CHAPTER XII.

PIONEER LIFE.

1736—1816.

The early settlers of this part of the country were a hardy, vigorous race, inured to hardship and accustomed to danger, generally the young, energetic and enterprising members of the older communities. "God sifted a whole nation that he might send choice grain" into these wildernesses.

Piety, integrity and respect for law and the authority of church and state were striking features of the early New England character. Those pioneers had small store of "book learning," for that was scarcely to be had, but they were liberally educated in the arts and methods of pioneer life. The hard life which they were compelled to lead quickened every fibre, and made them sharp in intellect and feature.

They were attracted to the settlement of these townships by the fertility of the soil—made evident by its fine growth of timber—the low price of the lands, each original proprietor getting a fraction over 400 acres for about twenty-five dollars, and the ultimate life of comfort and comparative wealth in prospect for those who owned and cultivated those lands. There was also an element of freedom from the restraints of society which is always fascinating to a large class of men—and even to some women—and an attractiveness in the beauty and grandeur of the landscape. The life which they must lead here was but a repetition of that which they had learned from their ancestors of the settlements nearer the coast, who had fought and driven back the Indians, cleared the land of its heavy growth of timber and brought it to a state of remunerative cultivation. They were in perfect training for the work, like the athlete for the race.

Their first efforts were directed to clearing away the

timber and putting in crops of rye and corn. For this purpose, they would advance into the forest, singly or in pairs if they were to be isolated, or in small parties if they were to be neighbors, on foot, blazing the trees to mark the route, each carrying his axe, gun, knife, tinder box, camp kettle, bucket or wooden bottle, provisions and other necessaries of life in the wilderness, among which were a present supply of rum and tobacco. For plate, bowl and platter, the pioneer would split small logs and hollow out the parts; and from a small slab he would soon carve out a shapely spoon.[1] This beginning was usually made in the spring, at the time when, by felling a hemlock or two enough bark could be quickly peeled for an excellent shelter when placed on poles upheld by crotched stakes. As soon as the foliage was out in full, he would cut down the trees on his first clearing, around the spot selected for his log-cabin. In a few weeks the leaves and twigs would be dry and he would set his "chopping" on fire. Millions of feet of the finest pine and other timber were destroyed in this way each year, to clear the land. Before setting the fire the careful woodsman would dig a shallow trench around his chopping, by removing the brush and leaves, to prevent his fire from overrunning the surrounding forest.

A "good burn" would clear the land of brush and everything except the bodies of the trees. These the young farmer would cut into logs small enough to handle, and roll them into piles to burn, saving enough to build a fence around his piece. For this heavy work, and for building his cabin, he would "change works" with his neighbor. Sometimes neighbors joined in "bees" to clear the land after the burning, and from the practice of shrewdly planning the piles for hastening the work, came the satirical political term "log-rolling." Yet in many cases the pioneer had no neighbor within many miles, and had to do all the work himself. In later years, when he had oxen, the logs would be hauled together and piled for burning. If the land was rough and intended for pasture, the logs were left on the ground, and the rye and grass seed were sown

[1] Spoonwood pond in Packersfield (Nelson) was thus named from the laurel, called spoonwood, which grew on its shores and from which the Indians and early settlers made spoons.

among them. Oxen were used almost wholly for hauling and for work on the farm, and horses were kept for riding only. Bringing his seed rye from the nearest supply—frequently on his back, sometimes on a horse barrow—he would sow it "broadcast" and scratch it in with a small two-pronged "scratcher." This preparatory work for his new home would occupy the young adventurer till late in the autumn, when he would return to his former home for the winter. Sometimes young wives accompanied their husbands in the first instance, and lived in the primitive manner above outlined. In that case a more elaborate outfit was carried and the log cabin was built at once.

Corn would be planted in the following spring by opening the soil with the hoe and putting in the seed wherever there was room for a "hill" of corn to grow between the stumps, rocks, and such logs as might be left on the ground. This method was called the "Indian plant." Pumpkins, peas, beans and other vines and vegetables could also be planted. It would be several years before ploughs could be used among the stumps and roots.

Then the log cabin would be built, of straight, smooth logs, matched and locked together at the corners to bring them in close contact and make impervious walls. Unavoidable cracks were filled with sticks and plastered with mud or clay mortar. When time and the expense could be afforded the logs were hewn, otherwise they were left round. One opening was left for a door and one for a window, the latter to be closed with a shutter without hinges, made of slabs split from logs. The door, made in the same way, would be hung on wooden hinges. The roof was of poles covered with bark, or thatched with rye straw. The earth formed the floor, and was soon trodden hard and smooth by use. Sometimes a puncheon floor was laid, but that was a luxury. In many cases there was but one room, sometimes two, the partition being made of logs like the walls. The first chimney was usually of stones at the bottom, topped out with short logs and sticks built like the cabin walls, and plastered with clay mortar. Sometimes there was simply a hole in the roof, with the fire on the ground in the middle of the cabin;

and sometimes the fire was outside, in front of the cabin door. Over the fire a "lug-pole" of green wood was placed, supported at the ends by crotched stakes, or in the jams of the chimney, with wooden hooks for suspending pots and kettles. Poles were laid across overhead in the cabin, on which articles could be stored; and sometimes puncheons were laid for a more permanent upper floor and the loft was made a sleeping apartment for the children, the hired man, and even for guests, to be reached by a ladder. For a cellar, an excavation was made outside the cabin and covered with logs and earth.

In two or three years, our farmer would have some grass on his place, and there was always good browsing and some native grass in the lowlands, and he could keep a cow; and it would not be long before he would have young cattle, a pair of young oxen, and a few sheep. Hogs and poultry he could have from the first, but the horse was a luxury and usually came later. Seeds would be brought at the first, and one of his first acts would be to plant a nursery of fruit trees; and a few years would bring him an abundance of apples, peaches and plums; and the women never forgot to bring a few seeds of their favorite flowers, and bulbs and roots for the garden. Every mother knew the medicinal qualities of many herbs and plants and other physician was rarely employed in the family, or could be obtained.

All the first years of the pioneer's life were devoted to clearing his land in the way described, piece by piece, and raising crops of corn, rye, vegetables, and sometimes wheat and other cereals. The virgin soil was rich—improved by the ashes of the burnt trees—and the yield was abundant and farming was remunerative. True, much of the soil was consumed by those furious fires and was left so thin that years of cropping nearly exhausted it. So hardy and powerful were those men, and so skilled in the use of the axe, that many a one felled his acre of heavy timber in a day, and some of them would drink a quart of rum and chew a "hand" of tobacco apiece while doing it. The writer remembers men who were known to have accomplished those feats, and has heard it from the neighbors of

others who had done the same. He also distinctly remembers one woman of that class of people, a farmer's wife, and the mother of a good deacon of one of the churches here at the present time[1] (1900), who has been known to pick up a barrel of cider and throw it into a cart. And her son relates the fact that when water was scarce and was hauled to the house in barrels, she would lift a full barrel, poise it on the edge of a large tub and empty it from the bung-hole.

The principal growth of the forest was oak, maple, beech, birch, white and black ash, and elm about the low grounds, with hemlock and spruce on the higher altitudes; while the plains and some of the lower elevations were covered with lofty white and yellow pines, perfectly straight and frequently reaching the height of eighty to 100 feet without a branch, making some of the finest lumber in the world. Boards may still be seen in the finish of some of the old houses that are three to four feet wide and perfectly clear. Those trees were so valuable that in every grant of a township in New Hampshire they were reserved for masts "for the use of His Majesty's Royal Navy."

The "sweetening" of the pioneers was made from the sap of the sugar maple, caught in troughs made from small logs split in halves and hollowed out. Such troughs were still used for that purpose within the memory of people now living.

The principal animals of these forests were the black bear, wolf, fox, wild cat, catamount, moose, deer, raccoon and the smaller ones still found here. The otter lived in the ponds, so numerous in these eastern states, and vestiges of the work of the beaver may still be seen where he built his wonderful dam, formed his artificial pond, and constructed his ingenious house.

In 1801, "A Mr. John Butler, while digging a cellar, on the first day of April, in Washington street, found, under a stump, fifty snakes of various kinds—house adders, striped, green, and white bellied snakes. They measured

[1] Mrs. Leavitt Philips, of that part of Nelson which is now Roxbury. Her maiden name was Mary Hinds, niece of Capt. Jacob Hinds of Chesterfield, one of Col. Reed's captains in the Revolutionary war. (Dea. Harvey Philips.)

from one foot to three feet in length. All were torpid but the house adders." A nest of "upwards of three hundred" was found at another time. (Annals, pages 90 and 91.)

The flesh of the moose was considered equal to beef, and deer furnished venison for those who were skilful enough to shoot them. Wild turkeys were sometimes shot, but they were not here in large numbers; and wild geese simply made some of our larger ponds, as they do at the present time, occasional resting places on their long journeys north and south. At harvest time wild pigeons came in immense numbers to feed upon the grain. Sometimes their flocks were so large that they obscured the sun like a cloud, and they had special roosting groves where millions of them would gather for the night. Their speed on the wing was 120 miles an hour. They were taken in large numbers in nets, and were delicious food. They have almost wholly disappeared, and naturalists tell us that they have migrated to Chili and Peru, South America. Song birds were plentiful, and morning and evening, in bright weather, the air was filled with their music.

Bears and wolves were a terror and scourge, and bounties were paid by the state for their destruction. Bears sometimes paid the penalty of their temerity in devouring pigs, and corn in the field, by furnishing the pioneer's table with their flesh, but it was not considered a delicacy.

"About this time [1777] a furious fight between a man and a bear took place in the North part of the town, of which the following account has been furnished by his son. Mr. Eleazer Wilcox, of Gilsum, going into his pasture, and having with him his gun, loaded with a small charge of powder, saw a very large bear, six or eight rods from him. Taking a bullet from his pocket, he dropped it into his gun, fired, and hit her in the head. She fell, but before Wilcox could get to her, sprang up and ran off. He then went to Mr. Joshua Osgood's, who was an experienced hunter and had a large dog, and they together followed the track of the bear, which was marked by her blood. Having followed it about three miles, supposing they were near her, they separated that they might have more chance of obtaining a shot at her. On a sudden, Wilcox saw the bear advancing, in a furious rage, towards him. His gun missed fire; the bear, coming near him, knocked it from

his hand with her paw, and then, by a blow on the head, knocked him down. He rose on his knees, when the bear, putting her paws on his shoulders, endeavored to throw him on the ground; but he, being a very athletic man, maintained his position with desperate effort. During the struggle, the dog aided him and perhaps saved his life by frequent and furious attacks. Osgood soon came up; for some time, the combatants being closely grappled and their positions often changing, he hesitated to fire, fearing to kill his neighbor; but perceiving the case desperate, he at length fired, and fortunately shot the bear in the side, without hitting Wilcox. She ran off, and the next day was found dead, East of the Branch. Mr. Wilcox, having received many wounds, and strained his back severely in the struggle, was carried home on a litter; and, though he lived many years, never entirely recovered."

(Annals, page 49.)

In 1811, the inhabitants of Keene, Gilsum and Sullivan joined in a large and well organized bear hunt, to rid themselves of the pests.

Wolves made the night hideous with their howling—two or three making sounds as if there were twenty—and were dangerous when pinched with hunger, particularly to children; but they seldom attacked men. They were so annoying in 1796 that a wolf hunt was organized at Walpole in which five hundred persons joined. Two wolves and a bear were shot, and the hunt ended with a supper at the several taverns in the vicinity.

In each settlement a sawmill was one of the first things to be set up, to provide lumber for building and finishing; and the blacksmith, and the shoemaker carrying his bench from house to house on his back, soon followed the leading pioneers, often combining farming with work at their trades. Here in Upper Ashuelot, in 1735, the year before the first permanent settlement was made, the proprietors voted 100 acres of "middling good land and twenty-five pounds in money" to any one who would build a sawmill on Beaver brook; and in 1738 "a set of blacksmith's tools" was bought by the proprietors for the use of the settlers. Until the blacksmith came—and afterwards in many cases—wooden pins, withes, and the inner bark of the elm and basswood did duty in the place of nails, bolts and wire.

Mechanics were very important members of a community, for all tools and implements had to be made by hand. Scarcely any ready-made article could be bought. In repairing old furniture, one often finds even small brads and finishing nails made by hand one hundred years ago or more.

Coopers were very much relied upon for making all sorts of wooden vessels. They were required by law to brand their casks with their name or initials and were punished with fine for making defective ones.[1] They not only made casks, tubs, barrels, buckets, etc., but also the keeler, piggin, noggin and many other vessels in common use.

It would not be long before a gristmill would be added to the sawmill. In 1736, the year of the first permanent settlement, the proprietors of Keene appointed a committee "to agree with a man to build a gristmill," and one was soon in operation. But until the gristmill came the settlers had to go long distances to have their grain ground. When John Kilburn and Col. Benj. Bellows first went to Walpole they had to go to Northampton to mill. In 1763, Ruth Davis of Rutland, Mass., at the age of seventeen, married "Breed Batchelder[2] of Keene, gentleman." They lived near the east line of the town, in what is now Roxbury, and she used to take a bag of grain on a horse and go to Rutland, fifty miles, to mill, doubtless including a visit to her home.[3] John Taggard, the pioneer of Stoddard, settled there with his family in 1768. Their nearest neighbors were at Peterboro, Keene and Walpole. He had to carry his grain on his back to Peterboro, twenty miles, to have it ground. On one trip he was delayed by a great snow storm till his family nearly starved.[4] "It is related that Mrs. William Greenwood,[5] one morning in winter, when the snow was deep, put on snowshoes, took half a bushel of corn on her shoulder, went by marked trees to Peterborough, had it ground into meal, and returned to Dublin the same day."

[1] Law of 1718.
[2] The tory of 1776.
[3] She lived till 1840—ninety-four years—and was buried in the small graveyard near Joseph Chase's.
[4] Gould's History of Stoddard.
[5] History of Dublin.

In winter the snows were usually deep, and the only means of travel was on snowshoes, in the use of which the pioneers became very skilful. Children, and even men and women, went barefooted the greater part of the time. "Children are early used to coarse fare and hard lodgings; and to be without shoes in all seasons of the year is scarcely accounted a want." (Belknap's History of New Hampshire, vol. 3, page 259.)

The supply of kitchen utensils was very small. In some cases the whole family would eat their bean porridge, hasty pudding and other food from a single dish, often of wood, placed on a rude table, the members taking turns in using the spoons, of which there were seldom enough to go round. Noggins, pewter porringers, and the shells of gourds were used for drinking cups. At first the supply of water was brought from the spring or stream near which the cabin was placed. Afterwards a well would be dug and the water drawn by fastening a bucket to the end of a long, slender pole with a wooden spring. Later, the "well sweep" would be erected and the oaken bucket attached. As time progressed the carpenter and the brick-maker appeared in the settlement, or bricks would be made within hauling distance, and framed and finished houses could be built, when desired; but the log cabins remained for many years. Hardware was not to be had, and hinges and latches were made of wood. A heavy latch was placed on the entrance door, to be raised from the outside by a rawhide string running through the door. To fasten against intruders the string was pulled in; but this was seldom done, even at night, except in times of hostile Indians. "The latch-string out" is still one of the forms of expressing hospitality.

With the framed house came the ample brick chimney, with its huge fireplace, provided with crane and pot-hooks, its spacious oven and its safe and convenient ash-hole. The brick oven turned out its great loaves of brown bread—two-thirds rye and one-third corn meal—its "Indian" puddings with the same proportions, its earthen pots of beans and pork, its roasts of beef, fowl and mutton, its delicious mince and pumpkin pies—all put in at

night and taken out steaming hot in the morning[1]—the materials for all of which were produced on the farm, except the salt and spices, and even some of the latter, as sage, mint, carraway, coriander and some others. These delectable viands were a great accession to the cuisine, and the family had now reached a stage of luxurious living, but the butcher and the baker were still unknown. After some years they began to raise wheat, but that was a luxury, and the economical housekeeper would make the upper crust of her pies of wheat flour and the under crust of rye. From that custom came the term "upper crust" as applied to aristocratic society.

The house was provided with a cellar, a comfortable chamber, and at least two rooms on the ground floor; and a barn would be built for the stock, hay, grain and fodder. For roofs, shingles split from large pine logs, and shaved, were exceedingly durable. The old meetinghouse built in 1786, on the north side of our present Central square, was covered with such shingles by Eliphalet Briggs, and they lasted until 1853, sixty-seven years, when they were replaced with the same material by his grandson, William S. Briggs. The ample kitchen fireplace, with its glowing logs, was the only ordinary source of warmth for the whole house even in winter. The sleeping rooms would be like the frigid zone, and the children in the chamber would often feel the snow sifting in their faces during violent storms, find their beds covered with it in the morning, and have to wade through small drifts with bare feet to get to the kitchen. And as the family gathered around the rousing fire their faces would be scorched while they shivered with cold from the rear.

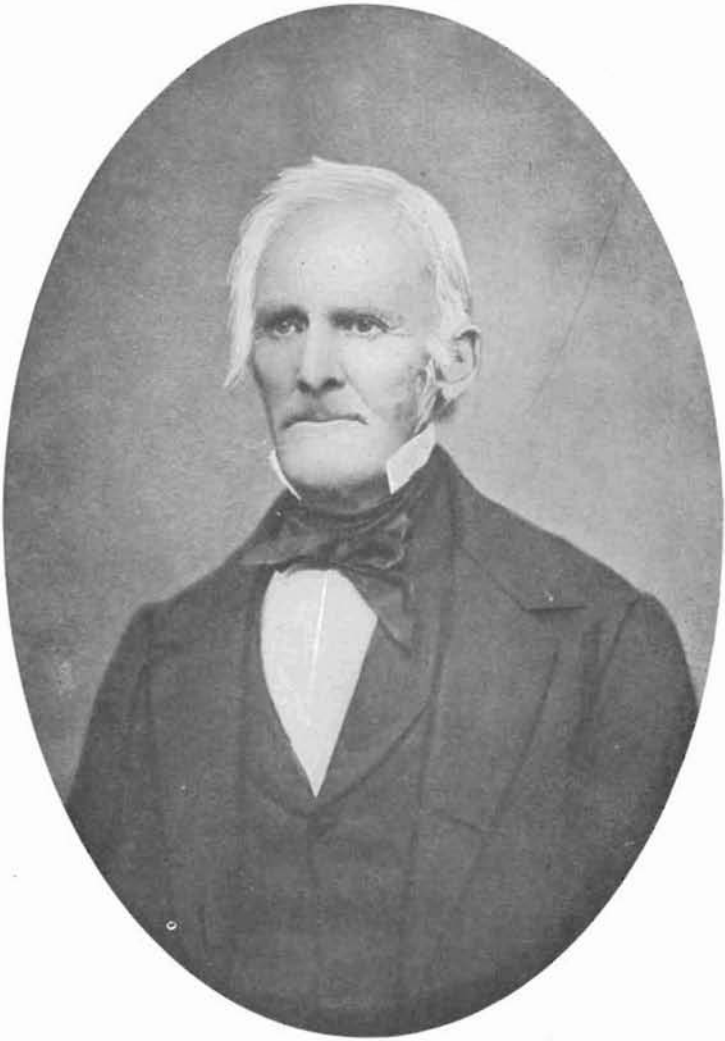
At night tapers from the yellow or "pitch" pine were used in place of candles, and the large pine knots from trees that had fallen and decayed, gathered and stored for winter use, were laid on the coals and gave sufficient light for reading. Candles could be had only when a fat beef was killed, which was not often, and oil and lamps had

[1] To avoid desecrating the Sabbath with unnecessary labor, Saturday was made the baking day of the week. The food was prepared on that day, put into the oven at night, and came out hot Sunday morning. Thus came about the Yankee custom of having baked beans and pork and brown bread for Sunday morning breakfast.

not come into general use. Candles were made by suspending half a dozen wicks at proper distances apart, on each of a number of slender rods and dipping them in tallow, in cold weather, when the tallow would adhere and quickly cool. The rods, suspended between two poles, were taken alternately, and after many immersions the "tallow dips" would be formed. When moulds could be had the tallow was sometimes run in those. Soap was made from scraps of grease cut with the lye of hardwood ashes.

Cattle and sheep ran at large in the woods, each owner having his mark or "brand," which was recorded in the town books. Hogs also ran at large, but were required to be yoked and ringed, and it was the duty of hogreeves, appointed by the towns, to enforce the law, and if necessary, themselves to put on the yokes and rings. Cattle, hogs or sheep found in fields might be put in the pound provided by the town and the owner notified and required to pay the cost. Each farmer kept at least a few sheep and raised his own wool for family use. The sheep were sheared at the proper season and the wool stored in the chamber. When the women were ready for the work the wool was "sorted"—the fine from the coarse—scoured, carded by hand into rolls a foot and a half to two feet long and half an inch or more in diameter,[1] and spun into yarn. Wool was spun on a large wheel, turned by hand, the spinner walking back and forth to draw and renew her thread. The speed of the twist was produced and regulated by a band from the rim of the large wheel, turning a small one in the "wheel head," which carried the spindle. Azel Wilder in his time made all the wheel-heads for this part of the country and shipped many to distant parts. For evening work, the large pine-knot already mentioned was laid on the fire and the wheel so placed that as the spinner drew her thread from the spindle it came directly between her eyes and the flame of the burning

[1] Towards the close of the 18th century machine cards were invented—wire teeth set in leather, as in the hand cards, and fastened on cylinders which were propelled by water power—and people sent their wool to be carded. Previous to that hand cards had been used from time immemorial. In 1778 the legislature offered a bounty of two hundred pounds for 2,000 wool cards to be made within the state.



AZEL WILDER.

knot, which gave her an excellent light.[1] The yarn was knitted into stockings, mittens and other articles, and woven into cloth for the clothing and bedclothing of the family. Cattle's hair from the tanneries was sometimes spun and woven into bed coverings.

Some of the woolen yarn was dyed, and the indigo blue dye-pot stood in the chimney corner, always ready for use, potent with its vile odors whenever it was stirred. Other dyes were used also, as the bark of the butternut tree, the sumac, the golden-rod, and other plants, gathered from the fields. Indigo dye mixed with the flowers of golden-rod and alum made green. Sassafras was used for yellow and orange. Pokeberry, boiled with alum, made crimson. Sorrel with logwood and copperas made black.

Flax was raised for the family linen. When matured it was pulled up by the roots and laid on the ground in gavels to "rot"—so that the woody part of the stock would separate from the fibre—then bound in bundles, and stored in the barn. The winter's work of the farmer was to break his flax with a "brake," "swingle" it on a "swingling board" with a "swingling knife"—a two edged, wooden sword—"hetchel" it (hatchel or heckle) ready for spinning; and to thresh his grain with a "flail." Swingling the flax must be done on a clear, sunny day.

The linen was spun on a "foot-wheel," the long, silken, combed fibres of the flax wound on a distaff, and carefully fed through a socket to the spindle, which was turned by bands, the power furnished by the foot, the spinner sitting. The Scotch Irish who settled Londonderry introduced their method of making linen and gave an impulse to that industry in New England. From the spindle the yarn was reeled off into knots and skeins. The reel was made to take on seventy-two inches in length at each revolution, and forty such threads made a knot; and seven knots of woolen yarn, or fourteen of linen, made a skein. The hand-reel for woolen yarn was called a "niddy-noddy." Linen thread was wound off on a clock-reel which counted and ticked off the exact number of strands for a knot.

[1] Many a time has the writer brought the knots from the pasture for his sainted mother, and lain on the floor reading by the same light that enabled her to draw her threads to perfection.

Spinning four skeins of woolen yarn—the spinner carding the wool herself—or two of linen, made a day's work, the pay for which in the early days of Keene was fourpence ha' penny (six and a quarter cents) and later sixpence. By the week, the pay was fifty cents. For common labor, men were paid from one shilling sixpence to two shillings a day.

All farmers' and mechanics' daughters learned to spin and weave, and they usually made their own marriage outfit. The loom was set up in the unfinished chamber, the yarn woven into cloth, the cloth sent to the clothier to be fulled, dyed, "finished" and pressed; and the tailoress —sometimes the tailor—went from house to house, to make up the garments for the family. There were regular prices for a day's work at weaving, varying with the width and kind of cloth woven.

"Leather breeches," of deer or sheep skin, sometimes of moose, were much worn by men for heavy work, as were leathern aprons of the same. In the same way the women used the strong, coarse cloth made of the combings of flax, called tow. Calico was beyond their means, selling, in 1788, at sixty-two and one-half cents a yard. The Scotch Irish of Londonderry brought with them also the art of making "striped frocking;" and it became an article of universal wear for farmers and laboring men, made in nearly every family. Straw braiding was also a profitable industry for women.

Farmers' daughters went out to serve as "help" to their more wealthy neighbors, or in case of sickness, or where there were no daughters in the family. And the women's work was not only spinning, weaving, making butter and cheese, and general housework, but they milked the cows—sometimes while the men watched with loaded gun to protect them from the lurking savage—fed the hogs and the poultry, and gathered the vegetables for the table; and they were fortunate if they had wood prepared for their kitchen fires. During the Revolutionary war, the women took almost the whole care of the farm and stock, and performed the labors of the field. The cooking was done by the open fire, with the aid of the brick oven,

supplemented in the later years with the bake-kettle. When that was lacking, the cake was often baked on the hot stones of the hearth, and potatoes were roasted in the hot ashes. Meat was roasted by being hung before the fire and kept constantly turning. Stoves did not come into general use until near the middle of the 19th century.

The farmer had almost nothing to buy. Nearly everything needed in the family was raised on the farm. Almost the only article of food purchased was salt fish, brought from the seaboard. His crops from his fresh, unworn soil were abundant and the surplus sold for good prices. Potatoes often yielded 400 bushels to the acre—even as late as 1840. After some years of industry and frugality many farmers attained comparative affluence.

During the later years of the 18th and the earlier ones of the 19th century, when snow covered the ground in winter all the roads to Boston would be lively with the teams of the farmers, carrying their produce to market. Some would go with a pair, some with a single horse, and some with oxen, loaded with pork, butter, cheese, poultry and other produce. The larger crops of rye, corn, oats and barley and wool were usually disposed of at home, and cattle and sheep were driven to market. Each farmer would carry his own provender and a large box of luncheon from home; and the tavern-keepers recognized the custom and provided such other entertainment as was needed. The return freight would be salt, molasses, a few gallons of the indispensable rum, a little salt fish, a little tobacco, a few spices, a little tea, and a few yards of dress goods and ribbons for the wife and daughters; and the arrival home of the thrifty farmer brought joy to the whole household.

Many of those primitive homes, though bare of ornament and meagre in outfit, were lovely and picturesque. As cold weather came on the roaring fire of the huge logs on the hearth shed a glow of light and heat through the ample kitchen. That fire was never allowed to go out. A log or large brand was buried in the embers each night, for a bed of coals the next morning. If by any chance the fire was lost, coals had to be brought from the neighbors,

perhaps over long distances, or rekindled with the tinder-box—but that was now getting out of date, and was seldom in condition for use. Fire was sometimes kindled by flashing powder in a flint-lock gun. Hunters often started fires in that way.

The kitchen was also the sleeping apartment of the farmer and his wife, the bed standing in one corner, with the wheel, or sometimes, in cold weather, the loom,[1] in the opposite corner. At the fireside stood the old "settle," and in an aperture in the chimney left for the purpose, or on a convenient shelf, were the pipes and tobacco, and the farmer and his wife would sit down at a leisure hour and enjoy a comfortable smoke together; and the excellent tobacco of those days gave a delightful perfume to the whole house. Very few young women used tobacco, but many fell into the habit in their later years. On the side opposite the fire stood the "dresser," bright with its polished pewter and possibly a few pieces of china or earthen ware, the plates and platters—some of wood—set up on edge, like a small army making the most of its numbers in the face of a more powerful enemy. When boards were laid for floors they were often kept in immaculate whiteness by scouring, or covered with clean, white sand, over which the birch broom would be drawn in various ways to make graceful and artistic designs. The broom was made by cutting a yellow birch sapling about three inches in diameter, four to five feet long, taking off the bark of about a foot of the upper end, then peeling that end into thin, narrow strips for the brush, and using the other end, shaved down, for the handle. Along the walls of the cabin hung crook-neck squashes and festoons of red peppers and apples on strings, the latter "quartered and cored," while on poles overhead were rings cut from the yellow pumpkin, all drying for winter use. The almanac, dividing with the Bible the honor of furnishing the literature of the family, and relied upon almost superstitiously for prognostications of weather, hung by the oven door. A sun-dial on a southern window-sill, or guesses by the

[1] "The loom of the same pattern as that shown in Giotto's frescoes in 1335, was used here in New England—had been for seven centuries without change," (Home Life in Colonial Days, page 213.)

position of the sun by day and the moon and stars by night, supplied the place of a clock, and were sufficient for all practical purposes. Evening gatherings were appointed "at early candle lighting."

In those times, church and state were united. The church was sustained by the whole community under the management of the political machinery of the state and town, a tax for its support being laid on each property holder. One of the conditions of a grant of a township by Massachusetts, as in the case of this town, was that a suitable meetinghouse should be built and a "learned and orthodox minister settled in such town within five years." And the charter of Keene from Gov. Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire required that there should be set apart "One Sixty forth Parte of the Said Tract for the first Settled Minister of the Gospel in S^{d} Town" and "One Sixty forth Parte of the said Tract for A Glebe for the Church of England, as by Law Established." One sixty-fourth part was 394½ acres. The first meetinghouse in every case was a plain building, like a barn, without finish, and the men sat on one side and the women on the other. There were no means of warming it in winter, yet every one was required to "go to meeting," though thinly clad and poorly shod, and remain through two long services, each sermon at least an hour long—dwelling chiefly on arguments upon abstract theology, the terrors of an angry God, and the horrors of eternal punishment—with one short and one very long prayer to each service.

One of the loveliest of her sex has told her experience in those days. Her father lived three miles from the meetinghouse and had nine children. On Sunday morning in winter, he would yoke his oxen to the sled, on which he would have a few boards, put on a chair for "mother," take blankets and bed-coverings in which the children cuddled down on the boards, drive three miles to meeting, stay through both services and an hour's intermission, and then drive home through the snow to a cold house, sometimes a furious storm coming on, in the meantime. She said her feet were cold ever afterwards. Women sometimes carried heated stones for their hands and feet, and later,

foot-stoves were used, filled at the start with hot coals and replenished for the ride home at the house of a friend near the meetinghouse. It was thought essential that a child should be baptised soon after birth, and babies were sometimes taken to those cold houses for baptism before they were a week old.

"A very large proportion of the persons who usually attended church, or meeting, as it is called, came from Ash Swamp and the hills in the West part of the town, at considerable distances. It was not convenient for these persons to return during the intermission, and it was the practice of those persons living in the vicinity of the meeting-house to throw open their doors for the accommodation of such, during the cold weather, when it was inconvenient to remain in the meeting-house. This weekly communication of the inhabitants of the village with those residing at a distance, if it did not tend to their religious improvement, was well calculated to cultivate the social virtues, to make the members of the parish better acquainted with each other, and to give additional interest to the usual exercises of the Sabbath."

(Annals, page 103.)

In summer all walked to meeting, or, if a horse was owned, the man would take his wife on a pillion behind him, and the children walked, barefooted, the older girls carrying their stockings and shoes and putting them on just before they arrived. The minister was regarded as a superior and sanctified being, and many a child, innocently judging from the remarks of its elders, believed him to be God himself. At the close of the services, the congregation would rise and stand while he passed out through the main aisle.

When the second and larger meetinghouse was built, though still severely plain and devoid of warmth and ornament, the wealthy and prominent citizens were allowed to select places and build their pews somewhat according to rank, and those exhibitions of grades and relative superiority caused many heartburnings and jealousies. Behind the meetinghouse, stood a long row of sheds, where scores of horses were sheltered and the less devout men gathered at noon for their weekly chat.

"Deacons' seats" were built at the base of the high pulpit, facing the congregation; those for negroes, boys

without parents and irresponsible persons at the rear, in a corner, or in the gallery. Several slaves were owned in Keene during the first years of its settlement and they were allowed seats apart. The tithingmen, chosen by the town from among its first citizens, and sworn to the performance of their duties, with long staves, sometimes with crooks like a shepherd's, took position overlooking the whole congregation, or walked the aisles, to preserve order and keep the overworked, drowsy ones awake. It was also a part of their duty to see that the laws requiring all to attend meeting were enforced.

The singing was performed by the reading of a line of a hymn by the minister or the leader—who gave the key note with his pitch pipe—and the choir, from its repertoire of half a dozen tunes, or the congregation, singing it after him; then taking the next line in the same way. This method was abolished in Keene in 1780, by vote of the town.

Sunday began at sunset on Saturday night and ended at sunset Sunday night, and that custom continued till about 1820 to 1830. The observance of the Sabbath was very strict. "A luckless maid-servant of Plymouth, who in the early days smiled in church, was threatened with banishment as a vagabond." Innholders were subject to fine for allowing "any person to drink to drunkenness or excess in his or her house on Lord's-day." "About 1750 the owner of the first chaise that appeared in Norwich, Conn., was fined for riding in it to church;" and in the other colonies, in the middle of that century, travelling on Sunday was punished by fines. But all must go to meeting, whatever the distance or the weather.

The sanctity of the Sabbath was so pervasive that even the dogs and the horses knew when the day came. The faithful and intelligent dog never failed to go with the family on other days, but no well-brought-up Puritan canine attempted to do so when the members started off on Sunday morning, dressed for "meeting." It is a tradition among the descendants of Lieut. James Wright, one of the early settlers, who lived where his grandson, George K. Wright, now does, (1900), that he always rode his

horse to meeting on Sunday; that one Sunday morning he sent some one to bring the horse from the pasture, but he could not be found; that thereupon the lieutenant walked to meeting; and that when he arrived he found the faithful animal standing quietly in his master's shed. The family of Mr. Timothy Colony attended the church at West Keene. "One Sunday morning the horse, ready harnessed, stood at the door, the family was a little behind time, and at the ringing of the bell the animal started, and trotted to the church door, leaving the family to walk." (J. D. Colony.)

During the Indian wars every man went to meeting armed, as he did to work in the fields, including the minister himself. A sentinel was placed at the door, and sometimes pickets at a distance.

Puritan morals frowned on amusements generally. Dancing, card-playing and theatre-going were considered abominations. Almost the only public and secular intercourse the people had was that intervening between the solemn services of the sanctuary, when they caught a few moments for gossip. But they were inclined to sociability, and gradually the taut lines of discipline were broken, and dancing and other amusements came in, with a greater tendency to looseness as a reaction from the unnatural tension. Kitchen junkets became frequent.

Wrestling was the favorite amusement of the men and boys, and professionals went from one town to another for matches on public days. After the Revolution, "court days" were very attractive for public gatherings. The raising of a house or other large building was always a time for unbounded hilarity; and accidents sometimes happened in consequence. At the raising of a meeting-house it was the custom for the town to provide a barrel of rum and plenty of food, men skilled in the business were hired from "down country," and the frolic lasted two days or more. When the large old meetinghouse in Packersfield was raised, the town sent a committee to Col. Bellows, at Walpole, for a barrel of rum, and it was hauled across the country on a horse-barrow. It was a common thing at such times for excellent citizens to be assisted to their

homes by the soberer ones, and no disgrace attached to them in consequence. Ardent spirits were considered indispensable to proper hospitality and enjoyment, and in bracing the system against exposure and hardship. Every family kept and used them. Callers were invariably treated with them, and there was special generosity of that kind when the minister called. The ordination of ministers, the dedication of meetinghouses, and even funerals, were made occasions of feasting, and great freedom in those indulgences. At one funeral of a notable person, "a strong sling of rum, sugar and water was prepared in a large tub, from which all present were invited to help themselves." When the temperance movement had abolished the custom, one good old patriarch said, with much bitterness, "Temperance has done for funerals." Very early the custom prevailed of furnishing all the guests at funerals with gloves. Later it was confined to the bearers.[1] There were no hearses, and the bearers, eight to sixteen, alternating by fours, carried the bier—often a rudely constructed one—on their shoulders.

The desire for social intercourse often led women to take a foot-wheel on a horse, sometimes with a baby besides, and go to a neighbor's to spend the day, industriously improving the time with hand, foot and tongue.

Youthful marriages and large families prevailed, and girls often became wives at the age of sixteen or seventeen. Bachelors were frowned upon, "old maid" was a term of ridicule and reproach, and few of either sex remained single. The banns were "published" for three weeks previous to the wedding by posting at the meetinghouse door, or by being "cried" in open meeting, three Sundays in succession. Weddings corresponded to the style of living, otherwise they were not materially different from those of the present day; but "fixing" to be married was an entirely different affair. Soon after the engagement the young woman bought her wheels and began to spin and weave her linen and flannels. Then came the quiltings—

[1] When that custom ceased, it is related that at a funeral where negroes were employed as bearers, as they often were when there were slaves, one of them who had not been provided with gloves as he expected, turned to his neighbor and inquired, "Sambo, you got glove?" "No." "Cæsar, you got glove?" "No." "Well den, fring 'e down, let 'e go hisself."

jolly frolics at which the women and girls did the work in the afternoon and the young men came in the evening for the dancing, where that was permitted, games, and to "beau" their sweethearts home. In going to parties at a distance the young man took his best girl on the horse behind him, but she was expected to provide her own pillion. Each daughter was furnished with at least one fine feather bed, the feathers picked from the live geese on the farm.

Huskings were delightful festivities, closing with a dance and a supper of mince and pumpkin pies, "nut-cakes" (doughnuts), cheese, apples and cider, and even these were sometimes preceded by roast turkey. A red ear husked by a young man entitled him to go the rounds with kisses, and one husked by a girl gave her the right to kiss the lad of her choice—or, if her courage failed her, be kissed by every lad present.

As the thrifty young orchard came to bearing, cider was the common drink, taking the place of beer in Germany and wine in France. Its market value was about fifty cents a barrel. Farmers put ten, twenty and even fifty barrels in the cellar for the year's supply of their large families. "One village of forty families in Massachusetts made 3,000 barrels in 1721." Charles Francis Adams tells us that "to the end of John Adams's life a large tankard of hard cider was his morning draught before breakfast."

To show how some families lived, the statement has been made that, in 1755, when Col. Benjamin Bellows, of Walpole, repelled the attack of the Indians, he had thirty men in his employ; and that many years afterwards his family was so large that he killed an ox or a cow every week and put down twenty barrels of pork and 400 barrels of cider for his year's supply, and other things in proportion. He ran boats to Hartford and Windsor, Conn., and brought up iron for his blacksmith and supplies for himself and the country around.

The first schools were very primitive affairs. Little could be learned in them in consequence of the lack of text-books and competent teachers, and the "three Rs"

constituted the entire curriculum. Before schoolhouses were built, the schools were taught in unoccupied log-houses, barns or other buildings. The first school in Keene of which we have any record was in 1764, and the town voted six pounds sterling for its support.

As the settlements grew the children increased rapidly in numbers, the schools were large and competent teachers came to the front. In winter the teachers were men and the schools were effective and practical, so far as they went. Having but few branches of study to engage their attention, and but short time for those, the pupils applied themselves closely, and many excellent readers, arithmeticians and chirographers received all their instruction in those schools of only a few weeks in the year. A handsome handwriting was an accomplishment and was acquired by many. The reading books were the Testament, New England primer, and, in some places, the psalter. Dilworth's spelling-book was published in England in 1740, and was used here about 1770, and Kneeland's spelling-book about 1800; but there were no textbooks on arithmetic, the teacher "setting sums" for the pupils to work out. Noah Webster's spelling book and Morse's geography appeared soon after the Revolution; and a little later, Pike's arithmetic, by Nicholas Pike of Somersworth, N. H., followed by the "Scholar's Arithmetic," by Dr. Daniel Adams of Leominster, Mass., afterwards of Keene, where he published his "Adams' New Arithmetic."

The style of dress for men was quaint and elaborate; that for women changeable, but much less so than at the present time. Till as late as about 1800, men wore "cocked hats"—the broad brim turned up to the crown in three places;—shirts with ruffles at the bosom and wrists, long waistcoats covering the hips, often very handsomely embroidered; coats made large and long, usually of blue, with deep facings of buff, and metal buttons; "short-clothes" with knee-buckles and long hose and low shoes with large buckles covering the instep; and one handsome coat was sometimes handed down from father to son with the farm and the stock. In full dress, gentlemen wore

swords, and their hose were of white or black silk. Military officers wore boots with white tops and spurs, even at balls. The same kind of boot was also worn at times by civilians. The warm underclothing of the present day was unknown, and women wore low, thin shoes, even in winter; and consumption carried off a larger proportion of victims than now. Rubber boots and shoes were unknown, and so were dry feet, except in dry weather or within doors. Umbrellas appeared in Boston in 1768, but did not come into general use until the last of that century.

The code of criminal law was strict and severe. In very early times not only murder, but treason, arson, rape, adultery, burglary, robbery and grand larceny were punished with death. Imprisonment for debt, even when contracted for food in cases of sickness and distress, was common, and that law continued in force in this state until within a few years. Whipping, branding, the pillory and the stocks were common methods of punishment. Men still living remember to have seen the old stocks used here in Keene, stored in the horsesheds in rear of the old meeting-house. For what would now be considered trivial offences, men were thrown into jail; but the limits of the "jail yard" were often prescribed, except for criminals, sometimes extending a certain number of rods, sometimes including the whole village or town. In very early times, scolds were punished by ducking, with an apparatus contrived for the purpose, or by wearing split sticks on their tongues. But there was comparatively little crime among pioneers. After the danger from savages had passed, doors and windows were seldom fastened, day or night. The roads were safe, and women and girls could travel alone through the woods, without danger of being molested.

Tramps were scarcely known. The only paupers were the demented, and the care of those was let out to the lowest bidder. In some towns this odious practice was aggravated by the custom of furnishing liquor at such "vendues," at the expense of the town, to incite the bidders to run the price down to the lowest possible point, thus leaving the poor in the hands of those least suited to have the care of them. By a law passed in 1719, any

person residing in a town three months without being warned to depart by the selectmen or constable became an "inhabitant" of that town, which made the town liable for his support in case he was at any time unable to support himself. Under that law it was the custom of the towns to warn nearly every new comer to depart, and many who afterwards became prominent citizens were thus warned. If they neglected, or refused, to heed the warning, the law provided that they might be taken by the selectmen, or constable, and delivered to a proper officer of some other town, and that officer might pass them on to another, until they reached the place of their legal residence. At the annual meeting in Keene, in 1781, the town "voted to Israel Houghton Thirty pounds Like money (old Continental currency) for his services carrying patte Towzer out of Town;" and many such votes are recorded in the old town books. That law continued in force for more than one hundred years.

The usual method of travelling was on horseback, the minister and doctor making their visits in that way, the latter carrying his instruments and medicines in capacious saddlebags. When Keene was first settled, the price of a physician's visit was sixpence (eight cents), and only eightpence at the time of the Revolution.

Dentistry was unknown till the beginning of the nineteenth century. If a tooth offended, the sufferer went to the nearest physician, or to the minister, the barber, the blacksmith, or other ingenious person, who wrenched it out with a "turnkey."

Making salts for pot and pearl ashes was an important industry. Potash-kettles were brought from Boston, and the lye of hard wood ashes was boiled down till it "grained," like sugar. This product sold readily for cash or its equivalent in goods. Roasting the salts in an oven produced potash, and another similar purifying process made pearlash. There were several manufactories of pot and pearl ashes in town, towards the close of the eighteenth century.

Ploughs for breaking up the ground among the stumps and roots had to be made very strong and heavy, and,

except the coulter, were almost wholly of wood—white oak or walnut.

The first plough used in Stoddard was carried there by John Taggart, from Peterboro, on his shoulder, and Mrs. Taggart carried a foot spinning-wheel at the same time. (History of Stoddard.)

As a rule, the pioneers here described, and their wives and the large families of girls and boys reared in those primitive homes, were among the purest and noblest of men and women. Though parents were austere and apparently unsympathetic,[1] and friends seemed cool and indifferent, "their hearts were warm under a stern exterior;" their Puritan principles were of the highest, and their industry, frugality and integrity made them the best of citizens; and most of those homes were pure fountains whence flowed the streams that formed the mighty rivers of the states and the nation. From such homes came the men, always nobly seconded by the women, who beat back the savages; subdued the forests; carried on the affairs of each little independent government, the town; organized the states; won their separation from Great Britain, and laid the foundations of this grand republic.

[1] "Doubtless mothers were as fond of their children as those of the present day, but they seldom or never kissed them." (Prof. Silliman's Autobiography.)