

Riley Henry Hiram

The Puddleford Papers: or, Humors of the West



Henry Riley
The Puddleford Papers:
or, Humors of the West

*http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23169851
The Puddleford Papers; Or, Humors of the West:*

Содержание

PREFACE	4
PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION	6
CHAPTER I	8
CHAPTER II	25
CHAPTER III	46
CHAPTER IV	59
CHAPTER V	75
CHAPTER VI	91
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	100

Riley Henry Hiram The Puddleford Papers; Or, Humors of the West

PREFACE

Everybody who writes a book, is expected to introduce it with a preface; to hang out a sign, the more captivating the better, informing the public what kind of entertainment may be expected within. I am very sorry that I am obliged to say that many a one has been woefully deceived by these outside proclamations, and some one may be again.

I am unable to apologize to the public for inflicting this work upon it. It was not through "the entreaty of friends" that it was written. It is not the "outpourings of a delicate constitution." (I weigh one hundred and sixty pounds.) I was not driven into it "by a predestination to write, which was beyond my control." It is not "offered for the benefit of a few near relatives, who have insisted upon seeing it in print;" nor do I expect the public will tolerate it simply out of regard to my feelings, if their own feelings are not enlisted in its favor.

The book is filled with portraits of Puddleford and the Puddlefordians. The reader may never have seen the portrait of a

genuine Puddlefordian. Bless me, how much that man has lost! If the reader does not like the painting after he *has* seen it, I cannot help it; it may be the fault of the original, or it may be from a want of skill in the painter.

Like the carrier-pigeon, let it go, to return with glad tidings, or none at all.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Many years have passed since Puddleford was first published. In the meanwhile the world has turned round and round, and so has Puddleford. The book, too, has been growing in size, from time to time, and some new "matter" has been now introduced.

The object of the book was not merely humor. It was hoped by the author that the reader would discover an undercurrent, showing strong points of human nature in the rough, and how at last the rugged rock becomes rounded and polished into the smooth stone – the iron cleaver turned into the tempered sword. How stern, honest men, who are driven to grapple and struggle with the hardships of a new country, meet and dispose of them in an irregular and home-made way, by striking at the root of the question, disregarding mere form. How the foundation of law, religion, and order is laid in strength, if not in beauty. How other generations build thereon the temple with its pillars and spire.

I cannot attempt to describe the Puddleford of to-day. Ike Turtle is old and gray, but his children hold high positions in society and state. Some of them have Ike's thorny, sharp genius, but toned down by education and cultivation into method and power. Squire Longbow totters around on his staff, tries over his old cases with anybody who will listen to him, repeats his

decisions of fifteen years ago, quotes Ike's jokes, and sums up all the testimony for the fortieth time to his weary listeners. Aunt Sonora has gone to her reward. Other courts are held in Puddleford now. Technicalities are observed. Law is law. How much more justice is administered, it is not for me to say.

The book is once more before the public. The public have received it in the past quite as well as it deserved, perhaps. Its future is now committed to the public again.

H. H. R.

September 8, 1874.

CHAPTER I

Puddleford. – Eagle Tavern. – Mr. and Mrs. Bulliphant. – May Morning. – Birds. – Venison Styles. – General Character of Society. – The Colonel. – Venison Styles' Cabin.

The township of Puddleford was located in the far west, and was, and is, unknown, I presume, to a large portion of my readers. It has never been considered of sufficient importance by atlas-makers to be designated by them; and yet men, women, and children live and die in Puddleford. Its population helps make up the census of the United States every ten years; it helps make governors, congressmen, presidents. Puddleford does, and fails to do, a great many things, just like the "rest of mankind," and yet who knows and cares anything about Puddleford?

Puddleford was well enough as a township of land, and beautiful was its scenery. It was spotted with bright, clear lakes, reflecting the trees that stooped over them; and straight through its centre flowed a majestic river, guarded by hills on either side. The village of Puddleford (there was a village of Puddleford, too) stood huddled in a gorge that opened up from the river; and through it, day and night, a little brook ran tinkling along, making music around the "settlement." The houses in Puddleford were very shabby indeed; I am very sorry to be compelled to make

that fact public, but they were very shabby. Some were built of logs, and some of boards, and some were never exactly built at all, but came together through a combination of circumstances which the "oldest inhabitant" has never been able to explain. The log-houses were just like log-houses in every place else; for no person has yet been found with impudence enough to suggest an improvement. A pile of logs, laid up and packed in mud; a mammoth fireplace, with a chimney-throat as large; a lower story and a garret, connected in one corner by a ladder, called "Jacob's ladder," are its essentials. A few very ambitious persons in Puddleford had, it is true, attempted to build frame-houses, but there was never one entirely finished yet. Some of them had erected a frame only, when, their purses having failed, the enterprise was left at the mercy of the storms. Others had covered their frames; and one citizen, old Squire Longbow, had actually finished off two rooms; and this, in connection with the office of justice of the peace, gave him a standing and influence in the settlement almost omnipotent.

The reader discovers, of course, that Puddleford was a very miscellaneous-looking place. It appeared unfinished, and ever likely to be. It did really seem that the houses, and cabins, and sheds, and pig-sties, had been sown up and down the gorge, as their owners sowed wheat. The only harmony about the place was the harmony of confusion.

Puddleford had a population made up of all sorts of people, who had been, from a variety of causes, thrown together just

there; and every person owned a number of dogs, so that it was very difficult to determine which were numerically the strongest, the inhabitants or the dogs. There were great droves of cows owned, too, which were in the habit of congregating every morning, and marching some miles to a distant marsh to feed to the jingle of the bells they wore on their necks.

There was one public house at Puddleford. It was built of logs, with a long stoop running along its whole front, supported by trunks of trees roughly cut from the woods, and bark and knots were preserved in the full strength and simplicity of nature. Its bar-room was the resort of all the leading men of Puddleford, besides several ragged boys and these self-same dogs. It stood in the centre of the village, and announced itself to the public through a sign, upon which were painted a cock crowing and a spread eagle. The bar was fenced off in one corner of the room, and was supplied with three bottles of whiskey, called, according to their color, brandy, rum, and gin; but fly-tracks and dust had so completely covered them, that the kind of liquor was determined by the pledge of the landlord, that always passed current. There were also about a dozen mouldy crackers laid away on the shelf in a discarded cigar-box, intended more particularly for the travelling public. The walls of the bar-room were illuminated by a large menagerie advertisement, which was the only real display of the fine arts that ever entered the place. Upon a table, near the centre of the room, stood a backgammon and checker-board, which were in use from the rising sun to midnight. Pipes, crusted

thick with soot, lay scattered about on the window-stools and chimney-shelf – old stubs that had seen service – and all over the floor rolled great quids of tobacco, ancient and modern, the creatures of yesterday and years ago; for the floor of the "Eagle Tavern" – such it was called – of Puddleford was never profaned by a broom, nor its windows with water. He who attempted to look out would have supposed there was an eternal fog in the streets.

The ladies' parlor, belonging to the Eagle Tavern of Puddleford, was a very choice spot, and had been fitted up without regard to expense. Its floor was covered with a faded rag-carpet, and its walls were enlivened with a shilling print, showing forth Noah's Ark, and the animals entering therein. Any person who had an eye for the practical, could see just how Noah loaded his craft, as the picture brought out clearly a long plank thrown ashore, up which the animals were climbing. I have often thought that I never saw it rain so tremendously as it did in that picture. Near by hung a six-penny likeness of Washington, somewhat defaced, as some irreverent Puddleford boy had run his finger through the old general's eye, which detracted very much from the dignity of his expression. He looked rather funny with one eye cocked; and he felt, I presume – that is, if pictures can feel – just as funny as he looked.

One advantage which the lodging-rooms of this tavern possessed ought not to be overlooked. They were lit up by the everlasting stars, and the tired traveller could go to sleep by the

dancing rays that shot down through the crevices of the roof above.

"Old Stub Bulliphant," as he was called, was, and had been for years, landlord of the "Eagle." He was about five feet high, and nearly as many in circumference. His eyes were of no particular color, although they were once. His eye-lashes had been scorched off by alcoholic fire; and nature, to keep up appearances, in a fit of desperation, substituted in their stead a binding of red, which looked like two little rainbows hanging upon a storm, for a rheumy water was continually running between them. His nose was very red, and his face was always in blossom, winter and summer. A pair of tow breeches and a red flannel shirt composed his wardrobe two thirds of the year. The truth is, the old fellow drank, and always drank, and he became, finally, preserved in spirits.

Puddleford was not destitute of a church, not by any means. The "log-chapel," when I first became acquainted with the place, was an ancient building. It was erected at a period almost as early as the tavern – not quite – temporal wants pressing the early settlers closer than spiritual.

This, precious reader, is a skeleton view of Puddleford, as it existed when I first knew it. Just out of this village, some time during the last ten years, I took possession of a large tract of land, called "Burr-oak Opening," that is, a wide, sweeping plain, thinly clad with burr-oaks. Few sights in nature are more beautiful. The eye roams over these parks unobstructed by undergrowth, the

trees above, and the sleeping shadows on the grass below.

The first time I looked upon this future home of mine, it lay calm and bright, bathed in the warm sun of a May morning, and filled with birds. The buds were just breaking into leaf, and the air was sweet with the wildwood fragrance of spring. Piles of mosses, soft as velvet, were scattered about. Wild violets, grouped in clusters, the white and red lupin, the mountain pink, and thousands of other tiny flowers, bright as sparks of fire, mingled in confusion. It was alive with birds; the brown thrasher, the robin, the blue-jay, poured forth their music to the very top of their lungs. The thrasher, with his brown dress and very quizzical look, absolutely revelled in a luxury of melody. He mocked all the birds about him. Now he was as good a blue-jay as blue-jay himself, and screamed as loud; but suddenly bouncing around on a limb, and slowly stretching out his wings, he died away in a most pathetic strain; then, darting into another tree, and turning his saucy eye inquisitively down, he rattled off a chorus or two, that I might know he was not so sad a fellow after all. Now, his soft, flute-like notes fairly melted in his throat; then he drew out a long, violin strain the whole length of his bow; then a blast on his trumpet roused all the birds. He was "everything by turns, and nothing long." After completing his performance, away he went, and his place, in a moment almost, was occupied by another, repeating the medley, for the whole wood was alive with them.

Scores of blue-jays, in the tops of the trees, were picking away at the tender buds. The robin, that household bird, first

loved by our children, was also here. Sitting alone and apart, in a reverie, and blowing occasionally his mellow pipe, he seemed to exist only for his own comfort, and to forget that he was one of the choristers of the wood. Woodpeckers were flitting hither and thither; troops of quails whistled in the distance; the oriole streamed out his bright light through the green branches; there was a winnowing of wings, a dashing of leaves, as birds came rushing in and out. It was their festival.

This scene was heightened by the appearance of a hunter. He was a noble specimen of the physical man. Tall, brawny – a giant in strength – his form loomed up in the distance. He was attired with a red flannel "wamus," a leathern belt girt around his waist, deer-skin leggins and moccasins, and a white felt hat that ran up to a peak. His rifle and shot-pouch were slung around him, and a few fox-squirrels hung dangling on his belt. His whole figure exhibited a harmony of proportion, a majesty of combination, sometimes seen in Roman statues. As I approached him, his face fairly beamed with rustic intelligence and good nature, and the old man grasped me by the hand, and shook it as heartily as if he had known me a thousand years.

"So you are the person," said Venison Styles, – for such I afterwards learned was the name he went by in the neighborhood, – "so you are the person that's come in here to settle, I s'pose – to cut down the trees and plough up this ere ground." I told him I was. "Well," said he, "so it goes; I have moved and moved, and I can't keep out of the way of these

ploughs and axes. It was just as much as the deer, and beaver, and otter, *could* do, to stand them government surveyors that went tramping around among 'em, just as though they were going to be sold out wher-or-no. And then," continued Styles, growing warmer, "they tried to form a thing they called a school *de*-strict about my ears; and then came a church, and they put a little bell on it, and that scart out the game. Game can't stand church-bells, stranger, they can't; they clears right out."

I tried to soothe the old man's feelings, and among other things, advised him to give up his hunting and fishing, and settle down, and till the soil for a living.

"What on airth does anybody want to till the soil for?" replied Styles. "What does the soil want *tilling* for? Warn't the airth made right in the first place? The woods were filled with beast and bird, warn't they? and the whole face of natur covered with grass and wild fruits? and streams and lakes were scattered everywhere? Ain't there enough to eat, and drink, and wear, growing nat'ral in the woods? and what else does anybody want, stranger?"

"Yes, but you are growing old, and your sight is dim, my friend," said I.

"Old! dim! eyes bad! no! no! Venison Styles is good for twenty years yet. I don't take physic. There ain't no more use of taking such stuff, than there is of giving it to my dogs. 'Tain't nat'ral to take it, not no how. All a man wants in sickness is a little saxafax-tea, or something warmin' of that sort. Children are all spi'lt nowadays. Their heads and inards are crammed with physic

and larning, and they ain't good for nothing. For my part, I hate physic, books, newspapers, and even the mail-carrier. None of my folks were troubled with larning; for, as near as I can tell, the old man (his father) died hunting game and furs down on the 'Hios, when it 'twas all woods there, and I never know'd of his writing or reading any."

"Well, Venison," said I, "how long have you been around in these parts?"

"Not mor-nor four or five years, or so about," answered Styles. "The game and I have kept running westard and westard, from civilization, as they call it, till I have travelled nigh on a thousand miles, or so. I used to hunt and trap way down on Erie, before them steamboats came a-snorting up, but when they came, they scart all the deer and everything out of the woods and streams; and then I left, too. This rifle," continued Styles, "this rifle has been along with me for forty years. I have eat and slept with it. I have worn out mor-nor twenty dogs – fairly *worn* 'em out, and buried every one with a tear; and byme-by old Venison himself will go, but he is good on the track yet."

I assented to much that was said by old Styles, and growing warmer the more interest I took in him, he rattled on about civilization – its effects, &c., &c.; and, finally, looking into a tree, where a cluster of spring birds were singing, he turned to me, and pointing upward – "Do you hear that?" he exclaimed; "that music was made when the world was – them throats warn't tuned by any singing-master; they always keep in order. If men would only jist

let natur alone, we could get along well enough. 'Tain't right to make any additions to natur. 'Tain't right to invent music, nor to mock the birds, nor cut down the woods, nor dam up the streams. It's all agin natur, the whole on't. The birds can't be improved on, and the streams and woods belong to the fish and game. They are their houses as much as my house is *my* house. I always hated a saw-mill," continued Styles; "its very sound makes me mad. I never know'd a deer to stay within hearing of one. They roar away just as though they were going to tear down the whole forest, and pile it up into boards. I always try to keep out of their way." But I cannot give all the conversation of this eccentric genius of the forest, with me. He was one of a class of men who are hurried along by immigration, like clouds before the tempest. When the rays of improvement warmed Styles, he had pushed farther back into the shade. He was a connecting link between barbarism and civilization. One half of him was lit up with the light of the sturdy pioneers, who crowded in upon him from the east, and the other half stood dark and gloomy in savage solemnity. With all his antipathy to the society of the whites, he was their stanch friend, and in many ways was of great service. He became, as we shall see, one of my pleasantest companions, and I cannot help now declaring, that few men have taken such strong hold upon my affections as this same Venison Styles.

The old man shouldered his rifle, and inviting me to "drop into his cabin, up the creek," bid me "good morning, stranger."

Reader, such was the scene presented to my eye the day I

first looked upon the piece of wild land upon which I finally settled and improved. I had just arrived from an eastern village, where I was born, and "brought up," as the phrase is. A somewhat broken fortune and breaking health had driven me from it, with a moderate family, to seek a spot elsewhere; and I resolved to try the Great West, that paradise (if the word of people who never saw it is to be taken) where the surplus population of a portion of the world have found a home.

The change was great. But great as it was, I resolved to endure it. So, at it I went. I procured "help," girdled the trees, put a breaking team of twelve yoke of cattle on the ground, tore it up, fenced the land, raised a log-house, and in the fall I had a crop of wheat growing, the withered oak trees standing guard over it. My family, consisting of a wife and three children, a boy of eight, and two girls of twelve and ten, were removed to their new quarters, and I had thus fairly begun the world again, and all things were as new about me as if I had just been born into it.

During the summer, I had an opportunity of studying the general character of the inhabitants of Puddleford, and its surrounding country population. Like most western settlements, it was made up of all kinds of materials, all sorts of folks, holding every opinion. More than a dozen states had contributed to make up its people. Society was exceedingly miscellaneous. The keen Yankee, the obstinate Pennsylvanian, and the reckless Southerner were there. Each one of these persons had brought along with him his early habits and associations – his own views

of business, law, and religion. When thrown together on public questions, this composition boiled up like a mixture of salts and soda. Factions, of course, were formed among those whose early education and habits were congenial; divisions were created, and a war of prejudice and opinion went on from month to month, and year to year. The New England Yankee stood about ten years ahead of the Pennsylvania German in all his ideas of progress, while the latter stood back, dogged and sullen, attached to the customs of his fathers. Another general feature consisted in this, that there was no permanency to society. The inhabitants were constantly changing, pouring out and in, like the waters of a river, so that a complete revolution took place every four or five years. Everybody who remained in Puddleford expected to remove somewhere else very soon. They were merely sojourners, not residents. There was no attachment to, or veneration for, the past of Puddleford, because Puddleford had no past. The ties of memory reached to older states. There stood the church that sheltered the infant years of Puddleford's population, and there swung the bell that tolled their fathers and fathers' fathers to the tomb. There was the long line of graves, running back a hundred years, where the sister of yesterday, and the ancestor whose virtues were only known through tradition, were buried. There tottered the old homestead which had passed through the family for generations, filled with heirlooms that had become sacred. The school-house was there, where the village boys shouted together. Looking back from a new country, where all

is confusion, to an old one, where figures have the stability of a painting, objects which were once trivial start out upon the canvas in bolder relief. The venerable, gray-headed pastor, who appeared regularly in the village pulpit for half a century, to impart the word of life, rises in the memory, and stands fixed there, like a statue. The quaint cut of his coat, the neat tie of his neckcloth, the spectacles resting on the tip of his nose, his hums and haws, his eye of reproof, his gestures of vengeance, are now living things – are preaching still. We see again the changing crowd, that year after year went in and out of that holy place; the spot where the old deacon sat, his head resting on a pillar, his tranquil face turned upward, his mouth open, enjoying a doze as he listened to the sermon. We recollect the gay bridal, the solemn funeral, the buoyant face of the one, the still, cold one of the other. We even remember the lame old sexton, who rang the bell and went limping up to the burying-ground, with a spade upon his shoulder. Even *he*, of no consequence when seen every day, is transformed by distance, and mellowed by memory, into a real being. And then there are the hills, and streams, and waterfalls, that shed their music through our boyish souls, until they became a part of our very existence. No man ever lived who entirely forgot these things, suppressed though they might be by the cares and anxieties of maturer years. And no circumstance so likely to bring them all up, glowing afresh, as a removal to a new country. Of course, no one was attached to Puddleford, as a locality, any more than the wandering Arab is attached to the particular spot

where he pitches his tent and feeds his camels.

Another general feature seemed to be the *strange character* of a large part of the population. Puddleford was filled with bankrupts, who had fled from their eastern creditors, anxious for peace of mind and bread enough to eat. Like decayed vessels, that had been tempest-tossed and finally condemned, these hulks seemed to be lying up in ordinary in the wilderness. Puddleford was to that class a kind of hospital. This man, upon inquiry, I found had rolled in luxury, but a turn in flour one day blew him sky-high. Another failed on a land speculation. Another bought more goods than he paid for. Another had been mixed up in a fraud. Another had been actually guilty of crime. The farming community were generally free from these charges; but Puddleford proper was not.

The "Colonel," as we called him, was a fair specimen of the bankrupt class. He was one of those unfortunate beings who was well enough started in the world; but after having been tossed and buffeted around by his own extravagance, he was finally driven into the forest. He was educated, polished, proud, and poor. He had sunk two or three fortunes, earned by somebody else, chasing pleasure around the world. His reputation having become soiled, and his pockets emptied, he concluded – to use his own language – to "hide himself from his enemies and die a kind of civil death." "Men," said the Colonel, "are naturally robbers, and it is safer to run than fight with them." I have heard him declare, in a jocose way, that he was the most "injured man living; for the whole

human family," he said, "set to and picked his pockets, and now the public ought to support him." He said, "he couldn't see why the government didn't pass laws for the relief of cases like his; for a government is good for nothing that fails to support its people. Starvation in a republic would be a disgrace, and ought not to be permitted." The Colonel said "there was no use in fighting destiny – no one man *can* do it – and it was his destiny to be poor." He said he "had no place to remove to, and that he couldn't get there if he had;" that he was "like an old pump that needs a pail of water thrown in every time it is used to set it a-going."

The Colonel resided in the village of Puddleford. His family was composed of a wife and two daughters, a couple of dashing girls, who looked like birds of fine plumage that had been driven by a storm beyond their latitude. His household furniture was made up of the fag-ends of this and that, which had somehow escaped a half a dozen sheriff's sales. His family wardrobe had been rescued in the same way, and contained all the fashions of the last twenty-five years. Here and there were scattered some plain articles of western manufacture, by way of contrast. Three shilling chairs stood on a faded Brussels carpet; an unpainted white-wood table supported a silver tea-set; thus, the faded splendor of the past contrasted with the rustic simplicity of the present. One thing I must not overlook: the Colonel had an old tattered carriage that had followed him through good and evil report, his ups and downs of life. I have often been amused to see it roll along with a melancholy air of superiority, putting on the

face of a good man in affliction. It was drawn by two diminutive Indian ponies, who would turn and look wildly at the antiquated thing, as if apprehensive of danger.

The Colonel kept an office, and pretended to act as a kind of land agent, and agent for insurance companies, and so on. He was never known to pay a debt; it being against his principles, as he used to say: besides, he said "his note would last a man ten times as long as the money; and they were not very uncurrent neither; for the justice of the peace at Puddleford had taken a very great many of them, and passed his judgment upon them for their full face."

But I will not go into particulars with the Puddlefordians at present. During the summer my acquaintance with Venison Styles had ripened into a deeper affection for the old hunter. I accepted his invitation to visit him, and found him sheltered in the depths of the forest, and nestled in a valley, his hut, overshadowed by great trees, which were filled with birds pouring forth their songs. A little brook tinkled down the slope by his hut, singing all kinds of woodland tunes, as the breeze swelled and died along its banks. The squirrels were chatting their nonsense, and the rolling drum of the partridge was heard almost at his very door.

Venison was a hunter, a fisher, and a trapper. The inside walls of his cabin were hung about with rifles, shot-guns, and fishing-rods, which had been accumulating for years. Deer-horns and skins lay scattered here and there, the trophies of the chase.

Seines for lakes, and scoop-nets for smaller streams, were drying outside upon the trees.

Venison kept around him a brood of lazy, lounging, good-for-nothing boys, of all ages, about half-clothed, who followed the business of their father. This young stock were growing up as he had grown, to occupy somewhere their father's position, and lead his life. They lived just as well as the hounds, for all stood on an equality in the family. These ragamuffins were perfect masters of natural history. There was not an instinct or peculiarity belonging to the denizens of the woods and streams which they did not perfectly understand. They seemed to have penetrated the secrecy of animal life, and fathomed it throughout. Birds, and beasts, and fish were completely within their power; and there was a kind of matter-of-course success with them in their capture that was absolutely provoking to a civilized hunter.

It was of no importance where Venison Styles' boys made their home, or under what particular roof. Their home was mainly a depot for their fishing-tackles, guns, and game. They roamed away weeks at a time, fifty miles off, up this stream and that, over many a lake, and camped out nights, feeding upon their plunder; and Venison felt no more concern about them than he did about the deer, who indeed were not much wilder than they. They were as hard as flints, sharp on the chase, happy in their wild, wayward-life, and generally managed to trap and kill just enough to be self-supporting, and keep soul and body together.

CHAPTER II

Lawsuit: Filkins against Beadle. – Squire Longbow and his Court. – Puddleford assembled. – Why Squire Longbow was a Great Man. – Ike Turtle and Sile Bates, Pettifoggers. – Mrs. Sonora Brown. – Uproar and Legal Opinions. – Seth Bolles. – Miss Eunice Grimes. – Argument to Jury, and Verdict.

My intercourse with the inhabitants of Puddleford had been frequent during the summer, and my acquaintance with them had now become quite general. One morning, in the month of September, I was visited by a constable, who very authoritatively served upon me a venire, which commanded me to be and appear before Jonathan Longbow, at his office in the village of Puddleford, at one o'clock P. M., to serve as a jurymen in a case, then and there to be tried, between Philista Filkins, plaintiff, and Charity Beadle, defendant, in an action of slander, etc. The constable remarked, after reading this threatening legal epistle to me, that I had better "be up to time, as Squire Longbow was a man who would not be trifled with," and then leisurely folding it up, and pushing it deep down in his vest-pocket, he mounted his horse, and hurried away in pursuit of the balance of the panel. Of course, I could not think of being guilty of a contempt of court, after having been so solemnly warned of the consequences, and I was therefore promptly on the spot, according to command.

Squire Longbow held his court at the public house, in a room adjoining the bar-room, because the statute prohibited his holding it in the bar-room itself. He was a law-abiding man, and would not violate a statute. I found, on my arrival, that the whole country, for miles around, had assembled to hear this interesting case. Men, women, and children had turned out, and made a perfect holiday of it. All were attired in their best. The men were dressed in every kind of fashion, or, rather, all the fashions of the last twenty years were scattered through the crowd. Small-crown, steeple-crown, low-crown, wide-brim, and narrow-brim hats; wide-tail, stub-tail, and swallow-tail, high-collar, and low-collar coats; bagging and shrunken breeches; every size and shape of shirt-collar were there, all brought in by the settlers when they immigrated. The women had attempted to ape the fashions of the past. Some of them had mounted a "bustle" about the size of a bag of bran, and were waddling along under their load with great satisfaction. Some of the less ambitious were reduced to a mere bunch of calico. One man, I noticed, carried upon his head an old-fashioned, bell-crowned hat, with a half-inch brim, a shirt-collar running up tight under his ears, tight enough to lift him from the ground (this ran out in front of his face to a peak, serving as a kind of cutwater to his nose), a faded blue coat of the genuine swallow-tail breed, a pair of narrow-fall breeches that had passed so often through the wash-tub, and were so shrunken, that they appeared to have been strained on over his limbs: this individual, reader, was walking about, with his hands in his

pockets, perfectly satisfied, whistling Yankee Doodle, and other patriotic airs. Most of the women had something frizzled around their shoes, which were called pantalets, giving their extremities the appearance of the legs of so many bantam hens.

The men were amusing themselves pitching coppers and quoits, running horses, and betting upon the result of the trial to come off, as every one was expected to form some opinion of the merits of the case.

The landlord of the Eagle was of course very busy. He bustled about, here and there, making the necessary preparations. Several pigs and chickens had gone the way of all flesh, and were baking and stewing for the table. About once a quarter "Old Stub" "moistened his clay," as he called it, with a little "rye," so as to "keep his blood a-stirring." *Mrs.* "Stub Bulliphant" was busy too. *She* was a perfect whirlwind; her temper was made of tartaric acid. Her voice might be heard above the confusion around giving directions to one, and a "piece of her mind" to another. She *was* the landlady of the Eagle beyond all doubt, and no one else. Better die than doubt that.

"Bulliphant!" screamed she, at the top of her lungs, "Bulliphant, you great lout, you! what in the name of massy sakes are you about? No fire! no wood! no water in! How, in all created natur, do you s'pose a woman can get dinner? Furiation alive, why don't you speak? Sally Ann! I say, Sally *Ann*! come right here this minute! Go down cellar, and get a jug of butter, some milk, and then – I say, Sally Ann! – do you hear me, Sally Ann? –

go out to the barn and – run! run! you careless hussy, to the stove! the pot's boiling over!"

And so the old woman's tongue ran on hour after hour.

At a little past one, the court was convened. A board placed upon two barrels across the corner of the room, constituted the desk of Squire Longbow, behind which his honor's solitary dignity was caged. Pettifoggers and spectators sat outside. This was very proper, as Squire Longbow was a great man, and some mark of distinction was due. Permit me to describe him. He was a little, pot-bellied person, with a round face, bald head, swelled nose, and had only one eye, the remains of the other being concealed with a green shade. He carried a dignity about him that was really oppressive to by-standers. He was the "end of the law" in Puddleford; and no man could sustain a reputation who presumed to appeal from his decisions. He settled accounts, difficulties of all sorts, and even established land-titles; but of all things, he prided himself upon his knowledge of constitutional questions. The Squire always maintained that hard drinking was "agin" the Constitution of the United States, "and so," he said, "Judge Story once informed him by letter when he applied to him for aid in solving this question." "There is no such thing as slander," the Squire used to say, "and so he had always decided, as every person who lied about another, knew he ought not to be believed, because he *was* lying, and therefore the '*quar-animer*,' as the books say, is wanting." (This looked rather bad for "Filkins's" case.) Sometimes Squire Longbow rendered

judgments, sometimes decrees, and sometimes he divided the cause between both parties. The Squire said he "never could submit to the letter of the law; it was agin' personal liberty; and so Judge Story decided." "Pre-*ce*-dents", as they were called, he wouldn't mind, not even his own; because then there wouldn't be any room left for a man to change his mind. "If," said the Squire, "for instance, I fine Pet. Sykes to-day for knocking down Job Bluff, that is no reason why I should fine Job Bluff to-morrow for knocking down Pet. Sykes, because they are entirely different persons. Human natur' ain't the same." "Contempt of court," the Squire often declared, "was the worst of all offences. He didn't care so much about what might be said agin' Jonathan Longbow, but *Squire* Longbow, Justice of the Peace, must and should be protected;" and it was upon this principle that he fined Phil. Beardsley ten dollars for contradicting him in the street.

"Generally," the Squire says, "he renders judgment for the plaintiff," because he never issues a process without hearing his story, and determining the merits. "And don't the plaintiff know more about his rights than all the witnesses in the world?" "And even where he has a jury," the Squire says, "that it is his duty to apply the law to the facts, and the facts to the law, so that they may avoid any illegal verdict."

The court, as I said, was convened. The Squire took his seat, opened his docket, and lit his pipe. He then called the parties: —

"Philista Filkins!" "Charity Beadle!"

"Here," cried a backwoods pettifogger, "I'm for Philista

Filkins; am always on hand at the tap of the drum, like a thousand of brick."

This man was a character; a pure specimen of a live western pettifogger. He was called Ike Turtle. He was of the snapping-turtle breed. He wore a white wool-hat; a bandana cotton-handkerchief around his neck; a horse-blanket vest, with large horn-buttons; and corduroy pantaloons; and he carried a bull's-eye watch, from which swung four or five chains across his breast.

"Who answers for Charity Beadle?" continued the Squire.

"I answer for myself," squeaked out Charity; "I hain't got any counsel, 'cause he's on the jury."

"On the jury, ha! Your counsel's on the jury! Sile Bates, I suppose. Counsel is guaranteed by the Constitution – it's a personal right – let Sile act as your counsel, then."

And so Sile stepped out in the capacity of counsel.

"Charity Beadle!" exclaimed the Squire, drawing out his pipe and laying it on his desk, "stand up and raise your right hand!"

Charity arose.

"You are charged with slandering Philista Filkins, with saying, 'She warn't no better than she ought to be;' and if you were believed when you said so, it is my duty, as a peace-officer, to say to you that you have been guilty of a high offence, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul. What do you say?"

"Not guilty, Squire Longbow, by an eternal sight, and told the truth, if we are," replied Bates. "Besides, we plead a set-off."

"I say 'tis false! you are!" cried Philista, at the top of her lungs.

"Silence!" roared Longbow; "the dignity of this court shall be preserved."

"Easy, Squire, a little easy," grumbled a voice in the crowd, proceeding from one of Philista's friends; "never speak to a woman in a passion."

"I fine that man one dollar for contempt of court, *whoever* he is!" exclaimed the Squire, as he stood upon tiptoe, trying to catch the offender with his eye.

"I guess 'twarn't nothing but the wind," said Bates.

The Squire took his seat, put his pipe in his mouth, and blew out a long whiff of smoke.

"Order being restored, let the case now proceed," he exclaimed.

Ike opened his case to the jury. He said Philista Filkins was a maiden lady of about forty; some called her an *old* maid, but that warn't so, not by several years; her teeth were as sound as a nut, and her hair as black as a crow. She was a nurse, and had probably given more lobelia, pennyroyal, catnip, and other roots and herbs, to the people of Puddleford, than all the rest of the women in it. Of course she was a kind of *peramrulatory* being. (The Squire here informed the jury that *peramrulatory* was a legal word, which he would fully explain in his charge.) That is, she was obliged to be out a great deal, night and day, and in consequence thereof, Charity Beadle had slandered her, and completely ruined her reputation, and broken up her business to

the damage of ten dollars.

Bates told the court that he had "no jurisdiction in an action of slander."

Longbow advised Bates not to repeat the remark, as "that was a kind of contempt."

Some time had elapsed in settling preliminaries, and at last the cause was ready.

"We call Sonora Brown!" roared out Ike, at the top of his lungs.

"No, you don't," replied the Squire. "This court is adjourned for fifteen minutes; all who need refreshment will find it at the bar in the next room; but don't bring it in here; it might be agin' the statute."

And so the court adjourned for fifteen minutes.

There was a rush to the bar-room, and old Stub Bulliphant rolled around among his whiskey bottles like a ship in a storm. Almost every person drank some, judging from the remarks, "to wet their whistle;" others, "to keep their stomach easy;" some "to Filkins;" others, "to Beadle," etc., etc.

Court was at last convened again.

"Sonora Brown!" roared Ike again.

"Object!" exclaimed Sile; "no witness; hain't lived six months in the state."

Squire Longbow slowly drew his pipe from his mouth, and fixed his eyes on the floor in deep thought for several minutes.

"Hain't lived six months in the state," repeated he, at last; "ain't

no resident, of course, under our Constitution."

"And how, in all created airth, would you punish such a person for perjury? I should just like to know," continued Sile, taking courage from the Squire's perplexed state of mind; "our laws don't bind residents of other states."

"But it isn't certain Mrs. Brown will lie, because she is a non-resident," added the Squire, cheering up a little.

"Well, very well, then," said Sile, ramming both hands into his breeches-pocket very philosophically; "go ahead, if you wish, subject to my objection. I'll just appeal, and blow this court into fiddle-strings! This cause won't breathe three times in the circuit! We won't be rode over; we know our rights, I just kinder rather think."

"Go it, Sile!" cried a voice from the crowd; "stand up for your rights, if you bust!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Squire Longbow.

Ike had sat very quietly, inasmuch as the Squire had been leaning in his favor; but Sile's last remark somewhat intimidated his honor.

"May it please your honor," said Ike, rising, "we claim there is no proof of Mrs. Brown's residency; your honor hain't got nothing but Sile Bates's say so, and what's that good for in a court of justice? I wouldn't believe him as far as you could swing a cat by the tail."

"I'm with you on that," cried another voice.

"Silence! put that man out!" roared Longbow again.

But just as Ike was sitting down, an inkstand was hurled at him by Sile, which struck him on his shoulder, and scattered its contents over the crowd. Several missiles flew back and forth; the Squire leaped over his table, crying out at the top of his lungs, —

"In the name of the people of the State of — , I, Jonathan Longbow, Justice of the Peace, duly elected and qualified, do command you."

When, at last, order was restored, the counsel took their seats, and the Squire retired into his box again.

Sonora Brown was then called for the third time. She was an old lady, with a pinched-up black bonnet, a very wide ruffle to her cap, through which the gray hairs strayed. She sighed frequently and heavily. She said she didn't know as she knew "anything worth telling on." She didn't know "anything about lawsuits, and didn't know how to swear." After running on with a long preliminary about herself, growing warmer and warmer, the old lady came to the case under much excitement. She said "she never did see such works in all her born days. Just because Charity Beadle said 'Philista Filkins warn't no better than she ought to be,' there was *such* a hullabalu and kick-up, enough to set all natur crazy!"

"Why la! sus me!" continued she, turning round to the Squire, "do *you* think this such a dre'ful thing, that all the whole town has got to be set together by the ears about it? Mude-*ra*-tion! what a humdrum and flurry!"

And then the old lady stopped and took a pinch of snuff, and

pushed it up very hard and quick into her nose.

Ike requested Mrs. Brown not to talk so fast, and only answer such questions as he put to her.

"Well, now, that's nice," she continued. "Warn't I sworn, or was't you? and to tell the truth, too, and the *whole* truth. I warn't sworn to answer your questions. Why, maybe, you don't know, Mr. Pettifogger, that there are folks in state's prison *now* for lying in a court of justice?"

Squire Longbow interfered, and stated that "he must say that things were going on very 'promis'cusly,' quite agin the peace and dignity of the state."

"Just so I think myself," added Mrs. Brown. "This place is like a town-meeting, for all the world."

"Mrs. So-*no*-ra Brown!" exclaimed Ike, rising on his feet, a little enraged, "do you know anything about what Charity Beadle said about Philista Filkins? Answer *this* question."

"Whew! fiddle-de-dee! highty-tighty! so you have really broke loose, Mr. Pettifogger," for now the old lady's temper *was* up. "Why, didn't you know I was old enough to be your grandmother? Why, my boy," continued she, hurrying on her spectacles, and taking a long look at Ike, "I know'd your mother when she made cakes and pies down in the *Jarseys*; and *you* when you warn't more than *so* high;" and she measured about two feet high from the floor. "You want me to *answer*, do you? I told you all I know'd about it; and if you want anything more, I guess you'll have to get it, that's all;" and, jumping up, she left the witness-

stand, and disappeared in the crowd.

"I demand an attachment for Sonora Brown!" roared out Ike, "an absconding witness!"

"Can't do it," replied the Squire; "it's agin the Constitution to deprive anybody of their liberty an unreasonable length of time. This witness has been confined here by process of law morn-a-nour. Can't do it! Be guilty of trespass! Must stick to the Constitution. Call your next witness."

Ike swore. The Squire fined him one dollar. He swore again. The Squire fined him another. The faster the Squire fined, the faster the oaths rolled out of Ike's mouth, until the Squire had entered ten dollars against him. Ike swore again, and the Squire was about to record the *eleventh* dollar, but Ike checked him.

"Hold on! hold on! you *old reprobate*! now I've got you! now you are mine!" exclaimed he. "You are up to the limit of the law! You cannot inflict only ten dollars in fines in any one case! Now stand and take it!"

And such a volley of oaths, cant phrases, humor, wrath, sarcasm, and fun, sometimes addressed to the Squire, sometimes to the audience, and sometimes to his client, never rolled out of any other man's mouth since the flood. He commenced with the history of the Squire, when, as he said, "he was *a* rafting lumber down on the *Susquehanna*;" and he followed him up from that time. "He *could* tell the reason why he came west, but wouldn't." He commented on his personal appearance, and his capacity for the office of justice. He told him "he hadn't only one eye, any

way, and he couldn't be expected to see a great way into a millstone; and he didn't believe he had as many brains as an 'ister. For his part, *he* knew the law; he had ransacked every part of the statute, as a glutton would Noah's Ark for the remnant of an eel; he had digested it from Dan to Beersheba; swallowed everything but the title-page and cover, and would have swallowed that if he warn't mortal; he was a living, moving law himself; when he said 'law *was* law, 'twas law;' better 'peal anything up from predestination than from his opinion! he would follow this case to the backside of sundown for his rights!"

During all this time there was a complete uproar. Philista's friends cheered and hurrahed; the dogs in the room set up their barking; Beadle's friends groaned, and squealed, and bellowed, and whimpered, and imitated all the domestic animals of the day, while the Squire was trying at the top of his lungs to compel the constable to commit Ike for contempt.

Ike closed and sat down. The Squire called for the constable, but he was not to be found. One man told him that "he was in the next room pitching coppers;" another, that the last time he saw him "he was running very fast;" another, that "he rather guessed he'd be back some time another, if he ever was, because he was a sworn officer;" another asked the Squire "what he'd give to have him *caught*?" but no constable appeared; he had put himself out the way to escape the storm.

A long silence followed this outburst; not a word was said, and scarcely a noise heard. Every one was eagerly looking at the

Squire for his next movement. Ike kept his eyes on the floor, apparently in a deep study. At last he arose.

"Squire," said he, "we've been under something of a press of steam for the last half 'our; I move we adjourn fifteen minutes for a drink."

"Done," answered the Squire; and so the court adjourned for a second time.

It was now nearly dark, when the court convened again. The trial of the cause, *Filkins vs. Beadle*, was resumed.

Seth Bolles was called. Seth was a broad-backed, double-fisted fellow, with a blazing red face, and he chewed tobacco continually. He was about two thirds "over the bay," and didn't care for all the *Filkinses* or *Beadles* in the world.

"Know *Filkins* and *Beadle*?" inquired Ike.

"Know 'em? thunder, yes."

"How long?"

"Ever sin' the year one."

"Ever heard *Beadle* say anything about *Filkins*?"

"Heard her say she thought she run'd too much arter *Elik Timberlake*."

"Anything, Seth, about *Filkins*' character?"

"Now what do you 'spose I know about *Filkins*' character? Much as I can do to look arter my own wimmin."

"But have you heard *Beadle* say anything about *Filkins*' character?"

"Heard her say once she was a good enough-er-sort-a body

when she was a-mind-er-be."

"Anything else?"

"Shan't answer; hain't had my regular fees paid as witness."

Squire Longbow informed Seth that he must answer.

"Shan't do it, not so long as my name is Bolles."

The Squire said he would commit him.

"W-h-e-w!" drawled out Bolles, stooping down, and putting his arms a-kimbo, as he gave the Squire a long look straight in the eye.

"Order! order!" exclaimed the Squire.

"Whew! whew! whew *uo-uo-uo!* who's afraid of a justice of the peace?" screamed Seth, jumping up about a foot, and squirting out a gill of tobacco-juice, as he struck the floor.

Seth's fees were paid him, at last, and the question was again put, if he heard "Beadle say anything else?" and he said "*he never did;*" and thus ended Seth's testimony.

Miss Eunice Grimes was next called. She came sailing forward, and threw herself into the chair with a kind of jerk. She took a few sidelong glances at Charity Beadle, which told, plainly enough, that she meant to make a finish of her in about five minutes. She was a vinegar-faced old maid, and her head kept bobbing, and her body kept hitching, and now she pulled her bonnet this way, and now that. She finally went out of the fretting into the languishing mood, and declared she "*should* die if somebody didn't get her a glass of water."

When she became composed, Ike inquired if "she knew

Charity Beadle?"

"Yes! I know her to be an orful critter!"

"What has she done?"

"What hain't she? She's lied about me, and about Elder Dobbin's folks, and said how that when the singing-master boarded at our house, she seed lights in the sitting-room till past three – the orful critter!"

"But what have you heard her say about Philista Filkins?"

"O! everything that's bad. She don't never say anything that's good 'bout nobody. She's allers talking. There ain't nobody in the settlement she hain't slandered. She even abused old Deacon Snipes' horse – the orful critter!"

"But what did she say about *Philista Filkins*?" repeated Ike again.

"What do you want me to say she said? I hain't got any doubt she's called her everything she could think on. Didn't she, Philisty?" she continued, turning her head towards the plaintiff.

Philista nodded.

"Did she say she warn't no better than she ought to be?"

"Did she? well, she did, and that very few people were."

"Stop! stop!" exclaimed Ike, "you talk too fast! I guess she didn't say *all* that."

"She did, for Philista told me so; and she wouldn't lie for the whole race of Beadles."

Squire Longbow thought Eunice had better retire, as she didn't seem to know much about the case.

She said she knew as much about it as anybody; she want "going to be abused, trod upon; and no man was a man that would insult a poor woman;" and bursting into tears of rage, she twitched out of her chair, and went sobbing away.

Philista closed, and Sile stated, in his opening to the court on the part of the defence, that this was a "*little* the smallest case he ever *had* seen." His client stood out high and dry; she stood up like Andes looking down on a potato-hill; he didn't propose to offer scarcely any proof; and that little was by way of set-off – tongue against tongue – according to the statute in such case made and provided; he hoped the court would examine the law for himself. (Here Sile unrolled a long account against Philista, measuring some three feet, and held it up to the Squire and jury.) This, he said, was a reg'lar statement of the slanderous words used by Philista Filkins agin Charity Beadle for the last three years, with the damage annexed; everything had been itemized, and kept in tip-top style; all in black and white, just as it happened. Sile was about reading this formidable instrument, when Ike objected.

"That can't be *did* in this 'ere court!" exclaimed Ike; "the light of civilization has shed itself a little *too* thick for *that*. This court might just as well try to swallow a chestnut-burr, or a cat, tail foremost, as to get such a proposition a-down its throat."

Squire Longbow said he'd "never heer'd of such law – yet the question was new to him."

"Laid down in all the law-books of the nineteenth century!"

exclaimed Sile, "and never heard on't!"

"Never did."

"Why," continued Sile, "the statute allows set-off where it is of the same natur of the action. This, you see, is slander agin slander."

"True," replied the Squire.

"True, did you say!" exclaimed Ike. "*You* say the statute *does* allow slander to be set off; *our* statute – that statute that I learned by heart before I knew my A B C's – you old bass-wood headed son – " But the Squire stopped Ike just at this time. "We will decide the question first," he said. "The court have made no decision yet."

Squire Longbow was in trouble. He smoked furiously. He examined the statutes, looked over his docket, but he did not seem to get any light. Finally, a lucky thought struck him. He saw old Mr. Brown in the crowd, who had the reputation of having once been a justice in the State of New York. The Squire arose and beckoned to him, and both retired to an adjoining room. After about a half an hour, the Squire returned and took his seat, and delivered his opinion. Here it is: —

"After an examination of all the p'int's both for and agin the 'lowing of the set-off, in which the court didn't leave no stone unturned to get at justice, having ransacked some half a dozen books from eend to eend, and noted down everything that anywise bore on the subject; recollecting, as the court well doz, what the great Story, who's now dead and gone, done and writ

'bout this very thing (for we must be 'lowed to inform this 'sembly that we read Story in our juvenil' years); having done this, and refreshing *our* minds with the testimony, and keeping in our eye the rights of parties – right-er liberty, and right-er speech, back'ards and for'ards – for I've as good a right to talk agin you, as you have to talk agin me – knowing, as the court doz, how much blood has been shed 'cause folks wern't 'lowed to talk as much as they pleased, making all natur groan, the court is of the opinion that the set-off must be let in; and such is also Squire Brown's opinion, and nobody will contradict that, *I know*."

"Je-hos-a-phat!" groaned out Ike, drawing one of his very longest breaths. "The *great* Je-mi-ma Wilkinson! and so that *is* law, arter all! There's my hat, Squire," Ike continued, as he arose and reached it out to him; "and you shall have my *gallusses* as soon as I can get at 'em."

The Squire said "the dignity of the court must be preserved."
"Of course it must! of course it must!" replied Ike, who was growing very philosophical over the opinion of the Squire; "there ain't no friction on my gudgeons *now*; I always gins in to reg'lar opinions, delivered upon consideration; I was just thinking, though, Squire, that as their bill is so much the longest, and as the parties are both here, Charity had better let her tongue loose upon my client, and take out the balance on the spot."

The Squire said "the cause must go on." Sile read his set-off, made up of slanderous words alleged to have been used; damages fifty dollars; and calling Charity herself, upon the principle, as he

said, "that it was a book-account, and her books were evidence; and her books having been lost, the paper which he held, and which was a true copy —*for he made it out himself*— was the next best evidence; all of which Charity would swear to straight along."

The court admitted Charity, and she swore the set-off through, and some fifty dollars more; and she was going on horse-race speed, when Sile stopped her "before," as he told her, "she swore the cause beyond the jurisdiction of a magistrate."

Here the evidence closed. Midnight had set in, and the cause was yet to be summed up.

The court informed Ike and Sile that they were limited to half an hour each.

Ike opened the argument, and *such* an opening, and *such* an argument! It will not be expected that I can repeat it. There never lived a man who could. It covered all things mortal and immortal. Genius, and sense, and nonsense; wit, humor, pathos, venom, and vulgarity, were all piled up together, and belched forth upon the jury. He talked about the case, the court, the jury, his client, the history of the world, and Puddleford in particular. "The slander was admitted," he declared, "because the defendant had tried to set off something *agin* it; and if his client didn't get a judgment, he'd make a rattling among the dry bones of the law, that would rouse the dead of '76!" He was "fifty feet front, and rear to the river;" "had seen great changes en the t'restial globe;" "know'd all the sciences from Neb-u-cud-nezzar down;" "know'd law –

'twas the milk of his existence." As to the court's opinion about the set-off, "his head was chock full of cobwebs or bumble-bees, he didn't know which;" "his judgment warn't hardly safe on a common note er-hand;" "he'd no doubt but that three jist such cases would run him stark mad;" "Natur was sorry she'd ever had anything to do with him; and he'd himself been sorry ever since; and as for ed'cation, he warn't up to the school-marm, for she *could* read;" "the jury had better give him a verdict if they didn't want the nightmare." And thus he was running on, when his half hour expired, but he could not be stopped – as well stop a tornado. So Sile arose, and commenced his argument for the defendant; and at it both labored, Ike for plaintiff, Sile for defendant, until the court swore a constable, and ordered the jury to retire with him, the argument still going on; and thus the jury left the room, Ike and Sile following them up, laying down the law and the fact; and the last thing I observed just before the door closed, was Ike's arm run through it at us, going through a variety of gestures, his expiring effort in behalf of his client.

After a long deliberation among the jurors, during which almost everything was discussed but the evidence, it was announced by our foreman, on "coming in," that "we could not agree, four on 'em being for fifty dollars for the defendant 'cording to law, and one on 'em for no cause of action (myself), and he stood out, 'cause he was a-feared, or wanted to be pop'lar with somebody."

And thus ended the trial between Filkins and Beadle.

CHAPTER III

Wanderings in the Wilderness. – A Bee-Hunt. – Sunrise. – The Fox-Squirrel. – The Blue-Jay. – The Gopher. – The Partridges. – Wild Geese, Ducks, and Cranes. – Blackbirds and Meadow-Larks. – Venison's Account of the Bees' Domestic Economy. – How Venison found what he was in Search of. – Honey Secured. – After Reflections.

Venison Styles and myself, as I have stated, had now become intimate. Together we scoured the woods and streams, in pursuit of fish and game. There was a kind of rustic poetry about the old man that fascinated my soul. His thoughts and feelings had been drawn from nature, and there was a strange freshness and life about everything he said and did. He was as firm and fiery as a flint; and the sparks struck out of him were as beautiful. Winds and storms, morn's early dawn, the hush of evening, the seasons and all their changes, had become a part of him – they had moulded and kept him. They played upon him like a breeze upon a harp. How could I help loving him?

Before daybreak, one morning in October, Venison, myself, his honey-box, and axes, set out "a bee-hunting," as he called it. It was in the beautiful and inspiring season of Indian summer, a season that lingers long and lovely over the forests of the west. There had been a hard, black frost during the night, and the great

red sun rose upon it, shrouded in smoke. We were soon deep in the heart of the wilderness, tramping over the fallen leaves, and pushing forward to where the "bees were thick a-workin'," according to Venison.

As the sun rose higher and higher, the leaves began, all around, to thaw, and detach themselves from the trees, and silently settle to the ground. There stood the yellow walnut, the blood-red maple, side by side with the green pine and the spruce. Ten thousand rainbows were interlaced through the tops of the trees, and now and then a sharp peak shot up its pile of mosaic into the sky.

Not a sound was heard around us till morning's dawn. The tranquillity was oppressive. The mighty wilderness was asleep. Everything felt as fixed and awful as eternity. The vast extent of the wooded waste, reaching thousands of miles beyond, on, and on, and *on*, filled with mountains, lakes, and streams, lying in solitary grandeur, as unchanged as on the day the Pyramids were finished, overwhelmed the imagination. And then the future arose upon the mind, when all this will be busy with life – when the present will be history, referred to, but not remembered – when the present population of the globe will have been swept from the face of it, and another generation in our place, playing with the toys that so long amused, and which we, at last, left behind us.

But as day dawned, and morning began to throw in her arrows of gold about our feet, the wilderness began to wake up. A fox-

squirrel shot out from his bed in a hollow tree, where he had been lodging during the night; and scampering up a tall maple, he sat himself down, threw his tail over his back, and broke forth with his *chick-chick-chickaree, chickaree, chickaree!* – making the woods ring with his song.

"Look at him," exclaimed Venison; "he's as sassy as ever. If I had my rifle, I'd knock the spots off that check coat of his'n; I'd larn him to chickaree old Venison."

This squirrel, very common in some of the north-western states, is one of the largest and most beautiful of its species. He is dressed in a suit of light-brown check, and may be seen, in warm, sunny days, cantering over the ground, or running through the tree-tops. He is a very careful and a very busy body. I have often watched him, as he sat bolt upright in a hickory, eating nuts, and throwing the shucks on the ground, with all the gravity of a judge. During the fall, he hoards up large quantities of stores. He hulls his beech-nuts, selects the fairest walnuts, picks up, here and there, a few chestnuts, and packs everything away in his castle with the utmost care; and, as Venison says, "the choppers in the winter have stolen bushels on 'em!"

While our squirrel was singing his morning psalm, a crow, just out of his bed, went sailing along above us, with his "caw! caw!" and settled on a tree nearby. "Caw! caw!" he screamed again, looking down curiously at the squirrel, as much as to say, "Who cares for *your* music!" Then out hurried another squirrel, and another, breaking forth with joy, until the crow, fairly drowned

out, spread his wings and soared away. Venison says, "Them crows can smell gunpowder, and that fellow know'd we hadn't any, when he lit so near us."

A blue-jay then commenced a loud call from a distant part of the forest. He is one of the birds that lingers behind, and braves the blasts of winter. He was flitting about in a tree-top, and had just commenced his day's work. How gaudily Nature has dressed this bird! How he shines, during spring and summer! All the shades, and touches, and tinges of blue flow over his gaudy mantle; and how orderly and lavishly they are strown over him. But the blue-jay is a dissolute kind of a fellow, after all – "neither more nor less than a thief," Venison says. His shadowy dress fades with the leaf, and after strutting about during the warmer months, making a great display of his finery, he "runs down," at last, into a confirmed loafer. Groups of them may be seen in the winter, drudging around among the withered bushes, and scolding like so many shrews.

Then out popped the little *gopher*, that finished piece of stripe and check, that miner, who digs deep in the ground. He, too, had left his mansion, and come to greet the morn. A troop of quail marched along, headed by their chief. Who does not love the quail? She is associated with early childhood and household memories. Her voice rings through the past. We heard it sounding over our better years. What a rich brown suit she wears, cut round with Quaker simplicity! what taste and neatness about it! It was she that long ago went forth with the reapers, and

piped for them her sunrise psalm, "*More wet! More wet!*" and she will stay here with us during the winter, and traverse, with her caravan, all day, the desert wastes of snow. Venison says he "don't never kill a quail – it ain't right – but he don't know why."

The partridges, all around, commenced rolling their drums, and every little while, one would whirr past our heads, and die away in the distance. The whole wood-pecker family began *their* labor. He who wears a red velvet cap, silk shawl, and white underclothes, was boring away in a rotten tree, to find his breakfast; and he kept hitching around, and hammering, without regarding or caring for our presence. The rabbit, with ears erect, sat drawn up in a heap, quivering with fear, as he gazed upon us.

At last we reached the bank of the river, and Venison said, "We had better sit down, and take our reck'ning." Here was one of the most beautiful pictures of still life ever painted by Nature. The river wound away like a silver serpent, until it was lost in a bank of Indian summer haze, and it gurgled and dashed through the aisles of the forest, like a dream through the silent realms of sleep. It lay, half sunshine, half shadow, and the shadow was slowly creeping up a tall cliff on the opposite shore, as the day advanced, counting, as it were, the moments as they passed. Afar down it, I was amused as I watched a flock of wild geese. They were about a hundred in number, sleeping upon the water, in a glassy cove, their heads neatly tucked under their wings. An old gander, who had been appointed sentinel, to keep watch and guard, was doing the best he could to perform his duty. He stood

upon one leg, and he grew so drowsy, several times, that he nearly toppled over, to his great consternation, and the danger of his charge. But rousing up, and taking two or three pompous strides, and stretching his neck to its utmost, with a very wise look, he satisfied himself that all was right, and that he was not so bad a sentinel, after all.

Near by this sleeping community, where a ripple played over a cluster of rocks, a flock of ducks were performing their ablutions. Now they were diving, now combing out their feathers, now rising and flapping their wings, now playing with each other, when the leader blowing a blast on his trumpet, they rose gracefully from their bath, and forming themselves into a *drag*, went winnowing up the river to their haunts far away.

A sand-hill crane, hoisted up on his legs of stilts, his clothes gathered up, and pinned behind him, was leisurely wading about, spearing fish for his breakfast. A dozy, stupid-looking kingfisher sat upon a blasted limb just over him, looking as grave as a country justice engaged in the same business. A bald eagle came rushing down the stream like an air-ship, his great wings slowly heaving up and down, as if he had set out upon an all-day's journey. A muskrat ferried himself over from one side to the other, urgent upon business best known to himself. A prairie-wolf came down to the water's edge, gave a bark or two, and taking a drink, turned back the way he came.

How many birds had left the wilderness for other climes! The blackbirds, those saucy gabblers, who spent the summer here,

feeding upon wild rice, departed a month ago. I saw their bustle and preparation. They were days and days getting ready for their journey. The whole country around was alive with their noise. They sang, and fretted. They seemed to be out of all kind of patience with everybody and everything – to have a kind of spite against Nature for driving them off. All the trees about the marshes were loaded, and some were singing, some complaining, some scolding; but having finally completed their arrangements, all of a sudden they left. And the meadow-lark, that came so early with her spring song – she who used to sit upon the waving grass, and heave herself to and fro, in so ecstatic and polite a manner, as her melody rose and fell – she, too, is gone.

But about *hunting bees*. Venison informed me that here was the spot where he should "try 'em – that he didn't know nothin' about his luck;" that "bees were the knowingest critters alive" – that they lived in "the holler trees, all around us." He said "they had queens to govern 'em" – that they had "workers and drones" – that "everything about 'em was done just so, and if any of 'em broke the laws, they just killed 'em, and pitched 'em overboard." This, he said, he had "seed himself; he had seed a reg'lar bee funeral." He "seed, once, four bees tugging at a dead body, drawing it on the back, when they throw'd it out of the hive, and covered it over with dirt." And then they have "wars," he says, and "gin'rals," and "captins," and "sogers," and "go out a-fightin', and a-stealin' honey;" they are very "knowin' critters, and there is no tellin' nothin' about 'em."

Venison took the little box he had brought with him, which was filled with honey, and, opening its lid, placed it on a stump. He then rambled around the woods until he found a lingering flower that had escaped the frost, with a honey-bee upon it. This he picked, bee and all, and placed on the honey. Soon the bee began to work and load himself; and finally he rose in circles, winding high in the air, and suddenly turning a right angle, he shot out of sight.

"Where has he gone?" inquired I.

"Gone hum where he lives," answered Venison, "to unload his thighs and tell the news."

In a few moments, three bees returned, filled themselves, and departed; then six; then a dozen, until a black line was formed, along which they were rushing both ways, empty and laden, one *end* of which was lost in the forest.

Venison and myself then started on a trot, with our eyes upward, to follow this living line; and after having proceeded a quarter of a mile it became so confused and scattered that we gave it up, and returned.

"What now?" I inquired.

"I'll have 'em! I'll have 'em!" he replied. "They can't cheat old Venison. I've hunted the critters mor-nor forty years, and I allers takes 'em when I tries. I'll draw a couple of more sights on 'em."

Venison took two pieces more of honey, and placed one on each side of his box. The bees followed him and commenced their work. Very soon, instead of one, he had three lines

established, his line of honey forming the base of a triangle, while the bees were all rushing to its point, on each side of this triangle, and through its middle.

This, of course, was a demonstration. Venison and myself followed up again, and, sure enough, we "had 'em," as he predicted. There they were, roaring in the top of a great oak, like thunder, coming in and going out, wheeling up and down through the air as though some great celebration was going on. It seemed that the whole hive of workers must have broken forth to capture and carry away Venison's honey-box.

"Will they sting?" inquired I.

"Some folks say they will," he replied. "If they hate a man they'll follow him a mile; and nobody knows who they hate and who they don't, until they're tried."

"Where's the honey?" I inquired again.

"Well, that's the next thing I'm arter;" and Venison put his ear to the trunk of the tree to ascertain in what part of it they were "a-workin'." He listened a while, but "they warn't low down, he know'd, for he didn't hear 'em hummin'." He thought the honey was "out the way, high up somewhere." So at the tree he went with his axe, and in half an hour the old oak – older, probably, than any man on the globe – came down with a crash that roused up all the echoes of the wilderness.

Upon an examination, the honey was, probably, Venison thought, packed away in a hollow of the tree, about fifty feet from the ground, as a large knot-hole was discerned, out of which the

bees were streaming in great consternation. So he severed the trunk again, at the bottom of the hollow, and there it was, great flakes piled one upon another, some of which had been broken by the fall of the tree, and were dripping and oozing out their wild richness.

"That's the raal stuff," exclaimed Venison; "something 'sides bees-bread."

Venison had brought nothing with him to hold his honey, and I was a little curious to know how he would manage. He cut the tree again above the knot. During his labor the bees had settled all over him. His hands, face, and hair were filled, besides a circle of them that were angrily wheeling about his head. But he heeded them not, except by an occasional shake, which was significant of pity rather than rage.

"Now," said Venison, when his work was finished, the tree cut, the knot-hole stopped, and the whole turned upside down, "that's what I call a nat'ral bee-hive, and we'll just stuff in a little dry grass on the top, and then I'll be ready to move."

"Move!" I exclaimed, "move! You don't expect *ue* will carry home a *tree*, do you?"

"Two or three on 'em, I s'pect. Venison allers gets as much as that."

Venison was right. Before noon, half a dozen hives were captured and ready for removal. I confess, after the excitement was over, that I began to grow quite serious over my forenoon's labor. I sat down to rest myself, and the very solemnity of

the wilderness produced a sober train of thought. A south-west breeze sprang up loaded with the dying breath of the fall-flowers. It was blowing down the leaves around me, and piling them up in gorgeous drifts. Like an undertaker around the remains of the dead, it was quietly tearing down the drapery, and preparing the year for its burial. A haze overspread everything, and the distance was mellow, the objects indistinct, and the whole landscape seemed swimming, as we sometimes see it in a dream. The trees were covered with haze; and a canoe, on its way down, appeared to be hung up in the air; the birds were hazy; and, looking about me, I appeared to be sitting in a great tent of haze. The squirrels were clattering through the trees, and throwing down the nuts; the partridges were drumming; the rabbits rustling through the dry leaves; the water-fowl hurrying through the air; and the crickets, those melancholy musicians, were piping a low, dirge-like strain to the golden hours of autumn as they passed away.

I thought I could hear the great heart of Nature beat with measured and palpitating strokes; could feel the pendulum of Time swinging back and forth.

But I said I was rather sober. There stood our six bee-hives, and clinging to each in large clusters were its inhabitants, who had been driven forth by us to brave a pitiless winter. We had destroyed six cities, and banished their people; six cities, six governments of law and order. Cities laid out in lanes, and streets, and squares; cities of dwelling-houses and castles; cities filled with all sorts of people; all castes in society. There were

the queen and her palace; the drones and their castles; and the serf, or day-laborer, and his hut; and there, sitting upon her throne, the sovereign swayed as mighty a sceptre, tyrannized over as great a people, in her opinion, as any human despot. She undoubtedly bustled about, talked large, swelled up herself with her importance, boasted of her blood, of her divine right to rule (certainly divine in her case), just as all earthly princes do. There she projected plans of war, marshalled her forces, and stimulated their courage with inflammatory appeals. She talked about her house as the royal line, as the French used to about the Bourbons. And then a lazy aristocracy had been broken up by us; we had turned hundreds of drones adrift, and according to the modern definition, drones must be aristocrats; that is, they did no work, and lived upon the labor of others. They were, in all probability, just like all other aristocratic drones. They lounged about the hive in each other's company; had an occasional uproar at each other's table; turned out to take the morning air, and slept after dinner. They probably advised in all matters of public policy, and cried every day, "Long live the Queen." I did not care much about the drones, however. But we had turned the poor day-laborer out of doors; he who rose with the sun, and went forth to work while the dew was yet tying on the flowers. We had humbled the pride of six cities, and brought it to the dust. Is it strange that I felt sober?

But Venison broke my musing by informing me that it was "about time to cakalate a little about getting our honey home, and he guessed he'd go and rig up a raft, and float the cargo down."

And soon a raft was constructed of flood-wood, and bound together with green withes, the honey rolled aboard, two long poles prepared to be used to guide the craft, and away we glided, followed by a long train of bees, who had been despoiled, and who streamed along after us, until the shadows of evening arrested their flight, and parted them and their treasure forever.

CHAPTER IV

The Log-Chapel. – Father Beals. – Aunt Graves. – Sister Abigail. – Bigelow Van Slyck, the Preacher. – His Entrée. – How he worked. – One of his Sermons. – Performance of the Choir. – "Coronation" achieved. – Getting into Position. – Personal Appeals. – Effect on the Congregation. – Sabbath in the Wilderness. – Is Bigelow the only Ridiculous Preacher?

Puddleford was not altogether a wilderness, although it was located near a wilderness. It was located just on the outskirts of civilization, and, like Venison Styles, it caught a reflection of civilized life from the east, and of savage life from the west. It was an organized township, and was a part of an organized county. There were hundreds and thousands of men who were busy at work all over this county, cutting down the trees and breaking up the soil. Law and religion had found their way among them, just as they always accompany the American pioneer. It could not be otherwise; because these obligations grow up and weave themselves into the very nature of the people of our republic. They are written on the soul. So that judicial circuits, a court-house and jail, Methodist circuits and circuit-riders, and meeting-houses, were established. All this was rough, like the country itself.

Few persons have ever attempted to define the piety of just

such a community as this; and yet it has a form, tone, and character peculiarly its own. The portraits of the Puddlefordians were just as clearly reproduced in their religion, as if they had been drawn by sunlight.

The "log-chapel," as it was called at Puddleford, was filled each week, with one or two hundred rough, hard-featured, unlearned men and women, who had come in from all parts of the country; some for devotional exercises, some for amusement; some to look, and some to be looked at. This congregation shifted faces each week, like the colors in a kaleidoscope. It was never the same. The man in the pulpit must have felt as though he were preaching to a running river, whose parts were continually changing. Yet there was a church at Puddleford, in the strict sense of the word; it was organized, and had, at the time I refer to, ten regular members in good standing; all the rest was "floating capital," that drifted in from Sunday to Sunday, and swelled the "church proper."

There was "Father Beals," and old "Aunt Graves," and "Sister Abigail," who were regular attendants at all times and seasons. They were, beyond all doubt, the pillars of the Puddleford church. Father Beals was *the* church, before any building for worship was erected. He was looked upon as a living, moving, spiritual body; a Methodist organization in himself; and wherever he went to worship on the Sabbath, whether in a private house, a barn, or in the forest, all the followers of that order were found with him, drawn there by a kind of magnetism. The old man had

been one of the faithful from a boy; had carried his principles about him from day to day; was indeed a light in the world; and he was, by some plan of Providence, flung far back into the wilderness, all burning, to kindle up and set on fire those about him. His influence had built the log-chapel, and, like a regulator in a watch, he kept it steady, pushing this wheel a little faster, and checking that. Sometimes he had to command, sometimes entreat, sometimes threaten, sometimes soothe.

"Father Beals" was a good man; and no higher compliment can be paid to any person. His head was very large, bald, and his hair was white. There was an expression of great benevolence in his face, and a cold calmness in his blue eye that never failed to command respect. He used to sit, on Sundays, just under the pulpit, with a red cotton handkerchief thrown over him, while his wide-brimmed hat, that he wore into the country, stood in front, on a table, and really seemed to listen to the sermon.

"Aunt Graves" was a very useful body in her way, and the Puddleford church could not have spared her any more than "Father Beals." She was an old maid, and had been a member of the log-chapel from its beginning. She was one of those sincere souls that really believed that there was but one church in the world, and that was her own. She felt a kind of horror when she read of other denominations having an actual existence, and wondered "what kind of judgment would fall upon them." She didn't know very much about the Bible, but she knew a great deal about religion; she knew all about her own duty, and quite a good

deal about the duty of her neighbors.

Now "Aunt Graves" was useful in many ways. She kept, in the first place, a kind of spiritual thermometer, that always denoted the range of every member's piety except her own. Every slip of the tongue; every uncharitable remark; every piece of indiscretion, by word or deed; all acts of omission, as well as of commission, were carefully registered by her, and could at any time be examined and corrected by the church. This was convenient and useful. Then, she was a choice piece of melody; there was not another voice like hers in the settlement. It had evidently been pitched "from the beginning" for the occasion. It possessed great power, was quite shaky (a modern refinement in music), and could be heard from a half to three quarters of a mile. She has been known to sweep away on a high note, and actually take the Puddleford choir off their feet. She rode through the staff of music headlong, like a circus-rider around the ring; and could jump three or four notes at any time, without lessening her speed, or breaking the harmony. She would take any piece of sacred music by storm, on the very shortest notice. In fact, she was *the* treble, aided by a few others who had received their instruction from her; and she was just as indispensable to worship, she thought, as a prayer or a sermon.

"Aunt Graves" always made it her business to "keep a sharp lookout" after the morals of the preacher. "Men are but men," she used to say, "and preachers are but men; and they need some person to give 'em a hunch once in a while." Sometimes she

would lecture him of the log-chapel for hours upon evidences of piety, acts of immorality, the importance of circumspection, the great danger that surrounded him – her tongue buzzing all the while like a mill-wheel, propelled as it was by so much zeal. She said it almost made her "crazy to keep the Puddleford church right side up; for it *did* seem as though she had everything on her shoulders; and she *really* believed it would have gone to smash long ago, if it hadn't been for her."

Now, "Sister Abigail" wasn't anybody in particular – that is, she was not exactly a free agent. She was "Aunt Graves's" shadow – a reflection of her; a kind of person that said what "Aunt Graves" said, and did what she did, and knew what she knew, and got angry when she did, and over it when she did. She was a kind of dial that "Aunt Graves" shone upon, and any one could tell what time of day it was with "Aunt Graves," by looking at "Sister Abigail."

Besides these lights in the church, there were about (as I have said) ten or a dozen members, and a congregation weekly of one or two hundred.

But I must not pass over the preacher himself. I only speak of one, although many filled the pulpit of the Puddleford church during my acquaintance with it. Bigelow Van Slyck was at one time a circuit-rider on the Puddleford circuit; and I must be permitted to say, he was the most important character that had filled that station prior to the time to which I have reference. He was half Yankee, half Dutch; an ingenious cross, effected

somewhere down in the State of Pennsylvania. He was not yet a full-blown preacher, but an exhorter merely. He was active, industrious, zealous, and one would have thought he had more duty on his hands than the head of the nation. His circuit reached miles and miles every way. He was here to-day, there to-morrow, and somewhere else next day; and he ate and slept where he could.

Bigelow's appointments were all given out weeks in advance. These appointments must be fulfilled; and he was so continually pressed, that one would have thought the furies were ever chasing him.

I have often seen him rushing into the settlement after a hard day's ride. He wore a white hat with a wide brim, a Kentucky-jean coat, corduroy vest and breeches, a heavy pair of clouded-blue yarn stockings, and stogy boots. He rode a racking Indian pony, who wore a shaggy mane and tail. Bigelow usually made his appearance in Puddleford just as the long shadows of a Saturday evening were pointing over the landscape. The pony came clattering in at the top of his speed, panting and blowing, as full of business and zeal as his master, while Bigelow's extended legs and fluttering bandana kept time to the movement. The women ran to the doors, the children paused in the midst of their frolic, as his pony stirred up the echoes around their ears; and it is said that the chickens and turkeys, who had often witnessed the death of one of their number when this phantom appeared, set up a most dismal hue-and-cry, and took to their wings in the

greatest consternation.

We hope that none of our readers will form an unfavorable opinion of Bigelow, after having read our description of him. He was the man of all others to fill the station he occupied. He was as much a part of, and as necessary to, the wilderness he inhabited, as the oak itself. He belonged to the locality. He was one of a gallery of portraits that nature and circumstances had hung up in the forest for a useful purpose, just as Squire Longbow was another. The one managed the church, the other the courts; and all this was done in reference to society as it was, not what it ought to be, or might be. There was a kind of elasticity about Bigelow's theology, as there was about the Squire's law, that let all perplexing technicalities pass along without producing any friction. They were graduated upon the sliding-scale principle, and were never exactly the same.

Bigelow was a host in theology in his way. He could reconcile at once any and every point that could be raised. He never admitted a doubt to enter into his exhortations, but he informed his hearers at once just how the matter stood. He professed to be able to demonstrate any theological question at once, to the satisfaction of any reasonable mind; and it was all folly to labor with the unreasonable, he said, for they would "fight agin the truth as long as they could, any way."

I used occasionally to hear him exhort, and he was in every respect an off-hand preacher. He worked like a blacksmith at the forge. Coat, vest, and handkerchief, one after the other, flew off

as he became more and more heated in his discourse. At one time he thundered down the terrors of the law upon the heads of his hearers; at another he persuaded; and suddenly he would take a facetious turn, and accompany the truth with a story about his grandfather down on the Ohio, or an anecdote that he had read in the newspapers. He wept and he laughed, and the whole assembly were moved as his feelings moved; now silent with grief, and now swelling with enthusiasm.

I recollect one of his sermons in part, and, in fact, the most of the services accompanying it. It was a soft day in June. The birds were singing and revelling among the trees which canopied the chapel. The church was filled. The choir were all present. "Father Beals," "Aunt Graves," and "Sister Abigail" were in their accustomed seats. The farmers from the country had "turned out;" in fact, it was one of the most stirring days Puddleford had ever known. It was quite evident that the occasion was extraordinary, as "Aunt Graves" was very nervous the moment she took her seat in the choir. If any error should be committed, the exercises would be spoiled, prayers, preaching, and all; because, according to her judgment, they all depended upon good music; and *that* she was responsible for. So she began to hitch about, first this way, and then that; then she ran over the music-book, and then the index to it; then she hummed a tune inaudibly through her nose; then she examined the hymn-book, and then changed her seat; and then changed back again. She was, in her opinion, the wheel that kept every other wheel in motion;

and what if *that* wheel should stop!

But the hymn was at last given out; and there was a rustling of leaves, and an a-hemming, and coughing, and spitting, and sounding of notes; and a toot on a cracked clarinet, which had been wound with tow; and a low grunt from a bass-viol, produced by a grave-looking man in the corner. Then all rose, and launched forth in one of those ancient pieces of church harmony, "Coronation;" every voice and instrument letting itself go to its utmost extent. One airy-looking person was pumping out his bass by rising and falling on his toes; another, more solemn, was urging it up by crowding his chin on his breast; another jerked it out by a twist of his head; while one quiet old man, whose face beamed with tranquillity, just stood, in perfect ecstasy, and let the melody run out of his nose. The genius on the clarinet blew as if he were blowing his last. His cheeks were bloated, his eyes were wild and extended, and his head danced this way and that, keeping time with his fingers; and he who sawed the viol tore away upon his instrument with a kind of ferocity, as if he were determined to commit some violence upon it. But the treble – what shall I say of *it*? "Aunt Graves" was nowhere to be seen, after the "parts" had got into full play; she put on the power of her voice, and "drowned out" everything around her at once; and then, rising higher and higher, she rushed through the notes, the choir in full chase after her, and absolutely came out safely at last, and struck upon her feet, without injuring herself or any one else.

When this performance closed, quite an air of self-satisfaction played over the faces of all, declaring clearly enough that their business was over for an hour at least. In fact, "Aunt Graves" was entirely out of breath, and remained in a languishing state for several minutes. So they busied themselves the best way they could. They gazed at every person in the house except the preacher, and did everything but worship. I noticed that it was very difficult for the female portion to "get into position." They tried a lounge and a lean, an averted face and a full one. Then their bonnet-strings troubled them, and then their shawls; and now a lock of hair got astray, and then something else. The men were as philosophical and indifferent as so many players at a show. He of the clarinet once so forgot the day as to raise his instrument to the window and take a peep through it, so that he might detect its air-holes, if any there were; and he afterwards amused himself and me, a long time, by gravely licking down its tow bandage, so that it might be in condition when called upon to perform again. In fact, the Puddleford choir was very much like choirs in all other places.

By and by, Bigelow took his stand, preparatory to his sermon. I do not intend to follow Bigelow through his discourse, because I could not do so if I attempted it; nor would it be of any importance to the reader, if I could. He said he would not take any text, but he would preach a sermon that would suit a hundred texts. He did not like to confine himself to any particular portion of the Bible; but wished to retain the privilege of following up the

manifold sins of his congregation, in whomsoever or wherever they existed. He then launched himself forth, denouncing, in the first place, the sin of profanity, which is very common in all new countries, evidently having in view two or three of his hearers who were notoriously profane; and after considering the question generally, he declared "that of all sinners, the profane man is the greatest fool, because he receives nothing for his wickedness. A'n't that true, Luke Smith?" he continued, as he reached out his finger towards Luke, whose daily conversation was a string of oaths; "a'n't that true? How much have *you* made by it? – answer to me, and this congregation." Luke quivered as if a shock of electricity had passed through him.

Bigelow then gave a short history of his own sins in that line at an early day, before he entered the pulpit, when he was young and surrounded by temptations; but, he said, he reformed at last, and every other man might do so by the same means. "When you feel yourself swelling with a big oath – for every man feels 'em inside before they break out," exclaimed Bigelow, – "jump up and cry "Jezebel!" three times in succession, and you'll feel as calm as an infant. This," he continued, "lets off the feeling without the commission of sin, and leaves the system healthy."

He next considered the sin of Sabbath-breaking; and he poured down the melting lava upon the heads of his hearers with a strength and ingenuity that I have seldom seen equalled. "Men," he said, "would labor harder to break the Sabbath than they would for bread. They would chase a deer from morning till

night on this holy day, kill him, and then *throw the carcass away*; but week-days they lounge about some Puddleford dram-shop, while their families were suffering. Men, too," he continued, "fish on Sundays, because the devil has informed them that fish bite better. It is the devil himself who does the biting, not the fish, it is *he* who is fishing for *you*; for Bill Larkin, and Sam Trimble, and Hugh Williams, and scores of others; he's got you now, and you will be scaled and dressed for his table unless you escape instantly;" and then, to impress his illustration, he soared away into a flight of eloquence just suited to his hearers; rough and fiery, plain and pointed, neither above nor below the capacity of those he addressed.

Bigelow then made a descent upon lying and liars. He regretted to say that this sin was very common in the church. "He had a dozen complaints before him now, undecided;" and he detailed a few of them, as specimens of "the depravity of the human heart." He "didn't want to hear any more of them, as he had something else to do, besides taking charge of the tongues of his church."

Then came an exhortation on *duties*; and almost every practical virtue was mentioned and impressed. Early rising, industry, economy, modesty, contentment, etc., etc., all received a notice at his hands. "Don't sleep yourselves to death!" exclaimed Bigelow; "rise early! work! for while you sleep the Enemy will sow your fields full of tares; and the only way to keep him out is to be on the spot *yourself*!" This was a literal

application of the parable, it is true; yet it was very well done, and productive, I have no doubt, of some good.

Bigelow closed in a most tempestuous manner. He was eloquent, sarcastic, and comical, by turns. He had taken off nearly all his clothes, except his pantaloons, shirt, and suspenders; a custom among a certain class of western preachers, however strange it may appear to many readers. Streams of perspiration were running down his face and neck; his hair was in confusion; and altogether, he presented the appearance of a man who had passed through some convulsion of nature, and barely escaped with his life.

I could not help thinking that Bigelow was entitled to great credit, not only for the matter his sermon contained, but in being able to deliver a sermon at all amid the confusion which often surrounded him. There were a dozen or more infants in the crowd, some crowing, some crying, and some chattering. One elderly lady, in particular, had in charge one of these responsibilities, that seemed to set the place and the preacher at defiance. She tried every expedient to quiet the little nuisance, but it was of "no use." She set it down, laid it down, turned it around, nursed it, chirped at it; and finally, giving up in despair, she placed it on her knee, the child roaring at the top of its lungs, and commenced trotting it in the very face of the audience. This operation cut up the music of the innocent, and threw it out in short, quick jerks, very agreeable to the preacher and congregation.

An excellent old woman also sat directly in front of Bigelow, her left elbow resting on her knee, which she swayed to and fro with a sigh. Her face lay devoutly in the palm of her hand, while her right thumb and fore-finger held a pinch of snuff, which she every now and then slowly breathed up a hawk-bill nose, with a long-drawn whistle, something after the sort that broke forth from the clarinet a while before. She then blew a blast into a faded cotton handkerchief, that reverberated like the voice of "many trumpets." This was followed by fits of coughing, and sneezing, and sighing; in fact, she sounded as great a variety of notes as the choir itself.

Besides all this, a troop of dogs who had followed their masters were continually marching up and down the chapel; and when any unusual excitement occurred with Bigelow, or any one else, as there did several times, we had a barking-chorus, which threatened to suspend the whole meeting. Bigelow, however, didn't mind any or all of these things; but, like a skilful engineer, he put on the more steam, and ran down every obstacle in his way.

Reader, I have given you a description of the log-chapel at Puddleford. It is like a thousand other places of public worship in a "new country." If there is something to condemn, there is more to praise. There seems to be a providence in this, as in all other things.

The settlers in a forest are a rough, hardy, and generally an honest race of men. It is their business to hew down the

wilderness, and prepare the way for a different class who will surely follow them. They cannot cultivate their minds to any extent, or refine their characters. They must be reached through the pulpit by such means as *will* reach them. Of what importance is a nice theological distinction with them? Of what force a labored pulpit disquisition? They have great vices and strong virtues. Their vices must be smitten and scattered with a sledge-hammer; they are not to be played with in a flourish of rhetoric. Just such a human tornado as Bigelow is the man for the place; he may commit some mischief, but he will leave behind him a purer moral atmosphere and a serener sky.

Society, in such a place as Puddleford, is cultivated very much like its soil. Both lie in a state of rude nature, and both must be improved. The great "breaking-plough," with its dozen yoke of cattle, in the first place, goes tearing and groaning through the roots and grubs that lie twisted under it, just as Bigelow tore and groaned through the stupidity and wickedness of his hearers. Then comes the green grass, and wheat, and flowers, as years draw on; producing, at last, "some sixty, and some a hundred-fold."

There is something impressive in the Sabbath in the wilderness. A quiet breathes over the landscape that is almost overwhelming. In a city, the church-steeple talk to one another their lofty music; but there are no bells in the wilderness to mark the hours of worship. The only bell which is heard is rung by Memory, as the hour of prayer draws nigh; some village-bell,

far away, that vibrated over the hills of our nativity, the tones of which we have carried away in our soul, and which are awakened by the solemnity of the day.

There is a philosophy in all this, if we will but see it; there is more; there is a lesson, possibly a reproof. If we are disposed to smile at the rusticity of a Puddleford church, may we not with equal reason become serious over the overgrown refinement of many another? May not something be learned in the very contrast which is thus afforded? Do not the extravagant hyperbole, coarse allusions, irreverent anecdote, and strong but unpolished shafts of sarcasm, that such as Bigelow so unsparingly scatter over the sanctuary, give a rich background and strong relief to the finished rhetoric of many a pulpit essay, that has been written to play with the fancy and tranquillize the nerves of a refined and fashionable audience? Are not the extremes equally ridiculous? the one not having reached, the other having passed the zenith.

CHAPTER V

Indian Summer. – Venison Styles again. – Jim Buzzard. – Fishing Excursion. – Muskrat City. – Indian Burying-ground. – The Pickerel and the Rest of the Fishes. – The Prairie. – Wild Geese. – The Old Mound. – Venison's Regrets at the degenerating Times. – His Luck, and Mine. – Reminiscences of the Beavers. – Camping out. – Safe Return.

Indian summer had not yet taken her bow from the woods or her breath from the sky. Old Autumn still lay asleep; Time stood by, with his hour-glass erect, slowly counting the palpitations of his heart.

Venison Styles appointed a day for a fishing excursion, and was desirous of my company; so, on one of those bright mornings, we might have been seen loading our gear into the boat, preparatory to a night's lodging in the woods. We were accompanied by "Jim Buzzard," a genuine Puddlefordian, whom we took along to do up the little pieces of drudgery that always attend such an expedition.

Puddleford was a wonderful place for fish-eaters, and the only real harvest the villagers had was the fish-harvest. One half of Puddleford lived on fish, and everybody fished. But our "Jim Buzzard" was a character in fish, and I could never excuse myself if I should pass him over unnoticed.

Where "Jim" was born – who was his father or mother – and whether he actually ever had any, are questions that no mortal man was ever yet able to answer. He appeared one spring morning in Puddleford with the swallows. The first thing seen of him, he was sitting, about sunrise, on an old dry goods' box, at the corner of a street, whistling a variety of lively airs. The crown was dangling from the top of his hat, he was shirtless and unshaved, and his shoes gaped horribly at the public.

"Jim" was a genuine loafer, and loafers, you know, reader, pervade every place, and are always the same. There is a certain class of animals that are said to follow civilization, as sharks follow in the wake of a ship, and generally for the same reason, to pick up what they can find. Rats and loafers belong to this class, and there is no human ingenuity shrewd enough to keep them off: their appearance seems to be a simple fulfilment of a law of nature.

Jim Buzzard was a fisher, too, and nothing but a fisher. He would sit on an old log by the bank of the river, and hold a pole from morning until night. If the fish would bite, very well; if they would not, very well. Ill-luck never roused his wrath, because there was no wrath in him to arouse. He was a true philosopher, and was entirely too lazy to get into a passion. Jim knew that the fish would bite to-morrow, or next day, if they didn't to-day. He was happy, completely so; that is, as completely happy as the world will admit. He didn't envy anybody – not he. All his wants were supplied, and what did he care about the possessions of his

neighbors? He never realized any future, here or hereafter. Jim never lay awake nights, thinking about where he would be, or what he should have, next week. He didn't know as there was any next week. He knew the sun rose and set, which was all the time he ever measured at once. Well, as I said, Jim made one of our company.

Our boat was finally loaded, our crew shipped, and we shot forth into the stream. The water lay as smooth as glass, and the reflected colors of the blazing trees that hung over it gave it the appearance of a carpet. The headlands put out here and there, intersected by long gores of marsh, that ran away a mile or more in the distance.

Upon one of these marshes a city had been reared by the muskrats, which presented an interesting appearance. Hundreds of huts had been erected by this busy population, intended by them as their winter quarters, composed of grass and sticks and mud, and hoisted up beyond the reach of the spring floods. Each one was a little palace, and the whole sat upon the water like a miniature Venice. Here huts were entered by diving down, the front door being always concealed to prevent intrusion. Up and down the canals of this city the inhabitants gossiped and gambolled by moonlight, like those of every other gay place. They had their routs, and cotillions, and suppers, in all human probability, and for aught I know drank themselves stupid. Perhaps they kept up an opera. I say perhaps – we know so little of the inner life of these strange creatures, that we may draw

upon the imagination in regard to their amusements as much as we please. If any transcendental muskrat should ever write the history of this colony, I will forward it to the newspapers by the first mail.

Venison said, "we were going to have a wet time on't, cause the rats had built so high, and the whole mash would be covered bime-by, by the rains." He said, "muskrats know'd more nor men about times ahead, and fixed up things 'cordingly."

Our boat glided along until we came in sight of a huge bluff that had pushed itself half across the stream. A melancholy fragment of one of the tribes of Indians, who once held the sovereignty of the soil, and who had escaped a removal, or had wandered back from their banishment, were clustered upon it. They had erected a long pole, and gathered themselves, hand in hand, in a circle about it; within this circle, their medicines and apparel worn in worship, lay for consecration. The plaintive chant was heard melting along the waters, as they wheeled round and round in their solemn service. I have never looked upon a more touching exhibition. Most of these Indians were very old; they had outlived their tribe, their country, their glory – everything but their ceremonies and themselves. What a beautiful tribute was this to the past! a handful of worshippers lingering round the broken altar of their temple, and hallowing its very ruins.

Near by, and on the southern slope of the bluff, lay the remains of an extensive Indian burying-ground. No white man could tell its age. Large oaks, centuries old, that had grown since the

dead were first deposited there, stood up over the graves. No monuments of stone designated the thousands of sleepers – the living themselves were the monuments of the dead. Weapons of war and peace were scattered beneath the turf, mixed with crumbling human bones.

What were this little band of red men, thought I, but so many autumn leaves? A few years more, and the solitary boat, as it turns this headland, will find no warrior kneeling on its height. The Great Spirit will brood alone over the solitude.

By and by, we turned into a bay, sheltered by an overhanging cliff, where we cast our anchor, and made ready for work. The water was transparent, and the shining pebbles glittered in the sandy depths below. Shoals of fish had gathered in this nook, beyond the strife of waters. The sun-fish, his back all bristling with rage, ploughed around with as much ferocity as a privateer; the checkered perch lazily rolled from side to side, as his breath came and went; the little silver dace darted and flashed through each other their streams of light; and away off, all alone, the pickerel, that terror of the pool, stood as still and dart-like as the vane of a steeple.

This congregation reminded me of the stir we sometimes find in the ports of a city. They seemed to have much business on hand. They were continually putting out and putting in; sometimes alone and sometimes in fleets. I noticed an indolent old "sucker," who made several unsuccessful attempts to reach the current, and get under headway. Once in a while, a fish would

come dashing in from above, like a ship before a gale, throwing the whole community into an uproar.

Below us, on the left bank of the river, stretched a prairie which was several miles in circumference. It was dotted, here and there, with a settler's cabin, but the greater part yet lay in the wild luxuriance of nature. It was surrounded by the forest, and long points of woodland pierced it, now glowing like a flame. Shooting back and forth, the prairie-hens sailed across it like boats upon the main. The sky above it was filled with hawks, sweeping round and round in search of prey – now they rested upon their outspread wings – then plunged through a long-drawn curve – then gracefully moved near the earth in downward circles, as some object was discovered, winnowing a while above it, to make sure of its nature and position, and rising once more, and turning with lightning quickness, away they rushed upon their quarry, and soared away with it on high.

In the depth of winter, when the lakes and rivers are bound in ice, vast bodies of geese assemble there. Acres of ground are covered, and they storm about their camp like an army of soldiers. Some commanding elevation, far out from shore, beyond the reach of the hunter's gun, is selected. When disturbed, their sentinels blow the alarm, and away they go, piping their dismal dirge, until it dies afar in the sky. By daybreak the next morning, they are on the ground again, as tranquil as though nothing had happened.

It is almost impossible to trap these wanderers. Before they

establish their quarters, they study the landscape with the eye of a painter. They take a daguerrian view of objects as they are. The log-hut, with its curling smoke – the hay-stack crowned with snow – the settler's cart tipped up, its tongue pointing towards the north star – a goose understands as well as a man. *They* never blow up nor work destruction. But just try an artificial house of boughs, a brush fence, or an intrenchment near their lines. They see the plot at a glance, and draw out of harm's way, and pitch their snowy tents again, beyond its reach. As well chase the fabled island as a flock of wild geese.

Not far below this prairie, near the bank of the river, a venerable mound raised its solitary head. It was thinly covered with oaks, and belonged to Oblivion. It was one of the few feathers that Time had cast in his flight, to mark the past and confuse the present. It looked like a hand reached out from eternity; but *whose* hand? Ay, whose? Who built it? When? Why? It was filled with all kinds of strange things that had been planted there by a busy race who were unable to preserve their own history. Their works had outlived themselves; but they cannot talk to us, nor tell us what they are, nor who fashioned them. There it stands, gazing dumbly at all who look upon it, a sad lesson to individual pride or national glory.

Venison did not seem quite satisfied with the prospect of catching fish in the little bay. "'Tain't as it used to be," sighed the old hunter. "Before the woods were cut down, and them are dams built," said he, "the whole river was alive with all sorts of fish.

In the spring-time the salmon-trout and sturgeon used to come up out of the lakes to feed, but they can't get up any more. They keep trying it every year yet, and thousands on 'em may be seen packed in below old Jones' dam, 'long 'bout April, waiting and waiting for it to go off. For I s'pose they think 'tain't nothing but flood-wood lodged."

"Why don't they climb it?" inquired I.

"When the water is very high up, and there arn't much of a riffle there, they will sometimes; but they can't climb like them speckled trout – they'll go right up a mountain stream, and make nothing on't – them fellers beat all nater for going anywhere."

However, as I said somewhere back in my narrative, we made ready for work. We looked around for Jim Buzzard, and found him sitting in the bow of the boat, his legs sprawled out, his head dropped on his chin, his ragged hat cocked on one side, fast asleep. There was an ease and self-abandonment about his appearance that were really beautiful. Jim could sleep anywhere – some people can't. He was never nervous. He never had any spasms about something that could never occur. He had no notes falling due – no crops in the ground – no merchandise on his hand – no property, except the little he carried on his back, and that he didn't really own; it was given to him – he was no candidate for office, and didn't even know or care who was President – all administrations were alike to him, for all had treated him well. He never flew into a passion because some persons slandered him, because he had no character to injure.

"Hallo, Jim!" I screamed, with my mouth to his ear, "the boat is sinking."

He gaped, and groaned, and stretched a few times, and finally opened his eyes, and adjusted his hat, and looking up at me, "Let her sink, then," he replied; "we can get-er up agin."

"Stir around! stir around, Jim!" I exclaimed; "the fish are waiting for our bait; out with your pole."

He said, "*he* was goin' overboard arter fresh-water clams – kase they were good with salt, and anybody could eat 'em;" and rolling up his breeches, over he went, and moving away down near a sandy beach, he commenced digging his clams with his feet, and piling them up on shore by his side.

Venison and myself dashed our lines overboard. I watched every movement of the old hunter. He went through as many ceremonies as a magician working a charm. His "minnys" (minnows), as he called them, were hooked tenderly at a particular place in the back, so that they might shoot around in the water, without dying in the effort; his hook was pointed in a certain direction, so as to catch at the first bite; he then spit upon the bait, and swinging the line a few times in circles, he threw it far out in the stream.

"That'll bring a bass, pickerel, or something," said he, as it struck the water.

Soon the pole bent, and Venison sprang upon it.

"Pull him out!" exclaimed I.

"Don't never hurry big fish," replied he; "let him play round

a little; he'll grow weak by-me-by, and come right along into the boat;" and accordingly, Venison "*let him play*;" he managed the fish with all that refinement in the art that sportsmen know so well how to appreciate and enjoy. Sometimes it raced far up the stream, then far down; and once, as the line brought it up on a downward trip, it bounded into the air, and turned two or three summersets that shook the silver drops of water from its fins. After a while, it became exhausted, and Venison slowly drew him into the boat, all breathless and panting; a famous pickerel, four feet long and "well proportioned."

My poles, all this time, remained just where I first placed them – not a nibble, as I knew. Some very wicked people, I have been informed, swear at fish when they refuse to bite – but I did not – because I have never been able to see why *they* were to blame, or why swearing would reform them, if they were. It was no very good reason that they should take hold of one end of my pole and line, because I happened to be at the other.

Not having much luck with big fish, I concluded to amuse the "small fry." So out went my hook ker-slump right down in the midst of a great gathering, who seemed to have met on some business of importance. It was a little curious to watch these finny fellows as they eyed my worm. They swept round it in a circle, a few times, and coming up with a halt, and forming themselves abreast, they rocked up and down from head to tail, as they surveyed the thing. By and by, a perch, a little more venturesome than the rest, floated up by degrees to the bait, his

white fins slowly moving back and forth, and carefully reaching out his nose, he touched it, wheeled, and shot like a dart out of sight. In a few minutes he came round in the rear of the company, to await further experiments. Next came the sun-fish, jerking along, filled with fire and fury, with a kind of who's-afraid sort of look, and striking at my hook, actually caught the tip of the barb, and I turned the fellow topsy-turvy, showing up his yellow to advantage. He left for parts unknown. There was a small bass who had strayed into the community, whom I was anxious to coax into trouble; but he lay off on his dignity, near an old root, to see the fun. I moved my hook towards him. He shot off and turned head to, with a no-you-don't sort of air. I took my bait from the water and spit on it, but it wouldn't do. I took it out again, and went through an incantation over it, but I couldn't catch him by magic; and I have no doubt, reader, he is there yet.

Venison, every little while, dragged another and another pickerel aboard. Pretty soon we had Jim Buzzard cleaning fish, and packing away in a barrel, with a little sprinkling of salt.

I gathered in my lines, arose, and thanked the whole tribe of fish, generally and particularly, for their attendance upon me, and promised not to trouble them for a month at least.

The sun was waning low, and the shadows of the trees were pointing across the river. The clouds in the west gathered themselves into all kinds of pictures. There was a fleet of ships, all on fire, in full sail, far out at sea; the fleet dissolved, and a city rose out of its ruins, filled with temples, and domes, and

turrets, and divided into streets, up and down which strange and fantastic figures were hurrying. The city vanished, and a pile of huge mountains shot up their rugged peaks, around which golden islands lay anchored, all glowing with light. Away one side, I noticed a grave, corpulent, and shadowy old gentleman, astride an elephant, smoking a pipe, and he puffed himself finally away into the heavens, and I have never seen him since – a solemn warning to persons who use tobacco.

Venison said "we had better hunt up our camping-ground, for his stomach was getting holler, and he wanted to fill it up."

Below us, a sparkling stream put into the river. Just above it, a mile or so, lay a broad lake, which was fed from this same stream – it came in from the wilderness. We started for this lake, and wound our way up this little creek amid the struggling shafts of sunlight that hung over it. The water-fowl were hurrying past us, towards the same spot, to take up their night's lodging, and we drove flocks of them ahead as we crowded upon them. The dip of our oars echoed among the shadows. We reached our ground, unloaded our gear, and prepared for the night.

Venison directed Jim Buzzard to build a "stack" and get supper. So, a pile of stones was laid up, with a flat one across the top, leaving a hole behind for the smoke to escape. Venison knocked over a gray duck on the lake with his rifle, and it was not long before we had four feet of pickerel and that self-same duck sprawled out on the hot stone, frying.

Venison was rather gloomy. "This," said he, "makes me think

of times gone. I used to camp here all alone, years ago, when there warn't no settlers for miles. I used to catch otter and beaver and rat, and sleep out weeks to a time. But the beaver and otter are gone."

"Beaver here?" inquired I.

"Why, not more'n nor a mile or so up this creek, I've killed piles on 'em. Why, I seed a company on 'em, up there, once, of two or three hundred. They com'd down one spring and clear'd off acres of ground that had grown up to birch saplings, that they wanted to build a dam with, and there they let the trees lie until August. Then they started to build their houses all over the low water in the mash – great houses four or five feet through – and they work'd in companies of four or five on a house till they got 'em done. You jist ought to see 'em carry mud and stones between their fore-paws and throat, and see 'em lay it down and slap it with their tails, like men who work with a trowel."

"Well," said I, "about those trees that they cleared off?"

"When they got 'em done, then they all jined in to build a dam, to raise up the water, so't wouldn't freeze up the doors of their houses. And then there was a time on't. You might see 'em by moonlight, pitching in the trees, and swimming down the stream with 'em, and laying 'em in the current of the creek, like so many boys."

"Pshaw!" said I.

"Yes, sir! I seed one night a lot of beavers drawing one of the biggest trees they had cut. It was more'n six inches through. They

got it part over the bank, when it stuck fast. Jest the top of the tree was in the water, and there were four or five on 'em sousing round in the water, pulling this way and that, and as many more on the bank jerking at it, until byme-by it went in kerswash; the beavers all took hold on't, then, and towed it to the dam."

"And so they really built a dam?"

"A dam three feet high, and forty or fifty long – all laid up with birch trees, and mud and stones, so tight 'tain't gone yet. The beaver have gone long ago, but the dam hain't."

"How did you catch 'em?" said I.

"When the fur is good, in the winter, we jest went round with our ice-chisels and knocked their houses to pieces, when away they would go for their *washes*, as we used to call 'em, where we fastened 'em in and catch'd 'em."

"Washes? what are they?" inquired I.

"Holes the beavers dig in the bank, partly under water, where they can run in and breathe without being seen."

Venison was going on to tell me how many beaver skins he got, but the duck and fish were done, and had been divided up by Jim Buzzard, and handsomely laid out on a piece of clean bark, ready to eat.

We ranged ourselves in a row, squat upon the ground like so many Turks, drew our hunting-knives, and went to work. I looked out upon the lake that lay like a looking-glass, draped with gauze, at my feet. Day was dying over it like a strain of music. One slender bar of light lay trembling along its eastern shore. By

and by it crept up the bank; from that to a mound behind, and from which it took a leap to a hill a mile distant, where it faded and faded into twilight. The water-fowl were screaming among the flags, and I noticed a belated hawk winging his way through the air on high, to his home in the forest. I could almost hear the winnowing of his wings in the silent sky. A chick-a-dee-dee came bobbing and winding down an oak near me, for the purpose of coaxing a supper. The trees began to assume uncertain shapes – the arms of the oaks stretched out longer and longer. The new moon grew brighter and brighter in the west. There it hung, looking down into the lake. The river sent up its hollow roar, the mists settled thicker and thicker, and solemn night at last came down over the wilderness.

After I had finished my watch of departing day, I looked around for my company. "Jim" had been stuffing himself for the last half hour, until he had grown as stupid as an over-fed anaconda. His jaws were moving very slowly over the bone of a duck – his eyes were drowsy – and every now and then he heaved a long-drawn sigh – a kind of melancholy groan over his inability to eat any more.

Venison said "we must build up our night fire to keep off the varmints," and accordingly we reared a pile of brush of logs, set it a-going, made up our bed of withered leaves, ranged ourselves in a circle with our feet turned to the blaze, and were soon lost in sleep.

Morn broke over us lovely as ever. As the first gray streaks

began to melt away, Venison roused up to get a deer for breakfast. We went out on to a run-way, hid ourselves in the bushes, and soon a large buck, his antlers swung aloft, came snuffing and cracking along over the leaves, on his way to the lake to take his morning drink. Pop! and over he went, and soon his "saddles" were taken out and carried into camp, our stack started, and breakfast prepared.

Another day was loitered away among the fish – another day, beautiful as the last, we floated over the lake, and threaded the stream that poured into it. At night we found ourselves safely moored at Puddleford, our boat loaded with fish, and my soul filled with a thousand beautiful pictures of nature, that hang there winter and summer, as bright and lovely as life itself.

CHAPTER VI

Educational Efforts. – Squire Longbow's "Notis." – "The Saturday Nite." – Ike and the Squire. – Various Remarks to the Point. – Mrs. Fizzle and the Temperance Question. – Collection taken. – General Result.

There has been much written in the world about the benefits of education. I am very sure that its importance was not overlooked in Puddleford. I cannot say that the village has ever produced giants in literature, but it has produced great men, comparatively speaking and judging, and very great if we take the opinion of the Puddlefordians themselves. Somebody once said that "in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed are monarchs," and I suppose it was upon this principle, if we give the maxim a literal construction, that Squire Longbow, who had lost an eye, as the reader may recollect, had become elevated to such a pitch among his neighbors.

Education, in almost every western community, stands at about a certain level among the masses. That level changes with changing generations, but very seldom among individuals of the same. I ought perhaps to exclude the Squire, who was an exception to all general rules, and would have undoubtedly distinguished himself anywhere and under any circumstances. The children of the pioneer, or a portion of them, receive

educational advantages, which had been denied the father, and their children still greater, until at last the polished statue rises out of the marble in the quarry.

But there were efforts making at Puddleford, about the time I allude to, to increase the common stock of knowledge, and keep up the general reputation of Puddleford with that of the world, which ought not to pass unnoticed.

One day in November, I discovered the following notice posted up in the streets, and nailed to several trees adjacent to the highways in the country: —

"NOTIS

"To all it may konsarn – men, wimmin, and their children. Whareas, edication, and knowlidg of all sorts, is very likely to run down in all knew countrys, owin to a great manny reasons that aint propper to go into this ere notis – and whareas many of the habitants of Puddleford and the circumjacint country all round bout it, are in danger of suffering that way – And whareas a few of us leading men have thot on the matter, and concluded that sumthing must very soon be did, or til be too late – therefore a meeting will be held at the log-chapel next Saterdag nite, to raise up the karacter of the people in this respect.

(Signed.)

'Squire Longbow And others.'"

On the "Saterdag nite," mentioned in the above "notis," I attended at the log-chapel, for the purpose of raising up the "karacter of the people." The gathering was large – made up of men and women, and quite a number were in from the country. Squire Longbow, the "Colonel," "Stub Bulliphant" the landlord of the Eagle, Ike Turtle the pettifogger, Sile Bates his opponent, Charity Beadle, Philista Filkins, "Aunt Graves," "Sister Abigail," Sonora Brown, and a large number of others, made up the meeting. It was very evident that something *would* be done. Pretty soon Ike Turtle rose, gave a loud rap with his fist on the side of the house, and said it was "high time this ere body came to order, and he would nominate Squire Longbow for President."

"You've heerd the nomination," continued the Squire, rising slowly from his seat in another part of the house. "You who are in my favor say Ay!"

"Ay!" exclaimed the house.

"Clear vote – no use in putting the noes;" and Squire Longbow took his stand in the pulpit, and proceeded: —

"Feller-citizens, ladies and gentlemen, all on you who are here, just keep still while I thank you. We have cum up here on a pretty big business – neither more nor less than edication. P'raps you don't all on you know that edication makes everybody and everything – it made our forefathers, it made some of us, and is a going to make our children, if *we* do *our* duty. You have made me President on this occasion, and it is my duty to thank you, and feller-citizens, you don't, you can't, no man *can* tell how I

feel when – "

Here Ike Turtle rose. "Squire Longbow," said Ike, "arn't it rather on-parliamentary to be speaking when you hain't got no secretary to take things down?"

The Squire was thunderstruck. "No secretary!" he exclaimed, "no secretary! all void! but I'll appoint Sile Bates secretary *tunk pro nunck* (nunc pro tunc), as we say in law, and that'll save proceedings – and as I was saying," continued the Squire, "no man can tell how I feel, pressed down as I am with the responsibility that you have thrown on to me." The Squire then took his seat.

Ike Turtle rose again to state the object of the meeting. He said "he was an old resider, and he had in fact grown up with the country. He had seed everything go ahead except edication. Taking out the President, members of the larned professions, the school-master, and the man who tended Clewes' grocery, there warn't hardly a person of edication left. Now," continued Ike, warming up, "this shouldn't orter be – we should all set about de *tar* mined to do something ('Amen!' groaned Father Beals.) Why, if it looks dark, feller-citizens, remember the dark days of the revolution, when the soldiers went roaming about, with a piece of corn-bread in one hand, nothing in t'other, with ragged uniforms on, and little or no breeches, yet all the while busting with patriotism. Jest turn your eyes backwards on to them times, and you'll think you're in paradise. Something's got to be did for edication. We've got to have a Lyceum, a library, and lecters on

all the subjects of the day. (Here 'Aunt Graves' gave a groan, as she expected all this would be accomplished by taxation.) Don't groan over yender," exclaimed Ike, "'taint right to groan at a new thing just a-starting – might as well groan down a child for fear he wouldn't be a man. Yes, they must be had – I say they must. or we'll all run to seed, and die. Why, Christopher Columbus, men and women, how many on you don't know your right hand from your left, scientifically speaking, and byme-by we shall go to ruin as old Nineveh did. Mr. President, I move that a collection be taken for the ginerall purposes of this meeting."

I was a little puzzled to determine whether Ike was serious or not. With all his eccentricities, he was a good citizen, and always put his shoulder to the public wheel. When he made his motion to take up a collection, a dead calm fell upon the audience. After a few moments, Sile Bates rose, and said, —

He "hoped this 'spectable meeting warn't going to Peter-out."

The calm continued. Squire Longbow stepped forward from his seat in the pulpit, and remarked that "he couldn't see what difference it would make a thousand years hence whether they did anything, or whether they didn't."

A man from the country "didn't know what money had to do with edication."

The Colonel said his pockets were "as dry as a powder-house."

One old lady thought "somebody'd have to sign for her 'fore spring."

Aunt Graves thought that "poor folks, who lived on bil'd

vittels, hadn't orter be called on."

The hat was, however, passed around, and three dollars and seventy-five cents raised, "for the ginerall purposes of the meeting," according to Ike's motion; and I will say here that this amount was appropriated towards the purchase of books for the Puddleford library, which was established at this meeting, and which has now grown into usefulness and importance.

The hat was reached up to the secretary, who gave it a couple of shakes, declaring at the same time, that he was "happy to say that the public spirit of Puddleford hadn't gin out yet."

Squire Longbow then rose and said, that "some plan must be laid to get up a set of lecters. There were three great sciences, law, preaching, and physic – law consarned property, physic consarned the body, and preaching consarned the soul. These sciences must be scattered, so everybody could enjoy 'em. He could talk on law himself, and Bigelow could on preaching, and physic was understood, any way. There were other subjects which would come up in their order. There was paintin', and poetry, and music – but them warn't of no account in a new country where money was skase. Politics was one of the uncertain sciences, and it didn't do much good to speak on't, any how. A feller might study and study, and just likely as not the next election would blow him into fiddle-strings. Yet politics had got to be had, 'cause that was what kept the country alive, and made liberty grow. Old Ginerall Washington himself had a little on't. He said 'twas one etarnal job to start edication, but jist get the thing a-goin once,

and it'll move off like ile – it'll run rite off like a steam injin."

Ike said "he know'd a curtain lecturer or two might be had," looking round at Stub Bulliphant. "They warn't the worst kind nother. They'd bring a man all up standin', when nothin' else would. He'd seen a fellow cave right in under one on 'em, and come out as cow'd as a whipt spaniel. About lecterin' on politics, he didn't know. He guessed the bushes were a little too thick to talk on that, yet. He hoped the meetin' would speak right out, and 'spress their feelin's, wimmin and all."

Old Mrs. Fizzle had been watching the movement of this august body for some time, and had thought, several times, that it was her duty to speak. When Ike, therefore, invited "women and all," she concluded to try it. She was a tall, weasel-faced looking person, and belonged to Bigelow's church. She was an out-and-out temperance woman, and had kept all Puddleford hot by her efforts to put down the sale of intoxicating drinks. She was a fiery, nervous, active, good sort of a woman. Mrs. Fizzle rose. She said "she thought she would give this meetin' a piece of her mind, consarnin' things in general. She didn't know but the meetin' was well enough – she liked meetins – she said she didn't care nothin' about politics, never did her any good as she know'd on – she didn't want to hear any lecters any way 'bout that. If some on 'em would talk 'bout temperance, she'd turn out, and give a little something to help the cause along. She said if she really thought that this meetin' could stop Clewes from selling licker, she'd tend it reg'lar."

"Certainly, ma'am," said Ike, rising, and turning his eyes towards Mrs. Fizzle. "We'll put a *habus corpus* on to him 'fore breakfast to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Fizzle said, "she didn't know what that was, and she didn't care much, if 'twould only hold him tight."

Ike said "it would hold him – couldn't break it no how – it was made by the law to catch just such chaps with."

"Wal," said Mrs. Fizzle, "if the law made it, I'm 'fraid on't. I've hearn tell how folks creep through holes the law leaves. I don't like your scorpus, as you call it."

Squire Longbow rose. "He felt it his duty to say, that a writ of *habus scorpus* would hold anything on airth. It was one of the biggest writs in all nater. He could hold all Clewes' grocery with one on 'em. He felt it his duty further to say this as a magistrate, who was bound by his oath to take care of the law."

Mrs. Fizzle "thought that would do. She had great 'spect for the Squire's opinion – and she now thought she'd go in for the meetin'."

Sile Bates said, "for his part, he thought the meetin' was getting a good deal mixed. 'Every tub orter stand on its own bottom,' as the Apostle Paul, Shakspeare, John Bunyan, or some other person said. We can't do everything all at onst; if we try, we can't make the Millennium come until 'tis time for't. We can kinder straighten up matters – hold onto the public morals a little more – and give edication a punch ahead. But who knows anything about the sciences in Puddleford? and who can lecturer?

'When the blind lead the blind,' as the newspapers say, 'they all go head over heels into the ditch.' Great Cæsar Augustus, Mr. President, jist think of a lecturer on 'stronomy, that *etarnal* science, which no man can lay his hands on, which the human intellect gets at by figuring. Just think of Bigelow Van Slyck, Ike Turtle, or *you*, Mr. President, measuring the distance to the stars. Don't it make your head swim, to think on't? He wouldn't say that the Squire couldn't lay down the law for the people, 'cause he made most on't, and ought to know it by heart. (The Squire gave a loud cough, and straightened himself in his seat.) As for lickster, he always *was*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.