the sun's setting! We ought to be going home."

"The sun gits down pretty early this time o' year up here," said Uncle 'Pollos. "Cum summer, it gits more to the north'ard of Mount Zoar, and then the days are so long that me and Rhody never think o' lightin' a candle unless it's to git up by, in hayin' time. But I s'pose you'd better be a goin'; the travellin's so poor, you want to git down the hill before dark."

"Are you coming down to March meeting, Uncle 'Pollos?" asked Dan, as he and Becky climbed into the chaise.

"Oh, yes, I'll have to, I s'pose. They couldn't manage the town bizness without my help, I 'spect," said Uncle 'Pollos, laughing at his own wit.

"Cum up and see us agin pretty soon," said both Aunt Rhoda and Uncle 'Pollos, as they stood on the flat door-stone and watched the children drive out of the yard.

"We will," said Dan and Becky. Not only had
they enjoyed themselves, but they knew that their visit had brightened up their old friends and made them happy, too. It was so late when they reached home that Grandma was moved to say, —

"I didn't know but you were waiting for Aunt Rhoda to weave the carpet!"

But when she heard Aunt Rhoda's bright prophecies of the new carpet's splendors, she was pleased, and said,—

"The keeping-room will look real nice, — that is, if we have any keeping-room left to put it in. I don't know what shape we shall be left in, after this moving business is over, I'm sure. We shall drive our sheep to market, and come back shorn, I'm afraid."
CHAPTER III.

SPRING WORK AND FUN.

The next morning, Dan went up to help his Uncle Zach tap the maple-trees. Dan and 'Rasmus often worked for Uncle Zach, who, having no boy of his own, was glad to pay his nephews for their services,—partly to encourage them in industrious, money-earning, and saving habits, and partly on his own account.

"There are some things on a farm that a boy can do better than a man," Uncle Zach sometimes said, "and it's cheaper than hiring a man."

It was always understood that the boys' services belonged to Uncle Zach when they were not needed at home. Dan asked no better fun than helping Uncle Zach in sugar time. They set forth with the ox-sled loaded high with sap-troughs, the strong oxen patiently tugging along, now pulling the sled across patches of bare ground, now plunging half way to their bodies in soft snow.

"You must be quite a capitalist, Dan, by this time, I should suppose," said Uncle Zach, as they walked beside the oxen. "What are you going to do with your money?"

"I lend it to Father," said Dan, "and he gives me his note for it, and is going to pay me six per cent interest."
"That's right," said Uncle Zach.

"I mean to buy a flute with it as soon as I save enough," continued Dan. "I guess I shall have enough saved up by fall."

"A flute? Sho!" said Uncle Zach, who had no music in his soul. "I would n't waste my money on any such nonsense as that. You 'd a good deal better put it in the Franklin Savings Institution over in Greenfield. You '11 get compound interest there. It will be growing while you are a-sleep, and if you let it alone and keep adding to it, you '11 have a nice little nest-egg there by the time you come of age."

The idea of the future "nest-egg" did not loom up nearly so tempting to Dan as did the present flute.

"No," he said, "I 'd a great deal rather have the flute. You 've no idea how bad I want one, Uncle Zach."

"Well," said Uncle Zach, "I guess you 're your mother 's own boy, only it 's broken out in you in a new spot. Remember was all for painting, and you are all for music. I 'm sorry for it. Too much music spoils a man, in my opinion. I don 't know how you will turn out, I 'm sure."

One may well wonder what fun Dan found in tugging about the heavy sap-troughs, helping prop them up firm and level with stones from the neighboring wall, while his uncle bored holes in the trees, and stuck in the spouts. But was not all this in preparation for the joys of sugar-making?

"It 's a grand sap day," said Uncle Zach. "There '11 be a big run to-day."
“I’ll be up early to-morrow to help gather it,” said Dan.

But the morning brought only disappointment to Dan. That night the wind howled and moaned down the chimneys, and the fire sputtered, and Grandma said,—

“The fire says snow.”

“Snow!” exclaimed Dan, in great disgust.

“Oh, dear,” said Becky, “what a shame! There’s so much bare ground, and it was getting settled. I do want spring to come, so I can go to the woods for wild-flowers.”

“It’s too early for settled spring yet,” said Grandma. “The winter always hangs on late, and keeps coming back, when you are sure it’s gone for good. We have to be patient, and wait the good Lord’s time. I don’t know any other way.”

The next morning, sure enough, the snow was falling fast in great wet flakes, accumulating to the depth of a foot by noon, when it stopped, the clouds broke and rolled away, and the sun shone brightly out on the wintry-looking landscape. After making the home paths, ’Rasmus and Dan went up to Grandma Bullard’s.

“Just in time, boys,” said Uncle Zach, whom they met at the back-door, his trousers tucked into his boot-legs. “You can go round with me and help empty the snow out of the sap-troughs.”

“Wasn’t it a shame to have this snow come now?” asked Dan.

“Why, no, I don’t know as it was,” said Uncle Zach. “This is a regular sugar snow. It will be a great sap day to-morrow.”
"Grandma calls this snow the poor man's manure," said 'Rasmus.

"Yes, that's so," said Uncle Zach. "These late snows do enrich the earth, and start the grass. And they rot the old snow, and help carry it off. Yes, it's a good thing."

So Dan learned that the weather was managed wisely, for the good of all, even if contrary to his ideas. The next morning the boys were on hand early, riding around on the ox-cart with Uncle Zach, helping him gather the sap in two large barrels that stood on the cart. Every night, their boots were so wet that it would have been impossible to get them on the next morning, had not the boys swabbed them well with a concoction of tallow, lampblack, and rosin. Even then they were stiff and hard, painful to wear for a while. But who minds suffering in a good cause?

The sugar season now began in good earnest, and Uncle Zach's sap-house became a popular place of resort, not only for the Strong children, but for others of their boy and girl friends who were not so fortunate as to own an Uncle Zach. 'Rasmus, Becky, and Dan went up daily to "help" Uncle Zach sugar off. Each day they ate so much warm sugar, waxing it on the big snow-bank still left north of the sap house, that they went home cloyed, feeling that they never wanted to see maple sugar again. But the next day they returned to the attack as fresh as ever. By the end of March they were sufficiently sweetened for a whole year,—a fortunate thing, as maple sugar was almost the only "goody" known to the children. Candy they seldom had, or even saw; bananas
were then unknown in the north, oranges were a very semi-occasional luxury, as were figs, raisins, and nuts, except those of home growth, and ice-cream had never been heard of.

When the lye running from the big barrel of ashes was found strong enough to bear up an egg, Grandma Strong announced herself ready to begin making soft soap. Making soap was regarded as a sort of picnic by the children, and they were always on hand to help. It was so delightful to be doing anything out doors again, after being shut up in the house all winter. In the chip-yard near the back-door, 'Rasmus and Dan built a roaring fire of their old foes, the sturdy knots that had stoutly withstood all their best efforts with saw and axe. Each side of the fire was driven into the ground a stout stick with a crotched top. From the pole which rested across these crotches hung a huge iron kettle, in which the fat, bones, and lye were boiling briskly, on their way to become soap under the skilful supervision of Grandma and Lyddy Ann. Grandma had on an old quilted brown silk hood of the musk-melon variety, — a sort of war helmet that she always wore in soap-making, house cleaning, and other domestic crises. When Grandma donned the musk-melon hood, it was always understood in the family that matters had to go briskly.

Lyddy Ann, who freckled, in deference to the warm sun and the March wind had a green gingham sunbonnet tipped down over her nose, — the stiffly starched cape standing up behind in a warlike manner. The wind blew hard. Snoozer, who liked to lend a helping hand in whatever was going on, was
rambling about, and ventured around the corner of the shed. The wind pounced fiercely on him, blowing him sidewise.

"See Snoozer," said Dan, as Snoozer beat a hasty retreat to the more sheltered spot by the fire, the wind merrily pursuing him, and blowing his tail over his back.

"'He spreads his sail, And down he bears before the gale.'"

"Don't laugh at the poor old fellow," said Becky.

Grandma and Lyddy Ann were bending anxiously over the kettle, stirring its contents with a long pole, the smoke blowing wildly around them in blue clouds.

"'Pears to me, Mis' Strong, it needs jest a grain more lye," said Lyddy Ann.

"I think you are right," said Grandma. "It doesn't look to me as if it were coming yet."

Dan burst out laughing.

"Grandma," he said, "you and Lyddy Ann look for all the world just like the witches over their caldron in 'Macbeth,'—

"'Double, double, Toil and trouble,'"

continued Dan, in a sepulchral tone, seizing the pole with a tragic air, and flopping it around so vigorously that he nearly tipped over the kettle.

"For the land's sake, Dan Strong," cried Lyddy Ann, "give me that pole this minit, and git out of the way with your nonsense. See what you are doin'. You'd a good deal better go and help 'Rasmus
sprout the potatoes, than be botherin’ the lives out of us.”

“Grandmother said I might help a little while first,” said Dan. “Let me stir it. I’ll be just as careful. Making soap always makes me feel like Robinson Crusoe, or the Swiss Family Robinson, or some of those folks that always lived out-doors and had a good time.”

“Yes, I think so, too,” said a voice from the other side of the fire.

“Becky Strong! What are you up to, I should like to know?” asked Grandma, peering through the smoke at Becky, who was squatting down, almost in the fire.

“I’m only poking chips in under the fire to make it burn faster,” said Becky, pleasing herself by waving a blazing chip about.

“The blaze is blowing right that way,” said Grandma, “and the next thing you know, your apron will catch fire, and then there’ll be a pretty how-d’ye-do.”

“Anything but a lot of children round under foot when you’re a tryin’ to work, say I,” said Lyddy Ann, with emphasis.

“You’re awful glad to have us bring you wood, and pick up chips for you, all the same, Lyddy Ann,” said Dan.

“It would be a pity if you wa’n’t of some use, once in a while,” replied Lyddy Ann.

Here a diversion was made by the stopping of a tinner’s cart before the house. It bristled with brooms, and the bright new tins hanging from its sides glistened like silver in the sunshine. ’Bijah
Goodell's red pedlar's cart and bony old white horse were known all over the country round, and their appearance was one of the unfailing signs of spring. 'Bijah, a thin, shrewd-looking, long-legged Yankee of the Yankees, slowly uncoiled his length of limb from his perch in front of the cart, and came back toward the group by the fire.

"Good-mornin', Madam Strong. Good-mornin', Lyddy Ann," he said. "Wall, I see you're as drivin' as ever; no grass a growin' under your feet. You always take time by the forelock. D'ye want to trade to-day?"

"Why, yes," said Grandma, "I'd be glad to if I can spend time. I wasn't looking for you quite yet."

"Oh, I always cum 'bout the time the robins do, you know, and the spring's a cumin' along pretty lively this year."

"Lyddy Ann, you bring out the rag-bags," said Grandma, "and go out and do the dickering. I can't leave this soap. Be sure to get a new dish-pan."

But after Lyddy Ann had gone out to the cart, Grandma began to have some misgivings.

"I don't know," she said, "I guess I'd best go out and see to it myself. 'Bijah's so sharp on a bargain, like's not he'll get the better of Lyddy Ann."

Calling 'Rasmus, as the most careful and trustworthy person near at hand, — 'Rasmus needing no urging to come up out of the cellar and forego sprouting potatoes for a season, — with many cautions and injunctions Grandma intrusted the soap-kettle to his care, while she went out to the cart to try to drive a
bargain with 'Bijah, followed by Dan and Becky, who always liked to hang around 'Bijah's cart. Dan climbed up on it and peeped into some of the mysterious little doors, and sat down on the seat in front, playing "be 'Bijah," his handling of the reins not disturbing in the least the deep nap into which the old horse always fell during a "trade." Becky admired the red cart and the new glittering tins, and wanted them, one and all. There was an attractive halo of travel and adventure about 'Bijah to the children. He spent his time riding to and fro in the land on this shining equipage, and always knew all that was going on, far and near.

"Parson's goin' to move his house up into the Centre, folks say?" he asked.

"Why, yes, I suppose so," admitted Grandma, reluctantly.

"And you're really a goin' to build a new meetin'-house, at last? Wall, wall, Hackmatack's always up to the times. I always tell folks where I go, 'You've got to git up mighty early in the mornin' if you're a goin' to git ahead of Hackmatack folks. Smart folks over in Hackmatack.'"

As he discoursed, Bijah had been weighing the rags,—first the white ones, then the colored,—with an air of fairness and judicial exactness becoming the importance of the transaction, while Grandma and Lyddy Ann looked on anxiously. Then he figured a little on a scrap of paper with a stump of a lead pencil.

"Thirty-seven and a half cents is jest what them rags cums to," he said. "But I don't mind stretchin' a p'int, seein' it's you, Madam Strong. Call it
thirty-eight cents,” he added, with an air of reckless generosity.

“Thirty-eight cents!” exclaimed Grandma and Lyddy Ann, glancing in dismay at the big piles of rags, — the thrifty savings of a whole winter.

“Thirty-eight cents for all those rags?”

“Yes,” said 'Bijah. “That’s really more ’n I can afford to pay, as rags is goin’ now; but seein’ you are kinder old friends, I want to do the best I can by you.”

“How much is that dish-pan?” asked Grandma.

“Forty cents,” said 'Bijah, firmly.

“Seems to me that’s very high,” said Grandma.

“I don’t think I ever paid so much as that for one.”

“High!” exclaimed 'Bijah. “Why, jest look at that pan, the very best block-tin that’s made. It’ll wear out half-a-dozen of your little thin, tinned-over pans, sech as sum folks carry. But I always like to give my customers the worth of their money.”

Grandma looked again at her great pile of rags, then at the pan, and tried to persuade 'Bijah to make an equal exchange.

“Sorry, Madam Strong,” said 'Bijah, “but I can’t do it. Fact is, tin’s a risin’ like everything, and I expect I’ll have to git forty-five cents for a pan like that, next time I cum along. Better make sure of it now.”

“I declare, Madam Strong,” spoke up Lyddy Ann, “I would n’t do no sech thing. We can git the old one mended again, before payin’ sech a price as that.”

“Wall, now, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said 'Bijah. “You pay me ten cents besides the rags, and I’ll throw in this cooky-cutter, and this little
tin cup for Becky here. That’s a bargain, if there ever wuz one. I’m a losin’ money on it though, I can tell you.”

The tin cup was painted blue, and had “For a Good Girl,” inscribed on it in gilt letters.

“Oh, do! do take it, Grandma,” begged Becky.

So the bargain was finally concluded, and Becky skipped joyfully away with the dear little cup, while ’Bijah climbed up on his cart, saying to Dan, who was coming down rather reluctantly, foreseeing a vista of potato-sprouting looming before him for the rest of the morning, —

“Dan, you’d better go round with me and learn the bizness. There’s money in it. All the women aint so sharp on a bargain as your grandmother here. I shall want to sell out one of these days, and it’s goin’ to be a good chance for some likely young feller with brains in his head.”

“I should like to,” said Dan; “but I’ve about decided to go to college. Father wants me to.”

“Wall, the parson’s in the right on’t. There’s nothin’ like a good eddication. I’ve took to studyin’ some this winter myself, when trade wuz slack.”

“What were you studying?” asked Dan, surprised.

“French,” said ’Bijah, with the modest bearing of one who will not assume the airs to which he might be justly entitled.

“French!” exclaimed Dan, still more surprised.

“Yes. You see there wuz a family over in Greenfield a breakin’ up and movin’ away, who sold me a lot of truck, and ’mongst it wuz a lot of old school-books, a French dictionary and grammar ’mongst the rest. I always did think I should admire to know
the French language, so I felt this wuz a chance not to be lost. I pegged away at it evenin's all winter, and now I can 'parley vooz' like a regular 'monseer.'"

"But how do you know how to pronounce it?" asked Dan, who had understood that there were some difficulties attending the pronunciation of the French language.

"I pronounce it jest as it's spelt," said 'Bijah, firmly. "I guess we know ez much about right pronouncin' ez enny of them ignorant foreigners way off there acrost the water. Good American pronouncin' is plenty good enough for me. Wall, I must be a movin' on. Good-by, Dan. Git a good eddication. You'll never be sorry for it."

And 'Bijah "g'langed" the old horse, who awoke, picked up his feet, and scuffled off down the road, raising a thick cloud of dust that soon hid 'Bijah and the red cart from Dan's lingering gaze,—lingering not so much from love of 'Bijah, as from a desire to postpone the evil day of potato-sprouting.

About this time occurred an incident which may or may not have been connected with the prosperous maple-sugar season at Uncle Zach's. Grandma Strong traced the connection most satisfactorily to her own mind, but Dan was not able to see it so clearly. Dan began to be tormented with a raging toothache. After onion poultices and all other known domestic remedies had been tried on it with only temporary relief, Grandma Strong said,—

"You may just as well go to Dr. Robbins first as last, Dan, and have that tooth out. It will plague you till you do."
There being no dentists in those days, physicians were expected to keep a few primitive instruments and perform all the dentistry that was done, which consisted simply in extracting teeth when they ached beyond further endurance.

After considerable urging and advising by the whole family, and after passing two sleepless nights with his aching tooth, Dan was finally induced to visit Dr. Robbins. Dan devoutly hoped the doctor would be out; but he was in, and greeted him with what Dan felt most ill-timed, not to say disgusting, briskness and cheerfulness.

"Why, good-morning, Dan! Fine morning this. What can I do for you to-day?"

Dan guessed to himself that Dr. Robbins would n’t be so awful cheerful about it if it was his tooth that had to be pulled.

After looking at the tooth, and saying that it was going to come hard he guessed, the doctor took from his drawer some clumsy, heavy instruments, seated Dan in a common wooden chair, took his head under his arm, cut around the tooth with his penknife, took a good hold of it with his forceps, and gave a mighty tug.

Dan despised crying as only fit for girls and babies, and he did not cry himself, but his body did. Two large tears rolled down his cheeks, in spite of himself.

"I tell you, that’s a hard one," said Dr. Robbins, stopping to take breath. "Your teeth are planted in your head as if they were part of the solid bone. I shall have to take my turn-key to it, I guess."
The turn-key was an instrument of torture that extracted a tooth by twisting it around until either the tooth or jaw gave way. Dr. Robbins now had Dan sit down on the floor before him. He sat in the chair, took Dan's head firmly between his knees, attached the turn-key, applied all his strength, and twisted the tooth from the jaw by main force. Dan had the toothache no more, and his lacerated jaw healed after a while.

A far pleasanter episode than this was March meeting, which was a sort of general holiday and rallying time, as everybody came in to the Centre to vote. Town meeting was an occasion of excitement and interest not only to all the men in Hackmatack, but also to the boys. It was held in the meeting-house, and the boys always occupied the galleries, — interested spectators of the sometimes lively encounters of wits below. All the "characters" in town turned out to town meeting, and aired their oddities and abilities in speeches on the various articles of the warrant. It was noticeable that some men who were notoriously incompetent to manage their own financial matters successfully, had no hesitation in assuming to direct the most important affairs of the town.

The matter of laying out a new town highway, involving unusual expense for bridges, etc., was under hot discussion. The boys sat in the gallery, making their own comments, acquiring unconsciously considerable public spirit, and some knowledge of human nature as well, from their observation of the intellectual combats below.

"Do listen to Ros Piper!" said Ki Kellogg.
"You'd suppose no one knew anything till he told it to them."

"Yes," said 'Rasmus, "and you would think he paid all the town taxes out of his own pocket by the free-and-easy way he talks of spending the town's money."

"Mighty little of it will come out of his pocket," said Ki, "and he knows it, too."

Roswell Piper, a man gifted with little property, but rich in eloquence and a high opinion of his own wisdom, and other kindred spirits aired their eloquence freely, discoursed glowingly of public spirit, progress, our duty to posterity, etc. 'Squire Drake and some of the other heavy tax-payers agreed heartily with Captain Pratt, when he said our highest duty to posterity was not to saddle them with a big town debt; it was wisest to go slowly in so important a matter, give it due consideration, and not vote for the proposed improvement till we were sure it would be an improvement.

But, as not unseldom happens, eloquence carried the day, and the new highway was rushed through triumphantly, the voters being led and influenced by men whom not one of them would ever have thought of consulting in his own private business.

Just as this exciting debate closed, the notes of fife and drum were heard outside, and instantly every boy clattered down the gallery-stairs "as if he had been sent for," Captain Pratt said.

The town drum-corps always improved the semi-holiday of town meeting, and the fact of their all gathering at the Centre on that day, to practise for the approaching "training." The corps was composed of
three fifes and two drums,—a big bass drum and a snare drum,—and made very good martial music. They met under the horse-sheds to practise. What mortal boy could listen unmoved to the thrilling rat-tat-tat of the drums, the shrill, warlike pipings of the fife? Certainly not our friend, Captain Daniel Strong. Hastily summoning the faithful Lieutenant Cyrus Dole, they mustered the "Washington Guards" on the spot; and that gallant force marched and countermarched on the green before the church, deploying, filing right and left, wheeling, charging, etc., in exact time to the music, to the admiration of all the loafers in town, who, hands in pockets, stood leaning up against the side of the meeting-house, engaged in a general supervision of town matters. The martial tone in which Dan cried "Shoulder arms!" "Halt!" "Dress right!" was a credit to his revolutionary ancestry; and that he kept his forces in active motion was indicated by Tertius Bigbee, the last man on the outside of the ranks, who complained,—

"Dan double-quicked us around that corner so fast that I had to 'most run my legs off to keep up."
THE next day was the first of April, not an especially noticeable day to the elder portion of the family, but one that the children were always determined to celebrate duly. This year, however, in the excitement preparatory to moving, Becky and Dan had forgotten the important date, and it stole upon them unawares. 'Rasmus, who had not forgotten, was extremely careful not to remind them. When Dan woke in the morning, 'Rasmus was already up and nearly dressed, looking very wide awake. Dan, knowing that it was still early, lay half asleep, half awake, lazily watching the crinkly waves of red light creeping up the wall opposite the window where the rising sun struck in.

"Dan Strong!" suddenly exclaimed 'Rasmus, striking an attitude of well-affected horror, "what is the matter? Your face is covered with blood!"

Dan, startled, sat up in bed and rubbed his hand across his face.

"I don't see anything," he said.

"You'd better get up then and look at yourself in the glass," said 'Rasmus.

Dan leaped out of bed and rushed across to the little gilt-framed mirror, with a picture of a weeping-
willow and a tombstone in its upper half, which adorned their room. He gazed in wonder at his clean face an instant, till 'Rasmus shouted "April Fool!" doubling up with laughter at the success of his trick. "Pshaw!" said Dan, half vexed, half pleased, "I forgot it was April Fool to-day," but now hurrying on his own clothes that he might get downstairs and have a share in the fun.

'Rasmus meantime had hurried down into the kitchen, where Lyddy Ann was bustling about, getting breakfast. "Well, I declare," she said, "what brought you down so early, 'Rasmus?"

"Oh, nothing particular. I just woke up. But my, Lyddy Ann, how did you tear your dress so?"

"If I’ve tore this brand new calico dress a’ready, I’m mad, that’s all," said Lyddy Ann, with energy. "Where is the tear? I don’t see it."

"Way round behind, — a great three-cornered hole. You must have caught it on the wood-pile," said the wicked 'Rasmus, chuckling as Lyddy Ann twisted her neck, and strained and pulled her dress skirt around, in a vain search for the rent. When at last 'Rasmus shouted "April Fool!" she said, in vexation,—

"I never did! The idea of your comin’ round a hinderin’ and pesterin’ me this way when I’m flyin’ round like a hen with her head cut off, a tryin’ to git breakfast ready! Git out of my kitchen this mimit, 'Rasmus Strong!"

And seizing 'Rasmus by the shoulders, Lyddy Ann pushed him toward the door, privately resolving in her own mind to pay him well for his trick before the
day was over. 'Rasmus succeeded in escaping from her and getting into the keeping-room in time to meet his grandmother as she entered it.

"Good-morning, Grandma," said 'Rasmus. "Have you seen the robin?" pointing out the window.

Now to see and hear the first robin was always an event in Hackmatack, because his advent was the sure forerunner of the ever welcome summer. So Grandma looked as pleased as possible, and hurried to the window, putting on her "other glasses" for a good look at the welcome visitor.

"Where is he, 'Rasmus?" she said. "I don't seem to see him."

"Over on the button-pear tree," said 'Rasmus. When he finally cried "April Fool!" Grandma, disappointed, said,—

"I think you might be in better business than fooling your old grandmother."

Dan, meantime, had hurried across to Becky's door, knocked, and cried,—

"Becky, hurry and get downstairs. Something awful must have happened to Snoozer. He's meowing terribly out under my window."

Becky, partly dressed, did not wait to finish in such a heart-rending emergency as this, but ran down the back-stairs, tumbling into the kitchen head first.

"Lyddy Ann," she cried, "what is the matter with Snoozer? Is he much hurt?"

"Not much, I guess," said Lyddy Ann, laughing. "It's some of them tormented boys' nonsense," while "April Fool!" shouted Dan down the stairs; and at the same moment Becky spied Snoozer sitting before the blazing fire, complacently making his
morning toilet, he having just finished a saucer of milk.

"Them pesky boys ought to be trounced," said Lyddy Ann.

"Oh, I don’t care. I think it’s fun," said Becky.

When ’Rasmus came in from the barn, Lyddy Ann said,—

"Here, ’Rasmus, you’ve hindered me so I’m behind with my breakfast. Jest carry that dish into the dinin’-room for me," pointing to a tempting-covered dish on the table.

’Rasmus, whose early rising had sharpened his appetite, seized the dish, saying, "What have you got in here good to eat, Lyddy Ann, I wonder?" at the same time peeping under the cover. The dish was empty save for a slip of paper on which was written "April Fool!" and Becky and Lyddy Ann did not fail to shout the same words at the discomfited ’Rasmus, who had boasted that "no one was going to catch him that day."

Of course the children did not venture to fool their father, nor did they think it wise to air their tricks much in his hearing, having a tolerable certainty of his disapproval. This did not prevent the war from being merrily waged all the morning between themselves and Lyddy Ann, with occasional raids on their grandmother, until, at last, no one would believe any one in the simplest statement; and when a coal did really snap out of the keeping-room fire, and Becky cried out, "There’s a coal snapped out on the carpet, Grandma," Grandma paid no attention until the smell of burning woollen announced a hole burned in the carpet.
“I never did take much stock in lying myself, even on April Fool,” said Grandma, justly annoyed, “and I shall be real glad when this day is over, and you children settle down again. Luckily it doesn’t come but once a year.”

The boys, who had been out at the wood-house sawing and splitting wood for an hour or so, grew very hungry toward eleven o’clock, especially as their noses informed them that Lyddy Ann was baking cake. Presently she opened the kitchen-door, and said,—

“Come in a minit, boys. Here’s some cup cakes I baked a purpose for you.”

On rare occasions, when Lyddy Ann felt particularly good-natured, she gave them this treat.

“Good for you, Lyddy Ann!” cried the hungry boys, eagerly seizing the nicely-browned, tempting cakes, and each taking a huge bite. How they sputtered when they found their teeth full of the cotton wool with which Lyddy Ann had carefully filled the inside of the cakes, while Becky and Lyddy Ann laughed so they could hardly cry “April Fool.”

“I guess we’re about even now,” said Lyddy Ann, triumphantly.

“I don’t know about that,” said ’Rasmus, giving Dan a wink full of dark mystery. The boys spent part of the morning privately in the corn-house, rejecting Becky’s pressing offers of her company, saying,—

“Run away, Becky. We’re too busy to be bothered.”

After dinner, they, with Becky’s active co-opera-
tion, did up an inviting-looking parcel of sand in brown paper, containing inside a slip of paper bearing the legend "April Fool,"—the package seeming to be a ten-pound bundle of sugar. They went down to the turnpike, and after looking carefully up and down the road to be sure that no one was in sight, waded out into the road where the mud was deepest and dropped the parcel. Then they climbed the fence, and, hiding behind a handy clump of hemlocks, waited to see who would fall into their trap.

By and by they saw a wagon coming slowly along. "Some one's coming, boys," chuckled Becky. "Oh, I'm almost scared!"

"Did you ever see such luck?" cried Dan. "It's old Calvin Skinner, of all men in the world!"

"He's sure to swallow that bait," said 'Rasmus. "He is n't the man to lose a chance of getting something for nothing."

"'Sh, Becky, don't giggle so," said Dan. "He might hear you. He's 'most here."

Becky held her hand tightly over her mouth to suppress her nervous giggles as Calvin Skinner spied the bundle, "whoa ed" his old horse, climbed down from his high wagon into the mud, and securing the prize, placed it carefully under his wagon-seat. He stood a moment with his foot on the step, looking irresolutely down the road toward the parsonage, while the boys nudged each other, and their hearts stood still. Then he climbed into his wagon and started off, and the children breathed easier. But, alas and alas! before he had gone far, he turned his horse, and took the road to the parsonage. In truth, a conflict between nature and grace had been fought in
Calvin's heart during that short time. Nature said, "Keep the parcel. It's yours. You came honestly by it. You don't know whose it is, and no one will ever be the wiser, anyway." But grace said, "Probably it has been dropped by some one going to the parsonage. You ought to see if it doesn't belong there. To keep it without trying to find the rightful owner is no better than stealing."

Although Calvin was "tight" to the verge of meanness, his conscience was of the old-fashioned New England kind, and gave him no rest till grace triumphed, and he turned to restore the lost bundle to its probable owners.

The children watched this change of base on Calvin's part in dismay.

"Well, we're in for it now," said Dan, ruefully.

"Yes," said 'Rasmus, "he'll take that bundle straight to Father, and of course we can't deny that we did it."

"Oh, dear," said Becky, almost crying, "I wish we had never done it."

"There's no use crying for spilt milk," said 'Rasmus. "We may as well go home and face the music first as last."

There being no other course to pursue, indeed, they went home, but not at all in the same frisky fashion in which they had gayly pranced down the road such a little while ago with the delightful parcel which they now wished they had never seen.

As they entered the kitchen, Lyddy Ann did not reassure their failing courage when she said,—

"My, ain't you in a pretty scrape now?"

In the keeping-room their grandmother glanced
at them over her glasses with considerable severity, for her, and said,—

"I thought you would get into trouble with your foolishness. Your father wants to see you all in his study right away."

The culprits filed solemnly into the study, 'Rasmus, as oldest, leading the way in much confusion of countenance, and Becky, on the verge of tears, bringing up the rear. There on the study table lay the open parcel of sand with the paper saying "April Fool" so plainly that he who runs might read; there stood Calvin Skinner, looking several degrees crosser and sourer than usual, even; and there, above all, sat their father, his sermon pushed one side, his pen hastily stuck over his ear, his countenance wearing its severest expression. To be interrupted in the unusually lofty flight of thought he had been pursuing just as his ideas were flowing with extraordinary smoothness, and be called down to earth by such foolishness, not to say wickedness, as this, on his children's part, was almost more than the minister could bear with patience.

"Did you prepare this parcel and place it in the road, with the deliberate intention of deceiving?" he asked.

It never occurred to the Strong children, in any of the tight places of life, that a lie was a possible way out. They knew no way when caught but to tell the truth, and take the consequences, whatever they might be. So now they all said humbly, in chorus,—

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Skinner, supposing it to be a package of
some value, has put himself to considerable trouble to pick it up," — here Becky felt an insane desire to giggle, — "and, like an honest man," — here a pucker or two smoothed out of Calvin’s brow, — "has taken the further trouble to drive out of his way to this house to restore, as he supposed, the package to its rightful owners. I trust I need not say to you, Mr. Skinner, how deeply mortified I am that you should have been caused this annoyance by the thoughtless conduct of my children, — conduct I never could have expected in them, and which I hope never to witness again."

The children, crimson with confusion, hung their heads.

"I must request each of you to apologize to Mr. Skinner in my presence, for the trouble you have caused him," continued Mr. Strong.

This was a bitter pill, but it had to be swallowed. In turn, the children stammered out their apologies to Calvin as best they could.

Calvin, softened by all these concessions to his wounded dignity, and nearly as embarrassed by the apologies as the children themselves, said,—

"It’s o’ no consequence. Never mind talkin’ about it. I guess I must be a goin’ now. Good-mornin’, Mr. Strong," and departed, much to the children’s relief.

"You may all go to bed now without your suppers," said Mr. Strong. "If anything of this kind on your part should ever occur again, the punishment will be much more serious. I trust, however, that you will never be guilty of such senseless folly again. From you, especially, Erasmus,
I look for a better example to your brother and sister."

'Rasmus, who felt sufficiently humiliated and enraged at being, at his time of life, sent to bed like a small boy, said nothing, inwardly wishing that he might never hear the words "April Fool" again, so sick was he of the whole business.

A most unnatural stillness and quiet settled down over the parsonage, the more marked after the unusual excitement and activity that had prevailed earlier in the day. Lyddy Ann, who had been out during the evening to attend a temperance meeting at the schoolhouse with Sam Hawks, came in late, got her bedroom candle out of the pantry from the corner of the shelf where she always kept it, and taking a coal with the tongs from those banked up under the ashes in the kitchen fireplace, blew it into a blaze, and tried to light her candle, saying to herself as she did so,—

"Well, I'm glad April Fool's over for another year, anyway. I guess the boys won't be quite so fierce for it agin, after what they got to-day. What under the canopy's the matter with this candle? It won't light."

Giving the wick a hasty poke, she tried again, blowing the coal till she was red in the face.

"Well, I never, if this aint the beater!" exclaimed Lyddy Ann, as the candle still refused to ignite. "It must need snuffin'."

Fumbling around in the dark, on the high wooden shelf over the fireplace, she found the snuffers. Only when she could not cut the wick did she discover that the candle was one which the boys had made in the
morning out of turnip, carefully blacking the wick, and placing it in Lyddy Ann's candlestick for her especial use.

"Land sakes!" said Lyddy Ann, "if them pesky boys haint been and got another trick onto me! Well, I don't care, I aint a goin' to tell their father on 'em, anyway."

And so ended the celebration of April first at the parsonage.
CHAPTER V.

FAST DAY.

THE first Thursday in April was Fast Day, as usual in Massachusetts. It was observed in Hackmatack nearly as strictly as Sunday itself. Sam Lane, a former Hackmatack boy, now in business in Lowell, had shocked his own people, and Hackmatack generally, by reporting that the Lowell young men played ball on the public streets on Fast Day; nay, were allowed to do so by a public ordinance to that effect. But such laxness was not tolerated in Hackmatack. Mr. Strong resolved to mention this desecration of the day, among other ominous signs of the times against which he intended to inveigh, in his Fast Day discourse, from Isaiah, lviii. 5, — "Is it such a fast that I have chosen?"

The family all went to church, of course. No one even thought of asking to stay at home, much less would have dared to suggest such a thing. There was the usual attendance at church, and the usual two services, with an hour's nooning between. There was no dinner, only a light luncheon of bread and butter and pie, the minister omitting the pie.

"I believe them children eat more Fast Day than any day the whole year round, if we don't have no dinner," declared Lyddy Ann. "First they crack
some butternuts, then they eat a few apples, then they prowl round the pantry to see what they can lay hands on. They 're a eatin' every blessed minit."

"I guess it’s to pass away the time," said Grandma.

Fast Day this year was a lovely spring day, not over warm, for the snow-banks still lingering in great white patches on the brown sides of Mount Zoar and on the shady side of woods, imparted a chill to the air. But the sun shone warmly, the birds had come, the frost was out of the ground, and the grass was beginning to grow green in the meadows, and in damp spots along the hillside pastures. The birds sang; hope, joy, new life, breathed in the air, and never had the out-door world seemed more attractive to the children. The second service had ended at half-past two, leaving a long afternoon on their hands.

The boys were out in the wood-house, cracking butternuts. To them appeared Becky.

"Oh, boys," she said, "do you suppose Father would let us take a walk? I want to go up on Fort Hill dreadfully. I shouldn’t wonder a bit if the mayflowers were out up there. And it’s such a pleasant day. Do go and ask Father if we may go, 'Rasmus."

"Well, I will," said 'Rasmus, who, like Becky, felt that he should enjoy a ramble over the hills this tempting spring day. He went into the study and asked,—

"May we go out for a little walk, Father?"

"Where were you thinking of going?" asked Mr. Strong, looking doubtful.

"We want to go up on Fort Hill."
Mr. Strong, after some deliberation, said,—

"I am willing you should go, on condition that your deportment is quiet and sedate, becoming the day. I do not wish you to exhibit any undue levity, or to go trooping abroad on Fast Day in a riotous, unseemly manner. If you think you can all go and walk in the fields in a quiet, decorous manner, I will consent to your going."

"Yes, sir, I think we can," said 'Rasmus, hastening to report his success to Dan and Becky, who were delighted. Becky began to hop and fly around so actively that 'Rasmus said,—

"You'd better look out, Becky. We can't go at all if you go to cutting up like that. I had to promise that we would walk along as sober as judges, just as if it were Sunday, before Father would let us go."

Becky sobered down on hearing this, and the children started off in quiet fashion, fully meaning to observe their father's restrictions. They struck into the "old road," which led off across lots, coming out near their Grandmother Bullard's. First came what they called the little hill, then the big hill. It was a stout climb up the big hill, for the old road, after the way of our forefathers, had been laid uncompromisingly directly up the steepest part of the hill, which the new road had afterwards been made to avoid.

The old road had grassed over, but its margin was still clearly defined by a scraggy line of trees and bushes where the old boundary fence used to run. Here Becky had the pleasure of finding the first pussy willows.

"Oh, you pretty things!" said Becky, as she
picked stalks covered with the soft, downy caterpillars. “Does n’t it seem good to see things growing again!”

“This willow wood is just right for whistles,” said Dan.

He and ’Rasmus cut branches from the willow trees overhanging the road. The spring sun beat down so warmly on their backs climbing the big hill that, heated and panting, they were glad to sit down on its top and rest. The boys improved this chance to make their willow whistles. The bark yielded to the twisting and turning of their strong hands and slipped off exactly as they wished it to, and soon each had a whistle that made melody in his own ears, at least.

Their cousins, Sarah Jane and her little brother Royal, Uncle Josiah’s children, had been allowed to take a Fast Day walk up to their Grandmother Bul­lard’s. While visiting with Grandma, suddenly they heard a great tooting and whistling in the yard, and ran to the window.

“Oh, Grandma,” said Sarah Jane, “if it isn’t Becky and Dan and ’Rasmus!”

“And they ’ve got some whistles,” said Royal.

“I should think they had!” said Grandma. “Well, children, I ’m glad to see you. But how did your father happen to let you go out walking on Fast Day? He holds to the old way of keeping it pretty strict, and I must say I think he is right.”

“He said we might go if we walked along in a sedate manner, without undue levity,” said ’Rasmus.

“If that is n’t just like him,” said Grandma, laughing. “The idea of letting a parcel of children loose
out-doors, and expecting them to walk along in a sedate manner! Well, you must try to be steady and mind your father. Where are you bound?"

"Up to Fort Hill for wild-flowers."

"That's a sightly spot. Sarah Jane and Royal may go with you, and here's some doughnuts to eat as you walk along."

It being Fast Day, Grandma's doughnuts were peculiarly acceptable, and the children strolled on, eating them, happy all the time in the air so pure and clear here on the hill-top, in the warm sunlight, in the sense that winter was really over, and spring had come at last. Royal's small heart was filled with joy by the gift of a willow whistle from Dan, which enabled him to make as much noise as the rest.

Fort Hill was one of the highest elevations in town. From its summit there was a wide and lovely view of undulating hills and valleys, the stately range of Mount Zoar near by, and Mount Monadnock's round back looming up far off against the northeastern sky. This commanding site had doubtless been chosen by the first settlers as a suitable place for a fort, enabling them as it did to overlook the country for miles around, and keep some watch of the movements of their stealthy, savage foes, who were ever prowling in the thick woods that covered the country then, ready to fall on the settlers in any unguarded moment.

In the shelter of Fort Hill's pine woods mayflowers grew most abundantly, and the blossoms were always peculiarly large and pink here, so here Becky hoped to find the first of the season to-day.

As they neared the summit of the hill, the chil-
dren saw two boys sitting on top of a stone wall, dangling their legs in the sun, while a yellow dog was sniffing around the wall below them. They soon saw that they were the Sprague boys, whose father’s farm lay on the slope of Fort Hill, not far away.

“Hello, ’Rasmus! Hello, Dan! Where are you going?” shouted the boys.

“Over to the woods for mayflowers.”

“We’ll go along too,” said Ira Sprague; “but I don’t think you will find any mayflowers yet. It’s too early.”

“There’s no harm in looking, anyway,” said ’Rasmus.

“What a nice dog you’ve got,” said Dan, making friends with the yellow dog. “What’s his name?”

“Spry,” said Ira, “and he is the spryest dog, too, after woodchucks, you ever saw. It takes a pretty smart woodchuck to get away from Spry, doesn’t it, old boy?”

Spry, well aware that he was being praised, and foreseeing woodchucks in the expedition, bounded up about the boys barking, whining, trying his best to talk, then running off and back around them again in wild circles expressive of pride and joy.

The children wandered out of their way to look at the famous Indian kettles, as they were called, some singular holes in a ledge of out-cropping granite rocks. The largest was three feet wide and two and a half feet deep, seemingly cut or hollowed out of the solid rock, perfectly smooth inside, and as regular in shape as if fashioned by man’s hand.

“Do you suppose the Indians really made these kettles, and used to cook in them?” asked Becky.
"I suppose so," said Ira. "Folks say so, anyway. My grandfather says they've always been here, just like this, ever since white folks settled here. He says the Indians used to fill them with water, — there's a good spring near by, you know, — build a fire and heat stones red-hot and drop them in the water, then cook their meat in it."

"There must have been lots of venison and bear meat boiled here then," said 'Rasmus, peeping over into the largest hole.

"Only think, Sarah Jane," said Becky. "Imagine thick, dark woods all around here, and night coming on, and a fire blazing high, lighting up the woods and the sky and the Indians' faces, as they peered over into these very kettles to see how their supper was cooking! I can almost see them."

"Pooh! I don't want to see them," said Sarah Jane, looking around half fearfully under the spell of Becky's vivid imagination, as if the Sheomet Indians might even yet be lingering in their old haunts on Fort Hill. "There's some stones now in the bottom of the kettle. Maybe the Indians left them there."

These stones, had Sarah Jane but known it, really told the whole story how the pot-holes came to be in the rock. Long, long ages before, when water covered even Fort Hill, some pebbles resting in a slight depression of the rock had been ground around and around by the action of the water, ever wearing deeper, until they had cut out the present kettles. So the true story the pot-holes told was even more interesting than the one Becky imagined.

Reaching the pine woods, they hunted along their edge and through the openings in well-known haunts
of the mayflowers for the fragrant blossoms. From under their warm cover of dead leaves, they pulled long stems of the plant, its hardy leaves bright with an ever green verdure, and bearing many clusters of tiny buds, but no bloom yet.

"Told you so," said Ira. "I knew it was too early. It will take another week or two to bring them out."

"We can take some of these buds home, anyway," said Becky. "If we put them in water, they will bloom after a while."

"Are you sure?" asked Sarah Jane.

"Yes, I know they will, for I tried it last year. But they come out perfectly white, blooming in the house."

"Here's a find!" cried Dan, "a big bed of checkerberries!"

In a spot sloping to the south was indeed a large patch of wintergreen. Under the shining green leaves hung down the pretty red berries that Mother Nature had carefully tucked away for the winter under her warm snow-blanket. Ah, the delight of gathering them, of being out-doors again, beginning once more to gather the wild fruits and flowers of the field!

As the children were picking the berries, cramming them alternately into their mouths and their pockets, Ben Sprague cried,—

"Hi, boys, just see Spry! Bet you anything he's found a woodchuck down there! Come on!"

And away dashed Ben, the other boys at his heels, for the spot on the distant hillside where Spry was barking and digging furiously, making the earth fly
all about him. As they ran, it occurred to 'Rasmus
that possibly his father might deem this "undue
levity," and he said to Dan, holding him back,—

"See here, Dan, I don’t know as Father would like
to have us hunt woodchucks on Fast Day."

"Why, yes, he would," panted Dan. "It’s neces-
sary, you know. We’re not doing it just for fun.
Woodchucks do lots of damage to crops. They’ve
got to be killed."

'Rasmus was easily convinced, and hastened to
join the others, and lend a helping hand in this work
of necessity. The boys whooped and jumped around
the exciting hole in the ground, and Spry, encouraged
by the excitement he was raising, stopped now and
then to bark wildly, and then made the dirt fly faster
than ever.

"He won’t come out," said Ben, finally. It
seemed strange he would not, when so urgently
invited!

"Let’s cut some long poles, and see if we can’t
poke him out," said Ira.

A woodchuck generally has a back-door to his
abode, as well as a front one, as the boys well knew.

So they now sought out his rear entrance, and 'Ras-
mus and Ben watched it while the other boys lay on
the ground and ran long poles into the main entrance
as far as they could reach, Spry meantime standing,
watching alertly, ears and tail quivering with eager-
ness. But no woodchuck came forth. Whether Spry
had woodchucks on the brain, and had led the boys
astray after an imaginary woodchuck of his own in-
vention, or whether the hole was unusually deep,
and its tenant unusually crafty, the boys could not
tell. Certain it is, no woodchuck came out of that hole.

"I shall bring our steel trap over to-night and set it here for him," said Ira. "He needn’t think he can fool me that way."

"Good Spry," said the boys, patting Spry, who walked along with a virtuous and self-satisfied air, as one who has done his whole duty.

While the boys rambled on, looking for more woodchuck holes to exercise Spry’s talents, the girls were in the edge of the pine woods, pushing aside the slippery needles in search of acorn-cups for their playhouses, pretty mosses for cushions, and other treasures of the woods. Suddenly they were startled by observing some one sitting on a log not far away, when they had supposed themselves to be all alone.

This someone wore a Scotch plaid cloak of rather faded reds and greens, now loosened and dropped back; and a thick quilted pumpkin hood of snuff-colored silk concealed her face, as it turned this way and that, in peaceful contemplation of the wide, beautiful landscape spread out below.

"Who can that be?" whispered Becky. "There are no houses very near here."

"Do you suppose it could be a gypsy?" asked Sarah Jane, a little frightened.

"Hark! she’s singing something," said Becky.

From the depths of the pumpkin hood this strain quavered forth on the sweet spring air, —

"On Springfield mountin’ there did dwell
A lovely youth I knew full well,—
Leftenant Merrill’s only son,
A likely youth jest twenty-one."
"One Monday mornin' he did go
Into the medder for to mow;
He mowed a bout or two, when he did feel
A pizonous sarpent at his heel."

"Why, it's Aunt Rhoda Benson!" cried Becky, who knew Aunt Rhoda's songs well.

"Oh, is n't that nice!" said Sarah Jane, and away ran the two girls down the slope of the hill, to where Aunt Rhoda sat on the log, basking in the spring sunshine. A basket with an old case knife and some roots in it, and the stick with which she had climbed the hill, lay on the ground beside her.

"Why, girls, are you up here?" she said. "I'd no idee there was any one round. You see," looking apologetically at Becky as the minister's daughter, "I thought I'd jest ramble forth and see if the greens wuz a startin' yet, and maybe gather some yarbs and roots. I set great store by dandelion-root tea to purify the blood in the spring of the year, though some folks holds to sulphur and molasses. I dare say your grandma does, don't she?"

"Dear me, yes," said Becky. "I wish she did n't."

"It's first-rate," said Aunt Rhoda, "and so's thoroughwort; but dandelion-root goes a leetle ahead of 'em all, in my opinion. But folks must doctor 'cordin' to their own notions. Wall, as I wuz a sayin', bein's it's Fast Day, and I could n't work, I thought I would jest walk abroad in the fields a piece, and see what I could find. I do jest hanker to git out-doors again, after I've ben shut up in the house all winter. I've rambled along, a lookin', and a pickin', and a diggin', till here I be, a sight fur-
ther from home than I calculated to be when I set out. Aint it a pleasant day?"

"Beautiful," said the girls in chorus.

"And this is sech a sightly spot," continued Aunt Rhoda. "I always did admire to cum up here. I've bin a settin' here, a viewin' the landscape o'er, like Moses on Pisgah's top, and thinkin' what a pritty world this is, and of the goodness of the Lord to us undesarin' mortals, poor worms as we be. Did n't know as I could git way up here now. 'Twas a pritty good tug for me. Like 's not I 'll never cum up here again. My jints are a gittin' stiff, and I aint so young and spry as I wuz, forty or fifty year ago."

"I wish you would sing something to us, Aunt Rhoda," said Becky.

"I should love to hear you," said Sarah Jane.

Aunt Rhoda was noted as a singer of old ballads, and a frequent entertainment, when she was at a house spinning, was to persuade her to sing.

"I dunno what started me up to-day," said Aunt Rhoda. "'Spect it must a bin the spring sunshine strikin' in, makin' me feel kinder young again. I sot here a thinkin' about old times, years ago before you was born or thought of, and I bust out into song 'fore I knew it. Did n't s'pose any one was a hearin' of me."

"Did you get those songs out of a book, Aunt Rhoda?"

"Bless ye, child, no! No book 's got them songs in it. When I was young, there wa'n't many books or papers either. So, when any startlin' event
happened, some one 'd write a lot of poetry about it, and it was printed on a large sheet of paper, and then the pedlars used to bring 'em about to sell. One of the most touchin' ballads was about a party of youths and maidens that went out in New York Bay on a pleasure trip, and a squall struck the boat, and they was all drowned, the whole blessed twenty-five on 'em. There was a border of twenty-five black coffins printed all around that one. It was very touchin', but I can't remember jest how it went. My mem'ry aint what it used to be."

"Sing all you can remember, Aunt Rhoda, please," pleaded the girls.

After a little more urging, Aunt Rhoda sang the whole of "Springfield Mountain," and then struck into "The Ballad of James Bird."

"Sons of Freedom, listen to me, 
And ye Darters, too, give ear, 
You a sad and mournful story 
As wuz ever told shall hear.

"'Mongst the troops that marched to Erie 
Wuz the Kingston Volunteers; 
Captain Thomas then commanded 
To protect our West frontiers."

Aunt Rhoda sang on, — the whole melancholy tale of the arrest of Bird, and his condemnation to be shot as a deserter, in spite of his record as the bravest of soldiers.

"Sad and gloomy was the mornin' 
Bird was ordered out to die; 
Where's the Breast not dead to Pity 
But for him would heave a sigh?"
As this was sung in a minor key, a mournful, wailing, monotonous strain, the girls looked so solemn and subdued at its close that Aunt Rhoda said,—

"I guess I shall have to sing 'The Soldier's Triumph,' to chirk up your spirits," and she struck off in livelier measure, into—

"I will tell you of a Soldier
Who lately cum from War;
He courted a Lady
Of fortune and great store."

This sounded most promising, but the song was cut short by the return of the boys. After exchanging greetings with Aunt Rhoda, 'Rasmus said,—

"It's time we were going home, Becky."

"Yes, and it's high time I was a startin', too," said Aunt Rhoda, gathering up her basket and staff. "Mount Zoar is a sendin' a long shadder to the eastward a'ready, and it'll be nigh sundown now 'fore I git home. 'Pollos he'll be scared to death for fear I've ben took with a fit, way off up in the pasters by myself, or broke my leg, or sumthin'. He says he's always expectin' sumthin' s a goin' to happen to me when I ramble off in the fields by myself."

And Aunt Rhoda, exchanging cheerful good-bys with the children, and bidding Becky tell her grandma that she expected to get at that carpet next week, certain, wended her way slowly down one side of the hill, aided by her staff, while the children went skipping down the other side in as sedate fashion as could reasonably be expected, considering that they were two girls, five boys, and a dog, and that
this was their first stroll in the fields for months. Dan and 'Rasmus brushed from their clothes as well as they could the earth acquired in wallowing around woodchuck holes, and they reached home in good season, taking Sarah Jane and Royal with them.
CHAPTER VI.

A MOVING TALE.

The last of April was a time full of interest to Hackmatack, where usually things went on the same, year in and year out, with few events or changes to vary the monotony. First came the tearing down of the old meeting-house. Mr. Hopkins, the master carpenter who had taken the contract to build the new church, had bid in the old building for one hundred dollars. Mr. Strong held a farewell service in the old church, on which occasion he delivered what was generally regarded as one of the most affecting discourses ever heard from him, moving many of his older hearers to tears.

The very next day, the hand of change, in the person of Mr. Hopkins, laid violent hold of the weather-beaten old structure that had so long loomed on the hill,—a venerable landmark. The windows and doors were removed, the roof torn off, and then the clapboards. When the huge hewn timbers were revealed to the light of the sun again, they were found to be as sound and firm as the day they were raised, long before the memory of living man.

It is almost superfluous to mention that Dan, 'Rasmus, Ki, Cyrus, indeed, all the boys in town, took the liveliest interest and satisfaction in the destruc-
tion of the old church, and were on hand, in season and out of season, — especially the latter, as Mr. Hopk
kins and his men thought, — to lend a helping hand.

“Those boys are the plague of my life,” Mr. Hopkins often remarked.

But such disparaging remarks did not prevent the boys from scrambling and climbing around in the thickest of the fray. The great bonfires they kept blazing on the hill from the refuse boards and sticks, would have made one think that old Indian times had come again, when the settlers were accustomed to signal each other in this way, from hill to hill.

Before the destruction of the old church was quite completed, came Parson Strong’s moving. Such a time as that was! Much of the furniture was stored in the barn, only the necessities being carried to the rooms which Mr. Strong had taken at the old tavern, he hoping very soon to be settled in his own house again. It was a time of immense excitement and delight to the children. Uncle Zach sent down his ox-cart to carry the heavier articles. ’Rasmus drove the cart, while Dan went to and fro with old John and the long wagon. Becky rode back and forth on either vehicle, as came handiest, bearing in her hands the fragile articles that must be carried tenderly.

No one knows till they have experienced it, what a tremendous undertaking it is for a family who have been long settled in one house to tear everything up and move. Their possessions exceed their wildest imaginations, come to unearth them from all the closets, attics, holes, and corners where they have been stored for many years.
Grandma Strong was a spectacle to touch the hardest heart, as, about noon on moving day, she stood, her hands on her hips, a large crock spot on her nose, the musk-melon hood much awry on her head, surveying in despair a large pile of miscellaneous household stuff.

"I declare, I don't see where all the things come from," she said. "Seems to me, the more we move out, the more we have."

"Well, we shall git rid of house cleaning, anyway," said Lyddy Ann, who was busy packing bedclothes into bureau drawers.

"What's house cleaning, compared to such a tearing up as this, I'd like to know? If we come through it alive I shall be glad. I hope now, Erasmus, you feel satisfied."

Mr. Strong, whose cherished study looked as if a whirlwind had desolated it, was helping the boys load the wagon with precious books. He had just seen Dan drop a whole armful, loosening some valued volumes from their covers, while the April wind pounced upon priceless papers, blowing them recklessly about the yard. He disliked changes of all sorts, and secretly felt, in bitterness of soul, that if he had realized exactly what "moving" meant, he would have lived and died at the end of the old road. He looked grim, and took no notice of his mother's sarcasm. He said sharply to Dan, however,—

"Daniel, mind what you are about. Don't let me see you drop another book. 'Rasmus, handle those commentaries more carefully. You cannot toss and bang choice books about like so many logs of wood."
In short, if the minister had not been a minister, one would have said he was decidedly cross. It takes a deal of grace to move and keep one’s temper perfectly unruffled through it all. The Sunday after moving, Mr. Strong preached one of his best sermons, from the text, “He that ruleth his own spirit is mightier than he that taketh a city,” the sermon being born, as perhaps is many an impressive discourse, from much personal humility on the writer’s part.

Snoozer roamed about in the midst of the confusion in as much perturbation of spirit as Grandma herself, not knowing what all this hubbub and overturning meant. When everything was at last moved, as they were to sleep at the old tavern that night, Becky determined to capture Snoozer. This she did with difficulty, for he was growing wild and suspicious under the alarming condition of affairs. Becky caught him at last, and put him in a large covered basket. Tying the cover down, she carried him carefully up to the old tavern, reassuring him tenderly by such soft words at these: —

“Yes, Snoozer was going to move, just like anybody else. He was going up to live with Becky in the nice tavern. Snoozer wasn’t afraid. He knew Becky would n’t let any one hurt her precious cat,” and so on, Snoozer, from the depths of his basket, making no response to these blandishments. Soon after the basket was opened, however, he was found to have mysteriously vanished, and great was the mourning on Becky’s part.

The next morning, when the boys went down to the old place to milk, on their return, Dan said,—
"Well, Becky, you needn't pine any more for Snoozer. He's back at the old place, safe and sound."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Becky. "But I'm afraid he'll starve down there."

"Pshaw! He knows too much to starve. He came rubbing around me, and I gave him some milk in an old pan I found lying around. And I saw him have a mouse. The rats and mice are all torn up down there. You needn't worry about Snoozer. He'll take good care of himself."

"You'd best leave him there till we get settled again, if we ever do," said Grandma.

Becky accepted this advice. But she made Snoozer frequent visits, carrying him choice morsels of meat, which Snoozer accepted affably, though his smooth fur and sleek sides showed that his present diet of new milk and mice was not disagreeing with him.

The life at the tavern was a sort of temporary picnic or camping out, a rough provisional living from day to day, that suited the children much better than their elders. No carpets were put down, it not being worth while for so short a time. Part of Mr. Strong's books were stored down at the barn, part packed in boxes about the room that served him at once for bedroom and study. Of course it was always the case that the book he needed most to see at once was either at the bottom of a box or down at the barn.

Becky and Dan had great fun entertaining their friends playing "I spy" among the great vacant upstairs rooms of the old tavern. But when the dusk stole on, there was something solemn in the echoing,
empty rooms, a vague feeling of the people long since
gone that had, in days too long since gone by, filled
these silent rooms with life and love and laughter,
that awed the children, and made them clatter noisily
down the bare staircase to the light and cheer of the
family rooms.

Becky's 'stent' now was braiding rag-mats to be
laid down to preserve the splendors of the new
keeping-room carpet. Becky did not like to braid
rags, and murmured so much at her lot that Grandma
quoted at her the verse from Solomon's Proverbs, "Go
to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be
wise." Becky secretly felt that if the ant had been
obliged to braid rags, her virtue might not have stood
the test so triumphantly.

Mr. Mosely, who had contracted to move the house,
was preparing for that undertaking with cheerful
confidence. The distance across lots to the new site
was only half a mile, and, excepting one place
slightly descending, was nearly level, so that Mr.
Mosely felt moving the house to be quite a simple
affair. First, the chimneys were all taken down and
the bricks carried over to the new site, where Mr.
Masters, the mason from Northfield, had already dug
a cellar, and laid the new foundation walls. Mr.
Mosely next cut and sawed the main part from the'
ell. Then he hoisted it up on timbers, and undertook
to move it with a turnstile, putting iron wheels under
it which were to run on heavy planks laid down
before them as they rolled along.

This plan sounded plausible in theory, and, at first,
it worked well enough. But the house, built of heavy,
square timbers, was much more solid than Mr. Mosely
had calculated, and the iron wheels cut into the timbers till it was impossible to go any farther. Mr. Mosely confessed himself nonplussed.

"Wall," he said, "I am dumfounded. I don't see what's to be done now."

The main part of the house was stranded in the fields, not far from its old site. Madam Strong and her son drove down in the chaise one morning to view the situation. It certainly looked far from encouraging. There stood the ell part in its old place, all gaping to wind and weather,—the familiar keeping-room, Lyddy Ann's bedroom, the cellar,—all yawning wide in view of an unfeeling world. The fences were all down, and the main part of the house stood over in the lots askew on its timbers, chimneyless, its windows and doors open, looking as wretched and disconcerted as house ever did.

Grandma sat looking at this spectacle like a second Cassandra in a green silk calash. After an impressive silence,—a silence born of utter dismay,—she opened her mouth and spake,—

"If this doesn't look like destruction let loose!"

Her son fully agreed with her, but did not think it necessary to say so.

"I knew how it would be before you began," continued Grandma, "just as well as I do now. You know I told you so, Erasmus. I said you would regret the day you went into this moving business. I always said it couldn't be done; from the very first I told you so."

"Yes, Mother, I know you did," replied Mr. Strong, in so meek and crushed a tone that his mother forebore to press her triumph further.
There stood the house for two weeks, while Mr. Strong became almost ill with mental worry, and all the parish shook their heads, and guessed "the parson had got himself into a pretty fix!" But Mr. Mosely, having consulted various high mechanical authorities, rallied his energies, and tried again. He obtained large wooden rollers to put under the house. Now it crawled on, inch by inch, until finally it actually reached its destination and was set up over the new cellar. Mr. Strong's spirits revived, and Grandma dropped something of her Cassandra tone.

It was now well on in May. Election day was coming, always observed as a holiday. The boys usually went fishing on that day, and Dan and 'Rasmus had long since made arrangements with the other boys for a grand fishing expedition this year. But something occurred before election day to alter these plans. The men of the parish took pity on the minister's tribulations, and resolved to devote election day to giving him a grand lift,—to have a "moving bee," in short.

Grandma and Lyddy Ann worked hard, preparing election cake and other good things for the luncheon to be served the workers at noon, being further aided by ample donations from Grandma Bullard.

Election day dawned bright and fair, as lovely a May morning as one would care to see.

"It seems as if this day was made on purpose for moving," said Grandma, as she stood in the doorway in the early morning sunshine; breathing in the dewy sweetness of the air, fresh with the odor of new grass and budding leaves. "It could n't have been pleas-
anter if it had tried. I begin to feel encouraged, I must say."

"Heaven helps those who help themselves, Mother," said Mr. Strong, cheerfully.

"Are you going a fishing to-day, Dan?" asked Becky.

"Fishing! Not much. Do you suppose I would be cheated out of the fun? No, sir. All the boys are coming to help."

"Peri and Persis are coming too," said Becky, "to help set the tables and pass things."

"Great help it's goin' to be, I guess," said Lyddy Ann. "'One boy is a boy, two boys is half a boy, three boys is no boy at all,' so folks say, and I guess we shall find it true enough, of boys and girls too, before this day is over."

"I expect some of the boys will get hurt," said Grandma. "Moving a house is dangerous business."

"If half a dozen on 'em aint killed, we shall cum out pretty well, in my opinion," said Lyddy Ann.

The boys, undismayed by any such forebodings, were on hand to a boy, bright and early, and soon the men also began to arrive from all over town with their oxen, till there were twenty yoke of oxen in all. These were hitched to a long hawser attached to the ell part. Bildad Hoyt, the auctioneer, selected for this place because he had such a loud voice, stood up on the building in front, to direct the work.

When everything was ready, it was really an inspiring sight. Bildad, standing proudly aloft, like a Roman emperor in his war chariot, "hollered," as the boys said, vociferously, till all the hills around echoed again, and then the men "hollered" and
whipped up the long line of oxen, and all the boys “hollered” too, on general principles; the oxen pulled their best, and the ell part began to move. The boys made themselves exceedingly busy and numerous, now riding in the moving building, now helping to bring up the rollers and put them under the house again, swelling the bustle and noise considerably. They looked in admiration on Bildad, when he roared in tones of thunder, “Whoa!” and all the men and oxen did his bidding, or when he gave the word of command, and all was set in motion again.

There were a few minor disasters among them, such as Dan’s falling off the second story timbers and getting a new bump on his forehead unknown to phrenology, that would not yield even to brown paper and vinegar; and Ki Kellogg’s crushing one finger slightly under a roller; and ’Rasmus catching his trousers on a nail and tearing out a large three-cornered piece; but no one’s legs were crushed, no bones broken, no boys killed, which, as Grandma remarked at night, was “a special mercy, and a good deal better than she expected.”

While the ell part was slowly but surely journeying on, Grandma and Lyddy Ann, aided by the girls and also some of the women of the parish who had kindly volunteered to help, were busy preparing the luncheon. Tables were put together, making one long one, out under the trees, whose tender new leaves cast a light shade on the fresh grass. The girls brought chairs enough from the houses near by to seat the company.

Promptly at twelve the conch shell was blown. The oxen were left to chew their cuds in quiet for
a while, wondering, no doubt, as they ruminated in the peaceful sunshine, what all the noise and excitement had been about, while the workers crowded in around the long table, which was loaded with all kinds of food acceptable to hungry men. There were biscuits and cold meat, and baked beans and pickles, and great loaves of the nicest election cake, and doughnuts, and cheese, and more cake, and all the approved kinds of pie, and plenty of cider and tea. The sweet May breeze rustled and shook the tender leaves overhead, making a pretty play of light and shadow over the tablecloth, and cooling the heated brows of the workers, while Lyddy Ann and the girls and boys flew about, filling cups, and passing cake and pie. Jokes, talk, stories, and laugh circulated around the board, among the men who seldom met together save at church or funeral, except on some rare festivity like this. "Parson Strong's moving bee" was long remembered in Hackmatack.

After the men had returned to their work, the girls and boys sat down to the table in their turn, enjoying the luncheon even more than the first tableful, perhaps, for seeing others eat is hungry work. So the boys especially had thought, as they helped the girls "pass." When Becky, Peri, and the rest had wiped the dishes and returned the chairs, they too went down to watch the moving. By night the ell was successfully landed against the main part. The men stood wiping their brows, well pleased with the success of their labors, when Bildad Hoyt called out in his stentorian tones,—

"Friends, I move that we come here a week from to-day, and finish the job. What d' ye say?"
"Second the motion," went up a shout.
"Is it a vote, then?"
"Ay, ay," was the shout, swelled by the voice of every boy present.

The following week, by this union of many kindly, willing hands that made "light work," the rest of the buildings were moved. It only remained now for Mr. Mosely and his assistants to hammer and patch the various parts together, and put up the picket fence and gates from the old place.

One of Dan's duties was to carry a luncheon every day down to the carpenters. One day, as he was setting forth on this errand, he met right at the tavern door a man whose appearance struck him as singular. He wore knee breeches and rough brogans; over his shoulder a bundle swung from a thick, thorny stick; and his red, good-natured face looked somehow different from people Dan was accustomed to see, though he would have been puzzled to define the difference. His speech seemed even more foreign than his looks, as he said,—

"The top of the morning to ye, my foine lad! Can a dacent man get a bite to ate here? It's nigh fam­ished I am, walking iver since the blessed sun rose in the hevins this morning, without a drop to ate or drink inside of me."

The genus tramp was unknown in those happy days. If, now and then, a foot traveller appeared at a farmhouse, he was usually respectable if poor, journeying in this way from motives of economy. People used their feet more then for pleasure than now. For instance, Williamstown students often walked to their homes in Shelburne, a distance of
nearly thirty miles; and once, when Dan and 'Rasmus went to visit the Brown boys in Athol, they considered it no hardship to walk the ten miles there, and then played the rest of the day after arriving. Grandma Strong often said,—

"Our house in Shelburne stood right at the brow of the hill, the first house you came to after you left Greenfield Street, three miles away. So it was a regular stopping-place for wayfarers, and my father always said, no matter how poor a man was, he should never be turned away from his door without a meal of victuals or a night's lodging, if he wanted it. Brother William says the same. They keep an old bed in the kitchen chamber for those that are not fit to go in a nice, clean bed."

Dan, knowing this traditional family habit of hospitality, had no hesitation in saying,—

"Come right in. My grandmother will give you something to eat," wondering much who the man could be.

Great was the interest of the children when, in response to Grandma's inquiries, it was learned that the man then stowing away cold meat and bread in the kitchen was actually an Irishman, from far away Ireland! Becky ran into her father's room, and said,—

"Father, there's a live Irishman in the kitchen. He came all the way from Ireland! He did! He said so himself."

Mr. Strong did not consider this an event beneath his notice. He came out into the kitchen and talked with the man, the children standing around, full of interest. When he asked the man if he were a Roman Catholic, and he replied, "Indade, and I
am that, yer honor, sure 's my name is Pat Mooney," they gazed on him with still greater marvel. He was the first Irishman or Roman Catholic they had ever seen, and he gave them quite a foreign feeling, as if they had come in direct contact with unknown lands far across the ocean, hitherto known only in the geography.

The last of June, the family moved back into their new old house. One of Grandma's worries about moving had been her "posy bushes." But very early in the season, Mr. Strong and the boys had taken them up carefully and set them out on the new place, as also the currant bushes. So when the family moved back, there were the "laylocks" and the flowering almonds, apparently in their old places, each side the front walk, all in bloom, the bush of "old man" under Grandma's window as fragrant as ever, and the bed of "pinys" by the front gate, all just as they used to be.

Grandma contemplated them with much satisfaction. In fact, it is hard to say who felt happier, Grandma to be in her old room again, with all her own things in place about her, or Mr. Strong, settled once more in his familiar study, with all his books and papers around him, where he could lay his hand right on them. The new carpet was laid in the keeping-room, an object of admiration to all behold- ers, being generally considered one of Aunt Rhoda's most artistic efforts, while Becky's rag-mats came in for their share of praise.

"One moving is enough for me," said Grandma. "I hope I shall never have to move again till I move once for all up into the old burying-ground."
"I think we have reason to feel well satisfied," said Mr. Strong. "Here we are, after some little trouble, it is true—"

"Yes, I should say so," interrupted Grandma.

"Here we are," continued Mr. Strong, "well fixed in our own house in the Centre, close to the church, store, school-house, and tavern. I must say I did not fully realize how inconvenient the old place was until since we have made this change, and find it such an improvement."

"Well, yes, I must say I like it better myself," admitted Grandma, "now it's all over and done with. It is real pleasant to live up among folks, and be able just to throw on my calash and step across the street if I want to run into a neighbor's. And I do love to sit at my window and see the passing, especially the stage-coach from Boston. I know more of what's going on in the world now, who comes to town, and who goes away."

"It was dreadful lonesome down at the old place," remarked Lyddy Ann, who was fully alive to all the advantages of living at the Centre, it being so much more convenient for Sam Hawks to drop in of an evening, among other good reasons.

Snoozer, sitting before the fire washing his face, seemed quite at home again. After their return, Becky had captured him and shut him up in the cellar, where she had spent much time reasoning with him, and explaining matters to his satisfaction, no doubt; for when let out, after going all over the house, smelling about, apparently satisfied at last that this was indeed his own old home, Snoozer had accepted the situation, like the wise cat he was, and
settled down. It is painful to relate that the greater social facilities he enjoyed at the Centre tended to develop his qualities as a champion fighter, and his ears soon presented a slit and notched appearance never known in the quiet retirement of the old place.

The children of course were delighted with their new home; so, from Grandma down to Snoozer, there was but one mind in the family about the advantages of the change.
CHAPTER VII.

THE RUNAWAY.

ONE morning, soon after the removal to their own house, Madam Strong, sitting at the front window with her knitting, was surprised to see her son out in the road, evidently negotiating with a drover who was taking a large drove of hogs to Brighton, the drove improving the stop to wallow in all the mud-puddles they could find.

"I do wonder if Erasmus is going to buy another pig," thought Grandma.

Her doubts were soon solved by the desperate efforts of 'Rasmus, Dan, and the drover to separate one pig from the drove and get him through the parsonage gate and into the pen. Grandma looked upon this addition to their stock with much disfavor, and when her son came in said,—

"What did possess you to buy such a pig as that, Erasmus? He's as lean and long-legged as a racer, and his ears are so big they flap like an elephant's."

"Why, we needed one more pig, and I got him very cheap."

"Yes, I guess the man was glad enough to get rid of him."

"And I thought he would fatten nicely by fall or early winter, when we put down the pork."
"That pig will never fatten," said Grandma, impressively. "Any one would know it only to look at him. He is n't the build to fatten. You 're a great Hebrew and Greek scholar, Erasmus, and a master hand at theology and doctrines; but when it comes to buying pigs, you 'd best take advice, in my opinion."

Grandma's dark forebodings about the new pig were fulfilled sooner than even she expected. Not long after its purchase, 'Rasmus came in one evening, all excitement, to report,—

"The new pig 's broken out of the pen, and we can't find him anywhere!"

"There, what did I tell you, Erasmus?" said Grandma.

'Rasmus and Dan escaped considerable work, and spent much of their valuable time searching the neighborhood over, in all possible and impossible places, for the absconded pig; but not a trace of him could be found, and great was the wonder what had become of him. Some time after all hope of recovering him had been abandoned, Moses Streeter came loafing into the parsonage kitchen, in his usual aimless, straggling manner.

"There comes that shif'less, good-for-nothing Mose Streeter," said Lyddy Ann, when she saw him coming. "Come a beggin' as usual, I s'pose."

"Moses never begs," said Grandma. "He would be ashamed to."

"Well, it amounts to the same thing in the end. He never forgits to bring that old meal bag of his along, and he knows, if he makes a poor mouth, you 'll be sure to fill the bag."
True enough, Mose did carry an empty meal-bag, and he did drop it casually on the floor where it would be within handy reach of Madam Strong. But he really had business of importance this morning.

"The parson’s pig’s ben seen," he said.
"Where?" exclaimed every one at once.
"Over on Mount Zoar, t’ other side."
"It can’t be possible!" said Grandma.
"Ya’as, it is. My ’Nezer see him fuss yisterday, and cum home and told me. ’Nezer wuz nigh scart to death; thought it wuz sum sort of a wild beast. He jest caught a glimpse of him in the woods, and, by ’Nezer’s ’count, I guess he run one way’s fast as the pig did t’ other. I tuk my gun and went right over to see what sort of a critter it wuz. I cum right out on him a eatin’ acorns in the aidge of the wood. I laid out to ketch him, but, cracky, you might as well try to ketch a streak o’ chain lightning!"

"I know it," said Grandma.
"The way he put it when he seed me wuz a caution. I s’arched round a while, but I haint seen hide nor hair on him sence. So I thought I’d jest santer down and tell your folks he’d ben seen."

"My son will be greatly obliged to you," said Madam Strong. "How are you getting along now, Moses?"

"Poorly, ma’am, poorly. I haint ben a feelin’ fuss-rate myself,—feel all kinder beat out, as if the wagons had run over me; haint ben able to do a stroke o’ work for nigh two weeks."

Here Lyddy Ann sniffed perceptibly, and banged
her new dish-pan down on the table with so much vigor that Moses was actually guilty of starting with more life than one would have supposed possible; but he soon continued in a whining tone that grated on Lyddy Ann's feelings almost beyond endurance,—

"Mis' Streeter she most always enjoys poor health, you know; but she 's ben a complainin' more 'n usual lately. Then 'Mandy and 'Nezer 's both on 'em got sore throats,—looks to me as if it wuz a goin' to be measles, and then the hull on 'em will cum down, and I dunno what will become on us then. It 's pretty tough sleddin' with us, — kinder up-hill work."

"Lyddy Ann," said Grandma, "won't you give Moses something to eat, to hearten him up for his walk home, seeing he has bwught us such good news."

Moses's ailments did not seem to have impaired his appetite, as Lyddy Ann scornfully remarked after he had departed. While he was eating, Grandma quietly took his bag and filled out its lean sides with corn meal, a piece of pork, and potatoes. Moses did not seem to observe this, but when through eating, slowly rose, picked up the bag in a matter-of-course manner, and slung it over his shoulder, only saying, as he departed,—

"Wa' al, if enny o' the boys cums up to s'arch for the pig, I'll go with 'em and help ketch him."

When it was noise d abroad that the parson's pig had been seen in a semi-wild state over on Mount Zoar, all the Nimrods of the parish were filled with zeal for his capture; and a large party of men and boys set forth to hunt him, 'Rasmus and Dan fore-
most among them. When they reached Moses Streeter's house on the mountain, he came forth and joined in the chase with enthusiasm, his health seemingly much improved.

Led by Moses, the party went over on the other side of Mount Zoar, and separating, surrounded the piece of woods where the pig had last been seen, beating them up toward the centre. No royal hunting party in days of yore, in the historic forests of Europe, ever enjoyed a wild-boar hunt more than did the Hackmatack boys the pursuit of the parson's pig.

As the circle with loud shouts narrowed in toward the centre, the pig was unearthed from a thick clump of underbrush, and darted forth.

"Hurrah, there he goes!" cried Ki Kellogg, who had started the game. "Look out, Joe, he's going your way!"

The pig darted frantically this way and that; but at every turn encountered his enemies, who, with loud shouts and laughter, that rang through the solemn woods, sprang about, making wild grabs at their prey.

"I've got him!" cried Joe Root, seizing the pig with both hands. But lo! the pig, giving a loud squeal, plunged between Joe's legs, upsetting him backward, and, amid the wild yells of the hunters, disappeared again in the depths of the forest.

The hunt was kept up with spirit all the afternoon, but fruitlessly. Several times the wary pig was seen and almost captured, but never quite, and at dusk a tired party of men, boys, and dogs came lagging home, somewhat crestfallen.

"I knew that pig would never be taken alive,"
said Grandma, when she heard the result of the expedition.

"Well, I don't care," said Dan. "We had lots of fun hunting him, did n't we, 'Rasmus?"

"Fun? I should say so," replied 'Rasmus. "Why, that pig can run like a deer. The dogs couldn't begin to keep up with him. Even Ira Sprague's Spry couldn't get near him."

A few days later Zeri Dunnell and Sam Hawks, two of the best hunters in town, who kept hounds, and who had spent many a night hunting coons, and many a day tracking foxes on the mountain, quietly left the village with their hounds, saying nothing of their plans. Great indeed was the excitement when, toward night, Sam and Zeri came driving into the parson's yard a wagon, from under whose seat appeared the head of the long-lost pig, a gleam of wild determination still in his eye, though a strong rope binding his legs limited his action.

"Sam and Zeri," said Mr. Strong, rubbing his hands with pleasure, "this reminds me of the triumphal entry of the old Roman generals into the capital, bringing their illustrious captives chained to their chariot wheels!"

"I don't know much about that, sir," said Sam; "but this pig's an old Roman if there ever was one. We had a lively time on't ketching him."

"The best sport I ever had," said Zeri. "But we should have cum out the little end o' the horn if it had n't ben for the hounds."

The pig was safely landed in his old pen, so fortified that he never succeeded in escaping again.

"You must both stay to supper with us," said
Grandma to his captors. "Lyddy Ann, you'd best get something hearty. I'm sure these young men must be hungry."

Mr. Strong heartily seconded his mother's invitation, and Lyddy Ann, nothing loath, flew around; and soon a smoking hot supper was set before the heroes, who ate it, entertaining the admiring family with an animated account of the chase,—a tale repeated later in the evening to a large audience around the tavern fire.

The next fall, at the select school kept by Mr. Weatherby, Ira Sprague made a sensation by handing in as a composition an original "poem" relating the tale of the parson's runaway pig.

"On one bright and starry eve,
Sometime last summer, I believe,
An incident of great renown
Took place in this old hilly town.

"That night the parson went to bed;
But scarcely had laid down his head,
When he heard a terrible noise,
But thought 't was occasioned by the boys.

"And to the boys he hollered out
And asked them what they were about;
When the boys answered with a shout,
And told him that the pig was out."

The unsuccessful return of the first hunting party was described in these words:—

"They therefore started home and said
They wanted soon to go to bed;
For as they had been on the leap,
They thought they now had better sleep."
The Runaway.

Lyddy Ann’s supper was immortalized in these lines:—

“And all accepted, it is true,
To share in a delicious stew”

No wonder that Ira Sprague was looked upon as a youth of much promise, likely to reflect credit upon Hackmatack in years to come.

The advantages of living near the Centre were illustrated one evening about this time, when Dan came in, all excitement, to say,—

“Potter, the great prestidigitator, is coming here, —he is, really. He is going to give a show down at the tavern hall to-night. I’ve just seen the bill. Can’t I go, Father?”

“I should like to go too, sir,” said ’Rasmus. “I’ve heard so much about the wonderful things he does.”

Mr. Strong knew “Potter, the world-renowned prestidigitator” well by reputation, and was pleased that he had honored Hackmatack with a visit. He had no objection to letting the boys attend his exhibition, except the expense. With his salary of four hundred dollars and large family, the minister had to consider even the pennies, much more the shillings. Seeing how anxious the boys were to go, he said finally,—

“I will give you a shilling. I cannot afford to spend more than that on mere diversion. If you can both get in for a shilling, you may go. Otherwise, you will have to come home.”

The boys were early at the door of the tavern hall that evening, fairly palpitating with anxiety lest they
should not get in. But before long Uncle Zach came along. "A friend in need is a friend indeed," and such a friend was Uncle Zach always to the boys. The boys hastened to lay the case before him.

"I will speak to the door-keeper about it for you," said Uncle Zach, much to the boys’ relief.

Approaching the door-keeper, who was very busy, as people were now pressing rapidly into the hall, Uncle Zach told him that these two boys had a shilling, and asked if that would admit them.

"Oh, yes," said the door-keeper, "that’s all right. I’ll let them in for a shilling. But they’ll have to wait. We don’t let any children in till all the grown folks are in and seated."

Telling the boys this good news, Uncle Zach went into the hall.

Dan and ’Rasmus, much relieved in their minds, stood among a crowd of other boys at the door, undergoing the torture of having to wait, seeing all the grown folks going in, and knowing that not only all the best seats would be taken, but feeling that probably they would get no seats at all. Finally, there was a lull in the coming. No more grown folks appeared.

"You can go in now, boys," said the door-keeper.

There was a grand rush and scramble of boys, in the midst of which, to their dismay, ’Rasmus and Dan were stopped by the door-keeper, who demanded another shilling.

"Why, you told our uncle you would let us in for a shilling," remonstrated ’Rasmus.

"I meant a shilling apiece," replied the door-keeper.
Here was trouble. What should they do?

"If Uncle Zach only knew about it he would pay the other shilling," said 'Rasmus.

But Uncle Zach was far beyond their reach, in the inaccessible paradise of the show.

"I'll run home and ask Father for another shilling," said Dan.

"It's no use," said 'Rasmus. "You won't get it."

In fact, both boys well knew that two shillings was a large sum for their father to spend for an evening's pleasure. But Dan was wilder than ever to go, after seeing all the other boys go in, knowing that the performance was about to begin, and he was ready to grasp at the least straw of a chance. Rushing home, and bursting breathlessly into the keeping-room, he told his tale of woe, almost in tears. Mr. Strong looked doubtful. But Grandma said,—

"I don't approve much of spending money on such foolishness," — here Dan's hopes sank to zero; "but you don't do it very often, I must say, and I don't mind giving you the extra shilling this time, seeing your heart's so set on 't."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Grandma," cried Dan, his eyes shining with rapture.

"We're never young but once, and you can't put old heads on young shoulders," said Grandma, in evident apology for her weakness, as she handed out the shilling.

Dan sped back to the tavern even faster than he had come down. When he and 'Rasmus entered the hall, oh, joy! Uncle Zach's tall form rose from the very front seat, and he beckoned the boys to come up there. He had saved two nice seats for them, in the
front row, close to the table, and had been wondering why they did not come in.

So in about five minutes the boys' hearts leaped from the depths of despair to the height of bliss. How their eyes opened with wonder at all the amazing sleight-of-hand tricks performed by Potter,—when he stood a pack of cards in the back of a chair, and then called any card he pleased, and it obeyed his bidding and came; when he borrowed Uncle Zach's hat, and drew forth from it, amid the roars of the audience, all sorts of things, from hens' eggs to a large cabbage; when he carried on a long conversation with a mysterious man up the chimney; when he produced a trunk and announced that he had a pig in it, as was clearly proved by the loud squeals of the pig when he raised the lid, their fainter sound when he closed it; when he did, in short, more remarkable things than Dan and 'Rasmus could fully describe to Becky and Lyddy Ann all next day.

It was one of the great evenings of the boys' life. True, going home after the show, 'Rasmus, with the superiority peculiar to his years, rather affected to belittle the entertainment, saying,—

"I saw just how he did it. I can do most of those tricks myself, easy enough."

"It is n't so easy as it looks," said Dan.

And so 'Rasmus found it, when he made some private experiments with a pack of cards at the barn next day.
CHAPTER VIII.

THE RAISING.

WHEN the details of the church raising came up in parish meeting for discussion, there were divided counsels, and some warm feeling. The burning question was, should it be a "wet" or "dry" raising, — that is, should rum be furnished the workers or not?

A few years earlier, this question would never have been raised. Rum would have been provided as a matter of course, — as the prime necessity, indeed. Rum and other strong drinks were furnished freely, not only at raisings, but even at ordinations and funerals,— on all occasions, in short, that brought the people together. It must, as a matter of course, be provided for the men in the hayfield; and if one employed carpenters or other mechanics, "toddy" must be sent them two or three times a day. Did the minister make a parish call? A mug of hot flip was brewed in the tall glass flip-mug before the fire for his special refreshment. The size of these old flip-mugs, holding nearly a quart, sometimes makes us moderns wonder whether the minister was expected to empty the glass unaided.

But the Washingtonian temperance movement, which had recently swept powerfully over the land,
had produced an equal change in public sentiment and practice. At the parish meeting, Captain Pratt, who for once was not on the side of progress, said,—

"There’s no use in arguing the question, or wasting breath talking about it. It can’t be done. You won’t get men enough together to raise the timbers, if it gets noised abroad that we don’t furnish rum. You can’t raise a church without rum."

"They did it over in Northfield," said Medad Billings.

"Well, it won’t work here, and so you’ll find out if you try it. It’s a busy time of year with farmers, and they won’t leave their work to come to a dry raising."

But here Dr. Robbins, who was on the building committee, rose and said,—

"Mr. Hopkins is a strong Washingtonian, and he makes it an absolute condition of his taking the contract that no rum shall be furnished at the raising."

"That settles it then," said the captain, "for we must have Mr. Hopkins. He’s the best master carpenter around here."

"I propose," said Deacon Kellogg, "that the parish furnish a dinner for the raisers at the tavern,—as good a dinner as can be had for money."

This motion of the deacon met with favor as a happy solution of the difficulty; for no one wished to have it said that Hackmatack had had a mean raising. Still, many of the dissatisfied predicted that not men enough would attend to do the work.

The day set for the raising dawned bright and
beautiful, — a day full of hope and sweet promise, when rustling leaves, balmy air fragrant with apple blossoms, wide, sunny sky, bird songs trilling from every tree, all chanted together, "Be joyful in the Lord!"

Contrary to the dark predictions of the anti-Washingtonians, a crowd of men came pouring in to the raising, not only from Hackmatack, but from adjoining towns, until over a hundred willing workers were assembled upon the green on the hill-top.

The underpinning of the new building was already laid, the floor beams in place, and boards had been laid across the beams. Mr. Hopkins invited all the raisers to assemble on this temporary floor. When all were gathered and hushed into silence, Parson Strong stood up in their midst and made a fervent prayer, not unlike that made by Solomon at the dedication of his temple. Into the dedication of this little wooden temple, standing on its own Mount Zion far up among the lonely, all-surrounding hills, under the brooding shadow of Mount Zoar, were breathed the same faith in God, the same spirit of devout consecration to his will and service, the same hope that here the people might find refuge and strength in every time of need.

After the prayer, the men went valiantly to work under the active direction of Mr. Hopkins and his first lieutenant, Mr. Mosely. The bents were already prepared. A bent was an upright timber standing at the side of the building, into which was fitted at right angles a horizontal beam.

"All ready? Now, then, all together. Up she goes!" cried Mr. Hopkins, as bent after bent went
up and was held in place until the cross-piece was hoisted and attached to keep it in position. Of course 'Rasmus and Dan, as well as most of the other boys in town, were not lacking in public spirit on such an important occasion, but were all on hand, much more anxious to help than was appreciated by the raisers, but enjoying the fun and excitement to the utmost.

The work went steadily on with such unusual regularity and stillness that it was the subject of comment. There was not as much noise and rough horse-play as at the old time "wet" raisings, neither was any one killed or maimed for life, as also often occurred at these same old-time raisings. The raising was completed without accident, much sooner than usual, and every one was well satisfied, especially after all were seated at the long table in the dining-room of the Hackmatack House, which was laden with roast turkey, roast pig, great joints of beef and pork, and all the known and approved sorts of pies, pickles, and preserves. True, a few strong anti-Washingtonians slipped across the street and into the store, where Captain Pratt kept rum as well as molasses for sale; but most were more than satisfied with the capital dinner that had been provided by the parish.

And so the raising was successfully finished, and on the hill stood the skeleton of the future church, its new beams gleaming white in the sun.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Dan soon knew every beam and timber of the new meeting-house as well as Mr. Hopkins or Mr. Mosely themselves. It was a most fascinating place to climb and
scramble about in, and to "dare" other boys to try various feats of perilous leaping and climbing. All the boys appreciated this fact; but Dan, as the minister's son, felt a peculiar sense of property in the new church, and his living so near gave him better advantages than the others had.

Mr. Mosely complained,—

"Them boys drive me 'most crazy. If I get that meetin'-house built without killin' some of 'em, especially Parson Strong's Dan, I shall come out better 'n I expect to. Dan Strong's got the most activity in him to the square inch of any boy I ever did see."

Grandma mended the rents in Dan's clothes, which were numerous about this time, and applied sticking plaster and opodeldoc to the various wounds and bruises he acquired in the active study of church architecture, and worried about him, as she often said, "enough to bring up half a dozen boys like 'Rasmus."

Priscilla came home from boarding-school the last of June. She came in triumph, bringing not only the silver salt spoon, marked "F. to S.," but also a stately letter from Miss Fiske to Mr. Strong, which stated, in a handwriting "fine enough to be framed and hung up," as Grandma said admiringly,—

"The conduct of your daughter throughout the year, and her uniform studiousness and faithfulness to duty, have won the highest esteem and approbation of her teachers. She has passed through our prescribed course of study with honor to herself and satisfaction to her teachers, and they believe themselves justified in cherishing a confident hope
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that she will be an ornament and blessing to that sphere in life that may be assigned her by her Heavenly Father."

Tears, but not of sorrow, came to Mr. Strong's eyes as he read this letter, and he said,—

"My daughter, this gratifies me deeply, I confess. I wish your mother could see this."

The other children looked almost with awe on Priscilla, after hearing this letter read. Then, too, besides all her book knowledge, Priscilla brought home the most beautiful and elaborate embroidered lace cap and deep collar ever seen in Hackmatack, the work of her own hands, and—she could play "The Battle of Prague"!

Not only Dan and Becky took the keenest delight in this performance, but the whole family—nay, the whole parish when they chanced to drop in—listened with mingled wonder and delight to Priscilla playing "The Battle of Prague" on the organ. There was the boom, boom, of the cannon at the lower end of the organ, the shrieks and groans of the dying, the galloping of horses, and then the quiddling of the very top keys for the smoke of the battle! It was really thrilling. And then, as Grandma said, "It's all labelled, so you can't help knowing just what it means."

In addition to this great piece, Priscilla played the "American March" and "Bounding Billows," and sang, among other songs never before heard in Hackmatack, "Gayly the Troubadour touched his guitar." No wonder that the minister's daughter was looked upon as a highly accomplished young lady, and that Madam Strong felt complacently that
her money had been well invested, and held her older sister up as, in every respect, a shining example to Becky.

The summer school was now in session, kept by a Miss Manning from Northfield, a young lady of fine character and capacity, and very pretty withal. Uncle Zach used to drive the teacher home to Northfield Saturday night now and then after his fast mare, causing some talk thereby among the gossips, to which Grandma Bullard listened unruffled. Were not the Mannings one of the first families in Northfield?

Becky of course attended school; Dan and the other boys of any size equally of course did not. But Dan's education was going on all the time. He was learning geology, botany, chemistry, natural history, and philosophy in the fields and woods direct from Dame Nature herself, without knowing it. The farm work he did, to say nothing of all his tree-climbing, running, and lifting, strengthened his muscles far better than any amount of gymnasium practice could have done. He still recited in Latin to his father, and had begun Greek with him, reciting with Elihu Briggs, a young man who was studying with Mr. Strong, fitting for college.

Mr. Strong had started a lyceum in Hackmatack, and the lyceum had a small library of well selected books; and the Sunday-school library was kept at the parsonage. It was a red-letter day in the family when Mr. Strong bought of a travelling merchant for the Sunday-school library the "Swiss Family Robinson," "Anecdotes of Washington," "Goldsmith's Histories of Greece and Rome," and "Woodstock."
Dan himself owned "Gulliver's Travels," given him by a dull boy at school whom he had helped in arithmetic, and who, happening to own this book, and having an aversion to all books on general principles, gladly gave it to Dan. Dan and Becky had read it almost out of its covers. Although Dan had never studied history and English literature at school, perhaps his reading from the libraries and the talk he heard about books in his father's family made him better informed than some more favored young people who "go through" regular courses in these branches at school.

There was always plenty of work in summer for Dan and 'Rasmus to keep them safe from the designs of that person whom Grandma often told them—

"finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

When there were no other chores, there was always the garden. You could always do something in the garden.

One day Dan had set his heart on going fishing. The potatoes had been hoed and the corn harrowed, and the grass was not yet quite ripe enough for cutting; and Dan could see no reason why he should not go fishing, and many excellent reasons why he should. He and Cyrus and Tertius and Ben had talked it over after Sunday-school last Sunday, and had agreed if they could get off, to meet at Dan's on this very day and go over to Dragon Brook for an all day's fishing excursion.

At the breakfast table Dan said,—
“Father, may I go fishing to-day? It’s ever so long since I went.”

“I do not see how I can spare you to-day, my son,” said Mr. Strong. “The garden needs hoeing badly.”

Dan’s countenance fell. That everlasting garden!

“Those beans will never be of any account unless they are poled right away,” said Grandma.

“I prefer to have Erasmus pole the beans, while Dan hoes,” said his father. “Erasmus, you may take old John and go down to the swamp and cut a load of white birch poles, and pole the beans.”

“Cyrus and Ben Sprague and Tertius are all coming here to-day, to go fishing with me,” ventured Dan, in an injured tone.

“The garden must be hoed to-day,” said Mr. Strong. “It is dry now, and in just the right condition for hoeing. The haying is coming on soon, too. We shall have a wet spell set in soon, I presume, and then you can go fishing.”

Dan said nothing except to ask to be excused, and left the table hastily.

“Aint you goin’ to eat no griddle cakes, Dan?” asked Lyddy Ann, as he stalked through the kitchen.

“No; I don’t want any griddle cakes,” said Dan, shortly, banging the kitchen door.

“My, he must be sick!” exclaimed Lyddy Ann, in wonder.
CHAPTER IX.

CITY VISITORS.

Dan took his hoe and went into the garden, feeling himself an injured, down-trodden boy. At first his hoe made savage slaughter among the weeds, and if, now and then, in his fury he cut up a promising young cucumber-vine, or nipped in the bud the career of a flourishing squash, he felt rather glad than otherwise.

"Don't care; serves you right," he thought grimly, feeling the innocent squashes and beets his personal enemies.

Gradually his work, and perhaps also some sweet influence in the summer morning, so serene and bright, in the bird-songs rippling all round him, in the breeze that rustled through the corn, and waved the plummy grass in green billows, and cooled his forehead as he tossed off his palm-leaf hat, calmed his rage, and even made him feel a little ashamed of himself. Just as he had reached this better frame of mind, he heard a shrill whistle. There was Tertius now. But Tertius was driving a load of meal bags.

"I can't go fishing to-day, Dan," said Tertius, mournfully; "I've got to go to mill. And Cyrus can't go either. He's got to ride horse for harrowing."
"That's lucky then," said Dan, "for I can't go myself."

"Can't you?" said Tertius, his face brightening.

"No, I've got to hoe to-day; but I'm going the first rainy day. Father said I might."

"All right. We'll be ready for an early start. I should n't wonder if it rained to-morrow. Father says he thinks to-day is a regular weather breeder."

"Oh, I hope so," said Dan, scanning the sky anxiously for any hopeful clouds. But the sky was almost unnaturally clear and deep and blue, not the least fleece of a cloud to be seen. The air was so clear that you could see every tree, shadow, and little hollow on Mount Zoar, as plainly as if it were near at hand.

Hoping for better things to-morrow, Dan hoed on so industriously that when, about three in the afternoon, his father came out to rest himself from studying and writing by plying the hoe a while, he said, well pleased,—

"Why, my son, you have worked well. There's no more hoeing here now than I can do myself, so you may have the rest of the day to yourself until it is time to get the cows."

Dan needed no urging to stop. Cheerfully did he hang his hoe up under the shed, and quickly did he disappear, lest Grandma or Lyddy Ann should spy his leisure and set him at work for them.

When Becky came home from school at four o'clock she found Grandma Bullard sitting in her chaise at the front gate, having driven down herself to impart an interesting bit of news to the Strong
family. Becky was determined to be the first to tell Dan of it. But where was he? She hunted everywhere for him. Neither his grandma nor Lyddy Ann had seen him. Finally she went out in the garden where 'Rasmus was poling the beans, and her father, stately and dignified even in his shirt sleeves, was, in his own mind, confuting the arguments of the adversary as he laid the weeds low.

"I have a vague recollection of seeing Daniel going off towards the old place," said Mr. Strong.

Away sped Becky across the fields, followed by Snoozer, who liked nothing better than a pleasant out-door ramble with his little mistress. Sometimes Becky carried him in her arms, which suited Snoozer well; but now she was too much excited, and he had to trot along behind her on his own little white paws. Finally she saw Dan's palm-leaf hat in the distance, bobbing actively around down by the brook-side, in the pasture.

"What is he doing, I wonder?" thought Becky, with interest; for Dan was a boy who sought out many inventions.

Coming nearer, she saw that he was building a strong dam across the brook, of large stones well packed with earth and sand.

"Oh, Dan," cried Becky, as soon as she was within hailing distance, "I've such a piece of news for you! You can't guess what it is."

"Then I won't try," said Dan, not looking up from his work.

"Ah, you wouldn't be so cool, I guess, if you knew what it was. Cousin Otis and Esther are coming from Boston to visit Grandma Bullard!"
They are coming in the stage to-night, and Uncle Zach wants you to drive them out to his house."

"Well, that is news worth telling," said Dan, stopping work and standing up. "I shall be ever so glad to see them again."

"I'm not glad," said Becky; "I dread meeting them. I know they will be so citified and full of formal airs that I shall be afraid of them."

"Nonsense!" said Dan, "don't be such a goose, Becky Strong. They're just like us, and as nice and pleasant as they can be. Esther is about your age, and a real pretty little girl. I know you will like her,—you can't help it."

"Well, perhaps I shall," said Becky, doubtfully; "but I dread meeting her all the same. What are you doing, Dan?"

"I've made a water-wheel," said Dan, displaying with some pride a little wheel about a foot long.

"Oh, how cunning!" cried Becky.

"And I've built a dam, and now I'm going to dig a canal and set the wheel up, and see if it will work."

"I'll help you," said Becky. "I love to dig in the ground."

So Dan and Becky squatted to the work and dug till their faces were red and their legs ached, while Snoozer rambled up and down the banks of the brook, nibbling catnip and rolling in the great bed of it, or lying artfully low in the grass for birds, who somehow always soared triumphantly up and away just as he was pouncing upon them.

By and by the canal was finished, and proved large enough to bring a good-sized stream of water around
below the dam, which, falling, on the little wheel, set it to turning merrily round and round, just like a grown-up water-wheel. After watching it for a while with all the pride of the successful inventor, Dan said,—

"We must drive the cows up now. It's 'most supper-time."

The cows were all waiting at the bars, impatient to be milked. Dan let down the bars, and Becky, with Snoozer in her arms, drove them through. The shadow of the hills lay long across the valley from the west, and a wood thrush’s sweet, melancholy note rang from the woods.

"Old Colonel Knapp is dead," said Becky.

"He must be awful old," said Dan.

"Yes, he's eighty-two," said Becky. "Only think how long the bell would have had to toll, if the meeting-house had been done."

The stage-coach from Boston was not due till late in the afternoon. Mr. Strong said,—

"Otis and Esther will have to wait here until I return from Colonel Knapp's, for I must drive over there at once to arrange for the funeral."

'Rasmus harnessed old John, while Dan, feeling that his usual out-door summer costume of shirt, trousers, and bare feet was hardly suitable array in which to greet his city cousins, voluntarily donned his best suit and heavy winter boots, feeling that his cousins would little appreciate the sacrifice he had made. Grandma braided Becky's two pigtails afresh, tying them with blue ribbon, smoothed the front hair carefully down each side her forehead, and put on her best white apron, reserved for occa-
sions of more than ordinary grandeur, and a pair of her best ruffled white pantalets. Thus attired, Becky was almost prepared to meet even her city cousins unembarrassed.

About sundown the stage came rolling along in a great cloud of dust, and stopped before the parsonage gate, where Grandma and the children, having heard the driver’s horn, were all standing, waiting to greet their guests. Otis rode on top the coach beside the driver, and shouted from afar,—

"Hallo, Dan!"

He carried a long parcel which proved later on to be a jointed fish-pole such as had never been seen in Hackmatack. The pale-faced, bright-eyed little girl looking eagerly out of the coach window, who carried a large bandbox covered with gay wall paper, was Esther.

There was a great time introducing everybody to everybody, while Becky felt very bashful as all the passengers in and on the coach watched the meeting of the cousins with interest. But Esther was so lively and chatty, and admired Snoozer so much, and thought Hackmatack such a lovely place, and was so delighted that she and Otis were going to spend a whole month on a farm, that Becky soon forgot to be afraid of her, and felt as if she had known her always, especially when Esther said,—

"There’s a present for you in this bandbox, Becky, from my mother," and opening the box, revealed not only her own best bonnet, but the love-liest little pink silk bonnet imaginable for Becky!

"Let’s walk up to Grandma Bullard’s," proposed Otis, "and not wait for the horse. We are so tired
Jolly Good Times at Hackmatack.

with sitting cramped up in the stage-coach all day, we had rather walk."

"Oh, yes," said Esther, "do walk; it will rest us; and the air is so sweet, and it is so pleasant here."

So it was agreed that Dan should bring the trunk up the next morning, and the cousins all strolled along the pleasant country road in the dusk of the summer evening up to Grandma Bullard's, calling for Sarah Jane on the way.

When they entered Grandma Bullard's yard, the three girls were in advance of the boys, who had been delayed by stopping to examine Otis's fish-pole. It was a new one, never yet used, and Otis did not need much urging to show it, but had opened and jointed it with equal satisfaction to himself and the boys. The girls went around to the back-door, of course, front-doors being used in Hackmatack only on occasions of state and ceremony, such as funerals, sewing societies, and high teas.

"Dear me, Becky," said Sarah Jane, "I do believe I hear those dreadful geese!"

"Oh, my, I hope not," said Becky.

"What is it?" asked Esther, alarmed.

"Grandma Bullard's geese. She keeps a great flock of them, and the old gander is so ugly. Oh, here they come! Run, girls, run!"

Away scampered the girls, the geese after them in hot pursuit, headed by the old gander, who hissed and flapped his wings and snapped at their heels in a warlike manner that frightened them all, especially Esther, who had not counted on such terrible experiences as these among her country pleasures. They tumbled head-foremost in at the kitchen door,
the old gander close at their heels, driven back only by Grandma Bullard’s broom.

Esther was crying. After Grandma had warmly welcomed her, she said,—

“Now, Becky and Sarah Jane, you ought to be ashamed. You have frightened your cousin so she will wish she had never come.”

“Why, Grandma, we really could n’t help it. We are so afraid of the geese.”

“They would n’t chase you if you did n’t run. Just see the boys, now.”

The geese had set out to attack the boys; but the boys, far from running, met them so valiantly with sticks and stones that the geese were glad to run in their turn.

“I don’t see why you want to keep geese, Grandma,” said Sarah Jane.

“Where would my beds and pillows come from then, I should like to know? I’m saving up feathers now, and I mean to give each of my granddaughters as nice a feather-bed and pillows and bolster as ever was seen when she marries. So you can’t afford to despise the poor geese. You must all be real smart and get a lot of bedquilts pieced up toward your setting out. How’s your quilt getting along, Becky?”

“I’ve had to braid so many rag-mats lately,” said Becky, “that I have n’t sewed much on it.”

“I suppose you have begun a bedquilt long before this, Esther?” asked Grandma.

“No, ma’am,” said Esther, meekly. “I never sewed any patchwork.”

“Well, I never did see —” began Grandma, then checked the expression of her horror at this shocking
neglect on the part of Esther's mother, out of politeness to her little guest.

"Well, never mind," she continued, "I'll start you on a quilt, and Becky and Sarah Jane can bring their patchwork up here, and you can all sew your stents together. Little girls must learn to sew if they want to grow up to be women of any account."

Grandma Bullard had the reputation of being the most notable woman in town for unflagging industry. No wasted moments lay on her conscience. She even kept her knitting-work on the little round stand at her bedside, and if she could not sleep in the night, sat up against her pillows and knitted until she felt drowsy. Nor did she waste candle-light either, her well-trained fingers being able to guide the needles skilfully in the dark.

Esther evidently did not anticipate the programme thus laid out for her by Grandma Bullard. But when Becky, who well knew that there were many alleviations of industry to be expected at Grandma Bullard's, exclaimed, "Oh, goody! I'd love to come, would n't you, Sarah Jane," and Sarah Jane assented with joy, her face brightened, and she felt more resigned to these unexpected pleasures of visiting.
CHAPTER X.

A SUMMER SUNDAY.

The next night after the arrival of the city cousins, it being Saturday, Grandma Bullard was surprised by the appearance of Dan and 'Rasmus at her house after supper.

"Why, boys," she exclaimed, "what's the meaning of this? What brings you up here so near sundown Saturday night? Is anything the matter at home?"

"No, ma'am," said 'Rasmus; "we're going in swimming. Father always lets us go in swimming Saturday night, to wash ourselves for Sunday. We came to get Otis to go with us."

Grandma now observed that the boys carried towels.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Over to Badger's Pond."

"Seems to me you might find some place nearer home than that."

"That's the best place, and Father said we might go."

"Well, I'll let Otis go," — Otis already stood, towel in hand, ready to start, — "but you mustn't go to skylarking around over there, and making a great noise. Remember it's Saturday night."
“Yes’m,” said the boys, already running off; for time was precious, and they longed to be in the water.

Badger’s Pond was so clear and bright that the trees and rocks along its shore, the pink clouds floating across the sunset sky, even Mount Zoar’s rugged sides, were all mirrored in its depths. Jumping into it was like taking a leap off into the sky, only the plunge shattered the mirror into thousands of little waves that chased each other until they broke against the shore. At the upper end was a shelving beach where you could walk out gradually into the water.

“Shall we go up to the beach to-night?” asked Dan.

“No,” said ’Rasmus, “let’s dive off the rock.”

“Dive, by all means,” said Otis, who was an expert swimmer.

“There’s some one else in swimming down there,” said ’Rasmus.

Drawing near, they found the white forms gliding about in the water so nimbly were their friends, Ki Kellogg and the Sprague boys, Spry meantime, in a state of evident excitement, now prancing wildly up and down the shore, now plunging in and swimming out to his masters, only to be rewarded by being pulled under the water. Emerging, he swam to shore, shaking a shower of drops from himself that wet the stones all around far and near, barking loudly in remonstrance at such treatment.

The day had been warm, and the boys hard at work in the sun all day. How quickly they shed trousers and shirts,—their only garments,—and how
delightful felt the evening breeze caressing their heated bodies, as, standing on the rock's edge, they clasped their hands high above their heads, took a flying leap into the air, and then sank down, down in the cool, clear water, to come up red-faced and sputtering, but as buoyant and at home as so many ducks. What wonder that such a passion for cleanliness seized the boys that their bath, alias swim, was prolonged until the long summer twilight died into evening, the sunset glow faded from the west, and the reflection of the stars danced and glimmered in the broken surface of the pond, rippled by their strokes. Suddenly the boys noticed how dark it was growing.

"Jiminy, boys," said Ki Kellogg, "it must be nine o'clock!"

Then and there was hurrying to and fro, a wild plunging into trousers, a difficult drawing on of shirts upon damp bodies.

"We shall catch it this time, sure," said 'Rasmus.

"Yes, you may bet on that," said Dan, his wet hair matted down on his forehead, as he struggled to get into his shirt.

"We had a delicious swim, anyway," said Otis. "I never want better fun."

"Come on, Otis," called Ki, who was already halfway up the hill, "you're a lucky dog. You're company, so you'll get off easy; but I expect Father will give me a whole chapter of the Bible to learn by heart, like's not."

Mr. Strong sent his boys right to bed on their arrival home, and said they could not go to Badger's Pond again for their Saturday night bath, as a punishment for staying so late.
The next morning was pleasant, but very warm. Mr. Strong, who was going away to preach on an ex-
change, said,—

"I shall start early in order to drive slowly, for apparently it is going to be a very warm day,—
the hottest we have had this season."

'Rasmus and Dan, who went barefoot all the week, felt even more than usual the hardship of being obliged to put on their heavy winter boots and stockings, also woollen trousers and spencers. Week days they wore nankeen trousers, but Sundays they must do honor to the day by wearing their best clothes. The boys were dissatisfied and cross; but the girls were radiant, for Sunday gave them an opportunity of airing their finery. When Priscilla appeared at meeting that day, in the big coal-scuttle leghorn bonnet that Dan had brought from Boston, trimmed inside and out with wreaths of apple blossoms, wearing a sprigged muslin dress, her neck modestly covered by the lace cape of her own embroidery, many people agreed with John Drake, just arrived home from college, that the minister’s oldest daughter had bloomed into a charming young lady.

Becky felt more gorgeous than Solomon in all his glory, dressed in a short-sleeved pink muslin dress, her ruffled white pantalets coming down almost to the tips of her cloth gaiter boots, her brown eyes shining from under the depths of the new pink silk bonnet with the high crown and peaked front that Aunt Susan had sent her from Boston.

"Fine feathers don’t make fine birds always," said Grandma, fearing that Becky was in danger of vanity. "Handsome is that handsome does."
Dan also felt it his brotherly duty to take down Becky's pride a peg.

"My," said he, "how peacocky we are! Do you know, Becky, in that pink bonnet, you look exactly like our black calf under the new shed!"

Becky, who knew that she was well tanned by the summer sun, felt quite mortified at this. But Lyddy Ann said, "You be still, Dan. She looks as pretty as a pink, so now," which made her feel happier. Soon, too, she was so absorbed in planning to sit next to Esther at meeting that she almost forgot even the glories of the new bonnet.

Meeting was now being held, for lack of a church, in that most useful building in all Hackmatack emergencies, the old unoccupied tavern on the hill. The children enjoyed the variety these services afforded much more than ordinary going to meeting in a proper church. There being no pews, they could often sit with their particular cronies, which was pleasant. Of course they could not whisper; but there were at least chances for occasional nudges and eye glances, which varied the monotony.

The old tavern hall was in the second story of the big, ungainly building that stood fronting the common on top of the hill, near the site of the new church. It had windows on three sides; on the fourth was the fiddler's seat,—a small, box-like recess built into the wall, with a bench across the back, and a low balustrade in front. In this nook many a once famous old "Rosin the bow," long since dead and gone, had plied his elbow briskly, his jovial strains sending merrily flying over the worn floor light young feet that had long ago ceased dancing.
of the old folks who felt it such a burden to climb wearily up the long flight of stairs to meeting to-day, as they sat listening to Parson Lyman's sermon, heard abler preachers than he discourse. Time, death, change, spoke to them more solemnly than did the minister.

The fiddler's seat was transformed for the time into a pulpit, a short board resting on two barrels, and covered by one of Madam Strong's tablecloths, forming a desk for the Bible, hymn-book, and sermon. A bench was built against the wall around three sides of the hall. On this sat the choir. Long slabs and planks, supported at each end by chairs, furnished seats for the congregation, the women and girls sitting one side the narrow aisle left down the centre, the men and boys the other. A large rocking-chair had been placed beside the temporary pulpit for Madam Strong's use, and here she sat with much dignity, facing the congregation, swaying a large feather fan, and keeping a vigilant eye on the children, especially on Becky, who, to her own joy and Grandma's uneasiness, had contrived to sit not only with Esther and Sarah Jane, but also with Peri Drake, Pert Billings, and Sophy Briggs,—a whole slab full of bright-eyed little girls, happy in surveying each other's summer finery, Becky's new Boston bonnet being the chief object of their thoughts, it is to be feared.

Dan, of course, sat with the choir; but he had Cyrus Dole next to him, which was a comfort. In spite of the heat, and the discomfort of the hard, backless seats, Parson Strong's congregation turned out to meeting as usual, and the hall was crowded.
All the windows were wide open, but seemed to admit more sun and flies than breeze. No one blamed Elijah Benson, who played the big bass-viol, and who put the same muscle and energy into the work that he did into shoeing horses week-days, for taking off his coat and playing in his shirt sleeves. It was a pity that Mr. Strong had exchanged to-day, of all days, with Parson Lyman, who was considered a dull preacher, having a monotonous, drawling delivery that would have ruined the finest sermon ever written, and that was sure to put the congregation to sleep even in the briskest weather. He was also greatly gifted with continuance.

Parson Lyman was an unusually tall man. There was always a fascination to Dan in watching Mr. Lyman unfold himself, inch by inch, as he slowly rose, to see how high he really would go. This fascination was almost painful to-day, for Dan was sure of the catastrophe which did happen. As Mr. Lyman straightened himself to his full height, his head bumped against the low ceiling of the fiddler’s box with a resounding thwack. Dan nudged Cyrus, and they hid their smiles in their hymn-books. But there was an audible titter from the slab occupied by the little girls. All the mothers looked rebukingly around, and Madam Strong frowned ominously at Esther and Sarah Jane, who blushed, looked very demure, and kept very still for a long time.

Parson Lyman, now carrying his head in a painful, stooping position, that made the congregation’s necks ache from sympathy, gave out the hymn,—

"Broad is the road that leads to death,
And sinners walk together there," —
to be sung to the tune of "Windham,"—a most depressing minor tune. Then the people stood for the long prayer. When it was over, they were glad to settle themselves as comfortably as they could on the comfortless seats, and prepare to listen to the sermon.

Parson Lyman had decided to compliment Brother Strong's people by delivering to them what he felt to be one of his finest efforts,—an abstruse metaphysical discourse. A dry sermon it would have been considered at any time; but to-day, in the crowded, warm hall, with the flies buzzing all around, it had a peculiarly soothing effect on his hearers. Luckily, Peri Drake had brought a big bunch of fennel, and Sophy Briggs had some sprigs of caraway. Nibbling these refreshments kept the little girls awake, and helped pass away the time, and their eyes were wide open to see anything funny. Then Miss Patty, who sat behind them, had some peppermint drops in her black velvet bag trimmed with steel beads, some of which she kindly passed over.

They enjoyed watching Aunt Rhoda Benson. As the flies buzzed, buzzed sleepily in the top of the room, and Parson Lyman droned drowsily on, Aunt Rhoda evidently grew very sleepy, but made touching efforts to keep awake.

"Allowing these premises to be correct," said Parson Lyman, "we are, my hearers, safe in deducing the following conclusions: Firstly, the Divine Grace,"—and so on.

Aunt Rhoda swayed her turkey-feather fan vigorously to and fro, and nibbled her dill, straightening herself and fixing her eyes on the preacher with a
determined expression. Gradually the fan waved slower and slower, Aunt Rhoda's erect position relaxed, the green calash nodded lower and lower, and suddenly bang went her fan on the floor. Waking with a jump, Aunt Rhoda hastened to pick up the fan, straightened herself, and looked fixedly at the preacher, as if she would defy any one to say she had been asleep.

Old Mr. Higby stood up now and then. He always did when he felt sleepy in church, so no one wondered at that. Most of the choir, who, seated against the wall, had the advantages of a back to their seat, went to sleep and enjoyed a comfortable nap, till Levi Bassett dropped the pitch-pipe from his relaxed grasp and woke them all up with the noise.

Deacon Kellogg had taken the wise precaution to have Ki sit next to himself, but Ki had secured 'Rasmus on his other side. When Ki saw that his father and the other men on his slab were dropping off to sleep, giving 'Rasmus a sly nudge, they managed, by a slight and apparently innocent change of position, to make the slab rock as if it were going over, effectually wakening every one with a jump. But presently their attention became riveted on Eldad Totman, down in the very front row. Poor Eldad, who had been working hard on the farm all the week, found sitting still in a close room, with a heavy woollen coat on, listening to something he could not possibly understand, altogether too much for his good intentions. First he nodded, then he pulled his eyelids open by a great effort of the will, and made heroic struggles to fight off the enemy;
but all in vain. Gradually the preacher’s droning voice sounded farther and farther off, his face faded wholly from sight, and Eldad, forgetting that he was not in his old pew where he had sat so many years, settled back comfortably into his accustomed corner, as he supposed, when up flew his feet, and over he went backwards into Dr. Robbins’s lap! Eldad, dreaming that he was in his wagon and the horse had run away, shouted out “Whoa!” before he woke enough to know where he really was. Then, blushing and crestfallen, he had no further difficulty in keeping awake, nor indeed had the rest of the congregation, after this startling incident.

The sermon finally came to an end. Even Madam Strong, who always stoutly upheld all ministers, when Mrs. Captain Pratt said to her, coming downstairs, “What a terribly dry preacher Parson Lyman is,” admitted, “I don’t think he preaches as much to edification as some.”

There was no opportunity to reprove the children during the short nooning, as Parson Lyman came home to luncheon with the family. But after the second service, when Dan had brought round Parson Lyman’s chaise and seen him double himself up in it and drive slowly out of the yard, Madam Strong gave them all what the boys called “a regular going over” for laughing in meeting.

“I shall ask your Grandma Bullard, Becky, to see to it that you and Esther sit with her after this,” said Grandma. “And Dan, I think now you’re old enough to sit in the choir, you’re old enough to sit still and keep your countenance, no matter what happens.”
'Rasmus was rather enjoying hearing Dan and Becky dealt with. But suddenly Grandma turned her batteries on him.

"'Pears to me, 'Rasmus," she said, "you and Ki Kellogg were not sitting any too still. You hitched about a good deal."

'Rasmus made no reply, feeling rather guilty.

"And I saw you laughing when Eldad Totman was overcome with sleep. The long and short of it is, you children must behave yourselves as becomes a minister's family, no matter what the rest of the girls and boys do. It looks worse in you than in them. You ought to be an example to the others. I must say, I shall be thankful enough when we get back into a meeting-house again and sit in pews, in order and decency."

In the afternoon, when the children had learned their Sunday-school lessons for the next Sunday, they were allowed to sit out-doors and read their Sunday-school books in the shade of the trees.

Reading out-doors always gave Becky a double pleasure. As a light breeze stirred the boughs, the leaf shadows played up and down the pages of "The Parent's Assistant," wherein Becky was reading "Lazy Lawrence," and a bluebird swinging lightly on the tip of a pendent limb sang a rippling melody that mingled pleasantly with the story.

Dan, lying on his back on the grass, looked up through the green boughs to the white clouds floating lazily across the blue sky overhead, and watched the yellow butterflies dancing over the waving buttercups in the tall grass. It was a peaceful pleasure. The rustling leaves, the bees bumbling in the white roses
on the bush by the side door, the warmth, the stillness only made more profound somehow by buzzing bees and singing birds, were all very soothing; and 'Rasmus was about to lay down his book and join the half asleep Dan on the grass, when the distant "trot, trot," of a horse's feet was heard, coming through the Sunday stillness.

"That's old John's trot," said 'Rasmus. "I can always tell the way he puts his feet to the ground when he is coming home. Dan, you'd better get up and sit in your chair. Father 'll think that looks most too much like a picnic for Sunday, I guess."

Dan, feeling the wisdom of this advice, jumped up and into his chair with a book well in his hand before old John rounded into the yard, head and ears up, on a considerably faster trot than the minister considered quite decorous for Sunday.

"As soon as Erasmus has put out the horse, you may come into the house, children," said their father, "and we will have our Bible reading."

Soon after the reading and their father's comments thereon, came supper. Then gradually, oh, so gradually, the sun sank behind the mountain, the shadows lengthened until the last ray of sunlight had vanished from the eastern hills, the birds, twittering, flew about in the fragrant dusk seeking their nests, and Sunday was over.

The boys went after the cows down to the pasture on the old place, and Becky was allowed to go with them. It was a pleasant ramble in the summer twilight, with much stopping along the road to examine Dan's water-wheel, to gather spearmint by
the brook, and great branches of pink mountain laurel in the edge of the woods.

Priscilla sat out on the front door-steps with a cinnamon rose in her hair,—a pretty picture in the moonlight that shone over her and fell, a broad white flood, through the open front-door into the painted hall, dimly revealing the wonderful landscapes on its walls. Oddly enough, John Drake happened to be passing by, and, having a taste for the beautiful probably, he dropped in and sat on the steps with Priscilla. The same little drama was being played on the back door-steps, where Lyddy Ann and Sam Hawks were enjoying the moonlight together.

When the children returned from pasture they brought Otis and Esther with them, having met them coming down the old road to spend the evening. They all seated themselves also on the front steps to enjoy the glory of the summer evening, and chatter over their own affairs. Then young Drake asked Priscilla if she would n’t come into the house and have a little music. Other friends began to drop in now. By and by, the sweet, solemn notes of the organ floated out the open window, bearing up the uplifted voices of the company in “Brattle Street.”

“When gladness wings my favored hour,
   Thy love my thoughts shall fill;
Resigned, when storms of sorrow lower,
   My soul shall meet thy will.

“My lifted eye, without a tear,
   The gathering storm shall see;
My steadfast heart shall know no fear,
   That heart shall rest on thee.”
The words conveyed little meaning to the children; but they felt an influence from the music that kept them quietly listening, as they watched the moonlight striking in under the dark arches of the solemn old trees, whose leaves rustled so mysteriously in the evening breeze.

Looking back in after years, their chief impression of the strictly kept Sundays of their childhood would not be a sense of wearisomeness and restraint, but rather of peacefulness, of sacred rest and quiet, and they would realize the good influences flowing through all their lives from the old-fashioned New England Sabbath-keeping of their youth.
CHAPTER XI.

GOING A FISHING.

YES, fishing; but first, a funeral, for Dan, as a minister’s son, had many and varied experiences. Due notice had been given at meeting that the funeral of Colonel Knapp would be attended the following day at his late residence. Dan must go, not only to drive his father and care for the horse, but also as a member of the choir, to sing.

Colonel Knapp had been in his prime one of the leading men of the town,—a kind, good man, of simple integrity and uprightness, who had been content to work hard on the farm inherited from his father, and grow rich slowly by industry and economy. In his youth he had been colonel in the militia; later, he had served in the Legislature, as County Commissioner, and in other offices. He was guardian of most of the orphans in town. Ordinarily the funeral of so prominent a man would have been held in the church; but now it was necessarily held at his house.

From far and near chaises and wagons were streaming along the road leading to the great white farmhouse on the hill that had been the dwelling-place of three generations of Knapps. The farmers had stopped work for one day to pay the last tribute of
respect to the memory of their old neighbor and friend, who rested at last from his labors. The house was filled to overflowing.

Dan stood out-doors with most of the men and boys. His father stood in the front hall, where his voice was audible to those out-doors as well as in the crowded rooms.

As Mr. Strong's voice rang solemnly out, reading from the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians,—"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power,"—Dan looked about him, at the rustling leaves overhead in all the freshness of early summer verdure, at the tree shadows shifting on the grass, at the long line of horses tied to the fence, at all the familiar, every-day objects. The sun shone, the birds sang, the breeze blew, the flowers bloomed all around,—how beautiful and alive and sure this world seemed! And yet here was this awful mystery of death in it.

Dan was called into the house to join with the choir in singing "China."

"Why do we mourn departed friends,
Or shake at death's alarms?
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
To call them to his arms."

In between the verses of this mournful, wailing minor air, Dan heard the song of a bluebird that, swaying on the tip of a white-birch limb near the window, gushed and rippled on, pouring out a flood of happy melody. Something seemed to tell Dan
that the bluebird's song was truer than "China," — that this was God's world, and so all was well in life or death.

At the end of the services the long procession was formed in strict order of relationship, — friends and neighbors following after the remotest kin, — and wound over the hills to the little country burying-ground on the shady hillside near the church. All over here, Dan rode silently home with his father.

The very next day, although it was not raining, Mr. Strong let the boys off for a whole day's fishing, in honor of their cousin Otis. Such a flying about as there was at the parsonage that morning, putting up luncheon, digging bait, hunting up fish-hooks, lines, and sinkers, and dashing around to notify the other boys, who were also allowed to go out of regard to "Jedediah Bullard's son." The trout up in Dragon Brook might almost have felt the excitement in the air from afar and been warned to hide from the coming attack.

The fishing-tools of the Hackmatack boys were mostly home-made. At the store they purchased two hooks for a cent; long strings of whip-cord were used for lines, to which were attached sinkers made of sheet-lead by the boys themselves.

As the party set forth from the parsonage, Otis was surprised to see that the other boys only carried blacking-boxes full of bait and the lunch-baskets.

"Why, where are your poles?" he asked.

"Growing for us, over in the swamp," said 'Rasmus.

In the swamp each boy cut a supple sapling for his pole, and a little switch with a fork on the end,
whereon to hang the expected spoil of the brooks. Dragon Brook ran through a large tract of thick woods, and the fierce summer heat had not yet shrunken its clear, deep current. So here, if anywhere, might the boys look confidently for trout.

"I vum!" suddenly exclaimed Dan.

"You'd better not let Father hear you say that word," said 'Rasmus.

"Well, I can't help it," said Dan, showing a bleeding finger. "My fish-hooks are caught in my pocket, and I tore my finger like everything trying to get them out. I guess you would say something if your finger smarted and bled as mine does."

The others came to Dan's aid by turning his trousers' pocket inside out, and cutting the hooks out of the lining. Dan wrapped his finger in his handkerchief, and he and the rest pushed on for Dragon Brook. Scattered along its banks, they kept still enough now, careful not even to show themselves as they lay flat on the ground angling for the wary trout, of which they caught now and then a tempting glimpse, as one floated shyly out from his hiding-place behind a mossy rock or old tree-root, but darted back again at the rustling of a leaf.

Dan was rewarded for all his suffering by having the glory of landing the first trout, and a big one, too.

"Is n't that a speckled beauty?" asked Dan, proudly holding up his prize.

"It's a whopper," said Otis. "How much do you suppose it weighs?"

"Half a pound, easy; maybe a pound," said Dan.
“Dan thought he would n’t wash that trout off,” said ’Rasmus. “When Dan was a little fellow, the first time he ever went fishing was in the brook down at our old place. Somehow or other he caught a little trout about as long as my finger. He thought it something wonderful, of course. But as it had fallen in the sand, he thought he would wash it off. He held it in the brook to rinse it, when away swam Mr. Trout out of his hand quicker than you could say ‘Jack Robinson.’ I never shall forget how surprised Dan looked. He did not know what had become of his fish.”

Inspired now by Dan’s success, the boys went to fishing with new zeal, and soon the strings of trout began to grow long. But Dan’s first fish proved the finest taken that day. Much as the boys had admired Otis’s fancy pole and artificial flies, their home-made poles and native angle-worms seemed to do quite as good execution, for Otis carried no longer string of trout than the rest when they went home at night.

As noon drew near, the sun struck more directly down into the woods, lighting up the brown depths of the brook with glimmering yellow rays. The trout disappeared in remote haunts known only to themselves, whence they would not be enticed by the most artful allurements.

“I say, boys,” said Tom Pratt, “let’s quit. I have n’t had a bite this half-hour.”

“Nor I,” said all the others.

“Some of you start a fire, and I’ll make some coffee,” said Tom, proceeding to undo a package he carried, which proved to be an old coffee-pot.
"But how can you make coffee out here in the woods?" asked Otis.

"Wait and see," said Tom.

The boys skilfully built a fireplace out of stones against a rock. In it they soon had a good fire burning, made from the dead branches and dry twigs scattered all around. On it the coffee-pot quickly simmered, sending a delicious odor through the woods most appetizing to the hungry boys. They had laid their strings of trout in a shady spot in the brook’s edge, well fastened down with stones to prevent their floating away.

Sitting on the mossy ground under the leafy arches of interlacing boughs, beside the brook that rippled past over its pebbly bottom so merrily, the boys feasted "like kings;" in fact, probably the average king seldom comes to a meal with such a gusto as did they.

"Let the merry cup go round," said Tom, as he passed an old tin cup full of coffee around the circle.

"You’re a fine cook, Tom," said Otis, after a long pull at the tin cup.

"It’s splendid coffee," said 'Rasmus. "Any more there?"

"Dunno," said Tom, peering into the pot. "I guess I can make a little more by watering it some."

"Boys," said Dan, who was lying on his back, looking up through the trees, "I believe that’s a crow’s nest up in the top of that big pine, and I’m going for it."

"Do you rob birds’ nests?" asked Otis.
“No, I should say not,” replied Dan; “but crows are n’t birds; they ’re pirates and thieves, — fair game; they root up more corn than their necks are worth.”

“You can’t climb that tree,” said Otis.

“Dan can climb ’most anything,” said ’Rasmus.

“Pooh! that tree is n’t much,” said Dan.

Shinning up the trunk, catching hold of projections where dead boughs had dropped off, Dan succeeded in reaching the lower limbs. Then it was easy work mounting from bough to bough, higher and higher, until he was lost to sight in the thick mass of pine-needles.

“There he comes out at the top now,” cried Otis.

“Yes, and there come the old crows after him,” said Tom Pratt. “He ’d better come down a good deal faster than he went up, or the crows will pick his eyes out.”

“Come down, Dan, come down quick!” shouted the boys from below.

Dan was happy swinging on the slender tree-top, high up above the undulating forest below, feeling like a sailor on a mast, as he looked far off over the stretch of green woods beneath him. Just as he reached up his hand to find out what was in the crow’s nest, suddenly, as he described it to the boys, “the air was just black with crows” all around him. The colony of crows who dwelt in these trees had scented danger from afar, and now an angry flock of them whirred around Dan’s head, making furious darts at his face and hands. Dan did not need the boys’ advice to “come down quick.” Hanging valiantly to the tree with one hand, and beating around
him with his cap with the other, he kept the foe at bay; but was soon glad to back out and down as fast as he could come, hand over hand, the crows circling about him, and filling the air with angry caws.

The boys aided him from below by throwing up sticks and stones at the enemy, and by shouts loud and terrible enough to have struck terror into a band of Indians. Dan landed on terra firma, both eyes still safe in his head, but with his hands pecked some and stained with pitch, his trousers much rent by catching on sharp points of dead limbs in his hasty descent.

"You'd best let crows' nests alone after this, I think," said 'Rasmus.

"I'm coming back here after this nest some time, see if I don't," said Dan, vowing vengeance on the crows.

There are many things included in "going a fishing." The boys dug sassafras and flag-root; they climbed trees; they picked wild strawberries, and ate birch bark; they hunted woodchucks, and chased gray squirrels that were always too spry for them, giving a saucy flirt to their bushy tails and vanishing up a tree-trunk like spirits. No one can tell how many miles they tramped that day, up hill and down, through swamps and bush and brier, climbing over rocks, stumbling over stones, now in the hot sun, now in the shady woods.

If they had been compelled to work half as hard one day at home they would have considered themselves abused; but this was fishing and fun. A whole long summer's day in woods and fields, free to do as they pleased, — what could boys ask more?

When Mount Zoar's shadow began to fall long
over Hackmatack, Grandma Strong went to the back-door, and for about the twentieth time peered anxiously out into the gathering dusk.

"I do wonder where under the canopy those boys can be," she said. "I'm afraid something's happened to some of them."

"Why, what could happen to them, Grandma?" asked Priscilla, a little disposed to make light of Grandma's fears.

"I expect Dan's fallen out of a tree and broken his leg, or hurt his back; or maybe he's succeeded in drowning himself at last. I hope nothing's happened to Otis; he isn't used to roughing it like the others."

"There they come now," said Priscilla.

"What a looking lot of boys!" exclaimed Grandma. The boys were tattered and stained and dirty, and Otis was limping badly.

"Are you hurt, Otis?" asked Grandma, anxiously.

"Only a stone bruise," said Otis, cheerfully. He had insisted on going barefoot like the rest, against the advice of both grandmas, and the day's tramp had been hard on his tender feet.

The girls all came out the back-door, and the sportsmen proudly displayed their strings of speckled beauties.

"I'm proper glad you got such a nice mess of trout for breakfast," said Lyddy Ann. "I'll help you dress 'em right away, for I guess you're pretty tired. Otis looks 'most beat out."

"Oh, no," said Otis, "I'm not tired, — at least, hardly any, and I never had such a good time in my life."
"I can't dress any fish," said 'Rasmus, "till I've had some supper. I'm perfectly hollow. We didn't have half enough lunch."

"That's so," said Dan. "You never put us up near lunch enough when we go a fishing, Lyddy Ann."

"My stars!" exclaimed Lyddy Ann, "you haint got strength to carry all you'd eat a whole day out in the woods. I put up enough for a regiment of sogers."

After supper Lyddy Ann helped the boys dress their trout on the bench outside the back-door; and then they were glad to tumble into bed, where they lived over the day's sport in dreams of wood, rock, and stream, and such enormous trout as were never seen out of dreamland.

Esther had been allowed to attend school with Becky while Otis had gone fishing. Miss Manning was very pleasant to the little guest, giving her a story-book to read in school-time. At noon the girls had had much fun jumping off the big bowlder near the schoolhouse, daring each other, and seeing who could take the longest leaps. After school, Becky had taken her cousin down to Dan's dam in the brook, and they had waded, and built more dams, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

When Esther appeared at home at night, she said, with much enthusiasm,—

"Oh, I've had such a beautiful time, Grandma!"

"Yes, I should think so," said Grandma Bullard, surveying with much disfavor Esther's delicate pink chintz dress, which showed but too plain traces of the good times its owner had been having. "I guess your mother has n't much idea how country children
play. I’ll go down to the store to-morrow, and get some indigo blue calico, and make you something fit to play in, for I don’t care how hard you play, so long’s you’re dressed suitably for it. I can’t bear to see you looking so pale complected. I want to send you home with cheeks as red as Becky’s."

The savory messes of trout that appeared on the breakfast tables of the two grandmas next morning were really worth suffering for, and the boys were quite ready to suffer again.

“I’d go again to-day in a minute,” said Otis, as, lame and stiff, he hobbled around the house with a bandage on his sore foot.
CHAPTER XII.

MAKING HAY.

The haying season was now at its height, and everyone was busy. Mr. Strong hired Tommy Bassett to come and help him and the boys make hay, much to the children's delight, for they always considered Tommy entertaining company. Tommy was not a young boy, as his name might lead one to infer, but a man almost sixty years old, lank, lean, and sun-browned. But "Tommy Bassett" he had always been in Hackmatack, and Tommy he would be to the end. He was the younger brother of Levi Bassett, and was considered not quite bright. He was good-natured, and industrious by fits and starts, making his home at his brother's, and doing enough jobs to keep himself in clothes and spending money. One of his peculiarities was that he thought himself a poet, and could sometimes be induced to "make poetry" for the gratification of his friends.

Tommy did the mowing, and the boys tossed the hay out after him to dry. The sun was hot and high in the hayfield, and on one of their frequent trips to a jug of molasses, ginger, and water that was set in a spring to keep cool, under the shade of a thick clump of willows tangled over with wild grape vines, Dan said,—
“Let’s sit here awhile and cool off.”
“Come, Tommy, make up some poetry,” said ’Rasmus.
“Oh, I dunno’s I want to now. Don’t feel like it. You can’t make up poetry unless you feel jest like it,” said Tommy.
“Oh, now, do, Tommy,” begged the boys.
But the Muse refused to inspire Tommy, plead they ever so hard. After Tommy had bent down to his scythe again and “mowed a bout or two,” suddenly he stopped, and standing erect, said,—

“Mr. Whittaker
Swallowed a chestnut burr.”

“Capital! Tip-top, Tommy!” cried the boys.
“Make some more.”

“Squire Drake
Killed a snake.”
said Tommy presently, solemnly.
“Better yet!” cried the boys. “More, more, Tommy.”

But not another line of poetry could they get out of Tommy then. After tea, seating himself on the back door-step, he displayed another accomplishment for which he was famous. Drawing from his pockets a large assortment of jews-harps of varying size and tone, selecting a fine one, he leaned his head against the door-post, and shutting his eyes, twanged away deftly enough “Come haste to the wedding,” his serene expression showing that his own soul was much moved and elevated by the music.
“Oh, is n’t that pretty!” exclaimed Becky.
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Tommy opened his eyes, looked rebukingly at Becky, and said,—

"I don’t want folks to talk when I ’m playing;" and then shut his eyes and absorbed himself in harmony again. Perhaps there was hid under the stupid exterior the undeveloped soul of a poet or musician, clogged by the too dull flesh in this world, but destined to blossom into full flower in a brighter sphere.

After he had played awhile, the boys teased him to make a poem for Lyddy Ann about Sam Hawks, and were delighted beyond measure by this effort, often quoted by them afterwards,—

"Sam Hawks

Sets and squawks."

"That’s the best poem yet, Tommy," said the boys, laughing long and loud.

"Pooh!" said Lyddy Ann, not pleased, "you’d better stick to your jews-harp and let po’try alone. You aint sech a dabster at po’try as you think you are, Tommy Bassett, I can tell you that. Your po’try ’ll never set the world afire."

"Never mind what she says; that’s just because she’s mad," said the boys. "Your poetry’s first-rate, Tommy, — can’t be beat. Give us some more."

But not all their blandishments could draw any more poetry from the justly offended poet.

When Mr. Strong’s haying was all done,— a comparatively light task,—’Rasmus and Dan went up to help Uncle Zach on the Bullard farm, where haying was a more serious task, Uncle Zach always having two big barns crammed to the eaves when the rowen was all in.
One morning, when the boys had gone up there, Becky was struck by a happy thought, and asked,—

"May I go up to Grandma Bullard's to-day?"

"I'm afraid your grandma won't want so many children bothering around, in haying time too," said Grandma Strong.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, she will. She asked Sarah Jane and me ever so long ago to come up and bring our stints, and sew with Esther, and we have n't been yet. She wants us to come."

"Well, seeing Esther's going home so soon, I will let you go, if you will be sure to tell your grandma to send you right home if she does n't want you to-day."

"Yes 'm, I will," said Becky, with cheerful confidence that Grandma Bullard would be sure to want her.

Taking a little basket with her patchwork, she called for Sarah Jane, who was allowed to go on the same conditions as Becky; and the little girls were soon hastening along the old road, up the little hill, then up the big hill. It was warm work climbing the steep "big hill;" but the little girls perspiring under the gingham sunbonnets were far from complaining. Were they not going to Grandma Bullard's to spend a whole day? Only stopping to pick some clusters of the pink wild roses that hung in fragrant branches out of the tangled hedge of bushes by the roadside, they hurried on.

Esther was sitting by the keeping-room window, sewing patchwork, looking and feeling rather doleful. She did not like sewing, and felt it a peculiar hardship
on such a warm day. But Grandma Bullard was firm.

"Little girls must sew their stint every day, if they want to grow up to be smart, capable women," she said, when Esther ventured to hint her distaste for sewing. "If you sew a square or two every day you will have a pretty bedquilt before you know it."

Even the thoughts of the pretty bedquilt did not cheer Esther. But when she saw Becky and Sarah Jane coming into the yard, her face shortened wonderfully, and she ran joyfully to welcome them.

"Will it be convenient to have us spend the day, Grandma?" asked Becky; "because you’re to send us right home if it is n’t."

"Law, yes," said Grandma, heartily. "Hang up your sunbonnets, and we ’ll have a regular sewing bee. I was up by five o’clock this morning, so my work’s all done up, and I’m going to sit down now to sew myself. I boiled dinner enough yesterday so I could have plenty to send the men,—they’re over in the North Meadow to-day,—so I was n’t calculating to get much dinner. But if you sew real smart, you’ll have plenty of time to go over to the blueberry pasture and pick enough berries so you can have berries and milk for your dinner."

"Why, are the blueberries ripe yet?" asked Becky.

"Yes, so Otis says. He was over there yesterday."

Animated by the prospect of going blueberrying, the little girls made their needles fly rapidly, executing such neat over-and-over stitches as to win Grandma’s praise. As Grandma Bullard always liked to know the news, Becky told her about Tommy Bassett’s working for them, and his funny poetry.
“Tommy’s as good-hearted a creature as ever lived,” said Grandma, laughing, “but he is a little cracked. Folks have always thought it was because he was born on the dark day. The rest of Mrs. Bassett’s children are bright as the average.”

“What dark day?” asked Sarah Jane.

“Why, the dark day. Dear me, didn’t you ever hear tell about that? ’T was when I was a young girl, way back in 1780. There never was such a time. Folks were scared to death. It was one Friday morning about ten o’clock. I was spinning, I remember. It began to grow dark, and it kept on growing darker and darker, till it was just like night. I had to stop work because I couldn’t see. I went out into the kitchen. Mother had lit a candle to see to get dinner. Father came in from the barn and said the chickens had all gone to roost, and the cows had come up to the bars, and the birds had stopped singing and gone to their nests, thinking it night. We all felt pretty solemn, it was so gloomy and unnatural, and we didn’t know what was going to happen next.

‘I don’t know but the end of the world’s coming,’ said Mother.

“Lots of people thought that. A good many quit work and spent the day praying, thinking the day of judgment was close at hand. But my father was of the same opinion as Mr. Davenport of Connecticut. The Connecticut Legislature was in session when this darkness fell over the land, and many members were badly scared, and wanted to adjourn,—thought it was the Day of Judgment. This Mr. Davenport rose and said,—
"Mr. Speaker, it is either the Day of Judgment, or it is not. If it is not, there is no need of adjourning; if it is, I desire to be found doing my duty. I move that candles be brought and that we proceed to business." And they did so.

"Father saw that we women folks were badly frightened, so he said,—

"'Whether it's the end of the world or not, one thing's certain: it's no sin to eat our dinner, so you put it on, Semanthy, and we'll go ahead and eat it.'

"But it was dreadfully gloomy eating by candlelight. I never want to see another such time. After dinner, Harmony Fletcher, who lived near by, stepped in. He had just come from the store, and he said the folks up there thought that a great comet had got between us and the sun and was going to smash the earth all to pieces; and that idea didn't comfort us much."

"What did happen?" asked Becky.

"Why, nothing. The next day was as bright and sunshiny a May day as you ever saw, and it seemed pleasant enough to see it, I can tell you. And the sun has shone ever since. No one ever knew what caused the darkness, though there were all sorts of notions. A good many thought it was on account of the sins of the people. Parson Hubbard the next Sunday appointed Thursday a 'day of fasting and prayer, in view of the recent mysterious and inscrutable visitation of Providence, that by humiliating ourselves before the Lord, we may perchance avert his righteous indignation from this sinful nation.' Some said that there were great fires way off in the
woods somewhere, and the wind blew the smoke all over New England, and the air was full of vapor which made it settle down. But no one ever knew the real cause, I guess. What's your Grandma Strong driving at now, Becky?"

"She's talking of going to Saratoga Springs," said Becky, who had forgotten to tell this important item of news.

"I want to know! That is a start. What set her up to go to the springs, I wonder?"

"She's been feeling rather poorly lately, and Mrs. Drake told her nothing would do her so much good as to drink the Saratoga waters. When she spoke to Father about it, he fell right in with it, and said he would drive her over soon after haying. You know Father went there once with my mother, and he felt as if he should like to go again. They mean to start next week, and be gone ten days."

"Well, well, to think of your grandmother's travelling so far from home! I must go down to see her before she starts. Have your folks heard how Lucinda Pickett is lately?"

"She's failing. Priscilla's going over there to watch to-night."

"I must make some of my calves'-foot jelly and take her."

"Won't you tell some of your riddles, Grandma?" asked Sarah Jane. "I want to see if Esther can guess them."

So Grandma Bullard told some of her famous riddles, such as—

"House full, hole full,
Can't catch a bowl full,"
which proved to be "Smoke;" and "Round the house and round the house, and squat behind the door," the answer being "A broom;" and —

"Twelve knights were riding by,
Twelve pears were hanging high,
Each took a pear,
And left eleven hanging there."

After Esther had puzzled over this a long time, she was surprised to learn that one of the knights was named "Each," — a thing she never could have imagined.

The patchwork squares were now all done, and Grandma being able to praise the stitches, the girls were allowed to put away their work. They started joyfully for the blueberry pasture, going up a shady lane, where they were protected from the sun's rays. The pasture was rocky, and pennyroyal and life-everlasting were more plenty than the grass, which cropped out, red and sun-burned, between stones and rocks. But blueberry bushes sprang up around all the rocks and stumps, and were laden with ripe berries, and also green ones, giving promise of abundant harvests yet to come.

Tinkle, tinkle, dropped the berries with a musical rhythm on the bottom of the tin pails, as the girls rifled the bushes.

"I never picked blueberries in my life before," said Esther.

"Why, Esther Bullard!" exclaimed her cousins.

"Well, how could I? There aren't any blueberry pastures in Cambridge, or Boston either. Oh, I think it's so much pleasanter at Hackmatack! I wish I
could live here all the time. How different the berries taste when you pick them off the bushes yourself, don't they?"

"I never ate any others," said Becky. When the girls reached home, Grandma Bullard said,—

"There's more berries here than we can use. You might sell some to Mr. Brownell, Becky, when you go home to-night. You mustn't spend the money foolishly if you do. You must save all your pennies, and when you get seventy-five cents I will put a quarter with it, and you will have a whole dollar to put in the Franklin Savings Institution over in Greenfield. Mr. Ripley will take good care of it for you, and it will be growing all the time."

"I don't believe I could ever get so much money as that," said Becky.

"Yes, you can. 'A penny saved is a penny earned.' 'Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.' Poor Richard knows what he is talking about."

While talking, Grandma, aided by the hungry girls, had been setting her table in the kitchen. The south door stood wide open, as did the north windows, and a delightful breeze scented with new mown hay blew through. Esther thought she had never tasted anything nicer than blueberries and milk; and Grandma brought out an ample dessert of her pie and cookies, which always tasted better to the children than those of any one else.

The girls had hardly wiped the last dish for Grandma, when they heard the scramble of the horses' feet on the barn floor, going in with a load of hay.
“Oh, Grandma,” cried Becky, “may we ride back to the hay-field?”

“Oh, please let us,” begged Esther. “I never rode on a hay-cart in my life.”

“Well, you may go if your Uncle Zach is willing.”

The girls seized their sunbonnets, and scampered for the barn with a lively confidence in Uncle Zach’s willingness which was not misplaced, for soon the hay-cart was going back to the field with a jolly load of girls and boys. The boys prided themselves on standing up, holding by the rack; but the girls sat on the bottom of the wagon, bouncing about as it rattled across the humps and hollows of the fields. The harder it bounced the more they giggled and laughed, and the more fun they thought it.

In the hay-field they felt that they made themselves very useful, helping rake up the hay. When it was all raked up in cocks, the children mounted the wagon and stowed it away, as Uncle Zach and the hired men tossed it up.

“If I had as much help as this every day,” said Uncle Zach, “I guess I should n’t get through haying all summer. But never mind. You’ll never be young but once; and I do love to see children have a good time. Besides, we must give Esther and Otis a chance at hay-making.”

“I mean to be a farmer when I grow up,” said Otis.

“I’ll live with you and help you,” said Esther.

“There’s lots of hard work in farming,” said Uncle Zach. “It is n’t all fun, by any means.”

But he piled a smaller load than usual on the cart, so all the children could ride on top the load, up to the barn. Of course high up on the hay, the uneven-
ness of the ground was more perceptible. As the load tipped and swayed this way and that, Esther screamed and cried,—

"Oh, we are going over, I know we are!"

"Why, of course," said Dan; "that's a very common thing, you know."

The boys all laughed, while Esther cried,—

"Please stop and let me get off, Uncle Zach."

"Never mind Dan," said Uncle Zach; "he's trying to frighten you. If I tip this load of hay over, it will be the first time."

"Play it's a storm at sea, and the waves are tossing the ship about," said Becky.

"Yes," said Dan the travelled, "this is just the way the steamer went up and down on the waves when I crossed the ferry in Boston."

"I like smooth sailing better," said Esther, still frightened, but feeling better as she saw that the load really did not go over.

"I'm not afraid," said Sarah Jane. "I think it's lovely to ride along high up in the air, among the tree branches. And the hay smells so sweet I love to cuddle down in it."

"Do look," said Esther. "Sarah Jane is so cuddled down in the hay, that she looks like a little bird in its nest."

"Peep, peep," chirped Sarah Jane, her black eyes shining, as her head stuck out from the hay.

While they were laughing at this, a maple branch swept across them and brushed Dan's palm-leaf hat off.

"How am I going to pick up that hat, I should like to know?" asked Dan.
“Leave it there till we come back,” said Uncle Zach.

“Serves you right for trying to frighten Esther,” said ’Rasmus.

“Pooh, I don’t care,” said Dan, “my head’s all the cooler without it.”

Esther had quite forgotten to be afraid, and was enjoying the ride as much as the rest when they drove in on the barn floor, singing in chorus, “Yankee Doodle.”

After stowing the hay away, they all slid down the mow to the barn floor, where Otis delighted the boys by singing a new song that had just come out in Boston, “Jim Crow,” dancing comically as he sang the chorus,

\[
\text{“Wheel about and turn about,}  \\
\text{And do just so,}  \\
\text{And every time I turn about}  \\
\text{I jump Jim Crow.”}
\]

The girls were so charmed with haying that they helped all the afternoon, until it was time to go in and help Grandma get supper.

“Many hands make light work,” said Grandma.

“Here, Sarah Jane, you run down cellar and get the bread; and Becky, you take this glass dish, — mind you don’t break it, — and bring up some of my peach preserve. You know which jar it is in.”

“Yes ’m, I will,” said Becky, with alacrity, smelling biscuit baking in the little tin oven standing before the fireplace, and perceiving that Grandma was really going to get up a “company supper” for them.

“Esther, see how nicely you can slice this dried
beef, while I go out to the well and get the butter,” continued Grandma.

Ice houses and refrigerators were unknown in Hackmatack, so it was customary to put butter in a covered tin pail, attaching it firmly to the bucket, and letting it down in the dark depths of the well for coolness. Fresh meat was preserved in the same way. Sometimes it happened that a pail unfastened. Great was then the excitement trying to fish out the refractory vessel, as it bobbed about on the dark waters, apparently determined not to be hooked.

No such untimely accident having happened tonight, tea was ready by the time the men and boys came from the hay-field, so hungry that Grandma’s good things melted before them as if by magic.

Grandma had some tiny pink tea-cups, on which was the picture of a romantic but improbable pink milkmaid milking a pink cow. These cups were greatly admired by Becky and Sarah Jane, and it was the finishing touch to this “high tea” that they had weak tea in these favorite cups.

After supper the children visited Grandma’s cherry-trees, which glowed red with ripe fruit. They climbed all over the branches, like some new and gigantic species of robin, and ate until they could eat no more. No wonder that Becky said, as they were about going home,—

“We have had such a nice time, Grandma.”
“I always love to come up here,” said Sarah Jane.
“We all do,” said Dan.
“Well, I love to have you come, I’m sure,” said Grandma.
“Be sure to let Esther and Otis come to the
picnic to-morrow, won't you, Grandma?” asked 'Rasmus.

“Yes, if it’s a pleasant day, they’ll have to go, I suppose. I’m only afraid they will get sick just as they are starting for home.”

“Oh, we’ll take good care of them,” said 'Rasmus.

The sun was setting in a sea of brilliant clouds, and the evening air was cool, and sweet with new mown hay as the children sauntered down the hill, discussing the coming picnic. Suddenly from afar echoed the mellow notes of a horn.

“there’s the stage now,” said Dan. “You’ll have to run for it, Becky, if you want to sell your berries to Mr. Brownell.”

They ran down hill, and reached the pike just as the great stage-coach swung into view, its four horses raising a dust as they came dashing along. A high pile of trunks was strapped on behind, and the coach was full inside and on top.

The children drew up beside the road; the girls made deep courtesies, the boys took off their hats and bowed, and the passengers and Mr. Brownell politely returned these salutations. Spying the berries Becky carried, Mr. Brownell reined up his wet horses, and asked,—

“Do you want to sell those berries, Becky?”

“Yes, sir,” said Becky, shyly, blushing as all the passengers gazed at her.

“Here’s a ninepence for them,” said Mr. Brownell. ’Rasmus climbed up on the wheel for the money, and passed up the berries, which Mr. Brownell distributed among his passengers. It was such little things as this which made Mr. Brownell the most
popular stage-driver on the road. His big red face was felt to glow with the warmth of an equally large heart.

The stage rumbled on, the dust subsided, and left the Hackmatack air as sweet and still as before this bit of the great outside world had dashed into and disturbed its quiet.

"Captain Pratt has some of the most delicious bull's-eyes down at his store I ever saw," Dan remarked, as they walked along, looking at Becky's ninepence. "They're striped all kinds of colors, and they're so big and round and hard that you can suck one half a day. They cost a cent apiece."

"Dear me, how nice!" said Becky; "but I promised Grandma Bullard I'd save this money, so I must, you know."

Dan well knew that spending money for candy would be considered unjustifiable extravagance, so said no more.

When Becky went to bed that night, instead of putting the extinguisher on the candle, as usual, she blew it out, and then anxiously watched the red tip of the wick. If the red died down gradually, it was a bad omen for the morrow; if it suddenly flared up before expiring, then the next day was sure to be pleasant. Oh, joy! the wick gave one brilliant flash and expired.

"It's sure to be a nice day to-morrow," thought Becky, as she tried to compose herself to sleep in spite of bright anticipations of the coming picnic, which kept prancing through her small head as it tossed restlessly on the pillow.
CHAPTER XIII.

THE PICNIC.

The Fourth of July was a general holiday, celebrated in various ways by the different members of the Strong family. Mr. Strong was to deliver a patriotic address at a grand public celebration in Athol, which John Drake had asked Priscilla to attend with him. Lyddy Ann was going to a temperance celebration at Orange with Sam Hawks. Grandma Strong said,—

"After I see the young folks all safely off, I shall lock up the house and drive up and spend the day with Mrs. Bullard. We can celebrate the Fourth well enough with our knitting work, I guess."

'Rasmus, Ki Kellogg, Tom Pratt, and Ira Sprague had started a picnic excursion to the top of Mount Zoar. At first they had not planned to include the younger set, but the juniors had raised such a clamor that finally they had graciously been allowed to go.

Becky had never been to the top of Mount Zoar, and Dan had been only once, so it was a great event to them, while Otis and Esther were full of anticipations of the "real country picnic," such as they had often heard about from their father.

"I'm so afraid I shall not wake up early enough," Becky had said, the night before. "Won't you call me, 'Rasmus?"
But when 'Rasmus knocked on Becky's door she was already up and dressed, and bobbed out the door full of excitement, saying,—

"Isn't it nice we're going to have such a lovely day? I was so afraid it was going to rain."

"You'll have to hurry, Grandma," said Dan, at the breakfast table, "to get our lunches ready in time. We are all to meet at Captain Pratt's store, and start at eight o'clock."

"Don't you worry, Daniel. Being behindhand in what I undertake is n't one of my failings. I am glad you start so early, for it is going to be a very hot day,—regular Fourth of July weather."

The boys did up the chores in a hurry, and harnessing old John, tied him in the shade of the large trees by the front gate, ready for Grandma's use, while Becky flew about so wildly, upstairs and down, that Grandma said,—

"Child, you'll be all tired out before you start. It's a hard climb up Mount Zoar, and such a hot day as this, especially. Do sit down and keep quiet."

"Oh, Grandma, I can't. How could I sit down and keep quiet when I'm going to a picnic?"

Otis and Esther now appeared, laden with lunch-baskets well filled by Grandma Bullard, and the whole party went over to the store. Here the excitement ran high. There was a deal of talking and laughing and running to and fro as one after another arrived, until Tom said,—

"There come Secundus and Tertius Bigbee at last. Now we can be off. Come, Philander, let's be a marching;" and seizing his own big basket, he led the
way, followed by a straggling procession of about thirty young folks.

Dan is pleased to find Dolly Meekins in the company, she having come up from Springfield expressly to attend the picnic, although he carefully avoided her, keeping off with Cyrus, Tertius, and the other boys.

Mount Zoar is about half a mile high. On one side it rises almost perpendicularly; but the other is a gradual slope which can be ascended, although the path is rough, if path you can call the track usually followed in making the ascent.

At Mr. Benson's the children turned into his barnyard, and letting down the bars, passed through into the field beyond, and began the ascent. The sun blazed down on their backs, and beat up in their faces from the hot ground, and soon they grew red in the face, and were drenched with perspiration.

"Say, Tom," said Ki, "is there any place along here where a fellow can get a drink? I'm expiring with thirst."

"So am I," said all the rest.

"Keep up your courage," said Tom. "There's a spring a little farther up that's as cold as snow."

"That sounds refreshing. Say that again," said 'Rasmus, wiping his forehead.

The children pushed on up hill till they came to the promised spring.

"Halt!" cried Tom; and every one was glad to obey him, setting down the baskets that had been growing heavier and heavier, throwing off hats and sunbonnets, and lying down on the grass in the shade for a short rest.
The spring trickled out from among mossy rocks into a little pool as clear as crystal, overhung by great pines. Resting in this delightful shade, the children drank long draughts of the cold water, and bathed heated faces and hands. The mountain air here in the pine shadows blew coolly around them, and was sweet with the fragrance of the pines, of tansy, pennyroyal, sweet fern, and a hundred other wild perfumes mingled in one aromatic odor, the fresh, free breath of the mountains.

Becky had brought along the precious little tin cup "For a Good Girl," and after refreshing herself with a drink from it, offered it to Peri, saying,—

"That cup is so bright you can see yourself drinking in the bottom, but you look all mouth. Doesn't the water taste good from it?"

"Delicious!" said Peri.

In after life, at elegant dinner-tables, from costly glass or dainty china, Becky and Peri might many a time drink beverages not so soul-refreshing as was this draught of pure spring water drunk from a tin cup on the mountain side.

"Well," said Tom Pratt, finally, "this is mighty pleasant, but it isn't business. We must move on, if we ever want to get to the top. Steady climbing,—that's what does it."

They climbed slowly on, often stopping to let down the bars that divided one pasture from another, or to pick raspberries from bushes too tempting to be resisted. Greatly to the amusement of the boys, the little city girls, Esther and Dolly, were inclined to be afraid of the cattle that they often saw in the pastures, although the cattle, startled at the unusual
sight of human beings in their solitudes, generally kicked up their heels, and ran off as fast as they could. But if one braver or more curious than his comrades stopped with erect head and ears to watch the suspicious invaders from afar, Dolly and Esther were terribly frightened, expecting to be tossed high in the air, or hooked to pieces on the spot. Being also less used to long walks than the others, they tired more easily; and as the way became steeper and rougher, lagged behind the rest, Becky and Sarah Jane, although well able to keep up with the party, staying with them for company.

The rest were some distance in advance when they were startled by hearing ear-piercing screams and shrieks from the distance.

"What's the matter now, I wonder?" said Tom.

"Perhaps an ox has looked at Esther or Dolly," said 'Rasmus, laughing.

"You shall not laugh at them," said Tilly Pratt.

"I'm sure something dreadful has happened to them."

"So am I," said Luella Pettit. "Let's run right back there, Tilly."

Running back they found Esther crying, and all the girls in great excitement.

"Esther just stepped on a snake, a great long black snake!" cried Becky, "and he curled right up around her ankle!"

"Ugh!" cried Esther, "don't speak of it. It makes me scrouge all over! I shall always dream about it, I know."

"Where is he?" asked the boys, arming themselves with strong sticks.
"He ran into that pile of stones."

The boys soon unearthed the snake and made an end of him; but Esther's nerves did not recover from the shock until they reached the summit, and she and Dolly walked along, looking for snakes on all sides, jumping violently at every crooked stick.

As they mounted higher, 'Rasmus said,—

"I declare, there's some thunder-heads sticking up over there."

Sure enough, off in the southeast the sky so blue and hot and cloudless overhead, showed the round heads of thick white clouds swelling ominously up against the intense blue.

"Oh my, I hope there won't be a thunder shower," said Tilly.

"Shower!" said her brother Tom. "What are you and 'Rasmus croaking about? Of course there isn't going to be any shower to-day."

Tom's cheerful confidence settled the matter for the children, especially as it fell in so well with their wishes. At last, after long and weary climbing, they came out on the very top of the mountain. It was a glorious sensation. No one felt the least bit tired now, as they stood there high up above all the world, it seemed, and looked off at the wide and lovely view below. Far, far below lay the familiar village where their lives had been spent,—such a small spot on the earth's surface, seen from here!

"Why, you can see over half the State up here, I should think," said Otis.

"Yes, I guess you can easily," said Tom Pratt. "There's Wachusett, and that great round-topped mountain humped up in the north is Monadnock."
That is thirty miles away, but it doesn't look half so far to-day, the air is so clear.”

“What village is that, Tom, that we see down there to the east?” asked Secundus.

“That’s Petersham. And do you see that church spire way up on the hills over there? That’s Heath.”

“I should think we could see Greenfield from here,” said Cyrus Dole.

“That lies in a valley, and the hills hide it,” said Tom. “You can see only the villages on the hills.”

A sea of green hills lay below them, rising all around in irregular billows. Cloud shadows floating along the hillsides and across the plains gave a dreamy peacefulness to the wide landscape.

Esther and Becky, who had never been on a high mountain top before, were not only delighted, but exalted.

“I feel as if I could spread my wings and fly, just like a bird,” said Esther.

“The hills look as if a great ocean had suddenly been frozen stiff, hardening the waves, doesn’t it?” said Becky.

“You wouldn’t suppose that this mountain was ever all covered with ice, would you?” asked ’Rasmus.

“Pshaw, don’t talk nonsense!” said Tom.

“Here’s the witness,” said ’Rasmus, placing his hand on the huge granite bowlder, half as large as a house, that lay on the summit of Mount Zoar. “This bowlder was dropped on top this mountain from a glacier, I can’t tell you how many thousand years
ago. I was up here once with Father, and he told me so."

There was no disputing the minister's word, of course, or else the children might have thought 'Rasmus was trying to astonish them with a big story of his own invention.

"Let's climb the old fellow," proposed Ira Sprague.

From the bowlder's top they had even a wider view than before.

"I tell you what it is, Tom," said 'Rasmus, anxiously surveying the sky, "I really believe there is going to be a shower."

The clouds had now spread up over half the sky, white at the top, but dark near the horizon, where streaks of lightning could be seen darting through them.

"Now don't croak like an old raven, 'Rasmus," said Tom. "That shower isn't coming this way,—any one can see that with half an eye. It's moving off over Greenfield way."

Somehow Tom felt that if the storm wasn't encouraged, if they did not weakly give in to it, they could stave it off. Tom had a strong will, and always disliked giving up, on general principles. So now he was determined to fight off the shower by ignoring it.

'Rasmus did not enjoy being called "an old raven," and made up his mind grimly that he would say no more, if it poured hard enough to wash them all down into the valley below.

"Perhaps Tom can brag down a thunder shower, but I don't believe it," thought he to himself.
The sun directly overhead announced that noon had come, and the children were all ready to examine the contents of the lunch baskets, being ravenous after their long walk. If it be true that "many cooks spoil the broth," then this picnic luncheon was in a fair way to be ruined, for every one literally "had a hand" in it. Sybil Ward and Tilly had brought tablecloths, which the boys spread on the ground, in the bowlder's shade. They were soon covered with a great assortment of cake, varied by a few biscuit and tarts.

Tom had brought up a pail of water from the spring. His father had given him some lemons and sugar from his store, and Tom made a pailful of lemonade,—a little thin in quality, perhaps, but then every one could see for themselves the slices of lemon swimming around on top, and so knew it was lemonade. Ki Kellogg had brought several bottles of his mother's far-famed root-beer, under whose weight he had been groaning all the way up the mountain; and the older boys had contributed enough money to buy sticks of red and white peppermint candy to treat the whole company. So, altogether, it was a delightful picnic luncheon in the children's eyes, and they enjoyed it immensely, never minding an occasional grasshopper swimming in the lemonade, or the ants that insisted on sharing this rare feast that had been spread on the mountain top expressly for them, as they seemed to think. So hungry were the children, and so absorbed in eating, talking, and laughing, that they did not observe the clouds, which had been coming up more rapidly, until suddenly the sun vanished behind them, and the breeze strength-
ened, blowing cool and damp, highly suggestive of rain.

Others besides the cautious 'Rasmus now took the alarm.

"'Rasmus was right," said Sybil Ward. "There is going to be a hard shower."

"And right away too," said Luella. "We'd best hurry down."

"Pshaw!" said Tom, though even his courage began to falter, "I don't think there's going to be much of a shower."

"There's a drop on my hand now," said Ben Sprague.

Scattering drops now began to patter down, and there was an ominous roll of thunder overhead. Without waiting to consult their leader, Tom, the children hustled the fragments into their baskets in less time than it takes to tell it, and started. A gale struck the mountain-top. Seizing Tilly Pratt's tablecloth, the wind bore it wildly away, twisting the unlucky cloth about the top of a tall pine far down on the mountain side, where it waved for months afterwards, plainly visible from the village below, until it flapped itself to pieces. "Tilly Pratt's flag of truce," the boys used to call it.

The children raced down the mountain, trying to hold on hats and bonnets, Tom clinging to his pail of lemonade, but spilling most of it on his trousers as he ran. In a third of the time it had taken to climb the mountain, they reached its foot, and, well sprinkled, dashed into Mr. Benson's barn just as the worst of the storm broke. With a vivid flash of lightning and a grand crash of thunder, the storm
came down in a deluge, sweeping in white sheets before the gale. Thankful enough were they to be under shelter, as the lightning darted down in blinding, crooked streaks, and the thunder seemed to roll in grand peals on the very roof of the barn, while the water poured in rivers down the hillsides and along the road, matting the tall grass, and laying Mr. Benson's cornfield flat.

"I don't think there's going to be much of a shower, Tom," said 'Rasmus, as soon as he could get breath.

Every one laughed at this except a few of the girls, who were too frightened to laugh as they sat on the edge of the bay, wincing at each flash and peal.

"Whew!" said Tom, "I should say there had been considerable of a shower — of lemonade, by the looks of my trousers. I suppose you feel satisfied, 'Rasmus, now you've got the shower you set your heart on."

"There's sense and reason in all things," replied 'Rasmus, with some warmth. "There's not much sense in sticking your head in the ground like a silly ostrich, and then saying there's no danger because you can't see it."

Tom did not relish being called a "silly ostrich" any better than 'Rasmus had being compared to a raven, and a dispute might have arisen but for the appearance of Mr. Benson in his shirt sleeves, just as he had run in from the hayfield.

"Well, I declare," he said, "if I'd a known I was goin' to have a party here to-day, I'd 'a' rigged up in my party fixin's. This is one of the hardest showers I ever knew. Lucky you made port when
you did. You aint the first picnic party I've had in my barn. You're welcome to stay; and you'd better finish out your picnic here, for it will be so wet even when the rain stops, you can't go out-doors."

So as soon as the lightning and thunder grew less heavy, Mr. Benson helped the boys pull his carpenter's bench out on the barn floor, and the somewhat damaged remains of the feast were spread on it, Mr. Benson not disdaining to lend a hand at disposing of the cake and tarts. Tom said he had some more sugar in his basket, and by adding a little more water to the lemonade, he thought it would "do." And it "did."

The children were now in fine spirits again, laughing over all the funny incidents of their downward flight,—how the gale had blown away Tertius's hat; and how Dan had stubbed his toe, and rolled down a steep pitch like a bag of meal; and how Esther had caught her white dress on a blackberry bush and torn most of the gathers out; and how Tom had sown lemon seeds down the mountain side, from which a fine crop of trees might no doubt be expected next year, and so on.

"You do look as if you had been through the wars," said Mr. Benson. "But never mind; you aint either sugar or salt; a little water won't hurt you a mite."

After the last crumb of cake and the last drop of lemonade had disappeared, as the rain still continued, though the clouds looked lighter, they had a lively game of "I spy." Then, as suddenly as it had disappeared, the sun broke out again, glorifying the countless raindrops that hung from every leaf and
twig with rainbow colors. The air was now pure and fresh, full of odors of the wet grass and dripping flower bushes, and the birds sang and sang, as if they could not rejoice enough over the pleasant change.

“How are we going to get home, I wonder?” said Ira Sprague.

“Swim, I guess,” said Tom.

While they were doubting whether to start or not, Uncle Zach appeared, driving his long hay wagon,—a most welcome sight.

“I’m glad enough to find you in such safe quarters,” he said. “Your grandmothers have worried themselves ’most to death about you, and nothing would do as soon as the shower let up, but I must start out after your remains, for they would hardly allow that you could be alive. I’ll take all that are going my way. Pile on.”

The children climbed on, and holding by the rack and poles rode home standing up, singing and laughing, a merry party, well satisfied with their picnic in spite of its many drawbacks. The two grandmas thought the children ought to “take something” to ward off possible colds after their exposure; but there arising, luckily, a division of opinion between the authorities as to the virtues of “elixir pro” or “bone-set tea” in the case, the children escaped.

Otis and Esther were obliged to go home a few days later. Sorry were they to go, and their cousins to lose them. As they rode off on top the stagecoach waving their hands to ’Rasmus, Becky, and Dan, standing at the parsonage gate and watching the coach until it was lost around the turn, Esther said, —
"I wish we could have stayed longer. I think Father might have let us. You can have such good times in the country."

"Perhaps Father will let us come up here again next summer," said Otis. "I'm sure I hope so."

"I wish we lived here all the time," said Esther. "Cambridge is so stupid."

"I don't know," said Otis, who was able to perceive that there were some slight advantages in living in Cambridge, "if I can't live in Hackmatack, I'm glad I live in Cambridge."
CHAPTER XIV.

THE CATS GO AWAY.

A FEW days before her father and grandmother left for Saratoga, Priscilla had her first experience in watching. Madam Strong had driven over to the Widow Pickett’s to inquire for Lucinda.

“How did you find Lucinda?” asked Mr. Strong, on his mother’s return.

“She’s very low, and the widow is almost worn out. She hasn’t any one engaged to watch to-night. She said no one had offered, and the neighbors had all been so kind and done so much that she hated to ask any of them, so she would sit up herself. If I were younger, or even if I felt better, I would go.”

“Priscilla, you must go,” said her father. “Rasmus can drive you over after tea.”

Priscilla evidently shrank from this work.

“Father,” she said, “I am so young, and I never watched with a sick person in my life. I’m afraid to go, — afraid I might make some mistake.”

“My daughter,” said her father, looking at her seriously, “it is your duty. You must make a beginning some time. If you were sick, all the neighbors would come and watch with you, and you must do as you would be done by. You are young and strong,
and better able to sit up than many of those who have gone again and again."

Priscilla said no more, and that evening 'Rasmus drove her over to the little lonely black house where lived the Widow Pickett and her maiden daughter Lucinda, who was now giving up the hard struggle of her life, and wasting away in consumption. The widow and her daughter eked out their scanty means by braiding palmleaf hats.

Mrs. Pickett was greatly surprised and pleased by Priscilla's offer to watch.

"It's real kind in a young girl like you, Priscilly," she said, "to think you can do such a thing. I'd made up my mind to set up myself; but I'm 'most used up, and shall be glad enough to get a night's rest."

A bed for Lucinda had been placed in the little parlor, whither Mrs. Pickett now conducted Priscilla, giving her the last directions for the night.

"I've covered up a good bed of coals in the kitchen fireplace, and left some cookies and crackers out," she said; "and along about midnight you'd better rake the fire open and make yourself a cup o' tea, and eat a bite. It will chirk you up a good deal, you'll find. 'Cindy has her medicine every hour, and I don't s'pose she'll want anything else, unless it's a drink o' water. She sleeps mostly now. If you see any change call me. You need n't feel a mite uneasy. I sleep close by, in the little bedroom.—Goodnight, 'Cindy," said her mother, tenderly stroking the moist hair back from Lucinda's forehead, but not kissing her, chary of making much demonstration of the deep affection which nevertheless lay hid deep in her heart of hearts.
The widow then took her candle and said goodnight to Priscilla, leaving her alone with the sick woman.

Priscilla never forgot that long, long night. How still it was! The long pendulum of the tall clock in the corner ticked, ticked, solemnly as the hours crawled by. The one candle seemed to cast more shadows than light,—shadows that moved and shifted uncannily when the light flickered. If a frog croaked in the swamp near by, or a cricket chirped, or a chance breeze rattled the window, Priscilla started, so loud seemed these noises in the profound stillness.

The sick woman, wasted to a skeleton, lay with closed eyes, sunken, pallid cheeks, the feeble, fluttering breath sometimes seeming to stop. Priscilla's heart almost stopped beating too then, and she waited in an agony of doubt whether she ought to call Mrs. Pickett from her much needed sleep, till the fluttering breath struggled on once more. Priscilla had time to think a good many serious thoughts before the welcome gray light of morning began to creep in, and the roosters sounded their cheerful notes.

Dan drove over for her early in the morning. As she was leaving, Lucinda opened her eyes, and said, the shadow of a smile flitting across her pale face,—

"It was so kind in you to come, Priscilla."

Priscilla felt happy as she drove home in the dewy freshness of the early morning, which had never seemed so pure and sweet as now, after the close air of the dark sick-room, and happy too when her grandmother said to her,—
"I knew it was a real hard thing for you to do, Priscilla, but I thought it was your duty. I am glad you went. You did right."

After all, there is no greater pleasure than knowing that one has well and faithfully performed a hard duty; and it was this consciousness that made Priscilla forget the long, dreary night and its fears, and sent her singing about the house in spite of lost sleep.

It had only been after long deliberation, and many doubts and misgivings, that Madam Strong had at last made up her mind to so important a step as the proposed trip to Saratoga. But the Saratoga waters had such a reputation for invigorating old people that she had at length decided to go. Her preparations were not on so extensive a scale as are now considered necessary. Two dresses, her black satin and her best bombazine, besides the dress she wore, were considered a handsome outfit. These and the minister’s best black suit, his “other” stock, and a sermon or two for possible emergencies, were easily packed in a little black-leather trunk, with a soft top that swelled out when stuffed with underclothes.

A fine July morning saw the chaise standing early at the side door, Madam Strong and her son seated within it, the little black trunk strapped beneath it, and the family assembled to see them off. A long green barege veil protected from any possible dust Madam Strong’s second-best bonnet, while a large bandbox on her lap held the sacred best one. Her face wore an anxious look as she gave her farewell injunctions.

“I declare,” she said, “I almost wish I was n’t..."
going. I can’t help feeling as if something might happen to some of you before I get back. It seems kind of tempting Providence to leave your home and set forth on such a jaunt.”

“I wouldn’t worry, Mother,” said Mr. Strong, who anticipated this unusual outing with much pleasure. “I think everything will go smoothly in our absence.”

“Priscilla,” said Grandma, “you must look after Becky. And Becky, you must mind Priscilla, and do just as she says.”

“Yes ’m,” said both girls.

”’Rasmus,” said his father, “I leave you in charge of the place, and I rely on you to see that all goes on regularly and properly.”

“Yes, sir, I will take good care of everything,” said ’Rasmus, proud of his responsibility.

“Daniel, you must be a good boy while we are gone.”

“Yes, sir, I will,” said Dan, who meant it, and yet couldn’t help feeling that the “cats” were going away, which gave the “mice” a little more opportunity than usual to frisk about.

“If any of you get sick, send for your Grandmother Bullard and Dr. Robbins right away,” said Grandma.

As the children were never ill, this precaution seemed unnecessary; but Grandma’s foreboding mind thought of every possible calamity that might happen during her unusual absence.

“I hope you’ll get along all right while I am gone, Lyddy Ann.”

“Don’t you worry one mite about us, Madam
Strong. I hope you’ll have a real good time, and come home feelin’ fust-rate.”

“Well, the morning is wearing along, and we must be going,” said Mr. Strong. “Good-by, children.”

“Good-by, Father; good-by, Grandma,” shouted the children, as their father gathered up the reins, and old John, who had had an extra measure of oats, trotted briskly off on his long journey, Grandma looking anxiously back through her green veil at the little group on the doorsteps as long as it was in sight.

The house seemed empty and desolate when the children went back into it again. It seemed so strange to feel that Grandma was nowhere about. Now that she was gone, they discovered that Grandma’s presence was like a warm, comfortable atmosphere that filled and cheered the whole house, even when they thought nothing about it. But now the house seemed bleak and empty.

“I really feel homesick,” said Becky at the dinner-table. “It seems so queer without Grandma.”

“Let’s go up to Grandma Bullard’s this afternoon, Becky,” said Dan.

“May I, Priscilla?” asked Becky.

“If you have sewed your stint you may.”

’Rasmus, who sat in his father’s place and served, and felt a full sense of his own importance as the head of the family in his father’s absence, said, with quite his father’s manner,—

“Dan, I want you to stay at home and help hoe the corn this afternoon.”

“You needn’t begin to order me round, ’Rasmus,”
said Dan. "I'll hoe that corn to-morrow, perhaps, if I feel like it."

"Well, you heard yourself what Father said. He put me in charge of everything, and he expects you to do as I say."

"Now, 'Rasmus," said Lyddy Ann, "you let Dan alone, and I guess he'll do about right. It allers makes folks kinder contrary to be bossed round much, 'specially men folks."

"I feel responsible to Father," said 'Rasmus, "and the corn needs hoeing badly."

"I don't care," said Dan. "I'm going up to Grandma Bullard's this afternoon, anyhow."

Becky hastened over to Uncle Josiah's to secure the company of Sarah Jane. After visiting with their grandmother a while, and telling her all about the departure of Madam Strong for "Saratogy," the girls thought they would go over to the lily pond. Dan had gone off to the woods with the Sprague boys, who had come along with a gun and Spry, soon after he reached his grandmother's.

The lily pond was a pretty little sheet of water lying in the hollow among the hills back of Grandma Bullard's house. Rambling along, stopping often to pick thimbleberries from the bushes that grew rampant in every fence corner, the girls finally came to the pond. The time for lilies was nearly past.

"I don't believe we shall find any to-day," said Becky, surveying the broad green leaves that padded the surface of the water. "I guess they are all gone."

"No," said Sarah Jane, "I see some, way off, most
round the point, right below that big rock. Don't you see them?"

"Oh, yes, now I do. We must try to get them. We shall have to wade out for them, though," said Becky.

Not unwillingly the girls took off their shoes and stockings, tucked their skirts up under their arms, and waded out as deep as they could go; but still the fragrant white lilies floated exasperatingly on their green leaves, "so near and yet so far," just beyond their reach.

Becky had a very persistent nature.

"You stay there, Sarah Jane," she said, "and I'll take a long stick and go out on the rock and see if I can pull them in far enough for you to pick them."

Becky mounted the rock in her bare feet, that left wet tracks on the rock's sunny surface.

"Oh, this rock burns my feet," said Becky, dancing up and down, while Sarah Jane laughed to see her. "Now, Sarah Jane, be ready to seize them when I pull them in."

Becky reached and strained, but could not quite touch the coveted lilies.

"I will have you," she said, and making a desperate stretch still farther out, lost her balance, and went splash into the deep water below the rock. The water flew all over Sarah Jane, who made for the shore, and began to cry,—

"Oh, Becky will be drowned! Oh, what shall I do?"

Luckily help was near at hand. There was a great crackling of twigs and underbrush in the woods near
by, and out came Dan and the Sprague boys, closely followed by Spry.

"Becky's drowned!" cried Sarah Jane.

At this instant Becky's head appeared above the water. Spry dashed into the pond, seized her dress and held on stoutly, although he was a small dog, until the boys could get hold of Becky and drag her ashore.

It was some moments before the gasping Becky knew where she was or what had happened to her. Then she fell to crying hysterically, and Sarah Jane cried too, from sympathy and reaction from the fright.

"Come, girls," said Dan, who hated to see girls cry, "don't cry. You're wet enough now, Becky, I should think, without spilling any more water on yourself."

This set Becky to giggling as nervously as she had been crying. Glad of this change for the better, Dan said,—

"Look at good old Spry. I don't know where you would be now but for him."

"Spry is a splendid dog," said Becky, patting Spry.

"Yes," said Ben, "he's got more pluck for his size than any dog I ever saw, and what he doesn't know isn't worth knowing, — for dogs, I mean."

Spry, meantime, bounded about, jumped up on the boys, and showed that he knew he was the object of well deserved praise.

"The quicker you get to Grandma's and get off your wet clothes, Becky, the better," said Dan.
It is describing her feelings mildly to say that Grandma Bullard was horrified at the arrival of Becky all wet and dripping, fresh from the bottom of her pond.

“Well, what mischief won’t children contrive to get into? Who ever thought of anything happening to you, as many times as you have been to that lily pond? I don’t know what your Grandma Strong would say if she knew about it, I’m sure. As she is away, and Priscilla don’t know much about doctoring, I guess I’d better keep you here to-night. Dan, you run home and tell Priscilla that I am going to keep Becky here to-night; and step into Josiah’s and tell them about it, and ask them to let Sarah Jane stay too, to be company for Becky.”

Pale and dripping as she was, Becky exchanged a smile of rapture with Sarah Jane. It almost paid for being nearly drowned to spend the night with Sarah Jane, at Grandma Bullard’s, too.

Dan set out to go right home on his errand; but finding the Sprague boys still in the yard, a bright idea struck him. He would have plenty of time to show the boys Uncle Zach’s new hay-cutter.

“What sort of a thing is that?” asked the boys, when Dan asked if they knew that Uncle Zach had bought a hay-cutter.

“It’s a great thing,” said Dan. “Come out to the barn, and I’ll show you how it works. It won’t take but a minute.”

This was the first hay-cutter ever seen in Hackmatack, and Dan took pride in exhibiting it to the boys. As he was feeding it with hay, he carelessly
let his hand slip in under the sharp knife as it came down with great force. The blood flowed freely, and Dan was uncertain how many fingers he had sliced off. A good deal frightened, he grasped his bloody hand, and fled to the house, appearing, a gory spectacle, to his grandma, as she was flying around to care for Becky.

"For pity's sakes, Daniel Strong, what have you done? Cut your finger off in your Uncle Zach's new machine? I always talked against it from the first. I don't believe in these new-fangled notions, myself. Well, wash your hand, and let me see how badly it's hurt."

It was found that Dan had cut off only a small slice from one of his finger joints. Grandma hunted up a roll of home-made sticking-plaster, melted one end of it, spread it on a linen rag, and dressed the wound. Dan carried the scar all his life as a reminder of "old times."

When Dan reached home and reported the day's adventures, 'Rasmus said,—

"There, Dan, you see how you came out. You had a good deal better have stayed at home, as I told you to."

"Sho!" said Dan, unrepentant.

"My, would n't your Grandma Strong have a conniption fit," said Lyddy Ann, "if she knew that Becky was 'most drownded and that Dan had cut his finger half off the very first day after she started!"

"I am glad she doesn't know it," said Priscilla. "It would spoil all her pleasure. I hope, Dan, you'll try to do right after this."
"I wasn't doing anything wrong," said Dan. "There's no law obliging me to mind 'Rasmus that I know of."

Becky and Sarah Jane, meantime, were having a royal good time at Grandma Bullard's. They had the high privilege of sleeping in her spare chamber, the great square front room with four windows, sacred to guests. This room, closely shut as it was most of the time, had what Becky called "an old-fashioned smell" that seemed a part of its state and dignity. The bedstead was a four-poster, whose framework held up a stately fringed canopy of white dimity, its curtains caught back on the sides and foot and tied in tent-like openings. The best feather bed was rounded up so high that the girls had to stand on chairs to get into it. In they jumped, and down, down they sank in its soft depths, with much giggling and "squiggling," to use a word of Sarah Jane's expressive of rapture. On the bed was the very best dimity counterpane, all tufted over with little white tassels of cotton yarn.

As the wind had changed into the east, and it was cloudy and threatening, Grandma thought it best, in view of Becky's drenching, to build a small wood fire in the open fireplace. The fire crackled and sparked cheerfully, and added to the girls' pleasure in being "company," and sleeping in all the glories of the spare room.

Grandma appeared at the opening in their curtains, carrying a steaming blue bowl in her hand, which smelled very "mediciny," as Becky said.

"Here, Becky," she said, "drink this boneset tea."
“Oh, Grandma, I can’t, — I can’t really.”
“Vous must,” said Grandma, firmly. “Down with it.”

With many wry faces, Becky forced down the bitter tea, but this was the only drop of bitterness in her cup that night.

“Now be good girls, and don’t talk,” said Grandma, as she departed with the candle.

It was impossible to help talking just a little. The firelight shone in through the opening in the curtains, and showed the two little girls, almost lost in the big bed, their eyes shining, not a bit sleepy.

“Isn’t this beautiful?” whispered Becky. “It seems as if we were not ourselves but somebody else, far away, camping out, and this was our great white tent. See our camp fire shine in at the tent door!”

“I’m an Indian come into your tent to fight you,” said Sarah Jane, who felt frisky and gay after all the excitement of the day.

Suiting the action to the word, she threw her pillow on Becky’s face, half smothering her. Of course Becky had to defend herself, and for a short time Grandma’s spare bed witnessed livelier scenes than it was accustomed to. But soon Becky said,—

“Come now, Sarah Jane, we must settle down and keep still, or Grandma won’t like it, and then maybe she will never let us stay here again.”

This dreadful possibility sobered Sarah Jane, who fell asleep as soon as she stopped playing; but Becky lay awake longer. The fire had burned down to coals, which still sent a pleasant red light upon the ceiling, and glistened on the handles of the
The Cats go Away.

mahogany bureau, in whose immaculate drawers, lavender scented, reposed all Grandma Bullard's best things. The firelight shone on the big gilt mirror, and even displayed dimly the designs on Grandma's sampler which she had worked in her far-away girlhood, and which hung in a black frame on the wall. Becky had often admired it, and knew it all by heart, — the stiff flower pots that held coneshaped trees with large red and yellow fruits of some unknown variety dotting their branches at exactly regular intervals, the impossible roses, and the still more impossible square-cornered dogs,—Becky knew them all well. All her life long, firelight shining upon the ceiling after she had gone to bed gave her a peculiarly happy, peaceful feeling, which went back to her childish experiences in Grandma's spare chamber.

The next morning she woke quite well, unharmed by her accident, and she and Sarah Jane had the pleasure of washing in the best wash-bowl, — a blue bowl with a lovely landscape on its bottom, wherein a shepherd, a shepherdess, and a flock of sheep graced the foreground, while a big blue castle loomed above the trees in the background. The bowl sat down in a hole cut in the little square stand, and there was a shelf beneath it for the pitcher. They were careful to use the cake of brown Windsor soap lying in the blue saucer beside the bowl, its odor seeming to them the very quintessence of "being company." And then they went downstairs, feeling truly elegant and ladylike.

"I meant to give you an Indian vegetable pill this morning," said Becky's grandmother, "if you seemed
at all ailing, but I guess you’re going to get along without it.”

“Oh, I hope so,” said Becky. “I never could swallow a whole pill in the world.”

“Yes, you could,” said Grandma, “if I covered it all up nicely in a spoonful of my currant jelly.”
A DAY or two after her adventure, Becky was sitting one morning reading alone in the keeping-room, when suddenly there was a great tumult in the chimney, followed by a rustling behind the fire-board. Snoozer, who was sleeping on the new carpet, in a patch of sunshine at Becky’s feet, flew to the fireplace at once, and sniffed eagerly around it, while Becky fled to the kitchen and burst in on Priscilla and Lyddy Ann with—

“Oh, I’m so frightened! Something’s come down the chimney!”

“Chimney swallows, most likely,” said Lyddy Ann, wiping her hands and preparing to come to the rescue. “That’s nothin’ to be scared at.”

“I guess you’d be scared yourself, if you were sitting there all alone, and suddenly heard such a racket as that in the chimney.”

“I wa’n’t born in the woods to be scant at an owl, or a chimney swallow either,” said Lyddy Ann. “You’d better put that cat out of doors before I take the board down, if you don’t want him to eat them up.”

Snoozer was put into unwilling exile, while Lyddy Ann took down the fireboard, revealing several half-
fledged swallows, the remains of the nest, and a quantity of soot that had come down with the nest.

"Poor little things! What shall we do with them?" said Becky.

"Give them to me," said Dan, "and I'll climb up the big pear-tree and put them on the roof, in the corner above the eaves, where I guess the old birds will find them and take care of them."

When Dan, wistfully followed by Snoozer, had gone with the swallows, Lyddy Ann began to clean the fireplace.

"My," she said, "what a lot of soot! This chimney must be dretful dirty."

A happy thought struck 'Rasmus.

"I'm going to burn it out," he said.

"'Rasmus Strong," said Priscilla, "don't you think of such a thing. You'll set the house on fire."

"Now you let me alone, 'Cilla," said 'Rasmus, as little disposed to be "bossed" by his older sister as Dan by him. "I guess I know what I'm about. I've often seen Father do it."

"Yes, but your father always takes a rainy time, when the roof's wet," said Lyddy Ann. "There haint ben no rain for a week, and the roof must be as dry as ashes."

"I know what I'm about," said 'Rasmus, "and you need n't worry, Lyddy Ann. Father will be glad to come home and find it done."

"'Pride goeth before destruction,'" quoted Priscilla after him, as he started for the barn to get some straw, while Lyddy Ann said, after he had gone,—

"'Rasmus is so dretful sot. Boys of his age
always think they know it all; you can't tell 'em nothin'."

'Rasmus, cheerfully aided by Dan, thrust bundles of straw as far as possible up the chimney, filled the fireplace full, and then set it on fire. The eager blaze devoured the straw, and roared up the chimney.

"I hope to goodness you won't burn the house down over our heads," said Lyddy Ann, frightened at the sight.

"Not a bit of danger. Just hear her roar!" said 'Rasmus.

They all ran out-doors to watch the blaze and smoke burst out the top of the chimney.

"It's burning well," said 'Rasmus. "There won't be any soot left in that chimney."

Bits of burning straw began to fly out in all directions, which made even the boys, great as was their enjoyment of the occasion, a little uneasy.

"There," suddenly exclaimed Priscilla in a tone of alarm, "the house is afire!"

"I told you so," said Lyddy Ann.

"What do you mean?" said 'Rasmus.

"Don't you see that smoke coming up from the shingles over on the farther corner of the roof?" said Priscilla. "Oh, what shall we do!"

Becky began to cry, and the boys did not know what to do first. But Lyddy Ann's native energy was equal to the emergency.

"Becky, stop crying," she said. "You and Dan run as fast as you can and alarm all the neighbors. 'Rasmus, git the long ladder. Priscilly, bring out all the pails you can lay hands on, and I'll be drawin' water to fill all the tubs. Fly round, all of you."
Nobody needed this last advice. They all "flew" without waiting to be urged. The neighbors came running, pails in hand, and formed a long line of men and women, from the well to the foot of the ladder. Some of the men took turns drawing water, while others mounted the ladder, and dashed buckets of water on the roof, which had caught now in several places. The full pails were passed up the line of women and boys, the empty ones back along the line. After a hard fight the fire in the chimney was put out, the blazes on the roof extinguished before they had got beyond control, and all could stop to take breath and talk the matter over. It had been the most exciting time in Hackmatack since the night the blacksmith's shop burned down.

'Rasmus, who did not feel himself covered with glory, was comparatively meek under the "I told you so's" of Priscilla and Lyddy Ann. After the excitement was all over, Priscilla said,—

"Now the chimney's burned out clean—"

"Yes, I should say so," interrupted Lyddy Ann.

"I am going to fill the fireplace with asparagus instead of putting up the board again."

"I would," said Lyddy Ann. "I love to see sparrow grass, it looks so cool and summery. While you are about it, you'd better put some over the lookin' glass and pictures too, to keep the flies off."

Meantime Mr. Strong and Madam, pursuing health and pleasure in a dignified and stately manner at Saratoga Springs, were quite unconscious of the exciting events occurring at home. Before leaving home they had consulted a new book, recently published, "The Traveller's Own Book," and had se-
lected a boarding-place recommended in that work as one where "might be observed clergymen and their families, respectable professional gentlemen, and persons and characters whose demeanor, though sober and retiring, is yet affable and genteel."

In such congenial society they drank the waters, and walked over to the terrace to observe the circular railway, where, to quote the "Traveller's Own Book" again, "The cars resemble the light body of a gig, and are provided with a seat for a lady and gentleman. With much ease the gentleman gives power to the movement, and when both cars are flying round with the velocity of the wind, and passing each other as feathered arrows, a thousand promenaders, chatting and laughing, fill up the ground; the scene is truly joyous and animating."

Madam Strong and her son also walked over to view the new railroad lately built to Saratoga, and, from a safe distance, had the "awful and pleasing treat" of seeing a train of steam-cars dash past,—a sight that by no means lessened Madam Strong's fear of them.

"Ride in 'em?" she said. "I'd as soon ride on a whirlwind!"

Having old John and the chaise, they also drove about to the lake, to Bemus's Heights, and to Schuylersville, where Madam's husband had witnessed the surrender of Burgoyne. But in spite of all these agreeable distractions, Madam Strong often thought of the young people at home and wondered how they were getting along. Postage was high; it was reckoned by distance, and would probably have been eighteen cents on a letter from Hackmatack to Saratoga.
toga. The habits of the time were economical, and few letters were written except on extraordinary occasions, so Mr. Strong and Madam did not expect to hear from home during their ten days’ absence. Nothing but alarming illness or death would have justified sending a letter. “No news” was literally “good news.”

Parson Kidder, of Orange, was to supply Mr. Strong’s pulpit during his absence. When he drove over Saturday night, and was about giving his horse and chaise into Dan’s charge, he suddenly observed the burnt patches on the roof of the parsonage.

“What!” he exclaimed in dismay, “has your house been on fire?”

Dan explained how the accident had occurred.

Mr. Kidder, who was a very nervous man, and whose especial dread was fire, looked worried, and clutched his carpet sack more firmly.

“I never leave home,” he said, “without taking with me my most valuable manuscripts, in case of fire at home during my absence. In this bag I have an ordination sermon, a sermon I preached before the governor of the State, and several other valuable discourses, that have cost me much time and prayerful consideration. I should be extremely sorry to expose them to the slightest risk.”

“This only happened because ’Rasmus burned out the chimney,” said Dan, “and there’s no danger of his trying that experiment very soon again. Our house never was on fire before.”

Finally Parson Kidder was partially convinced that his Brother Strong’s house was not habitually on fire, and consented to enter it, being careful, how-
ever, to keep the carpet bag with the precious discourses where he could lay his hand upon it at a moment's notice. He also evidently looked upon 'Rasmus as a dangerous youth who might break out in some new career of ruin at any moment.

Priscilla, who felt all the anxiety natural to so young a housekeeper that everything should be satisfactory and comfortable for her guest, was quite mortified by a discovery she made on going to Parson Kidder's room the next morning.

"Lyddy Ann," she said, coming down into the kitchen, "what do you think? Mr. Kidder has made his own bed! Worse than that, he has taken off our sheets and laid them over a chair, and has put sheets of his own on the bed. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Do you suppose he can think we are not neat?"

"Land's sakes, no!" said Lyddy Ann. "That's just his way. He 's the fullest of notions of any man a livin', I guess. He always takes his own sheets with him wherever he goes, for fear the sheets won't be properly aired. He says damp sheets are one o' the greatest dangers human bein's is exposed to. And he always makes his own bed because no one else can make it to jest suit him. Your grandma 's used to his fussy notions. She jest laughs and sez it 's Parson Kidder's way."

There was certainly a mutual sense of relief when Parson Kidder took an early departure Monday morning. He was glad to escape from so dangerous a locality, and Priscilla and Lyddy Ann felt relieved from the harrowing anxiety of trying to guess what articles of diet would, in his own opin-
The following week all the young people of Hackmatack were excited over a great event, a ball at the tavern. Such balls were usually held in the winter; but it was a long time since there had been a dance in town, and John Drake and some of the other college boys being home for the summer vacation, it was resolved to depart from the usual custom, and have a ball in summer. Accordingly the young men met at the tavern to "pick out for the ball." Each signified what young lady he wished to ask, and then arrangements were made to provide for those young ladies not "picked out."

One can imagine the flutterings of heart among the young ladies about this time. If "picked out" by the right young man, all was blissful; if by the wrong one, the unfortunate must either make the best of this "Hobson's choice" or lose the ball entirely.

Luella Pratt rode over on horseback one morning expressly to tell Priscilla that Hannah Pettit had told her that Amos Root's sister had told her that Amos meant to pick out Parson Strong's Priscilla for the ball. This was not agreeable; but in due time, Priscilla's fears were happily removed by a note informing her that "Mr. John Drake requests the pleasure of your company at the ball to be given at the Hackmatack House," etc.

This note threw Priscilla into a great flutter of indecision. Should she go or not? Hitherto she had been too young to be asked to a ball. Of course she wanted to go, but would her father approve? He
did not disapprove of dancing at private houses, but whether he would consider it proper for one of his family to attend a ball at the tavern was an open question. After much indecision, her inclinations prevailed, and she sent a note “accepting Mr. Drake’s kind invitation.”

Such a rushing about to see each other and talk over the grand coming event as there now was among the young ladies; such a clear-starching of white dresses, and such a doing up of hair in curl-papers! ’Rasmus, Dan, and Becky, who were only spectators of the excitement, still felt the liveliest interest in all the doings. Becky felt it a great privilege to help Priscilla dress, and willingly ran upstairs and down to wait on her.

When dressed, Priscilla really looked sweet in her sprigged India muslin, beautifully done up by the united skill of herself and Lyddy Ann, who entered heart and soul into the affair; an embroidered lace cape covered her neck, fastened in front with a bunch of roses; she wore roses in her hair, while her feet were encased in clocked silk stockings and kid slippers.

“...You’ll have to look out, ’Cilla, and dance carefully, or those stringlets will all come out straight, first you know,” said ’Rasmus, referring to the curls which much pains had produced in Priscilla’s naturally smooths locks.

“The kink will come out before you get through two sets,” said Dan.

“Much you know about it,” said Lyddy Ann, “Don’t pay any attention to them, Priscilly. We put too much quince seed into the water to have
them come out very easy. You can dance jest as hard as you want to."

"Never fear," said Priscilla, laughing, her eyes shining like two stars, "I'm sure to do that. I don't mind the boys. They're always trying to tease."

After Becky had had the pleasure of seeing Priscilla walk off in the twilight with John Drake, she went to bed alone, but not soon to sleep, for in at her open window floated plainly the gay music of the fiddles and the sound of the shuffling of many feet on the floor of the tavern hall, and Becky tossed restlessly about, feeling as if all the good times would be over before she were grown up and ready to take part in them.

Of course 'Rasmus and Dan went over to the tavern and hung around on the edges of the ball, as it were, where they could see the dancing and hear the music, which stirred Dan so that he kept his feet moving unconsciously in time to its entrancing strains. Only to see John Baldwin, who played first fiddle, ply his elbow, and hear him shout "Down centre all!" was enough to have made dry bones dance.

They caught many glimpses of Priscilla, "balancing" or sailing gracefully down the centre, or winding about in the mazes of such contra dances as "Money Musk" or the "Twin Sisters," her ringlets still retaining their corkscrews, in spite of the vigor of her motion, for the young people danced right up and down. There was no languid gliding or sliding about their dancing. They took all the steps, and bounded vigorously up and down; and after a
few dances, when they were well warmed to the work, some of the beaus cut "pigeon wings" that were the envy of less agile and brilliant youths.

After this energetic exercise, every one was ready for supper, when the landlord announced it. 'Rasmus and Dan watched the procession of couples, arm in arm, file downstairs to the dining-room, had a glimpse of them seated at the long table, and a sniff — alas, only a sniff! — of the roast turkey and other good things on that same long table; and then there was nothing for it but to go tamely home and to bed.

A few days later Mr. Strong and his mother returned. As they entered the outskirts of the town, every one they met stopped them, not only to give them a hearty welcome back from so long a journey, but to tell them that their house had been on fire; so that by the time they at last reached home they half expected to find only a few blackened ruins left, and were quite relieved to find the damage no more serious than Mr. Mosely could easily repair with a few bunches of shingles. But they entered the house in some anxiety and annoyance, not lessened when Becky, eager to be first to tell the news, said, as soon as the first greetings were over,—

"Grandma, 'Rasmus set the house on fire!"

'Rasmus, hastening to change the subject, said,—

"Did you know that Dan cut his finger nearly off in Uncle Zach's new hay-cutter?"

"Well," said Dan, "Becky fell into the lily pond and was almost drowned, and I was so excited I didn't know —"

"Bless us and save us!" exclaimed Grandma.
“What next, I should like to know? What have you been doing, Priscilla?”

Priscilla blushed, and Becky said,—

“'There was a great ball at the tavern, and Priscilla went, and never got home till one o'clock!'"

Grandma looked about her with the calmness of despair, as if words were unequal to the occasion. Her eyes chanced to fall on Lyddy Ann, whose conscience felt their gaze a demand for a report from her.

“I'm dretful sorry, Madam Strong,” she said. “I could n't help it. I seemed to be possessed that day.”

“Could n't help what?” gasped Grandma.

“Breaking your big blue meat-dish. It slipped out of my hands as easy, jest as if 't wuz bewitched, and went all to pieces.”

“Well,” said Grandma, “I guess I shall not leave home on a pleasure jaunt again very soon, if this is the way things go on when I am away.”

Mr. Strong had all the young folks in his study, and cross-examined them as to the details of the various happenings. When the evidence was all in, he pronounced his verdict, which was milder than might have been expected, for he felt the charm of returning to his home and family again after so unusual an absence, and was disposed to be lenient.

“Becky and Daniel were each the victim of accident, so we must not blame them too much. They have suffered enough to teach them greater carefulness in future, I trust. You, Erasmus, were guilty of an error of judgment not to be wondered at in one of your age, perhaps, but showing less sense and more
thoughtlessness than I look for from you. I hope this may be a lesson to you not to think too highly of your own opinion hereafter."

These words of his father were the finishing touch to 'Rasmus's humiliation.

"I should not have allowed you to attend a public ball at the tavern, Priscilla, had I been at home; and it would have been extremely gratifying to me had you denied yourself that pleasure in my absence, out of regard to my probable opinion."

"We mustn't be too hard on her," said Grandma. "If she must go, she couldn't have gone with a nicer young man than John Drake."

"True. I understand that the temptation was strong; but Priscilla should have resisted it, nevertheless. Duty first, pleasure second. I confess I am disappointed in you, my daughter."

Priscilla valued her father's good opinion and words of praise highly, and was so seldom blamed that she felt these words of censure a severe punishment.

The following Sunday Mr. Strong returned fervent public thanks in the long prayer for a safe return from a journey, and for deliverance from all perils thereto pertaining.
CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRST CIRCUS.

A NEW preacher was to be settled at Northfield, and the Franklin Association of ministers was to meet at the same time. Madam Strong, who had returned from Saratoga full of vigor, though she did say she had found no spring that would make old folks young again, said to her son,—

"I think we had better have the Association here this time. It is a good while since we have had them, and I'm feeling pretty smart now, and Priscilla is at home to help, so I think we had better have it and done with it."

Mr. Strong was only too happy to extend his hospitality to his brother clergy. There was a great time baking and preparing at the parsonage,—indeed at all the houses in the Centre; for the ministers would be quartered around at the nearer houses. 'Rasmus and Dan were busy all the morning of Association Meeting, caring for the horses that came driving into the yard from all points of the compass.

While the ministers, assembled in the study, listened to papers on high, abstruse themes, the women folk were flying about, setting forth all sorts of good things on long tables, preparing to regale the bodies of the ministers when their souls should again come
down to earthly wants. When they relaxed and came out to dinner, who such good company as the ministers? In spite of black suits and starched white neck-cloths, and manners also a little starched to match the neck-cloths, good stories and capital jokes flew around the board, at which Priscilla and Becky considered it a privilege to wait, that they might enjoy the talk.

The following day the Association all drove over to Northfield to assist in the ordination. Parson Somers, who drove a notoriously slow horse, said to his brothers when Dan brought up his horse and gig,—

"Brethren, you must allow me to go in the middle of the procession, lest I be left wholly behind. I think my nag will keep up if she can go in the centre."

The consequence of this arrangement was, that as the procession of gigs and chaises wound up the hill, the lookers on from the parsonage saw it gradually divided into two, Parson Somers's slow horse heading the second procession at a gradually increasing distance in the rear of the first section.

"Well, that's over!" said Madam Strong, as the last minister drove out of the yard. "Now, girls, I guess I'd better go right over to the quilting at Mrs. Holton's, while you straighten up the house. Mrs. Holton made a great point of my coming. Lovina has a good many quilts to be done, and they will need all the help they can get."

"I shall go very early to-morrow," said Priscilla. "All the girls mean to go early, to get the quilt out of the way before evening."
Lovina Holton was to be married ere long, and part of her “setting out” was to be a full supply of home-made bedquilts. To-day the married ladies and quilters of experience were assembled at Mrs. Holton’s, for this was the best quilt, a Job’s Trouble pattern, only to be trusted to experts. To-morrow a plainer quilt would be put on the frame for the young ladies. The quilters’ tongues would keep pace with their fast-flying needles; there would be some long stitches, perhaps, that Mrs. Holton would quietly take out next day; but the quilt was certain to be done before evening, when all the young men would come in to spend the evening playing games.

Madam Strong received a warm welcome.

“I was ’most afraid you wouldn’t make out to get here, after ’Sociation Meeting,” said Mrs. Holton. “We all want to hear about your Saratoga trip. I expect you got all the fashions there. They do say Saratoga is a great place for dress. Did you notice if they are wearing mantelets much now?”

“Yes,” said Madam, while she threaded her needle, and prepared to go to work, “mantelets are worn considerably; but long shawls are very fashionable too. I bought one and brought it home for Priscilla, —white crape, with purple silk stripes across the ends.”

“Dear me! it must be beautiful,” said Mrs. Holton, privately resolving to send to Boston by Captain Pratt the next time he went down to buy goods, for a long shawl for Lovina.

If Priscilla was anticipating the quilting, the children were even more wrought up over another coming event. Like all the other young folks in Hackmatack,
their wonder and curiosity had been much excited by flaming posters which blazed on the tavern horse­sheds, and on barns and fences along the turnpike, announcing that a circus would shortly exhibit in town. Such a thing had never been known in Hack­matack, and the excitement and interest among the young folks (and some of the old folks too) was immense. The boys stood around the red posters, and gazed with awe on the superhuman feats there de­picted, and held weighty debates as to their feasibility. The general opinion, however, was in favor of the strict truthfulness of the posters.

The Strong children were fearful that they might not be permitted to go. Their father did indeed hes­itate to consent; but when ’Rasmus said, “There are to be wild beasts, sir; it is partly a menagerie,” he said,—

“It may perhaps be an opportunity for instruction that will not occur again, as none of you have ever seen any wild beasts. I will therefore give you this choice: I will give you each a ninepence to do with as you please. You may spend it for something else, or use it to go to the menagerie.”

Seldom indeed was it that the children had so large a sum at their own disposal, and great were the discussions that now arose about the possible ways of spending it. ’Rasmus stood firm.

“I shall go to the circus and see the wild beasts,” he said.

“I don’t care so very much about the circus,” said Dan, with a rare flash of wisdom that made his grand­mother open her eyes in astonishment. “It’s only one afternoon, and then your money’s gone, and you
have nothing to show for it. Captain Pratt's just got in a new lot of jack-knives, splendid ones, and I guess I shall spend my ninepence for a knife.”

“I will go down to the store with you and look around,” said Becky, full of the joy natural to her sex in proudly going shopping all by herself, free to buy what she pleased.

Arrived at the store, Becky was at once transfixed by an irresistible ribbon,—a white ribbon with a pink sprig scattered over it and a pink satin edge. With fear and trembling she asked the price. Oh, joy! it was only twelve cents a yard. What a bargain!

It did not take Becky long to decide that she would far rather have the ribbon than go to the circus, and she went hippity-hopping home with it, too glad to walk.

“You are a very sensible child,” said Grandma, which also made Becky feel happy, for she was not praised too often.

The pink and white ribbon was carefully wrapped in tissue paper, and laid among Becky’s choicest treasures, to be taken out now and then and admired, but only worn on occasions of more than ordinary grandeur.

It took Dan longer to do his shopping. For nearly an hour he hung over Captain Pratt’s counter, wavering between the charms of different knives, in love now with this, now with that. It was too important a matter to be lightly decided. He had never bought a knife before. The old jack-knife he carried was a second-hand one. He had swapped for it, with Cyrus Dole, a ball of his own making,—a tip-top ball, too;
a piece of rubber inside, wound over with yarn, and then a leather cover sewed on.

Finally Captain Pratt, seeing his perplexity, came to his aid; and by the captain's advice, he selected a white-handled knife with two shining blades.

"You'll never get a better bargain than that if you live to be a hundred," said the captain, and Dan was sure of it as he walked slowly home, gloating over his treasure. All the boys envied him, and the knife filled Dan's soul for about a week.

Then the circus came to town. Dan saw the procession of big red wagons come driving in, and the tent pitched on Mr. Skinner's lot opposite the tavern. Hanging about the tent and wagons with the other boys, he even heard one of the wild beasts roar. He began to wish that he had not bought the knife.

But when, a little before the time for the show to open, some of the circus men in full spangled costume, blowing bugles, rode on horseback out about half a mile on each road leading from the Centre, when Dan saw the clown, so comical, riding backwards on a wonderful spotted calico pony, and heard the boys say that was the trick pony, he was crazy to go to the circus. He rushed to the store, and said,—

"Captain Pratt, will you please take back my knife, and give me the money again? I haven't used the knife any yet."

Captain Pratt, who had been a boy himself once, looked at Dan with a twinkle in his eye, took back the knife, and refunded the ninepence. It gave Dan a little pang to see his knife go back into the
showcase to be bought by some other boy; but still he must go to the circus. He took time to rush home to tell Becky of his good luck, and advise her to do likewise.

"I know Captain Pratt will take back that ribbon," he said. "You just ought to see that clown and hear that lion roar. He roared just like this."

The lion’s roar lost nothing as represented by Dan. "Mercy on us!" exclaimed Grandma. "I’m afraid it’s dangerous. Suppose one of those ferocious wild beasts should get loose!"

Now Becky had been helped to decide on the ribbon by one of the posters which pictured a lion in his jungle, his mouth wide open, leaping on a native, the lion being not only so fierce, but so much larger than his victim that it was evident there was no possible hope for him. Becky felt that the posters were only a faint foreshadowing of the show itself. So she said,—

"No, indeed, I had much rather have my ribbon than go to that dreadful circus."

While the circus remained in town, she was careful not only to remain indoors herself, but also to keep Snoozer in, lest some ravenous wild beast should snap up such a choice morsel.

Dan enjoyed the circus quite as much as he had anticipated, which is saying a great deal. It was wonderful to him and the other Hackmatack boys to walk around to the cages, and actually see the animals only known to them in pictures, which it had seemed to them did not really exist. But here they were, all alive, and just as real as horses, cows, and sheep. There was the lion and a large tiger and
some funny brown bears, and even a camel. Besides, there were wolves and leopards, and best of all, a monkey. What a roar of boy laughter went up to the tent-top at the monkey's funny performances!

Dan was quite surprised to find Moses Streeter and all his family at the circus, down to the babe in arms. Moses might suffer for some of the so-called necessities of life, but he would not forego the circus. Still more surprised was Dan to encounter his friend Uncle 'Pollos before the bear cage. Uncle 'Pollos said,—

"How d' ye dew, Daniel? I guess you didn't expect to find me here. Rhody she said a fool and his money wuz soon parted, and that she should think I wuz old enough to know better than to be a hangin' around circuses. But the fact is, I never seen any wild beasts in my life, and I did kinder hanker to see some of the strange critters I 've ben a readin' about all my born days 'fore I die. Now look at them bears. Ain't they redicerlus? Act jest like great, clumsy, good-natered boys, don't they? They would n't be so good-natered, I guess, if they caught you out in the woods alone. I never seen a bear before. I seen a bear-track once over 'n the edge of our cow paster, when I wuz a boy. They used to be plenty round here. I 've heard lots o' bear stories told, but I never seen a bear before."

"I think the camel is the strangest of all," said Dan. "He looks like deserts and caravans."

"Don't he though?" said Uncle 'Pollos. "He makes me think of the old Bible times."

Although Uncle 'Pollos had come merely to see the wild beasts, he seemed resigned to witness the
later performances in the ring. None of the boys laughed longer or louder than he when the clown rode round the ring with the monkey in a red coat and hat on his back, and he watched the wonderful doings of the trick pony with the liveliest interest and satisfaction. He confided to Dan,—

"I shall teach Nanny some of them tricks. See if I don't have her drinkin' out of a bottle before another month. Hosses is sech knowin' critters. Jest see that cunnin' leetle pony now. Aint he knowin'? If that great interferin' feller that feels so smart, struttin' round and crackin' his whip, would jest let him and the clown alone, there's no knowin' what they would do. The clown don't seem a mite afraid o' him, though; he jest gives him as good as he sends every time. I should s'pose all the folks laffin' at him so when the clown sasses him would kinder take the conceit out o' him, but it don't seem to. He 's got too big a stock on hand to run out easy, I guess."

When the interest was at its highest pitch, when the clown was the most amusing, when the bareback rider was doing his most thrilling feats, and the ring master was walking about swelling with importance, a man stepped into the ring and said in a loud tone,—

"I arrest you all!"

At first the boys all laughed, thinking it a part of the performance. But the performance stopped; the ring master looked crest-fallen, and whispered hurriedly with the man, whom the boys now recognized as the town constable. Then the ring master said, "The audience will please remain seated a
few moments,” and walked off with the constable. Dismay sat on every face.

“There,” said Uncle ’Pollos, “I thought sumthin’ was goin’ to happen. That feller’s ben altogether too smart. I s’pose we might as well go home. Guess that’s the eend on’t all.”

“Oh, no,” said Dan, who could not bear to give up so easily. “Let’s wait a while and see. No one else is going.”

Word spread around the tent that the performers had been arrested for not having taken out a license, as the law required. A few moments of great suspense passed. Then the ring master (who had gone up to the selectmen and paid his fine), returned, the show went merrily on again, and the audience enjoyed it all the more from having so nearly lost it.

The day after the circus, a great piece of good fortune fell Dan. Of course he had shown the white-handled knife to Uncle Zach, who had agreed with Dan that it was both a beauty and a bargain. When he went up to rake hay for Uncle Zach the day following the circus, after he had heard all about the wonders and delights of the show, Uncle Zach said,—

“By the way, I believe I’ve got something for you in my pocket, Dan.”

Uncle Zach then put his hand in his pocket, and actually drew out the precious knife, which he had been down to the store and bought back for Dan.

Dan might live to a good old age, but never would he meet with a kind turn that would out-rank this
great kindness of Uncle Zach. Uncle Zach heard his joyful thanks, saw his radiant face; and yet he little knew how much it meant to Dan, or that long after he was dead and forgotten by most people, Dan's heart would yet warm to him as he told his children about the circus and the knife.

But this is anticipating a good deal. At present Dan and his friends were all absorbed in playing circus. "Circus" raged all over town, until all the anxious mothers agreed with Madam Strong when she said,—

"Dan worries my life out of me. I am certain he will dislocate his neck, or burst a blood vessel, standing on his head so much as he does. And I don't think it's safe for him to be riding old John backwards when he takes him to the pasture, or to the blacksmith's, or where not."

"He is trying to persuade me to dress Snoozer up for a monkey," said Becky, "the next time he has a circus, but I won't do it. I don't believe Snoozer would like it."

"I wish that circus had never come to town," said Grandma.

"I have a plan for Daniel that I hope may influence the boy in the right direction, turn his energies into more useful channels," said Mr. Strong. "Edward Everett is to give the oration at Amherst Commencement this year. It is a rare opportunity to hear the great orator, and I intend to improve it, and will take Daniel with me."

Dan was greatly pleased when he heard of his father's plan. Not that he knew much about either Edward Everett or commencements. But it in-
The First Circus.

volved a two days' trip; it was travelling and seeing a new section of country; and, above all, it was not farm work. So, altogether, he was delighted that he had been selected to drive his father instead of 'Rasmus.
CHAPTER XVII.

DAN ASPIRES.

DAN and his father drove over to Greenfield the afternoon before commencement, and spent the night with Parson Belding, in order to take a very early start for Amherst the next morning. Dan enjoyed the next day's drive exceedingly. Although the day was evidently going to bring the traditional commencement weather, and be very warm, now, so early, the air was dewy and fresh, and Dan could ask nothing better than driving on after old John's easy trot, through the lovely Connecticut valley. The country was new to him, and full of interest.

Driving through Deerfield and South Deerfield, his father beguiled the way with the local Indian traditions, and they stopped to look at the old Indian house; and it was a good deal to Dan to cross Bloody Brook at the very spot of an actual Indian battle. Then as they drove along under the great elms of old Hadley, Mr. Strong had much to say about the regicides, Goff and Whalley, and their times, and Dan felt that he was seeing a great deal of history.

They found the village of Amherst all alive and in a great bustle, the streets thronged, vehicles pouring in from all points of the compass, and the common already thickly surrounded with the horses
tied to its fence. They hastened to secure seats in the gallery of the church, already well filled, though more people were crowding in every moment.

It was a thrilling moment when the band struck up, and down the main aisle marched the long procession of students, with the faculty at its head. Dan gazed upon the young orators of the day, from the salutatorian to the valedictorian, with deep respect, as great men. How should he feel to stand up there before such a great audience, with every eye fixed on him, every ear listening to his words, to be applauded and have flowers thrown him (by Dolly Meekins, perchance), and to have people whisper admiringly, as he sat down,—

"What a gifted young man!"

"I believe I can do it, if I've a mind to," thought Dan, "as well as any of them. I understood a good deal of that Latin oration."

After dinner came the great event of the day,—the oration by Edward Everett. Dan knew that Mr. Everett was candidate for governor. This was the nearest he had ever come to seeing a live governor. Mr. Everett's appearance and bearing, so elegant, so dignified, were well calculated to heighten Dan's awe of the future governor. But when he spoke; when Dan heard the rounded, flowing, polished sentences; when the audience hung spellbound and breathless on the magnificent flight of his eloquence, and greeted the finished climax with tumultuous applause, for the first time in his life Dan realized the power of talent. No one stamped harder or clapped louder than Dan.

Dan had not been out into contact with this new
world, the world of scholarly ambition, for nothing. As he drove along in silence on the way home that evening, his father said,—

"How were you pleased, Daniel? Did the exercises interest you?"

"Oh, yes, sir, very much indeed. I never heard any one speak like Mr. Everett."

"He is indeed wonderfully eloquent," said Mr. Strong. "I am glad you could have the good fortune to hear such a celebrated man."

"Father," said Dan, after a little pause, as old John jogged on in the summer twilight, "I have decided that I will go to college."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, my son. Your grandfather often used to say to me when I was a boy of your age, 'Mankind is divided into two classes: the hammer class, and the anvil class. You yourself must decide to which class you will belong. A good education helps put a man in the hammer class.' The older I grow the more I feel the value of a good education, and I will gladly do all in my power to aid you in going through college, if you are in earnest about it."

"I am, Father," said Dan. "You will see that I am."

The next Sunday evening, when some of the neighbors had dropped in, Mr. Strong closed his account of Edward Everett's oration by saying,—

"He must resemble some of the famous Greek orators. Such eloquence is rare. I suppose he has not his peer in the country to-day."

"Have you ever heard Daniel Webster?" asked Captain Dodge.
“No, I have never had that pleasure,” said Mr. Strong. “I have read his speeches, especially his reply to Hayne, with deep interest. It was published in all our papers, you recollect.”

“Yes, I know. I don’t believe Edward Everett can hold a candle to Daniel Webster as a speaker. He is a great scholar, and very polished and elegant, and all that; but Webster is a mighty power. He wakes up the dry bones. I happened to be in Boston the last time he spoke in Faneuil Hall. I thought of that verse in Genesis, as I listened to him: ‘There were giants in those days.’ He’s a giant. I guess if we had heard him deliver that speech to Hayne, the cold chills would have played up and down our backbones, for you can’t even read it without getting a good deal stirred up.”

“I wish he might be elected our next president,” said Mr. Strong.

“You Whigs will nominate him next time, I suppose,” spoke up Captain Pratt, who had listened to Webster’s praises as long as he could peaceably, “but Daniel Webster will never move into the White House. He’s smart enough, but he’s on the wrong side in politics. Locofocoism is bound to sweep this country like wildfire the next election, and if Martin Van Buren isn’t our next president, then all signs will fail.”

“Martin Van Buren is n’t to be even named in the same day as Webster,” said Captain Dodge. This opened up a warm political discussion that lasted the rest of the evening.

Dan had listened to the talk about Daniel Webster with great interest. “If Daniel Webster is a smarter
man and finer speaker than Everett, I should like to see him, that's all," he thought.

Dan had taken lately to reading politics, and become interested in the course of public events, and he now kept his eyes open for items about Webster, which were many and glowing, as his father took the Whig papers. He committed some of his speeches to memory, and spouted them around the house with much of Edward Everett's best manner.

The flute fund, the savings of several years, had now reached the sum of seven dollars, which Dan thought enough to buy a fine flute. His father consented that he should drive over to Winchester to make the important purchase. For some time he was undecided between a second-hand flute with silver keys, but a little cracked, and a new one of plainer make; but finally remembering Grandma's adage, "Fine feathers don't always make fine birds," took the new one. It was a great evening when he came home with the flute. He practised on it every leisure moment, blowing all his day dreams into the patient instrument. The other boys complained of his absorption.

"Dan Strong won't play circus, or training, or do a single thing now," said Tertius to Cyrus, "but just practise on that old flute of his."

"I know it," said Cyrus. "I can't go by the house but I hear it tooting and squeaking away. I'm sick of it."

But by and by it was considered a great treat to hear Priscilla sing and play the organ, accompanied by Dan on the flute; and finally he played the flute in church.
One day, late in the summer, as Dan was in the garden, picking vegetables for a boiled dinner, Lyddy Ann came out and said,—

“Dan, your Grandma wants you to run right down to the store and get ten cents’ worth of pearlash. Hurry up. She wants to make some gingerbread right away.”

“All right,” said Dan, “I like gingerbread.”

As he neared the store he saw a great dust up the road, and lingered a moment to see what was coming, for any little incident was welcome in the quiet monotony of Hackmatack everyday life. But this was to be an incident indeed. For out of the dust, to Dan’s amazement, came bowling along a handsome open carriage, drawn by six fine horses. This equipage dashed up to the tavern door, and so did Dan, arriving just in time to see Mr. King, the landlord, rush out and open the carriage door with unusual deference. Four gentlemen alighted. Seeing Dan, Mr. King said to him,—

“Run home as quick as you can, and tell your father that Daniel Webster’s here. He is on his way to speak in Vermont, and the party will dine here.”

Daniel Webster actually in Hackmatack! This was news.

“Which one is Mr. Webster?” asked Dan.

“The one standing on the steps now,” said Mr. King, as he hastened into the house.

Daniel felt that he need not have asked. That massive, overhanging brow, those piercing, deep-set eyes, the whole impressive look and bearing, could belong only to him who was as a giant among common men.
As Mr. Webster walked up and down the tavern piazza, he said to one of the gentlemen of his party,—

"It is a great relief to walk about, after sitting so long."

Simple words, but they were spoken in Daniel Webster’s voice, and Dan heard it! All these impressions were flashed on his mind in a moment, for he lost no time in running home and electrifying his father with the news,—

"Daniel Webster is over at the tavern, and Mr. King wants you to come right over!"

Great was the excitement this announcement produced in the Strong family. Pearlash and gingerbread were alike forgotten. Mr. Strong, in a greater state of excitement than Dan ever remembered to have seen him, hurried into his best suit of black and up to the tavern, where, introduced by Mr. King as the town pastor and a stanch Whig, he welcomed the party to Hackmatack, and was invited to dine with them. Dan took time to scamper up and tell his friend, Uncle Zach. Then he and 'Rasmus went over to the tavern, in front of which quite a little crowd of men and boys had collected, the rumor of the honor that had befallen Hackmatack having spread on the wings of the wind apparently all over the Centre.

After dinner the carriage with its six horses pranced up to the door. Mr. Webster came out, and Mr. Strong introduced the leading men of the town to him. When it came Uncle Zach’s turn, Mr. Webster said,—

"I suppose, Mr. Bullard, the farmers have nearly harvested their crops?"
Uncle Zach felt this the opportunity of his life.

"Well," he said, "I'm pretty much through myself; but Deacon Kellogg has only just begun on his wheat, and Mr. Sprague hasn't got more 'n half his oats in yet, and —"

He might have gone on, giving a full and conscientious report of the state of the harvest in Hackmatack, but just then some one else was brought up to shake hands with Mr. Webster, which Uncle Zach always felt a great pity.

'Rasmus and Dan were indignant to see Captain Pratt and other Democrats actually presuming to be introduced to Mr. Webster.

"As if it were any of their business to be shaking hands with Mr. Webster!" said Dan.

"It's downright hypocrisy," said 'Rasmus.

When the little crowd stood gazing after the disappearing carriage, still hardly able to realize their good fortune, Captain Pratt said,—

"Mr. Webster is a great man, no doubt, but he will never sit in the President's chair."

A howl of dissent went up from the radiant Whigs, and Uncle Zach, whose hand still thrilled with the grasp of that mighty hand, and who remembered that Mr. Webster had asked him in particular about the state of the crops in Hackmatack, said,—

"Daniel Webster is the greatest man in this country, and the country knows it, you'll see. Hackmatack has had the future president in it to-day."

"Hurrah, hurrah!" shouted all the Whig men and boys, while Captain Pratt and his friends laughed a scornful laugh.

That evening, after the chores were done, Dan went
up, as he often did, to see how the new church was coming on. The body of the building was far advanced, and lately the framework of the steeple had been erected.

Dan looked at the tempting skeleton of timbers rising up so high in the air, against the glowing red of the sunset sky.

"I wonder if I couldn't climb it," he thought. "I was never up so high as that. I'll try, anyway."

The carpenters had gone home, and there was no one about to interfere. Dan easily found his way up to the point where the steeple began, and then, being a skilled climber, had no great trouble in gradually mounting up, now by the scaffolding, now from one cross-piece to another, until he reached the top.

The spire viewed from below apparently ended in a point, but really on its top there was a board about eighteen inches square. Cautiously Dan pulled himself up on this board, and cautiously he stood erect. Used to climbing to the top of the tallest trees all his life, he never thought of being either dizzy or afraid. He simply felt perfectly satisfied with himself, like a king, as he stood there, so far aloft, looking far and wide from his elevated standpoint, over the familiar little village at his feet, over his father's white house nestled in the trees below, over the tiny patchwork of fields where he worked every day, over the roads winding out of the little valley into the great world outside, and then way off over the familiar hill-tops to strange hills that peeped up beyond. The red was dying out in the west, and a star or two twinkled faintly here and there in the wide sky overhead. Dan saw the tiny sickle of the new moon
in the western sky. The evening wind sighed through the pines on Mount Zoar’s wooded side. Many thoughts swelled Dan’s heart.

“I do not mean to live and die in this little valley,” he thought. “I will go to college, and study hard, and know a great deal. Then I will go out into the world, and travel, and see foreign lands. Who knows? Maybe I shall become a famous man, a great orator, perhaps, like Daniel Webster.”

Something like this were the dreams of future fame that flitted through Dan’s soul as he stood on top of the church spire.

Mr. Strong, driving peacefully home in the dusk from a parish call on a sick parishioner, found Captain Pratt standing in his store door peering anxiously through his far-sighted glasses toward the church steeple.

“What is it, Captain? What do you see?” he asked, checking old John.

“There appears to be something moving up on top of the church spire. The daylight’s so far gone, I can’t make out what it is.”

“It’s either a boy or a monkey,” said Mr. Mosely, the carpenter. “No one else could get up there. Ten chances to one, Parson, it’s your Dan. He’s a terrible hand to climb.”

The form had now disappeared. Mr. Strong waited until Dan came out of the church, somewhat surprised to find his father waiting for him below.

“My son,” said Mr. Strong, “I fear you have been running a foolish and unnecessary risk. Your grandmother would be much alarmed if she knew about it.”
"No, sir," said Dan; "I did it easily enough. I wanted to be high up in the world."

"I hope you will always aspire high," said his father, innocent of any intention to pun, "but you must not again ascend the church spire."
CHAPTER XVIII.

NUTTING.

The summer days had stolen away, September had come, and one afternoon, after a long northeast storm, the clouds broke and fled away before a brisk northwest wind, the sky wore a cold, clear aspect, and Madam Strong said to the girls,—

"Girls, get some newspapers and come out and help me cover up the posy beds. If the wind goes down there's going to be a sharp frost to-night."

The next morning a white frost lay heavy on grass and bushes; the squash vines and those of Grandma's posies that had ventured to stick their noses out from under their newspaper hoods, were black and blighted; the air was crisp and clear, the soft summer haze had vanished from the atmosphere, the sky was a harder, more steel-like blue, and, though there might still be now and then a warm day —

"To call the squirrel and the bee from out their winter home, — "

yet it was evident that summer was over, and autumn had come.

The home industries of Hackmatack now went on more briskly than ever. 'Rasmus and Dan and their boy friends were kept so busy gathering the corn and other crops, cutting up corn-stalks for fodder, clear-
ing the gardens, and storing the vegetables in the cellar, that it was seldom they found a chance to attend to their own affairs. Still there was occasionally a day's hunting, a joyous ramble of boy comrades with dogs and guns over the breezy hills. The three or four dead chipmunks brought home by the tails at night might seem to older people but a poor outcome for a whole day's "hunting;" but little did such objectors know that the game was but a small part of the fun.

Husking was much alleviated by being done in company. The boys all came over to help 'Rasmus and Dan husk. The corn-house was a picturesque sight, lighted by lanterns suspended from rake-tails thrust into slits in the corn bins, with a great heap of corn in the centre, and the group of boys sitting around it on inverted peck measures or other temporary seats, laughing and talking as they stripped off the husks, and the pile grew rapidly smaller. Grandma Strong considerately sent out a plate of her doughnuts, and a pitcher of new cider helped digest the doughnuts. The next evening 'Rasmus and Dan went over to Deacon Kellogg's to help Ki, and so on, around the circle.

Of course the boys had to help Uncle Zach more or less. One day when Dan had gone up to Grandma Bullard's to pick up apples, Becky and Sarah Jane obtained the privilege they were always coveting of going up there too. They found Grandma busy making her winter supply of candles, aided by Aunt Rhoda Benson. Aunt Rhoda was pleased to see the girls.

"My," she said, "it does beat all how you do grow! I can't keep track o' ye, hardly. When I
see another set o' children a comin' on so fast, spindlin' up into grown folks 'fore you know it, it seems as if 'Pollos and me must be 'most a hundred year old!"

"Time is a getting along with us all," said Grandma Bullard.

Two long poles were supported at each end on splint-bottom chairs. Across them rested rods, on each of which was twisted six wicks, at present barely stiffened a little from having been dipped into a tub of melted tallow that stood close by. Boards laid under the poles protected the shining yellow painted floor from tallow drops, as Grandma and Aunt Rhoda dipped row after row of the wicks into the warm tallow, a little of which adhering each time made the candles a trifle larger. A big kettle hung on the crane over the fire, and an odor of hot tallow filled the kitchen.

Making candles was hard, slow work, so it is no wonder that Grandma Bullard failed to respond with enthusiasm to the girls' delight in her occupation.

"What fun!" cried Becky. "How I should like to do it! Won't you let us help you, Grandma?"

"It looks so easy," said Sarah Jane.

"Rhoda and I have our hands full," said Grandma, "without being bothered much. Your Uncle Zach is making cider, and you 'd better go down and help him. Go away, and I 'll make you each two little candles of your own."

There was no resisting this offer; and the girls scampered off down hill to the hollow in the orchard where the cider mill's sloping roof showed through the trees but thinly covered now with yellow leaves,
the apples that had laden their branches lying on the ground in great red and yellow piles in the mellow sunshine.

“Oh, Becky,” cried Sarah Jane, “there are the geese. Run! Run!”

The geese, busily feeding on stray bruised and rotten apples scattered in the grass, might not have noticed the girls had not their running challenged their attention. Away ran the girls, the geese, led by the vindictive old gander, in hot pursuit. The girls dashed into the cider mill so impetuously that they quite woke up and startled the old “colt,” who was sleepily plodding round and round, turning the press, causing a feeble stream of juice to trickle out of the pomace.

The “colt” was the old horse, twenty years old or more, Mrs. Bullard’s special property, behind which she jogged independently about town, driving herself. The colt had always been so called since its remote youth, when it had been an animal of much fire and speed, which still cropped out sometimes in untimely antics that caused Mrs. Bullard to regard him as a creature of much mettle, requiring cautious management.

The colt now justified his reputation by bolting so violently as the girls dashed in on him, that he snapped one of the traces.

“Hullo,” said Dan, who was in charge of the press, “what’s the matter?”

“The geese are after us,” panted the girls.

“You must be geese yourselves to mind them,” said Dan. “See what you have done. Now I shall have to splice this trace the best way I can.”
"Is there any cider made yet?" asked Becky.

"Yes, there's a barrel over there just beginning to work first-rate," said Dan, who had found time to give it a fair trial.

The girls found some nice straws, and were still sucking cider from the barrel's bung-hole when Uncle Zach returned with a cart-load of apples. They passed a busy, happy forenoon riding on the ox-cart, being even allowed to take the long whip and to drive by the ever indulgent Uncle Zach, and being able to really help him in gathering the apples, their nimble young fingers easily picking up two to his one.

After dinner the children went down by the brookside, and picked the wild grapes that hung thick on the vines festooning the trees that overhung the brook. The grapes were to be divided between the two grandmas, and made into delicious purple preserves, of which the children would get their full share.

One night a little later, Ki Kellogg came over to see 'Rasmus on business of importance.

"A lot of us are going out on the mountain chestnutting to-morrow," he said, "and we want you all to go."

"I should love to," said 'Rasmus, "but I don't know whether we can get off or not. Father said Dan and I must begin to dig the potatoes to-morrow. When do you start, and where are you going?"

"Right after breakfast; going to meet at the store, just as we did for the picnic. Mose Streeter was down yesterday, and he says he never saw such a heavy crop of nuts as there is this year; the trees are just loaded, and if there's a sharp frost to-night to open the burs, the nuts'll rattle down lively to-
morrow. Mose is going with us to show us the best place.”

'Rasmus and Dan represented the necessity of their going nutting so strongly to their father, who fortunately felt the propriety himself of laying in a good stock of nuts for the coming winter evenings, that he graciously consented to postpone the potato-digging one day.

The children were all up by candle-light the next morning, and started off right after breakfast, the boys carrying meal-bags for their nuts, and Becky a large basket that now contained their luncheon, for it was to be an all-day excursion. The other girls and boys were equally prompt, and the party struck off into the fields while the grass was still wet where the early sunshine had melted the frost. The long shadows of the tree trunks and the rails of the fences were still marked on the grass in dense white frost, and there was a keen tang to the air, that would have put life into much older, soberer people than the children.

They first struck across Captain Pratt’s cornfield. The corn had been harvested. The stalks were stacked up in rows, like Indian wigwams. Between the rows lay exposed great yellow pumpkins, basking in the sun.

“Where are you going first, Ki?” asked 'Rasmus.

“Right to Mose’s house, to get him to show us the best place.”

“Maybe Mose won’t be at home,” said Tom Pratt.

“He might be off at work somewhere, you know.”

This sarcasm of Tom was greeted by loud laughter,
"If Mose Streeter is at work, I'm willing to go without chestnuts, — that's all," said Ki.

The children climbed stone walls and vaulted rail fences like so many gymnasts, as they pushed on higher and higher up the mountain side. The grass in the pastures was sere and brown, the golden-rod had gone to seed; but a bright bunch of purple asters still nodded here and there, lighting the brown grass with a touch of color, and everywhere grew the white life-everlasting, so like the Swiss Edelweiss.

"Let's get a lot of this life-everlasting when we come back," said Sybil Ward; "it's so pretty to dry for winter vases."

"I want to get ever so much," said Becky, "for both my grandmas like it, and I mean to carry some to the Widow Pickett, because she says she sets such store by it, and she hasn't any one to get it for her, now Lucinda is sick."

Sheep were still browsing about the pastures, which scampered away in terror at the children's approach. Ki now led the way down into a wooded ravine, down whose bottom a clear mountain brook tumbled along, dashing over, under, and around the mossy rocks that made its way so tumultuous. The ravine, in summer such a dense, shadowy, green spot, was now transformed by a golden touch. The thin foliage let the sunlight into nooks it could not penetrate in summer, and the yellow leaves through which it shone seemed to intensify its golden hue. The leaves rustled under foot and half choked the brook.

"Where are you taking us, Ki?" asked 'Rasmus, as they struck into this ravine. "Seems to me this is down hill instead of up."
"This is the shortest cut to Mose's house," said Ki. "It's all right. I've been here before. Follow your leader."

The children leaped from rock to rock, catching hold of branches to steady their steps, as the hollows were so full of dead leaves that their foothold was uncertain.

"Here we are at the bottom," shouted Ki, as he leaped upon a mossy stone. Over rolled the stone, and over rolled Ki with it, into the brook.

"You're at the bottom sure enough, now, Ki," said Dan, laughing so hard at Ki's mishap that he stepped carelessly, slipped, and landed in the brook by Ki's side.

"Follow your leader seems to be the game," said Tom. "Are we all bound to jump into the brook?"

"Oh, no," said 'Rasmus. "Ki's fond of the water. Winter or summer, it's all the same to him. He is a kind of a duck. Are you sure you're not web-footed, Ki?"

Ki and Dan took all the jokes and laughter at their expense in good part, and led the way up the other side of the ravine faster than the rest could easily follow, feeling chilly as the cold October wind struck their dripping garments, and hoping to warm themselves by active exercise. As they scrambled up the ravine, Peri Drake found a bush of witch-hazel already in bloom, and the children gathered branches covered with the quaint feathery yellow blossoms, that only come after its leaves have fallen.

Emerging from the wild depths of the ravine, they came out near Moses Streeter's house, and soon saw Moses himself, tipped up against the side of the
house in the sun, his hat drawn down over his eyes, fast asleep. A brood of ragged, bare-headed children, who were playing about, took to flight like the sheep at the sight of strangers, the oldest, however, stopping to give her father a nudge, saying,—

"Pa, there's company a comin'."

Moses tilted his chair forward on all fours, and said,—

"Wall, so here ye be, fierce arter nuts, I s'pose?"

"Will you go with us, Moses?" asked Ki.

"I'd admire to go. I've ben a lottin' on it; but fact is, I'm a feelin' ruther peaked to-day. You see Sam Hawks and Zeri cum up here last night with their dogs and guns, and nothin' do but I must go out a coon-huntin' with 'em. So I went. We wuz out the best part o' the night, — treed three coons, — and I feel all kinder used up to-day. But 'Nezer here" — indicating a tow-headed boy who had just come round the corner of the house — "will be glad to go and show you the place."

Here Mrs. Streeter, a shiftless, amiable, flabby sort of a woman, came out and exclaimed at Ki and Dan's wet clothing, and insisted that they should come in, put on some dry clothes, and leave theirs to dry against their return.

"Your grandma's done more than one good turn for us, Daniel," she said, "and I guess I kin do that much for her. She'd have a conniption fit if she see ye out in wet clothes, sech a cold day as this."

While the boys were inside, changing their clothes, Moses said,—

"If you haint got sum witch-hazel! It's early for it. Queer stuff that. There's no wood a growin'
makes sech a sure and sartain divinin' rod as witch-hazel."

"What do you mean by a divining rod?" asked Tom, who, like all the boys, liked to draw Moses out.

"Why, a rod that pints out a good spring o' water, and sometimes, they dew say, tells where gold 's buried. I haint never seen enny gold turned up by one; never had enny sech streak o' luck myself; but I 've seen springs found. Sol Gunn over in Shutesbury is a master hand at divinin'. When Deacon Pettit built his new house, — it's a goin' on nigh twenty year now, — he dug and dug for water, and somehow he could n't hit it. So he sent for Sol Gunn. A whole lot o' folks went up to the deacon's to see it done. Sum bet Sol could fetch it, sum bet he could n't. Sol looked mysterious-like and said nothin'. He had a forked rod o' witch-hazel in his hand. He held a twig o' the fork in each hand, and the rod straight out before him.

"Wall, Sol walked and he walked all round the deacon's hum lot fore and aft, the crowd at his heels, makin' scoffin' remarks, sum on 'em; but Sol said nothin'. All of a sudden that rod turned right over of its own accord, and pinto straight down to the airth! 'Dig here,' sez Sol. And they did dig there, and 'fore they got down twenty foot they struck as nice a spring as ever wuz! Queer stuff, witch-hazel!"

"Is that why it is called 'witch'-hazel, Moses?"

"Why, yes, o' course. I 'spect the old witches knew sumthin' about it if they 'd ben a mind to tell; but you could n't git much out o' them, not even when you drowned 'em."
Here Ki and Dan came forth, and the children roared with laughter at the spectacle they presented. Ki was clad in an old suit of Moses's as much too big for him as were the garments of 'Nezer too small for Dan.

"This is as good as the circus," said 'Rasmus. "Dan looks like the clown, and Ki—it's hard to tell what Ki does look like."

"Never mind how I look," said Ki, "I feel first-rate; so sort of roomy and easy." And here Ki cut a pigeon wing, to show how well he could do it, and the children laughed more than ever.

'Nezer led the way to a fine chestnut grove. From it there was a lovely view of hills, valleys, swampy meadows, all glorious in the most brilliant colors, the many dark pines mingled in the forests making more vivid the yellows, reds, and crimson of the other trees. White farmhouses peeped out of the brightness here and there, so small and far away they seemed like toy-houses.

The children stopped a few moments to admire the view and point out familiar spots in the big stretch of the world's surface spread below them. But the chestnuts lay thick on the ground, and they went to work so busily that it was not very long before 'Rasmus said they had best pole the trees. Some of the boys took rails from the fence and pounded the lower limbs, making the girls scream as a brisk shower of nuts fell on their heads, especially if one had a bur catch in her braids, as sometimes happened. Others climbed the trees, to shake down the nuts from the top branches. Suddenly 'Rasmus gave a cry. The pickers started up to see what had happened. Ki
Kellogg had lost his footing on a slippery round branch, and was falling headlong from a great height.

"He will be killed!" cried the girls. But their horror was in an instant changed to laughter. The amplitude of Moses's trousers catching on the sharp end of a broken branch saved Ki's head, perhaps his life. There he dangled in mid-air, head and heels down, the long tails of Moses's coat waving in the breeze like a banner.

"Hold on, Ki, till we get there," said Tom and 'Rasmus, as soon as they could speak for laughter.

"I'm safe to hold on," said Ki, "for I can't let go if I want to!"

'Rasmus and Tom climbed out on the limb and gave Ki a hand, enabling him to pull himself up, and so release himself.

"Moses's trousers were what my father would call a special providence that time," said Ki.

After their luncheon, enjoyed with the good appetite that waits on such exercise as they had been taking in the keen, bracing air, 'Nezer led them to some walnut-trees. By and by Ira Sprague said,—

"See here, boys, this meal-bag of mine is getting about as heavy as I can carry."

"I guess it is time we were starting for home," said Tom. "It must be three o'clock or later, by the looks of the sun."

Going home, the boys stopped to change their clothes, leaving a bushel or two of nuts with Mrs. Streeter in return for favors received. The girls did not forget to gather their life-everlasting as they
descended the mountain, and in a damp hollow they came on a beautiful great bed of fringed gentians,—

"Blue, blue, as though the heavens ’d let fall
A flower from their cerulean wall."

Fringed gentians seem like a direct gift from heaven, flowers of brilliant blue are so rare at any season, and these come so late, when we have ceased to expect flowers.

Becky found one stalk with sixty great blue blossoms on it, by actual count.

"I am going to give this stalk to Lucinda Pickett," said Becky. "She used to love to go out for wild flowers before she was sick."

The children struck across and came out on the Northfield road, stopping to rock the famous "rocking-stone," — a great bowlder so daintily balanced that a child’s finger could set it in motion. At the Widow Pickett’s they left the life-everlasting and more nuts than the widow was willing to take from them.

"I do believe those children robbed themselves," she said to Lucinda, after they were gone.

"It was real kind in them to think of us," said Lucinda, her weary eyes resting with pleasure on the beautiful stalk of blue gentian that stood in a tumbler on the little stand beside her bed. God’s love and human love seemed to breathe from them, brightening the dreary sick-room.

The Strong children spread their store of nuts out to dry on the floor of the woodhouse chamber, and felt rich as they looked at the great quantity they had. A week or two later Dan came in and said,—
“Some one’s taking our nuts. There’s a good many gone.”

Who the some one could be was a mystery, for thieves were unknown in Hackmatack. None of the houses had any window fastenings, and many families slept serenely all night with unbolted doors. Nuts were so plentiful that it was not for a moment to be supposed that any boy would steal nuts from the minister’s when he could get all he wanted honestly.

One day Becky discovered the thieves. She happened to see a chipmunk scamper from the old pear-tree whose branches touched the roof, and vanish through a knot-hole into the woodhouse chamber. She kept still and watched. Presently the cunning rogue came out, followed by another, their chops sticking out with nuts, dashed into the pear-tree, and down into a hollow in its trunk. Evidently they had been industriously laying in their winter supplies, for when a piece of tin was nailed over the knot-hole, the nuts ceased to disappear.
As time went on, the changes that are always coming in life crept imperceptibly into the parsonage, and the home circle began to break up, though no one realized this was what it really meant when Uncle Jedediah offered Priscilla a position in his school at Cambridge as assistant teacher. Madam Strong and the minister and Priscilla herself justly considered this the opportunity of a lifetime. Not only would Priscilla be earning an independent support, but, best of all, she would enjoy the many privileges that Cambridge society and intellectual opportunities afforded to an ambitious young person.

"I am so thankful that I sent Priscilla to the Misses Fiske’s school," said Madam Strong. "A good education is the best fortune a young person can have."

Mr. Strong felt that Erasmus ought to enjoy better advantages than the Hackmatack schools afforded, before he carried out his long-cherished purpose of "going into business," so he was sent for the fall term to Northfield Academy. This left Dan and Becky the only children at home. A larger share of work and responsibility now fell on them; but also they perceived a certain added respect and deference
in their treatment by their elders, which was gratifying. They were regarded as of more importance, and felt themselves less of children and more of young folks.

'Rasmus soon made an excellent reputation at Northfield. The academy was kept by Mr. Holman, brother of Dr. Holman, the minister. The Holmans lived in the academy building, and kept the boarding-house, where all the pupils from out of town boarded. Mr. Holman was in delicate health, and needed help about his farm work. One day, soon after the term opened, he said to the boy boarders,—

"I want some one to dig my potatoes. If any of you boys will undertake the job, I shall be glad to pay you for doing it."

'Rasmus at once stepped forward in a manly, business-like way that pleased Mr. Holman, and said,—

"I should like to take the job, sir, if you please."

"Very well," said Mr. Holman, "I will pay you four cents a bushel," which 'Rasmus considered good pay.

'Rasmus spent all his spare time in the potato field. At first the other boys laughed at him, and said they would n’t dig Mr. Holman’s potatoes for him,—catch them doing it; 'Rasmus was a fool to be working that way, and so on. But 'Rasmus worked steadily on, paying no attention to them, and by and by it dawned on them that 'Rasmus was making considerable money, and they might as well be doing the same as to be idling about after school hours. The upshot was that 'Rasmus succeeded in underletting a large share of his contract at two cents a bushel, revealing thus early the born financier. His straight-
forward character and steady industry soon won for him a high place in Mr. Holman's good opinion.

"That boy of Parson Strong," he said to his wife, "is a fine fellow. He is n't afraid of work, and he is always to be depended on. Whatever he does is well and faithfully done. He is just the kind of boy I have been wanting to find."

Accordingly he wrote to Mr. Strong, offering to give 'Rasmus his board for a year, if 'Rasmus would do his chores. As money was short at the parsonage, and only the most rigid economy enabled Mr. Strong to clothe and educate his children suitably on his salary of four hundred dollars, the proposal was gladly accepted. The tuition fee was small, the board being the chief expense, and now 'Rasmus by his own industry was able to relieve his father of this.

At the next Association meeting, Dr. Holman greatly pleased Mr. Strong by saying, before all the assembled ministers,—

"My brother says he thinks he shall send all his sons over to Hackmatack to be educated."

"Why so?" asked some one.

"Because he thinks Brother Strong knows how to bring up boys."

He then told the whole story of the potato contract, adding some words in praise of 'Rasmus's character that highly gratified his father.

Mr. Holman would have been glad to keep 'Rasmus with him as long as he himself remained at Northfield, but that was impossible. 'Rasmus was impatient to go out into the world and seek the fortune that he felt reasonably sure was awaiting him there, and a fine chance soon came to him, for it is
true that "Heaven" is apt to help those who "help themselves."

Sam Lane, a Hackmatack boy, had gone to Lowell in its beginning, and was now a leading man in one of the big mill-corporations there. He happened to be at home on a visit when the question of the future of Parson Strong's son was under discussion.

"I've heard," said Mrs. Lane, "that the parson is thinking of putting 'Rasmus into Maxwell's store over in Greenfield Hollow."

"Pshaw!" said Sam, speaking with the importance allowable in the successful man, "that's no place for him. Give the boy a chance. Let him come to Lowell. Lowell's a live, growing place, bound to be a big city before long. I can get him a fine opening there, where he'll have a chance to go in on the ground floor and grow right up with the concern and the town."

Sam was as good as his word. In the spring 'Rasmus bade good-by to home and went to Lowell, "clerking it" for a big corporation. Two of the young birds had now flown forever from the old nest, for Priscilla came home no more, save for an occasional visit, until she came to make preparations for her wedding.

The dedication of the new church early in the winter was a great event for Hackmatack and the region around, where new churches were not built every day. Mr. Foster came over from Rowe three days before to drill the choir for the important occasion, and singing-school was held every afternoon and evening. The choir were using the "Ancient Lyre," but Mr. Foster brought over copies of the "Boston
Academy of Music," and made them work on new anthems in that work. He laid special stress on the anthem, "The Earth is the Lord's." Grand was the effect when the bass and tenors chanted majestically,

"Who is this King of Glory?"

and then the whole choir burst out, fortissimo,

"The Lord, the Lord, strong and mighty,
The Lord, the Lord, mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, ye gates,
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of Glory shall come!
The King of Glory shall come in!"

The sleighing was good, every house in Hackmatack was full of guests, and the church was crowded, many being obliged to stand. Squire Drake wrote a hymn expressly for the occasion, whose last verse was,

"Accept, O God, this house of prayer,
We dedicate it all to thee;
Here may we meet, and here prepare
For death and vast eternity."

Dan, who was now quite a veteran choir-singer, sang the anthems with a swelling heart, letting out his voice in the second treble in a fashion that caused Mr. Foster to say to Parson Strong,

"That boy of yours has lots of music in him. Why don't you make a singing master of him?"

"Music will always be Daniel's pleasure and refreshment, I hope," said Mr. Strong, "but not his business. I have other views for him. I trust he
will go to college, and enter one of the learned professions."

During his second winter under Mr. Wyatt, Dan made such gratifying progress, and his ambition seemed now so thoroughly awakened, that Mr. Strong resolved to send him for the spring term to an academy, yielding to Dan's strong desire to go to Deerfield. Cyrus Dole was also going to Deerfield, and he and Dan planned to be room-mates.

Dan was careful to call at Grandma Bullard's and tell her all his plans as soon as they were decided, delicately intimating that a little spending-money would no doubt be useful to him in this new sphere. Grandma said nothing, but her eyes twinkled as she disappeared in her bedroom. Presently returning, she actually gave Dan fifty cents!

Dan could hardly believe his eyes, and his thanks were most sincere.

"The best way to thank me," said Grandma, "is to be a nice, good boy, and not do anything you need to be ashamed of. Don't be extravagant and spend your money foolishly. See if you can't make as good a name in Deerfield as 'Rasmus did in Northfield. Deerfield's a nice place, and you'll meet lots of nice folks there that it will do you good to mix with. We shall miss you badly, but the young birds must fly out into the world sometime on their own account."

Grandma Strong and his father also gave Dan some spending-money, so that when he set out for Deerfield one windy Friday morning in March, he actually had a dollar and a half in his pocket, and felt rich indeed.
Grandma Strong and Becky bade him good-by rather mournfully; but Dan was too much excited to be in the least sad at his first going from home. Was he not going out into new scenes and experiences, to set up in the world for himself, with a trunk of his very own in the sleigh, and a dollar and a half in his pocket? His mind was in such a whirl of excitement and expectation that it is to be feared some of the good advice his father gave him as they glided along in the high-backed cutter behind old John went where much good advice does go,—"in at one ear, out the other."

"Remember, my son," said Mr. Strong, "that it is only by diligent application that you can acquire the requisite knowledge of the classics. One who expects to hold a respectable rank in college by only giving a superficial attention to his lessons is much mistaken. There must be unwearied application, unflinching determination to excel."

"Yes, sir," said Dan, respectfully, wondering if Cyrus Dole would get over to Deerfield that day.

"I trust you will make continued progress in moral as well as in intellectual worth," continued Mr. Strong. "You have every incentive to strive after a high degree of both culture and character, and this, I hope, may be your aim."

"I will try, sir," said Dan.

They dined at Parson Belding's in Greenfield, and drove over to Deerfield in the afternoon. As they drove along the Cheapside road, Dan looked with great interest across the snow-covered meadows to the cluster of houses standing on the plateau at the foot of Mount Pocumtuck, with wide meadows all
around, the undulating line of the Shelburne mountain across the winding river bounding the western view, for this was Deerfield, and the big brick building that they caught a glimpse of after crossing the toll-bridge was the academy. His heart beat a little faster as they turned into Deerfield Street, with its stately houses standing under more stately old elms, whose bare branches, meeting over the wide street, showed plainly whence came the idea of the Gothic arch.

At the academy they were most cordially welcomed by Colonel and Mrs. Wardwell, who kept the boarding-house. His father helped Dan carry his little trunk to his room in the third story,—a bare, carpetless room, whose furniture was a bed, a wash-stand, a small table, and two wooden chairs, but for all that a delightful room in Dan's eyes. After much last good advice Mr. Strong bade him good-by, and departed, intending to spend the night with his relatives in Shelburne, who lived on the old farm where Grandma Strong played as a girl.

The tea bell rang soon after Mr. Strong had gone. It was quite an ordeal for Dan to sit down to the long table with so many strangers. Shyness kept him from saying anything, and even from eating all he wanted,—a phase of shyness that soon wore off; but he listened with wide-awake ears and eyes, too much entertained by the novelty and liveliness of his surroundings to think of being homesick.

There were ten boy boarders, and two girls. The boarders eyed Dan, and Dan eyed the boarders, deciding already which he liked, and which he knew he should dislike. The boarders sat in the parlor
evenings with the family, unless they had to study in their rooms. Dan, having no lessons as yet, spent the evening in the parlor.

He soon discovered Colonel Wardwell’s house to be the liveliest place he had ever been in. Young men dropped in, there was a constant coming and going, and music, talk, jokes, and laughter in plenty. The colonel had four bright and pretty young lady daughters, three of whom were at home. The colonel himself was a kindly, courteous gentleman of intellectual tastes and refined instincts, overflowing with cordial hospitality, all his tastes shared by his wife, and inherited by his daughters. So it is no matter of wonder that the academy parlors were the social centre of Deerfield.

The next day, Saturday, school kept in the forenoon, and Dan began his studies under Mr. Ledyard, the principal, a kind, cultured, scholarly man, but lacking force when it came to discipline. Under his mild sway those who chose could learn much; those who did not, could easily escape any painful exertion. Dan, who well knew that sacrifices were being made at home to give him these opportunities, felt in honor bound to improve them, and made a record as a scholar wholly satisfactory to his father.

By great good luck Dan had arrived at Deerfield at one of the most exciting episodes of her history. The very next evening after his arrival, the church bell rang out violently, as fast as the rope could be pulled. Every one was startled.

“Some one’s house must be on fire,” said Mrs. Wardwell.

But here the brass knocker on the front door was
plied loudly. Mary Wardwell hastened to open the door, and two or three excited young men rushed in.

"Hurrah, Colonel," they cried, "we've won! The motion to annex Cheapside to Greenfield has been defeated in Legislature. We carried it by forty-two votes!"

The territory where Greenfield now stands had formerly been included in the town of Deerfield. A settlement gradually grew up on the plain north of Deerfield River, along the Green River, finally attaining such respectable size that it had set up in life for itself as a separate town under the name of Greenfield. This was a hardship; but when the lively young bantling actually secured the Court House and other county buildings, and became the shire town, an honor which the mother town felt justly belonged to her priority of age and reputation, the offence was not to be forgiven.

"Cheapside" is a strip of land belonging to Deerfield, but on the Greenfield side of the Deerfield River. Greenfield village had spread down over this strip, and had now been making an effort to annex Cheapside to her own domains, an encroachment of the detested rival which Deerfield was bound to fight to the last penny in her purse, and her last drop of blood. So the joy and excitement that prevailed this Saturday night when news came that the right had triumphed, and the enemy had been defeated, were immense.

Colonel Wardwell, quite as excited as the young men, rushed over to the tavern, where an impromptu glorification meeting was being held. Of course Dan and the other academy boys were in the midst of the
fray. Speeches were made, and probably some rum drunk, and rousing enthusiasm prevailed.

Subscriptions were called for to provide powder to fire the cannon. Old Uncle Sid Daniels, the closest man in town, seldom known voluntarily to part with a quarter, was the first one to call out,—

"Put me down for three dollars!"

"Three cheers for Uncle Sid" were followed by such a brisk flow of dollars into the powder fund that it was soon made up. It was voted that early Monday morning the cannon should be taken to the north end of Deerfield Street, pointed towards Greenfield, and forty-two salutes be fired, that being the number of votes by which Deerfield had carried the day.

"I move that two extra salutes be fired in honor of Robert Rantoul of Beverly, and Colonel Thayer of Braintree," said Colonel Asa Stillman. These gentlemen had lent their powerful aid to the Deerfield side in the struggle.

"And I move," said Colonel Wardwell, "that another salute be fired for Rufus Saxton of Deerfield."

At this there were tremendous cheers from the assembly and great enthusiasm, for Mr. Saxton was the Deerfield representative who had carried his point against two legislators of such marked ability as Henry Chapman and James C. Alvord of Greenfield.

It was also agreed to have a public dinner and dance at the tavern Monday evening in celebration of the victory. Then every one went home, and Deerfield suppressed itself over Sunday as well as it could.
CHAPTER XX.
OLD DEERFIELD.

SUNDAY Dan attended church with the other boarders, they making with Colonel Wardwell’s family three pews full, and feeling quite a sense of their own importance as they filed in, facing the congregation. Dan was struck by seeing a venerable old gentleman, evidently stone blind, led by his wife to the foot of the long flight of pulpit steps, which he slowly ascended, taking his seat in the pulpit beside the minister. He learned that this was the venerated Dr. Willard, for many years a pastor of the church, who always sat in the pulpit, his silent presence, his touching patience, and Christian resignation under his affliction, preaching as powerfully perhaps to the congregation as did the minister’s sermons.

In the afternoon Colonel Wardwell assembled his family and boarders in the parlor, and read a sermon to them. Then he said,—

“Boys, you may go out for a walk now until tea time. You understand I expect you to observe the decorum proper to the day. I am confident I can trust you.”

The boys walked up into the burying-ground that lay on the hill above the academy, where murmuring
pines sighed mournfully over the dead resting in their quiet shade. There was a pretty view of the valley below, and a degree of interest in rambling about, perusing the inscriptions on the gravestones. In the evening young men dropped in, and there was singing of psalm tunes.

At sunrise Dan heard the boom of the first cannon-shot echoing up the valley, and hurried to the scene of action, full of enthusiasm, being by this time as strong a Deerfieldite as if he had been born and bred there. Deerfield's cause was his, her enemies his.

There was a peculiar point and pith in pounding a sense of her defeat into Greenfield with this cannon, for it was another disputed point between the two towns. Each claimed to own the cannon, and the "boys" of the respective towns were perpetually making midnight forays and stealing the cannon away from each other. At present Deerfield held her own, as she felt. The cannon was kept carefully hid in John Weston's cellar, and its carriage concealed in another place, the hiding-places known only to a tried and trusty few. So now to drag it forth and fire it defiantly at Greenfield was a double triumph.

Dan heard all these interesting tales, and it seemed to him as thrilling as real war. In the evening he and the other boys went up to the tavern and hung about, sniffing the dinner, the excitement, and the glory. After dinner toasts were drunk, of a defiant and jubilant nature, and speeches made. At each toast the flag was run up the flag-staff and the cannon was fired.

Then followed the dance in the tavern hall.
Colonel Wardwell led off with Mrs. Luke Wiswell, and all the prominent people of the town took part, and it was a courtly and elegant spectacle. Philo Temple played the violin, and called off. Mr. Temple lived in the contested strip, and his name had headed the petition to annex Cheapside to Greenfield; but there was some reason to think he had repented of the error of his ways. Across one end of the hall was stretched a white banner, bearing in huge letters this motto: “The Triumph of Principle!” Some one called Mr. Temple’s attention to this, asking if he saw that. He replied,—

“Yes, and I congratulate you on your success.”

Certainly never had Philo’s elbow plied more briskly, and never had feet stepped out more merrily to his music. This was the first time Dan had seen a cotillion danced. It was a dance but recently introduced, and had not yet reached remote towns like Hackmatack, where contra dances alone prevailed. Dan went to bed that night feeling that he was really out in the great world, the world of blood-stirring events as well as the world of elegance and fashion, and thought with some pity of quiet little Hackmatack, drowsing far away among her hills, unaware of these glorious excitements.

Cyrus Dole had arrived Monday evening, in season to share some of the excitement, though mourning bitterly all he had lost by not coming with Dan Saturday. Dan spent some of his precious hoard in the purchase of an oil lamp, some oil, and a can, and for wood, Cyrus sharing these expenses. Their wood was put in the large woodhouse behind the academy, and Dan and Cyrus used daily to saw and split enough
for the evening, and carry it up to their room. In the evening how cosy and jolly and independent they felt, with a blazing fire in their little fireplace, studying by the luxurious and unaccustomed light of a lamp, their own lamp and their own fire. Of course, they being two human boys, there was some fun and sky-larking, but on the whole, the boys were manly and faithful, doing good, honest work.

Just as the excitement of the Cheapside triumph had begun to subside, and as Deerfield was settling into her normal state of quiet, the town was thrown into another ferment by the report that the Greenfield boys had stolen the cannon!

Alas! it was too true. Perhaps, made too confident by triumph, the cannon had not been as carefully concealed as usual, or perhaps, though this is hardly conceivable, there had been treachery in the home camp. At all events the stealthy foe had discovered somehow the cannon’s hiding-place, had come in the darkness of night, and borne it away, and, after firing a few triumphant rounds on Greenfield Common, had in their turn concealed it, no one knew where.

To find and recover that cannon or perish in the wild attempt was now the one aim in life of the Deerfield boys. Spies were sent over into the enemy’s country, there was much cautious reconnoitring, and finally it was ascertained that the cannon was buried in the ground not far from the old tavern in the North Meadows. The Deerfield boys laid their plans craftily, made a midnight foray over the border, dug up the cannon, and brought it home rejoicing. Although they expressed much just indignation
against the Greenfield boys, yet who shall say that the spice of adventure, the flavor of Indian craftiness, the touch of warlike excitement, lent their quiet lives by the struggles over the old cannon, were not secretly enjoyed? Of course the academy boys entered heart and soul into the affair, and indeed would gladly have joined the foray bodily too, had Colonel Wardwell consented.

It would require a whole book by itself fully to recount all the pleasant events that varied the monotony of student life at Deerfield for Dan, — how he went to an elegant party given by Mary Newton, one of the day scholars, well satisfied with his own appearance in his best blue spencer, a gay striped velvet vest, and a broad turn-over collar; how Emily Haskins, one of the two girl boarders, a pretty blue-eyed girl, a little older than Dan, taught him to dance the cotillion so he could "chassée" and "balance to partners" with the best of them; how sometimes he walked out to Shelburne Saturday afternoon and spent Sunday on the old ancestral farm, Grandma's youthful home, beautiful for situation in its resting-place on the mountain side overlooking the Connecticut Valley; how other Saturdays the students walked up to "the rock" (not called Pocumtuck Mountain then), for the lovely view and for wild-flowers; how the students all went in a big wagon-load to an exhibition in an old church by the "Wisdom" School, where the sole foot-light was a giant candle that had been made expressly for this occasion, and how at the most thrilling moment the candle tipped over, leaving the audience in darkness, — an untimely accident attributed by the Wisdom people to the academy
boys; how during the winter term there was a long sleigh-ride of couples in single sleighs to Northfield Tavern, followed by a supper and dance, to which Dan took Emily Haskins, — all these and many other interesting episodes in Dan's Deerfield life must be merely hinted at.
CHAPTER XXI.

"TIPPECANOE AND TYLER TOO!"

DANIEL stayed a year at Deerfield, going home only for the short vacations. During the summer vacation he began to take a great interest in politics. In truth, no boy that was alive could help waking up now, for the exciting presidential campaign of 1840 was under full headway. Soon after Dan went home at the close of the summer term, a grand Whig rally was called at Greenfield. Most of the male population of Hackmatack was going. Dan was anxious to go; and his father was pleased to take him, feeling it good that the boy should begin to take an interest in national affairs. So one August morning Dan drove his father over to Greenfield in the chaise, proudly wearing pinned on his spencer lappet a pin given him by Uncle Zach, which bore a picture of a log cabin with a cider barrel lying before it, and the words, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too."

Most of the county seemed to be collected at Greenfield, certainly the Whig portion, with a fair sprinkling of Democrats, who were bound to see the fun, if they did view it with unsympathetic eyes. Old John pranced down Main Street with erect head and ears, being still antic for his years, and Mr. Strong said,—
"You had better put old John in the Mansion House stable, where he will be out of the way of all the noise and excitement."

This done, Dan hastened into the thick of things, mingling with the crowd of men and boys on the common. Suddenly there was a cry,—

"Deerfield is coming!"

Dan followed the rush to the brow of Clay Hill, where he saw a long string of fine, fat oxen coming up, drawing a large wagon, in which were seated the older Whigs of Deerfield. Following the wagon was a long procession of young men on foot, bearing flags and banners.

"Hurrah for Deerfield!" shouted the crowd, Dan's voice being loud among them, as the procession wound proudly up the hill, and in upon the grounds back of the old brick church, where a stage had been erected for the speakers, and where a log cabin cheered the eyes of the faithful.

General Wilson of Keene was the chief speaker, and his fiery exhortations, followed by glowing speeches from Isaac Bates and others, convinced all the Whigs present, at least, that their cause was the cause of right and truth, and was bound to triumph if there was any justice in the universe. The Peter-sham Glee Club and band was present, and loud was the cheering when the presiding officer, Hon. George Grennell, announced,—

"The Glee Club will now favor us with a new song, 'The Penitent Locofoco;'" and the Club, with immense spirit, struck off into—

I've been a locofoco these eight years or nine,
Spending my money in blanks, paper, and twine;
Now therefore let us lay by our money in store,
For we never will play the locofoco any more.

_Chorus:_ Locofoco, Locofoco,
Locofoco any more,
For we never will play the locofoco any more.

I went to the White House, where I used to resort,
I told them my money began to run short,
I asked for an office; their answer was "Nay,
We have new men to buy, sir, and old men to pay."

_Chorus:_ Locofoco, locofoco, etc.

Thinks I to myself 't is a hard case indeed
That a man in this land should lack money for bread;
I'll return to the Whigs, from whom I did roam,
I'll return to the Whigs like the prodigal son.

Here's a health to the Hero of Tippecanoe,
Here's a health to the Whigs, the firm-hearted and true,
Therefore let us lay by our money in store,
For we never will play the locofoco any more.

This song had a taking air, and roused the enthusiasm to a white heat. Before the last verse was reached, the crowd caught the chorus, and "Locofoco any more!" was roared so lustily that Shelburne hills and Rocky Mountain might well have echoed back to each other the mighty refrain. As for Dan, he shouted the chorus until his throat ached. After this, refreshments of crackers and cider were served the crowd, the cider barrel playing a prominent part in the campaign of 1840.

This loomed up as a great day in Dan's eyes,—one of the greatest in his life, until it was wholly eclipsed by one so much more remarkable as to be a never-forgotten episode.
Later in the summer there was a grand Whig rally at Barre, and it was announced that Daniel Webster would address the multitude. Hackmatack, being a strong Whig town, was resolved to be properly represented on this great occasion. The leading Whigs met in consultation and decided to have a banner painted to carry in the procession. There was much debate what its motto should be. Mr. Ward and Solomon Meekins strongly advocated this motto: "She Was and She Will Be,"—meaning that Hackmatack was and always will be Whig. As there was a general feeling among the Whigs that the eyes of the nation were fixed on Hackmatack, prepared to go as she did, this motto was felt to be exactly the thing,—brief, pithy, and pointed, and Mr. Ward was despatched to Athol to have it painted on a large banner.

The Athol painter, not seeing the matter from the Hackmatack point of view, with much difficulty persuaded Mr. Ward to give up the cherished motto, and inscribed on the banner in place of it this sentiment, altered from Shakspeare: "We come to Bury Locofocoism, Not to Praise It." This motto was well liked, though some would still have preferred the first.

A hay wagon, with boards laid across for seats, was the triumphal chariot which was to bear this banner. Barnard Chapin furnished the team, charging his passengers a quarter each. Dan and Cyrus were the only boys in the load. They sat on the front seat, and Dan proudly held aloft the banner in his own hands, declining to be relieved by Cyrus, who often said,—
“Your arms must be tired, Dan. Let me carry it now.”

“I’m not a bit tired,” Dan always said.

Barnard Chapin had said, —

“You must all be on hand at the tavern at three in the morning. It’s a thirty mile drive down to Barre, and I don’t know how the rest of you feel about it, but I want to be on hand bright and early, and see all the fun.”

The rest of the party evidently agreed with Barnard, for all presented themselves at the tavern promptly, in spite of the early hour, and precisely as the hostler’s lantern showed it to be three o’clock by Solomon Meekins’s big silver watch, Barnard, reins in hand, standing proudly up in front, looking back over his big load, shouted,—

“Are you all ready?”

“Ay, ay,” was the answering cry.

“Here goes, then. Hurrah for old Tippecanoe!” said Barnard, letting out his long whip-lash in a scientific crack over the backs of the four spirited horses. Away sprang the horses with a jerk that nearly threw over backwards the incautious gentlemen sitting on the rear board.

Three o’clock on a pleasant summer morning is not a bad time to be awake and out, after you have made the first dread plunge of getting up. The stillness, the dewy freshness, the wakening birds beginning to twitter from tree to tree, the gradually dawning day, the reddening eastern sky, the virtuous, satisfied feeling one has,—all contribute to one’s delight. When to all this is added the glowing fire of patriotism that burned in the breasts of the Hackmatack
Whigs, we may easily believe that never did four horses bowl along a greater amount of enthusiasm and happiness than did those which Barnard was so skilfully guiding over the hills this morning.

Going through Orange and Petersham Centres, the Hackmatack wagon and its banner created a most gratifying sensation, being loudly cheered, and Barnard's ambition growing by what it fed on, made him say,—

"Wait till we get to Barre. I'll put on a spurt that will make that old town open its eyes. We'll let them know that old Hackmatack is coming, I guess."

Accordingly, when they began to descend the hill down which they must go to enter Barre, Barnard swung out his long whip-lash, and put his horses to their highest speed, resolved to enter the Centre with a dash. The horses galloped, the banner, bellying in the breeze, proudly announced, "We come to Bury Locofoocoism, Not to Praise It," and the whole load began singing at their loudest,—

"We never will be locofocos any more,"—

when, alas and alas! the tire of one of the front wheels came off, and rolled down into the ditch!

Here was trouble. The horses were reined in, and every one dismounted and inspected the wheel. Finally Barnard said,—

"It's a new wagon, and the wheel is strong. I think it's safe enough, if I drive cautiously."

And so the entrance into Barre was safely but tamely made, falling far behind in impetuosity and fire the zeal that inflamed the hearts of the Hackmatack Whigs.
But Barre was all alive, and did not miss the Hackmatack spurt of noise and glory in its overflowing abundance. Wagons were pouring in on every road, and a great crowd had already gathered. One or two military companies were present, each bringing its own band, and the rat-tat-tat of the drums and the music of brass instruments helped swell the enthusiasm. Near the tavern a large tent had been erected, capable of holding many hundreds. Here a dinner was to be served, and here, above all, Daniel Webster was to speak. Dan's enthusiasm may be measured by the fact that he paid a dollar for a seat and a dinner in this tent,—a dollar of his own hard-earned money. This extravagance seemed somehow perfectly justifiable on this day of overflowing patriotism. Dan felt as if he were bleeding for his country, helping on the cause with his own hand.

There was a grand procession in wagons, on horseback, on foot, with music and banners, that marched all about town, bringing up at the tent for the dinner and speeches. Dan marched with the procession; but as Solomon Meekins now bore the Hackmatack banner (which, it must be said, held its own very well among the others), he was not confined to it, and so left the procession early, in order to secure a good seat in the tent. The dinner was quite inadequate to the crowd. There were aggravating rumors of roast pig in the air; but Dan considered himself fortunate, in the rush, to secure a well-filled plate of pork and beans.

"But never mind if I did pay a dollar for only a plate of pork and beans," thought he to himself. "I've made sure of a good seat, and I'm going to hear Webster."
The great tent was crowded to suffocation, not only every seat, but every inch of standing room occupied. When the president of the day and other notable ascended the platform, a murmur went round the tent like the rustling of leaves in a summer breeze,—

“There’s Webster!”

It was not difficult for the audience to recognize, in the tall gentleman clad in a blue swallow-tail coat with brass buttons, buff vest, and gray trousers, the great Whig orator. Not by his costume did they know him, for that was the ordinary dress of a gentleman of the period. There were other blue coats with brass buttons, and buff vests on the platform. But that vast dome of a brow overhanging great black eyes whose eagle glance swept with conscious power over the sea of upturned faces, that majestic presence, could belong to but one man,—the idol of the Whig party, the great orator of New England, one of the great orators of all time,—Daniel Webster.

As the president introduced him, at the name “Daniel Webster” a mighty shout of welcome split one’s ears, and the hand clapping was like a heavy shower, pattering on and on, as if never to end.

With the calm bearing, the dignity of conscious power, Mr. Webster advanced to the front of the platform, and at once a deep hush fell on the excited assembly. His voice, deep, sonorous, full, rolled out like the waves of the mighty ocean, submerging the remotest corners of the tent, as he said:

“We are, my friends, in the midst of a great movement of the people. No one can deny that an extraordinary excitement exists in the country, such as has not been witnessed for more than half a century; not local, nor confined
to any two, or three, or ten States, but pervading the whole from north to south, and from east to west, with equal force and intensity."

He then proceeded to give the causes for this great and general uprising, reviewing the policy of the Jackson and Van Buren administrations with a keen, scathing criticism, and exalting by contrast the past and future policy of the Whigs. The Miltonic grandeur of his language, his impassioned bursts of eloquence, swept the audience unresisting along the current of his argument. From his glowing countenance, alight with feeling and inspiration, seemed to flow a magnetism that swayed the audience at his will. He played upon them as on a mighty harp of many strings. They laughed, they frowned, they sighed, they applauded as he willed, their very faces mirroring the expression of his. In closing he appealed fervently to them to be true to the duties which the importance of the crisis demanded from every patriotic citizen.

"If we all do our duty, we shall restore the Government to its former policy, and the country to its former prosperity. Let us here, to-day, fellow-citizens, with full resolution and patriotic purpose of heart, give and take pledges that, until this great controversy be ended, our time, our talents, our efforts, are all due, and shall all be faithfully given, to Our Country."

The voice ceased, but still its tones echoed in Dan's ears. Tumultuous applause rent the air, and the bands played up merrily. Then the Worcester Glee Club sang a popular Whig song, whose refrain was —

"Van, Van,
Is a used up man."
But the play was over for Dan when Webster ceased speaking. All else seemed of trifling interest in comparison, and he longed to get home and tell his father all about it.

Barnard had had his wheel mended, and, it being Saturday night, he put his horses to their best speed on the homeward route, managing to land his passengers in Hackmatack a little before midnight, thus avoiding an actual violation of the Sabbath. The excursionists were all virtuously in their places at church next morning, although it must be confessed that some heads nodded rather low during the sermon, our friend Dan’s among them. Some of the Democrats did not hesitate to insinuate that some allusions to the desecration of Saturday night might have been looked for in Parson Strong’s sermon or prayer that day, had not the occasion been a Whig rally.
CHAPTER XXII.

FAIR HARVARD.

THE next autumn Mr. Strong, having been appointed a trustee of New Salem Academy, felt it proper to send Dan there as a pupil. Dan was sorry not to return to Deerfield, but had, of course, to do as his father thought best. New Salem Centre, where stands the academy, lies high up on the hills, commanding a charming view of the country around. Often when the autumn sun was shining brightly in New Salem, Dan would see the valleys below filled with a sea of white fog from the Connecticut, pierced here and there by hill-tops like islands, Mount Monadnock towering up in the north the biggest island of all.

There were only a dozen or fifteen pupils in all, so that the principal, an excellent teacher, was able to give each special attention, and Dan made rapid progress in his studies. But in spite of the pleasantness of the town, and the advantages he enjoyed there, Dan was very impatient for the arrival of the Saturday when his father had said he might come home and spend Sunday. He was going to walk home, the distance being only fourteen miles. Boys in those days made little of such tramps as this.

At last the longed-for Friday night came round. Dan was all excitement, meaning to start very early
in the morning, to have as long a visit home as possible. Knowing that the family clock had stopped, he said to Mrs. Miller, the woman with whom he boarded,—

"Won't you please set the clock right, Mrs. Miller? I want to start very early to-morrow."

"Don't you worry a mite about that clock, Daniel," said good-natured Mrs. Miller; "I'll set it a going all right, and I'll leave a cold bite in the pantry, so you can help yourself. I know just how you feel. It's awful nice to be going home, when you've been away a spell."

Thus assured, Dan went to bed unusually early. By and by he woke. It was November, and the ground was white with the first snow. A full moon shining on its pure whiteness made all out-doors literally "light as day."

"I hope I haven't overslept," thought Dan, who felt wide awake. He ran downstairs to look at the clock. Oh, joy! it was just six o'clock, time to start. He dressed hurriedly, took his "cold bite" in his hand, and started.

He walked on and on, constantly expecting to see lights in the houses, or other signs that morning had come, and the world was waking up. But he seemed to be the only being stirring, except an occasional dog who sometimes ran out as he passed a lonely, silent farmhouse, and barked him vigorously past his master's premises, as a dangerous character that needed watching.

When Dan reached Erving and found no lights there, no one stirring, he was satisfied that the busy Mrs. Miller had forgotten to set the clock (which
was indeed the fact), and that he was travelling at some unknown hour of the night. From Erving the shortest cut home was by the "old road," which ran over a very long, steep hill, and through a wild, desolate section, mostly covered with woods. Moreover, Dan remembered that two wild-cats had been shot in that region the previous winter. Should he take the old road? He did not hesitate long.

"Pshaw! who's afraid?" he said to himself, as he struck into the old road; but he took the precaution to cut a strong stick, to be used, he said to himself, as a walking-staff, and he kept a vigilant eye about him in the thick woods. No wild-cats did he encounter, or other desperate adventure; and soon the moonlight began to fade into the gray light of dawn, and the familiar Hackmatack steeple that he climbed once upon a time at last greeted Dan's rejoicing eyes.

He astonished Lyddy Ann by bursting into the kitchen just as she had come down to get breakfast.

"Why, bless us and save us, if it ain't you, Daniel Strong!" she exclaimed. "What time did you start from New Salem, I should like to know?"

"About midnight, I guess," said Dan. "Hurry up breakfast, Lyddy Ann; I'm starving."

And Dan flew about to the bedroom doors, rapping up the family, enjoying the excitement his early arrival created. In spite of his long walk, he tramped all over town that day, to see the boys, and Grandma Bullard and his two uncles. For pure joy there is nothing like coming home again after a long absence, and that pleasure Dan had to the full. Not until tea-time did he discover that he was tired. Then he
collapsed utterly, and was glad to take Grandma's advice and lay his aching legs between the sheets in his own old bed.

Dan continued at New Salem through the winter and spring terms. During the summer he worked on the home farm and for the two uncles, studying evenings, and reciting to his father with a young man that his father was also fitting for college. The next winter he taught a district school in Hackmack. True, he was only fifteen, and some of his pupils were strapping great fellows of eighteen; but Dan was by this time himself a long-legged youth almost six feet tall, who could assume considerable dignity when he saw fit; and he was regarded with respect in town, not only as Parson Strong's son, but also as a youth of more than ordinary book-learning for his years. He now played the flute in the church choir, and sometimes entertained the families where he was "boarding round" by a display of his musical skill, which added to his popularity.

Becky thought it great fun to visit Dan's school, having some difficulty in suppressing giggles when she witnessed his dignity, which she considered the best of jokes, or heard the pupils address him as "Mr. Strong," and saw them show him the deference due the master.

Dan, in spite of his youth, carried his school through to a successful termination, winning on the closing day high words of commendation from Dr. Robbins, one of the school committee, to which words Mr. Strong, sitting in state on the platform as another of the committee, listened with but poorly concealed gratification.
The next autumn, he being now sixteen, his father thought it best for him to try to enter Harvard. His father was to drive him down himself. This was by far the most important of Dan's goings away from home. Tears glistened in Grandma Strong's eyes as she stood at the side door, and watched Dan and his father drive out of the yard, Dan looking brightly back, smiling and waving his hand, delighted that he was at last really going to college.

"So the young folks leave us, one after the other," said Grandma, wiping her glasses; "it has to be, but it's hard on the old folks."

"I don't see anything to feel badly about," said Becky, now a tall, slender girl of thirteen. "Dan will come home in vacation, and that will not be so very long."

"He will never live at home again," said Grandma; and she was right. Daniel never came home again, save on an occasional vacation. Negro-minstrel tunes were then just coming into vogue, and it used to be considered entertainment of a high order, on these vacation visits, to hear Dan rattle off, for the admiration of the Hackmatack girls,—

"Oh, Susannah, don't you cry for me,"

"Stop dat knocking at my door,"

"Oh, Miss Lucy Neale
How happy I do feel,"

his father looking on and laughing harder than he was ever known to laugh before.

Daniel, meantime, jogging along Cambridge-ward behind old John, was dreaming delightful dreams of college life, only darkened now and then by a passing
cloud of doubt as to the possibility of his not passing the dreaded examination. They reached Lancaster that night, stopping with Parson Burt. They found that Mr. Burt was going to Cambridge the following morning, to escort several students who had been "suspended" the previous term, and rusticated with Parson Burt. These young gentlemen, but little solemnized by their recent painful experiences, gave Dan much valuable information about college life and customs, and added to any nervous dread he might have of the examination by vivid pictures of its terrors, enlarging on President Quincy's sternness.

The next morning Mr. Strong awoke with what bade fair to be one of his worst sick-headaches. He decided therefore to accept Mr. Burt's offer to take Dan to Cambridge on the stage with his boarders, and turned his own face homewards, after many last words of caution and good advice. So now Dan was launched in life on his own responsibility.

The stage did not reach Cambridge until nearly one o'clock. Dan went directly to his Uncle Jedediah, who took him in charge with alacrity, and went with him at once to President Quincy's office.

"The examinations began at six o'clock this morning," said Uncle Jedediah, as they walked briskly along. "I fear you are very late, but I will do the best I can for you."

Arrived in President Quincy's awful presence, Mr. Bullard said,—

"Here is a young gentleman, sir, who desires to be examined to enter college."

President Quincy glared at poor Dan, and said sternly,—
"You're late. Why did not you come before?"

Dan made the best explanation he could, inwardly quaking lest he should be turned back from the very threshold of his college career. But President Quincy, somewhat mollified by Dan's explanations, said in a milder tone,—

"I'll see what can be done for you. The examination in Greek prose is over, but the mathematical examination is now going on under Professor Pierce. You may go into that."

When the examinations were finished and Dan had been admitted to the awe-inspiring presence of the faculty, seated in state, to learn his doom, as he came out, his recent fellow-travellers, the suspended students, gathered about him with the liveliest interest, crying,—

"Are you in? Are you in?"

Yes, Dan was "in." His training had been thorough, especially in Greek and Latin, and he was admitted with only one condition,—Greek prose.

The Harvard College of Dan's day differed in many respects from the Harvard of to-day. Great frugality and simplicity characterized the habits of most of the students. Dan and his room-mate had a ground-floor room in old Hollis. Its furniture consisted of a bed, two wooden chairs, and a table. As few of the students had carpets, Dan felt it no hardship to go without one until his junior year, when having taught school (as was usual for college students then) during the winter on Cape Cod, and so being in funds, an opportunity offering to buy a second-hand carpet at a low price from a departing senior, he indulged in
one, and also in a second-hand bureau, and then felt that his appointments were indeed luxurious.

There were two commons for the students, known as "cheap commons" and "dear commons." Board at the cheap commons was a dollar and seventy-five cents a week, meat being served only three times a week,—Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. Board at the dear commons was two dollars and a half, and here meat was served once every day. The country minister's boy of course boarded at the cheap commons until his junior year, when his means, increased by teaching, enabled him to luxuriate in the dear commons. Perhaps it was appropriate that the first sermon Dan heard in the college chapel was the fine one by Dr. James Walker, on "Difficulty, Struggle, Progress." The closing passages, especially, made a never-to-be-forgotten impression on Dan:

"Difficulty, struggle, progress,—this is the law. By this we conquer; by this it is that the spirit gradually obtains ascendency over the flesh," etc.

Dan was by no means an object of compassion because obliged to practise a strict economy and self denial. For one thing, personal luxury and costly surroundings were not considered necessary to make one a leader among the students, and a great degree of independence characterized the young men. One day Dan was struck by seeing a young man, apparently a student, crossing the campus, barefoot, his sole array a shirt and a pair of trousers. Asking his name, he was told,—

"That? Oh, that's Tom Hill, the first scholar in his class."
Another day his attention was attracted by the peculiar dress of a student, who wore a linen blouse and a broad Panama hat with the sides turned in underneath. Inquiring his name, he learned that his initials were "T. W. H.," and furthermore was told,—

"He is a genius."

The classes were so small—Dan's numbered only sixty, of whom about forty graduated—that the students recited directly to the professors, who were such men as Felton in Greek, Beck in Latin, Pierce in mathematics, and Longfellow, Edward Channing, and Dr. Walker. So Dan enjoyed no mean advantages. Perhaps, after all, the best part of his education was derived from the college library, upon whose vast treasures he fell like a starving man upon food. At first, he hardly knew where to begin, and took out Marshall's voluminous "Life of Washington" as a correct thing to do. But ere long he noticed that a certain shelf under the curtain by the librarian's table was much visited by students, and thought he would see what was there. He found a fine and full edition of Sir Walter Scott's works, only one of which he had ever seen before, and fell at once under the spell of the "Wizard of the North." One "Boz" was bringing out his books at that time, too, creating a furore of admiration among the students. Here too he became acquainted with Macaulay's "Miscellany," and other good books. Many were the happy hours Dan spent in the "arched alcoves in the old college library in Harvard Hall." Like Lowell, he could have said, "There, with my book, lying at ease and in the expansion of intimacy on the broad win-
dow-shelf, shifting my cell from north to south with the season, I made friendships that have lasted me for life. . . . It was the merest browsing, no doubt, but how delightful it was!"

No attention was paid to athletics when Dan first entered the college, but a gymnasium was started before he left. One of the pleasures of the student of that day was to contemplate the "Panorama of Athens," which a gentleman had presented many years previous to the college. It had been packed away until recently the college had erected a suitable building for its exhibition. Entering by a dark, narrow passage, you came out on an elevation that seemed to be a hill just out of Athens. Before you gleamed the Parthenon, and all the wonderful ruins that crown the Acropolis, and over all was the sunny, clear sky and atmosphere of Greece. The illusion was remarkable; it was like looking at the city itself. By a disastrous fire this painting was destroyed a few years later.

When through college Dan chose the law as his profession. Erasmus had left Lowell and gone "out West" some time before, and now Dan followed him, to try his fortune also in these newer fields. Priscilla had married, not John Drake, after all, but a rising young merchant, of fine character and prospects, and they also settled in the West. Lyddy Ann set up in a house of her own as Mrs. Sam Hawks, and was an energetic, high-spirited matron, a power in Church and State.

In course of time Parson Strong married again, the daughter of a neighboring minister whom he had long known and esteemed; and by and by there was a
sturdy boy baby creeping around the parsonage, the only child there, for all the older children had gone out into the world to fight its battles on their own account.

Erasmus realized his boyish dreams, and became a millionaire manufacturer, using his wealth to aid schools, churches, and colleges, to build a library, and in promoting many benevolent undertakings.

Priscilla and her husband were recognized as leading people in the western village where they settled, active in church work, in the temperance cause, and in whatever was for the highest good of the community. They so beautified their own place, and adorned the public highway by setting out fine trees, that the contagion spread all over town, and now the tree-shaded streets and lawns of their pleasant village make it a bit of New England transplanted to Ohio.

Becky, after finishing her education at Keene, went to far away Washington as a teacher. Later she married a minister. A full account of all the people and all the good causes she and her husband helped, all the kind deeds they did, and the balls they set rolling, that are still rolling on for good, would certainly fill a much larger volume than this.

In due course of time even the baby grew up, in a fashion babies have, and he too went West, and became a wealthy manufacturer, and a man of character and prominence.

As for Dan, he did not become a second Daniel Webster — Daniel Websters are so scarce! — nor even a Congressman, nor a millionaire. But one summer, at the seashore, where the people from the north
and the south, the east and the west meet together, one of his old Hackmatack friends met a prominent gentleman from Dan's city.

"You have one of our Hackmatack boys in your city, Daniel Strong," said the Hackmatackian. "What sort of a man is he?"

"Mr. Strong's word is as good as another man's bond," replied the Westerner, emphatically. So, as things go in the world, perhaps we may fairly count Dan's life as one of the successes.

In short, wherever in after life the minister's children were found, they were an influence for good. They stood on the right side for religion and intelligence and refinement, and the world was the better and not the worse because they had come into it. The influence of the simple, frugal parsonage up among the Hackmatack hills shone far out into the world, a blessing and a help.

In his old age, when, retired from active service, Parson Strong enjoyed much ease and dignity, retaining his mental powers in full activity until his death at the ripe age of ninety-two, a great reader of the best books, full of interest in all phases of modern thought, and, mellowed by years and experience, the most delightful and interesting of companions, he was wont to say, not without an amusing touch of worldly pride and complacency,—

"I feel that I am greatly blessed in my children."

THE END.
"There," said Miss Patty, "that's a surtout as is a surtout."

PAGE 259.

By MARY P. W. SMITH,

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