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CHAPTER I.

Uncle Ephraim Barlow was an old-fashioned man, clinging to the old-time customs of his fathers, and looking with but little toleration upon what he termed the "new-fangled notions" of the present generation. Born and reared amid the rocks and hills of the Bay State, his nature partook largely of the nature of his surroundings, and he grew into manhood with many a rough point adhering to his character, which, nevertheless, taken as a whole, was like the wild New England scenery, beautiful and grand. None knew Uncle Ephraim Barlow but to respect him, and at the church in which he was a deacon, few would have been missed more than the tall, muscular man, with the long white hair, who, Sunday after Sunday, walked slowly up the middle aisle to his accustomed seat before the altar, and who regularly passed the contribution box, bowing involuntarily in token of approbation when a neighbor's gift was larger than his own, and gravely dropping in his own ten cents—never more, never less, always ten cents—his weekly offering, which he knew amounted in a year to just five dollars and twenty cents. And still Uncle Ephraim was not stingy, as the Silvertown poor could testify, for many a load of wood and bag of meal found entrance to the doors where cold and hunger would have otherwise been, while to his minister he was literally a holder up of the weary hands, and a comforter in the time of trouble.

His helpmeet, Aunt Hannah, like that virtuous woman mentioned in the Bible, was one who seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands, who riseth while yet it is night, and giveth meat to her household, while Miss Betsy Barlow, the deacon's maiden sister, was a character in her way, and bore no resemblance to those frivolous females to whom the Apostle Paul had reference when he condemned the plaiting of hair and the wearing of gold and jewels. Quaint, queer and simple-headed, she had but little idea of any world this side of heaven, except the one bounded by the "huckleberry" hills and the crystal waters of Fairy Pond, which from the back door of the farm-house were plainly seen, both in the summer sunshine and when the intervening fields were covered with the white snow.

The home of such a trio, was, like themselves, ancient and unpretentious, nearly one hundred years having elapsed since the solid foundation was laid to a portion of the building. Unquestionably it was the oldest house in Silvertown, for on the heavy oaken door of what was called the back room was still to be seen the mark of a bullet, left there by some marauders who, during the Revolution, had encamped in that neighborhood. George Washington, it was said, had spent a night beneath its roof, the deacon's mother pouring for him her Bohea tea and breaking her home-made bread. Since that time several attempts had been made to modernize the house. Lath and plaster had been put upon the rafters and paper upon the walls, wooden latches had given place to iron, while in the parlor, where Washington had slept, there was the extravagance of a porcelain knob, such as Uncle Ephraim said was only fit for gentry who could afford to be grand. For himself he was content to live as his father did, but young folks, he supposed, must in some things have their way, and so when his pretty niece, who had lived with him from childhood to the day of her marriage, came back to him a widow, bringing her two fatherless children and a host of new ideas, he good-humoredly suffered her to tear down some of his household idols and replace them with her own. And thus it was that the farm-house gradually changed its appearance, for young womenhood which has had one glimpse of the outer world will not settle down quietly amid fashions a century old. Lucy Lennox, when she returned to the farm-house, was not quite the same as when she went away. Indeed, Aunt Betsy, her guileless heart feared that she had actually fallen from grace, imputing the fall wholly to Lucy's predilection for a certain little book on whose back was written "Common Prayer," and at which Aunt Betsy scarcely dared to look, lest she should be guilty of the enormities practiced by the Romanists themselves. Clearer headed than his sister, the deacon read the black-bound book, finding therein much that was good, but wondering "why, when folks promised to renounce the pomps and vanities, they did not do so, instead of acting more stuck up than ever."

Inconsistency was the underlying strata of the whole Episcopal Church he said, and as Lucy had declared her preference for that church, he too, in a measure, charged her propensity for repairs to the same source with Aunt Betsy; but, as he could see no sin in what she did, he suffered her in most things to have her way. But when she contemplated an attack upon the huge chimney occupying the centre of the building, he interferred, for there was nothing he liked better than the bright fire on the hearth when the evenings were chilly and long, and the autumn rain was falling upon the roof. The chimney should stand, he said; and as no amount of coaxing could prevail on him to revoke his decision, the chimney stood, and with it the three fire-places, where, in the fall and spring, were burned the twisted

knots too bulky for the kitchen stove. This was fourteen years ago, and in that lapse of time Lucy Lennox had gradually fallen in with the family ways of living, and ceased to talk of her cottage in western New York, where her husband had died and where were born her daughters, one of whom she was expecting home on the warm July day when our story opens.

Katy Lennox had been for a year an inmate of Canandaigua Seminary, whither she was sent at the expense of a distant relative to whom her father had been guardian, and who, during her infancy, had had a home with Uncle Ephraim, Mrs. Lennox having brought him with her when she returned to Silvertown. Dr. Morris Grant he was now, and he had just come home from a three years' sojourn in Paris, and was living in his own handsome dwelling across the fields toward Silvertown village, and half a mile or more from Uncle Ephraim's farm-house. He had written from Paris, offering to send his cousins, Helen and Kate, to any school their mother might select, and as Canandaigua was her choice, they had gone thither the year before, but Helen, the eldest, had fallen sick within three months, when he returned to Silvertown, satisfied that the New England schools were good enough for her. This was Helen; but Katy was different. Katy was more susceptible of polish and refinement—the mother thought; and as she arranged and re-arranged the little parlor, lingering longest by the piano, Dr. Morris's gift, she drew bright pictures of her favorite child, wondering how the farm-house and its inmates would seem to her after all she must have seen during her weeks of travel since the close of the summer term. Morris was so annoyed when told that Katy had accepted an invitation to accompany Mrs. Woodhull and her party on a trip to Montreal and Lake George, taking Boston on her homeward route. Katy's movements were nothing to him, unless the little ambitious mother struck at random a few notes of the soft-toned piano as she thought how possible it was that the interest always manifested by staid, quiet Morris Grant for her light-hearted Kate was more than a brotherly interest, such as he would naturally feel for the daughter of one who had been to him a second father. But Katy was so much a child when he went away to Paris that it could not be. She would sooner think of Helen, who was more like him.

"It's Helen, if anybody," she said aloud, just as a voice near the window called out: "Please, Cousin Lucy relieve me of these flowers. I brought them over in honor of Katy's return."

Blushing guiltily, Mrs. Lennox advanced to meet a tall, dark-looking man, with a grave, pleasant face, which, when he smiled, was strangely attractive, from the sudden lighting up of the hazel eyes and the glitter of the white, even teeth so fully to view.

"Oh, thank you, Morris! Katy will like them, I am sure," Mrs. Lennox said, taking from his hand a bouquet of the choice flowers which grew only in the hothouse at Linwood. "Come in for a moment, please."

"No, thank you, the doctor replied. There is a case of rheumatism just over the hill, and I must not be idle if I would retain the practice given to me. Not that I make anything but good will as yet, for only the Silvertown poor dare trust their lives in my inexperienced hands. But I can afford to wait," and with another flash of the hazel eyes, Morris walked away a pace or two, then, as if struck with some sudden thought, turned back, and fanning his heated face with his leghorn hat, said, hesitatingly: "By the way, Uncle Ephraim's last payment on the old mill falls due to-morrow. Tell him if he says anything in your presence, not to mind unless it is perfectly convenient. He must be somewhat straightened just now, as Katy's trip cannot have cost him a small sum."

The clear, penetrating eyes were looking full at Mrs. Lennox, who for a moment felt slightly piqued that Morris Grant should take so much oversight of her uncle's affairs.

"Uncle Ephraim did not pay the bills," Mrs. Lennox faltered at last.

"Mrs. Woodhull wrote that the expense should be nothing to me, and as she is fully able and makes so much of Katy, I did not think it wrong."

"Lucy Lennox! I am astonished!" was all Morris could say, as the tinge of wounded pride dyed his cheek.

hear more, and hurried off a second time, while Mrs. Lennox looked after him, wondering at the feeling which she could not understand.

From Uncle Ephraim roused her, and going out into the square entry she tied his linen cravat, and then handing him the blue umbrella, an appendage he took with him in sunshine and in storm, she watched him as he stepped into his one-horse wagon and drove briskly away in the direction of the depot, where he was to meet his niece.

"I wish Cousin Morris had offered his carriage," she thought, as the corn-colored wagon disappeared from view. "The train stops five minutes at West Silvertown, and some of those grand people will be likely to see the turnout," and with a sigh she doubted whether it were not a disgrace as well as an inconvenience to be poor, she repaired to the kitchen, where sundry savory smells betokened a plentiful dinner.

Bending over the sink, with her cap strings tucked back, her sleeves rolled up, and her short purple calico sheld from harm by her broad check apron, Aunt Betsy stood cleaning the silvery onions, and occasionally wiping her dim old eyes, as the odor proved too strong for her. At another table stood Aunt Hannah, deep in the mysteries of the light white crust which was to cover the tender chicken boiling in the pot, while in the oven bubbled and baked the custard pie, remembered as Katy's favorite, and prepared for her coming by Helen herself—plain-spoken, dark-eyed Helen—now out in the strawberry beds, picking the few luscious berries which almost by a miracle had been coaxed to wait for Katy, who loved them so dearly.

"It's better, too, now than when I came home," Helen thought, as with her rich scarlet fruit she went slowly to the house. "Morris is here, and the new church, and if she likes she can teach in Sunday school, though maybe she will prefer going with Uncle Ephraim. He will be pleased if she does," and pausing by the door, Helen looked across Fairy Pond in the direction of Silvertown village, where the top of a slender spire was just visible—the spire of St. John's, built within the year, and mostly at the expense of Dr. Morris Grant, who, a zealous churchman himself, had labored successfully to instill into Helen's mind some of his own peculiar views, as well as to awaken in Mrs. Lennox's heart the professions which had lain dormant for as long a time as the little black bound book had lain on the cupboard shelf, forgotten and unread.

How the doctor's views were regarded by the Deacon's family we shall see by and by. At present our story has to do with Helen, holding her bowl of berries by the rear door and looking across the distant fields. With one last glance at the object of her thoughts, she re-entered the house where her mother was arranging the table for dinner, bringing out the white set kept for everyday use.

"We ought to have some silver forks," she said despondingly, as she laid by each plate the three-tined forks of steel, to pay for which Helen and Katy had picked huckleberries on the hills and dried apples from the orchard.

"Never mind, mother," Helen answered cheerily; "if Katy is as she used to be, she will care more for us than for silver, and I guess she is, for I imagine it would take her a great deal to make her anything but a warm-hearted, merry little creature." This was sensible Helen's tribute of affection to the little girl, chattering butterfly, at that moment an occupant of Uncle Ephraim's corn-colored wagon, and riding with that worthy toward home, throwing kisses to every barefoot boy and girl she met, and screaming with delight as the old familiar waymarks met her view.

"There is Aunt Betsy, with her dress pinned up as usual," she cried, when at last the wagon stopped before the door, and the four women came hurriedly out to meet her, almost smothering her with caresses, and then holding her off to see if she had changed.

She was very stylish in her pretty traveling dress of gray, made under Mrs. Woodhull's supervision, and nothing could be more becoming than her jaunty hat, tied with ribbons of blue, while the dainty kids, bought to match the dress, fitted her fat hands charmingly, and the little high-heeled boots of soft prunella were faultless in their style. She was very attractive in her personal appearance and the mental verdict of the four females regarding her intention was something as follows: Mrs. Lennox detected unmistakable marks of the grand society she had been mingling in, and was pleased accordingly; Aunt Hannah pronounced her "the prettiest creeter she had ever seen"; Aunt Betsy decided that her hoops were too big and her clothes too fine for a Barlow; while Helen, who looked beyond dress, or style, or manner, straight into her sister's soft blue eyes, brimming with love and tears, decided that Katy was not changed for the worse. Nor was she. Truthful, loving, simple-hearted and full of playful life she had come from home, and she came back the same, never once flinching of the difference between the farm-house and Mrs. Woodhull's palace, or if she did, giving the preference to the former.

"It was perfectly splendid to get home," she said, handing her gloves to Helen, her sunshade to her mother, her satchel to Aunt Hannah, and the water pail, from which it was saved by Aunt Betsy, who put it carefully in the press, examining it closely first and wondering how much it cost.

Deciding that "it was a good thumpin' price," she returned to the kitchen, where Katy, dancing and curvetting in circles, scarcely stood still long enough for them to see it in spite of boarding-school fare, of which she had complained so bitterly, her cheeks were rounder, her eyes brighter, and her figure fuller than of old. She had improved, but she did not appear to know it, or to guess how beautiful she was in the fresh bloom of seventeen, with her golden hair waving around her childish forehead, and her deep blue eyes laughing so expressively with each change of her constantly varying face.

Everything animate and inanimate pertaining to the old house, came in for its share of notice. She kissed the kitten, squeezed the cat, hugged the dog, and hugged the little goat tied to his post in the clover yard and trying so hard to get free. The horse, to whom she fed handfuls of grass, had been already hugged. She did that the first thing after strangling Uncle Ephraim as she alighted from the train, and some from the car window saw it, smiling at what they termed the charming simplicity of an enthusiastic school-girl. Blessed youth! blessed early girlhood, surrounded by a halo of rare beauty! It was Katy's shield and buckler, warding off many a cold criticism which might otherwise have been passed upon her.

They were sitting down to dinner now, and the deacon's voice trembled as, with the blessing invoked, he thanked God for bringing back the little girl whose head was for a moment bent reverently, but quickly lifted itself up as its owner, in the same breath with that in which the deacon uttered his amen, declared how hungry she was, and went into rhapsodies over the nicely cooked viands which loaded the table. The best bits were hers that day, and she refused nothing until it came to Aunt Betsy's onions, once her special delight, but now declined, greatly to the distress of the old lady, who having been on the watch for "quirks," as she styled any departure from long established customs, now knew she had found one, and with an injured expression, withdrew the offered bowl, saying sadly: "You used to eat 'em raw, Catherine; what's got into you?"

"It was the first time Aunt Betsy had called a name so obnoxious to Kate, especially when, as in the present case, great emphasis was laid upon the rine, and from past experience Katy knew that her good aunt was displeased. Her first impulse was to accept the dish refused; but when she remembered her reason for refusing, she said, laughingly: "Excuse me, Aunt Betsy, I love them still, but—well, the fact is, I am going by and by to run over and see Cousin Morris, inasmuch as he was not polite enough to come here, and you know it might not be so pleasant."

"The land! and Aunt Betsy brightened. "If that's all, eat 'em. 'Tain't no ways likely you'll get near enough to him to make any difference—only turn your head when you shake hands."

But Katy remained incorrigible, while Helen, who guessed that her impulsive sister was contemplating a warmer greeting of the doctor than a mere shaking of his hands, kindly turned the conversation by telling how Morris was improved by his tour abroad, and how much the poor people thought of him.

"He is very fine looking, too," she said, whereupon Katy involuntarily exclaimed: "I wonder if he is as handsome as Wilford Cameron? Oh, I never wrote about him, did I?" and the little maiden began to blush as she stirred her tea industriously.

"Who is Wilford Cameron?" asked Mrs. Lennox.

"Oh, he's Wilford Cameron, that's all; lives on Fifth Avenue—is a lawyer—is very rich—a friend of Mrs. Woodhull, and was with us in our travels," Kate answered rapidly, the red burning on her cheeks so brightly that Aunt Betsy innocently passed her a big feather fan, saying "she looked mighty hot."

And Katy was warm, but whether from talking of Wilford Cameron or not none could tell. She said no more of him, but went on to speak of Morris, asking if it were true, as she had heard, that he built the new church in Silvertown.

"Yes, and runs it, too," Aunt Betsy answered energetically, proceeding to tell "what goin's on they had, with the minister shiftin' his clothes now and ag'in, and the folks all talkin' together. Morris got me in once," she said, "and I thought meetin' was let out half a dozen times, so much 'tistin' round as there was. I'd as soon go to a show as I would to a meetin'."

He laughed and said "I'd feel different when I knew 'em better, but neebly's when I met 'em, made up as is good as them as isn't, though Morris, I do believe, will get to Heaven a long ways ahead of me, if he is a 'Piscopal."

To this there was no response, and being launched on her favorite topic, Aunt Betsy continued:

"If you'll believe it, Helen here is one of 'em, and has got a sight of 'Piscopal quirks into her head. Why, she and Morris sing that talkin'-like singin' Sundays when the folks get up. 'Melodeon, aunty, melodeon,' and Helen laughed merrily at her aunt's mistake, turning the conversation again, and this time to Canandaigua, where she had some acquaintances.

But Katy was so much afraid of Canandaigua, and what talking of it might lead to, that she kept to Cousin Morris, asking innumerable questions about his house and grounds, and whether there were as many flowers there now as there used to be in the days when she and Helen went to say their lessons at Linwood, as they had done before Morris sailed for Europe.

"Are you glad to have me home once she caught him regarding her with a peculiar look."

"Yes, Katy did, very glad," he answered; "I've missed you every day, though you do nothing much but bother me."

"Why did you look so funny at me rather abrupt how old he was?" "Twenty-six last May," he answered, while Katy continued: "You are not old enough to be married yet. Wilford Cameron is thirty."

"Where do you meet Wilford Cameron?" Morris asked, in some surprise, and then the story which Katy had not told, even to her sister, came out in full, and Morris tried to listen patiently while Katy explained how, on the very first day of the examination, Mrs. Woodhull, grandest, proudest looking man, who the girls said was Mr. Wilford Cameron, from New York, a fastidious bachelor, whose family were noted for their wealth and exclusiveness, keeping six servants and living in the finest style; that Mrs. Woodhull, who all through the year had been very kind to Katy, came to her very school and invited her home to tea, that she had gone and met Mr. Cameron; that she was very much afraid of him at first, and was not sure, though he was so polite to her all through the journey, taking so much pains to have her see the finest sights and laughing at her enthusiasm.

"Wilford Cameron with you in your trip?" Morris asked, a new idea dawning on his mind.

"Yes, let me tell you," and Katy spoke rapidly. "I saw him that night, and then—well, I rode alone with him once down by the lake, and he talked to me just as if he was not a grand man and I a school-girl. And when the term closed, I staid at Mrs. Woodhull's and he was there. He liked my playing and liked my singing, and I guess he liked me—that is, you know—yes, he liked me some," and Katy twisted the fringe of her shawl, while Morris, in spite of the pain twinging at his heart strings, laughed aloud as he rejoined, "I have no doubt he did; but go on—what next?"

"He said more about my joining the party than anybody, and I am very sure he paid the bills."

"Oh, Katy," and Morris started as if he had been stung. "I would rather have given Linwood than have you thus indebted to Wilford Cameron, or any other man."

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