Allen Grant

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. RURAL AMERICA

Whar's Hiram, Het?' Deacon Zephaniah Winthrop asked of his wife, tartly. 'Pears to me that boy's allus off somewhar, whenever he's wanted to do anything. Can't git along without him, any way, when we've got to weed the spring peppermint. Whar's he off, I say, Mehitabel?'

Mrs. Winthrop drew herself together from the peas she was languidly shelling, and answered in the dry withered tone of a middle-aged northern New Yorker, 'Wal, I s'pose, Zeph, he's gone down to the blackberry lot, most likely.'

'Blackberry lot,' Mr. Winthrop replied with a fine air of irony. 'Blackberry lot, indeed. What does he want blackberryin', I should like to know? I'll blackberry him, I kin tell you, whenever I ketch him. Jest you go an' holler for him, Het, an' ef he don't come ruther sooner'n lightnin', he'll ketch it, an' no mistake, sure as preachin'. I've got an orful itchin', Mis' Winthrop, to give that thar boy a durned good cow-hidin' this very minnit.'

Mrs. Winthrop rose from the basket of peas and proceeded across the front yard with as much alacrity as she could summon up, to call for Hiram. She was a tall, weazened, sallow woman,

prematurely aged, with a pair of high cheekbones, and a hard, hungry-looking, unlovable mouth; but she was averse to the extreme and unnecessary measure of cowhiding her firstborn. 'Hiram,' she called out, in her loudest and shrillest voice: 'Hiram!

Drat the boy, whar is he? Hiram! Hi-ram!' It was a dreary and a monotonous outlook altogether, that view from the gate of Zephaniah Winthrop's freehold farm in Geauga County. The homestead itself, an unpainted frame house, consisted of planed planks set carelessly one above the other on upright beams, stood in a weedy yard, surrounded by a raw-looking paling, and unbeautified by a single tree, creeper, shrub, bush, or scented flower. A square house, planted naked in the exact centre of a square yard, desolate and lonely, as though such an idea as that of beauty had never entered into the human heart. In front the long straight township road ran indefinitely as far as the eye could reach in either direction, beginning at the horizon on the north, and ending at the horizon on the south, but leading nowhere in particular, that anyone ever heard of, meanwhile, unless it were to Muddy Creek Dépôt (pronounced *deepo*) on the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdens-burg Railroad. At considerable intervals along its course, a new but congenitally shabby gate opened here and there into another bare square yard, and gave access to another bare square frame house of unpainted pine planks. In the blanks between these oases of unvarnished ugliness the road, instead of being bordered by green trees and smiling hedgerows, pursued its gaunt way, unrejoicing, between open fields or long

and hideous snake fences. If you have ever seen a snake fence, you know what that means; if you haven't seen one, sit down in your own easy chair gratefully and comfortably, and thank an indulgent heaven with all your heart for your happy ignorance.

Beyond and behind the snake fences lay fields of wheat and meadows and pasture land; not, as in England, green and lush with grass or clover, but all alike bare, brown, weedy, and illimitable. There were no trees to be seen anywhere (though there were plenty of stumps), for this was 'a very fully settled section,' as Mr. Winthrop used to murmur to himself complacently: 'the country thar real beautiful: you might look about you, some parts, for a mile or two right away togither and never see a single tree a-standin' anywhar.' Indeed, it was difficult to imagine where on earth a boy could manage to hide himself in all that long, level, leafless district. But Mrs. Winthrop knew better: she knew Hiram was loafing away somewhere down in the blackberry lot beside the river.

'Lot' is a cheap and nasty equivalent in the great American language for field, meadow, croft, copse, paddock, and all the other beautiful and expressive old-world names which denote in the tongue of the old country our own time-honoured English inclosures. And the blackberry lot, at the bottom of the farm, was the one joy and delight of young Hiram Winthrop's boyish existence. Though you could hardly guess it, as seen from the farm, there was a river running in the hollow down yonder-Muddy Creek, in fact, which gave its own euphonious name to

the naked little Dépôt; not here muddy, indeed, as in its lower reaches, but clear and limpid from the virgin springs of the Gilboa hillsides. Beside the creek, there stretched a waste lot, too rough and stony to be worth the curse of cultivation; and on that lot the blackberry bushes grew in wild profusion, and the morning-glories opened their great pink bells blushingly to the early sun, and the bobolinks chattered in the garish noontide, and the grey squirrels hid by day among the stunted trees, and the chipmunks showed their painted sides for a moment as they darted swiftly in and out from hole to hole amid the tangled brushwood. What a charmed spot it seemed to the boy's mind, that one solitary patch of undesecrated nature, in the midst of so many blackened stumps, and so much first-rate fall wheat, and such endless, hopeless, dreary hillocks of straight rowed, dry leaved, tillering Indian corn!

'Hiram! Hiram! Hi-ram!' cried Mrs. Winthrop, growing every moment shriller and shriller.

Hiram heard, and leaped from the brink at once, though a kingfisher was at that very moment eyeing him with head on one side from the half-concealing foliage of the basswood tree opposite. 'Yes, marm,' he answered submissively, showing himself as fast as he was able in the pasture above the blackberry lot. 'Wal! What is it?'

'Hiram,' his mother said, as soon as he was within convenient speaking distance, 'you come right along in here, sonny. Where was you, say? Here's father swearin he'll thrash you for goin'

loafin'. He wants you jest to come in at once and help weed the peppermint. I guess you've bin down in the blackberry lot, fishin', or suthin'.'

'I ain't bin fishin',' Hiram answered, with a certain dogged, placid resignation. 'I've bin lookin' around, and that's so, mother. On'y lookin' around at the chipmunks an' bobolinks, 'cause I was dreadful tired.'

'Tired of what?' asked his mother, not uncompassionately.

'Planin',' Hiram answered, with a nod. 'Planks. Father give me forty planks to plane, an' I've done'em.'

'Wal, mind he don't thrash you, Hiram,' the sallow-faced woman said, warningly, with as much tenderness in her voice as lay within the compass of her nature. 'He's orful mad with you now, 'cause you didn't answer immejately when he hollered.'

'Then why don't he holler loud enough?' asked Hiram, in an injured tone – he was an ill-clad boy of about twelve – 'I can't never hear him down lot yonder.'

'What's that you got in your pocket, sir?' Mr. Winthrop puts in, coming up unexpectedly to the pair on the long, straight, blinking high-road. 'What's that, naow, eh, sonny?'

Hiram pulls the evidence of guilt slowly out of his rough tunic. 'Injuns,' he answers, shortly, in the true western laconic fashion.

Mr. Winthrop examines the object carelessly. It is a bit of blackish stone, rudely chipped into shape, and ground at one end to an artificial edge with some nicety of execution.

'Injuns!' he echoes contemptuously, dashing it on the path:

'Injuns! Oh yes, this is Injuns! An' what's Injuns? Heathens, outlandish heathens; and a drunken, p'isonous crowd at that, too. The noble red man is a fraud; Injuns must go. It allus licks my poor finite understandin' altogether why the Lord should ever have run this great continent so long with nothin' better'n Injuns. It's one o' them mysteries o' Providence that 'taint given us poor wums to comprehend daown here, noways. Wal, they're all cleared out of this section naow, anyway, and why a lad that's brought up a Chrischun and Hopkinsite should want to go grubbin' up their knives and things in this cent'ry is a caution to me, that's what it is, a reg'lar caution.'

'This ain't a knife,' Hiram answered, still doggedly. 'This is a tommyhawk. Injun knives ain't made like this 'ere. I've had knives, and they're quite a different kinder pattern.'

Mr. Winthrop shook his head solemnly.

'Seems to me,' he said with a loud snort, "taint right of any believin' boy goin' lookin' up these heathenish things, mother. He's allus bringin' 'em home – arrowheads, he calls 'em, and tommyhawks, and Lord knows what rubbish – when he ought to be weedin' in the peppermint lot, an' earnin' his livin'. Why wasn't you here, eh, sonny? Why wasn't you? Why wasn't you? Why wasn't you?'

As Mr. Winthrop accompanied each of these questions by a cuff, crescendo, on either ear alternately, it is not probable that he himself intended Hiram to reply to them with any particular definiteness. But Hiram, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, and

wiping away the tears hastily, proceeded to answer with due deliberation: "'Cause I was tired planin' planks. So I went down to the blackberry lot, to rest a bit. But you won't let a feller rest. You want him to be workin' like a nigger all day.'Taint reasonable.'

'Mother,' Mr. Winthrop said again, more solemnly than before, 'it's my opinion that the old Adam is on-common powerful in this here lad, on-common powerful! Ef he had lived in Bible times, I should hev been afeard of a visible judgment on his head, like the babes that mocked at Elijah. (Or was it Elisha?' asked Mr. Winthrop to himself, dubitatively. 'I don't'zackly recollect the pertickler prophet.) The eye that mocketh at its father, you know, sonny; it's a dangerous thing, I kin tell you, to mock at your father. Go an' weed that thar peppermint, sir; go an' weed that thar peppermint.' And as he spoke the deacon gave Hiram a parting dig in the side with the handle of the Dutch hoe he was lightly carrying.

Hiram dodged the hoe quickly, and set off at a run to the peppermint lot. When he got there he waited a moment, and then felt in his pocket cautiously for some other unseen object. Oh joy, it wasn't broken! He took it out and looked at it tenderly. It was a bobolink's egg. He held it up to the light, and saw the sunshine gleaming through it.

'Aint it cunning?' he said to himself, with a little hug and chuckle of triumph. 'Ain't it a cunning little egg, either? I thought he'd most broke it, I did, but he hadn't, seems. It's the first I ever found, that sort. Oh my, ain't it cunning?' And he put the egg

back lovingly in his pocket, with great cautiousness.

For a while the boy went on pulling up the weeds that grew between the wide rows of peppermint, and then at last he came to a big milk-weed in full flower. The flowers were very pretty, and so curious, too. He looked at them and admired them. But he must pull it up: no room in the field for milk-weed (it isn't a marketable crop, alas!), so he caught the pretty thing in his hands, and uprooted it without a murmur. Thus he went on, row after row, in the hot July sun, till nearly half the peppermint was well weeded.

Then he sat down to rest a little on the pile of boulders in the far corner. There was no tree to sit under, and no shade; but the boy could at least sit in the eye of the sun on the pile of ice-worn boulders. As he sat, he saw a wonderful and beautiful sight. In the sky above, a great bald-headed eagle came wheeling slowly toward the corner of the fall wheat lot. From the opposite quarter of the sky his partner circled on buoyant wings to meet him; and with wide curves to right and left, crossing and recrossing each other at the central point like well-bred setters, those two magnificent birds swiftly beat the sunlit fields for miles around them. At last, one of the pair detected game; for an instant he checked his flight, to steady his swoop, and then, with wings halffolded, and a rushing noise through the air, he fell plump on the ground at a vague spot in the midst of the meadow. One moment more, and he rose again, with a quivering rabbit suspended from his yellow claws. Presently he made towards the

corn lot. It was fenced round, like all the others, with a snake fence, and, to Hiram's intense joy, the eagle finally settled, just opposite him, on one of the two upright rails that stand as a crook or stake for the top rail, called the rider. Its big white head shone in the sunlight, its throat rang out a sharp, short bark, and it craned its neck this way and that, looking defiantly across the field to Hiram.

'I reckon,' the boy said to himself quietly, 'I could draw that thar eagle.'

He put his hand into his trousers pocket, and pulled out from it a well-worn stump of blacklead pencil. Then from another pocket he took a small blank book, an old account book, in fact, with one side of the pages all unwritten, though the other was closely covered with rows of figures. It was a very precious possession to Hiram Winthrop, that dog-eared little volume, for it was nearly-filled with his own tentative pencil sketches of beast and birds, and all the other beautiful things that lived together in the blackberry bottom. He had never seen anything beautiful anywhere else, and that one spot and that one book were all the world to him that he loved or cared for.

He laid the book upon his knee, and proceeded carefully to sketch the grand whiteheaded eagle in his boyish fashion. 'He's the American eagle, I guess,' the lad said to himself, as he looked from bird to paper with rapid glances; 'on'y he ain't so stiff-built as the one upon the dollars, neither. His head goes so. Aint it elegant? Oh my, not a bit, ruther. And his tail! That's how.

The feathers runs the same as if it was shingles on the roof of a residence. I've got his tail just as true as Genesis, you bet. I can go the head and the tail, straight an' square, but what licks me is the wings. Seems as if you couldn't get his wing to show right, nohow, agin the body. Think it must be that way, pretty near; but I don't know. I wish thar was some feller here in Geauga could show me how the folks that draw the illustriations in the books ud draw that thar wing. It goes one too high for me, altogether.'

Even as Hiram thought that last thought he was dimly aware in a moment of an ominous shadow supervening behind him, and of a heavy hand lifted angrily to cuff him about the head for his pesky idleness. He knew it was his father, and with rapid instinct he managed to avoid the unseen blow. But, alas, alas, as he did so, he dropped the precious account book from his lap and let it fall upon the heap of boulders. Deacon Winthrop took the mysterious volume up, and peered at it long and cautiously. 'Wal,' he said slowly, turning over the pages one by one, as if they were clear evidence of original sin unregenerated – 'wal, this do beat all, really. I've allus wondered what on airth you could be up to, sonny, when you was sent to weed, and didn't get a furrer or two done, mornings, while I was hoein' a dozen rows of corn or tomaters. Wal, this do beat all. Makin' figgers of chipmunks, and woodchucks, and musk-rats, and – my goodness, ef that thar aint a rattlesnake! Hiram Winthrop, it's my opinion that you was born to reprobation – that's jest about the size of it!'

If this opinion had not been vigorously backed by a box on the

ears and a violent shaking, it isn't likely that Hiram in his own mind would have felt deeply concerned at it. Reprobation is such a very long way off (especially when you're twelve years old), whereas a box on the ears is usually experienced in the present tense with remarkable rapidity. But Hiram was so well used to cuffing (for the deacon was a God-fearing man, who held it prime part of his parental duty to correct his child with due severity) that he didn't cry much or make a fuss about it. To say the truth, too, he was watching so eagerly to see what his father would do with the beloved sketch-book that he had no time to indulge in unnecessary sentiment. For if only that sketch-book were taken from him – that poor, soiled, second-hand, half-covered sketch-book – Hiram felt in his dim inarticulate fashion that he would have solved the pessimistic problem forthwith in the negative, and that life for him would no longer be worth living.

The deacon turned the leaves over slowly for some minutes more, with many angry ejaculations, and then deliberately took them between his finger and thumb, and tore the book in two across the middle. Next, he doubled the pages over again, and tore them a second time across, and so on until the whole lot was reduced to a mass of little fluttering crumpled fragments. These he tossed contemptuously among the boulders, and with a parting cuff to Hiram proceeded on his way, to ruminate over the singular mystery of reprobation, even in the children of regenerate parents. 'You jest mind you go in right thar an' weed the rest of that peppermint, sonny,' he said as he strode away.

'An' be pretty quick about it, too, or else you'll be more scar't when you come home to-night than ever you was scar't in all your life afore, you take my word for it.'

As soon as the deacon was gone, poor Hiram sat down again on the heap of boulders and cried as though his little heart would fairly break. In spite of his father's vigorous admonition, he *couldn't* turn to at once and weed the peppermint. "Taint the lickin' I mind,' he said to himself ruefully, as he gathered up the scattered fragments in his hand, "tain't the lickin', it's the picturs. Them thar picturs was pretty near the on'y thing I liked best of anything livin'. Wal, it wouldn't hev mattered much ef he'd on'y tore up the ones I'd drawed: but when he tore up all my paper, so as I can't draw any more, that does make a feller feel reel bad. I never was so mad with him in my life afore. I reckon fathers is the onaccountablest and most mirac'lous creeturs in all creation. He might hev tore the picturs ef he liked, but what for. did he want to go tearin' up all my paper?'

As he sat there on the boulders, still, with that gross injustice rankling impotently in his boyish soul, he felt another shadow approaching once more, and looked up expecting to see his father returning. But it wasn't the gaunt long shadow of the deacon that came across the pile: it was a plump, round, thickset English shadow, and it was closely followed by the body of its owner, his father's hired help, late come from Dorsetshire. Sam Churchill leant down in his bluff, kindly way, when he saw the little chap crying, and asked him quickly if he was ill.

'Sick?' Hiram answered, through his sobs, unconsciously translating the word into his own dialect. 'Sick? No, I aint sick, Mr. Sam; but I'm orful mad with father. He kem right here just now and tore up my drawin' book – an' that drawin' book was most everything to me, it was – and he's tore it up, a ravin' an' tearin' like all possest, this very minnit.'

Sam looked at the fragments sympathetically. 'I tell'ee, Hiram,' he said gently, 'I've got a brother o' my own awver yonder in Darsetshire – about your age, too – as is turble vond of drawin'. I was turble vond of it myself when I was a little chap at 'Ootton. Thik ther eagle is drawed first-rate, 'e be, an' so's the squir'l. I've drawed squir'ls myself, many's the time, in the copse at 'Ootton, I mind: an' I've gone mitching, too, in summer, birds'-nestin' and that, all over the vields for miles around us. Your faather's a main good man, Hiram;'e 's a religious man, an' a 'onest man, and I do love to 'ear 'un argify most turble vine about religion, an' 'ell, an' reprobation, an' 'Enery Clay, and such like: but'e's a'ard man, tiler's no denyin' of it.'E's took'is religion 'ot an' 'ot, 'e 'as; an' I do think'e do use 'ee bad sometimes, vor a little chap, an' no mistake. Now, don't 'ee go an' cry no longer, ther's a good little vulla; don't 'ee cry, Hiram, vor I never could abare to zee a little chap or a woman a-cryin'. Zee 'ere, Hiram,' and the big hand dived deep into the recesses of a pair of very muddy corduroy trousers, "ere's a sixpence for'ee – what do 'ee call it awver 'ere, ten cents, bain't it? 'Ere, take it, take it young un; don't 'ee be aveard. Now, what'll 'ee buy wi' it, eh? Lollipops, most like, I

sim.'

'Lollipops!' the boy answered quickly, taking the dime with a grateful gesture. 'No, Mr. Sam, not them: nor toffy, nor peanuts neither. I shall go right away to Wes' Johnson's store, next time father's in the city, an' buy a new book, so as I can make a crowd more drawin's. That's what I like better'n anything. It's jest splendid.'

Sam looked at the little Yankee boy again with a certain faint moisture in his eyes; but he didn't reflect to himself that human nature is much the same all the world over, in Dorsetshire or in Geauga County. In fact, it would never have occurred to Sam's simple heart to doubt the truth of that fairly obvious principle. He only put his hand on Hiram's ragged head, and said softly: 'Well, Hiram, turn to now, an' I'll help 'ee weed the peppermint.'

They weeded a row or two in silence, and then Sam asked suddenly: 'What vor do un grow thik peppermint, Hiram?'

'To make candy, Mr. Sam,' Hiram answered.

'Good job too,' Sam went on musingly. 'Seems to me they do want it turble bad in these 'ere parts. Sight too much corn, an' not near enough candy down to 'Murrica; why can't deacon let the little vulla draw a squir'l if 'e's got a mind to? That's what I wants to know. What do those varmers all around 'ere do? (Varmers they do call 'em; no better nor labourers, I take it.) Why, they buy a bit 'o land, an' work, an' slave thesselves an' their missuses, all their lives long, what vor? To raise pork and corn on. What vor, again? To buy more land; to raise more corn an' bacon; to buy

more land again; to raise more corn an' bacon; and so on, world without end, amen, for ever an' ever. An' in the tottal, what do ur all come to? Pork and flour, for ever an' ever. Why, even awver yonder in old England, we'd got something better nor that, and better worth livin' vor.' And Sam's mind wandered back gently to Wootton Mandeville, and the old tower which he didn't know to be of Norman architecture, but which he loved just as well as if he did for all that: and then he borrowed Hiram's pencil, and pulled a piece of folded paper from his pocket (it had inclosed an ounce of best Virginia), and drew upon it for Hiram's wondering eyes a rough sketch of an English village church, with big round arches and dog-tooth ornament, embowered in shady elm-trees, and backed up by a rolling chalk down in the further distance. Hiram looked at the sketch admiringly and eagerly.

'I wish I could draw such a thing as that, he said with delight. 'But I can't, Mr. Sam; I can only draw birds and musk-rats and things – not churches. That's a reel pretty church, too: reckon I never see such a one as that thar anywhere. Might that be whar you was raised, now?'

Sam nodded assent.

'Wal, that does beat everything. I should like to go an' see something like that, sometime. Ef I git a book, will you learn me to draw a church same as you do, Mr. Sam?'

'Bless yer 'eart, yes,' Sam answered quickly, and turned with swimming eyes to weed the rest of the peppermint. From that day forth, Sam Churchill and Hiram Winthrop were sworn friends

through all their troubles.

CHAPTER II. RURAL ENGLAND

It was a beautiful July morning, and Colin Churchill and Minna Wroe were playing together in the fritillary fields at Wootton Mandeville. At twelve years old, the intercourse of lad and maiden is still ingenuous; and Colin was just twelve, though little Minna might still have been some two years his junior. A tall, slim, fair-haired boy was Colin Churchill, with deep-blue eyes more poetical in their depth and intensity than one might have expected from a little Dorsetshire peasant child. Minna, on the other hand, was shorter and darker; a gipsy-looking girl, black-haired and tawny-skinned; and with two little beady-black eyes that glistened and ran over every moment with contagious merriment. Two prettier children you wouldn't have found anywhere that day in the whole county of Dorset than Minna Wroe and Colin Churchill.

They had gathered flowers till they were tired of them in the broad spongy meadow; they had played hide-and-seek among the eighteenth-century tombstones in the big old churchyard; they had quarrelled and made it up again half a dozen times over in pure pettishness: and now, by way of a distraction, Minna said at last coaxingly: 'Do 'ee, Colin, do 'ee come down to the lake yonder and make I a bit of a vigger-'ead.'

'Don't 'ee worrit me, Minna,' Colin answered, like a young lady who refuses to sing, half-heartedly (meaning all the time

that one should ask her again): 'Don't 'ee see I be tired? I don't want vor to go makin' no vigger-'eads vor 'ee, I tell 'ee.'

But Minna would have one: on that she insisted: 'What a vinnid lad 'ee be,' she cried petulantly, 'not to want to make I a vigger-'ead. Now do 'ee, Cohn, ther's a a good boy; do 'ee, an' I'll gee 'ee 'arf my peppermint cushions, come Saturday.'

'I don't want none o' your cushions, Minna,' Colin answered, with a boy's gallantry; 'but come along down to the lake if 'ee will: I'll make 'ee dree or vower vigger-'eads, never vear, an' them vine uns too, if so be as you want 'em.'

They went together down to the brook at the corner of the meadow (called a lake in the Dorsetshire dialect); and there, at a spot where the plastic clay came to the surface in a little cliff at a bend of the stream, Colin carved out a fine large lump of shapeless raw material from the bank, which he forthwith proceeded to knead up with his hands and a sprinkling of water from the rill into a beautiful sticky consistency. Minna watched the familiar operation with deepest interest, and added from time to time a word or two of connoisseur criticism: 'Now thee'st got it too wet, Colin;' or, 'Take care thee don't putt in too much of thik there blue earth yonder; or, 'That's about right vor the viggeread now, I'm thinkin'; thee'd better begin makin' it now avore the clay gets too dried up.'

As soon as Colin had worked the clay up to what he regarded as the proper requirements of his art, he began modelling it dexterously with his fingers into the outer form and fashion of a

ship's figure-head: 'What'll 'ee 'ave virst, Minna?' he asked as he roughly moulded the mass into a bold outward curve, that would have answered equally well for any figure-head in the whole British merchant navy.

'I'll 'ave the Mariar-Ann,' Minna answered with a nod of her small black head in the direction of the mouth in the valley, where the six petty fishing vessels of Wootton Mandeville stood drawn up together in a long straight row on the ridge of shingle. The Mariar-Ann was the collier that came monthly from Cardiff, and its figure-head represented a gilded lady, gazing over the waves with a vacant smile, and draped in a flowing crimson costume of no very particular historical period.

Cohn worked away at the clay vigorously for a few minutes with fingers and knife by turns, and at the end of that time he had produced a very creditable figure-head indeed, accurately representing in its main features the gilded lady of the Mariar-Ann.

'Oh, how lovely!' Minna cried, delighted. 'Thik's the best thee'st made, Colin. Let's bake un and keep un always.'

'Take un 'ome an' bake un yourself, Minna,' the boy answered. 'We ain't got no vire 'ere. What'll I make 'ee now? 'Nother vigger-'ead?'

'No!' Minna cried, with a happy inspiration.

'Make myself, Colin.'

The boy eyed her carefully from head to foot. 'I don't s'pose I can do 'ee, Minna,' he answered after a pause. 'Howsonedever,

I'll try;' and he took a fresh lump of the kneaded clay, and began working it up loosely into a rough outline of the girl's figure. It was his first attempt at modelling from life, and he went at it with careful deliberation. Minna posed before him in her natural attitude, and Colin called her back every minute or two when she got impatient, and kept his little sitter steadily posed till the portrait statuette was fairly finished. Critical justice compels the admission that Colin Churchill's first figure from life was not an entirely successful work of sculpture. Its expression was distinctly feeble; its pose was weak and uncertain; its drapery was marked by a frank disregard of folds and a bold conventionalism; and, last of all, it ended abruptly at the short dress, owing to certain mechanical difficulties in the way of supporting the heavy body on a pair of slender moist clay legs. Still, it distinctly suggested the notion of a human being; it remotely resembled a little girl; and it even faintly adumbrated, in figure at least, if not in feature, Minna Wroe herself.

But if the work of art failed a little when judged by the stern tribunal of adult criticism, it certainly more than satisfied both the young artist and the subject of his plastic skill. They gazed at the completed figure with the deepest admiration, and Minna even ventured to express a decided opinion that anybody in the world would know it was meant for her. Which high standard of artistic portraiture has been known to satisfy much older and more exalted critics, including many ladies and gentlemen of distinction who have wasted the time of good sculptors by 'having

their busts taken.'

Meanwhile, down in the village by the shore, Geargey Wroe, Minna's father, was standing by a little garden gate, where Sam Churchill the elder was carefully tending his cabbages and melons. 'Zeen our Minna, Sam!' he asked over the paling. 'Wher's 'er to, dost know? Off zumwhere with yer Colin, I'll be bound, Sammy. They're always off zumwhere together, them two is, I vancy. 'E's up to 'is drawin' or zummat down to lake there. Such a lad vor drawin' an' that I never did zee. 'Ow's bisness, Sammy?'

'Purty good, Geargey, purty good. Volks be a-comin' in now an' takin' lodgin's, wantin' garden stuff and such like. First-rate family from London come yesterday down to Walker's. Turble rich volk I should say by the look o' un. Ordered a power o' fruit and zum vegetables.'Ow's vishin', Geargey?' 'Bad,' Geargey answered, shaking his head ominously: 'as bad as ur could be. Town's turble empty still: nobody come 'ceptin' a lot o' good-vor-nothin' meetingers. 'Ootton ain't wot it 'ad used to be, Sammy, zince these 'ere rail-rawds. Wot we wants is the rail-rawd to come 'ere to town, so volks can get 'ere aisy, like they can to Sayton. Then we'd get zum real gintlevolk who got money in their pockets to spend, an'll spend it vree and aisy to the tradesmen, and the boatmen, and the vishermen; that's wot we wants, don't us, Sammy?'

'Us do, us do,' Sam Churchill assented, nodding.

'Ah, I do mind the time, Sammy,' Geargey said regretfully,

wiping his eyes with the corner of his jersey, 'w'en every wipswile I'd used to get a gintleman to go out way, who'd gi' us share an' share alike o' his grub, and a drap out o' his whisky bottle: and w'en we pulls ashore, he sez, sez'e: "I don't want the vish, my man," sez'e; "I only wants the sport, raly." But nowadays, Lard bless 'ee, Sam, we gets a pack o' meetingers down from London, and they brings along a hunk o' bread and some fat pork, or a piece o' blue vinny cheese, as 'ard as Portland stone. Now I can't abare fat pork without a streak o' lean in it, 'specially when I smells the bait; and I can't tackle the blue vinny, 'cos I never 'as my teeth with me: thof my mate, Bill-o'-my-Soul, 'e can putt 'isself outside most things in the way o' grub at a vurry short notice, as you do well know, Sam, and I never seed as bate made no difference to 'e nohow. But these 'ere meetingers, as I was a sayin' (vor I've got avore my story, Sammy), they goes out an' haves vine sport, we'll say; and then, w'en we comes 'ome they out and lugs out dree or vower shillin's or so, vor me an' my mate, an' walks off with 'arf-a-suvren's worth o' the biggest vish, quite aisy-like, an' layves all the liddle fry an' the blin in the boat; the chattering jackanapes.'

"Ees, 'ees, lad, times is changed,' Sam murmured meditatively, half to himself; 'times is changed turble bad since old Squire's day. Wot a place 'Ootton 'ad used to be then, 'adn't ur, Geargey? Coach from Darchester an' 'bus from Tilbury station, bringin' in gurt folks from London vor the sayson every day; dinner party up to vicarage with green paysen an'

peaches, an' nectarines, – "An' a 'ole turbat,' Geargey put in parenthetically. 'Ay, lad, an' a 'ole turbot every Saturday. Them was times, Geargey; them was times. I don't s'pose they ther times ull never come again. Ther ain't the gentry now as ther'd used to be in old Squire's day. Pack o' trumpery London volk, with one servant, comin' down 'ere vor the sayson – short sayson – six week, or murt be seven – an' then walkin' off agin, without so much as spending ten poun' or so in the'ole parish. I mind the times, Geargey, when volks used to say 'Ootton were the safety valve o' the Bath sayson. Soon as sayson were over up to Bath, gentlevolk and ladies a-comin' down 'ere to enj'y thesselves, an' spendin' their money vree and aisy, same as if it were water. Us don't see un comin' now, Geargey: times is changed turble: us don't see un now.'

'It's the dree terms as 'as ruined 'Ootton,' Geargey said, philosophically – the research of the cause being the true note of philosophy.

'It's they dree terms as 'as done it, vor sartin.'

'Why, 'ow's that, Gearge?'

'Well, don't 'ee see, Sam, it's like o' thik. W'en they used to 'ave 'arf-years at the schools, bless 'ee, volks with families 'ad used to bring down the children vrom school so soon as the 'arf-year were over. Then the gurt people ud take the young gentlemen out vishin', might be in June, or July may-be, and gee a bit o' work to honest visher-people in the off-sayson. Then in August, London people ud come an' take lodgin's and

gee us a bit more work nice and tidy. So the sayson 'ad used to last off an' on vrom June to October. Well, bime-by, they meddlesome school people, they goes an' makes up these 'ere new-vangled things o' dree terms, as they calls 'em, cuttin' up the year unnat'ral-like into dree pieces, as 'adn't used to be w'en we was children. Wot's the consequence? Everybody comes a-rushin' and a-crushin' permixuous, in August, the 'ole boilin' o' 'em together, wantin' rooms an' boats and vishermen, so as the parish baint up to it. Us 'as to work 'ard vor six or seven week, and not give satisfaction nayther; and then rest o' the year us 'as to git along the best us can on the shart sayson. I can't abare they new-vangled ways, upsettin' all the constitooted order of things altogither, an' settin' poor vishermen at sixes and sevens for arf their lifetime.'

'It's the march of intellect, Geargey,' Sam Churchill answered, deprecatingly (Sam understood himself to be a Liberal in politics, and used this convenient phrase as a general solvent for an immense number of social difficulties). 'It's the march of intellect, no doubt, Geargey: there's a sight o' progress about; board-schools an' sich like: an' if it cuts agin us, don't 'ee see, w'y us 'as got to make the best of it, however.'

'It murt be, an' agin it murtn't; and agin it murt,' Geargey murmured dubiously.

'But any way, wher's Minna to, Sammy? – that's wot I comed vor to ax 'ee.'

'Down to vield by lake, yander, most like,' Sam answered with

a nod of his head in the direction indicated.

'I'll go an' vetch her,' said Geargey; 'dinner's most ready.'

'An I'll come an' zee wot Colin's up to,' added Sam, laying down his hoe, and pulling together his unbuttoned waistcoat.

They walked down to the brook in the meadow, and saw the two children sitting in the corner so intent upon their artistic performances that they hardly noticed the approach of their respective fathers. Old Sam Churchill went close up and looked keenly at the clay figure of Minna that Colin was still moulding with the last finishing touches as the two elders approached them. 'Thik ther vigger baint a bad un, Colin,' he said, taking it carefully in his rough hand.

''ee'aven't done it none so ill, lad; but it don't look so livin' like as it 'ad ought to. Wot do 'ee think it is, Geargey, eh? tell us?'

'Why, I'm blowed if that baint our Minna,' Geargey answered, with a little gasp of open-mouthed astonishment. 'It's her vurry pictur, Colin: a blind man could see that, of course, so soon as 'e set eyes on it. 'Ow do 'ee do it, Colin, eh? 'Ow do 'ee do it?' 'Oh, that baint nothin',' Colin said, colouring up. 'Only a little bit o' clay, just made up vor to look like Minna.'

'Look 'ee 'ere,' Colin,' his father went on, glancing quickly from the clay to little Minna, and altering a touch or two with his big clumsy fingers, not undeftly. 'Look 'ee 'ere; 'ee must putt the dress thik way, I should say, with a gurt dale more flusterin' about it; it do zit too stiff and starchy, somehow, same as if it wur made o' new buckram. 'ee must put in a fold or two, 'ere, so as to

make un sit more nat'ral. Don't 'ee see Minna's dress do double itself up, I can't rightly say 'ow, but sununat o' tkik there way?' And he moulded the moist clay a bit with his hands, till the folds of the drapery began to look a little more real and possible.

'I'd ought to 'ave drawed it first, I think,' Colin said, looking at the altered dress with a satisfied glance. ''ave 'ee got such a thing as a pencil about 'ee, father?'

Old Sam took a piece of pencil from his pocket, and handed it to Colin. The boy held it tightly in his fingers, with a true artistic grasp, like one who knows how to wield it, and with a few strokes on a scrap of paper hit off little Minna far better than he had done in the plastic material. Geargey looked over his shoulder with a delighted grin on his weatherbeaten features. 'I tell 'ee, Sam,' he said to the old gardener, confidentially, 'it's my belief that thik ther boy'ull be able one o' these vine days to paint rale picturs.'

CHAPTER III.
PERNICIOUS LITERATURE

When winter came, Hiram Winthrop had less to do and more time to follow the bidding of his own fancy. True, there was cordwood to split in abundance; and splitting cordwood is no child's play along the frozen shores of Lake Ontario. You go out among the snow in the wood-shed, and take the big ice-covered logs down from the huge pile with numbed fingers: then you lay them on a sort of double St. Andrew's cross, its two halves supported by a thwart-piece, and saw them up into fit lengths for the kitchen fireplace: and after that you split them in four with a solid-headed axe, taking care in the process not to let your deadened hands slip, so as to cut off the ends of your own toes with an ill-directed blow glancing off the log sideways. Yes, splitting cordwood is very serious work, with the thermometer at 40° below freezing; and drawing water from the well when the rope is frozen and your skin clings to the chill iron of the thirsty bucket-handle is hardly better: yet in spite of both these small drawbacks, Hiram Winthrop found much more to enjoy in his winters than in his summers. There was no corn to hoe, no peas to pick, no weeding to do, no daily toil on farm and garden. The snow had covered all with its great white sheet; and even the neighbourhood of Muddy Creek Dépôt looked desolately

beautiful in its own dreary, cold, monotonous, Siberian fashion.

The flowers and leaves were gone too, to be sure; but in the low brushwood by the blackberry bottom the hares had turned white to match the snow; and the nut-hatches were answering one another in their varying keys; and the skunks were still busy of nights beneath the spreading walnuts; and the chickadees were tinkling overhead among the snow-laden pine-needles of the far woodland. All the summer visitors had gone south to Georgia and the gulf: but the snow-buntings were ever with Hiram in the wintry fields: and the bald-headed eagles still prowled around at times on the stray chance of catching a frozen-out racoon. Above all there was ease and leisure, respite from the deacon's rasping voice calling perpetually for Hiram here, and Hiram there, and Hiram yonder, to catch the horses, or tend the harrow, or mind the birds, or weed the tomatoes, or set shingles against the sun over the drooping transplanted cabbages. A happy time indeed for Hiram, that long, weary, white-sheeted, unbroken northern New York winter.

Sam Churchill was with the deacon still, but had little enough to do, for there isn't much going on upon an American farm from November to April, and the deacon would gladly have got rid of his hired help in the slack time if he could have shuffled him off; but Sam had been well advised on his first hiring, and had wisely covenanted to be kept on all the year round, with board and lodging and decent wages during the winter season. And Hiram initiated Sam into the mysteries of sliding on a bent piece

of wood (a homemade toboggan) down the great snowdrifts, and skating on the frozen expansion of Muddy Creek, and building round huts, Esquimaux fashion, with big square blocks of solid dry snow, and tracking the white hare over the white fields by means of the marks he left behind him, whose termination, apparently lengthening itself out miraculously before one's very eyes, marked the spot where the hare himself was hopping invisible to human vision. In return, Sam lent him a few dearly-treasured books: books that he had brought from England with him: the books that had first set the Dorsetshire peasant lad upon his scheme of going forth alone upon the wide world beyond the ocean.

Hiram was equally delighted and astonished with these wonderful charmed volumes. He had seen a few books before, but they were all of two types: Cornell's Geography, Quackenboss's Grammar, and the other schoolbooks used at the common school; or else Barnes's Commentary, Elder Coffin's Ezekiel, the Hopkinsite Confession of Faith, and other like works of American exegetical and controversial theology. But Sam's books, oh, gracious, what a difference! There was Peter Simple, a story about a real live boy, who wa'n't good, pertickler, not to speak of, but had some real good old times on board a ship, somewhere, he did; and there was Tom Jones (Hiram no more understood the doubtful passages in that great romance than he understood the lucubrations of Philosopher Square, but he took it in, in the lump, as very good fun for all that), Tom Jones, the

story of another real live boy, with, most delightful of all, a reg'lar mean sneak of a feller, called Blifil, to act as a foil to Tom's straightforward pagan flesh-and-bloodfulness; the Buccaneers of the Caribbean Sea, a glorious work of fire and slaughter, whar some feller or other got killed right off on every page a'most, you bet; Jake the Pirate, another splendid book of the same description; and half a dozen more assorted novels, from the best to the worst, all chosen alike for their stirring incidents which went straight home to the minds of the two lads, in spite of all external differences of birth and geographical surroundings. Hiram pored over them surreptitiously, late at nights, in the room that he and Sam occupied in common – a mere loft at the top of the house and felt in his heart he had never in his life imagined such delightful reading could possibly have existed. And they were written by growed-up men, too! How strange to think that once upon a time, somewhile and somewhere, there were growed-up men capable of thus sympathising with, and reproducing the ideas and feelings of, the natural mind of boyhood!

One evening, very late – eleven nearly – the deacon, prowling around after a bottle or something, spied an unwonted light gleaming down from the trap-door that led up to the loft where the lads ought at that moment to have been sleeping soundly. Lights in a well-conducted farmhouse at eleven o'clock was indeed incomprehensible: what on earth, the deacon asked himself wonderingly, could them thar lads be up to at this hour?

He crept up the step-ladder cautiously, so as not to disturb them by premonitions, and opened the trap-door in sedulous silence. Sam was already fast asleep; but there was Hiram, sot up in bed, as quiet as a 'possum, 'pearin' as if he was a-readin' something. The deacon's eyes opened with amazement! Hiram reading! Had his heart been touched, then, quite sudden-like? Could he have took up the Hopkinsite Confession in secret to his upper chamber? Was he meditatin' makin' a public profession afore the Assembly?

The deacon glowered and marvelled. Creeping, still quite silently, up to the bedhead, he looked with an inquiring glance over poor Hiram's unsuspecting shoulder. A sea of words swam vaguely before his bewildered vision; words, not running into long orthodox paragraphs, like the Elder's Ezekiel, but cut up, oh horror, into distinct sentences, each indicating a separate part in a conversation. The deacon couldn't clearly make it all out; for it was a dramatic dialogue, a form of composition which had not largely fallen in the good man's way: but he picked up enough to understand that it was a low pothouse scene, where one Falstaff was bandying improper language with a person of the name of Prince (given name, Henry) – language that made even the deacon's sallow cheek blush feebly with reflected and vicarious modesty. For a moment he endeavoured, like a Christian man, to retain his wrath; and then paternal feeling overcame him, and he caught Hiram such a oner on his ears as he flattered himself that boy wouldn't be likely to forgit in any very partickler hurry.

Hiram looked round, amazed and stunned, his ear tingling and burning, and saw the gaunt apparition of his father, standing silent and black-browed by the bare bed-head. For a moment those two glared at one another mutely and defiantly.

At last Hiram spoke: 'Wal!' he said simply.

'Wal!' the deacon answered, with smothered wrath. 'Hiram, I am angry and sin not. What do you go an' take them bad books up to read for? Who give 'em you? Whar did you get 'em? Oh, you sinful, bad boy, whar did you get 'em?' And he administered another sound cuff upon Hiram's other ear.

Hiram put his hand up to the stinging spot, and cried a minute silently: then he answered as well as he was able: 'This aint a bad book: this is called "The Complete Dramattic Works of William Shakespeare." Sam lent it to me, an' it's Sam's book, an' ther ain't no harm in it, anyhow.'

The deacon was plainly staggered for a moment, for even he had dimly heard the name of William Shakespeare; and though he had never made any personal acquaintance with that gentleman's works, he had always understood in a vague, indefinite fashion that this here Shakespeare was a perfectly respectable and recognised writer, whose books were read and approved of even by Hopkinsite ministers edoocated at Bethabara Seminary. So he took the volume in his hand incredulously and looked it through casually for a few minutes. He glanced at a scene or two here or there with a critical eye, and then he flung the volume from him quickly, as a man might

fling and crush some loathsome reptile. By this time Sam was half-awake, and sat up in bed to inquire sleepily, what all thik ther row could be about at thik time of evenin'?' The deacon answered by going savagely to Sam's box, and taking out, one by one, for separate inspection, the volumes he found there. He held up the candle (stuck in an empty blacking-bottle) to each volume in succession, and, as soon as he had finally condemned them each, he flung them down in an untidy pile on the bare floor of the little bedroom. Most of them he stood stoically enough; but the Vicar of Wakefield was at last quite too much for his stifled indignation. Sitting down blankly on the bed he fired off his volley at poor Hiram's frightened head, with terrible significance.

'Hiram Winthrop,' he said solemnly, 'you air a son of perdition. You air more a'most 'n I kin manage with. Satan's openin' the door for you on-common wide, I kin tell you, sonny. It makes me downright scar't to see you in company along of sech books. Your mother'll be awful took back about it. I don't mind this 'ere about the Pirates of the Caribbean Sea, so much; that's kinder hist'ry, that is, and mayn't do you much harm: but sech things as this Peter Simple, an' Wakefield, and Pickwick's Papers – why, I wonder the roof don't fall in on 'em an' crush us in the lot altogether. I'm durned ef I could have thought you'd bin wicked enough to read 'em, sech on-principled literatoor. I sha'n't chastise you to-night, sonny; it's late, now, and we've read chapter: but to-morrer, Hiram, to-morrer, you shall pay for them thar books, take my word for it. You shall be chastened

in the manner that's app'inted. Ef I was you, I should spend the rest of the evenin' in wrestlin' for forgiveness for the sin you've committed.'

And yet in the chapter the deacon had read at family worship that evening there was one little clause which said: 'Quench not the Spirit.'

Hiram slept but little that night, with the vague terror of to-morrow's whipping overshadowing him through the night watches. But he had at least one comfort: Sam Churchill had got out and gathered up his books, and locked them carefully in his box again.

'If the boss tries to touch they books again, I tell 'ee, Hiram,' he said bi-lingually (for absorbent America was already beginning to assimilate him), ''e'll vind 'isself a-lyin' longways on the vloor, afore he do know it, I promise 'ee.' Hiram heard, and was partly comforted. At least he would still have the books to read, somehow, at some time. For in his own heart, unregenerate or otherwise, he couldn't bring himself to believe that there could be really anything so very wicked in Henry the Fourth or Peter Simple.

CHAPTER IV.
PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY

The deacon's cowhide cut deep; but the thrashing didn't last long: and after it was all over, Hiram wandered out aimlessly by himself, down the snowclad valley of Muddy Creek, and along to the wooded wilds and cranberry marshes near the Ontario debouchure, to forget his troubles and the lasting smart of the weals in watching the beasts and birds among the frozen lowlands. He had never been so far from home before, but the weather and the ice were in his favour, enabling him to get over an amount of ground he wouldn't have tried to cover in the dry summer time. He had his skates with him, and he skated where possible, taking them off to walk over the intervening land necks or drifted snow-sheets. The ice was glare in many places, so that one could skate on it gloriously; and before he had got half-way down to Nine-Mile Bottom he had almost forgotten all about the deacon, and the sermon, and the beating, and the threatened ten chapters of St. John (the Gospel of Love the deacon called it) to be learned by heart before next Lord's day, in expiation of the heinous crime of having read that pernicious work the 'Vicar of Wakefield.' It was the loveliest spot he had ever seen in all his poor unlovely little existence.

Close under the cranberry trees, by a big pool where the

catfish would be sure to live in summer, Hiram heard men's voices, whispering low and quiet to one another. A great joy filled his soul. He could see at once by their dress and big fur caps what they were. They were trappers! One piece of romance still survived in Geauga County, among the cranberry swamps and rush beds where the flooded creek flowed sluggishly into the bosom of Ontario; and on that one piece of romance he had luckily lighted by pure accident. Trappers! Yes, not a doubt of it! He struck out on his skates swiftly but noiselessly toward them, and joined the three men without a word as they stood taking counsel together below their breath on the ice-bound marshland.

'Hello, sonny!' one of the men said in a low undertone. 'Say whar did you drop from? What air you comin' spyin' out a few peaceable surveyors for, eh? Tell me.'

'I didn't think you was surveyors,' Hiram answered, a little disappointed. 'I thought you was trappers.' And at the same time he glanced suspiciously at the peculiar little gins that the surveyors held in their great gauntleted hands, for all the world like Oneida traps for musk-rats.

The man noticed the glance and laughed to himself a smothered laugh – the laugh of a person accustomed always to keep very quiet. 'The young un has spotted us, an' no mistake, boys,' he said, laughing, to the others. 'He's a bit too 'cute to be took in with the surveyor gammon. What do you call this 'ere, sonny?'

'I calc'late that's somewhar near a mink trap,' Hiram

answered, breathless with delight.

'Wal, it *is* a mink trap,' the trapper said slowly, looking deep into the boy's truthful eyes. 'Now, who sent you down here to track us out and peach upon us; eh, Bob?'

'Nobody sent me,' Hiram replied, with his blue eyes looking deep back into the trapper's keen restless grey pair. 'I kem out all o' my own accord, 'cos father gave me a lickin' this mornin', an' I've kem out jest to get away for a bit alone somewhar.'

'Who's your father?' asked the man still suspiciously.

'Deacon Winthrop, down to Muddy Creek Deepo.'

'Deacon Winthrop! Oh, I know him, ruther. A tall, skinny, dried-up kind of fellow, ain't he, who looks as if most of his milk was turned sour, an' the Hopkinsite Confession was a settin' orful heavy on his digestion?'

Hiram nodded several times successively, in acknowledgment of the general accuracy of this brief description. 'That's him, you bet,' he answered with unfilial promptitude. 'I guess you've seed him somwhar, for that's him as like as a portrait. Look here, say, I'll draw him for you.' And the boy, taking his pencil from his pocket, drew as quickly as he was able on a scrap of birch-bark a humorous caricature of his respected parent, as he appeared in the very act of offering an unctuous exhortation to the Hopkinsite assembly at Muddy Creek meeting-house. It was very wrong and wicked, of course – a clear breach of the Fifth Commandment – but the deacon hadn't done much on his own account to merit honour or love at the hands of Hiram Winthrop.

The man took the rough sketch and laughed at it inwardly, with a suppressed chuckle. There was no denying, he saw, that it was the perfect moral of that thar freezed-up old customer down to the Deepo. He handed it with a smile to his two companions. They both recognised the likeness and the little additions which gave it point, and one of them, a Canadian as Hiram conjectured (for he spoke with a dreadful English accent – so stuck-up), said in the same soft undertone: 'Do you know where any mink live anywhere hereabouts?'

'A little higher up stream,' Hiram answered, overjoyed, 'I know every spot whar ther's any mink stirrin' for five miles round, anyhow.'

The Canadian turned to the others.

'Boys,' he said, 'you can trust the youngster. He won't peach on us. He's game, you may be sure. Now, youngster, we're trappers, as you guessed correctly. But you see, farmers don't love trappers, because they go trespassing, and overrunning the fields: and so we don't want you to say a word about us to this father of yours. Do you understand?'

Hiram nodded.

'You promise not to tell him or anybody?'

'Yes, I promise.'

'Well, then, if you like, you can come with us. We're going to set our traps now. You don't seem a bad sort of little chap, and you can see the fun out if you've a mind to.'

Hiram's heart bounded with excitement. What a magnificent

prospect! He promised to show the trappers every spot he knew about the place where any fur-bearing animal, from ermine to musk-rat, was likely to be found. In ten minutes, all four were started off upon their skates once more, striking up the river in the direction of the deacon's, and setting traps by Hiram's advice as they went along, at every likely run or corner.

'You drew that picture real well,' the Canadian said, as they skated side by side: 'I could see it was the old man at a glance.'

Hiram's face shone with pleasure at this sincere compliment to his artistic merit. 'I could hev done it a long sight better,' he said simply, 'ef my hands hadn't been numbed a bit with the cold, so's I could hardly hold the pencil.'

It was a grand day, that day with the trappers – the gipsies of half-settled America; the grandest day Hiram had ever spent in his whole lifetime. How many musk-rats' burrows he pointed out to his new acquaintance along the bank of the creek; how many spots where the mink, that strange water-haunting weasel, lurks unseen among the frozen sedges! Here and there, too, he showed them the points where he had noticed the faint track of the ermine on the lightly fallen snow, and where they might place their traps across the path worn by the 'coons on their way to and from the Indian corn patch. It was cruel work, to be sure, setting those murderous snapping iron jaws, and perhaps if Hiram had thought more about the beasts themselves (whom after all he loved in his heart) he wouldn't have been so ready to aid their natural enemies in thus catching and exterminating

them: but what boy is free from the aboriginal love of hunting something? Certainly not Hiram Winthrop, at least, to whom this one glimpse of a delightful wandering life among the woods and marshes – a life that wasn't all made up of bare fields and fall wheat and snake fences and cross-ploughing – seemed like a stray snatch of that impossible paradise he had read about in 'Peter Simple' and the 'Buccaneers of the Caribbean Sea.'

'Say, Bob,' the Canadian muttered to him as they were half-way through their work (in Northern New York every boy unknown is *ex officio* addressed as Bob), 'we shall be back in these diggings in the spring again, looking after the summer furs, you see. Now, don't you go and tell any other trappers about these places we've set, because trappers gener'ly (present company always excepted) is a pretty dishonest lot, and they'll poach on other trappers' grounds and even steal their furs and traps as soon as look at 'em. You stand by us and we'll stand by you, and take care you don't suffer by it.'

'When'll you come?' Hiram asked in the thrilling delight of anticipation.

'When the first spring days are on,' the Canadian answered. 'I'll tell you the best sign: it's no use going by days o' the month – we don't remember 'em mostly; – but it'll be about the time when the skunk cabbage begins to flower.'

Hiram made a note of the date mentally, and treasured it up in safety on the lasting tablets of his memory.

At about one o'clock the trappers sat down upon the frozen

bank and ate their dinner. It would have been cold work to men less actively engaged; but skating and trapping warms your blood well. 'Got any grub?' one of the men asked Hiram, still softly. Your trapper seems almost to have lost the power of speaking above a whisper, and he moves stealthily as if he thought a spectral farmer was always dogging his steps close behind him.

'No, I ain't,' Hiram answered.

'Then, thunder, pitch into the basket,' his new friend said encouragingly.

Hiram obeyed, and made an excellent lunch off cold hare and lake ship-biscuit.

'Are you through?' the men asked at last.

'Yes,' Hiram replied.

'Then come along and see the fun out.'

They skated on, still upward, in the general direction of the blackberry bottom. When they got there, Hiram, now quite at home, pointed out even more accurately than ever the exact homes of each individual mink and ermine. So the men worked away eagerly at their task till the evening began to come over. Then Hiram, all aglow with excitement and wholly oblivious of all earthly considerations, became suddenly aware of a gaunt figure moving about among the dusky brushwood and making in the direction of his friends the trappers. 'Hello,' he cried to his new acquaintances in a frightened tone, 'you'd best cut it. Thar's the deacon.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.