Stowe Harriet Beecher

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
DISSOLVING VIEWS

The scene is a large, roomy, clean New England kitchen of some sixty years ago. There was the great wide fire-place, with its crane and array of pot-hooks; there was the tall black clock in the corner, ticking in response to the chirp of the crickets around the broad, flat stone hearth. The scoured tin and pewter on the dresser caught flickering gleams of brightness from the western sunbeams that shone through the network of elm-boughs, rattling and tapping as the wind blew them against the window. It was not quite half-past four o'clock, yet the December sun hung low and red in the western horizon, telling that the time of the shortest winter days was come. Everything in the ample room shone with whiteness and neatness; everything was ranged, put up, and in order, as if work were some past and bygone affair, hardly to be remembered. The only living figure in this picture of still life was that of a strapping, buxom Yankee maiden, with plump arms

stripped to the elbow and hands plunged deep in the white, elastic cushion of puffy dough, which rose under them as she kneaded.

Apparently pleasant thoughts were her company in her solitude, for her round, brown eyes twinkled with a pleased sparkle, and every now and then she broke into fragments of psalmody, which she practiced over and over, and then nodded her head contentedly, as if satisfied that she had caught the tune.

Suddenly the outside door flew open and little Dolly Cushing burst into the kitchen, panting and breathless, her cheeks glowing with exercise in face of the keen winter wind.

In she came, noisy and busy, dropping her knitting-work and spelling-book in her eagerness, shutting the door behind her with a cheerful bang, and opening conversation without stopping to get her breath:

"Oh, Nabby, Nabby! do tell me what they are doing up at your church. I've seen 'em all day carrying armfulls and armfulls – ever so much – spruce and pine up that way, and Jim Brace and Tom Peters told me they were going to have a 'lumination there, and when I asked what a 'lumination was they only laughed at me and called me a Presbyterian. Don't you think it's a shame, Nabby, that the big boys will laugh at me so and call me names and won't tell me anything?"

"Oh, land o' Goshen, Dolly, what do you mind them boys for?" said Nabby; "boys is mostly hateful when girls is little; but we take our turn by and by," she said with a complacent twinkle of her brown eyes. "I make them stand around, I bet ye, and you

will when you get older."

"But, Nabby, what is a 'lumination?"

"Well now, Dolly, you jest pick up your book, and put up your knittin' work, and sweep out that snow you've tracked in, and hang up your bonnet and cloak, and I'll tell you all about it," said Nabby, taking up her whole cushion of dough and letting it down the other side with a great bound and beginning kneading again.

The little maiden speedily complied with all her requisitions and came and stood, eager and breathless, by the bread bowl.

And a very pretty picture she made there, with her rosy mouth just parted to show her little white teeth, and the afternoon sunshine glinting through the window brightness to go to the brown curls that hung over her round, white forehead, her dark blue eyes kindling with eagerness and curiosity.

"Well, you see," said Nabby, "to-morrow's Christmas; and they've been dressin' the church with ground pine and spruce boughs, and made it just as beautiful as can be, and they're goin' to have a great gold star over the chancel. General Lewis sent clear to Boston to get the things to make it of, and Miss Ida Lewis she made it; and to-night they're going to 'luminate. They put a candle in every single pane of glass in that air church, and it'll be all just as light as day. When they get 'em all lighted up you can see that air church clear down to North Poganuc."

Now this sentence was a perfect labyrinth of mystery to Dolly; for she did not know what Christmas was, she did not know what the chancel was, she never saw anything dressed with pine, and

she was wholly in the dark what it was all about; and yet her bosom heaved, her breath grew short, her color came and went, and she trembled with excitement. Something bright, beautiful, glorious, must be coming into her life, and oh, if she could only see it!

"Oh, Nabby, are you going?" she said, with quivering eagerness.

"Yes, I'm goin' with Jim Sawin. I belong to the singers, and I'm agoin' early to practice on the anthem."

"Oh, Nabby, won't you take me? Do, Nabby!" said Dolly, piteously.

"Oh, land o' Goshen! no, child; you mustn't think on't. I couldn't do that noways. Your pa never would hear of it, nor Mis' Cushing neither. You see, your pa don't b'lieve in Christmas."

"What is Christmas, Nabby?"

"Why, it's the day Christ was born – that's Christmas."

"Why, my papa believes Christ was born," said Dolly, with an injured air; "you needn't tell me that he don't. I've heard him read all about it in the Testament."

"I didn't say he didn't, did I?" said Nabby; "but your papa ain't a 'Piscopal, and he don't believe in keeping none of them air prayer-book days – Christmas, nor Easter, nor nothin'," said Nabby, with a generous profusion of negatives. "Up to the 'Piscopal church they keep Christmas, and they don't keep it down to your meetin'-house; that's the long and short on't," and Nabby turned her batch of dough over with a final flounce, as

if to emphasize the statement, and, giving one last poke in the middle of the fair, white cushion, she proceeded to rub the paste from her hands and to cover her completed batch with a clean white towel and then with a neat comforter of quilted cotton. Then, establishing it in the warmest corner of the fireplace, she proceeded to wash her hands and look at the clock and make other movements to show that the conversation had come to an end.

Poor little Dolly stood still, looking wistful and bewildered. The tangle of brown and golden curls on the outside of her little head was not more snarled than the conflicting ideas in the inside. This great and wonderful idea of Christmas, and all this confusion of images, of gold stars and green wreaths and illuminated windows and singing and music – all done because Christ was born, and yet something that her papa did not approve of – it was a hopeless puzzle. After standing thinking for a minute or two she resumed:

"But, Nabby, *why* don't my papa like it? and why don't we have a 'lumination in our meeting-house?"

"Bless your heart, child, they never does them things to Presbyterian meetin's. Folks' ways is different, and them air is 'Piscopal ways. For my part I'm glad father signed off to the 'Piscopalians, for it's a great deal jollier."

"Oh, dear! my papa won't ever sign off," said Dolly, mournfully.

"To be sure he won't. Why, what nonsense that is!" said

Nabby, with that briskness with which grown people shake off the griefs of children. "Of course *he* won't when he's a minister, so what's the use of worryin'? You jest shet up now, for I've got to hurry and get tea; 'cause your pa and ma are goin' over to the lecture to-night in North Poganuc school-house and they'll want their supper early."

Dolly still hung about wishfully.

"Nabby, if I should ask papa, and he *should* say I might go, would you take me?" said Dolly.

Now, Nabby was a good-natured soul enough and in a general way fond of children; she encouraged Miss Dolly's prattling visits to the kitchen, let her stand about surveying her in various domestic processes, and encouraged that free expression of opinion in conversation which in those days was entirely repressed on the part of juveniles in the presence of their elders. She was, in fact, fond of Dolly in a certain way, but not fond enough of her to interfere with the serious avocations of life; and Nabby was projecting very serious and delicate movements of diplomacy that night. She was going to the church with Jim Sawin, who was on the very verge of a declared admiration, not in the least because her heart inclined toward Jim, but as a means of bringing Ike Peters to capitulation in a quarrel of some weeks' standing. Jim Sawin's "folks," as she would have phrased it, were "meetin'ers," while Ike Peters was a leading member of the Episcopal choir, and it was designed expressly to aggravate him that she was to come in exhibiting her captive in

triumph. To have "a child 'round under her feet," while engaged in conducting affairs of such delicacy, was manifestly impossible – so impossible that she thought stern repression of any such idea the very best policy.

"Now, Dolly Cushing, you jest shet up – for 'tain't no use talkin'. Your pa nor your ma wouldn't hear on't; and besides, little girls like you must go to bed early. They can't be up 'night-hawkin',' and goin' round in the cold. You might catch cold and die like little Julia Cavers. Little girls must be in bed and asleep by eight o'clock."

Dolly stood still with a lowering brow. Just then the world looked very dark. Her little rose-leaf of an under lip rolled out and quivered, and large bright drops began falling one by one over her cheeks.

Nabby had a soft spot in her heart, and felt these signs of affliction; but she stood firm.

"Now, Dolly, I'm sorry; but you can't go. So you jest be a good girl and not say no more about it, and don't cry, and I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll buy you a sugar dog down to the store, and I'll tell you all about it to-morrow."

Dolly had seen these sugar dogs in the window of the store, resplendent with their blue backs and yellow ears and pink tails – designed probably to represent dogs as they exist at the end of the rainbow. Her heart had burned within her with hopeless desire to call one of these beauties her own; and Nabby's promise brought out a gleaming smile through the showery atmosphere

of her little face. A sugar dog might reconcile her to life.

"Now, you must promise me 'certain true as black is blue,'" said Nabby, adjuring by an apparently irrational form of conjuration in vogue among the children in those times. "You must promise you won't say a word about this 'ere thing to your pa or ma; for they wouldn't hear of your goin', and if they would I shouldn't take you. I really couldn't. It would be very inconvenient."

Dolly heaved a great sigh, but thought of the sugar dog, and calmed down the tempest that seemed struggling to rise in her little breast. A rainbow of hope rose over the cloud of disappointment, and a sugar dog with yellow ears and pink tail gleamed consolingly through it.

CHAPTER II.
DOLLY

Our little Dolly was a late autumn chicken, the youngest of ten children, the nursing, rearing and caring for whom had straitened the limited salary of Parson Cushing, of Poganuc Center, and sorely worn on the nerves and strength of the good wife who plied the laboring oar in these performances.

It was Dolly's lot to enter the family at a period when babies were no longer a novelty, when the house was full of the wants and clamors of older children, and the mother at her very wits' end with a confusion of jackets and trowsers, soap, candles and groceries, and the endless harassments of making both ends meet which pertain to the lot of a poor country minister's wife. Consequently Dolly was disposed of as she grew up in all those short-hand methods by which children were taught to be the least possible trouble to their elders. She was taught to come when called, and do as she was bid without a question or argument, to be quenched in bed at the earliest possible hour at night, and to speak only when spoken to in the presence of her elders. All this was a dismal repression to Dolly, for she was by nature a lively, excitable little thing, bursting with questions that she longed to ask, and with comments and remarks that she burned to make, and so she escaped gladly to the kitchen where Nabby, the one

hired girl, who was much in the same situation of repressed communicativeness, encouraged her conversational powers.

On the whole, although it never distinctly occurred to Dolly to murmur at her lot in life yet at times she sighed over the dreadful insignificance of being only a little girl in a great family of grown up people. For even Dolly's brothers nearest her own age were studying in the academy and spouting scraps of superior Latin at her to make her stare and wonder at their learning. They were tearing, noisy, tempestuous boys, good natured enough and willing to pet her at intervals, but prompt to suggest that it was "time for Dolly to go to bed" when her questions or her gambols interfered with their evening pleasures.

Dolly was a robust, healthy little creature, never ailing in any way, and consequently received none of the petting which a more delicate child might have claimed, and the general course of her experience impressed her with the mournful conviction that she was always liable to be in the way – as she commonly was, with her childish curiosity, her burning desire to see and hear and know all that interested the grown people above her. Dolly sometimes felt her littleness and insignificance as quite a burden, and longed to be one of the grown-up people. *They* got civil answers when they asked questions, instead of being told not to talk, and they were not sent to bed the minute it was dark, no matter what pleasant things were going on about them. Once Dolly remembered to have had sore throat with fever. The doctor was sent for. Her mother put away all her work and held her in her

arms. Her father came down out of his study and sat up rocking her nearly all night, and her noisy, roistering brothers came softly to her door and inquired how she was, and Dolly was only sorry that the cold passed off so soon, and she found herself healthy and insignificant as ever. Being gifted with an active fancy, she sometimes imagined a scene when she should be sick and die, and her father and mother and everybody would cry over her, and there would be a funeral for her as there was for a little Julia Cavers, one of her playmates. She could see no drawback to the interest of the scene except that she could not be there to enjoy her own funeral and see how much she was appreciated; so on the whole she turned her visions in another direction and fancied the time when she should be a grown woman and at liberty to do just as she pleased.

It must not be imagined, however, that Dolly had an unhappy childhood. Indeed it may be questioned whether, if she had lived in our day when the parents often seem to be sitting at the feet of their children and humbly inquiring after their sovereign will and pleasure, she would have been much happier than she was. She could not have all she wanted, and the most petted child on earth cannot. She had learned to do without what she could not get, and to bear what she did not like; two sources of happiness and peace which we should judge to be unknown to many modern darlings. For the most part Dolly had learned to sail her own little boat wisely among the bigger and bustling crafts of the older generation.

There were no amusements then specially provided for children. There were no children's books; there were no Sunday-schools to teach bright little songs and to give children picnics and presents. It was a grown people's world, and not a child's world, that existed in those days. Even children's toys of the period were so poor and so few that, in comparison with our modern profusion, they could scarcely be said to exist.

Dolly, however, had her playthings, as every child of lively fancy will. Childhood is poetic and creative, and can make to itself toys out of nothing. Dolly had the range of the great wood-pile in the back yard, where, at the yearly "wood-spell," the farmers deposited the fuel needed for the long, terrible winters, and that woodpile was a world of treasure to her. She skipped, and sung, and climbed among its intricacies and found there treasures of wonder. Green velvet mosses, little white trees of lichen that seemed to her to have tiny apples upon them, long grey-bearded mosses and fine scarlet cups and fairy caps she collected and treasured. She arranged landscapes of these, where green mosses made the fields, and little sprigs of spruce and ground-pine the trees, and bits of broken glass imitated rivers and lakes, reflecting the overshadowing banks. She had, too, hoards of chestnuts and walnuts which a squirrel might have envied, picked up with her own hands from under the yellow autumn leaves; and she had – chief treasure of all – a wooden doll, with staring glass eyes, that had been sent her by her grandmother in Boston, which doll was the central point in all her arrangements.

To her she showed the chestnuts and walnuts; she gave to her the jay's feathers and the bluebird's wing which the boys had given to her; she made her a bed of divers colors and she made her a set of tea-cups out of the backbone of a codfish. She brushed and curled her hair till she took all the curl out of it, and washed all the paint off her cheeks in the zeal of motherly ablutions.

In fact nobody suspected that Dolly was not the happiest of children, as she certainly was one of the busiest and healthiest, and when that evening her two brothers came in from the Academy, noisy and breezy, and tossed her up in their long arms, her laugh rung gay and loud, as if there were no such thing as disappointment in the world.

She pursed her mouth very tight for fear that she should let out something on the forbidden subject at the supper-table. But it was evident that nothing could be farther from the mind of her papa, who, at intervals, was expounding to his wife the difference between natural and moral inability as drawn out in a pamphlet he was preparing to read at the next ministers' meeting – remarks somewhat interrupted by reproof to the boys for giggling at table and surreptitiously feeding Spring, the dog, in contravention of family rules.

It is not to be supposed that Will and Tom Cushing, though they were minister's boys, were not *au courant* in all that was going on note-worthy in the parish. In fact, they were fully versed in all the details of the projected ceremonies at the church and resolved to be in at the show, but maintained a judicious reticence

as to their intentions lest, haply, they might be cut short by a positive interdict.

The Episcopal church at Poganuc Center was of recent origin. It was a small, insignificant building compared with the great square three-decker of a meeting-house which occupied conspicuously the green in Poganuc Center. The minister was not a man particularly gifted in any of those points of pulpit excellence which Dr. Cushing would be likely to appreciate, and the Doctor had considered it hitherto too small and unimportant an affair to be worth even a combative notice; hence his ignorance and indifference to what was going on there. He had heard incidentally that they were dressing the church with pines and going to have a Christmas service, but he only murmured something about "*tolerabiles ineptiæ*" to the officious deacon who had called his attention to the fact. The remark, being in Latin, impressed the Deacon with a sense of profound and hidden wisdom. The people of Poganuc Center paid a man a salary for knowing more than they did, and they liked to have a scrap of Latin now and then to remind them of this fact. So the Deacon solemnly informed all comers into the store who discussed recent movements that the Doctor had his eyes open; he knew all about these doings and they should hear from him yet; the Doctor had expressed his mind to him.

The Doctor, in fact, was far more occupied with a certain Dr. Pyncheon, whose views of moral inability he expected entirely to confound by the aforesaid treatise which he had been preparing.

So after supper the boys officiously harnessed and brought up the horse and sleigh destined to take their parents to North Poganuc school-house, and saw them set off – listening to the last jingle of the sleigh bells with undisguised satisfaction.

"Good! Now, Tom, let's go up to the church and get the best places to see," exclaimed Bill.

"Oh, boys, are you going?" cried Dolly, in a piteous voice. "Oh, do take me! Nabby's going, and everybody, and I want to go."

"Oh, you mustn't go; you're a little girl and it's your bed-time," said Tom and Bill, as with Spring barking at their heels they burst in a windy swoop of noise out of the house, boys and dog about equally intelligent as to what it was all about.

CHAPTER III.
THE ILLUMINATION

Before going farther in our story we pause to give a brief answer to the queries that have risen in the minds of some who remember the old times in New England: How came there to be any Episcopalians or Episcopal church in a small Puritan town like Poganuc?

The Episcopal Church in New England in the early days was emphatically a root out of dry ground, with as little foothold in popular sympathy as one of those storm-driven junipers, that the east wind blows all aslant, has in the rocky ledges of Cape Cod. The soil, the climate, the atmosphere, the genius, and the history of the people were all against it. Its forms and ceremonies were all associated with the persecution which drove the Puritans out of England and left them no refuge but the rock-bound shores of America. It is true that in the time of Governor Winthrop the colony of Massachusetts appealed with affectionate professions to their Mother, the Church of England, and sought her sympathy and her prayers; but it is also unfortunately true that the forms of the Church of England were cultivated and maintained in New England by the very party whose intolerance and tyranny brought on the Revolutionary war.

All the oppressive governors of the colonies were

Episcopalians, and in the Revolutionary struggle the Episcopal Church was very generally on the Tory side; hence, the New Englanders came to have an aversion to its graceful and beautiful ritual and forms for the same reason that the free party in Spain and Italy now loathe the beauties of the Romish Church, as signs and symbols of tyranny and oppression.

Congregationalism – or, as it was then called by the common people, Presbyterianism – was the religion established by law in New England. It was the State Church. Even in Boston in its colonial days, the King's Chapel and Old North were only dissenting churches, unrecognized by the State, but upheld by the patronage of the colonial governors who were sent over to them from England. For a long time after the Revolutionary war the old *régime* of the State Church held undisputed sway in New England. There was the one meeting-house, the one minister, in every village. Every householder was taxed for the support of public worship, and stringent law and custom demanded of every one a personal attendance on Sunday at both services. If any defaulter failed to put in an appearance it was the minister's duty to call promptly on Monday and know the reason why. There was no place for differences of religious opinion. All that individualism which now raises a crop of various little churches in every country village was sternly suppressed. For many years only members of churches could be eligible to public offices; Sabbath-keeping was enforced with more than Mosaic strictness, and New England justified the sarcasm which said that they

had left the Lords-Bishops to be under the Lords-Brethren. In those days if a sectarian meeting of Methodists or Baptists, or an unseemly gathering of any kind, seemed impending, the minister had only to put on his cocked hat, take his gold-headed cane and march down the village street, leaving his prohibition at every house, and the thing was so done even as he commanded.

In the very nature of things such a state of society could not endure. The shock that separated the nation from a king and monarchy, the sense of freedom and independence, the hardihood of thought which led to the founding of a new civil republic, were fatal to all religious constraint. Even before the Revolutionary war there were independent spirits that chafed under the constraint of clerical supervision, and Ethan Allen advertised his farm and stock for sale, expressing his determination at any cost to get out of "this old holy State of Connecticut."

It was but a little while after the close of the war that established American independence that the revolution came which broke up the State Church and gave to every man the liberty of "signing off," as it was called, to any denomination that pleased him. Hence arose through New England churches of all names. The nucleus of the Episcopal Church in any place was generally some two or three old families of ancestral traditions in its favor, who gladly welcomed to their fold any who, for various causes, were discontented with the standing order of things. Then, too, there came to them gentle spirits, cut and bleeding by

the sharp crystals of doctrinal statement, and courting the balm of devotional liturgy and the cool shadowy indefiniteness of more æsthetic forms of worship. Also, any one that for any cause had a controversy with the dominant church took comfort in the power of "signing off" to another. In those days, to belong to no church was not respectable, but to sign off to the Episcopal Church was often a compromise that both gratified self-will and saved one's dignity; and, having signed off, the new convert was obliged, for consistency's sake, to justify the step he had taken by doing his best to uphold the doctrine and worship of his chosen church.

The little edifice at Poganuc had been trimmed and arranged with taste and skill. For that matter, it would seem as if the wild woods of New England were filled with garlands and decorations already made and only waiting to be used in this graceful service. Under the tall spruces the ground was all ruffled with the pretty wreaths of ground-pine; the arbor vitæ, the spruce, the cedar and juniper, with their balsamic breath, filled the aisles with a spicy fragrance. It was a cheaply built little church, in gothic forms, with pointed windows and an arch over the chancel; and every arch was wreathed with green, and above the chancel glittered a great gold star, manufactured by Miss Ida Lewis out of pasteboard and gilt paper ordered in Boston. It was not gold, but it glittered, and the people that looked on it were not *blasé*, as everybody in our days is, with sight seeing. The innocent rustic life of Poganuc had no pageants, no sights, no shows, except the eternal blazonry of nature; and therefore the people were

prepared to be dazzled and delighted with a star cut out of gilt paper. There was bustling activity of boys and men in lighting the windows, and a general rush of the populace to get the best seats.

"Wal, now, this beats all!" said Hiel Jones the stage driver, who had secured one of the best perches in the little gallery.

Hiel Jones, in virtue of his place on the high seat of the daily stage that drove through Poganuc Center on the Boston turnpike, felt himself invested with a sort of grandeur as occupying a predominant position in society from whence he could look down on all its movements and interests. Everybody bowed to Hiel. Every housekeeper charged him with her bundle or commissioned him with her errand. Bright-eyed damsels smiled at him from windows as he drove up to house-doors, and of all that was going on in Poganuc Center, or any of the villages for twenty miles around, Hiel considered himself as a competent judge and critic. Therefore he came at an early hour and assumed a seat where he could not only survey the gathering congregation but throw out from time to time a few suggestions on the lighting up and arrangements.

"Putty wal got up, this 'ere, for Poganuc Center," he said to Job Peters, a rather heavy lad who had secured the place beside him.

"Putty wal, considerin'! Take care there, Siah Beers, ye'll set them air spruce boughs afire ef you ain't careful lightin' your candles; spruce boughs go like all natur ef ye once start 'em. These 'ere things takes jedgment, Siah. Tell Ike Bissel there

to h'ist his pole a leetle higher; he don't reach them air top candles; what's the feller thinkin' of? Look out, Jimmy! Ef ye let down that top winder it flares the candles, and they'll gutter like thunder; better put it up."

When the church was satisfactorily lighted Hiel began his comments on the assembling audience:

"There goes Squire Lewis and Mis' Lewis and old lady Lewis and Idy Lewis and the Lewis boys. On time, they be. Heads down – sayin' prayers, I s'pose! Folks don't do so t' our meetin'; but folks' ways is different. Bless my soul, ef there ain't old Zeph Higgins, lookin' like a last year's mullen-stalk! I swow, ef the old critter hain't act'ally hitched up and come down with his hull team – wife and boys and yaller dog and all."

"Why, Zeph Higgins ain't 'Piscopal, is he?" said Job, who was less versed than Hiel in the gossip of the day.

"Lordy massy, yis! Hain't ye heard that Zeph's signed off two months ago, and goin' in strong for the 'Piscopals?"

"Wal, that air beats all," said his auditor. "Zeph is about the last timber I'd expect to make a 'Piscopal of."

"Oh, lands! he ain't no more 'Piscopal than I be, Zeph Higgins ain't; he's nothin' but a mad Presbyterian, like a good many o' the rest on 'em," said Hiel.

"Why, what's he mad about?"

"Laws, it's nothin' but that air old business about them potatoes that Zeph traded to Deacon Dickenson a year ago. Come to settle up, there was about five and sixpence that they couldn't

'gree 'bout. Zeph, he said the deacon cheated him, and the deacon stood to it he was right; and they had it back and forth, and the deacon wouldn't give in, and Zeph wouldn't. And there they stood with their horns locked like two bulls in a pastur' lot. Wal, they had 'em up 'fore the church, and they was labored with – both sides. The deacon said, finally, he'd pay the money for peace' sake, if Zeph would take back what he said 'bout his bein' a cheat and a liar; and Zeph he said he wouldn't take nothin' back; and then the church they suspended Zeph; and Zeph he signed off to the 'Piscopals."

"I want to know, now," said Job, with a satisfied air of dawning comprehension.

"Yis, sir, that air's the hull on't. But I tell you, Zeph's led the old deacon a dance. Zeph, ye see, is one o' them ropy, stringy fellers, jest like touch-wood – once get 'em a burnin' and they keep on a burnin' night and day. Zeph really sot up nights a hatin' the deacon, and contrivin' what he could do agin him. Finally, it come into his head that the deacon got his water from a spring on one of Zeph's high pastur' lots. The deacon had laid pipes himself and brought it 'cross lots down to his house. Wal, wat does Zeph do, without sayin' a word to the deacon, but he takes up all the deacon's logs that carried the water 'cross his lot, and throw'd 'em over the fence; and, fust the deacon's wife knowed, she hadn't a drop o' water to wash or cook with, or drink, nor nothin'. Deacon had to get all his water carted in barrels. Wal, they went to law 'bout it and 'tain't settled yit; but Zeph he took

Squire Lewis for his lawyer. Squire Lewis, ye see, he's the gret man to the 'Piscopal Church. Folks say he putty much built this 'ere church."

"Wal, now," said Job, after an interval of meditation, "I shouldn't think the 'Piscopals wouldn't get no gret advantage from them sort o' fellers."

"That air's jest what I was a tellin' on 'em over to the store," said Hiel, briskly. "Deacon Peasley, he was a mournin' about it. Lordy massy, deacon, says I, don't you worry. If them 'Piscopalians has got Zeph Higgins in their camp – why, they've bit off more'n they can chaw, that's all. They'll find it out one o' these days – see if they don't."

"Wal, but Zeph's folks is putty nice folks, now," said Job.

"O – wal, yis – they be; don't say nothin' agin his folks. Mis' Higgins is a meek, marciful old body, kind o' heart-broken at leavin' Parson Cushing and her meetin'. Then there's Nabby, and the boys. Wal, they sort o' like it – young folks goes in for new things. There's Nabby over there now, come in with Jim Sawin. I believe she's makin' a fool o' that 'ere fellow. Harnsom gal, Nabby is – knows it too – and sarves out the fellers. Maybe she'll go through the wood and pick up a crooked stick 'fore she knows it. I've sot up with Nabby myself; but laws, she ain't the only gal in the world – plenty on 'em all 'round the lot."

"Why," exclaimed his neighbor, "if there ain't the minister's boys down there in that front slip!"

"Sartin; you may bet on Bill and Tom for bein' into the best

seat whatever's goin' on. Likely boys; wide awake they be! Bill there could drive stage as well as I can, only if I didn't hold on to him he'd have us all to the darnation in five minutes. There's the makin' of suthin' in that Bill. He'll go strong to the Lord or to the devil one o' these days."

"Wal, what's his father think of his bein' here?"

"Parson Cushing! Lordy massy, he don't know nothin' where they be. Met him and Mis' Cushing jinglin' over to the Friday evenin' prayer-meetin' to North Poganuc."

"Wal, now," said his neighbor, "ef there ain't Lucius Jenks down there and Mis' Jenks, and all his folks."

"Yis – yis, jes' so. They say Lucius is thinkin' of signin' off to the 'Piscopals to get the trade. He's jest sot up store, and Deacon Dickenson's got all the ground; but there's the Lewises and the Copleys and the Danforths goes to the 'Piscopals, and they's folks that lives well and uses lots of groceries. I shouldn't wonder ef Lucius should make a good thing on't. Jenks ain't one that cares much which church he goes to, and, like enough, it don't make much difference to some folks."

"You know this 'ere minister they've got here?" asked Job.

"Know him? Guess so!" said Hiel, with a superior smile. "I've known Sim Coan ever since he wore short jackets. Sim comes from over by East Poganuc. His gran'ther was old Gineral Coan, a gret Tory he was, in the war times. Sim's ben to college, and he's putty smart and chipper. Come to heft him, tho', he don't weigh much 'longside o' Parson Cushing. He's got a good voice,

and reads well; but come to a *sermon*– wal, ain't no gret heft in't."

"Want to know," said his auditor.

"Yis," said Hiel, "but Sim's almighty plucky. You'd think now, comin' into this 'ere little bit of a church, right opposite Parson Cushing's great meetin'-house, and with the biggest part of folks goin' to meetin', that he'd sing small at fust; but he don't. Lordy massy, no! He comes right out with it that Parson Cushing ain't no minister, and hain't got no right to preach, nor administer sacraments, nor nothin' – nor nobody else but him and his 'Piscopal folks, that's been ordained by bishops. He gives it to 'em, hip and thigh, I tell you."

"That air don't look reasonable," said Job, after a few minutes of profound reflection.

"Wal, Sim says this 'ere thing has come right stret down from the 'Postles – one ordainin' another in a steady string all the way down till it come to him. And Parson Cushing, he's out in the cold, 'cause there hain't no bishop ordained him."

"Wal, I declare!" said the other. "I think that air's cheek."

"Ain't it now?" said Hiel. "Now, for my part, I go for the man that does his work best. Here's all our ministers round a savin' sinners and convartin' souls, whether the 'Postles ordained 'em or not – that's what ministers is *fur*. I'll set Parson Cushing 'longside any minister – preachin' and teachin' and holdin' meetin's in Poganuc Center, and North and South Poganuc, and gatherin' church members, and seein' to the schools, and keepin' every thing agoin'. That air kind o' minister 's good enough for *me*."

"Then you've no thoughts of signing off?"

"Not a bit on't. My old mother, she thinks every thing o' Parson Cushing. She's a gret deal better jedge than I be o' this 'ere sort o' thing. I shall go to meetin' with Mother."

"It's sort o' takin' and pretty, though, this 'ere dressing up the church and all," said his neighbor.

"Wal, yis, *'tis* putty," said Hiel, looking around with an air of candid allowance, "but who's going to pay for it all? These 'ere sort of things chalk up, ye know. All these 'ere taller candles ain't burnt out for nothing – somebody's got to foot the bills."

"Wal, I like the orgin," said Job. "I wish we had an orgin to our meetin'."

"Dunno," said Hiel, loth to admit any superiority. "Wal, they wouldn't a hed none ef it hadn't been for Uncle Sol Peters. You know he's kind o' crazy to sing, and he hain't got no ear, and no more voice 'n a saw-mill, and they wouldn't hev 'im in our singer seats, and so he went off to the 'Piscopals. And he bought an orgin right out and out, and paid for it, and put it in this church so that they'd let him be in the singin'. You know they can make noise enough with an orgin to drown his voice."

"Wal, it was considerable for Uncle Sol to do – wa'n't it?" said Job.

"Laws, he's an old bachelor, hain't got no wife and children to support, so I s'pose he may as well spend his money that way as any. Uncle Sol never could get any gal to hev him. There he is now, tryin' to get 'longside o' Nabby Higgins; but you'll see he

won't do it. She knows what she's about. Now, for my part, I like our singin' up to the meetin'-house full as wal as this 'ere. I like good old-fashioned psalm tunes, with Ben Davis to lead – that's the sort *I* like."

It will have been remarked that Hiel was one of that common class of Yankees who felt provided with a ready-made opinion of everything and every subject that could possibly be started, from stage-driving to apostolic succession, with a most comfortable opinion of the importance of his approbation and patronage.

When the house was filled and the evening service begun Hiel looked down critically as the audience rose or sat down or bowed in the Creed. The tones of the small organ, leading the choral chant and somewhat covering the uncultured roughness of the voices in the choir, rose and filled the green arches with a solemn and plaintive sound, affecting many a heart that scarce could give a reason why. It was in truth a very sweet and beautiful service, and one calculated to make a thoughtful person regret that the Church of England had ever expelled the Puritan leaders from an inheritance of such lovely possibilities. When the minister's sermon appeared, however, it proved to be a spirited discourse on the obligation of keeping Christmas, to which Hiel listened with pricked-up ears, evidently bristling with combativeness.

"Parson Cushing could knock that air all to flinders; you see if he can't," said Hiel, the moment the concluding services allowed him space to speak his mind. "Wal, did ye see old Zeph a-gettin' up and a-settin' down in the wrong place, and tryin' to manage

his prayer-book?" he said. "It's worse than the militia drill – he never hits right. I hed to laugh to see him. Hulloa! if there ain't little Dolly down there in the corner, under them cedars. How come she out this time o' night? Guess Parson Cushing 'll hev to look out for this 'ere!"

CHAPTER IV.
DOLLY'S ADVENTURE

And, after all, Dolly was there! Yes, she was. Human nature, which runs wild with the oldest of us at times, was too strong for poor little Dolly.

Can any of us look back to the earlier days of our mortal pilgrimage and remember the helpless sense of desolation and loneliness caused by being forced to go off to the stillness and darkness of a solitary bed far from all the beloved voices and employments and sights of life? Can we remember lying, hearing distant voices, and laughs of more fortunate, older people, and the opening and shutting of distant doors, that told of scenes of animation and interest from which we were excluded? How doleful sounded the tick of the clock, and how dismal was the darkness as sunshine faded from the window, leaving only a square of dusky dimness in place of daylight!

All who remember these will sympathize with Dolly, who was hustled off to bed by Nabby the minute supper was over, that she might have the decks clear for action.

"Now be a good girl; shut your eyes, and say your prayers, and go right to sleep," had been Nabby's parting injunction as she went out, closing the door after her.

The little head sunk into the pillow and Dolly recited her usual

liturgy of "Our Father who art in Heaven," and "I pray God to bless my dear father and mother and all my dear friends and relations, and make me a good girl;" and ending with

"'Now I lay me down to sleep.'"

But sleep she could not. The wide, bright, wistful blue eyes lay shining like two stars towards the fading light in the window, and the little ears were strained to catch every sound. She heard the shouts of Tom and Bill and the loud barking of Spring as they swept out of the door; and the sound went to her heart. Spring – her faithful attendant, the most loving and sympathetic of dogs, her friend and confidential counsellor in many a solitary ramble – Spring had gone with the boys to see the sight, and left her alone. She began to pity herself and cry softly on her pillow. For awhile she could hear Nabby's energetic movements below, washing up dishes, setting back chairs, and giving energetic thumps and bangs here and there, as her way was of producing order. But by and by that was all over, and she heard the loud shutting of the kitchen door and Nabby's voice chatting with her attendant as she went off to the scene of gaiety.

In those simple, innocent days in New England villages nobody thought of locking house doors at night. There was in those times no idea either of tramps or burglars, and many a night in summer had Dolly lain awake and heard the voices of tree-toads and whippoorwills mingling with the whisper of leaves

and the swaying of elm boughs, while the great outside door of the house lay broad open in the moonlight. But then this was when everybody was in the house and asleep, when the door of her parents' room stood open on the front hall, and she knew she could run to the paternal bed in a minute for protection. Now, however, she knew the house was empty. Everybody had gone out of it; and there is something fearful to a little lonely body in the possibilities of a great, empty house. She got up and opened her door, and the "tick-tock" of the old kitchen clock for a moment seemed like company; but pretty soon its ticking began to strike louder and louder with a nervous insistancy on her ear, till the nerves quivered and vibrated, and she couldn't go to sleep. She lay and listened to all the noises outside. It was a still, clear, freezing night, when the least sound clinked with a metallic resonance. She heard the runners of sleighs squeaking and crunching over the frozen road, and the lively jingle of bells. They would come nearer, nearer, pass by the house, and go off in the distance. Those were the happy folks going to see the gold star and the Christmas greens in the church. The gold star, the Christmas greens, had all the more attraction from their vagueness. Dolly was a fanciful little creature, and the clear air and romantic scenery of a mountain town had fed her imagination. Stories she had never read, except those in the Bible and the Pilgrim's Progress, but her very soul had vibrated with the descriptions of the celestial city – something vague, bright, glorious, lying beyond some dark river; and Nabby's rude account

of what was going on in the church suggested those images.

Finally a bright thought popped into her little head. She could see the church from the front windows of the house; she would go there and look. In haste she sprang out of bed and dressed herself. It was sharp and freezing in the fireless chamber, but Dolly's blood had a racing, healthy tingle to it; she didn't mind cold. She wrapped her cloak around her and tied on her hood and ran to the front windows. There it was, to be sure – the little church with its sharp-pointed windows every pane of which was sending streams of light across the glittering snow. There was a crowd around the door, and men and boys looking in at the windows. Dolly's soul was fired. But the elm-boughs a little obstructed her vision; she thought she would go down and look at it from the yard. So down stairs she ran, but as she opened the door the sound of the chant rolled out into the darkness with a sweet and solemn sound:

"*Glory be to God on high; and on earth peace, good will towards men.*"

Dolly's soul was all aglow – her nerves tingled and vibrated; she thought of the bells ringing in the celestial city; she could no longer contain herself, but faster and faster the little hooded form scudded across the snowy plain and pushed in among the dark cluster of spectators at the door. All made way for the child, and in a moment, whether in the body or out she could not tell, Dolly was sitting in a little nook under a bower of spruce, gazing at the star and listening to the voices:

"*We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify*

Thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory, O Lord God, Heavenly King, God, the Father Almighty."

Her heart throbbed and beat; she trembled with a strange happiness and sat as one entranced till the music was over. Then came reading, the rustle and murmur of people kneeling, and then they all rose and there was the solemn buzz of voices repeating the Creed with a curious lulling sound to her ear. There was old Mr. Danforth with his spectacles on, reading with a pompous tone, as if to witness a good confession for the church; and there was Squire Lewis and old Ma'am Lewis; and there was one place where they all bowed their heads and all the ladies made courtesies – all of which entertained her mightily.

When the sermon began Dolly got fast asleep and slept as quietly as a pet lamb in a meadow, lying in a little warm roll back under the shadows of the spruces. She was so tired and so sound asleep that she did not wake when the service ended, lying serenely curled up, and having perhaps pleasant dreams. She might have had the fortunes of little Goody Two-Shoes, whose history was detailed in one of the few children's books then printed, had not two friends united to find her out.

Spring, who had got into the slip with the boys, and been an equally attentive and edified listener, after service began a tour of investigation, dog-fashion, with his nose; for how could a minister's dog form a suitable judgment of any new procedure if he was repressed from the use of his own leading faculty? So, Spring went round the church conscientiously, smelling at pew-

doors, smelling of the greens, smelling at the heels of gentlemen and ladies, till he came near the door of the church, when he suddenly smelt something which called for immediate attention, and he made a side dart into the thicket where Dolly was sleeping, and began licking her face and hands and pulling her dress, giving short barks occasionally, as if to say, "Come, Dolly, wake up!" At the same instant Hiel, who had seen her from the gallery, came down just as the little one was sitting up with a dazed, bewildered air.

"Why, Dolly, how came you out o' bed this time o' night! Don't ye know the nine o'clock bell's jest rung?"

Dolly knew Hiel well enough – what child in the village did not! She reached up her little hands saying in an apologetic fashion,

"They were all gone away, and I was so lonesome!"

Hiel took her up in his long arms and carried her home, and was just entering the house-door with her as the sleigh drove up with Parson Cushing and his wife.

"Wal, Parson, your folks has all ben to the 'lumination – Nabby and Bill and Tom and Dolly here; found her all rolled up in a heap like a rabbit under the cedars."

"Why, Dolly Cushing!" exclaimed her mother. "What upon earth got you out of bed this time of night? You'll catch your death o' cold."

"I was all alone," said Dolly, with a piteous bleat.

"Oh, there, there, wife; don't say a word," put in the Parson.

"Get her off to bed. Never mind, Dolly, don't you cry;" for Parson Cushing was a soft-hearted gentleman and couldn't bear the sight of Dolly's quivering under lip. So Dolly told her little story, how she had been promised a sugar dog by Nabby if she'd be a good girl and go to sleep, and how she couldn't go to sleep, and how she just went down to look from the yard, and how the music drew her right over.

"There, there," said Parson Cushing, "go to bed, Dolly; and if Nabby don't give you a sugar dog, I will.

"This Christmas dressing is all nonsense," he added, "but the child 's not to blame – it was natural."

"After all," he said to his wife the last thing after they were settled for the night, "our little Dolly is an unusual child. There were not many little girls that would have dared to do that. I shall preach a sermon right away that will set all this Christmas matter straight," said the doctor. "There is not a shadow of evidence that the first Christians kept Christmas. It wasn't kept for the first three centuries, nor was Christ born anywhere near the 25th of December."

CHAPTER V.
DOLLY'S FIRST CHRISTMAS DAY

The next morning found little Dolly's blue eyes wide open with all the wondering eagerness of a new idea. In those early times the life of childhood was much more in the imagination than now. Children were let alone, to think their own thoughts. There were no kindergartens to train the baby to play philosophically, and infuse a stealthy aroma of geometry and conic sections into the very toys of the nursery. Parents were not anxiously watching every dawning idea of the little mind to set it straight even before it was uttered; and there were then no newspapers or magazines with a special corner for the bright sayings of children.

Not that children were any less beloved, or motherhood a less holy thing. There were many women of deep hearts, who, like the "most blessed among women," kept all the sayings of their darlings and pondered them in their hearts; but it was not deemed edifying or useful to pay much apparent attention to these utterances and actions of the youthful pilgrim.

Children's inquiries were freely put off with the general answer that Mamma was busy and they must not talk – that when they were grown up they would know all about these things, etc.; and so they lived apart from older people in their own little child-world of uninvaded ideas.

Dolly, therefore, had her wise thoughts about Christmas. She had been terribly frightened at first, when she was brought home from the church; but when her papa kissed her and promised her a sugar dog she was quite sure that, whatever the unexplained mystery might be, he did not think the lovely scene of the night before a wicked one. And when Mrs. Cushing came and covered the little girl up warmly in bed, she only said to her, "Dolly, you must never get out of bed again at night after you are put there; you might have caught a dreadful cold and been sick and died, and then we should have lost our little Dolly." So Dolly promised quite readily to be good and lie still ever after, no matter what attractions might be on foot in the community.

Much was gained, however, and it was all clear gain; and forthwith the little fanciful head proceeded to make the most of it, thinking over every feature of the wonder. The child had a vibrating, musical organization, and the sway and rush of the chanting still sounded in her ears and reminded her of that wonderful story in the "Pilgrim's Progress," where the gate of the celestial city swung open, and there were voices that sung, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him who sitteth on the throne." And then that wonderful star, that shone just as if it were a real star – how could it be! For Miss Ida Lewis, being a young lady of native artistic genius, had cut a little hole in the center of her gilt paper star, behind which was placed a candle, so that it gave real light, in a way most astonishing to untaught eyes. In Dolly's simple view it verged on the supernatural – perhaps it

was *the* very real star read about in the gospel story. Why not? Dolly was at the happy age when anything bright and heavenly seemed credible, and had the child-faith to which all things were possible. She had even seriously pondered at times the feasibility of walking some day to the end of the rainbow to look for the pot of gold which Nabby had credibly assured her was to be found there; and if at any time in her ramblings through the wood a wolf had met her and opened a conversation, as in the case of little Red Riding Hood, she would have been no way surprised, but kept up her part of the interview with becoming spirit.

"I wish, my dear," said Mrs. Cushing, after they were retired to their room for the night, "that to-morrow morning you would read the account of the birth of Christ in St Matthew, and give the children some good advice upon the proper way of keeping Christmas."

"Well, but you know we don't *keep* Christmas; nobody knows anything about Christmas," said the Doctor.

"You know what I mean, my dear," replied his wife. "You know that my mother and her family *do* keep Christmas. I always heard of it when I was a child; and even now, though I have been out of the way of it so long, I cannot help a sort of kindly feeling towards these ways. I am not surprised at all that the children got drawn over last night to the service. I think it's the most natural thing in the world, and I know by experience just how attractive such things are. I shouldn't wonder if this Episcopal church should draw very seriously on your congregation; but I

don't want it to begin by taking away our own children. Dolly is an inquisitive child; a child that thinks a good deal, and she'll be asking all sorts of questions about the why and wherefore of what she saw last night."

"Oh, yes, Dolly is a bright one. Dolly's an uncommon child," said the Doctor, who had a pardonable pride in his children – they being, in fact, the only worldly treasure that he was at all rich in.

"And as to that little dress-up affair over there," he continued, "I don't think any real harm has been done as yet. I have my eyes open. I know all about it, and I shall straighten out this whole matter next Sunday," he said, with the comfortable certainty of a man in the habit of carrying his points.

"I don't feel so very sure of that," said his wife; "at the same time I shouldn't want anything like an open attack on the Episcopalians. There are sincere good people of that way of thinking – my mother, for instance, is a saint on earth, and so is good old Madam Lewis. So pray be careful what you say."

"My dear, I haven't the least objection to their dressing their church and having a good Christian service any day in the year if they want to, but our people may just as well understand our own ground. I know that the Democrats are behind this new move, and they are just using this church to carry their own party purposes – to break up the standing order and put down all the laws that are left to protect religion and morals. They want to upset everything that our fathers came to New England to

establish. But I'm going to head this thing off in Poganuc. I shall write a sermon to-morrow, and settle matters."

Now, there is no religious organization in the world in its genius and history less likely to assimilate with a democratic movement than the Episcopal Church. It is essentially aristocratic in form, and, in New England, as we have already noticed, had always been on the side of monarchical institutions.

But, just at this point in the history of New England affairs, all the minor denominations were ready to join any party that promised to break the supremacy of the State Church and give them a foothold.

It was the "Democratic party" of that day that broke up the exclusive laws in favor of the Congregational Church and consequently gained large accessions to their own standard. To use a brief phrase, all the *outs* were Democrats, and all the *ins* Federalists. But the Democratic party had, as always, its radical train. Not satisfied with wresting the scepter from the hands of the Congregational clergyman, and giving equal rights and a fair field to other denominations, the cry was now to abolish all laws in any way protective of religious institutions, or restrictive of the fullest personal individualism; in short, the cry was for the liberty of every man to go to church or not, to keep the Sabbath or not, to support a minister or not, as seemed good and proper in his own eyes.

This was in fact the final outcome of things in New England,

and experience has demonstrated that this wide and perfect freedom is the best way of preserving religion and morals. But it was not given to a clergyman in the day of Dr. Cushing, who had hitherto felt that a state ought to be like a well-governed school, under the minister for schoolmaster, to look on the movements of the Democratic party otherwise than as tending to destruction and anarchy. This new movement in the Episcopal Church he regarded as but a device by appeals to the senses – by scenic effects, illuminations and music – to draw people off to an unspiritual and superficial form of religion, which, having once been the tool of monarchy and aristocracy, had now fallen into the hands of the far more dangerous democracy; and he determined to set the trumpet to his mouth on the following Sabbath, and warn the watchmen on the walls of Zion.

He rose up early, however, and proceeded to buy a sugar dog at the store of Lucius Jenks, and when Dolly came down to breakfast he called her to him and presented it, saying as he kissed her,

"Papa gives you this, not because it is Christmas, but because he loves his little Dolly."

"But *isn't* it Christmas?" asked Dolly, with a puzzled air.

"No, child; nobody knows when Christ was born, and there is nothing in the Bible to tell us *when* to keep Christmas."

And then in family worship the doctor read the account of the birth of Christ and of the shepherds abiding in the fields who came at the call of the angels, and they sung the old hymn:

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night."

"Now, children," he said when all was over, "you must be good children and go to school. If we are going to keep any day on account of the birth of Christ, the best way to keep it is by doing all our duties on that day better than any other. Your duty is to be good children, go to school and mind your lessons."

Tom and Bill, who had been at the show the evening before and exhausted the capabilities of the scenic effects, were quite ready to fall in with their father's view of the matter. The candles were burnt out, the play over, for them, and forthwith they assumed to look down on the whole with the contempt of superior intelligence. As for Dolly, she put her little tongue advisedly to the back of her sugar dog and found that he was very sweet indeed – a most tempting little animal. She even went so far as to nibble off a bit of the green ground he stood on – yet resolved heroically not to eat him at once, but to make him last as long as possible. She wrapped him tenderly in cotton and took him to the school with her, and when her confidential friend, Bessie Lewis, displayed her Christmas gifts, Dolly had something on her side to show, though she shook her curly head wisely and informed Bessie in strict confidence that there wasn't any such thing as Christmas, her papa had told her so – a heresy which Bessie forthwith reported when she went home at noon.

"Poor little Presbyterian – and did she say so?" asked gentle

old Grandmamma Lewis. "Well, dear, you mustn't blame her – she don't know any better. You bring the little thing in here to-night and I'll give her a Christmas cookey. I'm sorry for such children."

And so, after school, Dolly went in to see dear old Madam Lewis, who sat in her rocking-chair in the front parlor, where the fire was snapping behind great tall brass andirons and all the pictures were overshadowed with boughs of spruce and pine. Dolly gazed about her with awe and wonder. Over one of the pictures was suspended a cross of green with flowers of white everlasting.

"What is *that* for?" asked Dolly, pointing solemnly with her little forefinger, and speaking under her breath.

"Dear child, that is the picture of my poor boy who died – ever so many years ago. That is my cross – we have all one – to carry."

Dolly did not half understand these words, but she saw tears in the gentle old lady's eyes and was afraid to ask more.

She accepted thankfully and with her nicest and best executed courtesy a Christmas cookey representing a good-sized fish, with fins all spread and pink sugar-plums for eyes, and went home marveling yet more about this mystery of Christmas.

As she was crossing the green to go home the Poganuc stage drove in, with Hiel seated on high, whipping up his horses to make them execute that grand *entrée* which was the glory of his daily existence.

Now that the stage was on runners, and slipped noiselessly

over the smooth frozen plain, Hiel cracked his whip more energetically and shouted louder, first to one horse and then to another, to make up for the loss of the rattling wheels; and he generally had the satisfaction of seeing all the women rushing distractedly to doors and windows, and imagined them saying, "There's Hiel; the stage is in!"

"Hulloa, Dolly!" he called out, drawing up with a suddenness which threw the fore-horses back upon their haunches. "I've got a bundle for your folks. Want to ride? You may jest jump up here by me and I'll take you 'round to your father's door;" and so Dolly reached up her little red-mittened hand, and Hiel drew her up beside him.

"'Xpect ye want a bit of a ride, and I've got a bundle for Widder Badger, down on South Street, so I guess I'll go 'round that way to make it longer. I 'xpect this 'ere bundle is from some of your ma's folks in Boston – 'Piscopals they be, and keeps Christmas. Good sized bundle 'tis; reckon it'll come handy in a good many ways."

So, after finishing his detour, Hiel landed his little charge at the parsonage door.

"Reckon I'll be over when I've put up my hosses," he said to Nabby when he handed down the bundle to her. "I hain't been to see ye much lately, Nabby, and I know you've been a pinin' after me, but fact is – "

"Well, now, Hiel Beers, you jest shet up with your imperence," said Nabby, with flashing eyes; "you jest look out or you'll get

suthin."

"I 'xpect to get a kiss when I come round to-night," said Hiel, composedly. "Take care o' that air bundle, now; mebbe there's glass or crockery in 't."

"Hiel Beers," said Nabby, "don't give me none o' your saase, for I won't take it. Jim Sawin said last night you was the brassiest man he ever see. He said there was brass enough in your face to make a kettle of."

"You tell him there's sap enough in his head to fill it, any way," said Hiel. "Good bye, Nabby, I'll come 'round this evenin'," and he drove away at a rattling pace, while Nabby, with flushed cheeks and snapping eyes, soliloquized,

"Well, I hope he will come! I'd jest like a chance to show him how little I care for him."

Meanwhile the bundle was soon opened, and contained a store of treasures: a smart little red dress and a pair of red shoes for Dolly, a half dozen pocket-handkerchiefs for Dr. Cushing, and "Robinson Crusoe" and "Sanford and Merton," handsomely bound, for the boys, and a bonnet trimming for Mrs. Cushing. These were accompanied by a characteristic letter from Aunt Debby Kittery, opening as follows:

> "Dear Sister:
>
> "Mother worries because she thinks you Presbyterians won't get any Christmas presents. I tell her it serves you right for being out of the true church. However, this comes to give every one of you some of the crumbs which fall

from the church's table, and Mother says she wishes you all a pious Christmas, which she thinks is better than a merry one. If I didn't lay violent hands on her she would use all our substance in riotous giving of Christmas presents to all the beggars and chimney sweeps in Boston. She is in good health and talks daily of wanting to see you and the children; and I hope before long you will bring some of them, and come and make us a visit.

"Your affectionate sister,

"Debby Kittery."

There was a scene of exultation and clamor in the parsonage as these presents were pulled out and discussed; and when all possible joy was procured from them in the sitting-room, the children rushed in a body into the kitchen and showed them to Nabby, calling on her to join their acclamations.

And then in the evening Hiel came in, and Nabby prosecuted her attacks upon him with great vigor and severity, actually carrying matters to such a length that she was obliged, as a matter of pure Christian charity, to "kiss and make up" with him at the end of the evening. Of course Hiel took away an accurate inventory of every article in the bundle, for the enlightenment of any of his particular female friends who had a curiosity to know "what Mis' Cushin's folks sent her in that air bundle from Boston."

On the whole, when Dolly had said her prayers that night and thought the matter over, she concluded that her Christmas Day had been quite a success.

CHAPTER VI.
VILLAGE POLITICIANS

We have traced our little Dolly's fortunes, haps and havings through Christmas day, but we should not do justice to the situation did we not throw some light on the views and opinions of the Poganuc people upon this occasion.

The Episcopal church had been newly finished. There was held on this day, for the first time in open daylight, the full Christmas Service. The illumination and services of the evening before had been skillfully designed to make an impression on the popular mind, and to draw in children and young people with all that floating populace who might be desirous of seeing or hearing some new things.

It had been a success. Such an audience had been drawn and such a sensation produced that on Christmas day everybody in the village was talking of the church; and those who did not go ran to the windows to see who did go. A week-day church service other than a fast, and thanksgiving, and "preparatory lecture" was a striking novelty; and when the little bell rang out its peal and the congregation began to assemble it was watched with curious eyes from many a house.

The day was a glorious one. The bright, cold sun made the icicles that adorned the fronts of all the houses glitter like the

gems of Aladdin's palace, and a well-dressed company were seen coming up from various points of the village and thronging the portals of the church.

The little choir and their new organ rang out the *Te Deum* with hearty good-will, and many ears for the first time heard that glorious old heroic poem of the early church. The waves of sound rolled across the green and smote on the unresponsive double row of windows of the old meeting-house, which seemed to stare back with a gaze of blank astonishment. The sound even floated into the store of Deacon Dickenson, and caused some of the hard-handed old farmers who were doing their trading there, with their sleds and loads of wood, to stop their discourse on turnips, eggs and apple-sauce, and listen. To them it bore the sound as of a challenge, the battle-cry of an opposing host that was rising up to dispute the ground with them; and so they listened with combative ears.

"Seem to be a hevin' it all their own way over there, them 'Piscopals. Carryin' all before 'em," said one.

"How they are a gettin' on!" said another.

"Yes," said Deacon Dickenson; "all the Democrats are j'inin' them, and goin' to make a gen'l push next 'lection. They're goin' clean agin everything – Sunday laws and tiding-man and all."

"Wal," said Deacon Peasley, a meek, mournful little man, with a bald top to his head, "the Democrats are goin' to carry the state. I feel sure on 't."

"Good reason," said Tim Hawkins, a stout two-fisted farmer

from one of the outlying farms. "The Democrats beat 'cause they're allers up and dressed, and we Fed'lists ain't. Why, look at 'em to town meetin! Democrats allers on time, every soul on 'em – rag, tag and bobtail – rain or shine don't make no difference with them; but it takes a yoke of oxen to get a Fed'list out, and when you've got him you've got to set down on him to keep him. That's just the difference."

"Wal," said Deacon Peasley in a thin, querulous voice, "all this 'ere comes of extending the suffrage. Why, Father says that when he was a young man there couldn't nobody vote but good church members in regular standin', and couldn't nobody but them be elected to office. Now it's just as you say, 'rag, tag and bobtail' can vote, and you'll see they'll break up all our institutions. They've got it so now that folks can sign off and go to meetin' anywhere, and next they'll get it so they needn't go nowhere – that's what'll come next. There's a lot of our young folks ben a goin' to this 'ere 'lumination."

"Wal, I told Parson Cushing about that air 'lumination last night," said Deacon Dickenson, "and he didn't seem to mind it. But I tell you he'll hev to mind. Both his boys there, and little Dolly, too, runnin' over there after she was put to bed; he'll hev to do somethin' to head this 'ere off."

"He'll do it, too," said Tim Hawkins. "Parson Cushing knows what he's about, and he'll come out with a sarmon next Sunday, you see if he don't. There's more in Parson Cushing's little finger than there is in that Sim Coan's hull body, if he did come right

straight down from the 'Postles.

"I've heard," said Deacon Peasley, "that Mis' Cushing's folks in Boston was 'Piscopal, and some thought mebbe she influenced the children."

"Oh, wal, Mis' Cushing, she did come from a 'Piscopal family," said Deacon Dickenson. "She was a Kittery, and her gran'ther, Israel Kittery, was a tory in the war. Her folks used to go to the old North in Boston, and they didn't like her marryin' Parson Cushing a grain; but when she married him, why, she *did* marry him. She married his work, and married all his pinions. And nobody can say she hain't been a good yoke-fellow; she's kept up her end, Mis' Cushing has. No, there's nobody ought to say nothin' agin Mis' Cushing."

"Wal, I s'pose we shall hear from the doctor next Sunday," said Hawkins. "He'll speak out; his trumpet won't give an unsartin sound."

"I reely want ter know," said Deacon Peasley, "ef Zeph Higgins has reely come down with his folks *to-day*, givin' up a hull day's work! I shouldn't 'a' thought Zeph'd 'a' done that for any meetin'?"

"Oh, laws, yis; Zeph 'll do anything he sets his will on, particular if it's suthin' Mis' Higgins don't want to do – then Zeph 'll do it, sartin. I kind o' pity that air woman," said Hawkins.

"Oh, yis," said the deacon; "poor Mis' Higgins, she come to my wife reely mournin' when Zeph cut up so about them water-pipes, and says she, 'Mis' Dickenson, I'd rather 'a' worked my

fingers to the bone than this 'ere should 'a' happened; but I can't do nothin',' says she; 'he's that sort that the more you say the more sot he gets,' says she. Wal, I don't wish the 'Piscopals no worse luck than to get Zeph Higgins, that's all I've got to say."

"Wal," said Tim Hawkins, "let 'em alone. Guess they'll find out what he is when they come to pass the hat 'round. I expect keepin' up that air meetin' 'll be drefful hard sleddin' yit – and they won't get nothin' out o' Zeph. Zeph's as tight as the bark of a tree."

"Wonder if that air buildin's paid fer? Hiel Jones says there's a consid'able debt on't yit," said Deacon Peasley, "and Hiel gen'ally knows."

"Don't doubt on't," said Deacon Dickenson. "Squire Lewis he's in for the biggest part on't, and he's got money through his wife. She was one of them rich Winthrops up to Boston. The squire has gone off now to Lucius Jenks's store, and so has Colonel Danforth and a lot more of the biggest on 'em. I told Hiel I didn't mind, so long as I kep' Colonel Davenport and Judge Belcher and Judge Peters and Sheriff Dennie. I have a good many more aristocracy than he hez."

"For my part I don't care so very much for these 'ere town-hill aristocracy," said Tim Hawkins. "They live here in their gret houses and are so proud they think it's a favor to speak to a farmer in his blue linsey shirt a drivin' his team. I don't want none on 'em lookin' down on me. I am as good as they be; and I guess you make as much in your trade by the farmers out on the hills

as you do by the rich folks here in town."

"Oh, yis, sartin," said Deacon Dickenson, making haste to propitiate. "I don't want no better trade than I get out your way, Mr. Hawkins. I'd rather see your sled a standin' front o' my door than the finest carriage any of 'em drives. I haint forgot Parson Cushing's sarmon to the farmers, 'The king himself is sarved by the field.'"

"I tell you that was a sarmon!" said Hawkins "We folks in our neighborhood all subscribed to get it printed, and I read it over once a month, Sundays. Parson Cushing 's a good farmer himself. He can turn in and plow or hoe or mow, and do as good a day's work as I can, if he does know Latin and Greek; and he and Mis' Cushing they come over and visit 'round 'mong us quite as sociable as with them town-hill folks. I'm jest a waitin' to hear him give it to them air 'Piscopals next Sunday. He'll sarve out the Democrats – the doctor will."

"Wal," said Deacon Dickenson, "I don't think the doctor hed reely got waked up when I spoke to him 'bout that 'lumination, but I guess his eyes are open now, and the doctor 's one o' that sort that's *wide* awake when he is awake. He'll do suthin' o' Sunday."

CHAPTER VII.
THE DOCTOR'S SERMON

Poganuc was a pretty mountain town in Connecticut. It was a county seat, and therefore of some considerable importance in the vicinity. It boasted its share of public buildings – the great meeting-house that occupied the central position of the village green, the tavern where the weekly stage put up, a court-house, a jail, and other defenses of public morals, besides the recently added Episcopal church.

It was also the residence of some stately and dignified families of comfortable means and traditions of ancestral importance. Of these, as before stated, a few had availed themselves of the loosening of old bonds and founded an Episcopal church; but it must not be supposed that there was any lack of dignified and wealthy old families in the primitive historic church of Poganuc, which had so long borne undisputed sway in the vicinity. There were the fine old residences of Judge Gridley and Judge Belcher adorning the principal streets. Conspicuous in one of the front pews of the meeting-house might be seen every Sunday the stately form of Col. Davenport, who had been a confidential friend of General Washington and an active commander during the revolutionary war, and who inspired awe among the townspeople by his military antecedents. There might

be seen, too, the Governor of the State and the High Sheriff of Poganuc County, with one Mr. Israel Deyter, a retired New York merchant, gifted, in popular belief, with great riches. In short, the meeting-house, for a country town, had no small amount of wealth, importance and gentility. Besides these residents, who encamped about the green and on the main street, was an outlying farming population extending for miles around, whose wagons conveying their well-dressed wives, stalwart sons and blooming daughters poured in from all quarters, punctual as a clock to the ringing of the second bell every Sunday morning.

Not the least attentive listeners or shrewd critics were to be found in these hardy yeomanry who scanned severely all that they paid for, whether temporal or spiritual. As may have been noticed from the conversation at Deacon Dickenson's store, Dr. Cushing had rather a delicate rôle to maintain in holding in unity the aristocracy and the democracy of his parish; for in those days people of well-born, well-bred families had a certain traditional stateliness and punctiliousness which were apt to be considered as pride by the laboring democracy, and the doctor, as might be expected, found it often more difficult to combat pride in homespun than pride in velvet – perhaps having no very brilliant success in either case.

The next Sunday was one of high expectation. Everybody was on tiptoe to hear what "our minister" would have to say.

The meeting-house of Poganuc was one of those square, bald, unsentimental structures of which but few specimens

have come down to us from old times. The pattern of those ancient edifices was said to be derived from Holland, where the Puritans were sheltered before they came to these shores. At all events, they were a marked departure in every respect from all particulars which might remind one of the graceful ecclesiastical architecture and customs of the Church of England. They were wide, roomy, and of a desolate plainness; hot and sunny in summer, with their staring rows of windows, and in winter cold enough in some cases even to freeze the eucharistic wine at the communion.

It was with great conflict of opinion and much difficulty that the people of Poganuc had advanced so far in the ways of modern improvement as to be willing to have a large box stove set up in the middle of the broad aisle, with a length of black pipe extending through the house, whereby the severity of winter sanctuary performances should be somewhat abated. It is on record that, when the proposal was made in town meeting to introduce this luxurious indulgence, the zeal of old Zeph Higgins was aroused, and he rose and gave vent to his feelings in a protest:

"Fire? Fire? A fire in the house o' God? I never heard on't. I never heard o' hevin' fire in a meetin'-house."

Sheriff Dennie here rose, and inquired whether *Mrs.* Higgins did not bring a foot-stove with fire in it into the house of God every Sunday.

It was an undeniable fact not only that Mrs. Higgins but every respectable matron and mother of a family brought her foot-stove

to church well filled with good, solid, hickory coals, and that the passing of this little ark of mercy from one frozen pair of feet to another was among the silent motherly ministries which varied the hours of service.

So the precedent of the foot-stove carried the box-stove into the broad aisle of the meeting-house, whereby the air was so moderated that the minister's breath did not freeze into visible clouds of vapor while speaking, and the beards and whiskers of the brethren were no longer coated with frost during service time.

Yet Poganuc was a place where winter stood for something. The hill, like all hills in our dear New England, though beautiful for situation in summer was a howling desolation for about six months of the year, sealed down under snow and drifted over by winds that pierced like knives and seemed to search every fiber of one's garments, so that the thickest clothing was no protection.

The Sunday in question was one of those many when the thermometer stood any number of degrees below zero; the air clear, keen and cutting; and the bright, blooming faces of the girls in the singers' seat bore token of the frosty wind they had encountered. All was animation through the church, and Mr. Benjamin Davis, the leader of the singing, had selected old "Denmark" as a proper tune for opening the parallels between them and the opposing forces of ritualism. Ben had a high conceit of his own vocal powers, and had been heard to express himself contemptuously of the new Episcopal organ. He had been to Doctor Cushing with suggestions as to the tunes that

the singers wanted, to keep up the reputation of their "meetin'-house." So after "Denmark" came old "Majesty," and Ben so bestirred himself beating time and roaring, first to treble and then to counter and then to bass, and all the singers poured forth their voices with such ringing good-will, that everybody felt sure they were better than any Episcopal organ in the world.

And as there is a place for all things in this great world of ours, so there was in its time and day a place and a style for Puritan music. If there were pathos and power and solemn splendor in the rhythmic movement of the churchly chants, there was a grand wild freedom, an energy of motion, in the old "fuguing" tunes of that day that well expressed the heart of a people courageous in combat and unshaken in endurance. The church chant is like the measured motion of the mighty sea in calm weather, but those old fuguing tunes were like that same ocean aroused by stormy winds, when deep calleth unto deep in tempestuous confusion, out of which at last is evolved union and harmony. It was a music suggestive of the strife, the commotion, the battle cries of a transition period of society, struggling onward toward dimly-seen ideals of peace and order. Whatever the trained musician might say of such a tune as old "Majesty," no person of imagination and sensibility could ever hear it well rendered by a large choir without deep emotion. And when back and forth from every side of the church came the different parts shouting,

"On cherubim and seraphim

Full royally he rode,
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad" —

there went a stir and a thrill through many a stern and hard nature, until the tempest cleared off in the words,

"He sat serene upon the floods,
Their fury to restrain,
And he, as sovereign Lord and King,
Forever more shall reign."

And when the doctor rose to his sermon the music had done its work on his audience, in exalting their mood to listen with sympathetic ears to whatever he might have to say.

When he spread out his sermon before him there was a rustle all over the house, as of people composing themselves to give the strictest attention.

He announced his text from Galatians iv., 9, 10, 11.

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labor in vain."

The very announcement of the text seemed to bring out upon the listening faces of the audience a sympathetic gleam. Hard, weather-beaten countenances showed it, as when a sunbeam

passes over points of rocks.

What was to come of such a text was plain to be seen. The yoke of bondage from which Puritan New England had escaped across the waters of a stormy sea, the liberty in Christ which they had won in this new untrodden land, made theirs by prayers and toils and tears and sacrifice, for which they had just fought through a tedious and bloody war – there was enough in all these remembrances to evoke a strain of heartfelt eloquence which would awaken a response in every heart.

Then the doctor began his investigations of Christmas; and here his sermon bristled with quotations in good Greek and Latin, which he could not deny himself the pleasure of quoting in the original as well as in the translation. But the triumphant point in his argument was founded on a passage in Clemens Alexandrinus, who, writing at the close of the second century, speaks of the date of Christ's birth as an unimportant and unsettled point. "There are some," says the Father, "who over-curiously assign not only the year but the day of our Saviour's birth, which they say was the 25th of Pachon, or the 20th of May."

The doctor had exulted in the finding of this passage as one that findeth much spoil, and he proceeded to make the most of it in showing that the modern keeping of Christmas was so far unknown in the earliest ages of the church that even the day was a matter of uncertainty.

Now it is true that his audience, more than half of them, did

not know who Clement was. Even the judges, men of culture and learning, and the teacher at the Academy, professionally familiar with Greek, had only the vaguest recollection of a Christian Father who had lived some time in the primitive ages; the rest of the congregation, men and women, only knew that their minister was a learned man and were triumphant at this new proof of it.

The doctor used his point so as to make it skillfully exciting to the strong, practical, matter-of-fact element which underlies New England life. "If it had been important for us to keep Christmas," he said, "certainly the date would not have been left in uncertainty. We find no traces in the New Testament of any such observance; we never read of Christmas as kept by the apostles and their followers; and it appears that it was some centuries after Christ before such an observance was heard of at all." In fact the doctor said that the keeping of the 25th of December as Christmas did not obtain till after the fourth century, and then it was appointed to take the place of an old heathen festival, the "*natalis solis invicti*;" and here the doctor rained down names and authorities and quotations establishing conflicting suppositions till the wilderness of learning grew so wild that only the Academy teacher seemed able to follow it through. He indeed sat up and nodded intelligently from point to point, feeling that the eyes of scholars might be upon him, and that it was well never to be caught napping in matters like these.

The last point of the Doctor's sermon consisted in historical statements and quotations concerning the various abuses to

which the celebration of the Christmas festival had given rise, from the days of Augustine and Chrysostom down to those of the Charleses and Jameses of England, in all of which he had free course and was glorified; since under that head there are many things more true than edifying that might be recounted.

He alluded to the persecutions which had forced upon our fathers the alternative of conforming to burdensome and unspiritual rites and ceremonies or of flying from their native land and all they held dear; he quoted from St. Paul the passage about false brethren who came in privily to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us again into bondage – "to whom" (and here the doctor grew emphatic and thumped the pulpit cushion) "we gave place by subjection *not for an hour*."

The sermon ended with a stirring appeal to walk in the good old ways, to resist all those, however fair their pretenses, who sought to remove the old landmarks and repeal the just laws and rules that had come down from the fathers. It was evident from the enkindled faces in every pew that the doctor carried his audience fully with him, and when in the closing petition he prayed to the Lord that "our judges might be as at the first, and our counsellors as at the beginning," everybody felt sure that he was thinking of the next election, and Tim Hawkins with difficulty restrained himself from giving a poke of the elbow to a neighbor in the next pew suspected of Democratic proclivities.

As to Dolly, who as a babe of grace was duly brought to

church every Sunday, her meditations were of a very confused order. Since the gift of her red dress and red shoes, and the well remembered delightful scene at the church on Christmas Eve, Christmas had been an interesting and beautiful mystery to her mind; a sort of illuminated mist, now appearing and now disappearing.

Sometimes when her father in his sermon pronounced the word "Christmas" in emphatic tones, she fixed her great blue eyes seriously upon him and wondered what he could be saying; but when Greek and Latin quotations began to rain thick and fast she turned to Spring, who as a good, well-trained minister's dog was allowed to go to meeting with his betters, and whose serious and edified air was a pattern to Dolly and the boys.

When she was cold – a very common experience in those windy pews – she nestled close to Spring and put her arms around his neck, and sometimes dropped asleep on his back. Those sanctuary naps were a generally accorded privilege to the babes of the church, who could not be expected to digest the strong meat of the elders.

Dolly had one comfort of which nothing could deprive her: she had been allowed to wear her new red dress and red shoes. It is true the dress was covered up under a dark, stout little woolen coat, and the red shoes quenched in the shade of a pair of socks designed to protect her feet from freezing; but at intervals Dolly pulled open her little coat and looked at the red dress, and felt warmer for it, and thought whether there was any such day as

Christmas or not it was a nice thing for little girls to have aunties and grandmas who believed in it, and sent them pretty things in consequence.

When the audience broke up and the doctor came down from the pulpit he was congratulated on his sermon as a master-piece. Indeed, he had the success that a man has always when he proves to an audience that they are in the right in their previous opinions.

The general opinion, from Colonel Davenport and Sheriff Dennie down to Tim Hawkins and the farmers of the vicinity, was that the doctor's sermon ought to be printed by subscription, and the suggestion was left to be talked over in various circles for the ensuing week.

CHAPTER VIII.
MR. COAN ANSWERS THE DOCTOR

The doctor's sermon had the usual effect of controversial sermons – it convinced everybody that was convinced before and strengthened those who before were strong. Everybody was talking of it. The farmers as they drove their oxen stepped with a vigorous air, like men that were not going to be brought under any yoke of bondage. Old ladies in their tea-drinkings talked about the danger of making a righteousness of forms and rites and ceremonies, and seemed of opinion that the proceedings at the Episcopal church, however attractive, were only an insidious putting forth of one paw of the Scarlet Beast of Rome, and that if not vigorously opposed the whole quadruped, tooth and claw, would yet be upon their backs.

But it must not be supposed that this side of the question had all the talk to itself. The Rev. Simeon Coan was a youth of bright parts, vigorous combativeness and considerable fluency of speech, and he immediately prepared a sermon on his side of the question, by which, in the opinion of the Lewises, the Danforths, the Copleys and all the rest of his audience, he proved beyond a doubt that Christmas ought to be kept, and that the 25th of December was the proper time for keeping it. He brought also

quotations from Greek and Latin thick as stars in the skies; and as to the quotations of the doctor he ignored them altogether, and talked about something else.

The doctor had been heard to observe with a subdued triumph that he really would like to see how "Coan" would "get round" that passage in Clement, but he could not have that pleasure, because "Coan" did not get anywhere near it, but struck off as far as possible from it into a region of quotations on his own side; and as his audience were not particularly fitted to adjudicate nice points in chronology, and as quotations from the Church Fathers on all sides of almost any subject under the sun are plentiful as blackberries in August, Mr. Coan succeeded in making his side to the full as irrefragable in the eyes of his hearers as the doctor's in those of his.

But besides this he reinforced himself by proclaiming with vigor the authority of the Church. "The Church has ordained," "The Church in her wisdom has directed," "The Church commands," and "The Church hath appointed," were phrases often on his tongue, and the sound rolled smoothly above the heads of good old families who had long felt the want of some definite form of authority to support their religious preferences in face of the general Congregationalism of the land.

The *Church*, that mysterious and awful power that had come down from distant ages, had survived the dissolution of monarchies and was to-day the same as of old! The thought was poetical and exciting, and gave impulse to the fervor inspired by

a liturgy and forms of worship allowed even by adversaries to be noble and beautiful; and their minister's confident assertion that the Church commanded, approved and backed up all that they were doing was immensely supporting to the little band. The newly-acquired members, born and brought up in Congregational discipline, felt all the delight of a new sense of liberty. It had not always been possible to go to any other than the dominant church, and there was a fresh emotion of pleasure in being able to do as they pleased in the matter; so they readily accepted Mr. Coan's High Church claims and doctrines. Instead of standing on the defensive and apologizing for their existence he boldly struck out for the rock of apostolic succession, declared their church *the* true Apostolic Church, the only real church in the place, although he admitted with an affable charity that doubtless good Christian people among the various sects who departed from this true foundation might at last be saved through the uncovenanted mercies of God.

Imagine the scorn which this doctrine inspired in Puritan people, who had been born in the faith that New England was the vine which God's right hand had planted – who had looked on her church as the Church of God, cast out indeed into the wilderness, but bearing with her "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." That faith was woven into the very existence of the New England race. They cast great roots about it as the oaks of the forest grasped and grew out of the eternal

rocks of their hard and barren shores. So, when Mr. Simeon Coan, in a white surplice, amid suspicious chantings and bowings and genuflections, announced a doctrine which disfranchised them of the heavenly Jerusalem, and made them aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise, there was a grim sense of humor mingled with the indignation which swelled their bosoms.

"Uncovenanted marcies!" said stout Tim Hawkins. "Thet's what they call 'em, do they? Wal, ef thet's what Parson Cushing and all the ministers of our association has got to live and die by – why, it's good enough for me. I don't want no better; I don't care which kind they be. I scorn to argue with such folks."

In fact they felt as if they had seen a chip sparrow flying in the face of an eagle in his rock-bound eyrie.

But the doctor's sermon had the effect to draw the lines as to keeping Christmas up to the tightest brace. The academy teacher took occasion on Monday to remark to his scholars how he had never thought of such a thing as suspending school for Christmas holidays, and those of the pupils who, belonging to Episcopal families, had gone on Christmas Day to church were informed that marks for absence and non-performance of lessons would stand against them, no matter what excuses they might bring from parents. As to Christmas holidays – the giving up to amusement a week, from Christmas to New Year's – he spoke of it as a popish enormity not to be mentioned or even thought of in God-fearing New England, which abhorred a holiday as much

as nature abhors a vacuum. Those parents whose children had been drawn in to attend these seductive festivities were anxiously admonished by their elders in homilies from the text, "Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird."

For example, witness one scene. It is Sunday evening, and the bright snapping fire lights up the great kitchen chimney where the widow Jones is sitting by the stand with her great Bible before her. A thin, weary, kindly old face is hers, with as many lines in it as Denner's celebrated picture of the old woman. Everything about her, to her angular figure and her thin bony hands, bore witness to the unsparing work that had been laid upon every hour and moment of her life. Even now the thin hands that rested on the Bible twitched at times mechanically as if even in the blessed rest of Sunday evening she felt the touch of the omnipresent knitting needles.

On the settle beside the fire, half stretched out, lounges Hiel, her youngest born son and the prop of her old age; for all others have gone hither and thither seeking their future in the world. Hiel has been comforting her heart by the heartiest praises of the minister's sermon that day.

"I tell you what, Mother, them 'Piscopals got pitched into lively, now; the Doctor pursued 'em 'even unto Shur,' as the Scriptur' says."

"Yis; and, Hiel, I hope you won't be seen goin' to the 'Piscopal meetings no more. I felt reely consarned, after I heard the sarmon, to think of your bein' in to that air 'lumination."

"Oh laws, Mother, I jest *hed* to go to see to things. Things hez to be seen to; there was the Doctor's boys right up in the front slips, and little Dolly there rolled up like a rabbit down there under them spruces. I had to take her home. I expect it's what waked up the Doctor so, what I said to him."

"Wal, Hiel, mebbe it was all fer the best; but I hope you'll let it alone now. And I heard you was a settin' up with Nabby Higgins the other evening; was you?"

A curious expression passed over Hiel's droll handsome face, and he drew his knife from his pocket and began reflectively to shave a bit of shingle.

"Wal, yis, Mother; the fact is, I did stay with Nabby Christmas evening, as they call it. Nabby and me's allers ben good friends, you know. You know, Mother, you think lots of Nabby's mother, Mis' Higgins, and it ain't her fault nor Nabby's ef she hez to leave our meetin'. It's old Zeph that makes 'em."

"O yis. I ha'n't nothin' agin Mis' Higgins. Polly Higgins is a good woman as is goin'. I don't want no better; but as to Nabby, why, she's light and triflin', and she's goin' right into all these 'ere vanities; and I don't want no son of mine to get drawn away arter her. You know how 'twas in old times, it was the Moabitish women that allers made mischief."

"Oh land o' Goshen, Mother, jes as ef it would do any harm for me to set up with Nabby in the minister's own kitchen. Ef she don't pisen the minister's boys and Dolly she won't pisen me; besides, I wanted to see what was in that air bundle Mis'

Cushing's folks sent to her from Boston. Of course I knew you'd be a wantin' to know."

"Wal, did you see?" said the widow, snapping at once at the bait so artfully thrown.

"I rather reckon I did. Dolly she got a red frock and red shoes, and she was so tickled nothing would do but she must bring her red frock and red shoes right out to show to Nabby. They think all the world of each other, Nabby and Dolly do."

"Was the dress made up?" said the widow.

"Oh, yis; all made up, ready to put right on."

"Red, did you say?"

"Yes, red as a robin, with little black sprigs in't, and her shoes red morocco. I tell you she put 'em on and squeaked round in 'em lively! Then there was six silk pocket-handkerchers for the Doctor, all hemmed, and his name marked in the corner; and there was a nice book for each o' them boys, and a bonnet-ribbin for Miss Cushing."

"What color was it?" said the widow.

"Wal, I don't know – sort o' sky-blue scarlet," said Hiel, tired of particulars. "I never know what women call their ribbins."

"Wal, reely now, it's a good thing for folks to have rich relations," soliloquized the widow. "I don't grudge Mis' Cushing her prosperity – not a grain."

"Yis, and the doctor's folks was glad enough to get them things, if they *was* Christmas presents. The Christmas didn't pisen 'em, any way; Mis' Cushing's folks up to Boston 's

'Piscopals, but she thinks they're pretty nice folks, if they *be* 'Piscopals.

"Now, Hiel," said the widow, "Nabby Higgins is a nice girl – a girl that's got faculty, and got ambition, and she's handsome. I expect she's prudent and laid by something out of her wages" – and here the widow paused and gazed reflectively at the sparks on the chimney-back.

"Wal, Mother, the upshot on't is that if I and Nabby should want to make a team together there wouldn't be no call for wailin' and gnashin' of teeth. There might wuss things happen; but jes now Nabby and I's good friends – that's all."

And with this settlement the widow Jones, like many another mother, was forced to rest contented, sure that her son, in his own good time, would – do just as he pleased.

CHAPTER IX.
ELECTION DAY IN POGANUC

The month of March had dawned over the slippery, snow-clad hills of Poganuc. The custom that enumerates this as among the spring months was in that region the most bitter irony. Other winter months were simple *winter*– cold, sharp and hard enough – but March was winter with a practical application, driven in by winds that pierced through joints and marrow. Not an icicle of all the stalactites which adorned the fronts of houses had so much as thought of thawing; the snow banks still lay in white billows above the tops of the fences; the roads, through which the ox-sleds of the farmers crunched and squeaked their way, were cut deep down through heavy drifts, and there was still the best prospect in the world for future snow-storms; but yet it was called "spring." And the voting day had come; and Zeph Higgins, full of the energy of a sovereign and voter, was up at four o'clock in the morning, bestirring himself with a tempestuous clatter to rouse his household and be by daylight on the way to town to exercise his rights.

The feeble light of a tallow dip seemed to cut but a small circle into the darkness of the great kitchen. The frost sparkled white on the back of the big fire-place, where the last night's coals lay raked up under banks of ashes. An earthquake of tramping

cowhide boots shook the rafters and stairs, and the four boys appeared on the scene of action. Backlog and forestick were soon piled and kindlings laid, and the fire roared and snapped and crackled up the ample chimney. Meek, shadowy Mrs. Higgins, with a step like a snow-flake, and resignation and submission in every line of her face, was proceeding to cut off frozen sausages from the strings of the same that garnished the kitchen walls. The tea kettle was hung over the blaze, and Zeph and the boys, with hats crowded down to their eyes, and tippets tied over their ears, plowed their way to the barn to milk and feed the stock.

When they returned, while the tea-kettle was puffing and the sausages frying and sizzling, there was an interval in which Zeph called to family prayers, and began reading the Bible with a voice as loud and harsh as the winds that were blowing out of doors.

Zeph always read the Bible straight along in course, without a moment's thought or inquiry as to the sense of what he was reading, which this morning was from Zechariah xi., as follows: "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled. Howl, O ye oaks of Bashan, for the forest of the vintage is come down. There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds, for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions, for the pride of Jordan is spoiled." Zeph rendered the whole chapter with his harshest tones, and then, all standing, he enunciated in stentorian voice the morning prayer, whose phrases were an heir-loom that had descended from father to son for generations.

The custom of family worship was one of the most rigid inculcations of the Puritan order of society, and came down from parent to child with the big family Bible, where the births, deaths and marriages of the household stood recorded.

In Zeph's case the custom seemed to be merely an inherited tradition, which had dwindled into a habit purely mechanical. Yet, who shall say?

Of a rugged race, educated in hardness, wringing his substance out of the very teeth and claws of reluctant nature, on a rocky and barren soil, and under a harsh, forbidding sky, who but the All-Seeing could judge him? In that hard soul there may have been thus uncouthly expressed a loyalty for Something Higher, however dimly perceived. It was acknowledging that even he had his master. One thing is certain, the custom of family prayers, such as it was, was a great comfort to the meek saint by his side, to whom any form of prayer, any pause from earthly care and looking up to a Heavenly Power, was a blessed rest. In that daily toil, often beyond her strength, when she never received a word of sympathy or praise, it was a comfort all day to her to have had a chapter in the Bible and a prayer in the morning. Even though the chapter were one that she could not by possibility understand a word of, yet it put her in mind of things in that same dear book that she did understand; things that gave her strength to live and hope to die by, and it was enough! Her faith in the Invisible Friend was so strong that she needed but to touch the hem of his garment. Even a table of genealogies out of *his* book was a

sacred charm, an amulet of peace.

Four sons – tall, stout and ruddy, in different stages of progression – surrounded the table and caused sausages, rye and Indian bread, and pork and beans, rapidly to disappear. Of these sons two only were of the age to vote. Zeph rigorously exacted of his boys the full amount of labor which the law allowed till their majority; but at twenty-one he recognized their legal status, and began giving them the wages of hired men. On this morning he longed to have his way as to their vote; but the boys had enough of his own nature in them to have a purpose and will of their own, and how they were to vote was an impenetrable secret locked up in the rocky fastnesses of their own bosoms.

As soon as there were faint red streaks in the wintry sky, Zeph's sled was on the road, well loaded up with cord-wood to be delivered at Colonel Davenport's door; for Zeph never forgot business nor the opportunity of earning an honest penny. The oxen that drew his sled were sleek, well-fed beasts, the pride of Zeph's heart, and as the red sunlight darted across the snowy hills their breath steamed up, a very luminous cloud of vapor, which in a few moments congealed in sparkling frost lines on their patient eye-winkers and every little projecting hair around their great noses. The sled-runners creaked and grated as Zeph, with loud "Whoa," "Haw," or "Gee," directed the plodding course of his beasts. The cutting March wind was blowing right into his face; his shaggy, grizzled eye-brows and bushy beard were whitening apace; but he was in good spirits – he was going to vote

against the Federalists; and as the largest part of the aristocracy of Town Hill were Federalists, he rejoiced all the more. Zeph was a creature born to oppose, as much as white bears are made to walk on ice.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.