

Goodrich Samuel Griswold

**Peter Parley's Own Story.**  
**From the Personal Narrative**  
**of the Late Samuel...**



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# **Peter Parley's Own Story From the Personal Narrative of the Late Samuel G. Goodrich, («Peter Parley»)**

## **CHAPTER I**

**BIRTH AND PARENTAGE – THE OLD HOUSE –  
RIDGEFIELD – THE MEETING-HOUSE – PARSON  
MEAD – KEELER'S TAVERN – THE CANNON-BALL  
– LIEUTENANT SMITH.**

In the western part of the State of Connecticut is a small town named Ridgefield. This title is descriptive, and indicates the general form and position of the place. It is, in fact, a collection of hills, rolled into one general and commanding elevation. On the west is a ridge of mountains, forming the boundary between the States of Connecticut and New York; to the south the land spreads out in wooded undulations to Long Island Sound; east and north, a succession of hills, some rising up against the sky and others fading away in the distance, bound the horizon. In this

town, in an antiquated and rather dilapidated house of shingles and clapboards, I was born on the 19th of August, 1793.

My father, Samuel Goodrich, was minister of the Congregational Church of that place, and there was no other religious society and no other clergyman in the town. He was the son of Elizur Goodrich, a distinguished minister of the same persuasion at Durham, Connecticut. Two of his brothers were men of eminence – the late Chauncey Goodrich of Hartford, and Elizur Goodrich of New Haven. My mother was a daughter of John Ely, a physician of Saybrook, whose name figures, not unworthily, in the annals of the revolutionary war.

I was the sixth child of a family of ten children, two of whom died in infancy, and eight of whom lived to be married and settled in life. My father's annual salary for the first twenty-five years, and during his ministry at Ridgefield, averaged four hundred dollars a-year: the last twenty-five years, during which he was settled at Berlin, near Hartford, his stipend was about five hundred dollars a-year. He was wholly without patrimony, and owing to peculiar circumstances, which will be hereafter explained, my mother had not even the ordinary outfit when they began their married life. Yet they so brought up their family of eight children, that they all attained respectable positions in life, and at my father's death he left an estate of four thousand dollars. These facts throw light upon the simple annals of a country clergyman in Connecticut, half-a-century ago; they also bear testimony to the thrifty energy and wise frugality of my

parents, and especially of my mother, who was the guardian deity of the household.

Ridgefield belongs to the county of Fairfield, and is now a handsome town, as well on account of its artificial as its natural advantages; with some two thousand inhabitants. It is fourteen miles from Long Island Sound, of which its many swelling hills afford charming views. The main street is a mile in length, and is now embellished with several handsome houses. About the middle of it there is, or was, some forty years ago, a white, wooden Meeting-house, which belonged to my father's congregation. It stood in a small grassy square, the favorite pasture of numerous flocks of geese, and the frequent playground of school-boys, especially on Sunday afternoons. Close by the front door ran the public road, and the pulpit, facing it, looked out upon it on fair summer Sundays, as I well remember by a somewhat amusing incident.

In the contiguous town of Lower Salem dwelt an aged minister, by the name of Mead. He was all his life marked with eccentricity, and about those days of which I speak, his mind was rendered yet more erratic by a touch of paralysis. He was, however, still able to preach, and on a certain Sunday, having exchanged with my father, he was in the pulpit and engaged in making his opening prayer. He had already begun his invocation, when David P – , who was the Jehu of that generation, dashed by the front door upon a horse, a clever animal, of which he was but too proud – in a full, round trot. The echo of the clattering

hoofs filled the church, which, being of wood, was sonorous as a drum, and arrested the attention, as well of the minister as the congregation, even before the rider had reached it. The minister was fond of horses, almost to frailty; and, from the first, his practised ear perceived that the sounds came from a beast of bottom. When the animal shot by the door, he could not restrain his admiration; which was accordingly thrust into the very marrow of his prayer "We pray Thee, O Lord, in a particular and peculiar manner —*that's a real smart critter*— to forgive us our manifold trespasses, in a particular and peculiar manner," &c.

I have somewhere heard of a traveller on horseback, who, just at eventide, being uncertain of his road, inquired of a person he chanced to meet, the way to Barkhamstead.

"You are in Barkhamstead now," was the reply.

"Yes, but where is the centre of the place?"

"It hasn't got any centre."

"Well, but direct me to the tavern."

"There ain't any tavern."

"Yes, but the meeting-house?"

"Why didn't you ask that afore? There it is, over the hill!"

So, in those days, in Connecticut, as doubtless in other parts of New England, the meeting-house was the great geographical monument, the acknowledged meridian of every town and village. Even a place without a centre, or a tavern, had its house of worship; and this was its point of reckoning. It was, indeed,

something more. It was the town-hall, where all public meetings were held for civil purposes; it was the temple of religion, the pillar of society, religious, social, and moral, to the people around. It will not be considered strange, then, if I look back to the meeting-house of Ridgefield, as not only a most revered edifice, but as in some sense the starting-point of my existence. Here, at least, linger many of my most cherished remembrances.

A few rods to the south of this there was, and still is, a tavern, kept in my day by Squire Keeler. This institution ranked second only to the meeting-house; for the tavern of those days was generally the centre of news, and the gathering-place for balls, musical entertainments, public shows, &c.; and this particular tavern had special claims to notice. It was, in the first place, on the great thoroughfare of the day, between Boston and New York; and had become a general and favorite stopping-place for travellers. It was, moreover, kept by a hearty old gentleman, who united in his single person the varied functions of publican, postmaster, representative, justice of the peace, and I know not what else. He, besides, had a thrifty wife, whose praise was in all the land. She loved her customers, especially members of Congress, governors, and others in authority who wore powder and white top-boots, and who migrated to and fro in the lofty leisure of their own coaches. She was, indeed, a woman of mark; and her life has its moral. She scoured and scrubbed, and kept things going, until she was seventy years old; at which time, during an epidemic, she was threatened with an attack. She,



however, declared that she had not time to be sick, and kept on working; so that the disease passed her by, though it made sad havoc all around her, especially with more dainty dames who had leisure to follow the fashion.

Besides all this, there was an historical interest attached to Keeler's tavern; for, deeply imbedded in the north-eastern corner-post, there was a cannon-ball, planted there during the famous fight with the British in 1777. It was one of the chief historical monuments of the town, and was visited by all curious travellers who came that way. Little can the present generation imagine with what glowing interest, what ecstatic wonder, what big, round eyes, the rising generation of Ridgefield, half a century ago, listened to the account of the fight, as given by Lieutenant Smith, himself a witness of the event and a participator in the conflict, sword in hand.

This personage, whom I shall have occasion again to introduce to my readers, was, in my time, a justice of the peace, town librarian, and general oracle in such loose matters as geography, history, and law; then about as uncertain and unsettled in Ridgefield, as is now the longitude of Lilliput. He had a long, lean face; long, lank, silvery hair; and an unctuous, whining voice. With these advantages, he spoke with the authority of a seer, and especially in all things relating to the revolutionary war.

The agitating scenes of that event, so really great in itself, so unspeakably important to the country, had transpired some five-and-twenty years before. The existing generation of middle age

had all witnessed it; nearly all had shared in its vicissitudes. On every hand there were corporals, serjeants, lieutenants, captains, and colonels, no strutting fops in militia buckram, raw blue and buff, all fuss and feathers, but soldiers, men who had seen service and won laurels in the tented field. Every old man, every old woman, had stories to tell, radiant with the vivid realities of personal observation or experience. Some had seen Washington, and some Old Put; one was at the capture of Ticonderoga under Ethan Allen; another was at Bennington, and actually heard old Stark say, "Victory this day, or my wife Molly is a widow!" Some were at the taking of Stony Point, and others in the sanguinary struggle of Monmouth. One had witnessed the execution of André, and another had been present at the capture of Burgoyne. The time which had elapsed since these events had served only to magnify and glorify these scenes, as well as the actors, especially in the imagination of the rising generation. If perchance we could now dig up and galvanize into life a contemporary of Julius Cæsar, who was present and saw him cross the Rubicon, and could tell us how he looked and what he said, we should listen with somewhat of the greedy wonder with which the boys of Ridgefield listened to Lieutenant Smith, when of a Saturday afternoon, seated on the stoop of Keeler's tavern, he discoursed upon the discovery of America by Columbus, Braddock's defeat, and the old French war; the latter a real epic, embellished with romantic episodes of Indian massacres and captivities. When he came to the Revolution, and spoke of the fight at Ridgefield,

and punctuated his discourse with a present cannon-ball, sunk six inches deep in a corner-post of the very house in which we sat, you may well believe it was something more than words – it was, indeed, "action, action, glorious action!" How little can people now-a-days comprehend or appreciate these things!

## CHAPTER II

THE NEW HOUSE – HIGH RIDGE – NATHAN  
KELLOGG'S SPY-GLASS – THE SHOVEL – THE  
BLACK PATCH IN THE ROAD – DISTRUST OF  
BRITISH INFLUENCE – OLD CHICH-ES-TER – AUNT  
DELIGHT – RETURN AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

My memory goes distinctly back to the year 1797, when I was four years old. At that time a great event happened – great in the narrow horizon of childhood: we removed from the Old House to the New House! This latter, situated on a road tending westward and branching from the main street, my father had just built; and it then appeared to me quite a stately mansion and very beautiful, inasmuch as it was painted red behind and white in front: most of the dwellings thereabouts being of the dun complexion which pine-boards and chestnut-shingles assume, from exposure to the weather. Long after, having been absent twenty years, I revisited this my early home, and found it shrunk into a very small and ordinary two-story dwelling, wholly divested of its paint, and scarcely thirty feet square.

This building, apart from all other dwellings, was situated on what is called High Ridge, a long hill, looking down upon the village, and commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country. From our upper windows, this was at once beautiful and diversified. On the south, as I have said, the hills sloped in

a sea of undulations down to Long Island Sound, a distance of some fourteen miles. This beautiful sheet of water, like a strip of pale sky, with the island itself, more deeply tinted, beyond, was visible in fair weather, for a stretch of sixty miles, to the naked eye. The vessels, even the smaller ones, sloops, schooners, and fishing-craft, could be seen, creeping like insects over the surface. With a spy-glass – and my father had one bequeathed to him by Nathan Kellogg, a sailor, who made rather a rough voyage of life, but anchored at last in the bosom of the Church, as this bequest intimates – we could see the masts, sails, and rigging. It was a poor, dim affair, compared with modern instruments of the kind; but to me, its revelations of an element which then seemed as beautiful, as remote, and as mystical as the heavens, surpassed the wonders of the firmament.

To the west, at a distance of three miles, lay the undulating ridge of hills, cliffs, and precipices already mentioned, and which bear the name of West Mountain. They are some five hundred feet in height, and from our point of view had an imposing appearance. Beyond them, in the far distance, glimmered the peaks of the highlands along the Hudson. These two prominent features of the spreading landscape – the sea and the mountain, ever present, yet ever remote – impressed themselves on my young imagination with all the enchantment which distance lends to the view. I have never lost my first love. Never, even now, do I catch a glimpse of either of these two rivals of nature, such as I first learned them by heart, but I feel a gush of emotion as if I had

suddenly met with the cherished companions of my childhood. In after days, even the purple velvet of the Apennines and the poetic azure of the Mediterranean, have derived additional beauty to my imagination from mingling with these vivid associations of my childhood.

It was to the New House, then, thus situated, that we removed, as I have stated, when I was four years old. On that great occasion, everything available for draught or burden was put in requisition; and I was permitted, or required, I forget which, to carry the *peel*, as it was then called, but which would now bear the title of "shovel." Birmingham had not then been heard of in those parts, or at least was a great way off; so this particular utensil had been forged expressly for my father by David Olmstead, the blacksmith, as was the custom in those days. I recollect it well, and can state that it was a sturdy piece of iron, the handle being four feet long, with a knob at the end. As I carried it along, I doubtless felt a touch of that consciousness of power which must have filled the breast of Samson as he bore off the gates of Gaza. I recollect perfectly well to have perspired under the operation, for the distance of our migration was half-a-mile, and the season was summer.

One thing more I remember: I was barefoot; and as we went up the lane which diverged from the main road to the house, we passed over a patch of earth blackened by cinders, where my feet were hurt by pieces of melted glass and metal. I inquired what this meant, and was told that here a house was burned down by

the British troops already mentioned, and then in full retreat, as a signal to the ships that awaited them in the Sound, where they had landed, and where they intended to embark.

This detail may seem trifling; but it is not without significance. It was the custom in those days for boys to go barefoot in the mild season. I recollect few things in life more delightful than, in the spring, to cast away my shoes and stockings, and have a glorious scamper over the fields. Many a time, contrary to the express injunctions of my mother, have I stolen this bliss; and many a time have I been punished by a severe cold for my disobedience. Yet the bliss then seemed a compensation for the retribution. In these exercises I felt as if stepping on air; as if leaping aloft on wings. I was so impressed with the exultant emotions thus experienced, that I repeated them a thousand times in happy dreams; especially in my younger days. Even now these visions sometimes come to me in sleep, though with a lurking consciousness that they are but a mockery of the past; sad monitors of the change which time has wrought upon me.

As to the black patch in the lane, that, too, had its meaning. The story of a house burned down by a foreign army seized upon my imagination. Every time I passed the place I ruminated upon it, and put a hundred questions as to how and when it happened. I was soon master of the whole story, and of other similar events which had occurred all over the country. I was thus initiated into the spirit of that day, and which has never wholly subsided in our country; inasmuch as the war of the Revolution was alike unjust

in its origin, and cruel as to the manner in which it was waged. It was, moreover, fought on our own soil; thus making the whole people share, personally, in its miseries. There was scarcely a family in Connecticut whom it did not visit, either immediately or remotely, with the shadows of mourning and desolation. The British nation, to whom this conflict was a foreign war, are slow to comprehend the popular dislike of England, here in America. Could they know the familiar annals of our towns and villages – burn, plundered, sacked – with all the attendant horrors, for the avowed purpose of punishing a nation of rebels, and those rebels of their own kith and kin: could they be made acquainted with the deeds of those twenty thousand Hessians, sent hither by King George, and who have left their name in our language as a word signifying brigands, who sell their blood and commit murder for hire: could they thus read the history of minds and hearts, influenced at the fountains of life for several generations, they would perhaps comprehend, if they could not approve, the habitual distrust of British influence, which lingers among our people.

About three-fourths of a mile from my father's house, on the winding road to Lower Salem, which I have already mentioned, and which bore the name of West Lane, was the school-house where I took my first lessons, and received the foundations of my very slender education. I have since been sometimes asked where I graduated: my reply has always been, "At West Lane." Generally speaking, this has ended the inquiry; whether, because



my questioners have confounded this venerable institution with "Lane Seminary," or have not thought it worth while to risk an exposure of their ignorance as to the college in which I was educated, I am unable to say.

The site of the school-house was a triangular piece of land, measuring perhaps a rood in extent, and lying, according to the custom of those days, at the meeting of four roads. The ground hereabouts – as everywhere else in Ridgefield – was exceedingly stony; and, in making the pathway, the stones had been thrown out right and left, and there remained in heaps on either side, from generation to generation. All around was bleak and desolate. Loose, squat stone walls, with innumerable breaches, inclosed the adjacent fields. A few tufts of elder, with here and there a patch of briars and pokeweed, flourished in the gravelly soil. Not a tree, however, remained; save an aged chestnut, at the western angel of the space. This, certainly, had not been spared for shade or ornament, but probably because it would have cost too much labor to cut it down; for it was of ample girth. At all events, it was the oasis in our desert during summer; and in autumn, as the burrs disclosed its fruit, it resembled a besieged city; the boys, like so many catapults, hurled at it stones and sticks, until every nut had capitulated.

Two houses only were at hand: one, surrounded by an ample barn, a teeming orchard, and an enormous wood-pile, belonging to Granther Baldwin; the other was the property of "Old Chiches-ter;" an uncouth, unsocial being, whom everybody, for some

reason or other, seemed to despise and shun. His house was of stone, and of one story. He had a cow, which every year had a calf. He had a wife – dirty and uncombed, and vaguely reported to have been brought from the old country. This is about the whole history of the man, so far as it is written in the authentic traditions of the parish. His premises, an acre in extent, consisted of a tongue of land between two of the converging roads. No boy, that I ever heard of, ventured to cast a stone, or to make an incursion into this territory, though it lay close to the school-house. I have often, in passing, peeped timidly over the walls, and caught glimpses of a stout man with a drab coat, drab breeches, and drab gaiters, prowling about the house; but never did I discover him outside of his own dominion. I know it was darkly intimated he had been tarred and feathered in the revolutionary war; but as to the rest, he was a perfect myth.

The school-house itself consisted of rough, unpainted clapboards, upon a wooden frame. It was plastered within, and contained two apartments, a little entry, taken out of a corner for a wardrobe, and the school-room proper. The chimney was of stone, and pointed with mortar, which, by the way, had been dug into a honeycomb by uneasy and enterprising penknives. The fireplace was six feet wide and four feet deep. The flue was so ample and so perpendicular, that the rain, sleet, and snow fell directly to the hearth. In winter, the battle for life with green fizzling fuel, which was brought in lengths and cut up by the scholars, was a stern one. Not unfrequently the wood, gushing

with sap as it was, chanced to go out, and as there was no living without fire, the thermometer being ten or twenty degrees below zero, the school was dismissed, whereat all the scholars rejoiced aloud, not having the fear of the schoolmaster before their eyes.

It was the custom at this place to have a woman's school in the summer months, and this was attended only by young children. It was, in fact, what we now call a primary or infant school. In winter, a man was employed as teacher, and then the girls and boys of the neighborhood, up to the age of eighteen, or even twenty, were among the pupils. It was not uncommon, at this season, to have forty scholars crowded into this little building.

I was about six years old when I first went to school. My teacher was Aunt Delight, that is Delight Benedict, a maiden lady of fifty, short and bent, of sallow complexion and solemn aspect. I remember the first day with perfect distinctness. I went alone – for I was familiar with the road, it being that which passed by our old house. I carried a little basket, with bread and butter within, for my dinner, and this was covered over with a white cloth. When I had proceeded about half way, I lifted the cover, and debated whether I would not eat my dinner then. I believe it was a sense of duty only that prevented my doing so, for in those happy days I always had a keen appetite. Bread and butter were then infinitely superior to *pâté de foie gras* now; but still, thanks to my training, I had also a conscience. As my mother had given me the food for dinner, I did not think it right to convert it into lunch, even though I was strongly tempted.

I think we had seventeen scholars – boys and girls – mostly of my own age. Among them were some of my after-companions. I have since met several of them – one at Savannah and two at Mobile – respectably established, and with families around them. Some remain, and are now among the grey old men of the town. the names of others I have seen inscribed on the tombstones of their native village. And the rest – where are they?

The school being assembled, we were all seated upon benches, made of what were called *slabs*– that is, boards having the exterior or rounded part of the log on one side: as they were useless for other purposes, these were converted into school-benches, the rounded part down. They had each four supports, consisting of straddling wooden legs set into augur-holes. Our own legs swayed in the air, for they were too short to touch the floor. Oh, what an awe fell over me, when we were all seated and silence reigned around!

The children were called up one by one to Aunt Delight, who sat on a low chair, and required each, as a preliminary, "to make his manners," which consisted of a small, sudden nod. She then placed the spelling-book – which was Dilworth's – before the pupil, and with a buck-handled penknife pointed, one by one, to the letters of the alphabet, saying, "What's that?" If the child knew his letters, the "what's that?" very soon ran on thus: —

"What's that?"

"A."

""Stha-a-t?"

"B."

"Sna-a-a-t?"

"C."

"Sna-a-a-t?"

"D." &c.

I looked upon these operations with intense curiosity and no small respect, until my own turn came. I went up to the schoolmistress with some emotion, and when she said, rather spitefully, as I thought, "Make your obeisance!" my little intellects all fled away, and I did nothing. Having waited a second, gazing at me with indignation, she laid her hand on the top of my head, and gave it a jerk which made my teeth clash. I believe I bit my tongue a little; at all events, my sense of dignity was offended, and when she pointed to A, and asked what it was, it swam before me dim and hazy, and as big as a full moon. She repeated the question, but I was doggedly silent. Again, a third time, she said, "What's that?" I replied: "Why don't you tell me what it is? I didn't come here to learn you your letters." I have not the slightest remembrance of this, for my brains were all a wool-gathering; but as Aunt Delight affirmed it to be a fact, and it passed into a tradition in my family, I put it in.

What immediately followed I do not clearly remember, but one result is distinctly traced in my memory. In the evening of this eventful day the schoolmistress paid my parents a visit, and recounted to their astonished ears this my awful contempt of authority. My father, after hearing the story, got up and went

away; but my mother, who was a careful disciplinarian, told me not to do so again! I always had a suspicion that both of them smiled on one side of their faces, even while they seemed to sympathize with the old lady on the other; still, I do not affirm it, for I am bound to say of both my parents, that I never knew them, even in trifles, say one thing while they meant another.

I believe I achieved the alphabet that summer, but my after progress, for a long time, I do not remember. Two years later I went to the winter school at the same place, kept by Lewis Olmstead – a man who made a business of ploughing, mowing, carting manure, &c., in the summer, and of teaching school in the winter; with a talent for music at all seasons, wherefore he became chorister upon occasion, when, peradventure, Deacon Hawley could not officiate. He was a celebrity in ciphering, and Squire Seymour declared that he was the greatest "arithmeticker" in Fairfield county. All I remember of his person is his hand, which seemed to me as big as Goliath's, judging by the claps of thunder it made in my ears on one or two occasions.

The next step of my progress which is marked in my memory, is the spelling of words of two syllables. I did not go very regularly to school, but by the time I was ten years old I had learned to write, and had made a little progress in arithmetic. There was not a grammar, a geography, or a history of any kind in the school. Reading, writing, and arithmetic were the only things taught, and these very indifferently – not wholly from the stupidity of the teacher, but because he had forty scholars, and

the custom of the age required no more than he performed. I did as well as the other scholars, certainly no better. I had excellent health and joyous spirits; in leaping, running, and wrestling I had but one superior of my age, and that was Stephen Olmstead, a snug-built fellow, smaller than myself, and who, despite our rivalry, was my chosen friend and companion. I seemed to live for play: alas! how the world has changed since then!

After I had left my native town for some twenty years, I returned and paid it a visit. Among the monuments that stood high in my memory was the West Lane school-house. Unconsciously carrying with me the measures of childhood, I had supposed it to be thirty feet square; how had it dwindled when I came to estimate it by the new standards I had formed! It was in all things the same, yet wholly changed to me. What I had deemed a respectable edifice, as it now stood before me was only a weather-beaten little shed, which, upon being measured, I found to be less than twenty feet square. It happened to be a warm summer day, and I ventured to enter the place. I found a girl, some eighteen years old, keeping a ma'am school for about twenty scholars, some of whom were studying Parley's Geography. The mistress was the daughter of one of my schoolmates, and some of the boys and girls were grandchildren of the little brood which gathered under the wing of Aunt Delight, when I was an abecedarian. None of them, not even the schoolmistress, had ever heard of me. The name of my father, as having ministered to the people of Ridgefield in some bygone

age, was faintly traced in their recollection. As to Peter Parley, whose geography they were learning, they supposed him to be a decrepit old gentleman hobbling about on a crutch, a long way off, for whom, nevertheless, they had a certain affection, inasmuch as he had made geography into a story-book. The frontispiece picture of the old fellow, with his gouty foot in a chair, threatening the boys that if they touched his tender toe he would tell them no more stories, secured their respect, and placed him among the saints in the calendar of their young hearts. "Well," thought I, "if this goes on, I may yet rival Mother Goose!"

I hope the reader will not imagine that I am thinking too little of his amusement and too much of my own, if I stop a few moments to note the lively recollections I entertain of the joyousness of my early life, and not of mine only, but that of my playmates and companions. In looking back to those early days, the whole circle of the seasons seems to me almost like one unbroken morning of pleasure.

I was of course subjected to the usual crosses incident to my age, those painful and mysterious visitations sent upon children – the measles, mumps, whooping-cough, and the like; usually regarded as retributions for the false step of our mother Eve in the Garden; but they have almost passed from my memory, as if overflowed and borne away by the general drift of happiness which filled my bosom. Among these calamities, one monument alone remains – the small-pox. It was in the year 1798, as I well remember, that my father's house was converted into a hospital,



or, as it was then called, a "pest-house," where, with some dozen other children, I was inoculated for this disease, then the scourge and terror of the world.

The lane in which our house was situated was fenced up, north and south, so as to cut off all intercourse with the world around. A flag was raised, and upon it were inscribed the ominous words, "☠ Small-pox." My uncle and aunt, from New Haven, arrived with their three children. Half-a-dozen others of the neighborhood were gathered together, making, with our own children, somewhat over a dozen subjects for the experiment. When all was ready, like Noah and his family, we were shut in. Provisions were deposited in a basket at a point agreed upon, down the lane. Thus we were cut off from the world, excepting only that Dr. Perry, the physician, ventured to visit us.

As to myself, the disease passed lightly over, leaving, however, its indisputable autographs on various parts of my body. Were it not for these testimonials, I should almost suspect that I had escaped the disease, for I only remember, among my symptoms and my sufferings, a little headache, and the privation of salt and butter upon my hasty-pudding. My restoration to these privileges I distinctly recollect: doubtless these gave me more pleasure than the clean bill of health which they implied. Several of the patients suffered severely, and among them my brother and one of my cousins.

But although there is evidence that I was subject to the usual drawbacks upon the happiness of childhood, these were so few

that they have passed from my mind; and those early years, as I look back to them, seem to have flowed on in one bright current of uninterrupted enjoyment.

## CHAPTER III

RIDGEFIELD SOCIETY – TRADES AND PROFESSIONS – CHIMNEY-CORNER COURTSHIPS – DOMESTIC ECONOMY – DRAM-DRINKING – FAMILY PRODUCTS – MOLLY GREGORY AND CHURCH MUSIC – TRAVELLING ARTISANS – FESTIVAL OF THE QUILTS – CLERICAL PATRONAGE – RAISING A CHURCH – THE RETIRED TAILOR AND HIS FARM.

Let me now give you a sketch of Ridgefield and of the people, how they lived, thought, and felt, at the beginning of the present century. It will give you a good idea of the rustic life of New England fifty years ago.

From what I have already said, you will easily imagine the prominent physical characteristics and aspect of my native town: a general mass of hills, rising up in a crescent of low mountains, and commanding a wide view on every side. The soil was naturally hard, and thickly sown with stones of every size. The fields were divided by rude stone walls, and the surface of most of them was dotted with gathered heaps of stones and rocks, thus clearing spaces for cultivation, yet leaving a large portion of the land still encumbered. The climate was severe, on account of the elevation of the site, yet this was perhaps fully compensated by its salubrity.

Yet, despite the somewhat forbidding nature of the soil and climate of Ridgefield, it may be regarded as presenting a favorable example of New England country life and society at the time I speak of. The town was originally settled by a sturdy race of men, mostly the immediate descendants of English emigrants, some from Milford. Their migration over an intervening space of savage hills, rocks and ravines, into a territory so uninviting, and their speedy conversion of this into a thriving and smiling village, bear witness to their courage and energy.

At the time referred to, the date of my earliest recollection, the society of Ridgefield was exclusively English. I remember but one Irishman, one negro, and one Indian in the town. The first had begged and blarneyed his way from Long Island, where he had been wrecked; the second was a liberated slave; and the last was the vestige of a tribe which dwelt of yore in a swampy tract, the name of which I have forgotten. We had a professional beggar, called Jagger, who had served in the armies of more than one of the Georges, and insisted upon crying, "God save the king!" even on the 4th of July, and when openly threatened by the boys with a gratuitous ride on a rail. We had one settled pauper, Mrs. Yabacomb, who, for the first dozen years of my life, was my standard type for the witch of Endor.

Nearly all the inhabitants of Ridgefield were farmers, with the few mechanics that were necessary to carry on society in a somewhat primeval state. Even the persons not professionally devoted to agriculture had each his farm, or at least his garden

and home lot, with his pigs, poultry, and cattle. The population might have been 1200, comprising two hundred families. All could read and write, but in point of fact, beyond the Almanac and Watts' Psalms and Hymns, their literary acquirements had little scope. There were, I think, four newspapers, all weekly, published in the State: one at Hartford, one at New London, one at New Haven, and one at Litchfield. There were, however, not more than three subscribers to all these in our village. We had, however, a public library of some two hundred volumes, and, what was of equal consequence, the town was on the road which was then the great thoroughfare, connecting Boston with New York; and hence we had means of intelligence from travellers constantly passing through the place, which kept us acquainted with the march of events.

If Ridgefield was thus rather above the average of Connecticut villages in civilization, I suppose the circumstances and modes of life in my father's family were somewhat above those of most people around us. We had a farm of forty acres, with four cows, two horses, and some dozen sheep, to which may be added a stock of poultry, including a flock of geese. My father carried on the farm, besides preaching two sermons a-week, and visiting the sick, attending funerals, solemnizing marriages, &c. He laid out the beds and planted the garden; pruned the fruit-trees, and worked with the men in the meadow in hay-time. He generally cut the corn-stalks himself, and always shelled the ears; the latter being done by drawing them across the handle of the

frying-pan, fastened over a wash-tub. I was sometimes permitted, as an indulgence, to share this favorite employment with my father. With these and a few other exceptions, our agricultural operations were carried on by hired help.

It was the custom in New England, at the time I speak of, for country lawyers, physicians, clergymen, even doctors of divinity, to partake of these homespun labors. In the library of the Athenæum, at Hartford, is a collection of almanacs, formerly belonging to John Cotton Smith – one of the most elegant and accomplished men of his time – a distinguished Member of Congress, Judge of the Superior Court, and several years Governor of the State; in looking it over, I observed such notes as the following, made with his own hand: "Cut my barley," "began rye harvest," "planted field of potatoes," &c.: thus showing his personal attention to, if not his participation in, the affairs of the farm. Nearly all the judges of the Superior Court occasionally worked in the field, in these hearty old federal times.

But I returned to Ridgefield. The household, as well as political, economy of those days lay in this, – that every family lived as much as possible within itself. Money was scarce, wages being about fifty cents a-day, though these were generally paid in meat, vegetables, and other articles of use – seldom in money. There was not a factory of any kind in the place.<sup>1</sup> There was

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<sup>1</sup> I recollect, as an after-thought, one exception. There was a hatter who supplied the town; but he generally made hats to order, and usually in exchange for the skins of foxes, rabbits, muskrats, and other chance peltry. I frequently purchased my powder and shot from the proceeds of skins which I sold him.

a butcher, but he only went from house to house to slaughter the cattle and swine of his neighbors. There was a tanner, but he only dressed other people's skins. There was a clothier, but he generally fulled and dressed other people's cloth. All this is typical of the mechanical operations of the place. Even dyeing blue a portion of the wool, so as to make linsey-woolsey for short gowns, aprons, and blue-mixed stockings – vital necessities in those days – was a domestic operation. During the autumn, a dye-tub in the chimney corner – thus placed so as to be cherished by the genial heat – was as familiar in all thrifty houses as the Bible or the back-log. It was covered with a board, and formed a cosy seat in the wide-mouthed fireplace, especially of a chill evening. When the night had waned, and the family had retired, it frequently became the anxious seat of the lover, who was permitted to carry on his courtship, the object of his addresses sitting demurely in the opposite corner. Some of the first families in Connecticut, I suspect, could their full annals be written, would find their foundations to have been laid in these chimney-corner courtships.

Being thus exposed, the dye-tub was the frequent subject of distressing and exciting accidents. Among the early, indelible incidents in my memory, one of the most prominent is turning this over. Nothing so roused the indignation of thrifty housewives, for, besides the stain left upon the floor by the blue, a most disagreeable odor was diffused by it.

To this general system of domestic economy our family was

not an exception. Every autumn, it was a matter of course that we had a fat ox or a fat cow ready for slaughter. One full barrel was salted down; the hams were cut out, slightly salted, and hung up in the chimney for a few days, and thus became "dried" or "hung beef," then as essential as bread. Pork was managed in a similar way, though even on a larger scale, for two barrels were indispensable. A few pieces, as the spare-ribs, &c., were distributed to the neighbors, who paid in kind when they killed their swine.

Mutton and poultry came in their turn, all from our own stock, except when on Thanksgiving-day some of the magnates gave the parson a turkey. This, let me observe, in those good old times, was a bird of mark; no timid, crouching biped, with downcast head and pallid countenance, but stalking like a lord, and having wattles red as a "banner bathed in slaughter." His beard was long, shining, and wiry. There was, in fact, something of the native bird still in him, for though the race was nearly extinct, a few wild flocks lingered in the remote woods. Occasionally, in the depth of winter, and towards the early spring, these stole to the barnyard, and held communion with their civilized cousins. Severe battles ensued among the leaders for the favors of the fair, and as the wild cocks always conquered, the vigor of the race was kept up.

Our bread was made of rye, mixed with Indian meal. Wheat bread was reserved for the sacrament and company; a proof not of its superiority, but of its scarcity and consequent estimation.



All the vegetables came from our garden and farm. The fuel was supplied by our own woods – sweet-scented hickory, snapping chestnut, odoriferous oak, and reeking, fizzling ash – the hot juice of the latter, by the way, being a sovereign antidote for the earache. These were laid in huge piles, all alive with sap, on the tall, gaunt andirons. The building of a fire, a real architectural achievement, was always begun by daybreak. There was first a back-log, from fifteen to four-and-twenty inches in diameter, and five feet long, imbedded in the ashes; then came a top log, then a fore stick, then a middle stick, and then a heap of kindlings, reaching from the bowels down to the bottom. Above all was a pyramid of smaller fragments, artfully adjusted, with spaces for the blaze. Friction matches had not then been invented. So, if there were no coals left from the last night's fire, and none to be borrowed from the neighbors, resort was had to flint, steel, and tinder-box. Often, when the flint was dull, and the steel soft, and the tinder damp, the striking of fire was a task requiring both energy and patience. If the pile on the andirons was skilfully constructed, the spark being applied, there was soon a furious stinging smoke; but the forked flame soon began to lick the sweating sticks above, and by the time the family had arisen, and assembled in the "keeping-room," there was a roaring blaze, defying the bitter blasts of winter, which found abundant admittance through the crannies of the doors and windows. To feed the family fire in those days, during the severe season, was fully one man's work.

But to go on with our household history. Sugar was partially supplied by our maple-trees. These were tapped in March, the sap being collected, and boiled down in the woods. This was wholly a domestic operation, and one in which all the children rejoiced, each taking his privilege of tasting, at every stage of the manufacture. The chief supply of sugar, however, was from the West Indies.

Rum was largely consumed, but our distilleries had scarcely begun. A half-pint of it was given as a matter of course to every day laborer, more particularly in the summer season. In all families, rich or poor, it was offered to male visitors as an essential point of hospitality, or even good manners. Women – I beg pardon – ladies, took their schnapps, then named "Hopkins' Elixir," which was the most delicious and seductive means of getting tipsy that has been invented. Crying babies were silenced with hot toddy. Every man imbibed his morning dram, and this was esteemed temperance. There is a story of a preacher, about those days, who thus lectured his parish: "I say nothing, my beloved brethren, against taking a little bitters before breakfast, and after breakfast; especially if you are used to it. What I contend against is, this dramming, dramming, dramming, at all hours of the day. There are some men who take a glass at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and at four in the afternoon. I do not purpose to contend against old-established customs, my brethren, rendered respectable by time and authority; but this dramming, dramming, is a crying sin in the land."

As to brandy, I scarcely heard of it, so far as I can recollect, till I was sixteen years old, and, as an apprentice in a country store, was called upon to sell it. Cider was the universal table beverage. Brandy and whisky soon after came into use. I remember, in my boyhood, to have seen a strange zigzag tin tube, denominated a "still," belonging to one of our neighbors, converting, drop by drop, certain innocent liquids into "fire-water." But, in the days I speak of, French brandy was confined to the houses of the rich, and to the drug-shop.

Wine, in our country towns, was then almost exclusively used for the sacrament.

There was, of course, no baker in Ridgefield; each family not only made its own bread, cakes, and pies, but its own soap, candles, butter, cheese, and the like. The manufacture of linen and woollen cloth was no less a domestic operation. Cotton – that is, raw cotton – was then wholly unknown among us at the North, except as a mere curiosity, produced somewhere in the tropics; but whether it grew on a plant, or an animal, was not clearly settled in the public mind.

We raised our own flax, rotted it, hackled it, dressed it, and spun it. The little wheel, turned by the foot, had its place, and was as familiar as if it had been a member of the family. How often have I seen my mother, and my grandmother, too, sit down to it – though this, as I remember, was for the purpose of spinning some finer kind of thread – the burden of the spinning being done by a neighbor of ours, Sally St. John. By the way, she was a good-

hearted, cheerful old maid, who petted me beyond my deserts. I grieve to say, that I repaid her partiality by many mischievous pranks; for which I should have been roundly punished, had not the good creature forgiven and concealed my offences. I did, indeed, get fillipped for catching her foot one day in a steel-trap; but I declare that I was innocent of malice prepense, inasmuch as I had set the trap for a rat, instead of the said Sally. Nevertheless, the verdict was against me; not wholly on account of my misdemeanor in this particular instance, but because, if I did not deserve punishment for that, I had deserved it, and should deserve it for something else; and so it was safe to administer it.

The wool was also spun in the family; partly by my sisters, and partly by Molly Gregory, daughter of our neighbor, the town carpenter. I remember her well as she sang and spun aloft in the attic. In those days, church-singing was the only one of the fine arts which flourished in Ridgefield, except the music of the drum and fife. The choir was divided into four parts, ranged on three sides of the meeting-house gallery. The tenor, led by Deacon Hawley, was in front of the pulpit, the bass to the left, and the treble and counter to the right; the whole being set in motion by a pitch-pipe, made by the deacon himself, who was a cabinet-maker. Molly took upon herself the entire counter, for she had excellent lungs. The fuguing tunes, which had then run a little mad, were her delight. In her solitary operations aloft I have often heard her send forth, from the attic windows, the droning hum of her wheel, with fitful snatches of a hymn, in which the

bass began, the tenor followed, then the treble, and, finally, the counter – winding up with irresistible pathos. Molly singing to herself, and all unconscious of eavesdroppers, carried on all the parts thus: —

*Bass.* "Long for a cooling —

*Tenor.* "Long for a cooling —

*Treble.* "Long for a cooling —

*Counter.* "Long for a cooling stream at hand,  
And they must drink or die!"

The knitting of stockings was performed by the women of the family in the evening, and especially at tea-parties. This was considered a moral, as well as an economical, employment; for people held, with Dr. Watts, that

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

Satan, however, dodged the question: for if the hands were occupied the tongue was loose; and it was said that, in some families, he kept them well occupied with idle gossip. At all events, pianos, chess-boards, graces, battledoors and shuttlecocks, with other safety-valves of the kind, were only known by the hearing of the ear, as belonging to some such Vanity Fair as New York or Boston.

The weaving of cloth – linen as well as woollen – was performed by an itinerant workman, who came to the house, put up his loom, and threw his shuttle, till the season's work was done. The linen was bleached and made up by the family; the

woollen cloth was sent to the fuller to be dyed and dressed. Twice a-year, that is, in the spring and autumn, the tailor came to the house and made a stock of clothes for the male members; this was called "whipping the cat."

Mantuumakers and milliners came, in their turn, to fit out the female members of the family. There was a similar process as to boots and shoes. We sent the hides of the cattle – cows and calves we had killed – to the tanner, and these came back in assorted leather. Occasionally a little morocco, then wholly a foreign manufacture, was bought at the store, and made up for the ladies' best shoes. Amby Benedict, the travelling shoemaker, came with his bench, lapstone, and awls, and converted some little room into a shop, till the household was duly shod. He was a merry fellow, and threw in lots of singing gratis. He played all the popular airs upon his lapstone – as hurdygurdies and hand-organs do now.

Carpets were then only known in a few families, and were confined to the keeping-room and parlor. They were all home-made: the warp consisting of woollen yarn, and the woof of lists and old woollen cloth, cut into strips, and sewed together at the ends. Coverlids generally consisted of quilts, made of pieces of waste calico, sewed together in octagons, and quilted in rectangles, giving the whole a gay and rich appearance. This process of quilting generally brought together the women of the neighborhood, married and single; and a great time they had of it, what with tea, talk, and stitching. In the evening the men were

admitted; so that a quilting was a real festival, not unfrequently leading to love-making and marriage among the young people.

This reminds me of a sort of communism or socialism, which prevailed in our rural districts long before Owen or Fourier was born. At Ridgefield we used to have "stone bees," when all the men of a village or hamlet came together with their draught cattle, and united to clear some patch of earth of stones and rocks. All this labor was gratuitously rendered, save only that the proprietor of the land furnished the grog. Such a meeting was always, of course, a very social and sociable affair.

When the work was done, gymnastic exercises – such as hopping, wrestling, and foot-racing – took place among the athletic young men. My father generally attended these celebrations as a looker-on. It was, indeed, the custom for the clergy of the olden time to mingle with the people, even in their labors and their pastimes. For some reason or other, it seemed that things went better when the parson gave them his countenance. I followed my father's example, and attended these cheerful and beneficial gatherings. Most of the boys of the town did the same. I may add that, if I may trust the traditions of Ridgefield, the cellar of our new house was dug by a "bee" in a single day, and that was Christmas.

House-raising and barn-raising, the framework being always of wood, were done in the same way by a neighborly gathering of the people. I remember an anecdote of a church-raising, which I may as well relate here. In the eastern part of the State, I

think at Lyme, or Pautipaug, a meeting-house was destroyed by lightning. After a year or two the society mustered its energies, and raised the frame of another on the site of the old one. It stood about six months, and was then blown over. In due time another frame was prepared, and the neighborhood gathered together to raise it. It was now proposed by Deacon Hart that they should commence the performances by a prayer and hymn, it having been suggested that perhaps the want of these pious preliminaries on former occasions had something to do with the calamitous results which attended them. When all was ready, therefore, a prayer was made, and the chorister of the place gave out two lines of the hymn, thus: —

"If God to build the house deny,  
The builders work in vain."

This being sung, the chorister completed the verse thus, adapting the lines to the occasion: —

"Unless the Lord doth shingle it,  
It will blow down agin!"

I must not fail to give you a portrait of one of our village homes, of the middle class, at this era. I take as an example that of our neighbor, J. B., who had been a tailor, but having thriven in his affairs, and being now some fifty years old, had become a farmer. It was situated on the road leading to Salem, there being a wide space in front occupied by the wood-pile, which in these days was not only a matter of great importance, but of



formidable bulk. The size of the wood-pile was, indeed, in some sort an index to the rank and condition of the proprietor. The house itself was a low edifice, forty feet long, and of two stories in front; the rear being what was called a *breakback*— that is, sloping down to a height of ten feet; this low part furnishing a shelter for garden tools and various household instruments. The whole was constructed of wood, the outside being of the dun complexion assumed by unpainted wood, exposed to the weather for twenty or thirty years, save only that the roof was tinged of a reddish brown by a fine moss that found sustenance in the chestnut shingles.

To the left was the garden, which in the productive season was a wilderness of onions, squashes, cucumbers, beets, parsnips, and currants, with the never-failing tansy for bitters, horseradish for seasoning, and fennel for keeping old women awake in church time.

The interior of the house presented a parlor with plain, whitewashed walls, a home-made carpet upon the floor, calico curtains at the window, and a mirror three feet by two against the side, with a mahogany frame: to these must be added eight chairs and a cherry table, of the manufacture of Deacon Hawley. The "keeping" or sitting-room had also a carpet, a dozen rush-bottom chairs, a table, &c. The kitchen was large — fully twenty feet square, with a fireplace six feet wide and four feet deep. On one side it looked out upon the garden, the squashes and cucumbers climbing up and forming festoons over the door; on

the other it commanded a view of the orchard, embracing first a circle of peaches, pears, and plums; and beyond, a wide-spread clover-field, embowered with apple-trees. Just by was the well, with its tall sweep, the old oaken bucket dangling from the pole. The kitchen was, in fact, the most comfortable room in the house, cool in summer, and perfumed with the breath of the garden and the orchard: in winter, with its roaring blaze of hickory, it was a cosy resort, defying the bitterest blasts of the season. Here the whole family assembled at meals, except when the presence of company made it proper to serve tea in the parlor.

The bed-rooms were all without carpets, and the furniture was generally of a simple character. The beds, however, were of ample size, and well filled with geese feathers, these being deemed essential for comfortable people. I must say, by the way, that every decent family had its flock of geese, of course, which was picked thrice a-year, despite the noisy remonstrances of both goose and gander. The sheets of the bed, though of home-made linen, were as white as the driven snow. Indeed, the beds of this era showed that sleep was a luxury, well understood and duly cherished by all classes. The cellar, extending under the whole house, was by no means the least important part of the establishment. In the autumn, it was supplied with three barrels of beef and as many of pork, twenty barrels of cider, with numerous bins of potatoes, turnips, beets, carrots, and cabbages. The garret, which was of huge dimensions, at the same time displayed a labyrinth of dried pumpkins, peaches, and apples,

hung in festoons upon the rafters, amid bunches of summer savory, boneset, fennel, and other herbs, the floor being occupied by heaps of wool, flax, tow, and the like.

The barn corresponded to the house. It was a low brown structure, having abundance of sheds built on to it, without the least regard to symmetry. It was well stocked with hay, oats, rye, and buckwheat. Six cows, one or two horses, three dozen sheep, and an ample supply of poultry, including two or three broods of turkeys, constituted its living tenants.

The farm I need not describe in detail, but the orchard must not be overlooked. This consisted of three acres, covered, as I have said, with apple-trees, yielding abundantly – as well for the cider-mill as for the table, including the indispensable winter apple-sauce – according to their kinds. I think an apple orchard in the spring is one of the most beautiful objects in the world. How often have I ventured into Uncle Josey's ample orchard at this joyous season, and stood entranced among the robins, blackbirds, woodpeckers, bluebirds, jays, and orioles, – all seeming to me like playmates, racing, chasing, singing, rollicking, in the exuberance of their joy, or perchance slily pursuing their courtships, or even more slily building their nests and rearing their young.

The inmates of the house I need not describe, further than to say that Uncle Josey himself was a little deaf, and of moderate abilities; yet he lived to good account, for he reared a large family, and was gathered to his fathers at a good old age, leaving behind

him a handsome estate, a fair name, and a good example. His wife, who spent her early life at service in a kitchen, was a handsome, lively, efficient woman, and a universal favorite in the neighborhood.

This is the homely picture of a Ridgefield farmer's home half a century ago. There were other establishments more extensive and more sumptuous in the town, as there were others also of an inferior grade; but this was a fair sample of the houses, barns, and farms of the middle class.

# CHAPTER IV

HABITS OF THE PEOPLE – THEIR COSTUME  
– AMUSEMENTS – FESTIVALS – MARRIAGES –  
FUNERALS – DANCING – WINTER SPORTS – MY  
TWO GRANDMOTHERS – MECHANICAL GENIUS  
– IMPORTANCE OF WHITTLLING – PIGEONS –  
SPORTING ADVENTURES.

You will now have some ideas of the household industry and occupations of the country people in Connecticut, at the beginning of the present century. Their manners, in other respects, had a corresponding stamp of homeliness and simplicity.

In most families, the first exercise of the morning was reading the Bible, followed by a prayer, at which all were assembled, including the servants and helpers of the kitchen and the farm. Then came the breakfast, which was a substantial meal, always including hot viands, with vegetables, apple-sauce, pickles, mustard, horseradish, and various other condiments. Cider was the common drink for laboring people: even children drank it at will. Tea was common, but not so general as now. Coffee was almost unknown. Dinner was a still more hearty and varied repast – characterised by abundance of garden vegetables; tea was a light supper.

The day began early: the breakfast hour was six in summer

and seven in winter; dinner was at noon – the work-people in the fields being called to their meals by a conchshell winded by some kitchen Triton. Tea was usually taken about sundown. In families where all were laborers, all sat at table, servants as well as masters – the food being served before sitting down. In families where the masters and mistresses did not share the labors of the household or the farm, the meals of the domestics were taken separately. There was, however, in those days a perfectly good understanding and good feeling between the masters and servants. The latter were not Irish: they had not as yet imbibed the plebeian envy of those above them, which has since so generally embittered and embarrassed American domestic life. The terms "democrat" and "aristocrat" had not got into use: these distinctions, and the feelings now implied by them, had indeed no existence in the hearts of the people. Our servants, during all my early life, were generally the daughters of respectable farmers and mechanics in the neighborhood, and, respecting others, were themselves respected and cherished. They were devoted to the interests of the family, and were always relied upon and treated as friends. In health they had the same food, in sickness the same care, as the masters and mistresses or their children.

At the period of my earliest recollections, men of all classes were dressed in long, broad-tailed coats, with huge pockets; long waistcoats, breeches, and hats with low crowns and broad brims: some so wide as to be supported at the sides with cords. The stockings of the parson, and a few others, were of silk in summer

and worsted in winter; those of the people were generally of wool. Women dressed in wide bonnets, sometimes of straw and sometimes of silk; and gowns of silk, muslin, gingham, &c., generally close and short-waisted, the breast and shoulders being covered by a full muslin kerchief. Girls ornamented themselves with a large white vandike. On the whole, the dress of both men and women has greatly changed; for at Ridgefield, as at less remote places, the people follow, though at a distance, the fashions of Paris.

The amusements were then much the same as at present, though some striking differences may be noted. Books and newspapers were then scarce, and were read respectfully, and as if they were grave matters, demanding thought and attention. They were not toys and pastimes, taken up every day, and by everybody, in the short intervals of labor, and then hastily dismissed, like waste paper. The aged sat down when they read, and drew forth their spectacles, and put them deliberately and reverently upon the nose. Even the young approached a book with reverence, and a newspaper with awe. How the world has changed!

The two great festivals were Thanksgiving and "Training-day;" the latter deriving, from the still lingering spirit of the revolutionary war, a decidedly martial character. The marching of the troops, and the discharge of gunpowder, which invariably closed the exercises, were glorious and inspiring mementoes of heroic achievements upon many a bloody field. The music of the

drum and fife resounded on every side. A match between two rival drummers always drew an admiring crowd, and was in fact one of the chief excitements of the great day.

Tavern-haunting, especially in winter, when there was little to do, for manufactures had not then sprung up to give profitable occupation during this inclement season, was common even with respectable farmers. Marriages were celebrated in the evening, at the house of the bride, with a general gathering of the neighborhood, and were usually finished off by dancing. Everybody went, as to a public exhibition, without invitation. Funerals generally drew large processions, which proceeded to the grave. Here the minister always made an address suited to the occasion. If there were anything remarkable in the history of the deceased, it was turned to religious account in the next Sunday's sermon. Singing-meetings, to practise church music, were a great resource for the young in winter. Dances at private houses were common, and drew no reproaches from the sober people present. Balls at the taverns were frequented by the young; the children of deacons and ministers attended, though the parents did not. The winter brought sleighing, skating, and the usual round of indoor sports. In general, the intercourse of all classes was kindly and considerate, no one arrogating superiority, and yet no one refusing to acknowledge it where it existed. You would hardly have noticed that there was a higher and a lower class. Such there were, certainly; for there must always and everywhere be the strong and the weak, the wise and the foolish. But in our society



these existed without being felt as a privilege to one, which must give offence to another.

It may serve in some degree to throw light upon the manners and customs of this period, if I give you a sketch of my two grandmothers. Both were widows, and were well stricken in years when they came to visit us at Ridgefield, about the year 1803-4. My grandmother Ely was a lady of the old school, and sustaining the character in her upright carriage, her long, tapering waist, and her high-heeled shoes. The customs of Louis XV.'s time had prevailed in New York and Boston, and even at this period they still lingered there in isolated cases. It is curious enough, that at this time the female attire of a century ago is revived; and every black-eyed, stately old lady, dressed in black silk, and showing her steel-grey hair beneath her cap, reminds me of my maternal grandmother.

My other grandmother was in all things the opposite; short, fat, blue-eyed, and practical; a good example of a hearty country dame. I scarcely knew which of the two I liked the best. The first sang me plaintive songs, told me stories of the Revolution – her husband, Col. Ely, having had a large and painful share in its vicissitudes – she described Gen. Washington, whom she had seen; and the French officers, Lafayette, Rochambeau, and others, who had been inmates of her house. She told me tales of even more ancient date, and recited poetry, generally ballads, which were suited to my taste. And all this lore was commended to me by a voice of inimitable tenderness, and a manner at once

lofty and condescending. My other grandmother was not less kind, but she promoted my happiness and prosperity in another way. Instead of stories, she gave me bread and butter: in place of poetry, she fed me with apple-sauce and pie. Never was there a more hearty old lady: she had a firm conviction that children must be fed, and what she believed she practised.

I can recollect with great vividness the interest I took in the domestic events I have described. The operations of the farm had no great attractions for me. Ploughing, hoeing, digging, seemed to me mere drudgery, imparting no instruction, and affording no scope for ingenuity or invention.

Mechanical operations, especially those of the weaver and carpenter, on the contrary, stimulated my curiosity, and excited my emulation. Thus I soon became familiar with the carpenter's tools, and made such windmills, kites, and perpetual motions, as to win the admiration of my playmates, and excite the respect of my parents; so that they seriously meditated putting me apprentice to a carpenter. Up to the age of fourteen, I think this was regarded as my manifest destiny. It was a day of great endeavors among all inventive geniuses. Fulton was struggling to develop steam navigation; and other discoverers were seeking to unfold the wonders of art as well as of nature. It was, in fact, the very threshold of the era of steam-boats, railroads, electric telegraphs, and a thousand other useful discoveries, which have since changed the face of the world. In this age of excitement, perpetual motion was the great hobby of aspiring mechanics.

I pondered and whittled intensely on this subject before I was ten years old. Despairing of reaching my object by mechanical means, I attempted to arrive at it by magnetism, my father having bought me a pair of horse-shoe magnets in one of his journeys to New Haven. I should have succeeded, had it not been a principle in the nature of this curious element, that no substance will intercept the stream of attraction. I tried to change the poles, and turn the north against the south; but there, too, nature had headed me, and of course I failed.

A word, by the way, on the matter of whittling. This is generally represented as a sort of idle, fidgety, frivolous use of the penknife, and is set down, by foreigners and sketchers of American manners, as a peculiar characteristic of our people. No portrait of an American is deemed complete, unless with penknife and shingle in hand. I feel not the slightest disposition to resent even this, among the thousand caricatures that pass for traits of American life. For my own part, I can testify that, during my youthful days, I found the penknife a source of great amusement, and even of instruction. Many a long winter evening, many a dull, drizzly day, in spring, and summer, and autumn – sometimes at the kitchen fireside, sometimes in the attic, sometimes in a cosy nook of the barn, sometimes in the shelter of a neighboring stone wall, thatched over with wild grape-vines – have I spent in great ecstasy, making candle-rods, or some other simple article of household goods, for my mother; or in perfecting toys for myself and my young friends; or perhaps in

attempts at more ambitious achievements. This was not mere waste of time; mere idleness and dissipation. I was amused: that was something. Some of the pleasantest remembrances of my childhood carry me back to the scenes I have just indicated; when, in happy solitude, absorbed in my mechanical devices, I listened to the rain pattering upon the roof, or the wind roaring down the chimney: thus enjoying a double bliss, a pleasing occupation, with a conscious delight in my sense of security from the rage of the elements without.

Nay more; these occupations were instructive: my mind was stimulated to inquire into the mechanical powers, and my hand was educated to mechanical dexterity. If you ask me why it is that this important institution of whittling is indigenous among us, I reply that, in the first place, our country is full of a great variety of woods, suited to carpentry, many of them easily wrought, and thus inviting boyhood to try its hands upon them. In the next place, labor is dear; and therefore even children are led to supply themselves with toys, or perchance to furnish some of the simpler articles of use to the household. This dearness of labor, moreover, furnishes a powerful stimulant to the production of labor-saving machines; and hence it is – through all these causes co-operating one with another – that steam-navigation, the electric telegraph, the steam-reaper, &c., &c., are American inventions: hence it is that, whether it be at the World's Fair at London or Paris, we gain a greater proportion of prizes for useful inventions than any other people. That is what comes of

whittling!

I must add, that in these early days I was a Nimrod, a mighty hunter; first with a bow and arrow, and afterwards with the old hereditary firelock, which snapped six times and went off once. The smaller kinds of game were abundant. The thickets teemed with quails;<sup>2</sup> partridges drummed in every wood; the gray squirrel – the most picturesque animal of our forests – enlivened every hickory copse with his mocking laugh, his lively gambols, and his long, bushy tail. The pigeons, in spring and autumn, migrated in countless flocks; and many lingered in our woods for the season.

Everybody was then a hunter; not, of course, a sportsman: for the chase was followed more for profit than for pastime. Game was, in point of fact, a substantial portion of the supply of food at certain seasons of the year. All were then good shots, and my father was no exception: he was even beyond his generation in netting pigeons. This was not deemed a reproach at that time in a clergyman; nor was he the only parson that indulged in these occupations. One day, as I was with him on West Mountain, baiting pigeons, we had seduced a flock of three or four dozen down into the bed where they were feeding; my father and myself lying concealed in our bush-hut, close by. Suddenly, whang went a gun into the middle of the flock! Out we ran in great indignation; for at least a dozen of the birds were bleeding and

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<sup>2</sup> The American quail is a species of partridge, in size between the European quail and partridge. The *partridge* of New England is the *pheasant* of the South, and the *ruffed grouse* of the naturalists.

fluttering before us. Scarcely had we reached the spot, when we met Parson M – , of Lower Salem, who had thus unwittingly poached upon us. The two clergymen had first a squabble, and then a good laugh; after which they divided the plunder and then parted.

The stories told by Wilson and Audubon as to the amazing quantity of pigeons in the West, were realized by us in Connecticut half-a-century ago. I have seen, in the county of Fairfield, a stream of these noble birds pouring at brief intervals through the skies, from the rising to the setting sun. Of all the pigeon tribe, this of our country – the passenger pigeon – is the swiftest and most beautiful. At the same time, it is unquestionably superior to any other for the table. All the other species of the eastern, as well as the western continent, which I have tasted, are soft and flavorless in comparison.

I can recollect no sports of my youth which equalled in excitement our pigeon hunts, which generally took place in September and October. We usually started on horseback before daylight, and made a rapid progress to some stubble-field on West Mountain. The ride in the keen, fresh air, especially as the dawn began to break, was delightful. The gradual encroachment of day upon the night filled my mind with sublime images: the waking up of a world from sleep, the joyousness of birds and beasts in the return of morning, and my own sympathy in this cheerful and grateful homage of the heart to God, the Giver of good – all contributed to render these adventures most

impressive upon my young heart. My memory is still full of the sights and sounds of those glorious mornings: the silvery whistle of the wings of migrating flocks of plover, invisible in the gray mists of dawn; the faint murmur of the distant mountain torrents; the sonorous gong of the long-trailing flocks of wild geese, seeming to come from the unseen depths of the skies – these were among the suggestive sounds that stole through the dim twilight. As morning advanced, the scene was inconceivably beautiful: the mountain sides, clothed in autumnal green, and purple, and gold, rendered more glowing by the sunrise – with the valleys covered with mists, and spreading out like lakes of silver; while on every side the ear was saluted by the mocking screams of the red-headed woodpecker, the cawing of congresses of crows; and, finally, the rushing sound of the pigeons, pouring like a tide over the tops of the trees.

By this time of course our nets were ready, and our flyers and stool-birds on the alert. What moments of ecstasy were these, and especially when the head of the flock – some red-breasted old father or grandfather – caught the sight of our pigeons, and turning at the call, drew the whole train down into our net-bed! I have often seen a hundred, or two hundred of these splendid birds, come upon us, with a noise absolutely deafening. Sometimes our bush-hut, where we lay concealed, was covered all over with pigeons, and we dared not move a finger, as their red, piercing eyes were upon us. When at last, with a sudden pull of the rope, the net was sprung, and we went out to secure

our booty – often fifty, and sometimes even a hundred birds – I felt a fulness of triumph which words are wholly inadequate to express!

Up to the age of eight years I was never trusted with a gun. Whenever I went forth as a sportsman on my own account, it was only with a bow and arrow. My performances as a hunter were very moderate. In truth, I had a rickety old gun, that had belonged to my grandfather, and though it perhaps had done good service in the Revolution, or further back in the times of bears and wolves, it was now very decrepit, and all around the lock seemed to have the shaking palsy. Occasionally I met with adventures, half serious and half ludicrous. Once, in running my hand into a hole in a hollow tree, some twenty feet from the ground, being in search of a woodpecker, I hauled out a blacksnake. At another time, in a similar way, I had my fingers pretty sharply nipped by a screech-owl. My memory supplies me with numerous instances of this kind.

As to fishing, I never had a passion for it: I was too impatient. I had no enthusiasm for nibbles, and there were too many of these in proportion to the bites. I perhaps resembled a man by the name of Bennett, who joined the Shakers of New Canaan about these days, but soon left them, declaring that the Spirit was too long in coming – "he could not wait." Nevertheless, I dreamed away some pleasant hours in angling in the brooks and ponds of my native town. I well remember, that on my eighth birthday I went four miles to Burt's mills, carrying on the old mare two bushels



of rye. While my grist was being ground I angled in the pond, and carried home enough for a generous meal.

Now all these things may seem trifles, yet in a review of my life I deem them of some significance. This homely familiarity with the more mechanical arts was a material part of my education: this communion with nature gave me instructive and important lessons from nature's open book of knowledge. My technical education, as will be seen hereafter, was extremely narrow and irregular. This defect was at least partially supplied by the commonplace incidents I have mentioned. The teachings, or rather the training of the senses, in the country – ear and eye, foot and hand, by running, leaping, climbing over hill and mountain, by occasional labor in the garden and on the farm, and by the use of tools, and all this in youth – is sowing seed which is repaid largely and readily to the hand of after-cultivation, however unskilful it may be. This is not so much because of the amount of knowledge available in after-life, which is thus obtained – though this is not to be despised – as it is that healthful, vigorous, manly habits and associations, physical, moral, and intellectual, are thus established and developed.

# CHAPTER V

DEATH OF WASHINGTON – JEROME  
BONAPARTE AND MISS PATTERSON –  
SUNDAY TRAVELLING – OLIVER WOLCOTT –  
TIMOTHY PICKERING – AMERICAN POLITENESS  
QUITE NATURAL – LOCOMOTION – PUBLIC  
CONVEYANCES – MY FATHER'S CHAISE.

The incidents I have just related occurred about the year 1800 – some a little earlier and some a little later. Among the events of general interest that happened near this time I remember the death of Washington, which took place in 1799, and was commemorated all through the country by the tolling of bells, funeral ceremonies, orations, sermons, hymns, and dirges, attended by a mournful sense of his loss, which seemed to cast a pall over the entire heavens. In Ridgefield the meeting-house was dressed in black, and we had a discourse pronounced by a Mr. Edmonds, of Newtown. The subject, indeed, engrossed all minds. Lieutenant Smith came every day to our house to talk over the event, and to bring us the proceedings in different parts of the country. Among other papers he brought us a copy of the *Connecticut Courant*, which gave us the particulars of the rites and ceremonies which took place in Hartford in commemoration of the great man's decease. The celebrated hymn, written for the occasion by Theodore Dwight, sank into my mother's heart – for

she had a constitutional love of things mournful and poetical – and she often repeated it, so that it became a part of the cherished lore of my childhood.

I give you these scenes and feelings in some detail, to impress you with the depth and sincerity of this mourning of the American nation, in cities and towns, in villages and hamlets, for the death of Washington.

I have already said that Ridgefield was on the great thoroughfare between Boston and New York, for the day of steamers and railroads had not dawned. Even the mania for turnpikes, which ere long overspread New England, had not yet arrived. The stage-coaches took four days to make the trip of two hundred miles between the two great cities. In winter, during the furious snow-storms, the journey was often protracted to seven, eight, or ten days. With such public conveyances, great people – for even then the world was divided into the great and little, as it is now – travelled in their own carriages.

About this time – it must have been in the summer of 1804 – I remember Jerome Bonaparte coming up to Keeler's tavern with a coach and four, attended by his young wife, Miss Patterson of Baltimore. It was a gay establishment, and the honeymoon sat happily on the tall, sallow stripling and his young bride. You must remember that Napoleon was then filling the world with his fame: at this moment his feet were on the threshold of the empire. The arrival of his brother in the United States of course made a sensation. His marriage, his movements, all were gossipped over

from Maine to Georgia, the extreme points of the Union. His entrance into Ridgefield produced a flutter of excitement even there. A crowd gathered around Keeler's tavern to catch a sight of the strangers, and I was among the rest. I had a good look at Jerome, who was the chief object of interest, and the image never faded from my recollection.

Half a century later, I was one evening at the Tuileries, amid the flush and the fair of Louis Napoleon's new court. Among them I saw an old man, taller than the mass around – his nose and chin almost meeting in contact, while his toothless gums were "munching the airy meal of dotage and decrepitude." I was irresistibly chained to this object, as if a spectre had risen up through the floor and stood among the garish throng. My memory travelled back – back among the winding labyrinths of years. Suddenly I found the clue: the stranger was Jerome Bonaparte!

Ah, what a history lay between the past and present – a lapse of nearly fifty years. What a difference between him then and now! Then he was a gay and gallant bridegroom; now, though he had the title of king, he was throneless and sceptreless – an Invalid Governor of Invalids – the puppet and pageant of an adventurer, whose power lay in the mere magic of a name.

About this time, as I well remember, Oliver Wolcott passed through our village. He arrived at the tavern late on Saturday evening, but he called at our house in the morning, his family being connected with ours. He was a great man then; for not only

are the Wolcotts traditionally and historically a distinguished race in Connecticut, but he had recently been a member of Washington's cabinet. I mention him now only for the purpose of noting his deference to public opinion, characteristic of the eminent men of that day. In the morning he went to church, but immediately after the sermon he had his horses brought up, and proceeded on his way. He, however, had requested my father to state to his people, at the opening of the afternoon service, that he was travelling on public business, and though he regretted it, he was obliged to continue his journey on the Sabbath. This my father did, but Deacon Olmstead, the Jeremiah of the parish, shook his white locks, and lifted up his voice against such a desecration of the Lord's day. Some years after, as I remember, Lieutenant-Governor Treadwell arrived at Keeler's tavern on Saturday evening, and prepared to prosecute his journey the next morning, his daughter, who was with him, being ill. This same Deacon Olmstead called upon him, and said, "Sir, if you thus set the example of violation of the Sabbath, you must expect to get one vote less at the next election!" The Governor was so much struck by the appearance of the deacon, who was the very image of a patriarch or a prophet, that he deferred his departure till Monday.

Although great people rode in their own carriages, the principal method of travelling was on horseback. Many of the members of Congress came to Washington in this way. I have a dim recollection of seeing one day, when I was trudging along to

school, a tall, pale, gaunt man, approaching on horseback, with his plump saddlebags behind him. I looked at him keenly, and made my obeisance, as in duty bound. He lifted his hat, and bowed in return. By a quick instinct, I sat him down as a man of mark. In the evening, Lieutenant Smith came to our house and told us that Timothy Pickering had passed through the town! He had seen him, and talked with him, and was vastly distended with the portentous news thereby acquired, including the rise and fall of empires for ages to come, and all of which he duly unfolded to our family circle.

Before I proceed, let me note, in passing, a point of manners then universal, but which has now nearly faded away. When travellers met on the highway, they saluted each other with a certain dignified and formal courtesy. All children were regularly taught at school to "make their manners" to strangers; the boys to bow, and the girls to courtesy. It was something different from the frank, familiar, "How are you, stranger?" of the Far West; something different from the "*Bon jour, serviteur*," of the Alps. Our salute was more measured and formal; respect to age and authority being evidently an element of this homage, which was sedulously taught to the young.

For children to salute travellers was, in my early days, as well a duty as a decency. A child who did not "make his manners" to a stranger on the high-road was deemed a low fellow; a stranger who refused to acknowledge this civility was esteemed a *sans culotte*, perhaps a favorer of Jacobinism.

But I must return to locomotion. In Ridgefield, in the year 1800, there was but a single chaise, and that belonged to Colonel Bradley, one of the principal citizens of the place. It was without a top, and had a pair of wide-spreading, asinine ears. That multitudinous generation of travelling vehicles, so universal and so convenient now – such as top-wagons, four-wheeled chaises, tilburies, dearborns, &c., was totally unknown. Even if these things had been invented, the roads would scarcely have permitted the use of them. Physicians who had occasion to go from town to town went on horseback; all clergymen, except perhaps Bishop Seabury, who rode in a coach, travelled in the same way. My father's people, who lived at a distance, came to church on horseback; their wives and daughters being seated on pillions behind them. In a few cases – as in spring-time, when the mud was bottomless – the farm wagon was used for transporting the family.

In winter it was otherwise, for we had three or four months of sleighing. Then the whole country was a railroad, and gay times we had. Oh! those beautiful winters, which would drive me shivering to the fireside now: what vivid delight have I had in their slidings and skatings, their sleddings and sleighings! One thing strikes me now with wonder, and that is, the general indifference in those days to the intensity of winter. No doubt, as I have said before, the climate was then more severe; but, be that as it may, people seemed to suffer less from it than at the present day. Nobody thought of staying at home from church because

of the extremity of the weather. We had no thermometers, it is true, to frighten us with the revelation that it was twenty-five degrees below zero. The habits of the people were simple and hardy, and there were few defences against the assaults of the seasons. The houses were not tight; we had no stoves, no Lehigh or Lackawanna coal; yet we lived, and comfortably, too: nay, we even changed burly winter into a season of enjoyment.

I have said that, in the year 1800, there was but a single chaise in Ridgefield; and this was brought, I believe, from New Haven. There was not, I imagine, a coach, or any kind of pleasure-vehicle – that crazy old chaise excepted – in the county of Fairfield, out of the two half-shire towns. Such things, indeed, were known at New York, Boston, and Philadelphia; for already the government had laid a tax upon pleasure conveyances: but they were comparatively few in number, and were mostly imported. In 1798 there was but one public hack in New Haven, and but one coach; the latter, belonging to Pierpoint Edwards, was a large, four-wheeled vehicle, for two persons, called a chariot. In the smaller towns there were no pleasure vehicles in use throughout New England.

About that time there came to our village a man by the name of Jesse Skellinger, an Englishman, and chaisemaker by trade. My father engaged him to build him a chaise. A bench was set up in our barn, and certain trees of oak and ash were cut in our neighboring woods. These were sawed and seasoned, and shaped into wheels and shafts. Thomas Hawley, half blacksmith, and



half wheelwright, was duly initiated, and he cunningly wrought the iron necessary for the work. In five months the chaise was finished, with a standing top; greatly to the admiration of our family. What a gaze was there, as this vehicle went through Ridgefield street upon its first expedition!

This was the beginning of the chaise-manufactory in Ridgefield, which has since been a source of large revenue to the town. Skellinger was engaged by Elijah Hawley, who had formerly done something as a wagon-builder; and thus in due time an establishment was founded, which for many years was noted for the beauty and excellence of its pleasure vehicles.

# CHAPTER VI

THE UPPER AND LOWER CLASSES OF  
RIDGEFIELD – MASTER STEBBINS AND HIS  
SCHOOL – WHAT IS A NOUN? – DEACON  
BENEDICT AND HIS MAN ABIJAH – MY LATIN  
ACQUIREMENTS – FAMILY WORSHIP – WIDOW  
BENNETT – THE TEMPLE OF DAGON.

Ridgefield, as well as most other places, had its Up-town and Down-town; terms which have not unfrequently been the occasion of serious divisions in the affairs of Church and State. In London this distinction takes the name of West End and the City. The French philosophers say that every great capital has similar divisions; West End being always the residence of the aristocracy, and East End of the *canaille*.

Ridgefield, being a village, had a right to follow its own whim; and therefore West Lane, instead of being the aristocratic end of the place, was really rather the low end. It constituted, in fact, what was called *Down-town*, in distinction from the more eastern and northern section, called *Up-town*. In this latter portion, and about the middle of the main street, was the Up-town school, the leading seminary of the village; for at this period it had not arrived at the honors of an academy. At the age of ten years I was sent here, the institution being then, and for many years after, under the charge of Master Stebbins. He was a man with

a conciliating stoop in the shoulders, a long body, short legs, and a swaying walk. He was at this period some fifty years old, his hair being thin and silvery, and always falling in well-combed rolls over his coat-collar. His eyes were blue, and his dress invariably of the same color. Breeches and knee-buckles, blue-mixed stockings, and shoes with bright buckles, seemed as much a part of the man as his head and shoulders. On the whole, his appearance was that of the middle-class gentleman of the olden time; and he was, in fact, what he seemed.

This seminary of learning for the rising aristocracy of Ridgefield was a wooden edifice, thirty by twenty feet, covered with brown clapboards, and, except an entry, consisted of a single room. Around, and against the walls, ran a continuous line of seats, fronted by a continuous writing-desk. Beneath were depositories for books and writing materials. The centre was occupied by slab seats, similar to those of West Lane. The larger scholars were ranged on the outer sides, at the desks; the smaller fry of abecedarians were seated in the centre. The master was enshrined on the east side of the room, and, regular as the sun, he was in his seat at nine o'clock, and the performances of the school began.

According to the Catechism, which we learned and recited on Saturday, the chief end of man was to glorify God and keep His commandments; according to the routine of this school, one would have thought it to be reading, writing, and arithmetic, to which we may add spelling. From morning to night, in all

weathers, through every season of the year, these exercises were carried on with the energy, patience, and perseverance of a manufactory.

Master Stebbins respected his calling: his heart was in his work; and so, what he pretended to teach, he taught well. When I entered the school, I found that a huge stride had been achieved in the march of mind since I left West Lane. Webster's Spelling-book had taken the place of Dilworth, which was a great improvement. The drill in spelling was very thorough, and applied every day to the whole school. I imagine that the exercises might have been amusing to a stranger, especially as one scholar would sometimes go off in a voice as grum as that of a bull-frog, while another would follow in tones as fine and piping as those of a peet-weet. The blunders, too, were often very ludicrous; even we children would sometimes have tittered, had not such an enormity been certain to have brought out the birch. As to rewards and punishments, the system was this: whoever missed, went down; so that perfection mounted to the top. Here was the beginning of the up and down of life.

Reading was performed in classes, which generally plodded on without a hint from the master. Nevertheless, when Zeek Sanford – who was said to have "a streak of lightning in him" – in his haste to be smart, read the 37th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Acts, – "Now when they heard this, they were *pickled* in their heart," – the birch stick on Master Stebbins's table seemed to quiver and peel at the little end, as if to give warning of

the wrath to come. When Orry Keeler – Orry was a girl, you know, and not a boy – drawled out in spelling, "k – o – n, *kon*, s – h – u – n – t – s, *shunts*, konshunts," the bristles in the master's eyebrows fidgeted like Aunt Delight's knitting-needles. Occasionally, when the reading was insupportably bad, he took a book, and himself read as an example.

Master Stebbins was a great man with a slate and pencil, and I have an idea that we were a generation after his own heart. We certainly achieved wonders in arithmetic, according to our own conceptions, some of us going even beyond the Rule of Three, and making forays into the mysterious regions of Vulgar Fractions.

But, after all, penmanship was Master Stebbins's great accomplishment. He had no pompous lessons upon single lines and bifid lines, and the like. The revelations of inspired copy-book makers had not then been vouchsafed to man. He could not cut an American eagle with a single flourish of a goose-quill. He was guided by good taste and native instinct, and wrote a smooth round hand, like copper-plate. His lessons from A to &, all written by himself, consisted of pithy proverbs and useful moral lessons. On every page of our writing-books he wrote the first line himself. The effect was what might have been expected – with such models, patiently enforced, nearly all became good writers.

Beyond these simple elements, the Up-town school made few pretensions. When I was there, two Webster's Grammars and

one or two Dwight's Geographies were in use. The latter was without maps or illustrations, and was, in fact, little more than an expanded table of contents, taken from Morse's Universal Geography – the mammoth monument of American learning and genius of that age and generation. The grammar was a clever book, but I have an idea that neither Master Stebbins nor his pupils ever fathomed its depths. They floundered about in it, as if in a quagmire, and after some time came out pretty nearly where they went in, though perhaps a little confused by the din and dusky atmosphere of these labyrinths.

Let me here repeat an anecdote, which I have indeed told before, but which I had from the lips of its hero, a clergyman, of some note thirty years ago, and which well illustrates this part of my story. At a village school, not many miles from Ridgefield, he was put into Webster's Grammar. Here he read, "*A noun is the name of a thing – as horse, hair, justice.*" Now, in his innocence, he read it thus: "*A noun is the name of a thing – as horse-hair justice.*"

"What, then," said he, ruminating deeply, "is a noun? But first I must find out what a horse-hair justice is."

Upon this he meditated for some days, but still he was as far as ever from the solution. Now, his father was a man of authority in those parts, and, moreover, he was a justice of the peace. Withal, he was of respectable ancestry, and so there had descended to him a stately high-backed settee, covered with horse-hair. One day, as the youth came from school, pondering upon the great

grammatical problem, he entered the front door of the house, and there he saw before him his father, officiating in his legal capacity, and seated upon the old horse-hair settee. "I have found it!" said the boy to himself, greatly delighted – "my father is a horse-hair justice, and therefore a noun!"

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the world got on remarkably well in spite of this narrowness of the country schools. The elements of an English education were pretty well taught throughout the village seminaries of Connecticut, and, I may add, of New England. The teachers were heartily devoted to their profession: they respected their calling, and were respected and encouraged by the community. They had this merit, that while they attempted little, that, at least, was thoroughly performed.

I went steadily to the Up-town school for three winters; being occupied during the summers upon the farm, and in various minor duties. I was a great deal on horseback, often carrying messages to the neighboring towns of Reading, Wilton, Weston, and Lower Salem, for then the post routes were few, and the mails, which were weekly, crept like snails over hill and valley. I became a bold rider at an early age: before I was eight years old I frequently ventured to put a horse to his speed, and that, too, without a saddle. A person who has never tried it, can hardly conceive the wild delight of riding a swift horse, when he lays down his ears, tosses his tail in air, and stretches himself out in a full race. The intense energy of the beast's movements, the rush

of the air, the swimming backward of lands, houses, and trees, with the clattering thunder of the hoofs – all convey to the rider a fierce ecstasy, which, perhaps, nothing else can give. About this period, however, I received a lesson, which lasted me a lifetime.

You must know that Deacon Benedict, one of our neighbors, had a fellow living with him named Abijah. He was an adventurous youth, and more than once led me into tribulation. I remember that on one occasion I went with him to shoot a dog that was said to worry the deacon's sheep. It was night, and dark as Egypt, but Bige said he could see the creature close to the cow-house, behind the barn. He banged away, and then jumped over the fence, to pick up the game. After a time he came back, but said not a word. Next morning it was found that he had shot the brindled cow; mistaking a white spot in her forehead for the dog, he had taken a deadly aim, and put the whole charge into her pate. Fortunately her skull was thick and the shot small, so the honest creature was only a little cracked. Bige, however, was terribly scolded by the deacon, who was a justice of the peace, and had a deep sense of the importance of his duties. I came in for a share of blame, though I was only a looker-on. Bige said the deacon called me a "parsnip scrimmage," but more probably it was a *particeps criminis*.

But to proceed. One day I was taking home from the pasture a horse that belonged to some clergyman – I believe Dr. Ripley, of Greensfarms. Just as I came upon the level ground in front of Jerry Mead's old house, Bige came up behind me on the deacon's



mare – an ambling brute with a bushy tail and shaggy mane. As he approached he gave a chirrup, and my horse, half in fright and half in fun, bounded away, like Tam O'Shanter's mare. Away we went, I holding on as well as I could, for the animal was round as a barrel. He was no doubt used to a frolic of this sort, although he belonged to a doctor of divinity, and looked as if he believed in total depravity. When he finally broke into a gallop he flew like the wind, at the same time bounding up and down with a tearing energy, quite frightful to think of. After a short race he went from under me, and I came with a terrible shock to the ground.

The breath was knocked out of me for some seconds, and as I recovered it with a gasping effort, my sensations were indescribably agonizing. Greatly humbled and sorely bruised, I managed to get home, where the story of my adventure had preceded me. I was severely lectured by my parents, which, however, I might have forgotten, had not the concussion made an indelible impression on my memory, thus perpetuating the wholesome counsel.

When I was about twelve years old, a man by the name of Sackett was employed to keep a high-school, or, as it was then called, an academy. Here I went irregularly for a few weeks, and at a public exhibition I remember to have spoken a piece, upon a stage fitted up in the meeting-house, entitled "Charles Chatterbox." This was the substance of my achievements at Sackett's seminary.

The narrowness of my father's income, and the needs of a

large family, induced him to take half-a-dozen pupils to be fitted for college. This he continued for a series of years. It might seem natural that I should have shared in these advantages; but, in the first place, my only and elder brother, Charles A. Goodrich – now widely known by his numerous useful publications – had been destined for the clerical profession, partly by his own predilection, partly by encouragement from a relative, and partly, too, from an idea that his somewhat delicate constitution forbade a more hardy career. To this may doubtless be added the natural desire of his parents that at least one of their sons should follow the honored calling to which father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had been devoted. Hence he was put in training for college. The expenses to be thus incurred were formidable enough to my parents, without adding to them by attempting anything of the kind for me. And, besides, I had manifested no love of study, and evidently preferred action to books. Moreover, it must be remembered, that I was regarded as a born carpenter, and it would have seemed tempting Providence to have set me upon any other career. So, with perfect content on my part, from the age of twelve to fourteen, I was chiefly employed in active services about the house and farm. I could read, write, and cipher; this was sufficient for my ambition, and satisfactory to my parents, in view of the life to which I was apparently destined.

Nevertheless, though my school exercises were such as I have described, I doubtless gathered some little odds and ends of learning about those days, beyond the range of my horn-

books. I heard a good deal of conversation from the clergymen who visited us, and, above all, I listened to the long discourses of Lieutenant Smith upon matters and things in general. My father, too, had a brother in Congress, from whom he received letters, documents, and messages, all of which became subjects of discussion. I remember, further, that out of some childish imitation, I thumbed over Corderius and Erasmus – the first Latin books, then constantly in the hands of my father's pupils. I was so accustomed to hear them recite their lessons in Virgil, that

Tityre, tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi—

and

*Arma*, arms —*virumque*, and the man —*cano*, I sing,

were as familiar to my ears as *hillery, tillery, zachery zan*, and probably conveyed to my mind about as much meaning. Even the first lesson in Greek —

Εν, in – ἀρχή, the beginning – ἦν, was – ὁ λογος, the Word —

was also among the cabalistic jingles in my memory. All this may seem nothing as a matter of education; still, some years after, while I was an apprentice in Hartford, feeling painfully impressed with the scantiness of my knowledge, I borrowed some Latin school-books, under the idea of attempting to master that language. To my delight and surprise, I found that they seemed familiar to me. Thus encouraged, I began, and bending steadily over my task at evening, when my day's duties were over,

I made my way nearly through the Latin Grammar and the first two books of Virgil's *Æneid*. In my poverty of knowledge, even these acquisitions became useful to me.

From the age of twelve to fifteen, though generally occupied in the various tasks assigned me, I still found a good deal of time to ramble over the country. Whole days I spent in the long, lonesome lanes that wound between Ridgefield and Salem, in the half-cultivated, half-wooded hills that lay at the foot of West Mountain, and in the deep recesses of the wild and rugged regions beyond. I frequently climbed to the tops of the cliffs and ridges that rose one above another; and having gained the crown of the mountain, cast long and wistful glances over the blue vale that stretched out for many miles to the westward. I had always my gun in hand, and though not insensible to any sport that might fall in my way, I was more absorbed in the fancies that came thronging to my imagination. Thus I became familiar with the whole country around, and especially with the shaded glens and gorges of West Mountain. I must add that these had, besides their native, savage charms, a sort of fascination from being the residence of a strange woman, who had devoted herself to solitude, and was known under the name of "the Hermitess." This personage I had occasionally seen in our village; and I frequently met her as she glided through the forests, while I was pursuing my mountain rambles. I sometimes felt a strange thrill as she passed; but this only seemed to render the recesses where she dwelt still more inviting.

I have no doubt that I inherited from my mother a love of the night side of nature; not a love that begets melancholy, but an appetite that found pleasure in the shadows, as well as the lights, of life and imagination. Eminently practical as she was – laborious, skilful, and successful in the duties which Providence had assigned her, as the head of a large family, with narrow means – she was still of a poetic temperament. Her lively fancy was vividly set forth by a pair of the finest eyes I have ever seen; dark and serious, yet tender and sentimental. These bespoke, not only the vigor of her conceptions, but the melancholy tinge that shaded her imagination. Sometimes, indeed, the well of sadness in her heart became full, and it ran over in tears. These, however, were like spring showers; brief in duration, and afterwards brightening to all around. She was not the only woman who has felt better after a good cry. It was, in fact, a poetic, not a real sorrow, that thus excited her emotions; for her prevailing humor abounded in wit and vivacity, not unfrequently taking the hue of playful satire. Nevertheless, her taste craved the pathetic, the mournful; not as a bitter medicine, but a spicy condiment. Her favorite poets were King David and Dr. Watts: she preferred the dirge-like melody of Windham to all other music. All the songs she sang were minors.

You will gather, from what I have said, that my father not only prayed in his family night and morning, but before breakfast, and immediately after the household was assembled he always read a chapter in the sacred volume. It is recorded in our family

Bible, that he read it through, in course, thirteen times in the space of about five-and-twenty years. He was an excellent reader, having a remarkably clear, frank, hearty voice; so that I was deeply interested, and thus early became familiar with almost every portion of the Old and New Testament.

The practice of family worship, as I before stated, was at this time very general in New England. In Ridgefield, it was not altogether confined to the strictly religious; to clergymen, deacons, and church members. It was a custom which decency hardly allowed to be omitted. No family was thought to go on well without it. There is a good story which well describes this trait of manners.

Somewhere in Vermont, in this golden age, there was a widow by the name of Bennett. In consequence of the death of her husband, the charge of a large farm and an ample household devolved upon her. Her husband had been a pious man, and all things had prospered with him. His widow, alike from religious feeling and affectionate regard for his memory, desired that everything should be conducted as much as possible as it had been during his lifetime. Especially did she wish the day to begin and close with family worship.

Now, she had a foreman on the farm by the name of Ward. He was a good man for work, but he was not a religious man. In vain did the widow, in admitting his merits at the plough, the scythe, and the flail, still urge him to crown her wishes, by leading in family prayer. For a long time the heart of the man was hard,

and his ear deaf to her entreaties. At last, however, wearied with her importunities, he seemed to change, and, to her great joy, consented to make a trial.

On a bright morning in June – at early sunrise – the family were all assembled in the parlor, men and maidens, for their devotions. When all was ready, Ward, in a low, troubled voice, began. He had never prayed, or at least not in public, but he had heard many prayers, and possessed a retentive memory. After getting over the first hesitancy, he soon became fluent, and taking passages here and there from the various petitions he had heard – Presbyterian, Methodist, Universalist, and Episcopalian – he went on with great eloquence, gradually elevating his tone and accelerating his delivery. Ere long his voice grew portentous, and some of the men and maids, thinking he was suddenly taken either mad or inspired, stole out on their toes into the kitchen, where, with gaping mouths, they awaited the result. The Widow Bennett bore it all for about half an hour; but at last, as the precious time was passing away, she lost patience, and sprang to her feet. Placing herself directly in front of the speaker, she exclaimed, "Ward, what do you mean?"

As if suddenly relieved from a nightmare, he exclaimed, "Oh dear, ma'am, I'm much obliged to you; for somehow I couldn't wind the thing off."

I must not pass over another incident having reference to the topic in question. Under the biblical influence of those days my father's scholars built a temple of the Philistines, and when it

was completed within and without, all the children round about assembled, as did the Gazaites of old. The edifice was chiefly of boards, slenderly constructed, and reached the height of twelve feet; nevertheless, all of us got upon it, according to the 16th chapter of Judges. The oldest of the scholars played Samson. When all was ready, he took hold of the pillars of the temple, one with his right hand and one with his left. "Let me die with the Philistines!" said he, and bowing himself, down we came in a heap! Strange to say, nobody but Samson was hurt, and he only in some skin bruises. If you could see him now – dignified even to solemnity, and seldom condescending to any but the gravest matters – you would scarcely believe the story, even though I write it and verify it. Nevertheless, if he must have played, he should have taken the part of Samson, for he is one of the most gifted men I have ever known.



# CHAPTER VII

## THE CLERGY OF FAIRFIELD – A LAUGHING PARSON – THE THREE DEACONS.

Before I complete my narrative so far as it relates to Ridgefield, I should state that in the olden time a country minister's home was a ministers' tavern, and therefore I saw at our house, at different periods, most of the orthodox or Congregational clergymen belonging to that part of the State. My father frequently exchanged with those of the neighboring towns, and sometimes consociations and associations were held at Ridgefield. Thus, men of the clerical profession constituted a large portion of the strangers who visited us. I may add that my lineage was highly ministerial, from an early period down to my own time. The pulpit of Durham, filled by my paternal grandfather, continued in the same family one hundred and twenty-six consecutive years. A short time since we reckoned among our relations, not going beyond the degree of second cousin, more than a dozen ministers of the Gospel, and all of the same creed.

As to the clergy of Fairfield county, my boyish impressions of them were, that they were of the salt of the earth; nor has a larger experience altered my opinion. If I sometimes indulge a smile at the recollection of particular traits of character, or more general

points of manner significant of the age, I still regard them with affection and reverence.

I need not tell you that they were counsellors in religious matters, in the dark and anxious periods of the spirit, in times of sickness, at the approach of death. They sanctified the wedding, not refusing afterward to countenance the festivity which naturally ensued. They administered baptism, but only upon adults who made a profession, or upon the children of professors. I may add that, despite their divinity, they were sociable in their manners and intercourse. The state of the Church was no doubt first in their minds, but ample room was left for the good things of life. Those who came to our house examined my brother in his Greek and Latin, and I went out behind the barn to gather tansy for their morning bitters. They dearly loved a joke, and relished anecdotes, especially if they bore a little hard upon the cloth. The following will suffice as a specimen of the stories they delighted in.

Once upon a time there was a clergyman – the Rev. Dr. T – , a man of high character, and distinguished for his dignity of manner. But it was remarked that frequently as he was ascending the pulpit stairs he would smile, and sometimes almost titter, as if beset by an uncontrollable desire to laugh. This excited remark, and at last scandal. Finally, it was thought necessary for some of his clerical friends, at a meeting of the Association, to bring up the matter for consideration.

The case was stated, the Rev. Dr. T – being present. "Well,

gentlemen," said he, "the fact charged against me is true, but I beg you to permit me to offer an explanation. A few months after I was licensed to preach I was in a country town, and on a Sabbath morning was about to enter upon the services of the church. At the back of the pulpit was a window, which looked out upon a field of clover, then in full bloom, for it was summer. As I rose to commence the reading of the Scriptures, I cast a glance into the field, and there I saw a man performing the most extraordinary evolutions – jumping, whirling, slapping in all directions, and with a ferocious agony of exertion. At first I thought he was mad; but suddenly the truth burst upon me – he had buttoned up a bumblebee in his pantaloons! I am constitutionally nervous, gentlemen, and the shock of this scene upon my risible sensibilities was so great, that I could hardly get through the services. Several times I was upon the point of bursting into a laugh. Even to this day, the remembrance of this scene, through the temptation of the devil, often comes upon me as I am ascending the pulpit. This, I admit, is a weakness, but I trust it will rather excite your sympathy and your prayers than your reproaches."

It may be amusing, perhaps profitable, to give here a few sketches of the remarkable characters of Ridgefield, at the opening of the present century. Some were types of their time; others, however eccentric, were exemplifications of our race and our society, influenced by peculiar circumstances, and showing into what fashions this stuff of humanity may be wrought.

They are still prominent in my recollection, and seem to me an essential part of the social landscape which encircled my youth.

I begin with the three deacons of my father's parish. First was Deacon Olmstead, full threescore years and ten at the opening of the present century. His infancy touched upon the verge of Puritanism – the days of Increase and Cotton Mather. The spirit of the Puritans lived in his heart, while the semblance of the patriarchs lingered in his form. He was fully six feet high, with broad shoulders, powerful limbs, and the august step of a giant. His hair was white, and rolled in thin curls upon his shoulders; he was still erect, though he carried a long cane, like that of father Abraham in the old pictures, representing him at the head of his kindred and his camels, going from the land of Haran to the land of Canaan. Indeed, he was my personification of the great progenitor of the Hebrews; and when my father read from the twelfth chapter of Genesis, how he and Lot and their kindred journeyed forth, I half fancied it must be Deacon Olmstead under another name.

Deacon Olmstead was in all things a noble specimen of humanity – an honor to human nature, a shining light in the church. I have spoken of him as having something grand about him, yet I remember how kindly he condescended to take me, a child, on his knee, and how gently his great brawny fingers encircled my infant hand. I have said he was wise; yet his book-learning was small, though it might have been as great as that of Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob. He knew, indeed, the Bible by

heart, and that is a great teacher. He had also lived long, and profited by observation and experience. Above all, he was calm, just, sincere, and it is wonderful how these lamps light up the path of life. I have said he was proud, yet it was only toward the seductions of the world: to these he was hard and stern: to his God he was simple, obedient, and docile as a child: toward his kindred and his neighbor, toward the poor, toward the suffering, though not so soft, he was sympathetic as a sister of charity.

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